The GLOSSARY as Fictocriticism: a project

&

New Moon Through Glass a novel

by

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Dedication

I would like to thank my parents Drs Helen and Jim Farrar for engendering a love of writing and literature from an early age and also my partner Jim Jefferis for his patience, forbearance and love.

I dedicate this work to them with my heartfelt appreciation for their support.
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Statement of Authentication

I hereby declare that this work is original and a result of my own research endeavour and declare that this work has not been submitted for a higher degree at any other institution.

Signed _________________________________________
ABSTRACT

*The Glossary* is a fictocritical work which accompanies the novel, *New Moon Through Glass*, written for my doctorate that incorporates fiction, poetry, analytic and critical text, and which ‘writes back’ to the novel without the interpretive gesture and in doing so interrogates the art of fiction via a fictocritical critique.

The generic glossary (a collection of glosses) encapsulates the ‘interpretive gesture’ *par excellence* — the hermeneutical exercise that criticism’s role has widely been thought to be. Its earliest, medieval form as a commentary (or series of commentaries), translation or exegesis in the margins of or between the lines of a text, reiterates the glossary’s ostensible purpose to explicate rather than create ‘meaning’. As a fictocritical work, *The Glossary* therefore both interrupts the monolithic architecture of the text through the techniques of the cut and the stitch, and also, by ‘reading between the lines’ of the novel, provides alternative readings; a space for other voices, other texts. In the process the project repositions the glossary before the novel (a reversal of the usual order) inciting a series of readings and re-readings which establish a practice of critical fictionalising and the fictionalising of the critical and an incitement to read in this manner. In the performance, *The Glossary* ventures to open this Pandora’s Box and in the process reflects on what, as a practitioner, writing is, what reading is, and what is critical practice and what creative. *The Glossary* is a performance of a distinction put by Bathes as a ‘thinking through’ rather than ‘a residue of critical thought’ (1985: 284) and therefore demands to be read as a fictocritical work.

*The Glossary* was arrived at after much research and experimentation in my fiction writing practice with footnotes, asides and summarizing
(‘the story so far’ style) prefaces or segues and above all definitions, a fascination which might be summarised by the distinction that Charlotte Brontë drew between writing that was ‘real’ and writing that was ‘true’. Fiction often requires realism in order to ring true, and yet the elements of language that give it force owe nothing to realism — its power lies in its imagery, its symmetry, its poetry all of which foreground textuality and intertextuality in a manner congruent with the fictocritical project. *The Glossary*, ostensibly there to confirm and stabilise knowledge, language and reading practices, shows, by fictionalising the critical, the dependent ordering and silences through the art of character in this knowledge architecture. Far from keeping an ‘objective’ distance, *The Glossary* generates a parallel text to the novel in which the voice of the author ‘speaks’, and in doing so has much to say, by its multi-vocal presence, about authorial intentions (and anxieties), slippages, ruptures and textual transparencies, opacities and excess; about the ways in which writing is both knowledge and being, knowing and making.

*The Glossary* grew (rhizomically though not randomly) from textual asides, after thoughts and back stories, parallel and divergent interests, arguments, lyricisms, associations, allusions and theories. Eventually *The Glossary* became a piece of writing performing what could not ‘make it’ into the work of fiction. That a glossary is made up of ‘entries’ proved an enlivening form, which generated a different kind of writing practice and a different kind of writing, perhaps not dissimilar to a web log. In making this comparison I am referencing Kerryn Goldsworthy’s comments that ‘blogging’, as ‘dynamic thinking-in-action’, sets its form apart from traditional writing and ‘creates a shift away from the consumer-producer model’ by destabilising the notion of a one-way transaction, ‘active writer-producer to passive reader-consumer’.
Each entry in *The Glossary* is a jumping off point for text to grow either from the point-of-view of the writer or reader, and each item simultaneously encourages a non-linear reading with regard to itself out of which possibilities are generated — as a body of text; the ‘self’ to which it constantly refers — and the novel it appends. *The Glossary* allows space for ‘undisciplined’ writing which does not conform to the teleological narrative of the thriller genre and in doing so, offers a radically democratic opportunity for the reader (who along with the writer also composes the story) to join in the process and the practice and understand how in ‘working through’ any text we are subconsciously glossing and deducing as we go.

Some entries in *The Glossary* relate to specifics in the novel. Others to novels which haunt the text or other texts dreamed of, wished for or forgotten. Many of the subjects of *The Glossary* are familiar terms in literary and critical discourse examined in the process of writing. Still others relate to identity and to doubling, as a fictional device, but also as textual possibility. The counterpoint between the two texts — glossary and novel — holds other dialogues and polylogues: the intimate linkage between love and murder or desire and violence; disappearances — both textual and familial; childhood, memory and, motherhood; voice, reading, writing- (as well as reading-)blocks; the *flâneur*; psychoanalysis and dreams; collage; and the house as a metaphor for the body or the text. Certainly *The Glossary* presents an occasion for writing, an exercise, an exegesis and, where necessary, an excuse: 'Only paper offers the tactile complexities of the origami life, the *papier mache* existence. (*The Glossary* p. 84)
SECTION 1

The Glossary as Fictocriticism:

an introduction
The Glossary is a fictocritical work, which accompanies the novel, *New Moon Through Glass (NMTG)*, written for my doctorate, encompassing fiction, poetry, analytic and critical text, which 'writes back' to the novel without the interpretive gesture interrogating the art of fiction via a fictocritical critique. As a text concerned with writing creatively about creative and critical writing, *The Glossary* also provides the theoretical portion of my project.

The generic glossary (a collection of glosses) encapsulates the 'interpretive gesture' *par excellence* — the hermeneutical exercise that criticism’s role has widely been thought to be (Krauss 1985: 292). The glossary’s earliest, medieval form as a commentary (or series of commentaries), translation or exegesis in the margins of or between the lines of a text, reiterates the form’s ostensible purpose to explicate rather than create ‘meaning’. As a fictocritical work, *The Glossary* therefore both interrupts the monolithic architecture of the text through the techniques of the cut and the stitch, and also, by ‘reading between the lines’ of the novel, provides alternative readings; a space for other voices, other texts. At the same time, by opening this Pandora's Box of writing about writing; *The Glossary* and its novel, *NMTG*, reflect on what, as a practitioner, writing is; what is critical practice, and what is creative practice, and what is legitimacy in terms of literary or critical
‘product’. In the process, the project repositions the glossary before the novel (a reversal of the usual order) inciting a series of readings and re-readings which re-establish a practice of critical fictionalising and the fictionalising of the critical.

I would argue that *The Glossary* is performative of a distinction put by Bathes as a ‘thinking through’ rather than ‘a residue of critical thought’ (1985: 284). It can therefore be read as a fictocritical work, moving through the liminal space between fiction and criticism, via actions and interactions with and in the text, across discursive disjuncture, in the process of which something ‘else’ is created — a *something* or somewhere else — a place not figuring on any map (Pontalis 1992:103) — perhaps attaining the unsettling quality of the self-reflexive text which is also the ‘what if’ of play.

If there is a certain sense of status, even respectability, acquired by words or phrases which have ‘made it’ into a standard dictionary, the glossary or gloss, in my fictocritical performance of it at least, retains a sense of working at the edges of textual interpretation; at the edges of the ‘known’ world, if you will. A note made in the margins or between the lines of a book (in this case my novel) in which the meaning(s) of the text (or of specific words or phrases) in its originary language, is/are explained, translated, elucidated and cross-referenced, literally sits on the edge or to one side of the novel and sets off a tangle of vibrating air particles, *chori dispirati*, an opera of pulsational incidents, a sound grammar of memories, echoes, layering ‘a whole carnal stereophony’ (Barthes 1977).
The Glossary was arrived at after much research and experimentation in my fiction and critical writing practice with footnotes, asides and summarizing (‘the story so far’ style) prefaces or segues, all of which call forth different voices and all of which foreground textuality and intertextuality in a manner congruent with the fictocritical project. I would also argue that the glossary form, at least as I have used it, is a trope for the rhetorical and metaphorical process of language itself in the sense that tropes ‘change the meaning of words, by a “turn” of sense’ (Baldick 1990:230) and as such is an appropriate space in which to stage the theoretical and political concerns that inform the speculative and poetic writing sometimes categorized as fictocritical. Above all the intellectual provenance of the glossary form to define, confirm and stabilize knowledge, language and reading practices, offered an apposite form with which to interrogate an idea that might be summarised by the distinction that Charlotte Brontë drew between writing that was ‘real’ and writing that was ‘true’. Fiction, it seems, often requires realism in order to ring true, and yet the elements of language that give it force owe nothing to realism — its power lies in its imagery, its symmetry, its poetry, in the ways in which writing is both knowledge and being, knowing and making.

Borrowing in turn from the genres of the writer's journal, through to the academic footnote — one such called ‘Things I Don’t Understand’ which threatened to take over the entire exegesis in a coup which would have left the thesis as a flimsy sentence-deep entry on each page attached to a Sherman tank of a footnote — they (the footnotes and asides) eventually broke away like a radical cell, forming meanings and a text unto themselves. A movement that was perhaps inevitable. Far from keeping an ‘objective’ distance, The Glossary generated a parallel text to the novel in which the voice of the author ‘speaks’, and in doing so had much to say, by its multi-vocal presence, about authorial intentions (and
anxieties), slippages, ruptures and textual transparencies, opacities and excess, about the ways in which writing is both knowledge and being, knowing and making.

The word's etymology is an interesting one. It derives from the Greek *glossa* meaning 'tongue', which, imaginatively at least, underscores the obvious physicality of the glossary as an add-on or a protrusion (in this case variously a sexual appendage, an aid to oral consumption and an organ of speech), which interjects one text into another. In another of its senses 'gloss' is superficial lustre, specious or deceptive appearance — a heightened, eye-catching sheen, which dazzles the viewer so they are unable to see beneath the surface. As a verb it connotes reading a 'different' sense into a text (in fact giving it a different context or framework) or 'explaining [something] away': to gloss over something implies a premature burial — that intoxicating power and disturbing potential of language in action; language as consensus reality and language as gloss itself — a *tri-coleur* of control, create and obfuscate ...a fertile space of dialogue or polylogue breeding what? Another question: what can fictocriticism become? To quote my own *Glossary*,

There are no real rule books or maps to chart the territory in one's head or heart and like the early cartographers the edges, the very ends of the earth are places one can fall off. The edges where the feelings and thoughts of the body are not yet of the page . . . Deciphering the scratchings and scribbles on the blank surface — the page, the canvas, the mirror, the liquid crystal display — and making more . . . for a writer, even though they may be writing on a screen . . . [o]nly paper offers the tactile complexities of the origami life, the *papier mache* existence (83-4).

Dominique Hecq decries the paucity of critical material on fictocritical writing, and even lack of critical vocabulary to examine 'some of the most exciting work done in Australia over the past few decades', even though the debate surrounding the dissolution of boundaries between creative and essay writing has been around
now for at least thirty years (2005:179). Amanda Nettelbeck, in her introduction to a landmark Australian anthology of fictocritical writing, describes fictocriticism as a writing practice or strategy for writing ‘that stands outside the textbook definitions' suggesting it offers a space to do something different with texts, with the notion of female subjectivity and the gendered notion of authorial positions (4:1998). Nettelbeck quotes Rosalind Krauss describing theorist and critic Roland Barthes’s later work (The Pleasure of the Text, The Lover’s Discourse, Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes) as ‘a kind of criticism/non-criticism' that ‘finds itself caught in a dramatic web of many voices, citations, asides…' What better place to enact the marginal than in a glossary?

This may be an appropriate moment to pause and mention some of the peculiar and personal interests, which have been part of the genesis and/or genealogy of my Glossary, shared by Venetia the protagonist of NMTG; namely, a long love affair with an absent lover, the fluidity of identity, particularly through sexuality and family status and a fascination with dictionaries (word museums which both operate as a writer's 'supply text' and, through the randomness of alphabetic juxtapositions, as diversion and inspiration and also as last chance hope for stability in a changing world) also , margin doodles and annotations (like letters in bottles, speaking across generations of readers), and letters home (discovered sometimes as forgotten bookmarks) as parallel texts and illuminations. 'Letters home' (particularly unfinished, abandoned or 'filed’ ones) — one's own as well as others — are a whole category of 'found literature', which provide strange encounters with the self and others. If The Glossary ‘writes back’ to the novel, then it too borrows from the genre. From Sylvia Plath’s to Vincent Van Gogh’s, letters home evince a style, a genre, not so much of the epistolary novel, but a kind of fiction of optimism in the face of despair; a kind of narration of the things one imagines
the other would like to hear that is hopeless of ever quite being understood by those at home who haven’t ventured to the farthest boundary. ‘One thinks of the Freudian Sehnsucht,’ writes Pontalis ‘Not the nostalgia nor the pain of the impossible return; but the aspiration to a place not figures on any map: the future of the past’ (103).

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The glossary, along with the footnote, the preface, the aside, even the executive summary and the introductory essay (such as this one) — are all metatexts. The fact that, like some metaphors whose coinage is so devalued they have become invisible, the piece of writing which self-consciously addresses another work (or itself) is often ignored like the cellophane around the glossy magazine does not however mean that it is immaterial to our ‘reading’ of the work. Christopher Norris writes, in the introduction to his exposition of deconstruction published more than twenty years ago, an unwitting foreshadowing the fictocritical, of an emerging form of expression when he says, there is an ‘ambiguous comfort’ to be had in Jacques Derrida’s remarks (in Of Grammatology) on the ‘strange and deceptive status of “prefaces”’ (1982: xiii). That prefaches claim a summarizing function and a ‘power of abstracted systematic statement’ which denies the very process of writing (be it the work prefaced or the preface itself), while at the same time subverting the traditionally ascribed authority of ‘the work’ itself. I would argue the glossary (and The Glossary) acts in a similar fashion to destabilize the reading of the fiction to which is putatively accompanies and explicates. There is always another reading, another story, and one we may not have bargained for. The glossary reminds us of, and in my case is the repository of, that most intriguing and difficult material to work with, textual excess.
The Glossary grew (rhizomically though not randomly) from after thoughts and back stories, parallel and divergent interests, arguments, lyricisms, associations, allusions and theories while writing the novel, while reading critical theory and while writing itself. Eventually The Glossary became a piece of writing performing on one level what could not 'make it' into the work of fiction and on another what it could make of itself. That a glossary is made up of 'entries' proved an enlivening form, which generated a different kind of writing practice and a different kind of writing, perhaps not dissimilar to a web log. In making this comparison I am referencing Kerryn Goldsworthy's comments that 'blogging', as 'dynamic thinking-in-action', sets its form apart from traditional writing and 'creates a shift away from the consumer-producer model' by destabilizing the notion of a one-way transaction, 'active writer-producer to passive reader-consumer'. Goldsworthy goes on to say,

People who dislike the whole idea of blogs without really understanding how they work have complained about the undeniable mountains of dross in the blogosphere and the fact that there is no 'quality control'; my reply is that the whole notion of quality control suggests a capitalist model that the practice of blogging does a great deal to undermine. It is quite true there are no cultural 'gatekeepers' controlling what goes up on a blog, and for practitioners the radically democratic nature of that freedom is precisely part of its charm. Blogging is not primarily a product: it's a process and a practice. (2008: 49-50)

The Glossary celebrates the felicity of randomness in texts and in the alchemy of certain juxtapositions of words. Some of the textual effects explored through the glossary include those derived from the 'cut up' and other techniques of randomness practiced by Raymond Queneau and the OULIPO and popularized more widely by William Burroughs, who said in an interview that writing was 'fifty years behind' painting because 'the painter can touch and handle his medium' and the writer cannot. The writer does not
know yet what words are. ‘Experiments using the cut-up and the montage,’ says Burroughs, can 'show the writer what words are and put him in tactile communication with his medium. This in turn could lead to a precise science of words and show how certain word combinations produce certain effects on the human nervous system.' (1985:10)

Though published in the mid-eighties, Burroughs is talking in the nineteen seventies, but already the assemblage of films in the cutting room was an accepted practice — ‘artifice’ an accepted part of art. Burroughs says that some of the earlier experiments were useful from a literary point of view, some not, but his main realization was that the technique ‘liberated’ something fundamental about the writing process. For example, he says, by cutting pages up and rearranging them, certain channels were opened up in the text. He may not have used any of the actual cut-up material, but that whole new ideas emerged, which were later incorporated into the text. Even that, ‘[p]erhaps events are pre-written and pre-recorded and when you cut word lines the future leaks out’ (12). Where is this future leaking from? If textual excess is the uncontrollable dimension of writing, of the slippage between what is ‘said’ and the ‘unutterable’, the ‘desire that will not speak its name’ — then *The Glossary* is a nursery for proto-narratives — viral strains and mutants with vestigial wings.

Each entry in *The Glossary* is a jumping off point for text to grow either from the point-of-view of the writer or reader, and each item simultaneously encourages a non-linear reading with regard to itself — as a body of text; the ‘self’ to which it constantly refers — and to the novel it appends out of which possibilities are generated. *The Glossary* allows space for ‘undisciplined’ writing which does not conform to the teleological narrative of the thriller genre of *NMTG*, and in doing so, offers a radically democratic
opportunity for the reader (who along with the writer also composes the story) to join in the process and the practice and understand how in ‘working through’ any text we are subconsciously glossing and deducing as we go.

Some entries in *The Glossary* relate to specifics in my current novel. Some to novels or other texts dreamed of or wished for. Many of the subjects of *The Glossary* are familiar terms in literary and critical discourse examined in the process of writing, others are concerns or obsessions relating to writing: identity, loss and love, childhood, memory, voice, reading, writing (as well as reading) blocks, the *flâneur*, psychoanalysis and dreams, collage and montage (and the materiality of language as medium), the house as a metaphor for the body, the text as a metaphor for the body.

Anna Gibbs writes about the ‘passionate dimension of intertextual practices’ in *Writing and the Flesh of Others* (2003:309); bodies of words cannibalizing other bodies of words. Ghosts of the ‘living dead’ lingering on the thresholds of the writer’s studio/laboratory, the thresholds ‘of past and present, self and other, life and death’. The glossary, in its capacity to make substitutions, to interpolate words and lines between the text, to change the meanings by a ‘turn’ of phrase, enters and emerges from the body of words bearing traces of its tribal markings. As Lesley Stern writes in *Conversions (A Story Blown Hither and Thither)*, ‘What goes in must come out…between the going in and the coming out, things happen…Magical processes, processes of conversion…just as desires, though they mutate, seldom substitute neatly for each other.’ (1999: 482)

The ‘smoke and mirrors’ of textual affect, this *unheimlich* relationship of words, voices, ghosts and memories out of which forms the text and its author who is not present, has all the
hallmarks of gothic fiction whereby the writer, maniacally fired by narcissism and overarching ambition engages in ‘unholy alliances’ and creates literary monstrosities — ‘the cuts and edges dangerously concealed by the seamless unity imposed by (a certain) vision’ (Gibbs 1995:12); the relationship, perhaps between *NMTG*, and its glossary — or *The Glossary* and its fiction.

In relation to the novel, *NMTG*, *The Glossary* is hypothetical; that is, it does not function as explication to the text. Not in any simple sense, and at the time of writing at any rate. The self-consciousness of writing ‘in one’s own voice’ acute at the best of times, and excruciating when writing in the authoritative voice of the academy, is alive in the contours (often ‘flabby’) of *The Glossary* where the anorexic fiction could finally let loose her stays, and ‘wrest meaning from the grip of knowledge’ and return it to the iconoclastic and the quote Gibbs again, ‘the sound of laughter born of [its] ambiguous pleasures.’ (12) What might be concealed by a cut or an edge? Surely Venetia Glass is the bearer of scar tissue (‘Nice wound. Mind if I photograph it?’ a voice in *The Glossary* asks at one point). Surely re-constructing an identity (which might be the recognizable surface of things — the gloss) and a ‘self’ (the more complex whole that would seem to require internal consistency) requires all the anxieties associated with ‘breakage’.

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If the glossary is a genre, then we might ask what it means to be a stand-alone glossary: a kind of ghost-writing in which ‘story and sense are both sort and resisted, a fictocriticism in the wildest sense of that term, or perhaps simply a pseudo-fiction.’ (Gibbs 1995:12) its form functioning as an occasion for writing, an exercise, an experiment and, where necessary, an excuse. In answer to why? one might ask, why not? *The Glossary* represents writing as
memento, as memorial and minefield dedicated to the ‘unknown reader, the dreamed of friend’ as well to suffragettes who blew up letterboxes (and by this means re-directed mail) long before Lacan and Derrida began a debate about the possibility of doing so (Gibbs 1995:12). It is not coincidental that what might be termed Venetia's identity crisis is resolved around a letterbox key, nor that the interruption of 'knowledge' about her environment comes via a device called The Dumb Waiter which is of course a surreal device used by Harold Pinter by which ‘directives' from an assumed superior are interpolated into a drama involving hit men who are hiding out in a basement apartment awaiting instructions.

By allowing the writer to ‘step into' different discourses, the glossary enables the staging of various theoretical questions including those surrounding the gendered dimensions of traditional first person narrative. The glossary rehearses the trope of the passing observer, the flâneur (or flaneuse), strolling through or loitering in the city without apparent purpose (except the pursuit of voyeuristic and other vicarious pleasures) and describing or disclosing in the course of his ambles the possibility of creating/finding a discontinuous subterranean narrative – or series of incomplete stories or theses, or gestures towards these.

If it is true, writes de Certeau in The Practice of Everyday Life, ‘that the spatial order organizes and ensemble of possibilities...and interdictions...then the walker actualizes some of these possibilities. In that way he makes them exist as well as emerge. But he also moves them about and he invents others, since the crossing, drifting away, or improvisation of walking privilege, transform or abandon spatial elements.’ (1984:98)

A number of different voices can be explored throughout The Glossary increasing the possibilities in the writing of
transformations and transgressions. Just as the flâneuse creates her own fluid non-linear narrative of ‘shortcuts and detours’, proliferating by interior ramifications which mimic the process of memory or sensory and experiential montage, the glossary form offers a smorgasbord of narrative possibilities. Though arranged alphabetically, there is no compunction (as in conventional fiction or logic) to begin at the beginning and work one’s way through to the end. The glossary disrupts the normative fictional engine of cause and effect — and in the process enables other affects. The reader is offered an array of glossary ‘entries’ as they are called which are exactly entry points into the text, very much like a tasting menu. Cross-references offer subsequent but non-sequential ‘chapters’ or moves, some gathering momentum towards proto-narratives, others leading up blind alleys, producing asides and anecdotes, which may lead to further divertissements, sketching and scoping an alternative and idiosyncratic (therefore avant-gard and subversive) text proceeding dreamlike by analepsis and prolepsis; or the dead ends. That the flâneuse is a dilettante, which the Oxford Concise Dictionary defines as ‘a lover of the arts, an amateur, a smatterer [sic], one who toys with subject and concentrates on nothing’, perfectly fits the carnivalesque nature of the world of the glossary. Unconscious desire alone shapes the flâneuse’s walkabout, tasting this then that, like the writer's (and the reader's) own uncensored drift. The persistent distractibility of the stream of consciousness is captured in Virginia Woolfe’s Street Haunting: A London Adventure:

But what could be more absurd? It is, in fact, on the stroke of six; it is a winter’s evening; we are walking to The Strand to buy a pencil. How, then, are we also on a balcony, wearing pearls in June? What could be more absurd? Yet it is nature’s folly, not ours. When she set out her chief masterpiece, the making of man, she should have thought of only one thing. Instead, turning her head, looking over her shoulder, into each of us she let creep instincts and desires which are utterly at variance with his main being, so that we are streaked, variegated, all of a mixture; the colours have run. Is it the
true self this which stands on the pavement in January, or that which bends over the balcony in June? Am I here, or am I there? Or is the true self neither this nor that, neither here nor there, but something so varied and wandering that it is only when we give rein to its wishes and let it take its way unimpeded that we are indeed ourselves?

The Glossary steps out between derive (the drift of consciousness) and detournement (the ‘turn’ of the head and the ‘turn’ of the phrase), between fiction and criticism, between the spatial and the virtual, between the body and the body of words. But not necessarily in order to create oppositions. Along the way The Glossary provides grounds to explore, and material to exploit, in the pleasures of sex and text, as well as pay homage to feet (poetic as well as those parts with which we imprint the earth, while we are written upon), fancy footwork (and slippage), fetishisms, through footnotes as associative ideas and narrative textures to weave into or ‘treat’ (in the sense of treatment, but also as in ‘celebrate’) throughout the work of fiction.

The gloss forefronts the partial and phantasmagoric acts of writing and of reading and the dialogic nature of the deferred transmission of all written texts, including the margin notes from the previous reader(s). The glossary enables the writer, using Krauss’s observations of both Barthes and Jacques Derrida and this blurred distinction between literature and criticism, ‘to write (back) to a parallel text in a way that invokes that absent text but avoids the interpretive gesture.’ (1998:6). The Glossary is, as such, an attempt, in fact an essay, at drawing together the many different voices, influences, practices and affects of the process of researching and writing the doctoral project, particularly essaying the distance between expectations and execution, between critical distance and authorial voice. And in these gaps, these ‘blinks of an eyelid’ as South African writer J. M. Coetzee describes it in his novel Foe:
We yield to a stranger's embrace or give ourselves to the waves . . . Might [these blinks of an eyelid] not be the cracks and chinks through which another voice, other voices, speak in our lives? By what right do we close our ears to them?

In fictocritical writings “the identity of the author is very much at issue. This is not to say that an ‘identity’ declares itself strictly in terms of the lived experience of the individual, but it does declare itself as a politic to be viewed, reviewed, contested, and above all engaged with.” (Nettelbeck, 1998:12) The glossary challenges the authoritative overview of the critic or didact and the hermeneutical rendering of the text into its underlying truths, gesturing towards readings, interpretive practices which “have less to do with theories of the text than they have to do with performances, or ritualistic practices, of the self in relation to the text.” (Hunter, 1998).

By adopting the idiom of critical interpretation, yet all the while “invoking all the liberties warranted or unwarranted of poetry,” to quote Hélène Cixous (Conley 1984:150), the glossary challenges the logocentric order and its elisions - and foregrounds the primacy of language to our mediated experience of our ‘selves’ - or the performance of identities through acts of writing.

Where do these voices or proto-identities come from? From encounters, contingencies and from multiplicities, from the influences and hauntings of other writers, thinkers, speakers, ‘the flesh of others’. If Rousseau’s Confessions shaped the parameters of autobiography making problematic the first person female authorial voice, the glossary enables the use of fictional and poetic strategies to stage theoretical questions such as where does writing come from, using the writer's subjective relationship with the problem at hand.

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Memory and forgetfulness are tropes continually aroused by the contemplation of all literary production and especially experimental writing. Some of these memories, these fragmentary, imaginary riffs are like the music of the mind — snippets of other writers, the flavour of a sentence heard or read or seen, nuances, half-evolved meanings, injunctions or stories — propelling an exploration without precise beginning or end. Interspersed with these material incursions are forgettings: something like indifference — a place from where ‘differences’ are not (re)marked. As Borges writes,

My general recollection of the *Quixote*, simplified by forgetfulness and indifference, can well equal the imprecise and poor image of a book not yet written. (1964:66)

The notions of books ‘simplified’ and re-assembled in the forgetting and remembering — a kind of re-telling — and books ‘dreamed of and wished for’, invoke the textual and intertextual practices of collage, translation, and composition, as well as the notions of literary apprenticeships and haunted writing. *The Glossary* and the ‘other’ part of the project *NMTG* haunt each other. Yet they can operate as stand-alone texts, whilst becoming a character in each other’s composition.

By extension, through these two related, yet independent works, the project explores the tension between the calculated choreography of the fiction, and the digressions, reflections, arguments and body of words, which formed the exegesis. *The Glossary* becomes a place where composition could be rehearsed, semi-coherent, deranged even, groping forward at something not yet formulated, yet somehow at the same time, like a forgotten memory, ‘lost’.

I would suggest that the interaction between the glossary (both the generic form and my text) and the novel performs, not only the
anxieties alive in the production of knowledge in the textual world, that is the slippages and lacunas in the text(s), but also the ways in which characters or ‘bodies of knowledge’ within a fiction or within critical writing, frequently require further ‘glossing’ as reflections of the ways in which writing is both epistemological and ontological. *The Glossary*, is by definition incomplete and unreliable — the dictionary definition of ‘glossary’ means *both* the explanation or interpretation of the unfamiliar, the specialist or the foreign to enlighten or provide access to knowledge, *and* the deliberately misleading or negative interpretation of a text or telling of events — and the novel, which is also arguably ‘incomplete’, is a work of fiction, something ‘made up’ in both the sense of the fabulous and of a confabulation.

To ‘gloss over’ something could be considered a metaphor for writing (creating bodies of knowledge with text) itself if not to ‘give fictitious accounts of past events, believing they are true, in order to cover a gap in the memory caused by a medical condition such as dementia or Korsakoff’s syndrome). Certainly the summarizing, sometimes revisionist glossing of the efflorescence of a character in a novel, mirrors certain rhetorical practices involved in the creation of bodies of knowledge in critical discourse, the study of which might be itself a fairly precise definition of the fictocritical project. As writers we are always entering mid-stream, interpreting, commenting on and making meaning out of and into other texts, creating bodies fictionalised and positioned within myths and beliefs systems that form a culture’s social narratives and self-representations (Grosz 1994:119). And writing (and written identities) with its (their) production and destruction of texts, involves the push-pull of affect around permanence and impermanence and our relationships with objects of love.
‘Nothing is new, only forgotten.’ These words, ascribed to Rose
Bertin, Marie Antoinettee’s dressmaker appears at the beginning of
NMTG, the plot of which revolves around the appropriation of
another identity by Venetia Glass. After a traumatic experience,
Venetia moves into a flat above an elderly woman who, in her
dementia, mistakes Venetia for her long lost daughter. Since
Venetia is also looking for a way to reinvent herself, this
reassignment of identity seems an opportunity to start again.
Nothing is new, only forgotten. Or is it even really that simple? Or
only does it seem so in the forgetting and re-telling?

The forgotten in the gothic genre is the ‘other’ which facilitates
return. The forgotten is the crypt where the secrets are buried, the
forgotten is the morally ambiguous relationship: incestuous or
auto-erotic or hermaphroditic desire which must disguise itself and
in doing so manifests as the plot engine which necessitates the
disinterment of the corpse, the mirror-moment (in the Lacanian
sense) in which identity is revealed as desire and desire is
implicated in erasure and amnesia. The forgotten is everything
missing from the reords; a repository of the marginalized voices
not represented in the official story. Might this, my project via the
fictocritical, asks be the proper work of art: in this case, The
Glossary of a made up text confused as to its genealogy.

The ‘madwoman in the attic’ is a central metaphor used by Gilbert
and Gubar in their work (1979) for the manner in which nineteenth
century women writers sought to come to terms with their own
uniquely female feelings of fragmentation, their own sense of the
discrepancies between who they were and what they were
supposed to be. The trope is of course taken from Charlotte
Brönte’s Jane Eyre where the madwoman, Bertha Mason, is quite
literally confined in an attic, but it becomes emblematic of a female
subversive desire to challenge all-pervasive patriarchical standards
— a desire which, in the context of the gothic genre, can be expressed only, argue Gilbert and Gubar (cite page ref) through images of irrationality, passion and imprisonment. My project shares these feminist, iconoclastic ambitions and as an ostensible taxonomy, attempts to categorize as it performs the irrational, the passaionate and the imprisonment. By inciting a series of readings at once linear and fragmentary, NMTG and its Glossary seek to re-define and re-figure the critique of fiction. Similarly, Venetia, NMTG’s heroine seeks to re-define, re-figure herself and her relation to the world moving through gothic and other literary hauntings in the process. In the novel, she moves in above the elderly Mrs Meares who displays behaviours which might be considered mad, but also may be to do with her confinement or her grief. Moving through a series of memories, affective states and mistaken or duplicitous identities (including encounters with academics in the field of Fraudulent Arts), the novel ultimately questions whether it is rather Venetia who is, or becomes, the madwoman in the attic.

Both The Glossary and NMTG interrogate the constitution and stability of fictional character and factional identity. And as far as writing process and practice is concerned, the project as a whole asks, do all our fragments add up to an ‘unfinished masterpiece’ of the kind Harry Matthews and Roland Barthes are enamoured, or clues to a mystery that ‘I’ (the writer or possibly the reader) am alone in wishing to solve?

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The Glossary engages in that vexed area of critical discourse: writing about writing. And because it asserts itself as an exegesis, while at the same time foregrounding the ‘smoke and mirrors’ involved in the fictionalizing of the critical and the practice of critical ficitionalising, it necessarily engages in experimentation
which requires the breaking of rules. The genealogy of experimental writing (and fictocriticism) is a field of endless definition and re-definition, an arena of highly contested borders and terms — what is ‘modernism’ and therefore what is ‘postmodern’? Who or what is the ‘avant-garde’? How do we recognize a ‘prose poem’ and what does the invention of the term say about ambiguity and labels in literature? What is ‘literature’? And what is not, or what is it not? Or what is its text(ure)? And, given the focus of this essay, what, if anything, does the term ‘fictocritical’ gesture, with regard to fiction and critical writing practices and production mean?

I suggest the glossary form, performs a fictocritical gesture whereby the traditionally distanced critical discourse is interspersed and intermingled with fiction, with autographical writing, poetry or other text — intimately, literally and passionately — in an act of defiance of the dictations of either academic authority or ‘normative’ non-gendered discourse. If fictocriticism was initially conceived as a strategic and site-specific intervention into a particular set of problems surrounding what it meant to be a woman writing within genres and modes shaped mostly by men [as Rousseau’s *Confessions* shaped the parameters of autobiography (Miller 1978)] then *The Glossary* interrupts the institutional voice of academic writing with a range of tones and styles and voices sometimes in unison, at others in deliberate discord, in as Anna Gibbs puts it ‘an attempt to exorcise’ the paralysis induced by the interdictions of academic authority, when ‘reference’ is always ‘deference’(2005).

It is not by chance that some of the most interesting fictocritical writing in Australia takes up and comments on the discourse of anthropology, ethnography, psychoanalysis and autobiography and memoir, all of which require a kind of research and reflection intimately involved with the voices of others […] while heterologies often involve attempts to neutralize or to appropriate the voice of the other which they also tend to render naïve, requiring critical
interpretation and translations, what characterizes fictocritical work in this domain is its reversal of this process, its attempt to allow the voice of the other to interrogate the voice of theory in such a way as to reveal its particularity and its partiality. (Gibbs 2005:2)

*The Glossary* is inter-textual (in the ‘dialogic’, multivocal sense described by Bakhtin) and foregrounds itself as such by constantly referring to other texts and to other parts of itself as textual object. My *Glossary* is the site of literary borrowings, experiments, palimpsests, apprenticeships, hauntings by other writers and writings which operate within a dialogic space whereby the authoritative voice of critical writing gives way to ‘a subject who says “I”’, and who is thus ‘individualized on the level of utterance’, but whose discourse, as Barthes would have it, ‘is nevertheless a composed, a feigned, or, if you prefer, a “pieced-together” discourse (the result of montage).’

I am hoping to ‘trace out’ or ‘track in’ (from the Latin *investigare*) in this introduction and in *The Glossary* itself some of the issues addressed or acted upon by fictocritical practice. Tracing out the borders for ‘fiction’ and ‘theory’ or, alternatively, stepping across or outside them, to investigate what lies between, it seems, might be a way out of our ‘entrapment’ in language. In this sense appropriating the form of the glossary to perform, explore and examine the fictocritical is a *mis en abyme* of ‘the battle against bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language’ (Wittgenstein 1953:109) that might be, I argue, the proper role of both fiction (poetry) and criticism (philosophy).

If the fictocritical is on one level a radical *ethos*, if this is not a contradiction in terms, it not only presents, but demands a horizon as shifting as the edges of the Medieval known world: a cartography with cautions, *Beyond here be dragons*. How else could there be heroines? The fictocritical act is, strictly speaking, inimitable. Yet this post-structuralist stance displaces, as it were,
the pain of the loss of the philosophical dream of a totalizing explanatory discourse.

If the biblical glossary was inscribed between the lines of the text, bestowing, of necessity, an historical precedence to the ‘original’, then my Glossary has more of Blanchot’s ‘sort of parapet walk that runs alongside the other path’ (1981:71) the alternative, less travelled road that produces travaillé non salarié mais passioné (Benjamin 1973:15) — work that produces no immediate payoff other than passion — a place of charged solitude, where composition may be rehearsed, semi-incoherent, deranged even, groping forward at theory while reaching back into memory and past lives.

Who is to say which is the ‘original’: the groomed presentation and calculated choreography of the novel whose very convolutions through multiple drafts sprung ideas like leaks for digressions, footnotes and asides or the taxonomic ordering of terms relating to the novel out of which grew strands of narrative, backstory, outlines, arguments and ultimately a body of words which had a ‘secret’ life of its own. Both, in the end, are mediated experiences of the writing process. Both use different constraints to bring something into being — or becoming.

To write is not to compose a book, but first of all to practice an opening up of the self, a free fall into the interior of words...Each word is a drama which must be played out. It's difficult...The book grows, proliferates, advances by itself, as if dictated. By multiplication, by interior ramifications...It is never I who think; it is never I who speak. (Novarina 1996)

I hallucinate the literate medieval clergy by their glosses, encouraging particular readings (or any readings at all for the illiterate) of an unassailable text. Thus the glossary might be an epistemological sleight-of-hand, a metaphor for writing itself. Writing is always after. In trying to capture the moment of fleeting experience of the ‘real’, writing is cryogenesis. But one practiced by
workers who forgot to check the thermostat. With writing we are always dealing with situations of overdetermination. The fictocritical attests to the perfidiousness of textual meanings, or of tidy genres or of silence.

The glossary enacts the human need to arrange, to classify, to reference — to control, what is otherwise subject to excess. And its failure. *The Glossary* is a rhizome, sprouting interpretations and is infinitely expandable. The glossary attests to the need to sometimes stand aside and reduce meanings into manageable, 'bite sized' chunks, to cross-reference in the dramatic web of 'many voices, citations, asides.' (Krauss 1986) It also plays to the counter-attribute: 'People are poly attentive,' says John Cage in connection with his lecture/story series *Indeterminacy*. In Cage's project, the stories, a collection of ninety or so (the number was not static and was added to and subtracted from at different times) were read at one minute intervals as an 'irrelevant accompaniment' to a Merce Cunningham dance titled *How to Pass, Kick, Fall and Run*.

Late in September of 1958, in a hotel in Stockholm I set about writing this lecture for delivery a week later at the Brussels Fair. I recalled a remark made years earlier by David Tudor that I should give a talk that was nothing but stories. The idea was appealing, but I had never acted on it, and decided to do so now. My intention...was to suggest that all things — stories, incidental sounds from the environment and, by extension, beings — are related, and that this complexity is more evident when it is not oversimplified by an idea of relationship in one person's mind.

Outside of the performance space, Cage suggests *Indeterminacy* be read in the manner and situations that one would read newspapers when one does so purposelessly, that is, jumping here and there and responding at the same time to environmental events and sounds. This would do well as a prescription for reading *The Glossary* and indeed glossaries and dictionaries and encyclopaedias are typically never read cover-to-cover but ad hoc, intermittently, 'irrigorously' (Carter quoted in Costello 2005), tangentially as a
reference text which interjects into the reading of (an)other text or texts. Such reference texts and such readings uncover and even encourage surreal juxtapositions of ideas, associations and terms, which are part of the sometimes perverse pleasure of these texts: the shopping list one makes on the way to the library past the playground en route to the psychoanalyst. *The Glossary* invokes the trope of the *flâneur*; idiomatic and ultimately without conclusion. Each entry in the glossary is just that, a starting point, a line in the sand from which to free associate new topographies and forgotten recollections and

> [o]ther stories appear elsewhere, giving, it is hoped, what adjacent articles in newspapers sometimes give: an occasion for changing one's mind (Cage, 1961).

Writing is knowledge production, cultural production. Yet how does one write?

> *Je cherche, je cherche, j'essaie de comprendre, j'essaie de donner ce que j'ai vecu*... (I search, I search, I try to understand. I try to give that which I have lived) (Lispector 1977:19).

*The Glossary* foregrounds textuality and intertextuality in a manner congruent with the fictocritical project. Read as metalanguage, the glossary maintains the fiction of the sovereign critic and the separation of, categorization and prioritization of different kinds of writing namely, the primary text and its exegesis. Re-contextualized at the intersection of literature and postmodernism, with a concomitant collapse of critical distance, [which is where Amanda Nettelbeck sites fictocriticism as ‘an increasingly familiar form’ (1998: 3)], *The Glossary*, I argue, paradoxically and simultaneously subverts the authority of the text it putatively explices.

I am (following Nettelbeck and her cited sources in her *Notes Towards an Introduction* to a collection of Australian women
writing fictocriticism) referring to postmodernism as a long-standing cultural drift of the past thirty or forty years, something provisional in form, ‘that is avowedly self-conscious about the nature of textuality and of authorship’ which had its origins in the premises of post-structuralism (and, before that, structuralism). The impact of post-structuralist methodologies on the acts of reading and writing, which are now woven throughout contemporary literary and textual theory, provided the seedbed from which postmodernism emerged and hence, I will argue, fictocriticism. Dick Hebdige, cited in Nettlebeck’s essay, writes that postmodernism, conceived of a space of transmutation where, 

The shining that seemed in an earlier epoch to surround and sanctify the hush of human utterance in written form melts away as the voice and the book dissolve into a plethora of half-complete ‘texts’, voices, incommensurable ‘positions’. Between the two moments – a world of difference (1988:1).

That the term postmodern has a ‘problematic and blurred status’ and has now arguably passed its use-by date, does not, however, make it meaningless or mean that it does not (or did not) exist [as Helene Cixous puts it in another context (1991)]. Rather, the complex and not always related issues captured in the term have provided a culture (in the sense of a medium) for the equally slippery term fictocriticism to bloom (vi, to appear suddenly, usually in a cloud) within certain writing circles in Australia as well as France and Canada. The space designated postmodern, writes Noel King gave rise to ‘contaminated writing’ in the late eighties, ‘a writing of compounds and mutations, a hybrid writing that is not just not any one thing, but not any one thing.’ (1990) By writing in the indeterminate discursive spaces between fiction and autobiography, literary theory and the practice of performance, ‘gone is the notion that cultural texts provide unique insight into otherwise obscured social facts and that critical writing on such texts somehow sees through their fictional surfaces to obscured,
unrecognized textual truths.’ (1990:11) In place of the theory and the notion of its hermeneutical credentials we have writing which (re)news theory – not by reducing it to ‘mere fiction’, but by acknowledging the narrative and poetic (for example, metaphoric and rhetorical) drives of theoretical writing.

The fictocritical work, and hence my Glossary, appropriates this so-called postmodern space of hybrids and indeterminacies. The fictocritical glossary creates a character of the authoritative voice of critical writing, of taxonomy, subverting and parodying it, turning commentary, the ‘proper’ work of the glossarist, into conversation.

In post-structuralist literary critical terms, in which the focus is on the creation of meaning rather than the explication, the glossary (as fictocritical text) foregrounds the arbitrary assignment of category and of meaning, of signification and sign. Semiotician Ferdinand de Saussure’s argument that meaning only comes into being through constructed rather than ‘natural’ relations is enacted through the glossary, as Gayatri Spivak writes:

> We know of no world that is not organized as a language, we operate with no other consciousness but one structured as a language — languages which we cannot possess, for we are operated by those languages as well. The category of language, then, embraces the categories of world and consciousness even as it is determined by them (1987).

In other words, post-structuralism acknowledges the literary effects of all writing which make it not a transparent window through which we can neutrally and objectively view the world, but a construction of the world which brings it into being (King 1990: 11).

Nettelbeck relates the ‘collision’ of literature and postmodernism,
at least for the field of literary criticism, as key to the emergence of some recognizable narrative traits and features of what was in the process of becoming fictocriticism. Rosalind Krauss, who coined the counter-term paraliterary, describes in Roland Barthes’ later works (The Pleasure of the Text, The Lover’s Discourse, Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes) a kind of criticism/non-criticism in which the text ‘finds itself caught in a dramatic web of many voices, citations, asides...’, the space of Debate, quotation, partisanship, betrayal, reconciliation; but it is not the space of unity, coherence, or resolution that we think of as constituting the work of literature...What is left is drama without the Play, voices without the Author, criticism without the Argument (1985: 292-3).

The effect of this collision — this bringing of the ‘creative’ and the ‘critical’ together in order to make them ‘say’ something different — is, according to Nettelbeck, twofold: it creates the critical text as something other than a hermeneutical exercise (spilling as it does continually into the features of fiction), and it suggests that the critical text can be used to do something other than explication (since, rather than being a filter through which the ‘primary’ text is read, both become part of a single device for the generation of a new kind of text). The previously, apparently seamless façade of the beautifully written treatise, could be interrupted, and fatally it would seem, and in the process an entirely new excess of energy might be released from the body of the text as seismic and delightful as the birth of a new star.

This collision between the literal and the metaphorical gives us a clue to other traits of postmodernist text. Apart from self-reflexivity, writes Gareth Griffiths, there are ‘concerns with the accidental, the apparently contingent, the less (or more) than logical, the fact refusing to be contained, the fortuitous occurrence, the ‘random’ event, the unplaceable object (in time and space).’
(1989) *The Glossary* as collection and display case for: asides, afterthoughts and back stories, parallel and divergent interests, arguments, associations, allusions and theories, as graveyard for loved fragments and expository paragraphs under repair, produces just such a text by its processes of decomposition and composition, blurring the categories of objectivity and subjectivity, prose and poetry, philosophy and fiction.

Admittedly, I cannot ascribe ‘newness’ to fictocriticism in terms of generic hybridity as self-consciously hybridized texts have been available to past and present readerships at least since Lawrence Sterne’s eighteenth century classic *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy: Gentleman*, which accommodates both the fictional and the essayistic (Hecq 2003). Moya Costello lists more recent Australian examples she gives the alternative label ‘experimental’ or ‘innovative’ in the sense of ‘developing “generic hybridities”’: Beverly Farmer’s *A Body of Water* from 1990 (journal writing, poetry and short stories), Drusilla Modjeska’s *Poppy* (1990) (biography, fiction and autobiography), and Brian Castro’s *Shanghai Dancing* published in 2004 (auto/biography) (2005). Christine Brook-Rose in an even earlier essay looks at claims for categories such as the ‘new novel’ (*nouveau roman*) ‘in the wake of structuralist and post-structuralist trends’ and expresses astonishment that ‘the only narrative discourse recognized by the majority of readers (unlike audiences for other arts) should be that of the nineteenth century, based on truth of representation’ (Brooke-Rose 1978) given that its forms and ‘rules’ have been transgressed since at least the mid-twentieth century, and by some a decade or so earlier. Fictocriticism, if it is a useful concept at all, and ‘use’ may have less relevance than ‘allegiance’, then, for me, it has more to do with (literally, in the sense of acting and reacting) writing practices and their exploration, with questing and questioning and the texts that these activities and processes create,
and of poetic discourse as ‘an unsettling process of identity of meaning and speaking subject.’ (Kristeva 1981:124) And these practices and processes (since they are many) facilitate creative production, they somehow enhance or even just allow me to work with the material to hand in a way which produces an excess: more poetry, discourse and narrative.

Nettelbeck suggests that, rather than representing a ‘new’ form of knowledge, ‘the fictocritical can suggest ways of entering, drawing together and changing already familiar fields of knowledge.’ (7) And I suggest that the ‘entries’ in the glossary, though alphabetically arranged, are non-linear in their alliances. The glossary spreads out like Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizome, where any point can be connected with any other, ‘ceaselessly [establishing] connections between semiotic chains...’ (1987). The glossary is neither category of utterance nor writing genre but rather, like the hermaphrodite’s organs which together do not make a unity but a multiplicity in which parts continually refer to other parts outside of themselves, without any possibility of closure, without beginning or end. And I suggest the glossary can be what Anne Brewster has called a ‘space clearing’ strategy: the ‘essay’ in its seventeenth century incarnation as, literally, an ‘attempt’, ‘an irregular undigested piece’ that enables the ‘dialogism, the hybridization and the revitalization of knowledges' (1985).

In the thinking through, I am reminded that the notion of the hybrid is borrowed from scientific discourse, specifically genetics. The mixing of genetic strains of a particular species creates what is termed ‘hybrid vigour’: an intensity, an ability to thrive, an energetic forcefulness. This vigor, this excess, this writing ‘beyond’ the known wor(l)d as it were, suggests where the fictocritical project touches on *jouissance*, that ‘untranslatable' term which
relates to pleasure understood in orgasmic terms and also in a more general corporeal sense as well as the enjoyment of rights: the right to experiment, to flaunt the rules, to transgress traditions and make the world anew which is at the heart of the avant-garde project. Through language I create (my)self which, as Marion Campbell states ‘whether dispersed in clusters of potentiality called characters or not, is always at least a dialogue, if not a querulous polyphonic exchange between so-called “selves” …this projected self, estranged by writing, is always, of course, another.’ (quoted in White et al 1990:11-12)

This metaphor (of a textual vigour and intensity, expression demanding release through energetic, in other words sexual excess) evokes the ‘space between’ discourses where, says Dominique Hecq, ‘knowledge can be intuited, articulated or performed’, the littoral – the border or limit – beyond which one needs to go in order to create new knowledge. In the fictocritical, writing can unapologetically enjoy subjectivity, enacting the imbrication of the self with the social, not in order to value subjectivity over objectivity, but rather as an approach to ‘understanding the ways in which subjectivity is always produced at the intersections of different discourses.’ (King:11). The fictocritical glossary, I argue, can be viewed as a performance of the palimpsest of memory and desire.

‘Glossary’ and ‘gloss’ contain a sense of not only directing the reader towards a desirable reading or imposing a (politically, syntactically) correct one on a given text, but also, sometimes, willfully misleading them or supplying comments of an especially unfavourable sort, or of reading a different sense into (presumably different to that intended by certain other commentators). As Freud and Kristeva have shown, there are whole categories of words which have antithetical meanings (Hecq 2005), ‘literature’
being one of them (meaning both writing and its erasure). The glossary as concomitant enlightening and undermining commentary smacks of a text in which there might well be a mixture of fiction (invention/speculation) and criticism (deduction/explication); of ambivalence towards the available categories, discourses or narratives.

Reading a ‘different’ sense into a text (in fact giving it a different appearance or context) is language in the act of framing or, I argue, caught in the poetic act. Explaining something away is to gloss over it – a clear case of death (or live burial) by elusion or effacement. The fact that all manner of inconveniences: people, facts, (his & her)stories, agencies and relationships can be vapourised with words only serves to demonstrate the intoxicating power and disturbing potential of language in action to which any poet can attest.

That ‘glossa’ can also refer to a headland (a geographical tongue), the name of a village on the Greek Island of Skopelos, or be the acronym for the Gay and Lesbian Organised Sports Society of Australia is testament to the slippages in meanings in any text — as any translator knows — and the arbitrary nature of the signifier. The slippage between the signifier and the signified is a fissure or a wound akin to recognition — Judith Butler calls this ‘ambivalence’ —the trope of endless search.

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1 Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English (Fifth Ed. 1964)

2 The Bible is perhaps the best known example of a very well annotated and glossed text and one which underscores the partial and political nature of the writing of glossaries.

3 No doubt the slang usage, usually in gangster argot, of ‘framing’ someone, meaning setting them up to get caught, is artfully appropriate here.
SECTION 2

The Glossary:

*a fictocritical essay*
THE GLOSSARY

By Jill Martindale Farrar

My wor(l)d is a work of art that gives birth to my self. (after Nietzsche).

1 I debated whether to call this work ‘A Glossary’ or ‘The Glossary’, the latter obviously having more generic or universal authority of the kind which fictocriticism actively resists. However calling it A Glossary seemed faint of heart. Certainly the text as it is, represents only one of many possible outcomes, yet as other experimental writers have found, a tradition, genre or structure deliberately confronted, is a point of departure which opens up further transformative possibilities in writing of the kind I desired to explore in The Glossary. ‘I'm spelling out what Ashbery and others have called the liberating effect of constraints,’ says poet Rosmarie Waldrop in an interview with contemporary Joan Retallack in 1999. So my use of the definite article in this instance is intended to be therapeutic, as well parodic. In choosing to adopt the stance of ownership and definitiveness, I am foregrounding the privilege traditionally associated with a masculine pretension to possessing a language or a form (as one might a territory or a body) and ‘making it one’s own’. In contrast, such inspirational women writers such as language poets Waldrop, Retallack and Lyn Hejinian and others associated variously with écriture feminine or fictocriticism, such as Nicole Brossard, Gail Jones, Anna Gibbs, Hélène Cixous and Clarice Lispector have modeled a collegial, collage-istic use of the multivocity of language 'to be embraced as such, with no pretensions to originality or ownership' while at the same time enjoying the 'dicey pleasures of permeability, motion and susceptibility to chance occurrences' (Retallack, 2001). Another option was to call it simply Glossary, which again lacked specificity and the element of self-reflexivity or the kind of critical commentary on itself which, as Bakhtin long ago observed, is built into both the novel and the essay, pointing out its propensity to not only represent itself, but 'itself [to serve] as the object of representation' (1981:7). In addition, The Glossary reverses the ostensible relationship to its primary text (the novel: New Moon Through Glass), it even physically comes before the novel in the order of texts, in this way it foregrounds the palimpsest of language as medium: the glossary in this case is not the afterword of the novel but both texts are (always) intertwined within identities and traditions in ongoing, transformative conversation: 'the culture and the language we breathe and move in, which condition us even while we help to construct them' (Waldrop 1999). Fictocritical writing is 'haunted writing' in the sense used by Avital Ronell (1986), but also it acknowledges in its multivocity, what Michel de Certeau has termed ‘heterology’: the science of the different which attempts to write the voice (1984).

2 See jill farrar
'The act of writing begins with Orpheus' gaze...the movement of desire which shatters the song's destiny.'

**abreaction** — (psychoanalysis) The removal by revival & expression of the emotion associated with forgotten or repressed ideas of the event that first caused it. [ab-, reaction; after G *abreagierung*, a working off of anger, a letting off of steam].

Writing is this for me – the very act allowing an outlet, a valve through which to express the (socially) unacceptable feeling or desire or thought, an outpouring, not so much divinely inspired lyricism (though this too), but also of bile, of phlegm, of shit, of piss, blood, sweat, mucous, snot and smegma. Of placenta. Right, I'm glad I've got that out of the way. Obviously such blatant cathartic writings are not necessarily the fundament of literary or critical texts — or are they? Ought they to be? In a world where we are increasingly under surveillance, is the written a space of democratic freedoms, or at least ought it be defended as such? And yet again, does democracy extend to aesthetics? Do the excreta and expletives deserve their moment on the whiteboard or are they simply edited out unquestioningly? Do they count perhaps as ‘unfinished masterpieces' of which Harry Matthews (and Barthes) are enamoured — once written down, a project or idea, no matter how incomplete, is real work.\(^3\) I have (or had) a point I want(ed) to get to in all this, but, as writing acts have a tendency to do, as soon as I had enunciated that list of excreta I recognized they were all bodily productions, which in themselves produced another path, another twist in the fork in

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\(^3\) Maurice Blanchot, 1981.

the road of my thinking and so, many other subjects, associations, diversions presenting themselves to me like a storm in a snowdome must be let go and therefore forgotten about. How can this be I wonder? I am a veritable vomitorium of the written word — the notebooks, journals (the former mostly theoretical, the later mostly personal) exercise books (a combination of the above, including daily ephemera), plain pads of paper (no rules, doodles, anything, lists of books to read, telephone numbers, reminders, to do lists) and post-it notes (aphorisms — my own and other people's, example: we grow out of certain words like clothes and shoes and pursuits — simple ‘read this’ tombstones which emerge from any book I like/have referred to more than once/want to revisit; or sometimes, whole trains of thought which span a patina of post-its which exist in limbo, only ‘posted’ to more post-its). Of course, I am only talking about the writing that is ex-computer. This three dimensional material in a narrow variety of shapes, mostly rectangular and white, is detritus which forms like terminal moraine across my desk and study, only more swiftly. The notions, feelings, words circulate and settle like sediment or some other geo-physical event, sometimes ordered and filed, only to be ‘discovered’ at some later date like found objects on a beach. Or clues to a mystery I am alone in wishing to solve. As Harry says, ‘Certainly everything I’ve ever written seems to me to constitute a series of holding actions against the day when I can mount my triumphant “major” assault on the towers of fame.’5 Yet again I am distracted (which, the dictionary tells me means: showing lack of concentration or so worried or upset as to be

5 1988.
unable to think clearly or act clearly) by the word ‘vomit’ which I neglected in my original list of bodily productions and which, curious as to its etymology, I find in the dictionary that a ‘vomitory’, far from being a place where the overindulged Romans tickled the backs of their throats with a feather in order to facilitate further bingeing, is ‘Each of a series of passages for entrance & exit in (amphi)theatre.” This seems a felicitous meaning given the current project — a glossary — consisting of a series of ‘entries’ and ‘exits’ in this work which, employing different voices, is in itself a theatre.

But back at my scatological (as opposed to, but not necessarily excluding my eschatological) writing. Am I really suggesting (or at least prepared to entertain the thought) that my writings are a bodily function? Am I literally smearing my ‘self’ on the page as a baby might play with feces in an artistic expression or experimentation, unconscious of transgressing a fundamental social taboo?

Here I am reminded of a wonderful passage of writing by Dominque Hecq who traces the etymology of ‘literature’ and performs a kind of magic on the page — of disappearances and appearances — one associates with the best literature or should I say ‘fictocriticism’, but more of that later.

Hecq is tracing ‘a hint reminiscent of the possibility for knowledge-production in poetry’ for which she proposes she

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6 Concise Oxford Dictionary.
takes her readers to ‘this other shore’ between which writing forms a passageway, ‘[w]here the letter is litter. Where stars are clouds are sand.’

The French psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan conceived of literature as a series of holes and erasures. In an essay entitled ‘Lituraterre’ he meditates on the letter as constitutive of the subject (and of sexuality) as that which is written. In Latin, literature a signifies writing, grammar, learning or literature. However, literature derives from the verb lino, for ‘I smear’, ‘I cover’, ‘I erase.’ As Freud and later Kristeva have shown, the roots of languages from Ancient Egyptian to present-day German, French and English comprise antithetical meanings. Literature belongs to this category of words. ...Literature, Lacan suggests, is related to the Latin litus, meaning either the act of smearing or covering, or littoral, a shore. Thus the word literature generates a double pun: it suggests both letters and their erasure as well as the limit or border of a territory such as the ‘rim of the hole in knowledge’.

‘I smear’ seems particularly apt given how this entry began.

But I digress, which is of course one of the phantom productions/seductions of writing: taking the long way round. I had wanted to begin (at the beginning) as I pack my life into boxes (rather than ‘unpack’ it, which is a fashionable thing to do with critical theory just now). As I literally pack to move house, I am confronted with very similar decision-making and problem-solving processes — exploration and examination of material, salvage from other lives; debating whether to ‘bung it all in’ or ‘chuck it all out’ at the extremes and then, at the micro level,

7 2005.
weighing as on a goldsmith’s scales what to keep, what to
discard; how to order it, how to fit it in, how to find space and
whether, for instance, an origami frog (one of many) made by my
daughter a few years ago should be kept and, if so, kept ‘as a
frog’ or flattened for transportation and potential reincarnation
at a later date. My whole writing production — both the fictional
and the critical — seems one long act of origami folding
notebooks into textbooks and back again — with the same push-
pull of affect around permanence and impermanence and my
relationships with objects of love. And I realize my novel’s
protagonist Venetia has the same difficulty in reverse, she
cannot ‘unpack’ her boxes after moving and right now I feel
curiosity and a sense of anticipation, because unless I get back to
my novel I won’t find out what she has packed in them.

But just to further explain before I explore my packing metaphor
(and packing materials — which bits of writing could be
described as this?), I cheated by placing this text under
‘abreaction’ rather than waiting patiently (i.e. as a patient awaits
the needle) until ‘p’, for, though I could write entries in the
glossary in any order I chose — and this is the case with the
composition of any text — there are anxieties associated with
how a text will be read and like most writers (and people?) I am
concerned to make a good first impression. My narcissism urges
me to polish the front end (to a gloss?) on the assumption that
that is where my alleged reader will start.

And anyway, is not the alphabet yet another set of language
rules not so much for spelling (the casting of spells) as ordering,
archiving and retrieving information that otherwise is spurting in sheets ~

And yet in this place of abreaction, while I resist the idea of autobiography as truth exposure or confession, as soon as the autographical 'I' interrupts, as much as I protest, it shapes what I write (and how it might be read) into what Foucault calls in a paper on subjectivity and truth, the 'hermeneutics of the self'. And what does this have to do with fictocritical writing or my novel? This ‘to do’? This much ado, this voodoo is the trace of the body in the dumpster. See true crime and enigma.

**abortion** – recovery from ~. Vaginal birth begins with contractions. Powerful, expulsive and consciously uncontrollable – pain from which wrenches screams from the body if the social milieu allows it. And through the birth tears (in both senses) a child is brought forth tangled, messily bloodied and prune-like from its sojourn in immersion. The baby cries, sucks, sleeps. The mother’s body is opened and then deflates like a pink and red balloon. In abortion the scream never comes, camouflaged by the mask of the anaesthetist and the no-memory, the amnesia of a body event which is very rarely, if ever, spoken of. A missing person. A hollow; a punctured balloon, brown and shriveled. The mask stays put and she, ur-mother, must greet the world again while inhaling poison and shame.

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8 Michel Foucault, 1980.
Why discuss this if I am not prepared to really canvass the autobiographical elements which make it a topic to look into and discuss? Because the text is also about what is not, or cannot be said.

Muteness, Peter Brooks tells us in his analysis *The Melodramatic Imagination*, 'corresponds to melodrama as blindness does to tragedy and deafness to comedy. Blinding moments of insight, failures of insight, typify tragedy; while comedy is based on misapprehension and mistaken communication. The melodramatic text is mute, caught up by fear of the failure of rendering itself articulate...melodrama is a matter of the failure of literalness itself, of the articulateness of the literal. The melodramatic text does not speak the truth; it merely points to it, to its existence elsewhere.'\(^9\) In Barthes analysis of narrative codes, the proairetic code, he says, is intricately bound up with the hermeneutic, the code which governs the enigma and hence meaningfulness, significance. ‘This is true of tragedy as well, but in melodrama the protagonist is a *failed* rather than a masterful interpreter.’\(^10\)

Might it be useful, tactically speaking, to view my writing as a kind of melodrama in the above sense? Or at least of my writing about abortion. If writing is often conceived as a gestation and giving birth, would silence (inarticulacy) and failure (of understanding, of interpretation, of communication) then be

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\(^9\) Peter Brooks, 1976.

acceptable as some of the outcomes of such an experiment that might be construed as a phantom pregnancy? The artist, writes Blanchot, 'has to maintain the will to achieve and the claim on perfection while suffering the distress of irredeemable failure. And yet for us this failure is called Van Gogh.' ¹¹

Or if not phantom pregnancy, since I have chosen to enter this Glossary on ‘abortion’, am I engaged in the disinterment of an aborted text — a performance of a ‘self’ which is also an ‘other’; a voice which has been silenced by perceived or actual criticism. In other words, though the outcome of the research I am engaged in through writing may be different to those forms generally accepted as 'legitimate', I can attest to experiencing a long labour. ¹²

And, if fictocriticism is an 'outsider genre' then abortion (of babies and of words and texts) is a kind of haunting in the sense that Ross Chambers ¹³ (2005) writes about cultural and historical atrocities – society makes itself civilized by excluding them – the narratives of women’s lives excludes abortion – the atrocity that a woman must deal with alone...

¹¹ Maurice Blanchot, 1989.

¹² Indeed, argues Paul Dawson (1999) in defence of creative writing being as research, in a repudiation of poetic composition as emotional outpouring, T. S. Eliot wrote that, ‘the larger part of labour of an author in composing his work is critical labour; the labour of sifting, combining, constructing, expunging, correcting, testing; this frightful toil is as much critical as creative...’ (1964).

¹³ Ross Chambers, 2005.
absorption – being absorbed (entirely) in the moment of writing or reading (and as writers, we are constantly our own readers). The phenomenology of reading is not my subject here, and yet there is an absorption of concentration and, I would fancifully suggest, of the body (under which rubric I include the mind, but more on the ‘body’ and its absorption later) that becomes available to both the reader and writer which fascinates because it resists articulation. It may in fact (or in fancy) underlie folklore surrounding a mistrust of someone ‘good with words’ or the dismissal of ‘book learning’ as immaterial and hence false, and yet, if so immaterial, what’s the danger? Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never …our experience tells us this childish bravado is just that. ‘…[T]o be written, be it mortally and to be changed into a recognized word,’ \(^{14}\) alters every body, every thing.

To interject an anecdote, I lost the ability to read at a particular point in my life. I am not talking about functional literacy. I could read the back of a cereal packet or a popular magazine article. It was in the realm of reading literary texts that I suddenly (or incrementally, even the pace of the dis-ease resists analysis — as resistant as a metaphor) became an ‘outsider’. I was an outsider to the privileged discourse of literary texts, outside the academy in its largest sense and also literally, the university literary undergraduate degree in which I was participating, ‘enrolled’. In Lacanian I was the Father’s utterance, I was no longer able to be part of the world, it seemed, and of

course I knew the fault lay with me. At the time this was either a symptom of a wider malaise — a dissociation with a lifestory which required stockpiling academic achievements, jumping through hoops of increasing degrees of difficulty, not necessarily for glory, but simply to be deemed worthy, to be able to state that I was ‘doing something’ with my life. A major responsibility. So many ways to fail: narcissism — flaunting one’s achievements — being one of them. But as I review this Time of the Plague, the aspect which perhaps prolonged the terror of never again ‘fitting in’ was losing the ability of ‘lose myself’ in a book. (A worthy book of course) What I was outside was that sense of self-reflexive absorption which I would say is the basis of the statement — more an ejaculation — ‘I love reading!’ I am on the edge of dangerous ground here, on the verge of a discourse I am poorly equipped to discuss critically, though I did later study and train to become a remedial reading teacher in the secondary school system. Still, as a writer of poetry and of fiction — literary products — I am still plagued perhaps by the worry that something I have written may send another reader off into a downward spiral of incomprehension. Or the obverse, not so worrying as motivating, that written texts are acting and interacting upon readers and writers in (and within) complex, organic, though often or sometimes silent, phenomena.

Psychologists have well documented the direct influences of narrative and characterization in literary products on readers’ attitudes and beliefs, but the effects of the ‘stylistic’ or rhetorical aspects of literary works on reader ‘involvement’ that enable or ‘amplify’ these direct effects are less well articulated. In a much
longer discussion of personal involvement in narrative discourse, psychologists Max Louwerse and Don Kuiken preface their text by saying,

Across disciplinary boundaries, a variety of terms have been used to identify personal involvement in narrative presentations. Readers may become captured by a literary text, moviegoers may become entranced by a cinematic narrative, members of an audience may be moved by a dramatic performance, and so on. Despite terminological diversity, something common seems at stake: Often during narrative encounters, feeling becomes fluid, comprehension seems multifaceted, and the narrated world is brought vividly to presence. After such encounters, the presence of the narrative world often does not immediately dissipate. Lingering mood, changed beliefs, and shifts in self-perception indicate that something has not only been ingested, but also lastingly absorbed.

Clearly narratives (stories and narrative techniques) along with the aesthetic and tropological aspects of language have underreported powers which in an over-regulated world would require them to come with, not just G, MA and R ratings, but usage guidelines from the Surgeon General, nutritional information, toxicological analysis and warnings against handling heavy books whilst under the influence of alcohol or medication.

There is much more to write about bodies and texts and absorption: there is drug-induced absorption which may be a form of ‘reading’ for the reading immune (possibly the addictive nature of human beings is allied to a craving for being absorbed, entirely, into a world which ‘defamiliarizes’ or recontextualizes
the familiar and engenders an altered sense of self and new associations and attachments), there is the absorption and ‘hybridization’ of one or more bodies engaged in a pleasurable navigation of surfaces and nerve endings. There are the guilty (and guilt-free) pleasures of self-implication in crime fiction, there are a whole range of compulsive-obsessive and social behaviours associated with personal involvement in certain aesthetic qualities of a text which result in ‘fandom’ and its various manifestations (‘healthy’ and otherwise), there are questions about what the imagination might entail regarding the projection of our reading or writing focused on how literature enters life and vice versa, about reading- and writing-induced shifts in self-perception/self-creation whereby at one extreme writers of fiction who find in the process that their creations, characters but also the texts themselves, take on ‘a life of their own’ would be considered to be suffering an instance of ‘dissociation’ by many Western social and behavioural scientists. Or the kind of absorption in space of the casual observer, the voyeur, the flâneur ‘reading or writing’ the landscape that takes place while walking, sitting in a café or a waiting room, driving more often than not with musical accompaniment, or while ensconced in blue-white light in a room alone roaming the world wide web. (See flâneur) There are disappearances and appearances associated with readers and writers vanishing into or emerging out of a black hole, a white screen and a keyboard, or the border of the ‘hole’ that is

literature: where knowledge and jouissance coalesce\textsuperscript{16}. But I'm straying ahead of myself. And in the interests of playing fair, there must be some text left, like cookie dough, to fill the other entries, gaps, caesuras, in the \textit{The Glossary}. The parapet text which lea(r)ns on and imagines it is dictating what its host(ess) text, \textit{New Moon Through Glass} is really about.

When I engage in the act of writing, I do sense the thrill as well as a sense of dread of being involved in something illicit. (see autoerotic asphyxiation) I am delving, tinkering, free-associating. I am taking part in a process of which certain aspects are pleasurable. And fictocriticism, as Anna Gibbs points out, is ‘a way of writing for which there is no blueprint and which must be constantly invented anew in the face of the singular problems that arise in the course of the engagement with what is researched.’\textsuperscript{17} And yet the engagement requires of me a commitment to protect the practice above all else — as though one were committing [to] a crime — to mostly hide the ‘outcome’ of my research or at least until, at a later date, I have morphed into the reader of my own text, considered the difficulty (and intimacy) of disposing of the corpse and have been able to ‘doctor’ it — ‘it’ being the story and the discourse, the diegesis and mimesis.

Tide marks the sand.

\textsuperscript{16} I am indebted to Dominique Hecq’s scintillating footwork on Lacan and letters, 2005.

\textsuperscript{17} Anna Gibbs, 2005.
An epic poem of the earth
An echo of an earlier draft —
The wind’s feet shine and I
Simply repeat myself.

See choreography

aftermath. – a calculated afterbirth. A computationally complex communication cycle. The reverse telescope of hindsight creating a troubling editorial twitch regarding everything written on the page - the body text.

There is some trauma for me as I write concerning writing, the activity or practice of opening up the self, and this, as Novarina writes 'is not a painless act, but a constant tearing apart and unveiling...a free fall into the interior of words.'

It is as if there were a drama, a story or a piece of evidence, that can only be won through an argument with the keeper of the tale who must, logically be the writer, (my)self, but a self I haven’t met yet, or once was but have forgotten.

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18 Rachel Carson (author of The Silent Spring) remarked that sediments were the 'sort of epic poem of the earth'. I have also used words from line by Swinburne, 'The wind's feet shine along the sea.' I have not recorded where I found these references, though I assume the Carson quote is from her famous ecological work The Silent Spring. I could search for and properly reference these sources, though as they relate to fictocriticism and 'haunted writing', both borrowings have made a 'sea change into something rich and strange.'

19 Valere Novarina, 1996.
If painting and film making (to name but two instances) are ‘two dimensional visual art practices’, then what is writing? I place marks on the blank page or screen within a quadrilateral frame. Am I then engaged in a two-dimensional visual art practice? Or is it that, though the product of filmmaking and its projection may be two dimensional, the practice — the ‘making of a film’ is not. Unless the etching via exposure of light and shade (chiaroscuro) through the mechanical eye onto the ‘blank’ spool in its recesses is essentially that. The difference is that I am the medium. My head and my viscera explode onto the page in faltering slow motion. Frame by frame, word by word, letter by letter. (Molar becoming-molecular, perhaps) Each brush stroke (etching, écriture) moving through a complex transmutation from its ‘black hole’. The spool which runs in the unconscious is never blank or only through erasure – mostly it’s snapshots around which a story drapes its tendrils. Or sometimes silence when the thought vapourises before reaching the level [as in zones of indiscernibility (Deleuze and Guattari)] of language.

See also, seepage as in seepage is imperceptible.

**accidents and fate** – Fate: a series of accidents resulting in a narrative of cause and effect presumed to be pre-ordained by an impersonal deity, cathartic to witness. See *Oedipus Rex*.

Freud's take on accidents, 'slips', as expressive of unconscious wishes and drives, in other words, desire, are of course the basis of psychoanalysis' redescription of the oedipal myth (and fate) as unconscious intention. The Freudian slip was also the basis of a
childhood enigma for me as both my parents underwent Freudian analysis and just as our table tennis bouts might be subject to post mortem scrutiny, so were our Freudian slips and displays of oedipal/electrical complexes. So when Harry Matthews writes: 'Whatever I write tells my story without my knowing it. Whatever I'm aware of saying, even if it belongs to my story, is not the story I'm actually telling.' it revives a self-consciousness in my writing that, possibly in spite of myself (even literally ‘in spite’ of my self), I am displaying my oedipal complex which, having been theorized for me at an early age, I should have ‘grown out of’ like a favourite but fraying sweater.

This unraveling metaphor has a mythic quality to it for me as well: Penelope and her embroidery, Ariadne’s ball of wool, women who were both diligent, faithful and wily, a litany of desirably inscribed qualities in the daughter interrupted somewhat by the injection, ‘Rapunzel, Rapunzel let you’re your hair!’ If my sexuality, my gender, is also an ‘accident’, revealing my unconscious desires, and I were to ‘let down my hair’, then where should I slips my tongue?

Perhaps it has something to do with not finding clowns funny as a child, rather I found their exaggerated mouths and whitened-out and re-drawn eyebrows monstrous, frightening the way a huge adult head in close up is to a small child. But if one is aware that every time one opens one’s mouth (or spills words onto a page) one is responsible for the shape which the words make

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(something like the Rorschach's inkblot) and the words themselves and one's interpretation of them expose the mistakes and misregistrations that amuse the adults as a shamed 'child' or adolescentconfuses the marks on a fresh pinafore with the dirt in the back lane and the blood on the handkerchief with the nose with the vagina with the writing on the wall. The nature of the written self, the nature of writing and its fictional remove from the 'facts' is the beginning of the 'accident' of writing itself. I must start writing without knowing what it is I am listening to. There is always a lot of chatter — what yoga teachers call mind chatter — like a child talking to itself, telling itself what is going on, making it up as I go. As I catch my drift.

**Accident**, from *cadere* meaning fall (the slip, but also the event 'falls', i.e. 'shit happens') and prefix *ac-* (same as) *ad-* , a sense of motion or direction, increase or mere intensification. The accident in writing, not simply 'instructions for the production of randomness' but generative events of which one can make some but not one thing but many; challenging a state in which the voice of one (the majority or the ruling classes or the 'whites' or the language of the Father) to determine the fate of many. 'In a world of chance,' writes J. M. Coetzee in his novel *Foe*. 'is there a better or worse?'

We yield to the strangers embrace or give ourselves to the waves; for the blink of an eyelid our vigilance relaxes; we are asleep; and when we awake we have lost the direction in our lives. What are these blinks

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21 Anna Gibbs, 1997, ii.
of an eyelid, against which the only defence is an eternal and inhuman wakefulness? Might they not be the cracks and chinks through which another voice, other voices, speak in our lives? By what right do we close our ears to them.\footnote{Foe, 1986.}

On the massage table my body becomes fragments, ‘The “personal”’, writes Lyn Heijinian, ‘is already a plural condition. Perhaps one feels it is located somewhere within, somewhere inside the body — in the stomach? The chest? The genitals? The throat? The head? One can look for it and already one is not oneself, one is several, incomplete, and subject to dispersal.\footnote{Lyn Hejinian, 1991.}

\begin{quote}
I am the stone slowly
Dissolving like a tablet
In a glass.
\end{quote}

A series of tissues and sites which are touched upon sometimes sequentially, sometimes not. Snatches. Not being able to write. The masseuse and my communication is via our mutual focus on a nexus of pain or muscular holding pattern; becomes our metalanguage. ‘The flesh exists, under the gaze of others, in its absurd contingence, and yet it is oneself.’\footnote{Simone de Beauvoir, 1951.} A documentary of tactile interaction. We morph into a being, a text, which encompasses the piped music and the ticking clock, the rattling
window shades and the sound of the oil pump.

address book – A collection of names, contacts and associations sketching a journey.

The glossary is an address book of ideas tracing the coordinates, the trajectories, the impacts of ideas traveling to their final address.

addiction – An architecture that is a composed of words which creates a ‘space’ as four stone walls and a ceiling from which it is difficult to leave. The ghost marks left by pictures when they are removed from walls. Also, strange voodoo territory carrying deep disturbance like booty, ‘in that intellectual sweet head of yours’.25 Plastic glissandos. Beaded black nights. Sweat with nowhere to roll. (See dystopia and folk art. Compare wallpaper and paper-cuts)

That books are an addiction — and carry their own culture of trafficking, procurement and consumption, of brief meetings (more like moments of mutual recognition) with fellow addicts (book clubs I believe are for dilettantes, true addicts are a solitary breed), feeling the spines, inhaling that musty, earthy sometimes chemical smell, running a finger across the title, exchanging glances across the floor of the stacks — is not something well documented. I am well acquainted with the dilemma of carrying on a conversation and feigning genuine involvement in it with a friend, acquaintance or peer while

surreptitiously scanning their private book shelves — weighing, categorizing, hunting for some delectable morsel, some unpossessed prize. If, as Clarice Lispector writes in *Near to the Wild Heart*, "To steal without fear is not to steal at all," I cannot say I have never stolen a book. But whether the pounding of my heart on possession of a desired book by whatever means purports fear or excitement, as when approaching the beloved's breast, I'm hesitant to decipher. Sometimes infatuation is complete with a sampling of a few phrases from a precious tome. Sometimes the mere thought of a particular book is enough to realize a Midas-like fixation in me. I have been victim of others' predatory swoops on my library — my stash, and I suppose I understand their perfidy. The worst: the smiling faced 'borrower' who runs off with the virgin copy, mint clean from the bookstore (or horror of horrors some favourite, much loved and much read), never to return or sometimes to return with unwanted personal review.

‘Funny how one's life should be ruled by an appetite.’

*adolescence* – Initiation into adulthood frequently involves mutilation of the body. Aching sides – words which hold too much in. Where the songs you listened to were tattooed to the inside of your thigh. And the drummer’s breezy beat stayed to eat into the nights you couldn’t sleep, listening to the neighbour’s dog or the cars driving up the hill. Going

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26 1943.

somewhere.

‘Adolescence is where everything counted.’

**adumbrate** - the ankle turning slowly outwards — a shadow, indistinct which folds around the shoulders and appears as an echo in the eyes. (see *Girl With Bruised Shoulders*). Shoulders are grown up, responsible structures, the supporting partner in an adagio with the arms. In swimming they initiate the movement, following a solo variation concluded by a fast coda in which they dance again together. The breath is the primal act — the movement (inspiration) which brings us, the dancer, the swimmer, to life. The shoulders heave. Learning to talk — a socializing process like an incomplete conversation — similar to learning to move the body in acceptable ways. How many things can the shoulders, the wrist, the touch of fingertip on lumbar say, intimate, give vague indication or warning of? Recognition of looming regret: all the things said or gestures made which cannot be unsaid, erased.

‘Speech leaves no mark in space; like gesture, it exists in its immediate context and can reappear only in another’s voice, another’s body...’

A fundamental wound which, through erasure leaves only a vague outline – a mouth or placenta – which nourishes the

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28 Craig McGregor, 1983.

29 S. Stewart, 1984.
creative process. Heartbeat, clock ticking, a harkening that, as the shadows lengthen in the late afternoon, the time for revision may have already passed and what one was looking forward to is only... cloudy tea. Accepting the gifts of the imagination as obscure and faint, though lurid too at times, quells the almost constant presence of sadness. For de Quincey the process of taking drugs and swimming seemed somehow related.

**ambition.** - What one can achieve through acts of writing. The performance of identities. Lists of things — a catalogue of ‘is’ — defining the self. Words for thoughts, passions and fears, for carpets, cups and crevices. Textile fetishes. The exorcism of ghosts. Contrapuntal dialogue — music, rhythm and rhyme. Naming — incantation and fixation. Writing as register, (as in births, deaths and marriages) and aide memoir. Registration marks (in printing) the limits of ‘full bleed’ and mis-registration. Guidelines for the reproduction of art and life. And beauty, however you interpret the term. Acknowledgement of the presence of voices which are rarely silent. Messages in bottles (flotation devices) – sent adrift to be read by someone sometime somewhere somehow. The reading being the consummation of a long distance love affair with the self. See **masturbation.**

‘And so I suffer, apparently because I love you, but in reality because I am losing the motive that will sustain my passion, which most likely I am more fond of than you.’

This quotation from a book I have never read but which has stayed with me for

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years is one of the little ‘gems’ I polish with a soft cloth and gaze at in my eerie. I have begun to expunge the really personal from these musings. Thoughts about love affairs gone wrong, about painful career moves (does anyone else think that it is ironic to call something a ‘career’ which we then describe a sober and very straight narrative in our curriculum vitae?) The coup de grace with which the triumphant artistic embodiment of these failures will turn into narrative gold vies with Rumpelstiltskin or some other deluded fool whom the right and the just simply ignored.

**amorous discourse** - The love letter (helped enormously by alliteration) as opposed to hate mail having a completely different rhythm, metre and hence affect, ‘expects a response.’

Does hate mail? I’d argue it expects to stop its recipient dead in their tracks, like the revenge entrance by the spurned lover as in ‘Success is the best revenge’.

Chrysanthemums are profoundly happy. They speak through dishevelment.

Granted then the whole of literature is one long letter to an invisible other, a present, possible or future passion that we rid ourselves of, feed or seek.

**analogy** Like desire. The translation of one language into

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33 Barthes, 1977.
another. The theatre of gesture, poetry – the passage of vibrations emanating from a word in space transferring affect to its audience – the act that occurs under the mistletoe (the kiss) breaks the boundaries between two people.

anecdotes A pharmakon which can be both poison and cure, depending on who has keys to the medicine cabinet. Elspeth Probyn in discussing ‘the difficulty of speaking in the first personal singular’ and ‘the problematic of the [speaking] self’ within cultural studies theory, quotes Meagan Morris’s argument that anecdotes are ‘allegorical expositions of a model of the way the world can be said to be working. So anecdotes need not be true stories, but they must be functional in a given exchange.’ Anecdotes in this sense are some of the building materials of fiction. But a caveat should be issued with using raw anecdotes.

approval A warm pillow on which to lay the head, particularly when physically or emotionally drained. As Russell Meares states, ‘Patterns of reciprocal communicative behaviour evolve between the mother and the baby which depend upon appropriate responses to cues or signal.’ (see psychiatry, also, Piaget’s stages of development), which why, the formulation of original ideas, even those of a scientific or impersonal nature, requires moral courage. The analysand and the original thinker or artist both have to face the fear of being neither understood

35 1992:98.
nor approved. They face the fear of isolation from objects, both internal and external.  

physical signs of ~, See also sighing, stroking, cuffing.

aphasia -loss of speech and other rhetorical flourishes such as suddenly breaking off in the middle of a speech as in ‘she peppered her interactions with aphasia’ (Anon). And whatever is the term for not being able to read.

appropriate — a stiff leather opening; forbidden love. see also, collage, montage, recontextualization.

There is only
ONE WAY
in which
a person
acquires a
NEW IDEA:
by the combination
or association
of two or more ideas
he already has
into
a new
JUXAPOSITION

36 Rycroft, C. quoted by Anna Gibbs 1995, i.
37 Unreliable quotes echo the means by which myths are made.
in such a manner
as to discover
a relationship
among them
of which
he was not previously
aware.
AN IDEA IS A FEAT OF ASSOCIATION. 38

The story of your life is a lecture on modernity. Discuss.

**arabian nights** — The lie that sustains you. Or the fiction of you. Self-conscious in the presence of the other’s desire. Adjusting oneself on the sofa. Wait,’ she said. ‘…science is continuously busy with the complete description of something, with ultimately the complete description of anything with the complete description of everything —Think about grammar and a nightingale …It is impossible to avoid meaning and if there is meaning and it says what it does there is grammar…This is truly related/Truthful and truly./Truly and truthful./Everything that they say and they say so. 39

The mouth opens letting loose words like a flock of birds. The birds let loose refuse to fly to the open window. The failure of ever affecting her surroundings or the people surrounding her. She closed her mouth on his with a kind of determined


resignation to make the best of it. The memory of her magnificence perched like a talisman – rare, dead and forgotten – between them. Mathematically greater than the tired carpet or the impossibility of it.

I cannot actually say I am dying, since whether I die a violent death or not, I am present at only one part of the event. And a large part of the dread I feel at the idea of dying consists in the vertigo of being suspended in the heat of a crisis where my disappearance will prevent me from ever knowing the ‘denouement’.  

Repeating and repeating myself... grammar is only a reflection of a syntax that once was. 

as if (I write) – This very impossibility at the heart of the autobiographical enterprise, the impossibility of being ‘yourself’ pure and simple, may even be said to be autobiography’s generic condition of possibility. ‘[…] this differing of self from self – which we might term ‘desire’ […] is an emblem of the self-estrangement which is brought about by writing.’

Every story is an act of betrayal. My writing needs darkness and constant temperature to germinate. My body has been

42 Gibbs, 1995,i.
concertina’d. I walk doubled up with a pain. When she finds me watching her eyes go blank.

— You find me difficult. Or to use your word, ‘complicated’.
— I’m just a grammarian
— I know. That’s the point.

Not finding the words to say it. Finding the ‘it’ to say the words. It equals the event. The writing event. The inchoate body awareness. A sub-audible hum. Edge of monsoon. The long snowfall. Sound of ice melting. Being is one thing, but any attempt to write about it, especially as though the written version were somehow ‘real’ is quite another.

The place to which the writer travels has its own objective reality as well as an imaginative reality. But there is also a place from which the writer travels, shuffling between here and there, inside and outside the word and the text.  

... a sugar cube held at the edge of a cup absorbing the dark liquid;
... a fragment of a dream;
... certain notes;
... pieces of music and snatches of lyrics;
... the shards of a vessel smashed on impact with planet Earth.

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attention – I cannot say where this is leading. I am searching for the border of the self. My eyes feel ancient. I sense now this impossibility is my text. My ‘role’ has drifted from laborious translator of chaos or ‘the unconscious’ to the Oulipian ‘rat’ who must build the labyrinth from which I propose to escape. The question isn’t why or by whom it was created (as in social pressures or psychic drives) but how it is made. A sense of ‘powerless empowerment’. In literature, the smallest combination of words secretes perfectly intransitive properties …the field of meaning extends far beyond the intentions of any author.

autobiography — Let me digress …Samuel Goldwyn is credited with having said: I don’t think anyone should write his autobiography until after he’s dead. Put another way, is autobiography rebirth or obituary? Is it about ends? (the last event in the novel is the one the author chooses to give us, the autographical act ends with the writing of the narrative itself) Or discoveries via the ‘complication’ of the ‘dissimilarity between identity and discourse … the ever present ontological gap between the self who is writing and the self-reflexive protagonist of the work.’” And what difference does it make to how we read the text? In which case, what about the Bible? And what about the supposed authors of the Gospels, since glossaries were originally biblical commentaries. In the Gospel of St Mark, the voice of narrative commentary — the gloss — is subsumed into the text (or, because of the authority of the text and the narrator,

there is even, for the skeptical reader, an allowance for representational innocence …H. Porter Abbott makes this point well with another text, coincidentally with a religious reference in its title.

In Mark McCarthy's Memories of a Catholic Girlhood the author describes a contest set up for the orphaned McCarthies by their odious Uncle Myers: "the prize of a dime (no, a nickel) had been offered to the one with the highest marks." The naïve or acceptant reader sees the parenthetical adjustment — 'no, a nickel' — as a historian's scrupulous care for the facts. But the reader whose attention rests on the writing as action wonders: Why the correction? If the prize is a nickel, and the author recalled this while she was writing, why say anything about a dime? Imagining the textual event — ‘a dime (no, a nickel)’ — as it goes through draft after draft, from galley proof to page proof, makes even clearer its status as performance. It is altogether too smooth, and, seeing it as such, we see how the discourse in this instance is continuing the action in the tale of an actress too smooth for her own good, who eludes identity as an alcoholic eludes recovery.45

It has been remarked that the landmark texts of autobiography (Thomas Aquinas, Rousseau) show no similarity. Tracing the line of foam showing just how far speech may advance upon the sands of silence. See also, beach combing. Also, a heavily policed literary space. Conventionally an attempted reconciliation with the world from which the subject is violently alienated, and often provoked by a crisis which sets the narrative in motion. However,

no reconciliation is ever possible for, as Gertrude Stein says, ‘you are never yourself.’

**backstory** — Perhaps events are pre-written and pre-recorded and when you cut word lines, the future leaks out.  

First, once upon a time there were three unborn children. Make that three women who are pregnant. I'll stop apologizing. I'll stop telling you how I'm feeling or how it’s taken me thirty-five years and about the same number to the power of thirty-five if you count the time in dog years and drafts of this story. I notice I can't bear for something really terrible to happen to my characters. There are no icons; no full-skirted Virgins or crucifixes. Nothing: only my feet covered with red earth, which I stare at stupidly as I try to put this down on paper. I couldn’t bear, for instance for someone (a character) to actually die in the room with me as it were. Writing changes everything. Every tiny thing.

They might go off and die somewhere else; one might hear, second or third hand about a death — of eating something fatty or of being stung by bees. But imagine having a dead body in the room with you and not knowing what to do with it — their dead eyes just staring at you. There were too many bodies in this house. The story started before Simon’s suicide note was handed to me, before the doctor gave me a sedative and before I drove

46 Anna Gibbs, 1995, ii.

home in the sunset traffic — I guess before the sedative took
effect — blue light of the late European makes lining up all the
way from here to the Blue Mountains. It must have been a Friday.
The door knob rattled.

‘You can’t come in —.’

There was a significant pause. I thought I’d better start writing. I
might have had a ‘character’ who starts a fire which results in
someone’s death. Before I drank most of a bottle of black label
vodka — the kind my son would have turned his nose up at, if I
had one — a son that is. But I think I’d probably go back and
change it to ‘near death’.

Of course characters can have murderous feelings, they might
even battle with compulsive obsessive thoughts about doing
someone, or themselves damage. They might be very wary about
being around knives or behind the wheel of a car when they’re
particularly stressed. This fictional son would have developed a
habit of turning up his nose at my vodka indulgences as a
weakness, one that no one in their right mind could understand.
A fishing line. Song. The rubber of his gloves have an acrid taste.

I can hear noises, stirrings from the bedroom. The lodger is
awake. They might be chronically accident-prone and hurt
someone entirely without meaning to. Whenever I woke up, I
reached into my bag of palliatives. Bright reds and saffrons
under the station lights. There was someone dancing on a table.
In which case they might be better off sitting on their hands and
keeping their words and thoughts to themselves. Why did I tell you all this? I can tell you're already yawning. Even if they do know where the body is buried. The trip itself was a painful process of becoming. Secret lies in the tin trunk. Ninety-two hours on a bus. This thing about Simon. And even though I know that something happened (something terrible), it keeps the story moving. And was sick for three days. (in the emotional sense as well). Photogenic brown children projected obliquely onto the ceiling. I find it difficult to have my characters in a tight situation. The shock of revelation or betrayal. Unable to find words for it. I find the dramatic tension unbearable. Déjà vu you finally have an answer an insight. Dreams in which words make and I might need to resolve it quickly or change the subject. I already told you, Simon is dead and everything else seems, is, slipping away. 

Like giving in to an argument to make the peace. Some release, to gasp a breath. That night she lay in bed with a throbbing finger unable to sleep for the cocktail of shame and fear — but also of fascination. You can’t find your foothold. Every surface cut, angled, opposed to another surface. There are dreams of eating. There are dreams when you ask yourself. I don’t have any confidence. Others seem to know what you want. Patient whose anaesthetic made it all seem floating colours what you’re thinking when you ask yourself. Not dull sensation. That I can get this thing down.

The first person is the most convincing, the most intense. Can’t imagine those couples that still live together but don’t speak to
one another for ten years. The vodka thrums in my head — a flow of traffic that has no sound, only blood sensation. No sound. Blood welled up and mingled with the water. Simon is dead. And his suicide note does not make it any easier to deal with. Imagine being capable of living that out. All lying down together touching. I can’t. But if I had some characters who did that – clutching it too tightly and on the sharp edge. The waiting for someone to break the silence.

‘What are you doing with my razor?’

Everything in the room smelled like the ghost of a body. Blossoming in the grout between the tiles. From no contact to a crack in the wall. Each would try to provoke the other in covert ways — couldn’t help yourself. Your whole hand being engulfed. So you have to make it seem as though it were inevitable. In well lubricated, when your tears are the silent thinking. How did my thinking get me here? She had always wanted to be a dancer. Funny after the fact. Aping the gestures she had sometimes gazed at in the fog of the bathroom. And who would win? Bouncing, enveloped in the mattress. Which begs the question, how did Mr Meares die?

**backstory II** It is, in essence, performative, a meta-discourse in which the strategies of the telling are part of the point of the tale.\(^{48}\)

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\(^{48}\) Anna Gibbs, 1997, i.
Can you talk now? Are you alone? She remembers the little kitten she once had, but not what happened to it. In the meantime she practiced her French verbs. Water is mostly hydrogen. In the car on the way home from the funeral the backstories began. Although the simplest atom, everything in the universe from stars to humans are formed from it. I asked my mother, ‘When did grandpa (last seen some time after the Depression) die? Where is he buried?’ Which may explain its extraordinary effects. ‘Don’t be stupid, you’re only away for a week.’ Our blood is mostly saltwater. Absences are unsettling. To be or not to be. There is a narrative closure about a funeral. We stopped for tea and sandwiches. Apart from biological differences and social conditioning. A burial plot or commemorative jar. Is that the question? The therapeutic effects of a holiday by the sea. If the child seeks to emulate its world through creating a narrative it gives rise to a sexuality which is usually deeply felt. A man lacks a womb in which to make meaningful his existence, his relationships. To go, to come. Je range, tu range. Chicken and red salmon all chopped up and the fillings bound with some kind of mayonnaise. To stay. The crusts had been cut off and they were in fingers. This is not to deny men are capable of deep sexual experiences. Then a world full of silences and breakages may engender all sorts of other possibilities. A man finds a panther who awakens the anima within. ‘Anything is possible’ may be the most wondrous or the most frightening statement. The younger sister produced some vegemite wholemeal muffins, cut in quarters. Depending on the stability of the vessel carrying you through space. We all share this experience but do not remember.
backyard abortionist – a stalwart of times when women had no choice, had to behave as though their flesh was dull and unable to transgress the social norm, no choice, no way out and films like Vera Drake pretend that these women (or men) were unknowing, well meaning idiots. Mrs Meares, the woman who lives beneath my novel’s heroine, Venetia, was the Vera Drake of her era – the small row of terrace houses in Darlinghurst with their thriving backyard gardens have created a milieu for ideas and hauntings to grow. For Venetia to come to and salve her wounds, and ponder on violence and the relations between mother and daughter, between the wounds of love and the wounds of separation. The wounds of denial.

balms or milks – Words with a melting point of room temperature or body temperature, melting on the tongue, thrilling the surfaces of the skin. Those which must not be used around or close to the eyes, the lips, the mucosa. Those which must not be ingested or swallowed. Bleach and caustic soda. Sugar soap and bricks and mortar. There is something of the touch of flesh with flesh which abrogates, cuts sharp and straight across the devious intricate channels or decorous ordering, which enemies as well as lovers know because it makes them both — touch and touch of that which is the citadel of the central I-Am’s private own.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Rosa Coldfield’s words, from William Faulkner’s Absalom! Absalom!, passionately situate the body and affect as the basis of articulation of social relationships. And in speech melodies ‘more ancient than language’, to exfoliate some phrases from Anna Gibbs argument regarding fictocriticism,
beauty – Beauty is simply the total consciousness of our perversions. Miss Scarlett in the conservatory with a revolver (a vulva?) 'Beauty will be convulsive or it will not be...’ I grew up with Barbie. Her pneumatic breasts and vacant smile were the acme of desirability. ‘Convulsive beauty shall be erotic-veiled, explosive-fixed, magical-circumstantial, or not be.’ Her feet permanently shaped for stilettos, her life one long continuous round of costume changes. I never had a Ken, though I definitely thought about the possibilities or lack of them in a relationship sans genitalia. At some point Barbie’s impermeability got to me. Her perfect ponytail and lipstick began to churn my stomach — not with nausea; something more worrying, because exciting and sadistic. (see folklore — an acid chemical product extracted with great difficulty form the earth.) Barbie started having accidents. Her head was shaved and she was found naked with scars and pen marks on her body at the bottom of the garden. Her wardrobe of glamorous occasions was appropriated and piece-by-piece defiled — first sleeves were dismembered from blouses, then whole ball gowns were snipped to shreds. There was a horrible one-way direction to all this mayhem. (see literature — ‘one of the saddest roads that leads to anything.’) Barbie lost

affect and mimesis, Faulkner’s and his character’s words affect a giddy intoxication which interrupts, poetically, information exchange.

50 Salvador Dali, in Breton & Eluard, 1938.
51 Andre Breton, 1938.
52 Breton, op cit.
53 Breton, op cit.
her head completely and was reduced to working as a freak in sideshow alley. Her wigs became the headgear of fingers telling all manner of different not always pleasant stories about what could happen to a girl. Her body-less head seemed a ridiculous pink ping-pong ball which I imagined sailing through the stratosphere eyes wide, mouth slightly ajar in a lady-like scream. Life is just one beauty contest after another, says character in the film *Little Miss Sunshine*. See **depravity** and **madness**.

**becoming** –

'Whatever it takes'

All literature is potential, says Raymond Queneau[^54]

our language is at best

nuptials between two reigns.[^55]

Like **mathematics**

inadequate.

Call Jay, he'll fix you up.

pelvis to pelvis

It is from the fruitless search

| a strange forgetfulness |

I return with the unsayable:

You lonely?

I only asked. Bitch!

Becomings belong to geography,

[^54]: 'For which Oulipo rejoices.' Raymond Queneau, in collected ed.1986.

it is
you used
in essence
the task of describing women
Just come on over

to trace a surface of speeds and intensities

You haven’t lived till you seen San Diego.

possible
orientations, directions, entries and exits
existing arguments

My girlfriend would murder me.
supplanting the phenomena of imitation and assimilation

I did, I wouldn't lie.

But writing is haunted by narrative.

Sure the bathroom's down the corridor

becomings are characteristic of, they are
Trust me.
our vocabulary relegates women to

— the wrong part of San Diego.
recipients: ‘I entered her’
Like stepping into an elevator.
Questions of address.

Hey, but don’t sweat . . .
A body populated by multiplicities

First there is a face.

I am still capable of birthing
the now-instant (l’instant-déjà) this is the beginning of
inchoate various kinds
My Angel! I seen you in my dreams, like
the island, literature can be explored.

What is a body capable of?

Exquisite confection.
Call you tomorrow
even as it knows, to know that these things,
does not simply formulate delightful addition to the
menu
philosophy
I have studied the discourse
No I haven’t got any stuff
of madness, that is, ‘autobiographical’
science
But now I want plasma.
it’s your holiday.
perhaps precisely
You sure you don’t want me to stay?  

a hit and run

A ‘desiring machine’

washing is a universal practice.

accident

Perhaps one day —

You’ve got nice skin.

strategic

opposes the notion of unity or oneness

The words we use are either too clinical

Sexual experience

‘creative writing’

Distance is the greatest

invitation

or too derogatory

of all.

In context

you could use some fun

Let me show you

The laugh of the medusa

women’s (fiction) writing

our bodies

as a guide to the connoisseur

You’ve left me

on that fucking freeway

at the conferences

I have often wondered —

empowered to take the initiative
up the coast now
if the words for vagina
, a ‘double capture, of non-parallel evolution’, of
on fisting alone
into you
all manner of literary detritus —
I'm history!
Cutting 1982
& editing into each other
Bodies are capable of passions
now
Hey, I'm talking to you!
Very well aware
this sort of
first timid pleasure
nomadic not teleological
Groupings
the anecdote
Some good some not so
essential. Some essential change
round these parts
and special issues
shifts suddenly
To our morphology.

**betrayal** – ‘...a kind of hysterical writing — a writing moving not simply from position to position, but between positions as
well; a writing refusing and incapable of “an ordered account”…

~ of words
I have begun to finish books since I learned that many people skim over passages. They don’t read every single word. I had always tried, thinking it was right, to read every one. I thought it was important that I didn’t miss what was given in the text, that I ate and absorbed every one of them, that if I missed a passage I’d have to go over it. And sometimes I’d have to go over a thing two or three times — like cleaning your plate. Eventually it killed off the desire to read anymore, to fit any more in and I would have to lay the book down for a while, walk around a bit, take some deep breaths. And when I would come back to it, it would still be there. The passage I stumbled over before. This was Henry James you see. You have to have confidence to read. You have to have a self. That’s what I found out, after the years in the wilderness, after I walked out on *Wings of the Dove*.

There is no body there
And my entering the narrative
Under the bushes with
A painfully concussed head
Is like a death.

The whole thing seemed a magnificent punishment for something I had — or hadn’t — done, or both, either in this life

56 Anna Gibbs, 1995, i.
or another: the debt of bad karma — saying once that I hated Jesus. My sister Teresa turned on me. ‘You stupid idiot,’ she said, she didn’t like anyone to use the word ‘hate’, surely she argued ‘dislike’ was what I really meant. And this time I had really done it using ‘hate’ and Jesus in the same breath, really cut myself off from any salvation. As though I walked up to the man a spat in his face. And set Teresa up as Jesus’ champion all in one breath — is it any wonder I draw strength from my sister’s failures, any little discomfort or little stubborn unfeelingness in her — *she who upheld Jesus in our living-room by the gas fire one Sunday night.*

I don’t blame you for EVERYTHING

Or that other time when I lent a dress to one of Teresa’s boyfriend’s sisters. Any way, she must have liked it, because then she wanted to buy it from me. Fancy, and it was *black* and they were a very biblish family. She didn’t come to me herself, she sent my sister as advocate, who asked the price and then came back with half as much and poured scorn on me for not wanting to sell it for less. In the end I handed it over. I didn’t have any power you see because I’d said I hated Jesus. It seemed I had relinquished any power because, in the end the only grand gesture, the only lasting out-flinging swan dive I could make — the only melodramatic remark I could be remembered for, had doomed me forever. So I handed the dress over meekly, hating my sister who said she never ‘hated’ anything and this girl who would look silly in the dress at bible study.
I am a woman in a film with ashes in her vagina.

Nice wound. Mind if I take a picture?

**breaking** - the spine of books. My hands clasped across my mouth, smelling my fingertips - emulating what someone else would feel if I touched them. If I touched them. The split between 'author' — the agent of production and communication — and 'narrator' plays a key function in poetics of narrative fiction. ‘Yet there are important links between the author of the text and the narrator in it.’ (Lothe); Like an over-rich meal you regret as you stand up from the table or playing the same song again and again, experiencing a masochistic thrill.

**carnival** – A sideshow alley full of freaks. Half man-Half woman. See Fictocritical.

catalogue – ‘felicitous alphabetical conjunctions’ (A.S. Byatt *Possession*), like the glossary, the Dewey Decimal system ‘...and there was a pleasure to be had from reading the sentences Ash had read, touched with his fingers, scanned with his eyes.’ Reading as an intimate physical ‘knowing’ — something that becomes communal when a book (or body of words) is passed around, passed on, or inherited. Libraries as orgies of the literary. A love affair with the writing subject. An ecstasy which is often dissolved by looking at the photo of the author on the back jacket.
**cause and effect** – Repetitions. Is it belief, a believing, that helps one become whatever it is I am becoming? A becoming me. *Bewitched, bothered and…*

*Note to author of the Dumb Waiter:* How do Venetia, Karen and Lola relate — can they be one and the same? And what of their author? ‘When it comes to practically everything, we seem to be of two minds,’ says Hollis Frampton in *Circles of Confusion.* Only two? Binary thinking.

**character development** – We learn about a character from the decisions they make. The writer is an ‘inferred’ character in their own novel. ‘Make an appointment with yourself.’ I hear the train in the distance taking people through the night. Now a woman descends. *Like the silent village behind me the sense of being on the edge of moving towards a tomorrow.* The words are only speculation.

**childhood** – The hood of the child who wants both to be concealed (i.e. free to the think, feel, experience without censure) and to be noticed (viewed, named, remarked upon, given signification). Childhood is a remembered space and time — a cargo ship lost at sea, abandoned, eventually by its captain and crew as unsalvageable, given the damage to the hull and the vast pressures and presence of the waves. It is hallowed. It is the hook in advertising to bald heads and palsied hands. It is the calm remembered on a Sunday morning drying one's hair in the balcony in the sun. It is the taste of certain fruits – something

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57 1989, MIT Press.
private and shared at once - like relief. A single moment of wonder. It is all the fear and vulnerability which you were told did not really exist. All journeys are a seduction. From child to puberty to woman. ‘The loss of childhood is the beginning of poetry.’

To lose one’s parents is to lose one of the more significant reasons (and agencies of significance) to succeed, to write, a lost opportunity to speak...an opportunity like an actor's first night with an audience — critical and important — a survival issue. The sharp intake of breath which is the capital letter of panic — its materialization. The miasma of anger and frustration swirling inside my gut. Affecting all my other relationships including that with the page.

(from the novel)

I had been looking for a flat for several months when I remembered being homesick on that visit to the cousins'. The peculiar smell of some flats - a bit like rubber li-lo mattresses brought it back. On this trip I wanted to go home like a hunger for a particular kind of food, knowing a new baby has been born in my absence. I have been packed off to give my mother a chance to bond with the newling. For the whole time there is an emptiness in the pit of my stomach that I can be distracted from but never quite unaware of. Is this what I am searching for in this writing and in all my encounters - some solid relief from anything that hints at this loneliness - such as sitting down by myself to write on this computer page. It was like I held my breath for the entire visit until, when it finally came to an end, the comfortable sight of my mother’s body emerging from the

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58 Andrei Tarkovsky.
VW as she greets her sister my aunt and I run into her wideness, her immensity, her unending warmth and sweet scent. My frightening need, this hideous wound I stumble on while examining scorch marks in other people's kitchens. Every separation feels like a knife. I reach out to run my fingers across some bubbles in the Laminex. An agent is waiting patiently for me to finish and close the sale.


Wives waiting in the witching hour for their men to come home — the timing of dishes, adjustment of oven dials. Heated tempers, the flap of cupboard doors. The pantry wire screen which retracted on a spring. When I look back on it there must have been reasons. I am heir to their sense of betrayal. Doing one’s homework on the floor next to the gas fire. Billowing steam and the angry sizzle.

One time in the car we’d driven too soon after a quick meal of baked beans and Snow Cap and going round the bends at Watsons Bay, one, two, three of us all threw up. My older sister managed to make it out of the car and throw up on the verge with a trifle more dignity. She was the oldest. I can’t remember my parents’ reaction. There was a lot of groaning and screaming.
at the smell. The only one happy was Pongo who proceeded to lap up the bright pink baked bean mass off the back seat.

**chora** – ‘Plato used chora in a sense close to space or place; the milieu in which forms materialize.’

**chord and discord** – In love affairs we are seeking the union with our ‘mother’ apparently. (as in spiritual journeys) ‘We possess innate, genetically encoded patterns or repertoires of behaviour which are released by particular stimuli.’ See *sleeper genes.*

Note: the bits of cloth in the box under the bed are fragments of the narrative of me. ‘Affects are the coinage of the proto-conversation, the language of humanity before language actually emerges, after a very considerable amount of development has occurred during the second year of life.’ *Also,* No more fantasies! (political war cry attributed to Neo Realists) How did they expect girls to grow up ‘normal’ when their role models were Hamlet and Catherine Earnshaw. Someone spilling dye down a carefully painted shirt.

**choreography** – I start to write with the body in/as movement (but in a choreographed movement – a communication, even if only with oneself – a conscious, yet unconscious moment.) This moment is what I was trying to say in the proposal about dance – the contraction necessary before expansion. Expulsion. Writing could be a virus, an epileptic fit or a haunting, or (at least) all

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three. It is always a performance. One that is never perfect (because perfection does not exist) and never original (the material for the dance leaps out from unlikely sources: an alphabetized list in a style guide, from the description of an ancient Chinese folk art). Some of what’s written hardly bears later reflection, often dissolving like Dracula once exposed to the first light of day. Like the dancer’s pirouette — describing an arc in space — dissolving and drifting into a story that will never be written. Stitching together what, at some points might produce surrealistic effects I will sew together my own corpus (or ‘chorus’, which is where the word ‘choreography’ comes from) from desires to move, to unsettle, to inspire, to transport and to create a sense of poetry as place or space. Ultimately the writing would form a body of work — the text — acting on its audience not just conceptually, but also as ‘...a set of descriptions and directions which for its full effect must be “enacted”’. 61

**chori dispirati (in order to write)** – In order to write I must first make space — like opera, like psychoanalysis — a space for disparate voices...and things, objects, specificities (the collision of billiard balls – see Baudrillard), which, in their most elevated (or inspired) moments detach from statements, disturb and interfere with syntax, and wound or pleasure, in the audience, those places which have no speech either.

**coming to** – ‘After driving *(or writing)* for long periods of time, particularly at night, *(it is night, it is always night . . .)* it is

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possible to ‘come to’ and realize that for some time past one has been driving without being aware of what one is doing. The coming-to is an alarming experience. It is natural to describe what went on before one came to by saying that during that time one lacked consciousness. Yet it seems clear that, in the two senses of the word that we have so far isolated, consciousness was present. There was mental activity, there was perception. That is to say, there was minimal consciousness [making choices while writing] and perceptual consciousness [the words form themselves across the screen like rafts floating in the ether].

What a difference a day makes.

communicate – Impart, transmit, (heat, motion, feeling, news, a discovery, to); share (a thing) with.

In poetry the material of the words is constricted – or made to feel so. As in the dance. And in the body’s intensity - its intention of expressing this excess energy - is pleasure.

Communing with the spirit world through my facultades, through mediums, or sometimes through dreams, I enjoy the beauty of watching my pen move across the paper, of watching my hand make flourishes – not just any pen, any paper and not just any flourishes. Literary works can be made with the workings of the Ouija board or the becoming self that connects with other potential selves. This is not so much ‘automatic

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62 David Armstrong, 1981.
writing’, though possession of the writer seems to be part and parcel of the experiences described such, as an engagement with playacting and suspension of disbelief. My own feeling is that the nightly narrative of my dreams is somehow connected – that each episode is somehow linked – however loosely. And if I could only remember or re-play the dream material like unedited footage of a movie, then a narrative would form where confusion and the chaos of the broken self reigns.

After seeing a movie (a potent one) I somehow become the lead actor or actress – think, behave, act like them, or at least imagine I do. It’s the same with books and the imagined conversation I have with an artist or my construction of them through communing with their work. It is as though by immersion in another (another’s world) I am liberating some potential in myself – like the scientist who experimented with sensory deprivation tanks and emerged as some regressed ape-creature – only I am not think of regression so much as intensification.

**consistency.** - Consistency is compliance. Only in fiction do we find the plurality of lives we need.\(^6\)

**contract** - A contraction (dance terminology) *Panthers held in her hand like a ~* see also *Blood Memory*, the autobiography of Martha Graham. (see interests in dance and voice — contraction necessary before expulsion, explosive movement. Chronic contraction=slow death. In art however, if it’s all too relaxed

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there is no flush– there is something muscular about good writing.)

**conversant** – Having frequent intercourse, well acquainted (with person, object). So alike yet so different, like two keys on a piano setting off a *verismo* — a discord — too close — a tangle of vibrating air particles — each trying to drown the other, flailing, gasping for breath — contained within an air pocket.

‘...what it searches for are the pulsational incidents, the language lined with flesh, a text where we can hear the grain of the throat, the patina of consonants, the voluptuousness of vowels, a whole carnal stereophony, the articulation of the body, the tongue, not that of meaning, of language.’

**corpse** – see **backstory**.

**creation** – ‘a baby resulting from meaningful internal intercourse’. (and connection with *Prometheus Unbound* – my undergraduate honours thesis. Further, ‘Unlike writing in the “so-called exact sciences”’, writing in the heterological sciences proceeds ‘by means of a passage through or by way of the other. [It] advance[s] by means of a “sexual” process that posits the arrival of the other.’ The ‘different’ (storytelling’s supernova...
zone of transformation) behaving as a detour necessary for (its) progress.

**critical discourse** – lining up the empties.

**criticism** - this — this tone is where the voice — comes in — slides in under the door in a spiteful slither sending a forked tongue message *This should sound better, should sound like something else.*

**crime scene**

*Dashiell Hammett* and Huck Finn – men running away from the women (God’s police).

**death** - When it is repressed, death returns in an exotic language (that of a past, of ancient religions or distant traditions); it has to be invoked in foreign dialects; it is as difficult to speak about it in one's own language as it is for someone to die “at home”: these are the marks that define an excluded element, one that can return only in disguise.67 Joan of Arc led an army – though she was a poor country girl (a woman to boot). She inspired followers and stood up for her rights and the rights of the people. She was inspirationally beautiful and surprised her enemies by the strength and determination of her purpose and actions. Her motives were of the highest and her vision clear.

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67 De Certeau, 1984.
découpage The layering of points of view in a novel or cinematic work. William Burroughs's 'cutup' would suggest that creating a picture or camouflage for an object by cutting up and pasting pieces of paper is a random activity in which the artist surrenders to chance. Yet, one could question whether in a post Structuralist, post Levi-Strauss universe in which 'the error of traditional anthropology, like traditional linguistics was to consider terms and not relationships between terms', anything or any point of view was separate at least from the field of fiction. See intention

dedication – to the unknown reader, to the dreamed of friend.

deduction – It is the writer's job to decide what to leave out of 'the drama' – writing effectively is learning to omit whatever the audience can deduce, says a screenwriting manual (quote source). Yet writing, at least writing fiction, is fraught with anxieties of style, structure, tone and sophistication. Writing as artistic production leaves a trace which is vulnerable to misinterpretation or, worse, ratiocination. The writer's unconscious desires are on show for a reader to make of them what they will. De Certeau writes:

The reader takes neither the position of the author nor an author's position. He invents in texts something different from what was “intended.” He detaches them from their (lost or accessory) origin. He combines their fragments and creates something un-known in the space organized by their capacity for allowing an indefinite plurality of meanings. . .In spite of all
this, the story of man’s travels through his own texts remains in large measure unknown.\textsuperscript{68}

**deferral** – What does commitment leave out of the picture that we might want? If our descriptions of sexuality are tyrannized by various stories of committed purpose – sex as reproduction, sex as heterosexual intercourse, sex as intimacy – flirtation puts in disarray our sense of an ending. From a pragmatic point of view one could say a space is being created in which aims or ends can be worked out; the assumed wish for the more or less obvious sexual combinations, or commitments, may be a way of preempting the elaboration of, making time for, less familiar possibilities. Flirtation, if it can be sustained, is a way of cultivating wishes, of playing for time. Deferral can make room.\textsuperscript{69}

**defragging** – The self is constituted through practices; it is not a given.\textsuperscript{70}

**depression, the great** – Men holding caps in their hands coming to the backdoor at dinner time wanting something to occupy them and account for a meal.

**derridean** – A principle of textuality that subverts the edges between inside and outside, symbolic and real, signification and reference.

\textsuperscript{68} 1984.

\textsuperscript{69} Adam Philips, 1993.

\textsuperscript{70} Michel Foucault, 1977.
desire – In one of post-structuralism’s most-quoted statements, Jacques Derrida declared in *Of Grammatology* that ‘there is no outside-the-text.’\(^{71}\) If there are distinct links between sex and text, lust and letters, then literature is perpetually creating itself (a writing machine) in the image of its object of desire. There is no outside-of-desire, just as there is no outside-of-memory. No outside-of-language though there may be a through and out the Other side: a sort of revolving door whereby the mimetic (or representational) obverse to the diegetic (story). In the literary domain, women’s writing has historically been far more likely to be read as disguised autobiography and hence an imaginatively inferior production to men’s writing.\(^{72}\) Fictocritical writing interrogates the notion that autobiographical writing is any less the product of the literary imagination, and therefore of desire, than fiction, rhetoric, poesis. ‘The act of writing begins with Orpheus’ gaze,’ writes Maurice Blanchot\(^{73}\) — the passionate singer’s prohibited gaze, forbidden to turn from the clear light of day to look tenderly back upon his poor beloved, still half-hidden there in the night, but unable to resist the strong attraction. Orpheus’ gazes into the underground — the scene of transgressive and desperate longing. The words ‘lust’, ‘love’, ‘desire’, appear in the dictionary with a multiplicity of similar meanings. These signifiers are difficult to pin down.\(^{74}\) For

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\(^{71}\) 1974.

\(^{72}\) Anna Gibbs, 1995, i..

\(^{73}\) 1981.

\(^{74}\) I am in this statement inspired by a paper by Margaret Macarthur, *Lust in Space: Lover’s Discourse*, and George Alexander, a writer who has spent time
Deleuze and Guattari, who in *A Thousand Plateaus* introduce the notion of becoming-hermaphrodite, and in doing so unsettle the accepted signifiers of libidinal desire and, in the process as it were strap an explosive device to language (the phallus) for the purposes of liberation from rigid [sic] definitions of sexuality, from the notion of ‘desire as lack’, and from genitality. Like a well-censored dream, and subject perhaps to similar mechanisms, memory has the orderliness and teleological drive of narrative. Its relation to the past is not that of truth, but desire, writes John Frow.75

**desperate** – Her clairvoyance, her capacity to see how much, or how little it would take before she would have to describe herself as desperate. The copier kept malfunctioning. [see the desperadoes of spaghetti westerns]

**diary** – Virginia Woolf first named her inner censor in her diary and the cathartic moment when she killed this woman who spread her wings over her pages. My diaries remind me of all the cathartic writing I have done in them which will be discovered (if anyone undertakes the task) when I’m gone. They are like photo albums but less censored. Though I have still to break myself of the habit of obscurantism which plagues anything I write about anything. – intimate, not just sexual. Sometimes it’s easier writing something raunchy than writing something that may be interpreted (censored? critisised?) as mawkish, sentimental, the

writer feeling sorry for herself, wallowing in self-pity. Interestingly the word intimate as it relates to diaries - that place of charged solitude as Geoffrey Sirc puts it – is one of closeness, knowing, connection and emotions and hence is essential and intrinsic (according to the OED) or in terms of relationships is euphemistic of illicit (sic) sexual relations. However the verb to intimate seems much more blatant – to make known, state, announce, imply or hint (albeit that these last two are somewhat convert). Tristine Rainer talks about how students in her women’s writing class who wrote ‘powerfully and authentically’ about their personal experiences, when asked to experiment with erotic writing suddenly assumed ‘a common pornographic voice that seem male rather than female.’ The diary shares with sexuality and eroticism a fear of censure and exposure. Developing a personal erotic language is as awkward and angst-ridden as any writing attempt – or as any essay into desire and the world of one’s own attractions or passions.

**discharge** – Originally nothing other than a power, which was believed to lie. Killing chickens to read their blood for the future.

**dissociation** – in writing, characters take on a life of their own. The writing processes is something like allowing oneself to be taken over by some external power – like talking in tongues. I am sure I read an interview with Truman Capote in which he describes his writing process as an ‘out of body’ experience. A kind of discipline of indiscipline\(^6\) — controlling and letting go.
Some kind of crazy experimental drug causing just as many workplace accidents – to date no reliable blood or urine test available to detect the presence of writer’s contagion. Dr Jekyll conjectures that people are multiple, not singular. ‘I hazard a guess that man will be ultimately known for a mere polity of multifarious, incongruous and independent denizens’ also shoulder dislocation

**divination** – a gesture in the direction of human imperfection.

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76 The ‘discipline of indiscipline’ may or may not be an actual anarchist construct from the Spanish Civil War, though it is one of the confabulations in Frank Moorehouse’s *Buenaventura Durruti’s Funeral: A compilation of references and encounters, plans for a pilgrimage, a love story, notes on the problem of discipline of indiscipline, and two footnotes to a poem*. One such ‘reference’ is to the anarchist control of the Barcelona Telefonica, which enabled them to intercept calls for ‘the government’ at which point anarchist operators would instruct callers in anarchist theory and tell them there was no ‘government’. Another reference is to the Australian ‘condition’ as explained to a visiting American poet, or what it was when they were younger: ‘we wrote from a special freedom and perspective which came from the feeling that we lived outside the ‘real world’ [of Europe and the US].’ One of the narrator’s colleagues elaborates: ‘people from the real world were, paradoxically, people from literary history and they had a fictional gloss [sic] to them — [they] were not from the world of *Meanjin*’ [Australia’s literary world, which someone else jokes is taken from an Aboriginal word meaning ‘rejected from the New Yorker.’] This series of shifting identifications, which have an appealing even adolescent nostalgia twenty years on, create for outsider genres, in this case Australian writing, a radicalism which deflates ‘literary history’ while at the same time remakes it in order to mourn (to stage the funeral of) the passing of the ‘revolution’. This trope is mirrored by reference to a Henry James’ story *Watch and Ward* — a novel about a thirty-year-old man who adopts a ten-year-old girl to raise as his wife. ‘The narrator finds the adolescent girl “defiantly torpid” but then realizes that her “listless quietude covered a great deal of observation and growing may be a soundless process.’ *Transgressions: Australia Writing Now* pp. 231—244. See pedagogy, pederasty and colonialization.

77 Robert Louis Stevenson, 1886/1996, p. 68. A denizen is somebody who has taken up permanent residence in a foreign country and is given some rights there — a marginalized citizen of the kind thought to have created such notable institutions as Denizens of Iniquity.
documentary - versus reference section. Never let the facts get in the way of a good story.

**Dumb Waiter, The** - the patient had never sensed that his ideas were his own and did not come from anywhere else. In Harold Pinter's play *The Dumb Waiter*, interrupts the conversation of two assassins waiting in the basement for their 'orders', with orders for food coming from another time-space continuum when there was a restaurant above and the basement held the kitchen. As a metaphor for life's vicissitudes it reads as: 'you never know what the hell's coming next.'

dystopia - ‘Through a can opener, darkly'. Instruments of therapy. ‘Only motor cars are abroad at this hour, and one has a sense of emptiness, or airiness, of secluded gaiety.' 78

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78 Virginia Woolf, *Street Haunting: A London Adventure*, a selection of short pieces published as a Pocket Penguin in 2005 and which begins with the delightful statement, 'No one has ever felt passionately towards a lead pencil.' The pencil, the need for one, however is an excuse, as she says a 'cover' to indulge in the pleasure of a ramble through the streets of London. In doing so, the writer, with the 'need' for a pencil as a pretext, she steps out of her house — 'so agreeable after the solitude of one's own room' which represents hard won autonomy for women's intellectual life — shedding she says, 'the self our friends know us by' into the 'irresponsibility which darkness and lamplight bestow.' There is something sensuous and in Woolf’s term 'irresponsible' about an evening stroll (so different in character to a morning’s constitutional or an afternoon’s errand). Venetia, the protagonist of my novel, *New Moon Through Glass*, is alive to the possibilities of a ramble at dusk or in the dark: the narrative of the city unfurling in its streets, its faces, its institutions. 'For the perfect flâneur, for the passionate observer, it’s an immense pleasure to take up residence in multiplicity, in whatever is seething, moving, evanescent and infinite . . .you’re at the centre of everything yet you remain hidden from everybody,’ writes Baudelaire in one of the key texts of the modern urban experience, ‘The Painter of Modern Life'. In the sense the flâneur, like the writer composes the world through his walk/work, and he is the enigma at the heart of the narrative — an enigma even to himself. I have cast this sentence in the masculine third person unthinkingly and now have left it that way.
**engendered** – Beget thee to a nunnery.

**enigma**

**exiles bookstore** — a moment of true (real, palpable, guttural) Bohemia on Oxford Street, Sydney circa early 1980s. Cheek by jowl with other Sydney landmarks: The Balkan restaurant; The Wall alongside St Vincent’s Hospice; The Pissoir closest thing to a Parisian underground Metro Station; and a ‘club’ which was basically a bar, but in order to get around the archaic licensing laws one had to ‘belong’. It had no advertised entrance and one flashed a membership token through a letterbox size opening in the door to be let in. Once inside, one was greeted by the warm glow of three floors of people eating and drinking in various states of dissolution, particularly the ground floor which saw many of the well known poets of the day slide to the carpet, backs leaning against the bar, better to continue their fine distinctions and remarks about writing. Exiles had the patina of an era when coffee and communion with poets was considered the proper business of a bookstore, not selling books. Presumably they sold books, but the store — the floor space at least — was mostly taken up with sofas and armchairs and a serve-yourself coffee pot arrangement and loads of well-thumbed literary mags and chapbooks. Upstairs was an empty loft they used for poetry readings and book launches. It had all

since, apparently, there is no female equivalent of the *flâneur* (though the term *flâneuse* has been coined, it is a feminized afterthought). And this says something again about the gendered nature of language and about Venetia’s journey.
the atmosphere of church. And if, as I heard, there was a rundown terrace in the Cross where the anarchists held their meetings called the Church of Chaos (apparently the loo was so filthy you couldn’t see it even under a working lightbulb) then Exiles was the Church of Poetry:

I will not serve that which I no longer believe, whether it call itself my home, my fatherland, or my church: and I will try to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can and as wholly as I can, using for my defense the only arms I allow myself to use — silence, exile and cunning.79

**fantasy** – A fleeting imaginary representation intruding upon ego’s activities and as being, in that context, a total misfit.80 or A fragile conglomerate of powers held together by some unnatural pressure.

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79 James Joyce, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man.* (my itals.)

80 Torak & Abraham, *op cit.* The misfit or ‘interruption’ as a figure in communication arts has a long history at least dating back to the *New Testament* when narrative commentary, for instance in the *Gospel According to Mark*, interrupts ostensibly to explicate, but also to ramp up the narrative intrigue with enigma, resolved or not late in the text. Those movements in the first half of the twentieth century regarded as avant-garde such as the Futurists appropriated the ‘rupture’— linguistic collage, visual collage, the recontextualization of the ‘ready-made’ — as an iconoclastic gesture equivalent to, argues Marjorie Perloff, making art. In *The Futurist Movement: Avant-Garde, Avant Guerre, and the Language of Rupture*, (University of Chicago Press 1987) Perloff links the ‘technopoetics’ of the twentieth century — Cendrар’s conflation of geography in his voyage poems, Marinetti’s parole-in-liberta, and Ezra Pound’s imagism whereby ‘each writer loosened verse from logical constructions and rediscovered the force of independent, carefully juxtaposed words’ — to the period in 1913 when ‘manifesto fever’ enabled art and literary theory came to occupy the same privileged sphere as literature. If her reading stands, this is in a sense a reversal of the current hierarchy within in the academy of writing praxis and critical theory.
favourite words – eg vellum, nougat, opalescence. (colloq.) Sex with strangers. Anecdotal: You can ask a stranger for anything. Tongues going down on you. Darting, exploring every crease. Then the fantasy starts and the head between your legs melts into you and you’re riding their tongue, dragging your pelvis back an forth over the wet, spongy protuberance. The anonymous head sucking you off under the table in a restaurant. You try to keep up your end of the conversation. You politely nod at what your fellow diners are saying, while your mind focuses in like a vice on the dialogue between tongue and lips.


femme fatale I sent my love via and vis-à-vis the moon.81

fiction – comes from the Latin *fingere* original meaning ‘To make by sharpening’; to invent, to think up, to make up (c.f. Italian *fingere*, French *feindre*, English feign, German *fingieren*) – but it sounds and looks like finger. Fiction as the finger. ‘The moving finger writes and having writ moves on. . .'(Omar Kayam). Or as something made by sharpening — a blade, a point — needlepoint as stereotypical female fingere. What does it mean to finger someone? It has both a sexual connotation as well as that of betrayal in underworld slang. To give someone the finger is the

81 Kathleen Mary Fallon, 1989.
expletive gesture. Can fiction act in these ways too? The French
feindre sounds and looks like a cross between *feign*: invent
(excuse, story, accusation) or forge (document); and *feint*: sham
attack (blow, cut, thrust or military assault) to divert attention or
deceive opponent or pretence (of doing something). Creative acts
of fiction can divert us, distract our attention, seduce our
skepticism with fireworks and fancy footwork. Or rapier wit.

**fictocriticism** - the genre that ‘never was One.’ A ‘hybrid’ writing
form, an outsider genre, paraliterature, usu. overlooked by the
mainstream. If metafiction is the fiction that doubles as critique,
then fictocriticism might be the criticism which doubles as
fiction.\(^{82}\) **WRONG WAY GO BACK.** A ‘risky approach which must
be offset by a commitment of attention, openness and reflexivity
about questions of the politics of *poiesis* on the part of the
writer.’\(^{83}\)

In the *Apology for Poetry* by Sir Philip Sidney says of the poet: he
‘nothing affirms, Therefore never lieth.’ Unlike, one feels one
might add, the critic. Theodore Adorno, fiction is ‘a form of
subconscious writing of history’\(^{84}\)

NB “written texts circulate ‘freely’ isolated from the original act
of creation.”

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\(^{82}\) Brain Attebury, 1998.

\(^{83}\) Anna Gibbs, 1992.

\(^{84}\) Jakob Lothe, 2000.
Not a very good job. In a coffee shop, but one with a certain clientele. Women on shopping expeditions. Some sat alone and ordered sandwiches with precise specifications. They always gazed into the middle distance or looked off to one side while they chewed, bringing their heads back mechanically, bovine-like, towards their cups to sip, as though...

**file cards** – My life achievement story reads like someone’s edited diary – or the lobomized journal of an amnesiac. See also *Pale Fire*, Vladimir Nabokov. *Sometimes she astounded herself with the ease and fluidity of her movements. Moving too fast was always a dead give away. Middles are difficult. The middle is half way so the rest is down hill by definition in the negative sense.*

**flâneur** — The figure of Baudelaire’s flâneur, or privileged, leisurely urban spectator, is a forerunner of the fictional detective. He is someone who can confidently ‘read’ the city and its inhabitants. Theorists of the representation of the modern city from Walter Benjamin to Dana Brand have used Edgar Allen Poe’s 1845 short story ‘The Man in the Crowd’ to describe the changing relation between the modern metropolis and the practice of urban spectatorship. The tale which moves its protagonist from detached voyeur who amuses himself diving the history of people in the passing crowd, evincing in the process an assimilation of Darwin-inspired theories of physiognomy, through and finally detective in shadowy pursuit: having found a face he cannot ‘read’, that of the badaud (the gawker — or voluptuary desperate for sensation and the ‘buzz’ of the crowd), its illegibility becomes associated with criminality.
‘As the narrator is drawn from his [comfortable, detached] point of observation into a more elusive attempt to decode city types, the urban landscape becomes a site of mystery that must be penetrated to be deciphered.’

Throughout my novel, the city of Sydney operates as a character, in particular the sybaritic priorities and pace of life of the central districts around Kings Cross, Darlinghurst and Rushcutters Bay. Venetia, whose detachment from her surroundings, starts as a flâneuse, classifying the sights and people around her in more or less stable (if ironic) categories. Events in the novel serve to disturb her complacency and turn her into an amateur detective. See exiles bookshop.

**flowers** - At Jean Genet’s trial in 1943 for repeated convictions as a thief, Jean Cocteau, who had discovered Genet and arranged to publish his first novel, *Our Lady of the Flowers* submitted a statement read out in court: ‘He is Rimbaud, one cannot condemn Rimbaud.’

*(from the journal)*

Flowers emerge. Flowers tumble from their stems, fill the orifice and then open amid the stomach, flower in the crevasses of the groin, in the anus, in the small intestine, in the interstices behind my ears and in my fly buttons and on the floor between my toes. I sit looking into the brown froth of my coffee and recognize a

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moment eons ago when I had the thought that to write would simply be the expression of myself – not anything to do with what other people wanted me to say.

Whatever I think of myself there is someone out there thinking something else.

My hands on the keys stumble.

I usually stop and want to take myself elsewhere but I know if I stop I will just be buying time, wasting it. Waiting it – the clock inside the alligator. Waiting for me to become a man – or a woman – whatever it is that will make me seem grown up – what was it that I wanted to seem?

Then willingly, my dunderhead of a child – the thick fingered clumsy one who could not articulate the monstrosity that was the self – the thing that was vomited up regurgitated in place of something – conversation, an explanation, at the dinner table, then slunk away and threw it down the toilet bowl walls, like freezing comments and inappropriate responses that had no place being inside me a girl like me anyway.

Lindsay Kemp and Jean Genet

(s)fogati (suffocated voice) - There is no body there and my entering the narrative under the bushes and with a painfully concussed head is like a death. Coming into life. Observing my situation from ‘inside’ is full of pain. The rain – an expression of
futility – on the train windows is an excess: what cannot be said, a lament for what goes unnoticed, unacknowledged. My mind’s a tangle of glottal stops.

This [work?] is a text in a raincoat, a text in disguise pretending to be ordinary but unable to repress its covert desire for attention. This is a text yearning to be read between the lines, yearning for a meaning that it cannot tell, all the while creating of itself and in itself another life in excess of the ‘author’ whose messy natal surgery has left the wound/womb/tomb/tome unclosed. A series of bad disguises.

folie à plusiers (madness of many) – Proliferating narratives.

[excerpt from journal] I took the DVDs back. I passed Dennis’s old studio – massage, then reflexology and then astrological insights. He had obviously given the place up. There were advertisements on the glass for counseling of different varieties and then a request for professionals who might want to share the space as consulting rooms. No more piano lessons. No more lectures on coloured-crayons and family dynamics.

Then just as I thought there might be something seriously wrong with me (what I really thought was that maybe this is the way life not only would be but should be. Kind of grey and ordinary) I ran into Elizabeth who was on a television panel with me back in the eighties, who entertained the troupes as a go-go dancer in the sixties and who taught striptease to professional women in the nineties.
I gave her a very brief précis on the story of my novel – girl living in Darlinghurst during the late eighties, having doubts about her sexuality, living above an old woman who has gone crackers and thinks said girl is her long lost daughter. Elizabeth has a daughter, Liberty who is about to go overseas by herself and as a mother she is of course concerned – though how she can think that it's any more dangerous to travel the world today than it was going to Vietnam at 19 as a go-go dancer I don't know. (and this reminds me of a story a guy who had been a soldier in Vietnam told me, because of some infringement he and some of his mates had committed, they weren’t allowed to go see a strip show that had been organised to entertain the boys. They had to peel potatoes instead. And now I see how the peeling of the potatoes was a very apt punishment – the sensual disrobing of the vegetable revealing its pale interior flesh so like the unveiling of the female iconic form, tantalizingly near and yet just out of reach. And yet, how can feasting one’s eyes on a striptease be nourishing? A tease by its very nature is something that leaves you wanting more. Unlike peeling a potato which ultimately can be eaten – feasted on with the whole.)

So Elizabeth turns to me as we turn to move on and says, ‘That sounds good – don’t give up on it. Remember: inch by inch and it’s a synch, Goddess!’ Until I got back home I couldn’t say that it struck me as anything other than a good phrase. Inch by inch and it’s a synch. Often with Elizabeth I feel as though I am providing an occasional, almost anonymous audience to her life. As we waited for the TV panel to start she entertained us in the
dressing room with stories of wiping men’s dicks with Dettol in the brothel she worked in, and getting the sack for simultaneously introducing them to some of the finer points of Buddhism. I don’t know whether she still remembers the TV show or just the dance lessons. (I later took her Sensuous Dance Moves workshop where she taught us how to cut pantyhose into stage outfits.) Does she even remember my name? She corners me in the supermarket sometimes and tells me about her mum and dad, how lucky she is that they are still alive. Cornered isn’t really fair. I’m always grateful that I don’t really have to think of anything much to say to her, so Elizabeth isn’t one of those people I see in aisle five and make a quick U-turn. But I do wonder if she really remembers me or just some generalized me, let alone the who, where or why of our connection? (see A Scanner Darkly, and mistaken identity)

Which is why today’s foray into a description — more an elevator snapshot — of what I was working on was unusual.

But once back at my desk and replying to an email about story telling, the notion arrives: that she was something of a archetypal figure appearing out of the mists — Glenda87 from The Wizard of Oz (Is that why I chose a DVD on Judy Garland when I got down to Blockbuster?) If the walk to the video store was my yellow brick road or if my whole day — glass chunk included — was something akin to a day of messages: ‘Tales of

87 Is it merely coincidental that my bridesmaid’s name was also Glenda? Though anyone less like the Good Witch of the West I’m yet to come across.
the Orange Kaftan’ a putative answer to the Arabian Nights is born.

**footnotes** n. pl. - *moves* across the fret board of consciousness. ‘...if it is true that the spatial order organizes an ensemble of possibilities...and interdictions...then the walker actualizes some of these possibilities’, writes de Certeau. 88 'In that way, he makes [some of these possibilities] exist as well as emerge. But he also moves them about and he invents others, since the crossing, the drifting away, or improvisation of walking privilege, transform or abandon spatial elements.' (1984) (See foot fetishism and flâneur) In writing, and reading, the footnote creates a *syncopation* to the narrative or argument of the text — opens up dialogic possibilities in the text, increasing the possibilities in writing of narratives proliferating by interior ramifications. A *syncope* or shortening of a word so that it fits a particular poetic metrical scheme is at least in its aesthetic pretensions like the ancient Chinese art of foot binding. And foot binding — as social practice and craft, otherwise known as fancy footwork — is a sashay into other fictions. Debutantes, beauty queens, successful film stars and even female corporate head honchos are still encouraged it seems to crown their life stories with an appropriate ending or at least next chapter - marriage and motherhood. The romantic idyll - in particular Cinderella-type stories as they are played out by in the popular media provide one narrative formula for celebrating female achievement. In fact

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88 de Certeau, 1984:98.
there is evidence that the Cinderella story existed in some very ancient Chinese and Tibetan texts (a story in chapter 11 of the ‘Vetalapancavimsati’ for instance) and the European version was an eighteenth century Chinese import along with gunpowder, spices and noodles (basic ingredients for a picaresque life story, see noodles). For females, having appropriately mutilated feet was a sign of good breeding. See stilettos. Also, the early versions of the Cinderella cycle begin with matricide. Cinderella murders her mother, severs her breasts and then eats the flesh: the unforgivable crime which kicks off the story’s cycle of redemption.

A syncope is also a loss of consciousness due to lack of oxygen to the brain. A consequence of over-reading, over-writing? Or just tight shoes?

I prefer Walter Pater’s aphorism that romanticism is: The addition of strangeness to beauty.

**footsteps** (~ on the dance floor) - The writer asks herself, has this story got legs? Is it going somewhere?

**foreplay** — Eternity begins and ends in bed. Journal writing might be considered foreplay for any other sort of writing.

Journal writing in bed might be the —

**Elegy at first light**

I avoid

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90 Breton & Eluard, 1938.
the black book
contents of too many dreams
they slide awake and
my weary head splices
the cold water
of a new day.

What is that cocoon
through which I travel each night
a shadow book
patterned amphora
telling my irritation
and my love
my caterwaul
and my other body shot put.

Pouring hot liquids
into a crater mouth
in a love-hate relationship
with what has vanished with the dawn
like chocolate
or heat.

**fragment** – *Fragment (consider revising).* My computer software questions my choice of words. Questions the elegance of my sentence structure and makes polite enquiries about alternative grammatical constructions.

‘These fragments of discourse can be called figures. The word is to be understood, not in its rhetorical sense, but rather in its *gymnastic or choreographic acceptation* as the body’s gesture.’

The use of fragment is common in fictocriticism, because it enables the creation of commentary from juxtaposition and

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91 Barthes 1985, *my itals.*
facilitates the formation of relations between things that previously had none. It allows for gaps and discontinuities, and for the use of silence. One might think of it as a verbal form of montage.\textsuperscript{92}

‘Towards the end of his life Ibsen, one of the world’s greatest dramatists, suffered strokes which destroyed his memory for words and even the alphabet. He died in 1906 in Kristiana (now Oslo).’\textsuperscript{93}

What would Ibsen’s thoughts have been as he lay there gazing out the window of the sanatorium. If not words, then what? Colours, reverberations, textures or transfer of energies. A nurse’s hand held warmly on the abdomen, the tightening of the tourniquet to take blood. What is the sting of a needle and the sound of instruments lain in a kidney tray, a respirator or the rasp of a flannel across the buttocks when there are no words for these movements in the grid? The blank screen of consciousness the metaphor for, perhaps, the futility of human aspirations, the playwright’s grand design. And yet the framed view from the second story captures an apple tree or a church steeple. A butterfly in mid-life hovers over a May bud. The cries of school children at earnest play.

My schoolgirl note in the margin of my old copy of Ibsen’s collected plays goes — \textit{the beauty of the human being striving} (as

\textsuperscript{92} Gibbs, 2005.

\textsuperscript{93} \textit{The Master Builder and Other Plays}, Penguin Classics.
if to remind myself of grand concepts, impressive phrases). Now I write, the beauty of one's own fingertips on clean sheets... clean white sheets of paper. Touching Ibsen’s words now a century since his death...is the beauty in what he was striving to express or just in his striving?

**free indirect discourse (FID)** An opportunity, particularly in the thriller genre, to play on ambiguity. Such ambiguities need not be solely concerning the clichéd ‘who done it?’, though toying with the ebb and flow of information exchange can certainly sustain narrative tension. Ambiguities concerning the ‘speaker’ or the ‘thinker’ in the case of interior monologue or pre-verbal thought, can also reflect or enact or image other themes within a work of fiction such as, the discontinuous developing self of its protagonist, or, in a more existentialist vein, the difficulty of both inscribing experience in a comprehensible form and sharing through language that experience. As narrative theory unpacks the attributes of FID, it shows that even when different segments of a work can ultimately be attributed to identifiable speakers and more so when they cannot, FID enhances the bivocality and polyvocality of the text by bringing into play a plurality of speakers and attitudes: the ‘dialogic’ nature of texts according to Bakhtin’s theories. Hence FID as a function of the text and as a writing practice, speaks to the relationships within a text, to its and, I would argue, lays the groundwork for a different kind of relationship with the reader.

**gestalt** – a collection of physical, biological, psychological or symbolic entities that creates a unified concept, configuration or
pattern which is greater than the some of its parts. A rambunctious word that could stop a semi-trailer by puncturing a tire or halt a traveler crossing a bridge (see fairy stories and the transformational or metamorphic arc in narrative esp. trolls under bridges). Also, dumpling soup made without gestalt is one of the travesties of health-conscious cookery (attrib. Various). In other words, the generation of prosaic, prescriptive aesthetics is missing the big picture and the big taste. Usage: get gestalted is a double-edged epithet: it is used both as a put down (or off – in the latter case, it may indicate the need to simply go away and think about it – i.e. a piece of writing that is simply not ‘hanging’ together), and, as a (usually) well-intentioned recommendation for a work of art to have a complete physical, sexual and psychological overall (‘add some gestalt’). Not good news for any writer, but a line in the sand beyond which it’s perilous to go. Which of course only incites further investigation. See excess.

gesture - Significant movement of body or limb. See signification. The fictocritical field is full of gestures towards unpredictability.

Look at that blue, you said, detaching the colour from the sky as if it were a membrane. A mutilation you constantly sharpen your language for . . . the scar lines on your body. Raw sky . . . Lesions of language. Or perhaps it is a misunderstanding to peel back skin in order to bare the mechanics of a mirage.94

94 Rosemarie Waldrop. As one of the language poets, Waldrop actively challenges the ‘natural’ presence of the speaker behind the text as well as that
American poet Rosamrie Waldrop, along with many of her Language Poet contemporaries in America and their predecessors in modernist literary experiments such as OuLiPo, find their poetic gestures are liberated by constraints.

‘It was an important moment for me when I realized consciously that the encounter of a poem-nucleus with an arbitrary pattern (like a rhyme scheme) would tend to pull the nucleus out of its semantic field in unforeseen directions,’ she said in a recent interview. Similarly, fictocriticism may adopt forms such as this glossary in order to stage just such a charged interaction between regulation and deviancy.

(Winnicott wrote of the baby’s body expression as ‘the gesture’ and of the way in which it maintains the illusion of ‘normal omnipotence’)

‘Periodically, the infant’s gesture gives expression to a spontaneous impulse; the source of the gesture is the True Self, the gesture indicates the potential of a true self.’ When the mother responds to the gesture in a way that meets the affect it conveys, then: ‘The true self has a spontaneity and this has been joined up with the world's events. The infant can now begin to enjoy the illusion of omnipotent creating and controlling. [is this

‘oppressive circle of self-presence, the “cry of the heart” designed to convey some sort of mysterious essence,’ which Marjorie Perloff identifies as poetry’s ‘conventional representations’, 1987.

95 Ouvrier de Littérature Potentielle, in other words ‘Workshop for Potential Literature’.
also the aim of the writer?]' Put another way, the mother’s response gives a shape, makes recognizable, what is going on in the baby’s body. In this way, bodily states are ‘joined up’ with emotions. Under these circumstances, the baby’s emotional expression includes all the vitality of its bodily accompaniments. In ‘the favourable circumstances’ of the mother continuing to be ‘good enough’, ‘the skin becomes the boundary between the me and the not me. In other words, the psyche has come to live in the soma’. As times goes on, ‘The live body with its limits, and with an inside and an outside, is felt by the individual to form the core for the imaginative self’. The circumstances (relations with the mother), however, may not be favourable.96

On hating to see a picture of an author on the back of a book (it destroys some essential mystery for me).

genealogy – my search — Nietzsche, Foucault — the Body at Inscriptive Surface 97

Girl with bruised shoulders — a book not yet written.

gloom raiser — cocktail from the 1920s involving quantities of white spirit and Pernod, usually best drunk while wearing a pith helmet to protect the head when one inevitably falls sideways.
glossary – See also glossolalia, talking in tongues (esp. resulting from trance or schizophrenia see double bind and Gregory Bateson).

Glossary (also) marks literariness and literary criticism by being a paradigm, a kind of mis en abyme of what some theoreticians consider a principle characteristic of narrative fiction. For, as Derrida has repeatedly argued (e.g. 1967, 1977), language always ‘quotes’ other language, ‘constituting itself on linguistic iterability and cultural clichés whose direct utterances are nowhere to be seen.’ 98

A/The Glossary is a companion piece to a work of fiction called New Moon Through Glass (NMTG). While contiguous, in that the two texts ‘touch each other’, any reference to NMTG in The Glossary may be considered purely coincidental. No experience of NMTG is necessary for semantic or semiotic enjoyment of its alleged glossary. A/The Glossary grew from a previous text by Jill Farrar, Shadowmouth (a gloss), 99 an aggregation of poetry, autographical and critical texts which was partly inspired by the Surrealist Dictionary. That ‘gloss’ can be defined as both an interpretive interruption to a text offering additional information, translations of foreign or difficult words or an explanation (as most common in Biblical commentaries) of something deemed ‘surprising or confusing’, at least not self-

98 Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, 1983.

99 w/edge 2, University of Western Sydney, 1997.
evident at the diegetic level and a specious summary, a misrepresentation, something superficially attractive but deceptive, encapsulates the rhetorical issues concerning language and glosses (representation and interpretation or misrepresentation), and glossaries (as self-referential texts) themselves. [aside: glossary is therefore another word in that class mentioned before by Hecq which comprise antithetical meanings] If, as in the Lacanian prescription, the world and the unconscious are constructed like a language, then it is fitting that in sociology, Talcott Parsons used the word 'gloss' to describe how the mind constructs reality.

The Cutting Room Floor. The surgery of revision is often painful. Creating a holding pen for half-baked ideas can help salve the raw edges after slashing, incising and lancing a text. I hoard pieces of text, fragments, just as I used to hoard pieces of fabric in a box under my bed as a child. Writing and re-writing is a matter of making choices. There is a difference between worrying over every little detail in a sentence – adding and subtracting like a calculator – and a complete re-visioning of a text. I have spent time in the bog of editing recognizing that until I severed a limb I would be stuck waiting for my entire body to go gangrenous. Writing continually confronts the writer with not just how to say something but what. And what might have seemed the pinnacle of aesthetic pleasure one day – running the shiny fabric between your fingertips - seems lonely, dirty stuff the next.
Words to be defined in a glossary should be arranged in alphabetical order and typed flush left.¹⁰⁰

There are no real rule books or maps to chart the territory in one’s head or heart and like the early cartographers the edges, the very ends of the earth are places one can fall off. The edges where the feelings and thoughts of the body, are not yet of the page. Tatum O’Neal’s autobiography is called *A Paper Life.* Whether this refers too her debut film role along side her father Ryan O’Neal in a movie called *Paper Moon* or some other aspect of her being, such as being a paper tiger, was not made clear in the review I read. But the title holds a fascination for a writer even though they may be writing on a screen. My life is a paper life. Deciphering the scratchings and scribbles on the blank surface – the page, the canvas, the mirror, the liquid crystal display – and making more. Only paper offers the tactile complexities of the origami life, the *papier mache* existence.

*glove puppet* - see *transference.* It takes two hands. It takes two to tango, to dialogue and to…what? I was a preacher in my second-class glove puppet performance, and Prince Charming in the first class’s production of *Cinderella.* In an all-girls’ school, somebody has to ‘play the man’. It seemed therefore that it was entirely possible to choose to ‘play the man’. It wasn’t glamorous, it wasn’t what I wanted, but Prince Charming was a starring role and the preacher puppet was remarked upon as one of the better ‘characters’ in the mix. The ventriloquist’s dummy

is the acme of glove puppetry — a role which many of us are asked to play from time to time. In fact if you haven’t had someone operate your responses by manipulating your insides, then it's arguable you haven’t truly lived. The novelist manipulates her characters — can give all the best lines to one or other of them, and can narcissistically have ‘their character’ — the one they identify with — win, gain revenge on all the thugs who have bullied them, shock, amaze, disgust, get the upper hand, and win the audience over. In fact the fiction writer is the ventriloquist’s dummy — performing as if independently, though really the product of an obscene number of pleasuring encounters with Other(s) (other voices, other hands, other emissions, slippages and slides) who are in fact your Self. (NB the exhortation to ‘pull one’s finger out’ may create serious inhibition in writers and artists and should be resisted at all costs.)

gothic – somewhere along the way I must have decided love and sex were somehow better with fear and death.

growth – Aged seven I developed a growth at the base of my neck near the collarbone. As if it wasn’t enough that I felt awkward having grown several inches in the previous six months (an occurrence my father insisted on describing as a ‘growth spurt’, an expression which seemed unattractive and uncomfortably corporeal if not down right sexual — something my brothers might chuckle over between wrestles on the floor), and that I was taller than most of my school class, and had large awkward hands and brown hair and eyes (i.e. un-princess-like,
apropos, princesses were blonde-haired and blue-eyed). While so many of my seven-year-old activities, anxieties, and ambitions were glossed over or ignored, this 'growth' to all intents and purposes was my crowning achievement if measured by the attention it received. About the size of a ping-pong ball, though not as uniformly round, it looked strange but otherwise had no other affect on my health or behaviour. I would have preferred if we, as a family, could have just turned a blind eye and got on with our lives. But no. While pleas to skip school for various colds or other more nebulous aches and pains fell on deaf ears, the growth occasioned unwarranted (from my perspective) and immediate removal from school and a flurry of visits to doctors' 'surgeries' (the word 'surgery' hanging over my head as my mother and I walked into these buildings all smelling of linoleum floors and methylated spirits — the latter a smell that struck fear into my frame as it usually heralded an injection of some sort or worse — but more of that latter). One particular visit stands out because it was not to a large institutional building, rather to a suburban house with a rather nice leafy garden. Once in front of said doctor I was asked, yet again to remove my shirt, something that even a seven-year-old feels loathe to do in front of a stranger, but adults rarely think about these things. And this man placed a finger or two on said growth, while I assumed the unfocussed, middle-distance gaze forward I had rehearsed and evolved as the best posture to adopt during these examinations and then said, 'It has a rubbery feel.' (This line has been repeated by my mother so many times it has entered family lore and taken on the weight of a Shakespearean quotation and in fact I have, in my mind, improved on the doctor's line so that he says, 'It hath a
rubbery feel' my itals.) At this point in the drama I am then asked to replace my shirt, an activity which prevents me from seeing the glances interchanged between the doctor and my mother — the adult drama in fact. And then told to go and collect the mail from the mailbox at the front gate. I remember it was a beautiful sunny Sydney autumn day and I lingered for a moment under a large tree and watched the patterns the light made through the leaves. I don't know what is going to happen and feel slightly guilty because my friends at school are hunched over arithmetic or some such while this beautiful day is going on just outside their reach, but I'm also aware that this mailbox gig is some sort of ruse and want to crawl under a rock and hide. (See as yet unwritten novel, *The Patient's Doing Fine*)

I still bear the scars from said growth. Narratives bursting all over the body like blisters. What the body says, how out of our control it is, how we are having these conversations with the people around us unwittingly through our bodies. My growth was interrupted — what was it trying to say or do?

**hallucination (madness and sleepwaking)** – A plastic vocal gesture of dark beauty. Violent espressivo. Supernatural, spiritual. It is as though a life were a voice.

**handguns and tequila** – mistakes; apparently of all human inventions, computers are responsible for the largest and most rapidly achieved mistakes in the course of history, with the possible exception of handguns and tequila. In terms of mistakes, in a kind of anti-Piaf, I regret everything. See
Pentimento, Lillian Hellman and also by her, The Children’s Hour (investigate biographical source or literary precedents for lesbian love story and ‘mis-takes’ vis Lola and Venetia). Also, another as yet un-penned novel in the Venetia Glass series which opens: The security guard stopped, reached for his handgun — and tequila…

**hauntings** – It was not long after the party that rumours started circulating. Manny hadn’t had time to share all that had occurred in the forty-eight hours since. Or even felt the cold stone between her fingers.

‘What are you up to?’ her father suddenly appeared at her shoulder as she gazed at the road that vanished up over the rise between the cypress trees.

‘I think I'll walk to Tara’s today,’ she said and he shrugged and took his paper to the circle of light beneath the leather skin lamp in his favourite corner.

The road was quite steep and Manny’s legs began to tire. There were flies about and she longed for the clear view of an ocean. Or a flat plain, rather than the enclosed hills of her family’s property.

**hauntings II** – A doorway showing a crease of light; the lashing wind outside; pull back layer after layer. Obsessions are the mirror to the soul.
**headstones (and footstones)** – vanishing books. Writing subject to the editorial effects of time and tide. See also, new professions as yet un-titled — e.g. retired couples who travel the countryside documenting country graveyards.

Headstones:
*Entry in catalogue*
AJ Deller Meares
Bertha May Meares
Edna Violet Meares
Ivy Isabel
Lucy Hannah

All 19-20 August 1922 – Burned to death.

These Meares did not, as far as I could work it out, relate in any of my searches to Mrs Elsie Meares. I followed threads down paths that led to Binchey and Bickford. There was a group of people, a family, called Clovefoot buried in a separate graveyard near the reservoir. Their name caught my eye though it was merely an alphabetical coincidence (see ‘felicitous alphabetic conjunctions’ and the *flâneur*) — a random juxtaposition next to the family names beginning with Bs I happened to be investigating. Yet I held onto them, the idea of them, for a long while. Three different generations, including one infant. But I couldn’t make them fit into any logical pattern or make sense of how the ‘Meares’ sisters (which is how I thought of them, though presumably only one sister had the surname Meares) were connected to the Clovefoots, and in the end I abandoned them,
reluctantly, because I had grown fond of my idea of them, though probably mostly I was just taken by their name.

The cemeteries where I discovered these possible (though never strongly probable) traces of family history had been documented by a husband and wife – a Mr and Mrs Joe Landsic, who, as a labour of love or out of devotion to history, or simply as something to do, had spent a little under a week walking the cemeteries of mid-western New South Wales. They noted the names, dates and relationships where they (the headstones) survived the ravages of weather and time. They noted the condition of the markers and the graves themselves whether both headstone and footstone survived; whether denominations where still clearly discernible within the cemetery, if they existed at all or ever had; noted particularly fine examples of the stonemason’s art. Finally they drew diagrams of the plots, the avenues and orientation to sunrise (in real estate agent’s jargon, I presume, the ‘dress circle’ of cemeteries). Roland had been adamant that he would not be cremated, that a plaque in a commemorative wall simply did not have the same sense of presence — in the architectural sense — as a grave bounded by stone, topped with, perhaps, sculpture of some sort or other. But reading the description of these graves where the headstone had sometimes been reduced to a pile of crumbled rock, or, even if a still-standing stone, effaced by acid rains, the graves themselves often unkempt and all too frequently vandalized, I was struck by the impermanence of a plot and even of stone such as granite or marble — the epitome of the monumental — as a device to maintain one’s presence beyond a lifetime. Again, what was
written on the tablets was no more permanent than a lipstick message on a mirror — saying gone, gone, all gone.

The devotion of the Landsics, who trod the paths and felt the temperature of the ground, the raised nipples on the marble angel and the chiseled numerals on the stones, touched me. I imagined them in khaki shorts and terry toweling hats, carrying clipboards. I imagined them silent about their work and then later, lying in the campervan fondling each other, silent still with a fear in their breasts, hearing the wind in the grass on the hill.

**heterological – heterologies**— in the writing there are connections and understandings emerging and splintering (de Certeau’s heterologies of ū interests, leads, sexualities, narratives, writings and readings). But here I know I must exercise some discipline. That state I feel slipping as the books and papers and file cards scatter and intermingle and gather dust. I must be the editor of the writings of what may be, it turns out, a mad woman. The task before me is gargantuan, brobdinagian. Somewhere I wish to find the *dossier secrets*, the crypt, the spontaneous memories that I can allow because I no longer feel they must be “understood” or “approved of”. The self I am longing to acquaint myself with – the one who was projected so faithfully onto Lola – crafted, coloured and coded. Cf *The Dumb Waiter*.

*fragments*
• ‘Fingers in the pie’. Is this a generic statement of desire? An instance of the irresistible breaking of the cultural code – busting through the crust – getting to the meat of the question in one bite (or grab).

• At one time I had difficulty reading at all. There just didn’t seem to be a point. There was something that I couldn’t seem to grasp — like there was something in double inverted commas waiting to trip me up — or else, there was no ‘other’ ‘reading’ and so the plainness of it was a little disappointing.

Reading. Consumption patterns. (investigate)

**holonomic brain theory** — information about an image point is distributed throughout the hologram, such that each piece of hologram contains some information about the entire image seemed suggestive to Karl Pribram (originator of the theory) about how the brain could encode memories.

**homesickness** — Sometimes I read books backwards — OK I read sentences forwards. However there is a perverse satisfaction in ‘getting’ the book through different means. Vincent Van Gogh wrote home to his brother, ‘I am sometimes homesick in the country of paintings...’ And the state that this sentence produces in me (as opposed to the state it describes — even literally as in a ‘country’) is one I would like to be able to produce at will with my own sentences. But I am overcome with inarticulacy.
identities – writing and identification with characters (and passionate feelings towards them), experimenting – in the chemical sense – with different character combinations and with different identities. In Fictocrit the literary critic is also the author. Traditional guidelines/formulae for writing 'the novel' apply, yet are there to be ‘played’ and ‘played with’ – fictocrit plays with the notion of genre by asking ‘what if there was something that writing could do which wasn’t part of a particular genre – implicit in many genre stories is the notion of heterosexual bonding and happy ever afters – what about the “other” [alterity] something which isn’t sanctioned by the usual parameters of social acceptability.

illusion – in lusio means beginning a game. Mimicry is one of four cross-cultural patterns of play identified by the eccentric intellectual Roger Caillois in 1958. ‘All play presupposes the temporary acceptance of an illusion or imaginary universe.’ (check source) Mimicry is play – when someone forgets, disguises or temporarily sheds his personality in order to feign another. I am using a story (in the fiction) of mistaken identity (or identity theft or misappropriation) to investigate such themes as:

- acting (playacting and affect)
- play (the creative play space and what it enables)
- the self (its relation to consciousness, its continuity and its breaks and their relation to narrative – what constitutes
identity and how does a writer create a sense of self in herself and in other characters in her fiction?)

- writing (as re-writing, as autobiography and what might this mean, ‘writing one’s life’? as representation of dissociative phenomena: ‘out of body’ experiences, trance, implicit perception/memory, automatic writing and the unconscious)

- chance (destiny and accidents)

- narrative [of the self – ‘spontaneous kundalini awakening that propelled him to the edge of insanity and death’ (Krippner & Powers, 1997)]

- falling in love [religious fervour and high temperature visionary obsessions (Sontag date)]

**imagination** – is a good horse to carry you over the ground – not a flying carpet to set you free from probability. 101

**innerness and language** – The language of the playing child has a peculiar form. It shows abbreviations, it jumps and it is not grammatical. It moves by resemblance and other associations. Vygotsky calls this the ‘egocentric monologue’ which becomes ‘inner speech’ …different syntax from socialized speech. ‘It is a dynamic, shifting, unstable thing, fluttering between word and thought…The senses of words combine and unite – a process

101 Robertson Davies, 1993.
governed by different laws from those governing combinations of meanings.’ Vygotsky called this an “influx of sense. . .the senses of different words flow into each other – literally ‘influence’ each other – modifying later one.”102 Similar to dreaming.

**innocence** – Initiation into adulthood frequently involves mutilation of the body (See also *anthropology*).

**intensities and flows** – *things I don't understand*. If depth and interiority are terms which involve the body in hierarchization, stratification, overcodings and, in particular refer, culturally, to the ‘hidden’ genitalia of women, which have contributed to the notion of the ‘feminine mystique’ — women as ‘unknowable’; ‘what do women want?’ etc — then what is the implication of this for the archaeology of writing (digging up the past to reinterpret history); psychology of the psychoanalytic variety (digging up the past to interpret pathology or neuroses in the present) genealogy (digging up the past to remodel the story of how we got from here to *here*). Digging, digging, as though we (writers) were grave diggers plundering and defiling, working by lamp light and the sound of the garbage truck. Memory is encoded in language as digging up or digging in the past, though it is different from actual digging since it engages the imaginations (the imago), the birth of something that has not happened before: an experience, a sensation, a possibility, an affect — these productions are a text that is not in search of ‘truth’ (whatever its ostensible

102 Meares, *op cit.*
agenda) but in search of 'pleasure'. This pleasure is akin to the solving of a crime, the unraveling of an enigma and yet, since the pleasure exists in the pursuit, the unraveling, the 'game', our unconscious must continuously disguise as well as tease — resolution means the end of the game. What we want is to tell ourselves that we want an 'answer', the 'truth', when what we want is to continue to be stimulated. For man, woman-as-enigma (That Obscure Object of Desire) is the game. The fascination, the trap: in the literal imagination the vagina as 'trapdoor'; in the metaphorical sense a talisman which induces a trance from which the one entranced may absolve themselves of responsibility for their libidinous desire. Whatever the 'woman' activates in the participant of the game is her 'fault'. The classic projection of desire onto the woman as blank canvas.

But if we step back and see what is already written on the canvas — the canvas is never blank. We see it has our name written on it — our gnomic self, a collection of aphorisms and clichés or, metaphors which have become so commonplace as to become invisible — which stares back at us as an eye, an 'I' or as a black whole.

**intention** As a writer one's intention may be at once diffuse and focused.

**intertextuality** – Another word for plagiarism.

**intonation** –
*from* Songs of Childhood (with apologies to William Blake)
The bike slid down the damp green slope
Gashed brown with living wounds.
We screamed that scream of fright and pleasure
Through the rain, the afternoon.

The rain inked all in dark and brilliant scraggles
Our glee ran like Visigoths and Huns.
Earthling fingers paint graffiti, while
The trees look indulgently on.

jean d'arc — expanding the realm of female possibilities. Even at the price of death. I'm a sucker for French film.

jill farrar — Fictocritical practice is at one level a response to the problem of defining autobiography or at least it engages in the argument at the avant-garde end of the spectrum in attempting to suspend ‘dominant classical codes and [to permit] the efflorescence and excesses of the subordinate codes' to reference Julia Kristeva’s distinction between ‘the symbolic — a rationalized structure — and the semiotic — a process which is in excess of and cuts across structure — to support the hierarchical arrangement of codes in realism. Barthes himself uses the distinction between denotation and connotation in this same way.’

Without quite wishing to draw up a manifesto of fictocriticism, while understanding the need for protocols in its exploration of and experimentation with and within genres and ‘the space between’, my understanding of the fictocritical project

103 Burgoyne, 1982.
is one which avoids polarization in the argument: at one end those who not only define autobiography but find in it (or in its most successful form) repeatable narrative shape; at the other end those who contend that autobiography is inherently indefinable. Or, to put it another way, the features in *A/The Glossary* one might describe as ‘autographical’ (i.e. the broad category of self-writing of which ‘autobiography’ is its narrative subset). To which debate I would simply like to cite Paul de Man, in an article on the inevitable tropological and disfiguring character of autobiography, who ventured that autobiography would have to include ‘any book with a readable title-page’ since somewhere on it ‘the author declares himself [sic] the subject of his own understanding.’

**journal** – decisions made during writing process. ‘How do I work? I grope’.105

**labyrinth** – Throughout my trip the idea of the labyrinth had never been far away. I had seen labyrinths used again and again as decorative motifs; I had been inside consciously labyrinthine houses; the souks I had visited had all been constructed on labyrinthine principles; and I had sensed that the larger structure of Arab society was – unlike the vertical hierarchies of the West – a labyrinth too. . . .Wherever I turned, there were new riddles and contradictions. If I thought I was in one place, it turned out to be another. . . .Sana’a was functioning exactly as a labyrinth should: it

104 1983.

105 Albert Einstein — Quoted in Shaunessy, *op cit.*
was a close protective hive for insiders; but for an outsider it was a trap with no apparent means of escape. 106

**language** - I had thought by boiling it down, boiling language down to its component parts — knuckles and shanks... *the knee bone's connected to the thigh bone*...the old 'essences' trap — that I could get the better of it. Control it. Reduce the number of drafts needed to produce a masterpiece. As if the distillation of poetry, of knowledge, the drip, drip, drip of pure essence along the glass tube would provide a *formula* for writing, by which I mean 'success'. Why do you think the formula is always a *secret*. It's the same with the treasure map. The encryption key. We, as writers and readers already know what we're looking for — at least we know it when we see/hear/touch it. 'The uncanny,' writes Freud, 'is the name for everything that ought to have remained...hidden and secret and has become visible.'107 Hélène Cixous says 'knowledge started for all of us with knowing with the mouth, by tasting...And the price of it has been exile, death, but also work, art, creation.'108 The mouth is the exploratory orifice and the first point of entry to the body where are told 'Don’t': 'Don’t put that thing in your mouth.'

And yet, wasn’t this — this reaction — the dead-end whereby I found I could no longer read? The mistrustful reading with potential threats around every bend.

107 Sigmund Freud, 1953.
It's as if nothing has happened until an event is made explicit in language.

_Hear your name as I whisper it in the hall…_

But if (to quote Cervantes) history is the mother of truth, then what of fantasy? What of desire? Between the entreaty and the articulation, between the dancer's jetée and arrival _en pointe_, there is the impossibility of ever knowing what was meant or said. All writing is re-writing. These ominous words hit like a dart from a blowpipe. Yet this so-called impossibility, which is the moment(s) when the dancers’ bodies are suspended in mid-air, this is also the great escape. The intensity is released and releases a kind of well-spring in the heart of the observer. Just as a gorgeous sight makes one catch one's breath — the sheer impossibility of it or, is it, the reality of it (its materialization). This is what the dance world calls _balon_. It might also be called _jouissance_ — once tasted, the artist must try to recreate — as the unconscious does in dreams — the remembered moment of libidinal satisfaction. The artist seeks (or researches) the exact conditions needed to (re)create the sense of _balon_ — a quality somewhat like a bouncing ball, but which cannot be taught. And finding these exact conditions, the exact combination of words perhaps to produce an alchemy, which reinvents, reconnects with the object of desire. Which is to summarise the plot of my novel.

True writing always has further questions to ask.
laughter – A complex behavioral response... The initial and final stages of laughter may mimic the narcissistic smile of recognition.

life – A pharmaceutical experiment.

list – A leaning; or tendentious rhetorical flourish.

Louise Brooks – Lulu, the black bob. The self-destructive urge in those who have achieved success. Thanatos. The audience's desire to see the fall of kings. See also Frances Farmer.

lucubrations — long, hard study, especially at night and the work, usually scholarly or pedantic resulting from such prolonged study. Putting 'out of sight, out of mind' into a computer which translates it into Chinese and brings it back from Chinese as 'invisible idiot'.

mad, bad and dangerous to know – Literature might be a virus or an addiction.

mad scientist – My younger brother lit a fire behind the bookcase and then went out to play in the backyard. There was a space behind the bookcase which was just large enough for one or two of us as young children to sit and pour over some forbidden text – usually a really disgusting one of birth defects, of babies with huge deformed heads and suppurating sores for eyes and nostrils. The game was, one finds the worst picture and
then dares the other to look at it – and then the roles are reversed. It was nightmare stuff, it churned my stomach, terrified me witless yet was utterly compelling and impossible to turn away from. The fire didn’t take very well and the only thing it damaged was the bookcase which thereafter had a huge scorch mark and one panel was basically charcoal. So our sessions behind the bookcase were curtailed and anyway it stank of mouldering fire where the firemen had hosed it down. I remember the fireman holding my younger brother on his hip and telling him never to do that again – to promise. And I was so envious that he got to sit that close to a fireman I was thinking why didn’t I think of that. An early adventure which no doubt ignited my passion for books.

mad woman upstairs, the trope – *Jane Eyre* and also Jean Rhys, *The Wide Sargasso Sea*.

magazines – flipping through ~ – a *flâneurism*. A magazine’s continued existence depends upon readership and the science of attraction and flirtation. One must feel ‘appetized’ (as in, having eaten an appetizer\(^\text{109}\)) but not entirely satisfied (in fact many mags strive to, or perhaps innocently achieve a sense of dissatisfaction in the reader — in their life, their body, their general circumstance, their level of intelligence — this is known as the magazine’s aspirational index). The science involves directing the gaze of the reader from editorial to advertisement

\(^{109}\) Also known as an *amuse bouche* — something to amuse the mouth with — a whole other story in itself.
and back again achieving a blurring of distinctions. Ideally the dissatisfaction combined with a persistent but generalized hunger will light on an image — visual or textual or both, which is the Bingo! of magazine marketing — which will be deemed to satisfy said hunger. Whether or not one acts on this identification is dependent of course on resources and other factors which the magazine doesn’t really care about. You’ve paid your cover price and can be damned. But the image of a life with this particular desirable accoutrement/commodity/attainment\textsuperscript{110} - which may be intellectual, let’s not be snobbish about this, literary magazines have their own aspirational index — stays and becomes part of the repertoire of one’s daydreams. A new toy to be pulled out in a dull moment to entertain and to be embellished. In fact daydream embellishment is one of the little know decorative arts at which most people excel. At which point you have ‘sold’ yourself on the necessity (psychic at least) of possession or transformation (some day dreams require you to actually become someone else by whatever sleight of hand) in order to maintain the fantasy. Which has become incorporated into your body

\textsuperscript{110} While magazines often seem to be promoting or celebrating or even providing an instruction/construction manual for a particular so-called lifestyle, the lifestyle is actually part of the assumed rewards of purchase. The lifestyle is an unactualised potential — Deleuze’s and Guattari's's virtual realm in \textit{A Thousand Plateaus}, which is ‘populated by multiplicities, which provide the structure for intensive morphogenic processes composing bodies and assemblages’ (Bonta & Protevi 2004) — in the narrative of the magazine reader who, entranced, believes the prosthetic of a particular commodity or course of action will produce the desired affect. In and of itself this is neither undesirable nor impossible, just another instance of the complex web of relations and textual effect.
somehow from the pages – glossy or sober, lively or learned. See also markets (flea) and all shopping.

**mapping** – ‘Memory as a function of the ego is an obstacle to surrendering to one's own unconscious or temporarily forgetting who one is.’

**markets** – flea, super etc. Cruising the dairy cabinet for indefinable wants. The market, as the cities built on great trade routes attest, is the meeting place for disparate elements, ideas, cultures – the cargo of associations, myth and fantasy – the baggage we project onto the ‘other’. Venetia loves the white noise of the supermarket, the empty stage (blank page) where she can enact or become anybody she chooses — through what she chooses. Fish fingers are badly realised. They should be slippery sliver digits like surgical gloves full of muscular slugs.

**metaphor** – dying with one hand in a French underwire bra (attrib. to Rodolphe Salis, Baron de la Tour de Naintre, the son of a rich brewer, also sometime painter, sometime poet a member of the literary society the Hydopathes — ‘Wet Apostles’ — who was instrumental in promoting the notion of the avant-garde and its first expression as cabaret, Le Chat Noir in Montmartre around 1880). *Fru, fru, fru, luscious fountain spray over my voluptuous belly* (quote from unknown Italian *Futurist* poet, my translation). To the Futurist manifesto, museums and art galleries were cemeteries. Marinetti, thrown from his automobile

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one evening in 1909 into a factory ditch full of water, emerges from it as if from amniotic fluid to be born – without ancestors – a futurist (Krauss 158). At the same time, notion is also born that originality is a metaphor not only for artistic invention but also for the sources of life. The birth of the work of art, in the discourse of originality, places the self (experiencing the present a new as distinct from a tradition-laden past) at the epicenter of the creative process. The avant-garde artist wore many different guises in the first hundred years of his existence: revolutionary, dandy, anarchist, aesthete, technologist, mystic.

memory – Socrates at one point remarks, in Plato’s Phaedrus, that writing — a gift from the Egyptian god Theath to King Tharmus — is a remedy for memory is a remedy souvenir, ghosts (A. Ronell), fragments, lost objects (salvage from past lives). Genet writes, “. . .the beauty of a living thing can be grasped only fleetingly.” There are also memories of books. When I pick up Genet’s Miracle de la Rose (Miracle of the Rose), I am frustrated because my first infatuation with Genet was produced by Notre Dames des Fleurs (Our Lady of the Flowers) and though I have more than one copy of the former, I do not have the latter and may have in fact re-purchased Miracle in a mix up with the titles involving flowers. Because I have a remembered scene in one of these Genet texts of a lover Divine framed at the doorway that I want to ‘get back to’, to recreate with Venetia and Lola in my book. And another connection was the Lindsay Kemp production of Flowers which was a theatrical groundbreaker and a pivotal point in the whole sexuality issue for me in early university days.
memory and writing – bodies are branded to make a memory.\textsuperscript{112}

Excerpt from journal: Decided I was unhappy with the relationship with my first husband. Made intermittent attempts to relocate. Grew savage. Grew other personalities, horns, fangs, a desire to read constantly and voraciously. Decided that I had had enough. Developed inappropriate relationship with an ‘other’ which acted as a crowbar. Sprung from prison. Undertook lonely self-examination. Recognised I needed an income. Saw opportunity in up-coming job interview. Bought a red coat. Sold myself well...

My aunt approaches ninety years of age. The waratahs bloom on the hill to the north and the pond settles mud to the earth and the eyes of my aunt are far away with her lover whence he’s gone to collect all the blooms. Whence he’s gone to collect all the spoons.

menopause – the slightest eddie is a relief.

mimicry and likenings — uncanny likeness — to the ‘false self’ in Meares’ The Metaphor of Play;\textsuperscript{113} or déjá vu. One cannot say

\textsuperscript{112} Elizabeth Grosz,, 1994.

\textsuperscript{113}“Most people caught up in the false self system do not seem false to others. This is one of its mysterious aspects. It is the people themselves who complain that their existence is fake whereas those around them may see a lively and engaging but in no way fraudulent person. This state of affairs is illustrated by my first meeting with a young woman who was referred because her depression seemed intractable … She smiled and walked into the room with a step which was firm and decisive. Her dress was simple and stylish. [This is somewhat like Venetia, my novel’s protagonist — intractable depression, but on first meeting, smiling, dressed simply but stylishly, carries herself confidently. Looks well.] In following meetings she emerged as
one is happy — since happiness happens — no more than once could say one exists. The evidence is all in the past or a state postulated in the future, alone can say is — it depends. (After Helene Cioux)

**mother** - n. as in concubine, conceiver, creator, mother lode (the main vein of ore in a mine and a plentiful supply of something - text?) and mother figure (a woman who embodies the qualities traditionally associated with a mother, especially support, advice and affection) coaxing the difficult phrases out with her mother tongue and Mother Goose (the supposed author of a collection of nursery rhymes first published in the 18\textsuperscript{th} century). Husband implies a science or skill, that which raises animals and manages resources. Mother implies the place that services other satellites. The mother tongue sounds sexual, laps up the afterbirth in animals, (and all communication). Writing has a corporeal element, then how is the baby which is delivered written differently to the baby which may itself be unable to be written - miscarries or is aborted through a critical, clinical procedure. And what of post partum depression which reportedly affects a substantial number of women. Is writer's block this same silence extremely likeable — quick, amusing and charming. However, she experienced herself as 'inauthentic', saying such things as: 'I copy people. I'm just an act, like being a fake person. I don't know what's really me.' Or, 'I take on other people's mannerisms on the telephone, so others know who I'm speaking to [I can relate to this as I 'become' the actress I've just seen at the cinema, or adopt, even practice, an expression, a gesture a way of sitting or standing or coming into the room that I have imbibed from the creation on screen] 'I'm worried about having no shape or form unless other people provide it. It's not legitimate for me to have opinions. My personality is a facetious parodying of other people. I only exist in a negative way, reacting to other people.' Meares, 1992, p.95.
after the tsunami of textual outpouring? See writer's contagion and depression.

(from the journal)

The picture of me, my mother and my aunt. Her sister shows us steps and stairs getting smaller, paler and less in focus. It doesn’t show what got us there. Are we brave, are we wise? My daughter doesn’t really want to know what it takes, what it took. My old stories and war wounds are of no importance and the clock ticks and we all spend another day with our thoughts, in our heads and she leaves in tears for work without resolving anything.

Am I of the opinion that it always ends in tears? or rather that by bringing tears to the surface (or should that be, forth) we have begun to talk, like an ancient physician that must bleed the patient before doing anything else. It does seem it is part of my repertoire: I make a cut, slice back what politeness has put before us: something unsatisfactory and stale or smelling of roses and lavender, but not really to the point. What is the point, that she has a life and I don’t. Not true. Though sort of true. That she not make the same mistakes I made. Sort of true – though I accept that there is no way I can ever pretend to replicate the circumstances of my own mistakes and certainly no way I can expunge my past errors through some re-writing of the script via the vehicle of my offspring.
If, in writing one creates a body of words, then properly the writer is both a mother (— *mother tongue*) and a midwife (*see Jane Gallop on immoral teachers*).

The midwife is designated a supporting role as is the mother when we talk of mother ship, mother cell or mother figure. Midwifery was associated with witches or wise women who were the primary health care givers until the emergent profession of medicine in the fourteenth century drove the use of herbal remedies, tinctures, potions and poultries underground. Witches were burnt and so were books by controlling regimes and there still lingers, at least in folklore, a mistrust of someone ‘good with words’ (these things which are uncanny – affecting yet spirit-like), someone who weaves texts like a spell – and what is a spell, but a series of incantations - holding audiences spellbound or salivating over some concocted stew or soup or salad. Because one person’s witches brew is another’s fine ale. And a mother can be a curse (a cunt) or a saint, or a slimy mass of bacteria that forms on the surface of alcohol being converted to acetic acid — added to wine or apple cider the ‘mother’ makes vinegar. Now don’t tell me mother’s (and writers) don’t have acid tongues.

**and daughter stories** – see a non-fiction text by Susan Woolfe author of *Leaning Towards Infinity*.

**nonchalance** – cool indifference or the quality of appearing so. Relating to ‘nonce’, the present time, or ‘nonce word’, a word

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114 Also called ‘mother of vinegar’. *Mac on-line dictionary.*
coined for a single occasion (*Unreliable source*). Appearing to create with calm: unconcerned for critics’ opinions. A sea of faces unable to faze a speaker. *Also*, a particular walk adopted by dandies of the French Court in the early eighteenth century in which various gestural follies and furbelows interrupted progression from A to B. (usu. considered refined) Briefly, a greeting between comrades of various avant-garde politico-art movements (properly *Non chalance!* of pre-war Spain roughly translated as, ‘passion without violence’ now relegated to a colloquial expression meaning, coffee, tea (or other caffeinated beverage) taken with milk, (the *passion* - vis maternal mammary excretions and fetishisms), but without sugar (the *violence* - referring to the history surrounding the substance: of female repression, colonial exploitation and slavery).

*narrative* - smoke and mirrors. ‘I believe imagination is the primary necessity. It’s not a process of reasoning, but letting one set of words fire off another, and another, and another…like improvising a dance.’ — Jessica Anderson (in *Making Stories* eds Sue Woolfe and Kate Grenville)

‘Accounts of the “child bride evil” provided dramatic opportunity to warn young women of the necessity for extreme caution in the management of their desires in order to draw the narrative of their growing up to a satisfactory conclusion.’115 That life has a narrative (or may be made to seem that it has) implies that some events (narrative turns such as abortions) are less than felicitous to a copybook edition and that every life is a book and every

book lies. What and who are expurgated from the general release version. Television series such as *This Is Your Life* celebrate a life's achievements, yet overhanging the happy reunion with the childhood friend; the influential teacher, is the funereal heaviness of the realization that, in any case, this life too must end. That the subject of each episode is given the book of their life at the end of the show seems fitting and yet somehow bleak. This is the book of your life that someone else has written and over-written erasing your voice from it. Role credits, throw to an ad break.

**negroni** – equal parts gin, Campari and sweet vermouth on ice. My variation is to substitute vodka for gin and skip the vermouth, then top up with blood orange juice and a spritzer of soda water. The fact that the name is an Italian hangover from the jazz era and a racist one at that (*negro* is the archaic word for black in Italian — now *nero*) is unfortunate because it's a good drink — and looks great! A good drink is like good music (good jazz) one can feel it pulsing in the veins, moving the ideas around, tapping the feet. Jazz is a nonsense word, or onomatopoeia, or reference to *jizz* or come – sexy, exciting, ejaculatory playing – depending on who you read. Hum, buzz and shimmy are all in the same lexicon. As are roar, squawk and clang. When the spirit takes you, every sound, every rhythm is translated through you, drawn like a line from the trumpet’s goitered riff through the keyboard's subtle tranquillized seduction. Lying sideways, lying on your back, your front, your body's defying gravity's envelope scraping cigarette smoke from the ceiling fan blades. Undulating till the dying chord that ends
the show. The record stutters at the scratches like their voices from the gin ‘n’ whisky soaked studio, drinking in the whole arrangement the pause as the needle gets stuck and the musos sway in place. Too soon the glass is empty or the studio's shut, the music dying in an echo down the hallway where somebody’s practicing their piano, stuck on some musical phrase that won’t leave and won’t perform what it has potential to say. The faces, the closeness, these ‘state-dependent’ memories glide like the guitarist's thumb across my fretwork. If this is ‘possession’ I'm black New Orleans gone. Purportedly evil spirits have entered my body and made me hum and shake fit for a revivalist meeting. I don't know my don't know my can’t find my — way home name.

**new moon through glass** — a novel. Also, bad luck to view the new moon through glass. To be avoided by the superstitious.

**noodles** - I do not remember my first encounter with noodles. Or when noodles became my passion, my obsession, my almost daily vice. Perhaps it was ‘gradually, tentatively, mistrustingly, as a swimmer goes down a shelving beach to a deepening sea...’ (see de Quincey’s *Confessions of an Opium Eater*).

Into the red cave of tongues.
bite pull suck inhale mulch mouth nibble rotate masticate draw dive; — sweet surrender of the farinaceous.

The farinaceous becomes the most skilled Concubine. I am completely powerless in this seduction, and yet the noodles suggest that they are weak, limpid, warm, soft and supple: the
body before lovemaking. Fresh, soft and ductile:— the flesh of seduction. Mid-bowl-bowel: mobile, violent and metaphysical: the form of the face. Gentle, weary and subtle: the body after noodleful.

Like the Arabian Nights, noodles come in many different guises (the veil of cuisine entices by what it conceals). Apparently artless, they never exhaust their delight — the belly is full before the mouth has tired of this bite pull suck.

Asians are unself-conscious in their consumption of noodles. Put on a bib, roll up the sleeves. Their mouths are capable orifices — sucking and ejecting morsels of bone, gristle with great proficiency and absorbed concentration. Noise and the consumption of noodles [see Tampopo (the film) — the definitive text on noodle soup] are generally frowned upon in Western etiquette — our civilization having bequeathed a shame upon registering too much relish. Too much appetite. Perhaps mostly against women showing too much appetite. In this case you're your noodles alone. The Western equivalent is sucking the last few drops of a milkshake from the bottom of the carton (or icy metal container). Tolerated in young children but frowned upon in maturity when one should have grown out of the desire to suck.

Noodles and the writer, the stringer of tales, seem somehow related. Pleasure and pain. A fine line. The masseur’s hands bring me back into the here and now — birth me. The dentist's hands as he flosses my teeth. Another long thin strand, this time
unyielding and exploratory. A fishing line. The dentist lowers his hook, line and sinker into my mouth. The rubber of his gloves has an acrid taste, but the silent sawing action, the mild sting on contact, the intimate concentration, makes an eroticism of the encounter.

Mouths in general as organs (colonies) of communication, of communion, sustenance, self-defense. Song. The entire organism a vibrating box for a voice — nothing but a complex resonating chamber for the voice — breathed to life by God's word. The body of the instrument...

**oneiromancy** - My opening, yawning, cavernous denying slit.

**orpehus & eurydice** - or *Ofeo et Euridice* (Gluck's opera) — Orpheus, the passionate singer who is so beautiful he becomes his song. The poet who with prohibited gaze seeks his desire in the underground – the drug addict searching for ecstasy in the interstices of the human soul, Darlinghurst Road, the Cross. Reaching Lethe on a wintry Sunday, prisoners of the afternoon, and forgetting to row back through the strip joints and fast food clichés. Dying amongst a clutter of paper coffee cups and half-baked ideas. The journal, writes Maurice Blanchot,

is not essentially a confession, a story about oneself. It is a Memorial. What does the writer have to remember? Himself, who he is when he is not writing, when he is living his daily life, when he is alive and real...The Journal represents the series of reference points that a writer establishes as a way of
recognizing himself...a path that is still viable, a sort of parapet walk that runs alongside the other path.\textsuperscript{116} (1981: 71)

Is not the writer's most difficult task to bring the beloved, the imagined into the daylight? Is it not the greatest wish fulfillment to coax each letter (each love letter) into being — this smearing of the tablets called literature or faeces? ‘The rough poetry of the raw archive...Orpheus' gaze transgresses pertinency, it is impertinent.’\textsuperscript{117} ‘His inspired and forbidden gaze dooms Orpheus to lose everything.’\textsuperscript{118}

There are quite a few interesting aspects to the myth of Orpheus. Calliope, one of the Muses whose emblem is the stylus and wax tablet (the instruments of writing) gave birth to Orpheus, the impertinent one. Calliope means ‘beautiful voice’ and her son Orpheus' singing was deemed more beautiful even than the Sirens who would lure men with their voices to their death, making him a good man to have around if your boat happened to be passing temptation. But what is a voice? How do we recognize a beautiful one? And might listening be a writer's primal art? A writer's voice is one of the strongest, strangest effects of their writing. The 'voice' (which is also close to a tune) in the writer’s head passes from their body into the written word which is then translated (or transmuted) into a 'voice' in the reader's head. There is no guarantee that the voice I hear in a work is the voice you hear – which in some way accounts for my jealous

\textsuperscript{116} Blanchot, 1981.

\textsuperscript{117} Sirc, 2003.

\textsuperscript{118} Blanchot, \textit{op cit.}
possession of certain texts. There is an intimacy associated with the voice (it is also breath, warmth, and vibration) that if experienced as pleasure (or beauty or the sublime) in that place of charged solitude (the literary space which also equates to place(s) in the body) is transformational, is precious, is as close a definition as I can come to of love.

Note: perhaps I could structure my novel after Orfeo and Euridice: Venetia meets Lola, falls in love and then is separated from her – Lola in the underworld. Venetia ventures into the underworld to retrieve her (or to recreate her, the memory of her and of jouissance). Venetia’s dark night of the soul is essentially her written jour(n)ey – the work that was never meant to see the light of day. The dark shaft of a dis-used dumb waiter which joins the flat above (Venetia’s) and the flat below (Elsie Meares’) is the where the material emerges from – the monstrosity which is formed by a creative, transgressive act. This monstrosity is a previously (or badly) aborted child – a manuscript which has lain writhing in the dark birth canal waiting for someone to resuscitate it. The story which emerges (this is beginning to sound like bad back jacket copy) begins to morph into Venetia’s self-reflective writings developing an alternative narrative and identity for her and for Lola and for Mrs Meares. To give up failure, writes Blanchot is a crime ‘much greater than giving up success, as though what we call the insignificant, the inessential, the mistaken, couldn’t reveal itself – to someone who accepted the risk and gave himself freely up to it – as the source of all authenticity.’ (102)
overs – ‘Enough about you. Let’s talk about me.’
see The Death of the Author and the question of authority and ‘proxy’.

Ovid's Metamorphoses – An Imaginary Life, David Malouf

pantomime Jill coming out in stars.


passion – ‘So whether you are writing your masterpiece of arthouse cinema or an episode of a soap opera, write about things important to you. Dig deep inside yourself, access your own experiences through life, take one aspect or incident that has been important to your own development…and develop it.’
(Raymond G. Frensham Teach Yourself Screenwriting)
Why do I find this style of exhortation so deflating? ‘Take that specific idea and develop it,’ Frensham goes on, ‘fictionalize it and add to it, to make some universal truth that will mean something to others — your audience.’ It is probably sound screen or any other kind of writing advice. But I find I want to rebel in the face of it, want to blow to smitherens the notion that I am tricking up my life experience and ‘turning it into’ like in a pottery class, a cup or a mug. It probably does have

119 Frensham, 1996.
something to do with the writing process, but I am either unwilling or unable to analyse why this sort of template for success engenders a scream level of violent protest in me. *If you give a man some fish he will eat, if you teach a man to fish he will survive* — well I say give a person some dynamite and he won’t have to go fishing! The dead ones just float to the surface. Now go away, don’t ask me to explain.

**persistence** - And so I keep on writing in an act of foolishness or bravery — one or the other. The consciousness that my time might run out at any moment — not such a grand dramatic thought at my age as it was when, as an adolescent, the horror of death seemed near and yet almost surreal in its unfamiliarity. That I have wasted plenty of time is neither here nor there. Or so I tell myself in an effort to keep a certain lightness of mood. My writing can too easily become leaden with too much purpose and worth. Reading carries so many opportunities in its palm – the warmth of a park bench in the sunshine, or the longed for bus trip with a seat and no interruptions, among strangers. The hospital bed even – though this last is not my ideal. A long wait in a waiting room or at the hairdressers. Some people can’t stand waiting and either can I if I haven’t brought something to read with me. Something to Read could be the title of a book – it has analogies with Something to Eat as in, I feel like ~ Something to Read is more a pressing crisis which must be addressed although sometimes you have to get up, stretch and walk about the room. My back can no longer stand being held in suspense of the reading posture. Now I’m sleepy and I haven’t persisted for very long at all.
pleonasm – the use of more words than are necessary to express a meaning.

postcards – Cross-cultural insemination breaks in continuity; the distance between stars.

post-it notes – see desk terminal moraine.

prison house (of language) – a good title for a doco on Hay Institute for Girls

prostitution – Inner city Sydney identity, Nelly Campbell; *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie*, Jean Rhys; the novels of Charles Louis Philippe and Godard's film, *Vivre sa Vie*.

punctuation – ‘the line along which the train (composition, style, writing) must travel if it isn’t to run away with its driver.’ (Partridge 1947)

ramifications – structures one might expect an Egyptian pharaoh to build.

razor gangs – Inner-city Sydney in the 30s and 40s. — Tilley Devine and Kate Leigh as inner city capos. (review Killarney Heights).

reading – *A Hand in the Bush* — Deborah Addington; *Bonjour Tristesse* — Françoise Sagan; *Nightpictures* — Rod Jones; *The Monkey Mask* —
Dorothy Porter; *Sanitarium Under the Hourglass* — Bruno Schultz; *As I Lay Dying* — William Faulkner; *The Life of Pi* — Yann Martell; etcetera, etcetera, bedtime, the pile beside the bed, where you read and what difference this makes to public transport and, cafes and, waiting rooms and,

**recycling**, – no shame in. See *appropriation* and Libraries as Opshops?

**reversals** – ‘A reversal is the term applied to the fleeting change of self-state in which the individual *becomes* the other. It is induced, in the first place, by intense anxiety which obliterates inner reality. In the therapeutic situation it is particularly likely to come about through a break in the connectedness between self and selfobject. This break, however, is experienced as massive compared with that produced by an ‘optimal frustration’ in which the individual’s sense of personal existence remains ...In the therapeutic situation a reversal is most likely to occur in those individuals whose sense of self is somewhat precarious, i.e. in borderline personalities. An attenuated sense of self produces a vulnerability which may lead to a series of rapidly changing, and often perplexing, reversals during a single session.’(Meares 1992:19)

See — *On not being able to read; and other tales of anorexia in suburbia*. Note: Venetia has at one point in her history a reading block. While writing blocks have been written about, reading blocks are rarely read about. Everything substitutes for
something else (Baudrillard). Everything reminds me of something or someone else.

Woman as subject-in-process and woman as sexual identity — Julia Kristeva (see Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes).

rupture — Bataille, language etc Julia Kristeva’s split subject see sacred.

secret, The — Russell Meares talks about the ‘soothing aspect of “the secret”’, reminiscent of the effect of the mother(1992:15). The secret is like the enigma at the heart of writing. The object of desire, which moves the reader and the writer.

siti rambuka — A flaming Fijian cocktail very popular on the outer islands.

specific developmental deficits — What Gethsemane? — Thomas Mann

story

storytelling — what is the difference between story and narrative? And how do both relate to meaning? If humans are meaning-seeking, meaning-creating creatures does the Jungian idea of a collective unconscious; or of ‘memory’— create the story? Revisit Esther Salaman ‘A Collection of Moments’ (haven’t

120 Russell Meares, op cit.
quite worked out the question that these things raise). Interestingly, Calliope the muse of epic poetry is the daughter of Zeus and Mnemosyne, the personification of memory in the Greek mythological pantheon,

**success** – Genet writes in the *Miracle of the Rose* of his ambitions towards Fontevrault (prison) and the prisoner Harcamone, sentenced to death, who 'succeeded' in dying on the scaffold ‘which is our glory.’ ‘And as this success was not of an earthly order, like fortune or honours, his achievement filled me with amazement and admiration (even the simplest achievement is miraculous), but also inspired the fear that overwhelms the witness of the magical operation.’ Could we not say this about successful writing?

**sudoku** – avoidance or mental training? Procrastination, as opposed to multiplication, is the name of the game, and each generation plays it the same.

**surrealist dictionary** – The wind and tide playing fast and loose with my hair; tangles in the netting; superficial holding pattern presenting normality; a rotting shark net undulating impersonally under water.

**swimming pool** – A small liquid prison; a rectangle of water closed on four sides; the image of the world in continuous motion, a network of choices and consequences and constantly dissolving and reforming connections.
tales – of the Orange Kaftan (from Under the Orange Kaftan by Venetia Glass soon to be published by Farrar, Straus & Giroux).

taxonomy – once the science of classifying living organisms.

techniques (for idea generation) – Always carry a notebook and pen for overheard conversations, characters that catch your eye; note their dress, speech, mannerisms (see flâneur) Keep the fragments in a shoe box — ideas, dreams, sense memory exercises, real life stories. Let them mingle and talk to each other. Meanwhile put on your shoes and dance!

techniques for writing – esp. journal proliferation And here again I start yet another ‘investigation’ (might I say ‘giro’) into something which may relate or not to the ‘topic’ at hand. What exactly is the topic at hand is difficult to clarify or produce an adequate explanation of. Certainly there is a sense, as the note books and the references proliferate, as the pathways and the interests diverge and coalesce of derive (drift – avenues of exploration lead down other avenues, soon one’s moorings, so to speak, are well out of sight and a mixture of calmness and trepidation set in) and detournement – everything seems strange – I remember during a particularly stressful period seeing a road sign which said One Car Per Green Per Lane (there were no lights to be seen) and I couldn’t understand what it was talking about. At that point I really thought I had gone mad.

What I like in a good author isn’t what he says, but what he whispers.
'The second you start moulding it, pushing the scene to go in a certain direction, the characters stop talking.'

**the** – the definite article.

**theme** – ‘In my younger days I was writing but then I discovered something. I had this great urge to communicate, but I had nothing to say.’

‘Theme is a universal statement about the human condition that you, the writer want to make. ...Theme applies to your audience, but it also answers the question: why do you want to write this script?’

**tomb, The** – ‘Silence is an independent and theoretical entity. What is unspeakable.’ — Abraham and Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel* or Avital Ronell, *Dictations*. In a particularly grim episode in Australia’s correctional history, the Hay Institute for ‘Incorrigible’ Girls the inmates, aged between 13 and 18, as lately as the 1960s and early 1970s were allowed to speak to each other for only two periods of ten minutes day – otherwise they must be silent.

**trance** – in a ...

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121 Maria Irene Fornes, playwright.

122 Rubin, in Frensham.

123 Frensham, op cit.
**translation** – ‘...to be written, be it mortally and to be changed into a recognised word.’

**truth** – The war is deep behind everything I do. It taught me that the public world is largely a delusion created by directors and actors and lighting men. I would read accounts of so-called battles I had been in, and they had no relation whatever to what had happened. So I began to perceive that anything written was fiction to various degrees. The whole subject — the difference between actuality and representation — was an interesting one. And that’s what brought me to literature in the first place.

**uchronia** – I found a lump of glass – about the size of a large pea and looking like a piece of a shattered wine glass stem – in the bottom of my laksa. I bit into it and my teeth made a grinding sound as though I’d lost a filling or shattered a tooth. Never a good feeling. As I retrieved the piece from my mouth I expected either white tooth or grey amalgam. Instead, clear, jagged-edged glass.

**undead** – the undead exist in what is written, spoken or read about them. There existence is through language. The historian, like the writer, the poet lives on the blood of the undead. They also regularly consume their own bodies as a sacrifice to the black arts of literature.

**venetia** – coincidences and an instance of ‘flanning’ online. My heroine’s name is Venetia Wright. The results of Googling

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Venetia Wright call up Santa Venetia, California, a census-designated place in Marin County the home of science fiction writer Philip K. Dick. The place was envisioned in the early 1900s as a little Venice so canals were built and houses and structures built along them. It was a vacation spot for the wealthy for a brief period in the 19020s. The plan of building a little Venice was abandoned in the 60s but houses built along North San Pedro Rd share the neighbourhood with the Marin County Civic Centre designed by Frank Lloyd-Wright. About 7.3% of the population are below the poverty line. While living here and experimenting with methamphetamine, Dick wrote *A Scanner Darkly*, the title of which comes from Paul’s letter to the Corinthians. (*I Corinthians* 13, Verses 9-12 King James Version). In the book the drug of choice is called Substance D, which causes the two hemispheres of the brain to function independently. This produces a strange scenario in which Arctor (the protagonist) and Agent Fred do not realize they are the same person. Substance D is refined from the flower *Mors ontologica*.

**voices (chori dispirati)** –

from Castelot’s biography, *Josephine*:

‘It is true — and it had often embarrassed him [Napoleon] — that Josephine, with a Creole’s naive and unthinking immorality, often talked shamelessly of her former lovers…Only the pleasure of adorning herself, ordering a dress, matching a ribbon for her hair could arouse her from indolence…To be convinced that he was right to make his wife an empress, Bonaparte only had to
recall with what grace, charm and distinction she received people...Above all, he loved that gentle, silvery, caressing voice, whose tones were so enchanting that "one stood still simply for the pleasure of hearing it". (NB Wide Sargasso Sea’s heroine is also Creole)

**wallpaper** – Papering over the cracks implying the past is imperfect and needs a makeover. The guy’s voice next to me in the library is annoying — I want silence or at least the white noise of nothing identifiable as word. When I try to hard to concentrate his voice pierces the calm. He has a running sore of a voice. It speaks as though he believes he has the answers. His companion is the fall guy listening as though the main guy — the insistent voice guy — he will lead him somewhere interesting. Maybe it has lead me somewhere I wasn’t intending to go. I was feeling stuck up in my oh so intellectual melody. There is a baby who keeps shouting in away that would seem to suggest it is happy which doesn’t bug me like this guy’s voice.

**Well, The** (of Loneliness?) – Radclyffe Hall has been ‘rehabilitated’ from the author who kept lesbian love in the ‘forbidden and any who dare go there come to a sad and lonely end’ camp. See **genre**.

**witness** – writing by the light of a candle.

**writer’s contagion** — Words are the punishment. I want to leave a mark. Yet each sign can only be defined in terms of what it is not. (see Saussurian linguistics) I am not talking about the
punishment in Foucault’s sense more in the writer's way of being plagued by particular words which must be used somehow while not knowing quite what one wants to say, but feeling, all the same an urgency that this thing – this something – must be said.

**writing after** — I think you were afraid of doing something that might look artificial, and so you did nothing at all. ‘If you cannot project something, then it does not belong on stage.’

And here again I start yet another ‘investigation’ (might I say ‘giro’) into something which may relate or not to the ‘topic’ at hand. What exactly is the topic at hand is difficult to clarify or produce an adequate explanation of. Certainly there is a sense, as the note books and the references proliferate, as the pathways and the interests diverge and coalesce (a bit like the ‘research’ pertaining to *the Holy Blood and the Holy Grail* and the *Da Vinci Code*) there are connections and understandings emerging and splintering (the heterologies of n interests, leads, sexualities, narratives, writings and readings). But here I know I must exercise some discipline. That state I feel slipping as the books and papers and file cards scatter and intermingle and gather dust. I must be the editor of the writings of what may be, it turns out, a mad woman. The task before me is gargantuan, brobdinagian. Somewhere I wish to find the dossier secrets, the crypt, the spontaneous memories that I can allow because I no longer feel they must be “understood” or “approved of”. The self

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125 Sonia Moore, 1968.
I am longing to acquaint myself with – the one who was projected so faithfully onto Lola – crafted, coloured and coded.

I tell myself to breathe. I am not yet free of my own self-surveillance techniques, which perhaps prevent the ‘truth’ from outing itself. There is something thin and flabby, pock-marked and bald. These are writings on training wheels, on arthritic thumbs. These are feelings that seem to hold the whole world in their gaze and yet vanish amid the piles of references texts, that circulate the room, but go no further than a chair, a bolster beneath my back, a tundra of writing at once too personal and too general. To be of use. What was it that someone recently said was their or their mother’s response to the question, How are you going? Something like, ‘Oh, just trying to matter.’

And there goes the mad woman again, the maddening silence, the flat eyes, the purposelessness of eating, the sense of ‘fakeness’ the distorted body image, the passivity which cruelly swallows a life. The years spent trying to be heard, understood, to argue a point, to make a difference, to rail against injustice – what I perceived as injustice, anyway. All a funny joke — non-existent. Bits of paper which no one reads.

Could I beguile you with a piece of verse? Is it all connected and are you coming my way by way of thinking through these things and finding them equally bizarre?

**writing before** – *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Anxious moments. You want too much. Sinking without trace — her déjà vu was turning
labyrinth, n. LÅ'BÝRÝNTH Complicated irregular structure with many passages hard to find way through or about without guidance, maze; intricate or tortuous arrangement; (anat.) complex cavity of internal ear; entangled state of affairs.

Just as in fair cities such as Amsterdam or Bandung, the rabbit warrens of workers’ cottages stood behind the grand houses on the canals, in Sydney the lowly dwelt in the depressions, while the mighty dwelt on the ridge.

Apologies for this sketchy and, in any encyclopaedic sense, inadequate portrait of the history, geography or should I say, genealogy of that entity we now call real estate. However, it captures the essence of the choices available to someone of modest material means in regards to housing in contemporary Australian cities. In Sydney the areas around Woolloomooloo, Darlinghurst, Potts Point, Surry Hills and later Redfern, Chippendale, Erskinville and Newtown are museums of a way of life established by the European settlers who so effectively reframed the local indigenous way of life as to have almost entirely obliterated its mark on the landscape (The Block in Redfern notwithstanding). I say almost because it must not be forgotten that our most celebrated international monument rests at a place named for an Indigenous advisor to the then Governor of the Colony. He may not have his profile on a coin of the realm, but his (European) Anglicized surname continues to support and point to the introduced culture of the nation.

So, finding several grander houses, now fallen on leaner times, on the Darlinghurst ridge (the suburb’s name created in honour of one of the earliest Governors), had been subjected to the developers scalpel, I was fortunate to be able to afford a small apartment in the area. It
was, as I say, small, with a confabulation (or conflation) of bedroom and living area with a small anteroom, which served a gas ring and a sink. I say gas ring, but I mean hotplate. I have always preferred domestic cooking arrangements using gas as it is much more responsive to the moods and distractions of the chef. Though I did once have a serious incident involving a pot of depilatory wax which ignited due to proximity to the naked flame on a gas stove (and wreaked no end of havoc with the landlord who happened to be passing under the flat’s windows at the time when hot, flaming wax was ejected, not to mention the remnants of black soot and a penetrating stench which seemed to sully the ambience of the place for what seemed weeks, even months afterwards), this occurrence has not dissuaded me from my preference for gas stoves, and I believe the weight of culinary opinion is in my favour. So, my use of the term 'gas ring' was as a generalist and should be taken as a habitual usage for a cooking device, but its manifest slip of the mind (if there is such a thing) is important, as you will see once you read the rest of the story.

But if I may continue with my description of the place: the bathroom was an interesting collection of the usual bathroom paraphernalia. But having studied the matter, and I should introduce my profession in a brief aside saying only that people pay me to research certain aspects of society and then produce texts which, through creative imagination, persuade others to purchase objects by which they (said 'others') hope to achieve what is generally known as a 'lifestyle'. Having thus sketched my occupation you will understand why I trust myself to be accurate when I say that I believe no one worthy of the title plumber had designed or affixed said paraphernalia to said bathroom. There occasioned water in places (and from places) where water should not be — even in a bathroom (or other place of bathing). If I might digress a little just to show off a little of my research in the area, if only because inevitably one achieves more knowledge in a
lifetime than will ever be given space (be viable) by/for my clients, or family, or friends, the Minoans created the first bath — that is, the first high-sided watertight chamber specifically designed to be lain in by a single person for purposes of hygiene and sensuous pleasure — using a sloping bottom to facilitate drainage. Bathing in those day, my sources implied, was a leisurely and no doubt many splendid thing — at least for the nobility — with a series of interconnecting tiled rooms, some private and enclosed, others open to the stars, the heavens. And unlike today, there were no council restrictions separating eating and food preparation areas from those where one conducted one’s ablutions. I believe eating a mango in the bath, an activity which at least for this writer is up there with other peak experiences on Earth, may have had its first performance somewhere within the labyrinthine bathing complex in the Palace of Minos.

But I digress. Meanwhile, back in Darlinghurst, the important thing about the hodge-podge of spaces that had been grouped together behind a door and called an apartment was an interesting (one term for it) protrusion on one of the walls; something like a chimney which, while not providing or ending in the aesthetic enhancement of a fireplace, simply created an awkward nuisance. It prevented the neat alignment of the mattress against the wall meaning one could not sit up to read in bed, nor did it provide a convenient alcove for a set of shelves. But I am blathering now simply to disguise my discomfort as I remember the number of times I tripped, stubbed my toe, spilt coffee or wine or cause hot buttered toast to slide from its plate when negotiating this bugger of a cockeyed arrangement of furniture because of said bump in the wall.

And then at last, as though a fork in the road had been reached, or enough spiritual aura had been jettisoned, I finally ‘saw’ what this shape was. A tomb. A secret passageway. A mausoleum which held the last will and testimony of the previous inhabitants of flat 4/61.
Womerah Avenue. A passageway, in the sense that, as we leave one shore (the littoral), we launch ourselves through a transitional phase (the literal?) — something which effects body as well as mind — an image, a face — and so we emerge on the other shore (of Styx) not as we were. Either genetically nor generatively. The Eros and the Thanatos of our lives — asleep and awake — creative and destructive and everything else in between. And whether the Fates or Good Fortune fill our sails.

One Venetia Glass, for instance, lived here and recorded many things: things she saw and heard. It is these experiences, plus some of the materials from previous inhabitants which provided clues, which I have dared, with this volume to re-frame. The body, which was found in the Dumb Waiter on the — day of — in the year —, was merely a red herring. This is Venetia’s story, and let it stand in testament to those who would fly close to the sun, or the son. And remember, from a distance, someone scraping paint can sound like vermin in the walls, a masonry drill has the wail of pain of the constant invalid and a cat can sound like a baby.
NOTHING IS NEW, ONLY FORGOTTEN.

- Rose Bertin, Marie Antoinette’s dressmaker.
**prologue PRÔL’OGUE, N., & V.T.** preliminary discourse, poem, etc, esp. introducing play (cf. **EPILOGUE**); (fig.) act, event, serving as introduction (to) [Gk **PRO (logos SPEECH)**]; dark, familiar groupings in front of hydrangeas; mouth like an untouched match.

When the doctor first told me about my problem, or condition, rather, my legs started trembling and I had butterflies in my stomach as though he had just given me some great news. Or that some guilty secret **secret** had passed between us — that he’d always fancied me, say, and we were going to consummate our passion on the floor of his pristine surgery. I stared at the grey shadow on the x-ray which he was pointing at. It had the shape a heel makes in the sand with ill-defined edges. As he spoke about the pressure on this nerve and the delayed neurone response from this lobe and that cerebral vertebra, I thought the heel print looked exactly like someone had walked along the edge of the water and the next wave had washed the rest of the footprint away, leaving only the heel, like someone had stepped on the left side of my head and pressed hard. I instinctively brought my hand to touch the area I imagined to be around the spot the doctor was indicating with a pencil. I don’t know what I was expecting — that I would find a pulpy patch at the corresponding part of my skull, that it might be weeping sticky, colourless fluid. And I had the funny notion of seeing this picture of me and the doctor and the illuminated picture on the wall like it was some diagram in a crank book on electricity — like **Coles Book of Animals** or **Cautionary Tales** or whatever it was we gazed at as children — with arrows indicating the flow of electrons and my hand touching my head closed the circuit.

The doctor’s pleasant timbre flowed on about how this ‘largish, mid-size’ oedema, the size of a small mandarin, was responsible for the tingling in my left arm, the visual aura that ‘things’ had acquired for
me — the computer screen, the bleeding street lights, the lines of car
tail lights becoming flooding streams, the television ghosting itself on
the wall to one side. And of course this was the reason behind the
loss of balance, increasing clumsiness and slowness of my thoughts
and verbal responses — not, as I imagined my colleagues might have
conjectured, because of my capacious drinking habit.

In addition, he was saying, due to interferences with messages being
sent to the glands in my body, this grey smudge on my brain had
rendered me infertile. Barren. Without child.

That was three years ago. You can hardly notice the scar now my hair
has grown back, and I have had it cut in quite a fetching tom boyish
bob. The layers disguise the cleft in the skull — again a bit like an
impression, not as large as a heel, more like something formed by the
pressure of a finger — and there are only moments when I'm tired
that the lights start to blur on me. When I'm under stress you'll notice
that I lack some finer reflexes, my speech slackens, my left eyelid
hangs lower than the right. Of course the fingers on my left hand will
never completely straighten again.

Life is a painful process of materialisation for me: of taking
responsibility, of showing up. I don’t know what it is. Did I miss the
first lesson? I don’t feel properly engaged. After all the fabrications,
I'm a bit confused sometimes as to what actually has and has not
happened. I took a bus ride from Bookitingi to Bandung back in '78.
It took three days. Whenever I woke up I reached into my bag of
palliatives and pulled out a Mogadon. The passenger's head to my
right kept leaning uncomfortably close and hot. He had short bristly
hair. The only way I could get through it was to sleep.

At midnight we would stop at roadside stalls and be presented with
dozens of tiny, fiery dishes. Bright reds and saffrons under the
bright lights. There was someone dancing on a table at one of these cafes. Or was that a dream? I desperately wanted to go to the toilet or thought I was desperate until I was shown a creek and surrounded by curious onlookers of all ages. Of course I couldn’t go. Back onto the bus and the Muslim chants at three AM and the Mogadon.

The trip itself was a painful process of becoming. Or unbecoming. My first overseas trip. Ninety-two hours on a bus, weaving and ducking on mountain roads between terraced rice paddies. People, friends, brothers had come back from Indonesia in hypnotic states of ecstasy over it. My big brother Thomas staged a slide night on his return of photogenic brown children projected obliquely onto the living room ceiling at home. Pink Floyd sung, *Up, up, up, up* and *down down down down down* and *after all it’s only round and round and round and round*. I smoked some of the joint that was being passed around and was sick to the stomach, retching in bed for three days afterwards.

Did I tell you I was in magazines? Sounds glamorous, doesn’t it. Part of the media, putting together stories on celebrities, fashion, hair and makeup. I was quite ambitious back then, before the operation, before I made one too many gaffs, before I ran out of juice, stopped writing and slid into serious dejection. (And here one of those other people’s voices jumps in here to say on the subject of my supposed manic-depression, ‘I don’t remember any of your *manias*’. ) Of course the breakup with Roland was all part of that, so now I’m not sure which happened first – the dereliction of duty, the florid delusions of a ‘different' kind of life — the life of the writer/artiste — the substance abuse, or the pulpy intrusion in my brain.

Then of course there was the issue of money — or lack of it. And there were drug friends who were company of sorts and afternoons, entire days totally spaced-out spent doodling on a pad, having terrific
thoughts that evaporated by early evening. Like the friends, the money, and my job.

I also thought I'd fallen in love. It's too hard to do this right now. I can't go there. I'm not being a tease, you'll go into overload and start taking surreptitious looks at your watch. I'll go back to talking about my love of noodles. Or my new flat. Or the afternoons on my futon, ticking through the seconds, the minutes in my mind. Listening for the old lady downstairs. Or waiting for my life to start. Again.

I have always been a thief. I have always had the desire. Is it the thrill of the chase or of possession? I've read books on kleptomania — but I think much of it with me is the pleasure of pretence. I try on different identities — adopt them if I sense they fit. I stand before the mirror as guilty as any transvestite mouthing obscenities, rehearsing lines. I was trying to perfect a piece of writing about the change that had been wrought in me by an encounter now a year or more past when I became aware that I didn't understand where Desire was taking me. I'm talking about Lola, of course. Though I'm still not sure whether the change was happening anyway, thanks to said brain condition. There was one particular night when the longing for this person — Lola, now departed — and the struggle to find the right combinations of words (encryptions) were all one and the same incantation, the same obsession. I could feel the absence of what could have been somewhere in the region between my shoulder blades. Somewhere in my mouth. My openings. And as I happened to be on a aeroplane at the time, traveling alone, there was no one to tell, no one to transfer this information, about what was happening to me. No 'where' for 'it', the realization and the reality, to 'go'. Cigarette after cigarette. I convinced myself if I could obliterate myself — after an as yet to be determined conflagration — then I would experience the vindication, the justification I was searching for in the pure expression of surprise
and outrage in my audience — the world — as I succeeded in the final act of the great illusionist — vanishing up one’s own arse.

I spent long hours staring at the ceiling without a single repeatable thought. There were other times when Lola’s distance, her absence was as palpable as — the velvet surface of the sofa cushions or the fur on my cat’s cheeks (the velvet on the bridge of its nose). Something vulnerable and real to be cherished at all costs. I was only too aware that matter was space and there was no way to tell whether I actually existed at all, except by making marks on a page. I went over the details of our relationship the way an assassin maps out the movements of his prey. On these nights I sat with my white notebook and my black pen warming my insides with a wineglass of gin. Or vodka. Stringing words together soothed me, sent the world away. I could rearrange the outcomes of Lola and me with the precision of a chess grandmaster or the determination of a punter (one who incarcerates wild animals). On just such a night, I recognised that certain constellations of words elicited a depthcharge of bliss in me, which is also like incomprehension — similar to gazing at the moon.

The Japanese say water is like a mother’s affection. Looking up on a sharp winter’s night I’d find a half moon, as distinct as a geometric slice. Or the first scythe. As delicate as a fine nail clipping, positioned just so with one twinkling star, in the early evening, when the rim of the Earth still glows.

Once I would sit on the edge of Lola’s bed and swing my legs coquettishly. Lola, or my obsession for Lola, slowly destroyed my relationship with Roland — I was going to say, from within. But what does that mean? Interiority was a masculine construct, so Lola insisted. ‘There is no inside and outside. Our bodies are a continuum of surfaces and intensities – a Mobius strip.’ What eroded my capacity for relationship with Roland was a desire that was infantile in intensity.
With Lola, or through Lola, I could play roles otherwise unavailable to me. Wade in up to the thigh. Lola and I were a performance. Or a theatre. Really it wasn't the person of Lola so much as what she allowed for me — her absence and my desire to write the definitive piece about her as a way of ‘fixing’ her. I long for the permanent control of art. But this is post-analysis. A cool, calculating way of forgetting all the things it was. Because that is what is so difficult, and so difficult to write about.

I pluck my eyebrows as my morning meditation. To fix, to frame, to freeze time. The ‘self’ – reduced to single strands of fine dark hair. Plucking is an ordering, perhaps a neurotic one: an erotic, impossible quest. Everything that interests me is ‘impossible’. As is my desire. This is significant because Lola had built a career around the philosophical study of Desire. Because of Lola, I understood now my flat, my futon, my writing were all in fact my movement towards an ‘unactuated potentiality’. A rhizomic potential which could spread in any direction. Or so the theory went.

My flat amounted to one high-ceilinged room, which ran the width of the building and opened onto an enclosed balcony converted into a kitchen. Hotplates, sink and just enough room for table and chairs. When I arrived, the entire place was empty and painted white — other lives expunged — except for the nondescript patterned linoleum floor of the balcony-kitchen. All of it danced in sunlight and somewhere — it was difficult to make out — somewhere out there beyond the balcony — the water of Rushcutters Bay. It was part of my condition of uncertainty (about the meaning of life — about my next move) that I sat and stared at the windowpane and the changing interplay of light and water. I had been trying to perfect a piece of writing about Lola for so long, I no longer knew what I wanted to say. The urge had become something else. There was nothing I wanted to do more than have this
queer sensation take me over — the free fall into the space where I write.

*The space that exists to be spoken into.*

Dreams do it. The ones where the railings are black smudges and the silvery trees slip through. I have opened up and allowed things to happen. In dreams things have already happened. I am needed from the time I leave — to the time afterwards. I’m in San Francisco in a hotel room. There is a logic, but no one explains. Am I the predatory seductress or the open, violated victim? Is the wound in the heart, viscera, jaw, teeth, or bones?

Some nights I lie awake unable to commit myself to sleep, to return to that other land of dreams. That place of labyrinthine architecture. Of signs which are quicksand, of dialogue overheard but never quite understood, of weddings I gatecrash as an observer, of significances which present themselves impersonally like the iron daggers on the garden fence. I wander through this crowd or that with some forgotten purpose, examining details — the bride’s black stocking veil, the sheen on her lips as she looks up at him. Is it the clanking sound of dungeon keys, or something in the way we are all spread out on the steps that makes me uneasy next morning, that carries over into my waking state? As though my eyes had been forced to focus on details or study single frames, like I’d watched a film in a foreign language. The rain — the rain on the train windows. The sequences which never begin.

Last night I got dead drunk. I woke up naked not knowing where I was. I imagined I had seen Roland again and even that we had made love.
I remember Mama’s blackest rages, me cowering in the corner while the clothes hoist helicopter Medusa swings wildly over her head. Secrecy is better. Never really share with anyone else what plans or preferences have formed are forming in parallel with the words slanting through the dark leaf cover.

There is a silence at the beginning of a blaze. (‘Silence’, quoth Lola, ‘is an independent clinical and theoretical entity.’) The first flames appear to hover, even lick the surface of things. (‘What is unspeakable,’ she reads, ‘where we have buried our victim — our dread that will not be named.’) The flames are one thing and many. They spread like language. (‘Our lives have no logic, only surfaces and distances like postcards and the sea.’) There is a low roar as the flames consume, as they inhale and exhale, a crackle as they ‘take’. They snap. They fry. Faster and freely. Then sub-audibly — woosh — fingernails across the piano strings. (‘We seek the other.’) (‘It is the nourishment of the other on which our own body feeds’).

They are shouting, there is someone knocking at the door. They are saying something to me, shouting something into my face, my skin crawling. I end up on my back under the stars. Uncanny space. Roaring in the background. Racing sirens. I try to get up and the ground has me glued, there is a smell of something rancid — burning pothandles — mingled with damp grass and night air. There are hands at different points, rolling me, raising me, a blaze of lights, sting of a needle, then the doors shut and we’re away.

There were meetings, concerns, at the magazine after the accident. My Editor was sympathetic. Such things can happen to anyone. Any time. ‘It’s scary,’ she said with wrinkled brow. ‘There’s probably a piece in there somewhere, but in the meantime I think you need a break. Why don’t you take a couple of weeks off,’ she began straightening her papers. ‘Don’t rush back. Do what you need to do.’
Mopped the floor at three am car alarms beaming up from the street below.

There is something satisfying about a blaze. There is a silence at the beginning – a silence like a thought. I can’t say there was intent. I can’t exactly say why I didn’t move from watching to doing, preventing — it all happened so fast. The flames leapt from the pile of papers to the shelves. There is a silence at the beginning. I would remember things on the way to the office, things that I had written down and then forgotten to conceal. Her papers or her particulars — things I was committing to heart. Then I'd forget, and with a start would wonder how much I'd said in an unguarded moment. They had asked me so many questions — and so many left unasked. An involuntary memory interposes itself between me and a point a colleague is trying to make. About when we were children and were allowed to stay up in our pajamas to watch the pretty bonfire. Back at the flat, with a whiskey in my hand — as though memory reacts through alcohol solution — forms (shapes) appeared on white pages like photographs — an explosion as a wooden table leg buckled, a clump of paper succumbed to the heat with a sigh, and somewhere the scrape — is it Lola getting up from her desk — an up-bow, yet I still wouldn’t cry out. In disbelief and at the same time in a kind of knowing trance I believed I was justified in cleansing the room this way — it was my work I was destroying, no one else’s. Then all at once I was standing transfixed before an inferno, fixed like the rabbit in the proverbial on-coming headlights — the memory, ‘taken’ the way a flashlight blinds the subject and lights up the red cave of the retina — held as the blaze begins, and the snap, crackle pop is till to come.
It was exciting to see how often we could meet without anyone noticing even a wrinkle in the bedclothes. The thrill of driving home afterwards, recklessly taking the corners as though the road were licorice. Sweets, lollies all sorts of indulgences suddenly became available – part of a wicked prize I had stolen or acquired by slipping through Alice’s crack into the mirror world on the other side.

One day I arrived at her apartment to find her sprawled on the bed with a huge manuscript and a box of chocolates. This memory bursts in on me as a presence.

I have seen her many times, The Girl with Bruised Shoulders, or thought I have, in crowds, in galleries, in the street. Her shoulders just out of reach. Her violet shadows written by Picasso or Vermeer. I can’t be sure. I want to say, your collarbones make me weep, I want to reach out and dip my thumbs into her pools of bony softness. To cradle her head and suckle her.

Now in my solo flat perched above a mad old lady, I alternate between the blank page and the blank window, the blank wall, I remember things. (Things I didn’t tell you) Things I don’t want to forget. One minute I would like to kill you and next turn my head and place my kiss very lightly on your breast. Your dry lips. I pour a drink, open my mouth. The sound of our breathing in the afternoon …
indeterminate \textit{indéterminé} \textsc{a}. not fixed in extent, character, etc.; vague; left doubtful; \textit{~ sentence}, one that leaves prisoner’s release dependent on his conduct & on probability of amendment; Lola, aged twelve, unable to strike a smile for the camera.

Call me Venetia. I am a veritable \textit{vomitorium} of the written word: notebooks and journals\(^1\), exercise books,\(^2\) plain pads of paper lined and unlined\(^3\) and post-it notes\(^4\). These are the \textit{glacier} (cue time phase photography: clouds scuttle, flowers \textit{bloom} and die) creeping across Venetia’s desk. Only more swiftly.\(^5\) Not to mention what appears on fronts and backs of envelopes, the margins of books and other texts, or the words lost in the moraine, erased in ensuing drafts, no more substantial than a puff of smoke, or the writing that exists in the ether, on the computer, in the cellar of the imagination. Or in dreams.

These are the grave markings of a genealogy of ... Venetia. Or the scores that count the days on the inmate’s cell. Venetia. She who is (QED) what I have become: this body of words. When they break down the door and remove my stinking corpse, these piles, these letters, these conversations will be all that remain. Venetia’s notions, feelings, her blank spaces circulate and settle as an as-yet-uncharted geophysical event. In an attempt to prevent myself from drowning in her verbosity ... \textit{Excuse this circumlocution, as I seemed to be ...} pissed.

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\(^1\) The former, more structured and theoretical, the latter more messy and personal.
\(^2\) A combination of the above, including daily ephemera.
\(^3\) No rules, anything goes, doodles, lists, reminders, single collectable words.
\(^4\) Aphorisms, ‘read-this/remember this’ tombstones emerging from books by the dozen or sometimes post-its stuck to post-its, stuck to post-its in whole trains of thought that lead nowhere.
\(^5\) Examining for the moment only the three-dimensional materials – mostly rectangular and off-white. Or in some cases yellow. Or pink.
Sometimes in an attempt to save myself (to resuscitate Venetia) I will attempt to put her in order, file her under this or that classification or chapter heading (capitulation means to surrender on terms which are drawn up under subject headings, in which case I give up). But frankly, if I want to lose something I only need to file it. So much of my genius, Venetia's assault on the monument (the cliff-face) of fame and fortune, has gone missing in the records. Occasionally something will surface, be discovered at some later date, during an unfortunate event such as moving house. At which time, such notes, without context or timeframe read like random flakes of skin or worse, because more obviously fabricated — more like the fake snow in a souvenir snow dome. Which nonetheless enchants, momentarily, like fiction's vivid and continuous dream. The loose leaves of paper disconcert and settle autumnally, unreadable, like clues to a mystery I am alone in wishing to solve. Sometimes I look at her, chaotically spewing forth her scribbles 'filed' in the old columbarium she found at a secondhand store, only to be lost forever, look at Venetia the Glacier, the yet to be David Attenborough'd terminal moraine of scribbles and doodles, and I can't believe I've made such a botch of it. Ice sculpture she ain't.

What is the definition of adult anyway?

White paper becoming black text. Venetia becoming Lola or Lola becoming Venetia. The smallest step, the full-stop. As Venetia literally packs to move house she's confronted by much the same dilemmas as in writing itself: what to salvage and what to excise? Do I 'bung it all in' or 'chuck it all out'? Do I remember Lola or do I bury her in the back yard under the fig tree? Like a placenta. Ordering, dissecting, grafting sentences, phrases, words ... anyway, isn't the alphabet just another language rule not so much for spelling (as in the casting of spells) but for ordering, for archiving and retrieving information that otherwise is spurting in sheets —
But let's not go there. History is really quite arbitrary when you come to think of it.

Writers write fiction because there is something they want to find out not because they have something to say. And if I hold my ear up to the Dumb Waiter I can hear snippets of conversations from the other units in the block. Begin to fill in the pictures I have in my brain of those above me and below.

Call me Venetia.

I am something of a misfit. Someone who never really fitted in. I want to ‘fix’ others. To fix, the frame, to freeze time. Or lose my ‘self’ — reduced to single strands of fine, dark hair.

But I suppose you want a story. Then you shall have one. But don’t blame me if it doesn’t come out the way you expect it to. It never does. At least not with me.

Much later she showed me her photo album. The dark, familiar groupings in front of hydrangeas. Lola, aged twelve, unable to strike a smile for the camera, mouth like an untouched match.

In dreams you are somehow behind your eyes, in photographs you’re in front of them. If you’re with me. Dreams capture what we cannot say; photos what we cannot see. Lola’s arms folded across her chest, her ‘good head’ towering above her relatives, not wanting to be there in her size fourteen thighs. Lola. Unfeeling upper arms falling sausage-like from a sleeveless, pale-coloured shirt with Peter Pan collar, darker Bermuda shorts. Weight on one thick leather sandal, suffering the hard shadows of the Sydney sun. And another, after a late teenage ball, long gloves and a full skirt, in front of a notice
board, some agapanthus held in her hand like a pointless argument. Her shapeless hair to her shoulders, thin watchband over the glove at one wrist, no inkling of what she would become.

But of course by then it was too late. By then I'd seen how Lola looked like me, how we could have stood in for each other at these various “photo-opportunities”. How our parallel lives had collided, not in one neat cross but haphazardly, like scratches on a painted surface, or the scores that count the days in an inmate's cell.
The bike slid down the damp green slope
gashed brown with living wounds.
We screamed that scream of fright and pleasure
through the rain, the afternoon.

The rain inked all in dark and brilliant scraggles,
our glee ran like Visigoths and Huns.
While earthling fingers paint graffiti
the trees look indulgently on.

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abreaction ABREÄ’CTION, n. (PSYCHO-An.). The removal by revival & expression of the emotion associated with forgotten or repressed ideas of the event that first caused it. [AB-, REACTION; after G abreagierung] Shapeless shoulders, in dreams, the front of them. Of course by then,

She used to hate getting up early in the morning or getting up at all. She'd place bets with herself how many cars she'd hear taking off for work for the day before she'd answer the call of nature and run on tiptoe to the loo and back. And still struggle deeper into the sheets, winding the bed clothes around her nakedness and sometimes fall into a sharp abyss of slumber and wake at ten or half past flushed and groggy.

In between combing through house listings she thumbed through her writings and found she seemed like a stranger to herself — a whiny teenager at least. The black lines of text - convincing herself she couldn't leave, move forward, without a new set of feelings.

Work-wise, things were equally full of obfuscation and the need for cataloguing and what they call 'recontextualization'. She was trying to 'get back into' magazines. It was the sort of summary one made to the inevitable question from acquaintances unluckily met in the green grocer when one hadn’t washed one’s hair. At least it politely avoided or delayed the inevitable ‘what ever happened to you and …’ ‘Oh, we parted ways...’ she would have said, if only she’d had the presence of mind at the time. Though usually she'd mumbled something through a smile while patting down bits of greasy hair or fingering a frond of lettuce. It was as if thirteen years of marriage had had a particularly unlucky effect, and, like some female Rip Van Winkle and just as hairy, she had woken up, shaved her legs and squeezed back into a suit, to find a job. Start afresh. God knows she thought, straightening
her skirt with difficulty before the tiny mirror above the sink, I could use a makeover – and some money.

(ramifications, she thought, hearing Roland’s familiar rant about forward planning and probity in her head …)

She tidied up the remnants of the evening’s indulgences noticing in the process the backs of her hands had begun to show raised veins through the thinning flesh. The blood ticked silently at her temples.

The new editor of More magazine had liked a short, humourous piece Venetia had written on dinner party disasters, which is how she came to be waiting in reception in a tight pair of heels trying to look relaxed.

‘Venetia Glass to see Caroline Coolidge,’ she said looking, she hoped, purposefully at the wraith at the front desk. The young woman tapped a long fingernail on a sign in sheet and returned to the endless greeting Good morning More magazine…good morning More magazine…Behind the desk was a large illuminated pane of frosted glass, the light from which was so bright it cast the receptionist’s face into shadow. All that the visitor could make out were a couple of glints where there should have been eyes. The wraith’s head pivoted bird-like and her hands, glowing from a concealed light somewhere under the desk, zig-zagged across a keyboard, but of her facial expressions, Venetia could see nothing.

Venetia moved towards a row of white leather ottomans. She weighed it up: standing in her borrowed heels would have her wincing in minutes, but sitting down meant negotiating lowering onto and then rising up from a low bench, elegantly — something notoriously difficult to achieve in a pencil skirt, especially while juggling a briefcase and organizer. She smiled to no one in particular and opted
to stand. Couriers danced between the elevator doors and the reception desk’s glass clipboard. Trolleys of garments in plastic bags moved backwards and forwards like stage scenery as young women, all in black, directed traffic.

She took a deep breath and repeated her mantra: new magazine, new woman, new life. One entire wall was covered in the enlarged covers of recent issues of More with their smiling faced models and their enthusiastic coverlines: *Get your man to ‘yes’; and have him gagging for it; Tutoring tumescence: A hard-on doesn't count as personal growth; and, Challenge the rules: tango by yourself.*

The usual mixture of self-help and social engineering, thought Venetia sucking in her lower abdominals. The young woman behind the desk appeared to be talking to herself, speaking softly in tongues.

Women’s magazines live and die by their coverlines and you might say, don’t we all. Venetia had had to do a lot of thinking about what her 'story' was, betraying a common prejudice towards forward progression as being equivalent to success in all things in life. Careers were not supposed to go round in circles, or go up and down in wave patterns. Women’s magazines themselves like many of their icons from Madonna to Princess Mary of Denmark were role models of self re-invention. The perpetual up-beat message — *take control of your own destiny.* Like some longed-for encouragement from an idealized friend, a successful magazine was something you ‘subscribed to’ – a message, a method and, no less, a mother figure. But could Venetia suspend her disbelief and rise above the pain of shoes which were more like instruments of torture long enough to throw her hands up and shout, *I believe?*

After a ten-minute wait Venetia's feet were really starting to complain. She approached the desk again. ‘I was wondering …’ said
Venetia, ‘said’ hardly rendering the feeling of weightlessness she was experiencing. Her feet had begun to throb and she imagined all the blood from her head rushing there as if to the scene of a crime. But the receptionist sensed her coming and showed Venetia her palm.

‘I just love your blouse,’ another female all in black pushed a trolley loaded with garment bags past reception and succeeded in getting the receptionist’s attention with this remark. In the gloom something that could have been a smile flash on and off the wraith’s face.

Why didn’t they just beat it into you at birth, that everyone everywhere, no matter what their job description, dreams or destiny would spend ninety-nine point nine per cent of their time massaging other people’s egos. How was it she, Venetia had spent even a second of her life studying for exams or attempting to do something considered worthwhile? How silly, how naff. Years of toil and wasted idealism might have been short-circuited with this essential knowledge. *Venetia Glass, Ego Masseuse.* It might be worth getting a business card to that effect and to hell with it.

‘Do you have the keys to the Beauty Cabinet?’ The two young women exchanged glances and then the wraith passed something to the other woman in a closed fist. Whatever it was went straight into the receiver’s pocket, who then strolled down the hall speaking into her mobile phone.

‘You can go in now,’ intoned the young wraith and the frosted glass panels slid back with a soft groan. Venetia glanced over her shoulder to acknowledge or farewell the young Cerberus, but the scene in reception continued oblivious in its repetitive cycle as the portcullis slid closed again.
Many offices have noisy floors full of open plan cubicles. By the look of it, *More* might have been called *Less*. Venetia circuited a glazed bowl of river stones that sat on a clean wooden bench by itself directly behind the glass-paneled doors. ‘Circuited’ might suggest a more fluid form of locomotion than was possible given the two burgeoning blisters on her heels. Somewhere she thought she could hear water trickling. Groomed heads worked behind computer screens wearing headphones. Flowers and a fanned group of magazines sat on a meeting table. Plush carpet muffled the sounds of footsteps, but also caught on the heels of Venetia’s borrowed shoes. She advanced to the sound of ripping Velcro toward the corner office. Heads looked up from proofs and light boxes, brows wrinkled at the unwelcome invasion by this uncouth carpet Yeti. Venetia tried to slow her pace, which only drew out the ripping sound to excruciating lengths, like someone taking forever to unwrap a Mintie in the cinema.

It was assumed she knew where she was going. Caroline Coolidge’s name was printed in florid script directly onto the glass-paneled door, with editor-in-chief in capitals underneath. Caroline’s domain held nothing but a glass-topped trestle table and white notebook computer. In the corner, a side table supported something that might have been ice sculpture and a small dog graced a chaise lounge of the kind magazines like *More* called ‘iconic’. It was made out of linked metal like chain mail — the sofa, not the dog — though to give it its due, the dog could have held its own as an exhibit at the V & A. And finally, on top of a sparsely filled bookcase a large, lovingly distressed birdbage. Empty. Of course.

The woman behind the desk put the phone down.

‘Jacqueline.’
In spite of the fabulous view and the fawning assistants, when Venetia, looked from the threshold towards the woman who occupied this enviable real estate, momentarily a frightened child seemed to meet her gaze.

‘Jacqueline,’ came a surprisingly deep voice again and Venetia was about to correct what she thought was a mistaken identity when a Shirley Temple impersonator stuck her head into the room.

The woman in the white suit crossed her arms and gave instructions without turned her head. The curly haired moppet wrote something onto a piece of paper and exited. No more frightened child, the editor-in-chief now looked tired and old, as she ordered some water and something for a headache. Her performance of unassailable purpose was exemplary and everything about her was freshly done: hair, nails, frown lines.

‘Venetia.’ She finally held out a hand indicating a chair opposite her own.

The moppet in smock and brightly coloured clogs was back with some pink tablets on a ceramic dish and a goblet of water. She turned to Venetia and mimed ‘Coffee? Tea?’ Venetia nodded and mouthed ‘coffee’ and slid into a seat as Caroline spun her director's chair around and mumbled briefly into a mobile phone.

‘Inside DPS. Yes, they've cancelled. Will you? I'll call you later.’

Caroline snapped her phone shut and then turned back with a smile that seemed to cost her some effort.

‘Bloody advertisers.’ This came out with an amount of rancour surprising in someone so small and Venetia thought ‘fresh-looking’.
‘They get you to hold the inside front cover. Inside front! And then pull out because the “creative’s not ready” or some model’s contract’s expired or the photographer fucked the fucking shoot!’

Caroline seemed to be talking to no one in particular.

‘Or fucked the model, more likely.’

She paused and her tiny hand shook as she turned some pages in her diary and then reached up to massage away the crease between her eyebrows. She was not what you would call a happy camper. How could she be? Formidable predecessors to live up to and a queue of hopefuls waiting for her to fail so they could take over her office. Not to mention a tyrant of a proprietor (Jack Burrell’s nephew Stuart Rainer) who wanted to topple his nearest rivals and climb to the very pinnacle of media mogul-dom. Her assistant was back with a cappuccino in a metal cup for Venetia.

‘Call Dexter and tell him we’ve got a DPS inside front going begging in the January issue.’ Venetia noticed she spoke to the space directly in front of her. ‘He'll cream himself,’ she said and tipped her head back and took the pills. A sip of water followed and something like relief flowed across her tiny, perfectly proportioned features.

‘And tell him I won’t be skinned, but of course it’s discounted — we’re going to press in two days time.’ Caroline gazed for a second at her manicured hands suggesting all the compromising, thoroughly dirty deeds fit for a Goneril or Regan — and then she snapped out of it.

In that moment Venetia realized why she had never risen to great heights in magazines. Apart from the fact that she had learned too late the fine art of ego jockeying (yes there is a difference between
being a ‘nice girl’ and saying the right people-in-authority pleasing things and actually manipulating a situation into getting what you wanted out of it) she had never, ever, really brought her whole self to work. Here was Caroline as pretty as a picture and able to imply in one simple sentence a depth of commitment Venetia could only imagine.

‘Good morning,’ she said and drew a single sheet of paper from a leather folder.

‘Venetia. Venetia, thank you for your time. I enjoyed your piece immensely. Let me tell you why you're here.’ Her brow had relaxed and her eyes narrowed.

‘We have every gorgeous twelve-year-old model wanting to be on our cover, we have designers, department stores and skin care giants pushing their advertising dollars or contra our way because we're the new kids on the block. What we don’t have is much substance. That is, we're not a scandal rag. Unfortunately. If you've got the budget, it’s much easier to just regurgitate Hollywood gossip. Frankly it's like a drug – people get addicted and they simply have to have the their hit – and, having come from that side of magazines, let me also say it's easy. Not as easy as some people would suggest, but — but the Rainers want something more. . .up market. Whilst still producing big revenue.’ She leaned forward and her eyes bulged as if to say Ok Salvatore, I want Jimmy wacked. Leave him in a dumpster, so the garbage men have a little surprise, capishe?

‘And, what we have here,’ Caroline sighed and looked another decade older, ‘is a family business.’ Venetia quelled the urge to make some wisecrack and simply nodded and cranked up an enthusiastic smile. The phone rang on the desk and Caroline frowned through the glass
at the girl in the pinafore who was chatting to a young man in silver paisley tie.

‘What we have here,’ she indicated the two people through the glass panels, ‘is something much more tricky. This is a “family affair”. I don’t mean the content of the mag, I mean we don’t just have to please Stuart, Mr Rainer, we also have to please the Matriarch, his mum. We have to feed his nieces, his nephews, sons and daughters and the Rainers, are a big, big family.’ She said this with a slow shake of her head.

‘And what I need you to do is simply ramp up the intelligence quotient of the mag, but without losing readers to more frivolous, entertaining options. You see . . .’ she stood and walked slowly towards the plate glass window and the harbour view.

‘You see, when Jack Burrell walked out on this magazine, when it was Magda, the industry thought it was all over bar the shouting. But,’ she said turning back, and pinching the bridge of her nose. ‘Can I let you into a little secret? I may have grown up on the wrong side of the tracks, but I’m damn sure I’m not going back there. Stuart, and Mrs Rainer Senior, have given me open slather to nail the ghost of Magda to the shed and put More on the coffee table of every home in Australia. And in every hairdresser, doctor’s surgery, dentist’s, wine bar, school lunch room —.’ She paused, one arm out flung and then, catching her reflection in the plate-glass window, smoothed the lapel of her suit. She returned to her seat and touched the corners of her mouth with her ring finger.

‘I want us sold out by lunchtime on the newsstands and collected in people’s attics for millennia.’ Each phrase was punched out by a slice of one hand like a blade into the other like a chopping block. ‘And Jack Burrell can go screw himself.’
Whether the pills or the rhetoric, something was working because she crossed her legs and let her chair dip at a rakish angle.

‘I don’t want you to mistake this meeting as some sort of briefing doddle.’ She now directed the flow to the ceiling.

‘I’m serious. And, I haven’t got a clue how we’re going to win back a fickle readership . . . Venetia, we know about your checkered past and we know we’re taking a risk with you,’ she returned to locking Venetia in her gaze. ‘But, to be perfectly frank, you wouldn’t be sitting here if we had any other option. Burrell’s run off with a lot of good people. There’s that new gay mag Masseur which is huge and were about to see the launch of one of the biggest budget media productions ever: it’s coming out of Saudi Royal Family backing and they’ve picked the eyes out of the best British and American freelancers and gobbled up every decent subeditor and contributor on the planet. You know what I’m talking about?’

Venetia sat wide-eyed and circled her head deciding a simple ‘no’ would implicate her in who knows what idiocy.

‘You must have been under a rock for the last twelve months, it’s going to be bigger than Ben Hur. It’s The Bible. You must have heard about it on the grapevine. It’s going to shit all over the W’s and the other mob. You know what I’m talking about now? I think Richard Branson is the executive director – he can put copies on every plane and in every toilet in the West with the amount of influence he has. Anyway, we’ve got a short window of opportunity before The Bible hits our shores and I want you to go away and come up with something that will save the day. But — before you ask — I can’t put you on staff. You worked with Jack and if it got out that I’d employed anyone from the old Magda days well, Stuart would kill me.’
Caroline was silent for a moment. Their eyes met across the desk for a moment.

‘What sort of time frame do I have?’ Venetia ventured, ‘What issue are you working on now and is there any readership research to give me some idea … where I can start from?’

What Venetia really wanted to know was when and how much she would be paid.

‘You’ve read the magazine, do your own research,’ Caroline said. ‘No issue — this is a blank slate. This is your chance to prove yourself. But here’s a start.’ She reached behind her for a folder and slid some grainy black and white photographs across at me. They were of city streets. At first there didn’t seem to be any connection between them. Groups of people, rush hour crowds, markets, Circular Quay full of tourists and touts.

‘Look closer,’ she said when Venetia looked blank. ‘Look at the people in the background.’

In each photograph, ostensibly of some part of Sydney, there were pavement dwellers in the background. Sometimes it was just a group of kids hanging about in a building’s doorway. Sometimes there was a clutch of them sitting with bottles in paperbags. Occasionally it was a lone adolescent sitting on a bench in a park staring into space.

‘You mean write a piece on street kids?’ Venetia said after a while.

‘Not just some usual “ain’t it awful”, raise money for the homeless worthy piece of —.’
'You mean you want me to get some first person stories from the front line.' Venetia said quickly.

'Exactly.' She had really loosened up now. 'Everyone of these people on the streets has a tale to tell. It won't be easy, but it's the sort of thing the other mags won't touch, not unless there's a charity involved. And Stuart wants to make headlines by being seen to have championed a good cause. But first I want you to tell their stories. The voiceless, the marginalized, the lonely, the desperate. Come up with some gripping reading and we'll reward you – we'll publish you. We need audience-winning, “cutting edge” stuff,' she made quotation marks in the air, 'Reportage. The stuff in between the ads and the twelve-year-old models. Something that wins over people who normally wouldn't buy our magazine.'

Why hadn’t she seen this before, thought Venetia. Magazines are adult storybooks full of cautionary tales (read: fat and failure or drugs and destitution) and fairytale endings (read: marriage). Feeling lost? Define yourself through the vicarious thrill of other lives that leave you feeling relieved and briefly happier with your own lot after the encounter. Meanwhile Caroline, she could see, was recruiting Venetia to her own crusade to create a sort-after magazine in her own quest to be different, memorable and loved.

'So should we meet again once I've come up with a start?' said Venetia.

'Just email me.' Caroline waved her hand. Her attention had moved back to her phone, which was beeping in messages by the dozen. She checked her watch. 'My diary is full of useless meetings and gabfests. Just email me or speak with Josh my assistant. Then just start sending in the copy. Well accept or reject on sight. I don’t think we need to talk about it any more — just get cracking.' She stood up.
'If I have any questions?'

'Josh. He’ll field them for me.' She was putting together her papers.

'Are you around? In case …'

'Josh will have all my contact details. I am off on a trip, let me see, I will be out of the country on and off for the next month or so. Of course I’ll be in regular touch with the magazine — I’m guest editing one of the American editions and then there’s the world conference for the Group Heads in Quebec. But by then we should be seeing some work from you. Anyway, I’ve got another meeting now. I’ll introduce you to Josh on the way out.’ She was already half way there. She had slipped back into her court shoes and strode out, a patterned scarf trailing in her wake.

'Josh? Josh, this is Venetia.' The young man in the paisley tie swung round.

'Please take care of her. You will be the contact between us in future. There you are,’ she said holding out the manicured hand. Venetia went to shake it, but it was withdrawn just as quickly.

'Josh, I'm at the Bathers for lunch with William — you know — and then the editor’s collective.’ She nodded to Venetia and then was gone.

'Of course,’ cried Josh. ‘Au revoir! Now, Venetia. What a beautiful name. Do you get many compliments on it?’

'Some. Shall we exchange mobile numbers?’
'Of course. **Mais oui.** Here is my card. Just email me and I will have your details. In fact I emailed you something yesterday – No! I was supposed to – I will send you the Package – everything is designed around *Le* Package these days – key words for the e-Edition, words that Monsieur Proprietor just will not allow in *Le* magazine. Excuse me, I'm learning French. Last month it was German – such a cute little graphic designer . . .Oops! I'm late for my lunch date. I must go. I'll send you the bumf and we'll talk. Let’s do lunch. I love a good goss. Cheerio – you know where the lifts are? Wait, I'll have to let you out,’ he said dragging a plastic card on a lanyard out from under his shirt. ‘I'm desperate for a wazz.’
Methamphetamine (methamphetamine) or desoxyephedrine (commonly known as ‘meth’ or ‘ice’ or ‘Tina’), a psychostimulant and symptomimetic drug. Meth enters the brain and triggers a cascading release of norepinephrine, dopamine and serotonin. To a lesser extent methamphetamine acts as a dopaminergic and adrenergic reuptake inhibitor and, in high concentrations, as a monoamine oxidase inhibitor (MAOI). Ice or meth stimulates the MESOLIMBIC reward pathway causing euphoria and excitement. It is prone to abuse and addiction. Users may become obsessed or perform repetitive tasks such as cleaning, hand-washing or assembling and dis-assembling objects (see PUNDING and ‘TWEAKING’).

From 1942 until his death in 1945 Adolf Hitler was given daily intravenous injections of methamphetamine by his personal physician Theodor Morell.
3.

consanguinity  CÔNSÃNGUÍN’ITY (-NGGW-),  n.  blood-relationship (also fig.)

‘Dobblante.’

Thomas was looking through the Flinders Street soot on the windows at the party animals stumbling from the Taxi Club, just closing at 10am, up the alley to the Beresford for a recovery party.

‘Che?’ Venetia had covered the cramped kitchen with the Domain section of the SMH which, in this real estate obsessed city was the real Bible. ‘And bugger Richard Branson,’ she said aloud.

‘Sir.’ Thomas refilled his coffee cup and perched on a stool.

‘Charming three bed with northerly aspect ... what are you on about?’

‘I believe he has been knighted, therefore you must call him Sir Richard.’ Thomas took a pull on his mug and let out a sigh. ‘You still make the best coffee in — where are we exactly?’

In spite of years of neglect Thomas still cut a pleasingly louche figure in a pair of jeans, his Northern Hemisphere tan set off by his white t-shirt, well, to a T. A black leather jacket completed the Euro-trash ensemble.

‘Smoking!’ Venetia smiled at him.

‘Is there something in this coffee, because we seem to have spent the last three minutes talking at cross purposes?’
'More like three decades. I'm talking about your new leather jacket.'
And she mimed roach between thumb and forefinger eyelids pinched.
'Isn't that what you say?'

'Thanks pet,' and he did a few runway turns on the square metre of lino.

'All right. Are you going to help me look at these places or just prance around working off your hangover?'

'Oh Darl – look, you know what you want, I'd just be in the way.'

'Typical.'

'We could meet up afterwards.'

'Where? Last time I agreed to that you left me alone in a bar for hours ...'

'Listen to her — I was left alone in a bar — It's not as if it was the Simpson Desert.'

'I didn't have any money ...'

'Exactly. That's all I am to you — a bulging wallet.' He clutched his vitals.

'You're such a pain.' She let her chin slump into the knuckles of her left hand.

'If you can't get someone to buy you a drink in a bar, you're no sister of mine!' He pronounced it 'sista'. 'And you've got to make a start on these ...' he waved his hands around like cheerleader pompoms.
'Street stories,’ Venetia completed for him. ‘I just don’t know where to start.’

‘There’s plenty just over the road. Want me to go out an make a few contacts for you?’ He was back looking at a pack of revelers all dressed in tight white jeans and not much else.

‘I've got to find somewhere to live.’

‘Make up your mind. Look, I've got to go. Good luck with the house hunting. Give me a bell, we might end up at the beach.’

She brightened. He leaned down and pecked her on the cheek. ‘Might.’

She clutched her coffee and watched from the window as Thomas make his way towards the throng in the alleyway. It was a beautiful Sydney day. Venetia had been looking for a home for most of her adult life. Three or four months in reality — at least this time around. Ok, she’d been an adult for a bit longer than that, but everything to do with real estate is hype.

For those who don’t know Sydney, they just won’t get what those three little words mean. Beautiful. Sydney. Day. There are beautiful days and there are beautiful Sydney days. On a beautiful Sydney day — cerulean sky and a breeze as salacious as a feather — it is possible to imagine you are beautiful yourself and somehow blessed. One can imagine one is capable of anything and it is easy to decide that such a feeling needs to be celebrated in the usual ways: at the beach, with a bong or a bottle and bugger responsibilities. It is a peculiarly Sydney way of deciding on what matters in life and for some in Sydney absenteeism is a way of life, one which Venetia is well acquainted with. The buff bronzed lifeguards at the beach affectionately known as Glamorama can pick the shoals of office workers too sick with
saturnalia to go in on a given day. Like a Centurion but clad only in a tiny toga of nylon, they will saunter up to the them with such words of greeting as, ‘I can see some very, very ill people here today. I’ve heard there’s a Glamorama flu going around and I can see you are all going to need doctor’s certificates. The weather’s likely to hold till the end of the week.’

Which is why it is particularly stoic that on just such beautiful Sydney day that Venetia, freshly focused, set out again to look for a new abode, but then she had reached a limit with friends’ couches and the alternative: this grimy boardinghouse on Flinders Street. As they say, you are where you live.

‘An absolute steal,’ the agent said passing her his card.

Three rooms, sunlight and solitude. These were her stated requirements. Venetia had been looking for a place for what seemed most of her adult life, really two or three months if you counted the time she did nothing but talk about it. For weeks it had poured with rain and the windscreen wipers of her ancient VW had flapped like an old woman tossing aside reassurances. She missed two brilliant places by being slow to act. Everything else seemed fungal, out of the way, or over the top expensive.

Then one beautiful Sydney day she struck it lucky. As Thomas stumbled up a lane towards the Bereford Hotel, Venetia stumbled upon an address in Womerah Avenue, near Rushcutters Bay. Literally stumbled, because, as the agent opened the door to Flat 4, she was momentarily dazzled after the suffocating darkness of the stairwell.

The room, which was basically what the flat amounted to, seemed ablaze. It was so bright, if there had been anyone there, it would have been impossible to see them; though you might have heard them
cross the polished floor. The agent's black brogues circled, then waited. Venetia's red suede ankle boots stood still. Her eyes adjusted and he removed his shades. She could see — and what she could see was that nothing in this flat looked like anyone had ever lived here before. No black fuzz where pictures had been hung, no scorch marks above the stove or cigarette burns on the mantelpiece. The walls were painted white — everything was dazzling white. The fireplace surrounds and mantelpiece were mismatched, the wrong size, and white. The bedroom was tiny, almost an antechamber to the bathroom, and white. The bathroom was full to bursting with bright porcelain. The agent smiled. White. It was about eleven o'clock in the morning and the hum of traffic — the backwash from the overpass — seemed distant enough to be exciting, like a passing parade. And out through the enclosed balcony cum kitchen window — sunlight on water and a glimpse of white yachts bobbing on the Bay.

'Going for a song,' the agent's voice brought Venetia back from her trance. 'But you'll have to be quick,' he said punching numbers into his organizer. It was the kind of weather you want to be out sailing on the Harbour or sitting sipping Chardonnay watching other people ply the Harbour. And a tragedy of sorts to waste it hunting for houses. Venetia tested one of the taps, and tapped on one of the walls.

She could already see herself, her possessions occupying the room. Her smile was unconscious and she was feeling a little giddy. The agent's name was Roger, a name Venetia always found mildly amusing. 'Did you say quick?' she said stifling a laugh. 'The building's owner needs to recoup some costs of the conversion.' Roger tugged at his shirt cuffs and straightened his tie. 'I'll be round Monday morning, can you hold it for me?' she said, then blushed. The traffic hummed. It was indeed a beautiful day...
The block which contained her new flat was at the lower end of a sandstone ridge overhung by lantana and cypress trees. The evening afterwards Venetia decided to take another look at it and parked her Beetle in the street out front. There was no one about. The building’s façade was in darkness. Some lights were on at the ground floor rear. She looked up at her future home thinking, tomorrow I sign the contract, pay the bond and move in. Then the next chapter of my life will begin. It was a balmy evening following another beautiful day and all seemed right with the world. The thump, thump of some dance music was pounding off in the distance like drums. Someone was out there celebrating the night, but sense held its sway. Better get some sleep and make an early start on it. Then suddenly a chill shot from the base of her spine to her skull. Out of the corner of her eye she thought she’d seen someone at one of the upper windows. They were gone again just as suddenly, so she wasn’t sure if she’d just imagined it. One of those vision jags that had nothing to do with reality. But the hairs on the back of her head stood on end and her hands shook as she turned the ignition key. Perhaps she hadn’t made such a good decision about the flat after all.

In the cold light of day any misgivings seemed nonsense.

‘Who else is living in the flats?’ Venetia asked the agent when she went to pick up the keys.

‘Oh, no one. Mrs Meares, the owner. But you won’t see much of her.’ His hair had been gelled into peaks front and back, but she recognized the shirt from the day before.

‘Or she of you,’ chimed in his partner from behind his glasses. ‘They say she’s half blind.’
They both wore smiles as the envelop with the keys was passed across to her. She imagined a look would pass between them once her back was turned. She suddenly felt tired. The envelope was of an old fashioned kind, lined with oyster grey tissue. Unusual to use such an expensive item as a receptacle for a set of ordinary keys she thought. Her mother had had personalized stationery just like this. Strictly forbidden to be used it for anything or by anyone but herself. Venetia tried to imagine the woman on the other end of this transaction — her landlady Mrs Meares — and drew a blank. Or was unable to imagine anything but an identikit mother, perhaps with Mother Hubbard hair. Was this envelope hers? Was she really blind? Or did they mean half-cut?

‘Forgot to say the painters will be finished up today,’ Roger had emerged from behind the agency’s plate glass and stuck his head through her Beetle’s open window. ‘I’ll get them to put an extra coat on any scratches.’ She nodded. He leaned on his laundered cuffs on the car’s window ledge.

‘Let us know if there’s anything else we can do for you.’

She could smell the must of an unwashed shirt and wanted to rub a fingertip back and forth in the short hair at the base of his neck.

By the time Venetia had lugged several loads of her stuff up two flights of stairs including a new futon that weighed a ton, she had forgotten all about Roger’s long eyelashes and Mrs Meares’ proclivities or her expensive taste in notepaper.
consequence n. result (of something proceeding); logical inference; importance (often used in negative statements it is of no — ) n.pl. CONSEQUENCES the unpleasant or difficult results of a previous action

4.

‘That’s great V. White is the easiest to decorate. I’m in Singapore for three days and then fly to L.A. But I’ll come over and we’ll crack a bottle when I get back.’

‘When will that be?’ Venetia said for the third time.

‘This line’s atrocious. Just text me your landline when you can. I can’t hear you. Bye, Luv.’

The idea of home was quite strong in her Venetia felt. Only ‘quite’ because her mother once remarked that her ‘V’, as she called Venetia, seemed to quite like living out of a box. There had been some circumstance when Venetia was a child when she had had to give up her bed to an elderly relative and took turns sleeping on the couch in the living room and on a camp bed on the verandah. Her clothes and possessions, such as they were at the age of five or six, moved with her in a cardboard box, which sat beside or under wherever she happened to lay her head.

As in most things in life there had been some advantages and disadvantages for Venetia who, as the child of her mother’s later years was apt to be thought of as, if not quite an impediment, then a consideration which was close to being an inconvenience. If her mother had been tempted to put these less than ideally maternal sentiments into a shape, she might have said that her daughter Venetia was like a bulky piece of furniture one is obliged to keep but which doesn’t quite go with the rest of the décor. The advantages for Venetia in the circumstance of the remnants box were that she could
express her nature — variously called whimsical or nonsensical depending on her mother’s mood — which manifested as, in the absence of any other descriptor, what Venetia felt might warrant the term ‘collecting’. She hoarded pieces of cloth and ribbon for starters — things which easily fit into the box — fragments which seemed, to the child, rich in narrative promise. \textit{The surgery of revision is often painful.} So begins an entry in one of her later diaries. \textit{Creating a holding pen for half-baked ideas can help salve the raw edges after slashing, incising and lancing a text.}

To her siblings and parents these fragments were odd, infantile and even bordering on disgusting, depending who was having a ‘take’ on them that particular day.

\textit{I hoard pieces of text, fragments, just as I used to hoard pieces of fabric in a box under my bed as a child. Writing and re-writing is a matter of making choices. There is a difference between worrying over every little detail in a sentence — adding and subtracting like a calculator — and a complete re-visioning of a text.}

Experience had demonstrated that portability and sometimes stealth were advantageous to their preservation. These pieces of Venetia.

\textit{I have spent time in the bog of editing recognizing that until I severed a limb I would be stuck waiting for my entire body to go gangrenous. Writing continually confronts the writer with not just how to say something but what. And what might have seemed the pinnacle of aesthetic pleasure one day — running the shiny fabric between one’s fingertips — seems lonely, dirty stuff the next.}

Yet by the age of thirty-two Venetia had accumulated not just one box of fragments, but several — dozens — to be precise. The boxes had moldered in a paid storage facility during the Roland years — an expensive secret which came out around year six and had engendered
rancor for the subsequent six or seven. By her forty-second birthday, boxes stacked upon boxes up against boxes. Of what? She no longer knew what was in most of them, let alone why she hung onto them. There are no real rule books or maps to chart the territory in one’s head or heart and like the early cartographers the edges — the very ends — of the earth are places one might fall off. *The edges where the feelings and thoughts of the body, are not yet of the page.* Why didn’t she sort through it — or even ‘clean slate’, throw the lot out? *My life is a paper life.* Deciphering the scratchings and scribbles on the blank surface — the page, the canvas, the mirror, the liquid crystal display — and making more. Only paper offers the tactile complexities of the *origami life,* the papier mache existence. She sometimes fantasized about setting it all alight — recognised something of the pyromaniac at least in her fantasy life. Then felt the familiar sense of futility as she took the storage cage keys out of her bag, smelled the peculiar smell of the damp concrete walls, the eerie sounds of metal sliding doors, locks and chains. At the same time, it did occur to her that these boxes were now the closest thing she had to ‘home’.

*origami* **or-i-gâmi** *n.* ancient Japanese art of folding paper (Jap. *Oru,* to fold, *kami,* paper.), practitioners use combinations of folds known as ‘procedures’ each with its own descriptor term such as, *pleat, swivel, squash-fold,* and *crimp.*

5.

*What could be more sensational than to laze away your languorous summer days with perfectly peachy, silky summer skin?* Or, *Stressed out? Surrender to the sensual release of deep tissue massage. Soak your tired limbs in a scented oil spa bath, and shed the weight of the world with our tantric full body exploration experience.*

‘There’s nothing *wrong* with it.’ Robyn rolled her eyes at Venetia who read this excerpt from some of her old her magazine copy.
‘But it’s not what you’d call serious journalism. It’s not really doing anybody any good.’

‘But you’re good at it. Everyone wants a little boost to get them through the day. It comes easily for you this, this …’ Robyn dragged on her St Moritz.

‘Schlock.’

‘…and they — the readers, the editors — they like it.’ Robyn exhaled a cloud of smoke through the open window of Venetia’s balcony-cum-kitchen. This was her umpteenth attempt at giving up and had convinced Venetia to hold a stash of her favourite gaspers just to get her through the first few ‘smoke free’ weeks.

“I’m just bored —,’ Venetia said plucking at a stray cuticle.

‘Don’t say that. Don’t ever say that. That’s career suicide.’ Having finished her fag Robyn was replenishing her eye makeup and lipstick. ‘Beauty advertisers are what keep magazines — and you and me, by the way — in business. Why we’re here.’

Venetia looked dubious. ‘Here’ was a one room walk-up in Darlo for Christ’s sake.

‘What does it matter if on some level …’ Venetia paused mid-formulation, musing that for many women, lotions and potions are possibly a sex substitute. Robyn gazed this way and that before the glass, going slightly cross-eyed and poking the tip of her tongue out while lowering the jersey of her top with one index finger to display more cleavage.

‘ … maybe it’s better than sex,’ Venetia finished aloud.
'What is?' Robyn turned.

'Don’t worry. Where are you off to?'

'I am about to sally forth once more into the vexed arena of the slush fund. But I need a coffee first.'

Venetia was supposed to meet with Caroline (or her assistant Josh) to talk through her ‘status’, something like that. Venetia was desperate for some sort of retainer. Caroline was elusive. Josh spun enough euphemisms to knit an Afghan and they were circling each other (the Magazine and Venetia) like lion and gladiator in the Coliseum of freelance negations. The message kept being reiterated that she was not to think of herself as a staffer, only a magazine contributor on a long thread. But she needed to start producing the goods or the game was off. No editorial meetings just yet (the carrot which would bring Venetia into the fold). Caroline was paranoid about freelancers stealing ideas. But as soon as her stories were hitting the right ‘notes’ with the readers, and other platitudes about copy that would really ‘sing’, well then, she might be offered more privileges.

Yeah, and talk like that used to make her truant from school too.

‘Robyn? I'm going insane. I don't know what to write. It’s been a couple of weeks and I'm going round in circles lying awake at night chewing through ideas, but nothing seems good enough. I think I've lost my touch.’

Robyn’s mobile rang.
‘Hello, who is this? I’m taking messages for Robyn Horden. Who shall I say is calling?’ (pause) ‘And can I say what it’s about? Ok. I'll pass the message on.’

‘What was that about?’

‘I’ve got a few difficult clients. It helps if they think they have to get through to me through my secretary. Right, are you coming? I need a latte to get through the next few hours without a ciggie.’

Robyn was fingering the ‘throw’, which was punched into the corners of the futon-sofa that Venetia called a bed.

‘Really, you’ve got to pull yourself together, how can you entertain in a space like this?’ She wiped her hands on her hips and made for the door.

Coluzzi's was full of the usual mixture of lawyers back from their morning cycle dressed like they were taking part in the Tour de France, business people in suits wearing joggers and backpacks scoring points by walking to work, and the old regulars: a motley collection of ‘freelancers’ who may or may not have smoked their first joint before breakfast but who nonetheless relished their coffee and toasted ham and cheese croissant and the vague if fleeting sense of being part of a life larger than a small solitary workroom. Venetia, being one of this latter category pulled up a milk crate and embarked upon a comprehensive read of the newspaper. Robyn said she’d shout and then vanished inside the café for what seemed at interminable chat with Luigi, former pugilist turned café owner who had the inside story on most of the big wigs in town.

In the spirit of investigative journalism, Venetia pulled out a common or garden notebook to start jotting down ideas and observations as
they occurred. She had brought the package of photographs with her and sat doodling and dividing her attention between the people and the coffee and the news. Starting with the gossip columns it occurred to her that Robyn’s beat—Lady Mayoress’s Dinners and Gala Nights at the Opera, all for a good cause—might just be the place to get behind some other aspects of the ‘Homeless’ story. It was getting closer to office hours but Coluzzi’s was buzzing. It was a bit early for a chocolate fudge brownie, but she had already earmarked a likely suspect at the counter and would pounce with her second cup, when Robyn finally arrived with the first one, placed it down and then excused herself.

Nobody in the bike pack looked like they were rushing to a business meeting. Lots of back-slapping over tiny shots of espresso. Robyn and Luigi were still engaged in a tête a tête. On closer inspection, there was smoke rising above their heads. Venetia pulled out the photographs from the manila envelope.

There was a girl in one shot who had enviable long, light-coloured hair. Difficult to say exactly what colour in a black and white shot, but it looked honey blonde, straight and surprisingly well cared for given her supposed ‘homeless’ status. Your hair is the first thing to ‘go’ when your finances are shot and your mood-altering substances are more important than one hundred brush strokes at night or a visit to the salon for a trim.

When Venetia looked closer, it seemed that the long-haired girl was actually in the background of another shot. Difficult to be sure — she was turning away from the camera, but the hair was pretty much unmistakable. This time it was not quite as groomed, but it was — well Venetia had to admit that it was 'rich girl' hair. This was out and out stereotyping, she knew. It was the sort of prejudice Venetia would love to overturn in someone else’s reasoning — say if it was about
women and logical reasoning, or journos and booze or poets and
booze, or even ‘creatives’ and the practicalities of life — like paying
bills and staying on the right side of the law. But she would be forced
to admit that sometimes these generalizations spawned a whole mass
of shining exemplar. And there was some kind of primitive reaction
Venetia was having in connection to this girl’s hair.

She was on the very edge of understanding something. Like
remembering something from last night’s dream — not
understanding it, but seeing it, as if for the first time. Suddenly there
was Robyn juggling a plate with two brownies and a canolli and the
phone in her bag was beeping like mad.

‘Would you?’ Venetia reached into her bag as Robyn manoeuvred her
capacious behind onto a milk crate.

‘Hello Robyn Hordern’s phone?’

‘Who is this? I want to speak to Robyn.’

‘Can I ask what it’s about?’

‘Stop playing games and give me to Robyn, I know she’s right there.’

I handed Robyn the phone and she blushed as she listened to what
her caller was saying to her.

She swiveled on her milk crate and gazed towards a black Mercedes
double-parked beyond the Tour de France pack.

‘Ok. Ok. I'll call you back in five.’ She put the phone down and
reached for her coffee. They sat for a moment drinking in silence. A
hole in the air between them. Neither touched the pastries.
'There's a guy over there I'm sure I've seen before.' Venetia broke the silence tentatively.

'Anybody who's anybody comes to Coluzzi's.' Robyn checked her makeup again in a compact and straightened her back as if in answer to an accusation.

'I know, but this guy doesn't move in my world—and I hardly ever come here you know. You know I favour Victor's …'

'I don't want to turn around. I have to go.' Robyn stood and brushed imaginary crumbs from her lap. 'Can you pay. I'm really, really late.' She grazed Venetia's cheek with hers and was in the street dialing before Venetia could protest.

Great, thought Venetia. The vacuum left after Robyn's departure was palpable. The Coluzzi's crowd became an undifferentiated blur as she sat staring after the receding black Merc.

'Another coffee?'

'No thanks. Oh, no wait. I will. Latte, double shot. And can you heat these up?'

'Sure. Not the canolli?'

'No just the brownies. Can you take the canolli back, we didn't touch it.'

Sampson, one of Luigi's nephews who worked mornings at the café. He was the next hopeful in the prize ring. His massive shoulders
strained against his white t-shirt, even more so when he shrugged in response.

‘Hey, do you know that guy over there?’

Sampson steadied the plates in his hands and did an expertly swift check over his shoulder.

The guy Venetia was referring to was standing, pantomimining some anecdote, much to his mates amusement.

‘Him? He’s a Rainer. Second son I think. The one who doesn’t get the inheritance. Capische? Making the most of it while his Dad can afford to buy him a bike. Anything else?’

‘No thanks Sam, just more coffee and the pastries - extra hot.’

The treats arrived and Venetia paid up, as compelled, with her last fifty. She hated breaking a fifty this early in the dole fortnight, she could almost feel the taste of rough red — the last drops of rough red — she’d be reduced to no doubt by tomorrow, now. Sam brought her the change, mostly coins, on a kind of small metal plate that Coluzzi’s used for that sort of thing — a system designed to encourage patrons to wave away what looked like pennies. If the change contained notes they were always the oldest, crumpled or folded. No dice with Venetia, she pocketed the lot, picking up the folded notes and straightening them out before returning them to her wallet. This usually simple procedure was made tricky by one of the notes being folded not just once lengthways but also twice across. She finally managed to get the recalcitrant note to lie flat, but just as she finally rose from her milk crate to go, she caught the guy — Rainer the Younger — looking at her. Or at least looking her way. She gave him a half smile and sidled off. She resisted the urge to turn back and have
another look, but she was sure his eyes were boring into the area between her shoulder blades. At the corner of Surry Street she gave in and did a swivel disguised as a double-take at a notice in the Laundromat window. He was nodding now to something a coffee-buddy was saying to him, but his eyes were still on her. And possibly the Laundromat.

addiction [ADDITION, N. (PSYCH.) devotion to an habitual practice, also an architecture that is composed of words which creates a ‘space’, as four stone walls and a ceiling from which it is difficult to leave. (Rom. Law) deliver over by sentence of a judge. [f. L ad(dicere dict-say) assign] see dystopia and folk art

6.
I've seen her many times, or thought I have, in crowds, at art galleries. She was in the room with the wild photomontage of the Ukraine and the sewer pipe installation. I had ducked down to peer through the large glass cases full of perforated PVC piping and I saw her long back listing to read the fine print on a sketch plan of the Ukrainian artist’s next concept. She is so like me, it’s uncanny and yet … there are subtle differences, substitutions if you will. Different eyes and slighter shoulders. Smaller wrists. Flatter feet. I stay behind her for a moment or two, checking to see if she’ll turn and recognise me. She walks straight through to the next room where a washing line is hung with clothes stuffed like sex shop appendages. I follow a little too late and only see the back of her striped grandpa shirt recede into the stairwell. The stairs lead to three other floors of galleries, as well as back to the main entrance. I race up the first flight to the large open-plan foyer full of rough wooden coffins growing trees. She’s not here so I guess she must have ventured further upstairs. On the top floor I am taken by a series of old photographs by a recently ‘discovered’ photographer, now in her nineties.
photographer had run the studio of a famous photographer of last century, but her own glass slides had lain in boxes at the back of a tin shed — until by chance, or some collective outrage decided to reverse the credits of the past. This is Lola’s territory for sure. I am so certain that everything I have been trying to confess is but an hallucination that I determine I will stand behind her striped business shirt and grab her shoulders. Give them a real shake. The Girl with Bruised Shoulders. But she’s taken herself off somewhere. She’s not here or in the other halls. She is not this one who looks right through me or, that other who, flashing a look of annoyance, brushes past me out of the lift.

The compression of a life into boxes. This piece from one of the countless journals Venetia revisits as they make their journey out of the storage facility and into her sun lit study. It is as though their contents is more moldy and suffocating than she previously imagined and she places them back in their tearing archive boxes and sets them in the sun to fumigate. As Roland Barthes puts it, every story is a collection of fragments. Half-completed projects disabled through lack of direction or funds, great ideas, mementoes: all folded, labeled, stacked. Venetia had discarded what she could — she had told herself to be ‘ruthless’ as her mother always urged when spring cleaning. But she found deciding to throw things out painful. Filing even worse. As a child she hoarded scraps of material — fabric and small, broken pieces of doll in lieu of a history, perhaps, or at least a story. How long has this pain been felt in the side of your head? When did you first notice your vision blurring? Any unusual hair growth?

Doctors have a way of creating a story of their own.

After coffee and a disgusting amount of chocolate brownie, Venetia trailed her Dr Scholl’s back from Coluzzi’s and picked up her mail
from the hall table on the way through. A flood had destroyed, or
decimated an archive of early Sydney's history, according to the
papers. A curator was shown wading through ankle deep water and
experts discussed measures to avert such disasters in the future. She
was getting quite used to living in Darlo, in her flat at the top of the
stairs, though there was always the feeling that someone was looking
at her through the crack of the door as she went out for milk and
cigarettes. And the sense that her mail had at least been fondled. It
seemed too far-fetched that anyone would take the troubled to steam
it open ... though it sometimes did look wrinkled and water damaged.

Venetia had a new neighbour. As she thought of it — the right
ventricle to her left. This neighbour trails the perfumes of the night
up the knotty stairwell to her room at the top right hand side of the
building. She receives her guests in a flesh-coloured satin robe, or
sometimes something in a similar fabric in green, and heels. Venetia
knows, she has peeped. And there is always much merriment and
music exuding from behind the right ventricle's warped pink wooden
door.

The newspaper's editorial pointed to an irony in a new law
enforcement initiative which was pulling undercover agents off
organized crime investigations and placing them back on the streets.
'Higher police visibility has been successful in lowering the crime rate
in places like LA and Bangkok,' the Police Commissioner was quoted
saying. Her coffee pot had begun to splatter over the white baked
enamel of the cook top. She'd better be quick about finding a
replacement for the rubber seal, it was getting to the point whereby
she lost almost half the coffee before it had come to properly to the
boil and the constant clean-up was becoming onerous. The
Commissioner's detractors called his approach draconian. 'Draconian'
was an interesting word. Venetia made a note of it on a pad of post-
its, which served this purpose on the kitchen table. Almost had a sense of (or simply a look of) Dracula about it.

The wardrobe door would spring open unexpectedly and it would make her jump every time. And she had a bad flu one week and listened helplessly how the staircase echoed as visitors or inhabitants walked up and down to the flats variously across, below and above. The Coluzzi’s blow out had completely thrown Venetia’s little morning routine, so without needing the coffee whilst wanting to regain a sense of rhythm she filled her espresso pot and lit the gas, noticing in the process that she had just used her last match.

Customs agents had seized a large shipment of pharmaceuticals produced offshore with generic branding. Among the cargo were huge quantities of antidepressants, a popular tranquillizer, anti-histamines and a drug given to organ transplant recipients to suppress their immune system so as not to reject the donated organ. The haul had confused the drug squad as it was unclear whether these were destined for the recreational drug market or were evidence of a new trend in underground prescription drugs. While the coffee boiled she applied some Vaseline to her woeful cuticles. She still couldn’t figure out what the dream meant, meeting some old friends — or more colleagues really — in a museum in Norway — the scene emerging out of a Medieval narrative involving ice and a boat and dark textures which were suddenly removed like a stage set once she had run into these old acquaintances. ‘And something I should have said or done for my mother — that I can’t reach any more.’ These words came out conversationally, as though there was someone else at the Laminex table holding her arm out straight to examine the improvements.

Though she really didn’t need it, she made more coffee, good and strong, perhaps too strong, given the water wastage during the preparation. But there was nothing, Venetia believed, to compare with that first sip. If she was bitter about anything, and mostly she
believed she was not a bitter person — life just had those uncomfortable twists and turns — there was nothing to complain about really. No, if there was one thing that reminded her that the moment could not be held it was that sense of the first sip. It really never got any better than that. The coffee would be cold and ordinary by mid-cup and the mandatory second cup (she was nothing if not rigid in her routine) was pleasant, but unmemorable. Cè la vie. Back to the beleaguered Commissioner — his photo showed deep lines running across his forehead and from each side of his nose towards the corners of his mouth. She clipped his photo thinking his face had some interesting things to say about character and aging. For the moment she was not able to say what. He could have impersonated Gordon Ramsay, and no doubt he could deliver a salty epithet when the situation required. So, his detractors were pointing to some of the recent busts of paedophile rings and groups involved in people trafficking. It was unclear to her what exactly these people were criticizing in his handling of these ‘busts’ (another interesting word). Others called for investigations into thirty thousand or so people who go missing each year as a vast repository of either crime perpetrators or victims. Finally, one Angus McMasters (AO), Emeritus Professor of Organized Crime at one of the large universities asserted his belief that organized crime was an industry which fed the economy and employed a comparable number of people as legitimate business. This contentious position had had him banned from various professional organizations, but he had developed a high profile within radical student politics and was the keynote speaker at a conference being held that week in Sydney. Venetia cracked open her new notebook and took down the details. There might be something here. Interview a cross-section of ‘players’ in and around the so-called organized crime syndicates. It wasn’t quite street kids, but there’d be some connection — junkies, people living off crime or prostitution to support their habit etcetera and at the top, the crime bosses.
She started to feel positive again. Time for the, albeit disappointing, second cup. And a look through the mail. Not much there. A notice from the bank saying she owed them thirty dollars dishonour fee on a cheque she had written for something or other. The cheque was for less than the fee. A notice from the real estate agents informing her that late payment of her rent would incur a penalty and two such late payments in a row would have them seek an eviction notice. It was going to be hard to regain that sense of peace and happiness brought on by that first sip of coffee. The third envelope contained a surprise. A school reunion. A gilt-edged card requested the pleasure of her company at a cocktail function to be held at someone’s home. Couldn’t put a face to the name at first. Everyone used their married names of course, a fact which made the prospect of explaining her ‘relationship status’ fifty times at such a function a tad daunting to say the least. She threw the card onto the pile of opened mail, magazines and assorted litter that accrued like piles of sand throughout the apartment.

There was a way forward and his name was Angus McMasters. She even remembered she had a distant relative who had done a thesis on sex workers. Exactly what about sex workers she could not remember. But her name was McMasters too. There had to be a connection — even an associative connection meant, in this quasi-religion of congruence — that she was on the right path and ready for another walk. This time down to Rushcutters bay park. A million dollar view of Sydney Harbour, free for anyone who cared to stretch their legs.

The thing the self-help books always told you was to ‘chunk it down’ when you’re feeling overwhelmed. She was relaxing now and leaned back to think again about the group of *Maillot Jeune* wanna-bes outside Coluzzi’s in Darlinghurst Road that morning. This group of men, all about thirty-something, some forty-ish (good skin care and grooming made it even more difficult to tell), the occasional dark
tanned member probably retired early on a good pension plan possibly pushing fifty, were well-heeled, well fed and well manicured. The occasional wedding ring said married, the more than occasional display of chest hair said not. They bantered like a group of schoolboys, though the longer she had looked the more she could discern a hierarchy. One chap, Venetia had dubbed him the ‘capo’, had a close-shaved head and extra shiny new-looking bicycle shorts, and an even more exaggeratedly aerodynamic fuchsia helmet. The Capo sat. The others danced around. The Capo leaned his hairy forearm on his knee, holding his short black, pinky finger extended. Dark eyes, great skin. The body of a man who would not be hurried nor pushed. A younger, rangier guy in white shorts and a nose piercing had come and sat by him. They had conferred, slightly apart from the raillery of the morning cuppa. Sampson had brought these two a round of coffees and had passed something into the bald-one’s hand. Could have been an invoice, a receipt. The Capo palmed it into the rolled up newspaper in his lap. Small change? A little something extra? Surely something illegal would not happen so clumsily like this that she — an ordinary latte-swigging schlepper at Coluzzi’s — could see it. Or maybe it was that simple, that ordinary. Hardly a day went by without some celebrity or other being found in possession of illegal substances. In which case, that was the story, the seamless layer of illegality that was no ‘shock-horror’, just an everyday reality. And shocking because of that.

Venetia began to reconsider her first proposal: something like Confessions of a Homeless Drug Addict or I Was a Drug Dealer’s Mole complete with lurid detail on crime and corruption — trading sex for drugs etcetera — complete with sense of moral outrage and call to action. A standard magazine story formula for sure, but therefore less interesting? It was the stuff that sold. Who was she trying to kid that she was suddenly going to expose a new kind of hierarchical (endemic? systemic?) hypocrisy in our dealings with addictive
substances? What if the story was less about the people in the gutters, but those with keys to the executive washroom?

She phoned the magazine to run the skeleton of the idea past Caroline — for two reasons. A, she wanted some validation and kudos for formulating ‘the idea’ and B, to ensure they would pay any expenses incurred, for attending the organized crime conference for instance. She was flicked through to Josh who suggested they meet for what he called ‘Marytime’, his way, he said, of combining ‘business with the business’. Venetia laughed without quite ‘getting it’ and agreed to a place and time later that same day.
ADDRESS BOOK  n. a collection of names, contacts and associations sketching a journey. The glossary is an address book of ideas tracing the coordinates, the trajectories, the impacts of these ideas traveling to their final destination.

7.
Some awakenings are gentle, sun-dappled transitions from sleep to consciousness. Others are like a red hot poker applied to the vitals. Venetia's experience the morning following her foray out with Josh was closer to the latter. She woke with a start and couldn’t remember where she was. She had spent the early hours of the morning reading accounts of various drug cases, gangland hits, mob boss revenge, classic murder scenarios and last but not least, the workings of the criminal mind. ‘How does a poor panel beater rise from the ashes of apparent bankruptcy to become one of the wealthiest and most notorious drug lords in Australia's criminal history?’ asked a piece on ‘principal’ of the Griffith marijuana trade, Robert Trimbole, ‘By all accounts, fairly rapidly.’ The last thing she read before lights out was this gem from William S. Burroughs: ‘Junk is the ideal product . . .the ultimate merchandise. No sales talk necessary. The client will crawl through a sewer and beg to buy.’

It's one thing reading in the press impersonal accounts of successful interceptions of large shipments of heroin for instance. Yet another staying up late with nothing but the light of the computer's LCD screen contemplating the case in small town America of a woman’s murdered body being axed to death 41 times (the axe-wielder pleaded self-defense) or the disappearance of the Beaumont Children off a suburban beach in Adelaide. Worse, and more closely related to the idea to hand, drug related crimes in Sydney—whistleblower Sally-Anne Huckstepp’s strangled body floating face down in Busby’s Bore, Centennial Park.
But that wasn’t the real reason she had had difficulty getting to sleep. There were others, that is, more than one. There was the familiar dry mouth and muddy head of too much alcohol. This would not have normally been an issue had it not been exacerbated by the taste, both literal and metaphorical of broken promises—in Venetia’s case, cigarette smoke. Galling, but not necessarily damning. No, the real reason was the gut twisting memory of a certain scene she had witnessed on her way out of the bar which had extinguished not only her self-control but her albeit fairly unsteady poise.

The evening had proceeded, thus. Bloody Maries followed by Vodkatinis had slid down like water to a five-day camel. The mixture of a sympathetic ear in Josh, or at least an unshockable one, and an expense account credit card—his—had turned a duty meeting into a marathon moan set in a suitably self-indulgent bar overlooking Circular Quay.

‘When I was a little kid my parents split,’ she remembered saying to him early in the evening. ‘Whoever invented the term “nuclear family” must have been through a breakup because splitting some families can be explosive to say the least.’

‘I’ll say. I’m sure my three older sisters’ noses were straight to start with.’

By the time she was wearing a paper cocktail umbrella behind her ear she had covered the period of time when she shunted between parents.

‘I used to wake in the middle of the night not knowing where the bedroom door was . . .’

‘I’ve pissed in the cupboard a few times myself —’
‘Unfamiliar colours, unfamiliar smells …’

‘God yes. Our family put odour eaters in their breakfast food and it still didn’t stop us being a fire hazard on a warm night …’

'I kept my things in a small cardboard box under my bed, and ever since there has been a part of me that likes to keep things portable — you never knew when it’s going to be time to leave.’

‘You are a woman after my own heart. I always park the car facing the way I need to go in case I need to make a swift exit. My last boyfriend, last year some time, had an Hispanic sugar daddy — this was in Spanish Harlem, New York — so we always had to make love very quickly in case we were caught. Apparently he threw knives. Oh dear, I think if I eat another olive you’ll be able to smear me on top of a pizza. Excuse me a minute.’

Josh, who had listened with his head on one side and a toothpick busy between the olive bowl and his mouth, was roused when calls started coming in on his phone thick and fast. He excused himself to go to the gents. They never did get around to talking through magazine ideas and his extended trip to the toilets left Venetia to stare into space. She began to yawn and was about to take in some air when she chanced to look towards the back of the bar. A man and a woman were sitting close to each other in a booth. It was Roland. Funny how even though she hadn’t seen him for ages and the bar lighting was dim and rippling with a water-like effect, he was unmistakable. It was as if his contours had left a permanent impression on her psyche. Venetia watched as the couple ordered drinks. They had a formal air and nodded in turn as the other spoke and clinked glasses, smiling. Venetia surmised, a first date. She didn’t
wait to see any more. Josh had disappeared it seemed, so she turned tail and headed out into the night.

This little tableau involving her ‘ex’ had had a chastening effect and she arrived back at the flat sober and unsatisfied, neither ready for bed nor really ready to do any writing. So she’s sat up till the early hours reading creepy crime stories on the net, eating chocolate and finishing the packet of cigarettes she had bought on the way home.

At some point she must have fallen asleep because it was broad daylight when she heard the phone ring. She ignored it. It rang out, telling her that the answerphone was not on or had malfunctioned and then she noticed that the time on its face was wrong, at least according to her mobile phone meaning, she guessed, there had been a power outage at some time during the night.

The phone rang again and this time she picked up.

‘Hello,’ she said expecting a telephone-sales person to launch into a spiel.

‘You take your time picking up. What, are you still in bed?’ It was Robyn, the same rock of friendship Venetia had called out to the day before to help with her writing block. Now her strident voice jarred worse than an abandoned car alarm.

‘Hi. How are you. Thanks for calling back,’ Venetia sat on the edge of the bed and made a sterling effort to sound alert.

‘You obviously haven’t heard the news—or read the newspaper this morning for that matter, otherwise you’d be congratulating me on the wonderful job I’d done for Jack and how he really ought to be paying
me more and how you can’t wait to buy me lunch and hear all about it.’

Venetia drew breath, but felt unequal to the task of finding some appropriate words with which to respond. In the pause, Robyn had gotten her second wind and relieved Venetia of the necessity.

‘Pity he’s now had to go into hiding. Well not hiding exactly—more an unplanned overseas trip on family matters.’

‘What are you talking about?’

‘It’ll cost you lunch to find out.’

‘You know I’m broke. I can hardly keep body and soul together let alone afford to eat out.’

‘Excuse me, I forgot the violins. You’ve got credit cards haven’t you? I’ve just filled the car up with petrol so I’ve obviously spent my monthly allowance, how about I come over and pick you up in an hour and we can decide where to eat then.’

There was another paused which Robyn briskly filled with, ‘I'm just dying to tell you the news. You really don't know what I'm talking about do you.' It wasn’t a question, it was a statement and she had already rung off.

Venetia’s feet had hardly recovered from the recent event which she had come to refer to in her mind as The Attack of the Stilettos. Thinking it had potential as the name of a sci-fi flick—B grade, of course — in idle moments she had began to compose the trailer for the film. Black and white images of women’s faces contorted in mid-scream would be overlain with a voiceover: Not ‘til now have you seen
the true face of human cruelty, never in the history of the world have so many fallen in the cause of shapely calves and swaying hips . . .

while the innocent sleep, the next victims are facing their final moments in the Attack of the Stilettos . . . drum roll, dramatic music crescendo, camera pans down from the screaming women's faces to find them standing at a cocktail party in footwear designed by the Devil himself. Followed by, close up of fiendish cobbler in the backstreets of Dickensian London with Mr Hyde facial features pounding nails into heels as long and slender as satay sticks. The camera pans back as we hear him laughing and laughing . . . Venetia felt there had to be an 'alien' angle and hadn't worked out that bit of the plot, but as she applied another round of band-aids to her heels, toes and insteps, she decided the stilettos grew out of some irradiated shoes (irradiated by a passing UFO) in the back of some poor, blind widow's house. The widow mistakenly puts them on and finds she is 'possessed' by them — as in movies like The Red Shoes — and finds she dances and shops and drinks cocktails and makes love indiscriminately in a self-destructive frenzy until she is entirely spent. And dies happy? Better than spending your life as a poor, blind widow one suspects. But B movies usually have an up-beat moral ending, and people who indulge in sins of the flesh are usually punished not rewarded. Maybe her sons find her semi-naked body lying in a pool of her own blood (from her blisters) and decide to destroy the cobbler. And the women of the village return to wearing Hessian sacks and clogs.

Something like that. The disgusting remains of her own indulgences were on show on the living room rug in the shape of an overflowing ashtray and a mound of Lindt ball wrappers. The thought of listening to Robyn's latest career success delivered in a style reminiscent of being jabbed by a stiletto repeatedly in the eye had all the appeal that such an experience might promise. But first things first: coffee and a face mask. It is a truth universally accepted that there is very little
angst that could not be, at least temporarily ameliorated by the application of sweetly smelling goop to the outside of the body and richly smelling substances to its inside.

Robyn insisted on lunching in Double Bay, of course, in spite of Venetia’s budgeting protestations. Ever since Mario’s in Darlinghurst had closed Robyn had been somewhat like a star of the silent film era, unable to quite establish herself to her liking in a new context. She wanted the flutter of waiters’ white jackets and the smooth attentions of a mature maitre d’. And the flattering lighting of dim interiors. She complained that everyone was dining al fresco these days, and a new breed of restaurant wait staff were too perky, efficient and full of themselves to take time to slaver over the clientele.

‘So what’s up?’

‘Taste this first, it’s my latest discovery.’ It was a big, buttery South Australian chardonnay, which, though Venetia had sworn off alcohol forever on waking, was just the sort of balm for frayed nerves.

‘I don’t know why you don’t go into the wine business, you always choose the best.’

‘Thank you darling. Wait ‘til you see the price. Now, now, you’ll think it’s worth it when I give you the goss.’

‘Ok. Just let me enjoy this moment of sunlight, hint of peach, integrated oak characteristics combined with,’ Venetia opened one eye and referred to the copy on the back of the bottle, ‘what would you say, a grassy mid-palate, don’t tell me, perfect with seafood, white meats and Asian-style cuisine.’

‘Very funny. Now, have you guessed what all the fuss is about?’
‘I know you’ll tell me.’

‘It’s Jack, he’s been outed.’

‘He’s gay?’

‘No, no. At least not last time I checked.’

‘Then what?’

‘Insider trading. Remember that big warehouse fire down near Botany Bay? Wait a minute. That’s Stuart Rainer I’m sure. Don’t look. That must be a toupee. Oh my God, and that girl he’s with must be his granddaughter — no you don’t put your tongue in your granddaughter’s ear. At least not in public. I always knew he was a tasteless git. Where was I?’

‘Jack’s been . . . What exactly is insider trading?’

‘Shhh. Stuart’s coming this way — probably coming to get the goss on Jack. How’s my lipstick? Good. Just play along with me. I’m going to tell a few fibs about the business, but you know that he and Jack are not only related but are the biggest . . . Stuart! How lovely. You’re looking well. How’s that darling wife of yours. Haven’t seen her for ages,’ Robyn extended her wrist. ‘Robyn. Robyn Horden. Emboss PR. We’ve met. This is . . .’ Stuart looked startled and checked over his shoulder. ‘This is Venetia . . . she’s just joined More . . . You must be doing well to have such a good tan this time of the year.’

Stuart fingered Robyn’s business card with a frown.
‘Yes we’re very busy. Lot of new business in town. Excuse me.’ And so saying he wove his way through the wrought iron tables to the men’s room.

‘What did you do that for?’

‘What? What did I do. What …?’

‘First I not supposed to tell anyone I’m with More — Caroline’s strictly forbidden it.’

Robyn shrugged.

‘It might get back to her — her boss. And second, why did you let on who you are. Presumably he knows you work for his rival? At least he does now.’

‘Get the knife in whenever you can,’ Robyn forked into her Atlantic Salmon. ‘Keep your opponent off balance. He knows someone in Jack’s camp has seen him here — with her. Mamma Rainer may not approve.’

Soon after this interaction, Stuart and the girl rose from their bar stools and were ushered towards the interior of the restaurant out of sight.

‘What are you looking at?’ Robyn had finished her meal and her last sentence. Venetia was looking at the space left by the squire and his charge.

‘I just can’t see what a girl like that could see in —.’
‘In a Stuart Rainer? In someone who can lift a finger and have a chopper fly him to Port Douglas accompanied by champagne and … whatever else it is that a man like that wants on his days off. You must remember he works almost non-stop. I should say his type do. I don’t know his whereabouts or workload personally.’ The young male waiter was scraping crumbs off their white tablecloth and Robyn crossed her arms and muttered thanks.

‘You must have a fair idea. You’re pretty close to his evil twin.’ The wine had given Venetia a pleasant buzz and the equally pleasant sensation that she was more savvy and intelligent than she probably was. ‘Or are they simply clones of each other,’ she continued emphatically, ‘leaving the rest of us to play Spot the Difference.’

Venetia couldn’t be sure, but she thought she might have seen a blush creep across Robyn’s cheeks. She uncrossed her arms and her bosom sagged. Then her lips turned grey. She upended the chardonnay bottle and signaled to a waiter for the bill.

‘You know, sponging off the Government isn’t precisely ethical either.’

Venetia watched Robyn’s blue silhouette weave between the tables and exit into the sunlight. She sat in silence for a moment, then finished her glass and moved to stand herself. That’s when she noticed it: a red leather notebook on the seat her friend had just vacated. Her heart began pounding alerting her to what she was about to do next even before she was conscious of it herself. In a seamless movement she bobbed down to pick up her own bag and took the notebook in the same sweep.
The move to Womerah had been the usual headache. Venetia didn't have much stuff, or nothing much of value, but what she did have conspired to be awkward and heavy. Trying to carry a futon mattress on top of a VW was a mistake to begin with. Trying to get it up two flights of stairs by yourself, priceless. Her shoulders, legs and back were still complaining. But what was also ‘complaining’ was a little voice inside here head which replayed the scene between Roland and his new flame in the bar the night of her cocktail-fest with Josh. And after their little lunch Robyn was now stubbornly refusing to return Venetia's calls. It kept nagging at her, going round and round, back and forth like flashing lights and a bell.

She knew the woman’s face. But where from? Was she a neighbour? An old work buddy? A colleague of Roland’s? Having washed her face and applied to it the contents of a sachet of something that described itself as ‘hot mud', Venetia placed her still bandaged feet on the kitchen table and drank from a dense, sweet milky brew that she could only describe as ambrosial.

And then it struck. The smiling woman who chinked glasses with Roland in the bar was a caterer. Venetia had engaged her for a birthday party — one of Roland’s. A caterer down from the country trying to set up a business ... *Angels on Horseback*, is that what they were called? She and Roland had seemed to find the name funny, well it was, but they also thought the miniature quiche pretty hilarious and met eyes every time they pierced a chipolata with a toothpick. Now she came to think of it, Venetia was sure it wasn’t usual for a caterer to stay behind drinking with the host long after the guests had gone (and the hostess had gone to bed), especially not wearing a little cardboard party hat and some party-popper streamers caught like semen in the fabric of her dress.
Far from being a one-horse town caterer trying to earn a living with home made short-crust pastry and mayonnaise, it turned out she had quite a few connections at the Town Hall (a nephew ran the catering operation there and seemed to be well in the A-listers) and promised to introduce Roland to some potential clients and even get him up the proposal list on the new mega water-treatment plant infrastructure thing-a-my that everyone who was any one in the building, development and construction game wanted a piece of. See, Roland would have said to her had he been here and not wining, dining some wealth piece of hayseed, I knew you weren’t paying attention.

It was enough to make you want to take up smoking again. That evening in the bar had had all the twists and turns of a slasher movie. The fountain of alcohol in the red lit bar, which, in memory at least, seemed to throb. The stab of recognition on seeing Roland, not alone and depressed and drowning his sorrows in cheap wine, but perkily squireding an attractive woman to a nightspot and drenching her in technicolour shots. The walk home past the strip club spruikers spraying the punters with lewd suggestions for cranking up their sex life. Then lying down on her bed — more a plank, but that was another story — and having to get used to the streetlight that shone through the kitchen window at night, and gave the apartment an eerie blue stillness. This was after aforementioned orgy of cigarettes, chocolate and true crime stories on the web. When she had finally turned out the lights it had been very late and her head had been full of the faces of missing persons (in Australia a person goes missing every eight minutes). It had been difficult to sink into oblivion. Dream sequences involving snippets of story ideas had made her toss and turn. At one point she had blinked (awake?) and examined the clock. It had stopped. Or it had seemed so. It always seemed to be three in the morning. The next and ensuing days she couldn’t quite say which part was imagined and which was real.
She vaguely recollected shuffling past the heap of boxes in the corner of the living room, as she went to the basin to sluice off the face pack and tried to piece the nocturnal drama together. In the middle of the night she had got up to go to the bathroom, without turning on the light. That's when she heard her. A woman standing somewhere below Venetia's bathroom window. At first it had sounded like someone moaning – but, half asleep, it could also have been branches moving in the trees. As Venetia stood up from the loo, she listened more closely. It was a woman's voice coming from down below. And the sound of it seemed familiar enough for it to seem part of a dream. 'My daughter,' it seemed to be saying, this disembodied voice. 'My daughter,' it came again and again, repeating this phrase alone at irregular intervals. It reminded Venetia of something, a memory half-recollected. Then it freaked her out and she raced back to bed and dived under the covers. But it continued. The voice. Eerily persistent in an otherwise quiet universe.

The bathroom window, which looked out onto the back courtyard, was too high for Venetia to look out of. And this next bit may or may not have actually happened. Galvanized by curiosity, she could see herself (or imagine herself) in the blue light from the street, grabbing a cardboard box from the living room and placing it under the window. It was not a good choice because it was full of loose notes tied together with ribbon, reminders and clippings and small notebooks, nothing solid or regular to take a person's weight. In her memory of this sequence she was wearing a long white nightgown. Except that she didn't have one. Or long hair. Probably her naked body was white reflected in the glass of the window. Recreating the scene in her mind, her hands seem huge as they reached towards the window casement. Standing on the box created a tear in its side, the papers and notebooks start sliding out and she slides down at the same time as she reached for the window frame. Trying to see but not
be seen was difficult in the extreme. She thought she could just get a
glimpse of the top of the speaker's head near the back door. The
wailing banshee was swaying before a cumquat tree that seemed
spotlit form above. 'My daughter,' she was saying as if to the tree.
This phrase repeats itself, unchanging in tone or pitch, like birdcall or
a cat's mewl. Or an abandoned baby crying in the night.

In the brilliant sunshine afterwards Venetia thought all this through.
She showered and brushed her teeth and passed the window on her
way out of the bathroom. There was no box under the window. Later
still as she went down the stairs to get the paper she met someone in
the corridor who introduced himself as Dan. A man of imposing size,
Dan described himself as 'the one who mends things around the
place. Dan the Handy Man,' he seemed amused by his own joke as he
held out his hand. His skin was rough as you'd expect from someone
wearing overalls and paint spatters. He warned her to be prepared for
a bit of noise to come as the last flat was still being fitted out. 'Lots of
masonry drilling,' he said. When she looked blankly he explained, 'It's
the high-pitched sound you can hear, very penetrating, goes right
through you. No pun intended.' Again he laughed. He had a full,
throaty laugh that wouldn't have been out of place at a social
gathering going full throttle, but seemed a bit overdone for a casual
encounter between strangers.

Venetia asked how many people were living in the building, Dan said
only herself and Mrs Meares, 'though she's away with relatives at
present. So I think it's just you and the cat, Luv.' This was another
combination of words he found highly amusing. Venetia forced a
giggle and then excused herself. However he stopped her for a
moment further to say that they'd found a tenant for the apartment
upstairs at the back. 'She might have arrived already. I don't know,
but you'll have some company soon.'
7.

Soon, it turned out, was very soon. Another wakeful night about a week later had Venetia venture down to the shared laundry facilities at the back of the block well after dark. She was reading the instructions on the coin-operated washing machine when her concentration was interrupted by a woman’s cries. Venetia dropped everything and walked swiftly, but warily around the side of the building where she thought the cry for help was coming from. Warily, because she still wasn’t sure of the terrain — she had noticed several broken paving slabs on the way out — and because the instinct to come to someone’s rescue had sent her into action before she had any idea what she would actually do if assistance were required.

She rounded the corner and came to an abrupt halt. At first she could not make out where the noise was coming from. She moved closer to the backdoor which led to the stairwell and the moaning became louder. Now it sounded like there was a man’s voice as well. Both appeared to be gasping for air. As she stood there momentarily transfixed she realized there was a rhythm to it. And simultaneously recognized what the sound was, and that the woman wasn’t in any trouble — or none that Venetia need save her from. And all at once she retreated full speed back into the laundry, heart pounding. Only she could still hear it — them — reaching a crescendo, and then silence. A few minutes later some music came on. A slow, tumbling jazz the rhythm of inhaling cigarette smoke.

A cocktail of emotions surged through her. She cupped her hand over her mouth and silently chuckled. Who was it? And how brazen, she thought feeling vaguely sullied, as though she’d spied on this scene of intimacy even as she was the victim of someone else’s exhibitionism. Finally, she put on her load of washing and she ran back upstairs hoping she wouldn’t meet anyone on the stairs.
Later the same evening she thought she heard voices again in the courtyard, but this time she put the pillow over her head and forced herself to go back to sleep.
8.
Robyn Horden, Venetia’s partner in crime at *Magda* before its demise, had moved up in the world. Her BMW convertible was champagne coloured. Her suits had French labels in them, and her mobile had what looked like a charm bracelet dangling from it, otherwise known as ‘phone jewellery’. Along with the ‘tennis bracelet’ — an item of personal adornment, usually diamond-studded, which one imagines isn’t really worn while playing tennis — tarting up one’s mobile device with precious metal and stones was just another status symbol that Venetia recognized she probably would never own. Robyn was definitely ‘old school’ magazines: long lunches, lots of ‘Darlings’, fill in the gaps with colour and movement.

Robyn lived north of the harbour and, as in the urban legend, probably would wear a black tennis dress to her husband’s funeral. Except that she was now, as the expression went, a gay divorcée. She did work hard, but one had the feeling that Robyn had a slightly different definition of ‘work’ to the rest of us. You might say Robyn was *always* working or at least ‘working it’. She had a long history with the social pages of one of the tabloid newspapers. Not because she was ‘hot’ in either the physical or newsworthy sense, but because she was well-connected: her ex-partner was a gossip columnist. There wasn’t a snippet of gossip that Robyn hadn’t bitten on, chewed and spat the pips out of. She wasn’t loose tongued. She didn’t kiss and tell, but you would not want to reveal anything too sensitive about yourself in her presence lest it be emblazoned across the heavens by a sky writer the next morning. Though, she had a vulnerable side — the way, presumably even boa constrictors had — and Venetia had a soft spot for her madcap approach to life. Her taste in shoes was another thing entirely. Venetia gladly put the borrowed items in a plastic bag in preparation to return them to their owner.
While Venetia was at the State library up to her eyebrows in organized crime, Robyn had called and left a voice mail.

‘Having lunch with the major sponsors – very important meeting; Vice President of Centralex who recently acquired Lentusche and Jack Burrell’s been made executive director. They need people on board, hint hint. I want to be able to say I have writers on the boil ready to hit the PR button. Please, please send an email or a voicemail; I’ll have my Blackberry with me, to say I can count on you to help out. I’d like to be able to back up what I’ve put in the report.’ Beep.

Venetia hit replay. When excited, Robyn gushed so fast the whole history of their interaction was littered with misunderstandings. For instance, Venetia thought at one stage that Robyn had a daughter and a son who turned out to be a dog and a goldfish, though she would swear she heard Robyn mention the name of an exclusive school as an option for Emile or Emilie, though it transpired it was a dog training school that the mutt was being sent to. The fuss was of the same scale. The goldfish story was even stranger because Robyn was raving on at lunch one day, admittedly after a couple of glasses of wine,

‘Terrible. Terrible. As guardian of a living creature – a beautiful, svelte young thing she is —‘

‘How old?’ Venetia asked.

‘Oh don’t ask. She was adopted.’

‘And she won’t eat?’

‘Wait a minute. I have messages coming in form the press about Jack’s sabbatical. Where was I?’
'Blanche is maybe anorexic?'

'Oh hush, don’t say that. I would hate that to get out – it’s so damaging for the mother, they always blame the mother. But it breaks your heart – she just - poof, turns her head from the food at dinnertime. Sorry I’ve got to go. You are coming to the Kidney Transplant Gala aren’t you? Good. Be good.'

Anyway Venetia never did hear the end of the Blanche saga. And the Stuart Rainer-Jack Burrell connection had just slipped into the back of her mind until here she was still part of Robyn's circle who was in Jack’s camp and working (at least notionally) for Caroline who was in Stuart’s.

Which is why when parliament and the papers were up in arms about political donations, arson-fuelled share price plunges and dodgy development deals, trips to Saudi and pictures of apartment blocks with huge cracks in them because the foundations were not sunk deep enough in swampy land, Jack Burrell was entertaining VIPs in Majorca, immune from extradition to Australia. Another ‘Jack’ en route from the Cannes Film Festival was snapped by paparazzi dining on Burrell’s yacht and the daughter of a former Australian Prime Minister was rumoured to be dating Jack’s son Russell. It all made for good back-of-the-newspaper reading and a few shrugs around dinner party tables in the better suburbs of Sydney.

But it’s surprising what connections you find when you start to dig. Literally. On one level we do all connect, mingle and commune with each other, through the network of drains and gutters and pipes and reservoirs that make up the infrastructure under a house or series of houses, and multiply to service a suburb and a city. Human beings need water and the development of human civilization was dependent
on reliable water supply and on hygienic sewerage systems. Venetia was pretty sure she had had a book on it that may or may not have survived the move, and once she got around to sorting through my boxes she would look it up. The history of the city was the history of plumbing and Sydney in its development had its fair share of third world crises. During the 1890s, or she might have the decade wrong, wish she knew where that book was again, families spent their entire day lining up for water at the local pump, dysentery was rife and before the Government stepped in there were cartels and standover men controlling the distribution of this precious resource. What is also fascinating, though not surprising is how much controlling the access to water played in the growth of certain industries, and production of certain crops in Australia and in the rise of certain powerful families. But in the end, to put it another way — our shit all flows out the same sewer pipes.

The Burrell's had been connected with Sydney’s water supply since the early days of the colony. Jack Burrell’s great great great uncle had been a senior surveyor in the office of the Chief Engineer to Governor Macquarie. It didn’t take a genius to figure that the wealthy houses up on the ridge, now known as Potts Point would get their water supply fixed before the workers who lived on the slopes of the ridge, now Woolloomooloo Bay. The legions of workers who kept the grand houses of the Colony’s upper classes functioning lived together in cozy little slums which were also the breeding grounds of the first union bosses, the first signs of unrest, and the first leaders of the Colony’s organized crime – that is, beyond the actually army (Rum Corpse) themselves. Jack Burrell’s forebear may have worked in an office and had, through hard graft worked his way up the pecking order to be one of the trusted senior team whom the Chief Engineer relied on to implement the many grand plans that Governor Macquarie envisioned in his glorious fiefdom. But his family and neighbourhood were some of the poorest slums in Christendom and
turning one’s hand to some extra curricular activity was essential if 
mouths were to be fed and, eventually, they were to ever get out of 
the mire of destitution.

At the other end of the spectrum, the Rainers had emigrated to 
Australia with silver-lined pockets, or perhaps that should be 
concrete-shoed. To be precise: it was all about clay. The family 
fortune was made in ceramics, but not like the Wedgewoods and the 
Spodes. The Rainers made pipes, clay pipes, solid four inch (in the old 
money) pipes made to last a hundred years or more of shipping 
excrement out of people’s houses and into whatever treatment 
arrangements were appropriate for the time. Unlike their Colonial 
fathers in the old country, most Australians had a bathroom (albeit a 
concrete tub and a tap) and a privy (locally known as a dunny) out the 
back. Places like Darlinghurst and Surry Hills are rabbit warrens of 
dunny cart lanes where the nightsoil collectors plied their trade. 
Before the wholesale implementation of sewer mains and reliable 
piping. And there’s the rub. What had gone in the dunny cart extra 
curricular so to speak was not anybody’s business — at least not one 
most would have wanted to know about. Which is where the Rainers, 
having got in on the ground floor (or below the ground floor) of the 
sewer pipe expansion in the colony, were also there to pick up the 
‘extra curricular’ end of the business.

Which is where the Burrells and the Rainers first cross swords, 
crossed paths, or sewer diagrams and literally began generations of 
turf war.

As Jack Burrell today looked at it, you do what you can, you take what 
you can and you get where you need to get going to. He had studied 
for a while in the States as a young man and still talked like a Wall 
Street (or Chicago Ghetto) jock from time to time. His friends found
his argot amusing and Robyn described his ‘street savvy’ in her property development prospectuses for him.

‘Take a look at this,’ Jack said from an apartment not far from Venetia’s but much higher both in metres from the ground and in asking price. He took his champagne flute and a spare chair to the table out on the balcony of his penthouse. His mate Harry had done him proud — and for his trouble as the relationship manager between the Lord Mayor's office and the Developer, Burrell took the cream of the job's offerings for himself: the five bedroom Penthouse with views clear to the Harbour Bridge and the Blue Mountains in the distance beyond.

‘What am I looking at? Is it – is it the new wing at the Children’s Hospital? Oh you darling! I thought you said you couldn't raise the capital.’ Robyn swung around and took his face in her hands.

‘I have my ways. Come here.’

‘You wonderful, wonderful man.’ She kissed him roundly on the lips and then took a swig of his champagne.

‘It will have to be paid for, you know.’ He brought his haunches behind hers and playfully pumped as she leant over the blueprints.

‘I know.’ She was silent for a moment, seemingly staring at the view. ‘How many lovers have you killed?’

‘They died. There’s difference.’ He reached a hand under her blouse while finishing his glass with the other.

‘Not now. I'm at the Lord Mayor’s for dinner.’
'Later then. Come over and bring some of your friends.'
An unusual event had occurred. A pot plant Venetia bought on a whim with the last of her social security money had flowered. A beautiful red flower with delicate white tracery around the edges of the petals. It had been on a discount table and she’d just like the name: begonia. Such a miraculous event was worthy of celebration and she had reached a stasis trying to write some notes from her research into organized crime in Australia. It had taken her all sorts of places – way out west to Griffith to various agricultural enterprises – all made possible by a water catchment and irrigation scheme realized with the building of the Burrinjuck Dam. But then she’d hit a dry, she punned ruefully to herself. There was a disconnection notice from the electricity people on her desk. Her social security paperwork was due today and a slip had been enclosed with her last cheque informing her that her presence was requested at meeting with a Social Security Officer regarding her status as 'long term unemployed'. What to do? Procrastinate. How often when confronted with an intractable problem do you stop for a cup of tea? It was like one of those magazine personality quizzes. A) Sometimes B) Never C) Whenever I can get away with it. Having stalled the brain, she then realized was also out of milk. It’s just one thing leading to another. So, leaving An Illustrated History of the Riverina Rice Industry on the kitchen bench and the kettle on the stove, Venetia dashed out to the shop for milk and only realised after the door had slammed, that she had no keys.

She stood for a moment scratching her head in the dark stairwell. She contemplated using her shoulder as a battering ram. An acquaintance of Venetia’s told her that, when she found she was locked in her bathroom through a faulty door
latch, that she used a sledgehammer to bash her way through the door. Why this woman happened to have a sledgehammer in the bathroom in the first place remained a mystery. One of those lucky coincidences perhaps, but she had had some explaining to do with the handyman who came to fix what was left of the door next day.

No such luck for Venetia. No coincidental battering ram. And as she stood looking at the apartment door she imagined she could hear the kettle begin to whistle. I could ring the maintenance man if I could remember the number, she told herself in an attempt to allay the panic that was rising in her chest. Somebody, probably Dan, would have a spare key. There were no side passages, no casement windows, no way to actually ‘break in’. Then while she stood there, the door of the flat below, which opened onto the landing diagonally opposite, creaked open. The crack was just wide enough for Venetia to ascertain an eye. In the dim stairwell, it was unsettling and grotesque. As she hesitated, the door, just as suddenly just as suddenly shut. Venetia jumped. Then kicked herself for not seizing the opportunity. ‘Wait!’ she cried and dashed down to the landing. She knocked, waited and knocked again and finally could hear someone clawing at the locks from within. Eventually the door eased open and a head emerged. It was at about waist height.

‘Darling?’ A female voice said gruffly to the passageway. ‘Yes, yes,’ Venetia said. ‘I’m locked out. I just need to use your telephone if you don’t mind.’ The locks were slowly being opened and we continued to talk at cross-purposes. ‘Is that you?’ said the voice again. Torn between establishing clarity and gaining access to her telephone for help, access won. ‘Yes,’ Venetia said meekly, culpably back.
A memory intruded into Venetia's thoughts: she once surprised a burglar in a house she had lived in many years earlier. She had gone out for the day, realized she’d forgotten something and came back suddenly and discovered someone on the phone right behind her front door. She remembered how she screamed an instinctual blood-curdling scream and the chap bumbled into this story about how his wife was having a baby and was vomiting (except he said ‘bomitting’) and he needed to use the phone to call the ambulance. And, in the moment, Venetia was so stunned she just stood and nodded and waited while he made a phone call, after which he excused himself and made a swift and apologetic exit. Later, she called the police still questioning the circumstances, was it possible he wasn’t a burglar? And, if he was, and a reality check persistently broke through the trace that held her in that brief encounter saying that he must have been, why hadn’t she done more to confront him, this person who had crossed this boundary of personal space? There was some lesson here, she thought, something about the rules of enchantment and its dangers. So now with this old lady, Venetia realised her position was false, but excepted that there are times when we are all willing to cross that boundary, all willing to “appropriate” however unethically what we need in order to get what we want. And Venetia, hearing the rising alarm of the whistling kettle from inside her flat, simply had to get to a phone. She bumbled an explanation, to which the old dear turned a confused eye upward. I give up, thought Venetia. And after a pause her rescuer, the ancient incumbent of flat number two, turned around on unsteady legs and rocked back inside the door indicating to Venetia to follow.

Her flat was damp. And dusty. It smelled. There were two tiny dogs, both with white or gray fur that showed their pink and
piebald bodies underneath. The dogs sat slumped in a basket in front of TV, one biting itself.

There were framed pictures everywhere - framed and posed, unframed and peeling around the edges. The living area at the end of the hall was an Aladdin’s Cave of silver spoons. Every wall had cabinets and wooden display boards full of shiny teaspoons. Many of the display boards were in the shape of Australia, some painted with gum leaves or Uluru. The cabinets had glass fronts and also held tiny silver ornaments - kangaroos, medals. The old dear, whom Venetia assumed was Mrs Meares vanished into the room beyond via a plastic strip curtain. She returned with a plate of chocolate biscuits on it and a bowl with sugar cubes. One of the dogs leapt up and gave a whiny little bark at which she tisked.

Mrs Meares again tisked again when Venetia began to protest at the precursors to what could have been a long drawn out tea ritual. Visions of her flat on fire crowded in around her. Her hostess was gone again before she had time to explain the urgency of the situation and now there were sounds of running water coming from the kitchen. It occurred to her that she could just make a call - ring directory assistance for Dan’s number, or just get the fire brigade. The phone was within reach on a bookshelf. Leave her some coins and let myself out. Probably wouldn’t even notice she’d gone. A clatter of dishes came from behind the plastic fringed curtain so Venetia stole over to the phone. With one eye on the kitchen doorway, she lifted the receiver. Softly, softly, then put the instrument to her ear. Nothing. No dial tone. Venetia tapped the button a couple of times and then looked at the back of the ancient instrument - there was no cord from the telephone going anywhere. It was absolutely dead and Venetia was stuffed. She took a biscuit and
nearly spat it out. They were terribly old. She envisioned a gas explosion. She could see people pouring from buildings up and down the street with tear-stained, blackened faces.

Just then there was a knock at the front door. The old dear was taking her time in the kitchen and Venetia didn’t wait. Back down the hall to the door she charged, only to be confronted by a phalanx of locks and bolts. There was another knock and a male voice called out, “Anybody there?” Venetia shouted in reply like somebody trapped in a mine, and a key from the other side opened one of the locks.

‘I’ve never been happier to see anyone in my entire life,’ she said when she saw handyman, Dan, through the crack, on the other side. He had smelled the gas and gone into my flat to investigate.

‘It’s all right I turned everything off,’ he said still through the door. ‘Everything all right in there?’

‘I’ll have to get Mrs Meares to unlock the rest of these.’

The old dear seemed surprised to see Dan, but it was as though he were another surprise visitor. She placed another cup beside the biscuit plate.

‘Not enough biscuits to go around – my daughter you know, always hungry.’

‘Never mind Luv,’ he was saying. ‘Can’t stay, got an urgent leaky tap to attend to.’ And he winked at Venetia and nodded for her to make a move. The dogs jumped up and tried to get the biscuits.
'Mad old coot, said Dan when he also finally got back out through the door.

Venetia thanked him.

'I think she thought I was her daughter.'

She was feeling a mixture of relief – Dan now felt like her second best friend – and shame, lest she seemed to be taking advantage of an elderly woman.

'Have you ever met Mrs Meares' daughter? I hear her talking to her or about her at night.'

'You’d be wrong there. I've never seen any of her mob. Not that I remember anyway, but then I'm usually looking for leaky taps and rising damp – not extended family.'

He had some thick, industrial gloves sticking out of his side pocket and was holding a huge ring of keys with different coloured tags on them and, having opened Venetia's door, stood on her doorstep shuffling them like worry beads. At last he turned to go, then he turned back and added,

'I might be getting mixed up with someone else, but I think the old dear’s daughter was the one who gassed herself. Lovely young thing if the pictures are anything to go by.'

He was quiet for a moment and Venetia thought he’d finished, when he said.
‘Something beginning with L – my brain’s going. Lillian I think, or Lola. Horrible thing to come home to. Anyway – take care.’
10.
Dole offices would have to be the worst place to be on earth. Slight exaggeration, but only slight. They are filled with the grim air of desperation and deceit. With expressionless people behind glass partitions and personality free interior décor, it is a crime to laugh in a dole office. It is a worse offence to display insufficient shame. The fluorescent lights assist in helping everyone feel appalling. So the great unwashed, the unloved and the barely liveable sit in their misery, not motivated to pull themselves up by their bootstraps (*Be whomever you want to be*), but quietly planning their next dole scam.

Venetia took a number and sat on a purple bucket seat bolted to an aluminum rail. A rabble of blokes with greasy hair stood before the job board. Mothers with prams and bottles and bored toddlers looked as though they’d been there since Leonardo painted *The Madonna and Child.*

Eventually her number was called and Venetia was ushered into a booth by a woman who seemed, professionally at least, eager to please.

‘Hi I’m Harriet Cornwall, please sit down. How has your day been?’

‘Fine thanks.’

‘Great.’ Harriet smiled and leaned forward eagerly in her chair. ‘The Department has developed a new initiative regarding long-term unemployment,’ she began. She might have been getting ready to describe plans for a party or preparing to read a child a storybook if her tone were the only guide.

Venetia nodded and smiled back.
'We’re calling it early intervention.’ Harriet paused, still smiling and blinked.

‘While you are by no means in the long term category yet, we’ve identified you as someone with a work history that just seems broken.’ Harriet blinked several times in quick succession. ‘We’d like to help you get back on your feet.’

There was another pause during which Venetia squirmed searching for the right response. Later she would refer to this as the Harriet Cornwall Effect.

‘That’s great,’ Venetia said at last. ‘I’m really struggling at the moment and think I’m very close to getting a job offer. But it’s difficult.’

‘Do you have any family you could —?’ Harriet waved a hand in the air indicating in an arc all sorts of unstated familial benefits.

Venetia was shaking her head. Harriet’s hand halted mid-air and, like a plucked flower, slowly began to wilt. Venetia ventured,

‘My mother is very – old. Very ill – not physically. She’s quite, er. She takes a lot of caring.’

This came out of the blue. Venetia herself was not sure what she was saying or why.

‘Oh I see, I see,’ said the dole officer. ‘This wasn’t on your file. Are you her carer – or at least her principle carer then?’ More blinks.

‘Well, there isn’t anybody else …’
'I know. Oh I know.' Harriet sat back and pressed her lips together in a line. 'Isn't it always the women that take on these caring roles. Look, this changes everything from our perspective. I think this is definitely something which would be considered an impediment to your job search.' She was jotting down some notes on the papers in her manila folder.

'I also think you should be receiving carer's allowance. Have you filled out the paperwork?'

'No, I’d didn’t know…' Venetia started to regret her flight of fancy.

'Precisely, so many people don’t know what they’re entitled to. That’s my job.' Harriet looked up and smiled. 'You’d just need to provide full documentation and then you’d be under less pressure to find work, but of course your social security payments would be adjusted. Still you wouldn’t have to comply with all the job search requirements. What is your mother's name?' Harriet looked up, pen poised.

Venetia hesitated and then said, 'Meares. Mrs Elsie Meares …'

'Address?'

After this entrée into a fresh world of deceit Venetia again found it difficult to sleep. Not that she’d always been scrupulously honest in the past. To put it mildly. In fact she found deceit tasted something like dense chocolate cake: divine, sickening, guilt-inducing and highly addictive all at once. But telling fibs to a sibling to simply mess with their minds was one thing. So was bending the truth with your mother or your boss in order to avoid punishment. But lying to a stranger in a way that might be bordering on criminal was like stepping up the addiction a notch, like going from the soft drugs to hard. It had stirred things up. Memories best laid to rest. Dreams
slowly twisted and turned through her thoughts like the long suburban train she used to take home from school.

Her mother’s rages were legendary. She remembers cowering in the corner behind her hands as the rotary clothes airer whorled like a whirling dervish over her mother’s exploding head - damp underthings lashing the walls. Her brothers and her running, staggering, crouching variously around the room. Of course, she thinks or dreams, we children didn’t know the full story, who does? Pretending to be a queen, young Venetia would carry with ceremony a bowl of Cherry Herring and ice cream to her father’s room, up past the table on the landing - don’t look at the vase with the swirly pattern and the scary woman's face in it - past grandma’s room, musty with memories. Knock. Wait. Enter. Place the bowl gently on his bedside table. His body is hunched over. A mumbled thanks. Venetia perches on the edge to watch him eat it. ‘How’s it going kid?’ Does he say this? Or anything? Can’t remember. Can’t remember. In this theatre of her mind the truth stretches on like that train. Like a wooden articulated snake, or a backbone undulating along a line.
11.

Having taken the plunge, Venetia looked at the stuff she had boxed up at the first move — straight after the separation — and felt numb. She had sometimes toyed with burning the lot. There is a hypnotic satisfaction to a blaze. She argued with herself late into the night, dining on crackers and cheese washed down with a ten dollar special from the bottle shop. An established writer had once advised her, Seer to Aspirant, *Never throw anything out*. It was both frustrating and impossible to achieve. Ideas captured on scraps of paper, the backs of envelopes, post-its along with notebooks, exercise books, journals accumulated over the years to an expensive and cumbersome archive that also managed to be dirty.

And yet if she ever did embark on an archaeological journey through one or other of her boxes, she found the encounter with her former self, uncanny. Bizarre even. And sometimes rewarding. It was heartening to discover a little gem here and there. *Be ruthless*, her mother would say each year when it came to spring cleaning. And dutifully she would discard a pile of whimsy, a stack of lists, so many starting *Milk, bread, cigarettes* . . . But now that she didn’t smoke, even these seemed like messages from a former self that might be intrinsically valueless but . . .

And then she’d run out of steam, box it all up again and put it back into storage. Nobody told you making decisions was so nerve wracking.

Roland Barthes said that every story is a collection of fragments. When her soon to be officially ex-partner Roland (not to be confused with the French theorist of the same name) moved out of their home, at first he took almost nothing with him. Anything that came from
their little terrace where they couldn’t even agree on how much to prune the ornamental grape was apparently an abomination. He refurbished his wardrobe and began wearing much brighter clothes with ethnic references: coarse weave vests in burnt orange and black or cream Indian shirts with Nehru collars and white embroidered bibs, recycled leather sandals. It was as though he had been traveling abroad or had converted to some obscure branch of Christianity. He even grew a beard and began going to film festivals when, as a couple, they had hardly ever darkened the door of the local arthouse cinema because they couldn’t agree on a film they both wanted to see.

But with the passage of time he slowly decided he was missing something. He would show up back at the house Venetia still occupied and rummage through kitchen cupboards and bedroom closets. He directly accused her of throwing his belongings out. One day she became so enraged with his irritating insistence that there was something in the house which eluded him, she rang him at his work and told him everything he had ever owned was sitting outside the door in the street. He was welcome to come and collect it.

She reneged, wimp that she was. When Roland arrived twenty minutes later she had brought most of it inside in a moment of remorse. He got the lot in the boot of his car - a sad strangle of ties, crockery, ski pants and an Alvo Alto vase one of his friends had given them as a wedding present - and drove off.

Strangely enough Venetia became nostalgic remembering Roland and her attempts at bagging the cuttings from the ornamental grape. The image: two people wrestling with unwieldy limbs and growths, snagging the plastic, barely containing their frustrations. It was a metaphor for their marriage. The marriage itself seemed the unwieldy thing. Individually they were quite likely decent people. Together they had become savage - or rather he had become long suffering and she
had become savage. And then depressed. Her own mother had looked
dazed when she told her they’d split up.

‘But why?’

It was difficult to explain. And in the end maybe even she didn’t
know.

Venetia began to visit garden centres, found them restful places full
of potential and that delightful earthy smell of damp soil.

Around the same time she started researching family history. This
was ad hoc, but somehow addictive. And swallowed time she should
have spent looking for or doing paid work.

She took long drives in the country with the intention of making a
pilgrimage to graveyards where any of her ancestors were buried. She
hadn’t got that far yet, but sometimes she combined a visit to a
garden centre with a drive through the country and would come
across a beautiful cemetery. She was superstitious and rarely
stopped. But noted how the village graveyard was often positioned
prominently at the edge of the road heading into town. In the middle
of a country laneway the headstones served as a reminder: drive
carefully, eat slowly.

Sometimes she would get out and walk the pathways through the
stones. And sometimes the consciousness would seep in: that no one
gets out alive. But she usually kept it at a distance and preferred to
extrapolate the sad stories from what was inscribed on the stones.
And think about how there was something almost edible in a nice
piece of marble crucifix.
‘I need to know whether this is serious, or if you’re just having a flat period.’

Robyn was tapping her long red nails on the leather strap of her handbag. Venetia lay there blinking, Robyn’s face dark against the white of Sydney sun. It was rumoured Venetia had had a fever and Robyn had called around to suss it out. In the incestuous magazine world, word travels fast.

Robyn was looking at Venetia, who couldn’t remember the last forty-eight hours. Robyn sighed. Venetia was still drifting in and out of consciousness. She had stumbled through some feeble chain of excuses, listening to her own voice sounding less and less like herself. Robyn sighed again. She was expecting more for her troubles. At least some juicy gossip.

‘No I just succumbed.’

‘To what? Succumbed to what?’

‘I don’t know. I just couldn’t face it anymore and decided it was easier just to stay under the covers.’

‘But what about that conference. Isn’t that on today?’

Venetia got out her diary and pulled on some jeans.
12.
The Tenth Annual Conference of the International Association of Practicing Criminologists and Criminal Investigators (IAPCCI, pronounced e-yap-chi) had been bumped from its usual venue in a prestigious downtown hotel by diminishing attendances and had been forced to take up residence in one of the student colleges at City Central University. Venetia took the bus from Central Station. It was already stifling hot by early morning and steam was rising from the pavement from an overnight tropical storm.

The college was empty of students being the mid-semester break, but the smell of instant noodles and sexual desperation clung to the place. A woman with shoulder length dark brown hair stood behind the reception desk presiding over an older woman with graying blonde hair in a bun. The lady with the bun used a ruler to cross off attendees’ names as they came to the desk. The woman with the dark bob would utter something *sotto voce* each time the other lady’s pen was poised to cross a name off. This succeeded in putting the woman with the list off her rhythm and she would waver, her pen suspended, her shoulders ratcheting up a notch with each interruption.

Ten or so years earlier, Venetia reflected, she was a young woman sitting under the Magnolia trees in the courtyard of the self same University. She remembered feeling awkward. A mid-term paper just back from marking had, according to her tutor’s notes, ‘monstrous syntax’, ‘ludicrous spelling’. How influential teachers are in our lives. An overexposure to Romantic poets and a mis-identification with TS Eliot at school had left Venetia with a desire to express the ineffable. She yearned to fill the space between or beyond the words, to say the unsayable. And evidently her tutor did not appreciate her attempts. She sat on her hands; grotesque and monstrous as her writing. A desire filled her the way the streetlight flooded her current abode.
She didn’t know what it was that had shifted during the time between the last two years of high school and the first couple of university. She had been a model student at school, popular, though friendless. At some stage during this time she began to panic. Somehow, since she felt her response to a work of literature would never be enough, she knew she had to produce something more. Felt she had to create something astonishing, had to conjure up essays, texts never dreamt of before. To impress. To be noticed. Around the same time she began feeling dizzy and weak at the idea of stepping into an elevator. Sometimes driving on the approach to the Harbour Bridge the panic would mount and, but for the stream of traffic on all sides, she would have preferred to stop, get out of the car and return home on foot.

‘What are you writing?’
‘Nothing.’
‘Show me.’
‘It’s nothing.’
‘Stop talking you girls up the back.’
‘Give it to me your ears are going red.’
‘You two will have to be separated.’
‘If it’s nothing, why have your ears gone red?’

Nothing was original. It happened just like they said. She ‘filled out’ and became a woman. And like Dr Frankenstein, spent hours in the stacks exhuming corpses from previous essays believing a creation made up of other people’s ideas was bound to be better than anything she could compose herself. Or this was a form of composition — a pastiche, which tasted of failure.

Daybreak would find her sprawled across a pile of notes. Arguments and insights which seemed earth-shattering at two o’clock in the morning, often dissolved like Dracula once exposed to the critical eye
of a second reading. Perhaps, she reasoned, it had something to do with the individual component parts. Each sentence and then each word took on extreme significance. Scribbles, erasures, borrowings, conjectures. Her writings became like the walking dead. Milking the first line of a set text left her drained and useful for nothing but a night of bingeing and purging. With the sun, her notes were illegible or irrelevant:

_The dreamer never tells_  
_the riddle’s answer_  
_the body revolves all night long_  
_mechanical as a mirror ball_  
_or as the giant rings outside the Albury_  
_turning symbolic with tedium, with unending duty._

_Glass jug with volume marks - a ladder_  
_up its side no lemon_  
_juice - nothing to dress the salad._

What was she to do with words like that? In those school mornings she could hear her own parents leaving for work. Their monotone reaching between her tea and toothpaste lips, through running taps and the slap of cupboard doors. ‘Why don’t you get up you lazy bastards,’ Shouldn’t be in bed.

Eventually by the second year of university she knew nothing but the first lines of any text, though she held them dear to her heart like runes or rough stones ‘She waited, Kate Croy.’ ‘Mrs Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself.’ ‘Call me Ishmael.’ Precious but inscrutable.

So intimidated by the undoubted authority of these first lines, she could progress no further in the texts. Had she _really_ understood
them? She would go over and over them in case there was something she had missed. For days she sat slumped in the library stacks in a sugar daze. Nights she spent bent over the bowl, failing to fulfill the promise of early success at school and the gold lettering on the English Honour Board. She had no friends and only vaguely attempted to remedy the situation. She’d show up at the pub and stay for a pint but always felt a little world-weary compared to the bright young faces that filled the room. She yearned for something brooding, decadent and decaying. She was after all, nineteen. By the end of first year she had been taken under the wing of one Martha Griegs, a department radical who sometimes held tutorials in her terrace backyard while sunbathing. She took Venetia home and fucked her, then fed her baked beans and bile on her colleagues in the morning.

But here she was at the criminology conference. Duly registered and, coffee in hand, settled into a wooden chair at the back of the auditorium, Venetia swam through the rising tide of uncomfortable memories. Martha Griegs had set her up beautifully — created scarcity, authority and made Venetia feel ‘special’ even from afar because their times together were brief, infrequent and known ‘by no one but ourselves’, Martha would say breathing Marlboros into her young pupil’s neck.

The woman with the dark hair who had been at reception took the stage and made some opening remarks: the usual thanks yous, congratulations and declarations about how fortunate we all were to have the rare treat of hearing some of the assembled speakers. Dr McMasters unfortunately had been a late cancellation due to ill health, she said and a ruffling wave came in response from the audience. The woman at the dais held up her hand in protest and spoke over the unrest:
'We all wish Dr McMasters a speedy recovery, I want to assure you, however, we have not been left with a chasm in our program. A member of McMaster’s research group has been traveling with him doing some of her own research and she has kindly agreed to step into the breach.'

Another murmur rose from the crowd, this time on an ascending pitch and again the speaker held up her hand.

'I am going to keep her identity a secret until just before her paper. She is on her way from the airport as we speak. But for now would you please make very welcome CCU’s own Director of Criminal Studies and Fraudulent Arts, Professor Gavin Chambers.'

It was a Saturday and a glorious one at that. In spite of herself, Venetia found her attention drawn towards the grassed outdoor space beyond the sliding doors. The day had become a scorcher, but with that off-shore breeze that almost voiced a promise. She reflected that she had imbibed the dictum that one must not ‘waste’ a sunny day inside. Sydney again? It didn’t help that the first few speakers mapped areas of their expertise in ways that Venetia found tedious and difficult to follow. There was a distinct leaning towards shaved heads and untucked short sleeved shirts. And realizing that this might be the sum of the knowledge she might take away from day, she felt a familiar despondency associated with academia. Where she wanted if not wild conjecture, at least a story, a flow, something to engage the imagination, instead she got evidence backed by research and measured conclusions. She could see there were political dimensions to the Body exploded by microscopy; that organized crime had neglected menstruation and yet, how could she put this? She felt the way she had when the sex education teacher had flashed up twin diagrams of the human form, male and female, as they would appear if they were sliced down through the middle: the speakers so
far had been as exciting as lukewarm tea and she felt numb with factitude. She wondered if there was something basically wrong with her. And her mind wandered back again to her days as a student.

She recalled one of her lecturers who was referred to by her peers as Mr Petulant because of his tendency to sigh heavily and to look like he would throw something at you if you asked a stupid question. He was big on the withering gaze. At least one person would get it at every tutorial and unconsciously the group sat around waiting for it each week. He wouldn’t actually say anything, but he would sigh and his whole being emanated something along the lines of, ‘You may have something worthy to share with us regarding literary criticism but until you are able to crawl out of whatever Neanderthal cave you come from I can’t be expected to help you.’

Mr Petulant, and, to be fair to him, he probably didn’t know this at the time, was there to shut the door in Venetia’s face at the worst moment in her life. As a student. After a dark night of the soul, after two months of Martha Griegs’ attention and then an icy stare of non-recognition when Venetia returned from the long summer break, after a moment of incomprehension and then a realization that she had been dumped (‘She always has a pet - for a while,’ one of her classmates told her, ‘Then she gets bored.’). When Venetia decided she had no earthly reason to continue to exist, she ran to Mr Petulant who was the closest thing she had to a rational human being in her life, or of someone who might just listen, she ran, essay in hand and all he did was smile a sick smile at her panting sweaty delivery of it at the eleventh hour, touching his wristwatch, he closed his office door, locked it then moved down the hallway towards the cloisters.
13.
The moment in the seminar, our First Meeting, had been brief. So brief, my desire to see Lola again was more like curiosity. But every phrase is inadequate to describe the moment when we first recognised each other.

She stood in the brilliantly sunny courtyard, smoking. The green smell of turf and the brown smell of tobacco. Her serious mouth, her stern nostrils becoming positively sensuous as she drank from her cigarette. Her bony, boy's wrist and her narrowed eyes holding the tension required to fend off the clamour of eager young minds swarming around her on the grass. But the moment which clinched it was as insignificant to anyone else as breathing air. My mother and I decided to take a cab home after the seminar – exhaustion having set in. We eventually flagged one down quite close to the entrance to the quadrangle dropping off four loud college girls carrying shopping bags. As the cab snaked its way out the exit road towards the city, Lola and some companions were heading back on foot the same way. Her head was down and she was preoccupied with something one of them was saying to her. I was enjoying examining her from the anonymous distance of the cab, but just as we had passed by, I turned to take one last look from the rear window and she looked up. Straight at me.

ooo

'Basically, ‘money laundering’ is a misnomer. Of course it’s a concept that many people, including those engaged in criminal activities are anamoured of — precisely because it appears to absolve the products of their crimes. We are, by implication, all guilty in contemporary society,' Professor Chambers paused and drew a cigarillo out of his jacket pocket. 'Excuse me, I'm giving up. Pardon, I have given up. This just satisfies the physical twitch.'
'But why is money laundering a misnomer? I'm curious. But really, I need to steer us back to organized crime, fraud as it might be practiced by street kids or by human traffickers, for instance.'

Perhaps unusually for her, Venetia was keen to get down to some detail rather than floating in the rarified air of fine distinctions. The Professor's apartment was a little airless and creepy and his large white hands, covered as they were with long dark hair, were a little too intrusive in the conversation. They fidgeted constantly whether Chambers or Venetia was speaking, and lay palm up on Chambers' trousers when neither said a word.

'That said,' Chambers proceeded ignoring Venetia's attempt to steer, 'laundromats are increasingly popular fronts for the, let's call it, legitimization of funds, because — apart from the money laundering term — they have an innocent function. And people buy their services with cash. Cafés too. Chemists I believe are also on the rise — the newer supermarket/convenience store type. And of course storage facilities. I know it sounds too obvious doesn't it, but there's the rub — the obvious is sometimes the most obscure. If you catch my drift,' he said ending as he brought the prosthesis to his lips.

'You see most money doesn't exist.' He was working the plastic cigarillo now, actually miming inhalation and exhalation. And tapping ash from the end. 'Money used to be a promissory note. Now it's a promissory email or simply a digital hallucination. An impersonation these days is not so much wigs and moustaches as a digital encryption. Much less theatrical, but there you go.' He gazed mildly around the room which was chokers floor to ceiling with CDs.

'But surely opening an account these days — well, they've made it harder haven't they? You can't just walk into a bank and, you know ...'
'Hundred point identification. Pah!' He stubbed his cigarillo out and placed it back in his inside jacket pocket. 'It’s not rocket science. If you know where to go, you could have a new identity this afternoon.'

He stood and walked to one of the book shelves and took out a CD, slid it into the side of his computer and clicked it open.

'Have a look at this.' He seemed to be up close on a florid wall paper design in green and white. He clicked through to similar designs, blue and white, red and white, some stamp faces and finally stopped at an image of a round stamp on white paper — like something embossed (Venetia knew the term from printing — magazines rarely got to emboss anything because of the expense). 'This is the work of a true craftsman. Have a look at the precision, the edging, the relief. I can’t tell you how long I could gaze at this and just — Ah, Venetia. Can I offer you a drink? And I'll tell you the story behind this, this, Michelangelo of the counterfeit world.'

ooo

The family research hadn’t got very far, but Venetia had had a play with some family tree software and applied for a few copies of certificates online. Her grandmother’s birth certificate arrived first. It surprised her how much was communicated with so little. Father’s occupation: Timber Merchant. Didn’t that sound good. Somehow written down in black and white it sounded quite important, though she guessed it could have been someone selling planks of wood from the back of a horse-drawn cart.

What she was even more curious about was her father's birth certificate, which she’d ordered at the same time, but which seemed to be held up by some bureaucratic hitch. According to the letter from the Chief Records Clerk, his paperwork may have been amongst
the records which had been lost in a fire during the 1950s. They had a backlog of requests which they were ‘processing in date order’ via the microfiche archive and she would be ‘informed when a positive identification has been made.’

Several days later Venetia noticed a peculiar smell in the corridor outside Mrs Meares’ door. It was the usual sort of cat’s piss and cabbage, plus something else. She was heading on up the stairs when he realized it was gas she could smell. Her phone was out of credit so she banged loudly on the door to Mrs Meares’ flat. No answer. In a flash she was back down the stairs out the front door and up to the convenience store a few doors up.

Ooo

The view from a distance always makes the details less important. Sme tiny butterflies flitted through the plumbago and the ancient nursing home buildings bump into each other without apology at the end of the drive. As Venetia bathed her face in sunshine and imagined what it must be like to be doomed to spend the rest of one’s days in a place like this: linoleum floors, wheelchairs by the front door, garage-style common room for macramé lessons on Tuesdays and a bus trip to the activity centre on Thursdays. Baked dinner on Sundays followed by jelly and custard on plastic plates and something educational on the box. Few of the residents have room for the jelly and custard, which sits around congealing in the afternoon light.

Footfalls echo in the memory. As Roland packed that night they called it quits, Venetia lay straight as a plank in bed, recognizing her victory as a failure and sunk lower and lower in her own estimation. Scarcely had this image installed itself, than a truly awesome vision of herself after an afternoon listening yet again to her mother’s woes. She felt again the dank encroachment of that old catastrophe.
In the end the fishtank — their transparent lives — exploded. Venetia stood watching as Roland's car vanished down the road. He would not be back. All that was left were the hard little moments where their lives had crossed.

*She sits here before me my daughter pale and penitent. Her hands in her lap, her old blue and brown striped sweater — was that once mine? Everything once mine is now hers. My eyes, my hands, my ambitions, my — specialiness. Bizarre, if they'd told me as a youth what would happen to me.*

- Did you remember to empty the letterbox?

Her mother's voice snaps her out of her reverie. Whenever Venetia arrived with flowers, Charlotte the head nurse would tut because flowers, she says in clipped matron-speak, ‘are quite simply a nice idea and complete waste of my time. They are dead, decaying impostors. Disposing of their corpses is a task I find more distasteful than many other in this job. Just save your money in future and buy some raffle tickets in our hamper at reception. Thank you.’

‘I'm sorry I —.’

‘Your sister came last week with flowers as well.’

‘I don't have a sister.’

‘Sidonie.’

‘No. Venetia. I'm Venetia Glass.’
'I'm sorry, I've mistaken you for one of the Finches. Very similar facial structure. Will you excuse me for a minute?'

'Help! Get me out of here! Help. Get me help!' These words were heard down the corridor from one of Esme’s neighbours over and over again. Sometimes Venetia’s entire visit was overshadowed by this mournful tirade.

This time Venetia put her head around the door. The woman screaming was sitting up in bed with her meal tray in front of her. A couple of family members sat on either side — one knitting, the other flipping through a magazine.

000

Venetia pulled out the enlargements she had made of Caroline's the photographs of the homeless. She had blown up sections of them so she could really look at the people in the margins, in the background. There were some brilliant faces. A quality caught by the camera that was never meant to be on display. It wasn’t just boredom, it was beyond that. The more she looked at the faces, the more their stories began to be revealed.

A skinny bloke with a tan who looked like he'd been soaked in a solution that had eaten him away and preserved him at the same time. If you took the beanie away and put a suit of him would he have been able to pass in mainstream life? It was unimaginable. He was part of a separate cast. His hands clasped in front of him, elbows resting on his knees, nothing connecting him with the present of the past, large eyes gazing at nothing in particular between the busy people blur.
A bunch of young men — younger than the other bloke at least. Not yet intensified by circumstance or mindset into a permanent delete. Hair all in their faces. They’re still interacting with each other. There is a ray of something like hope about their bodies, as though they might know or still believe that someone can see them. They may be absent from school and families or just from the social register. But they still count — to themselves.

Then there is the girl — or young woman rather — difficult to see her face. Her hair is dark blonde and held back with hair clips on either side, but she is gazing down as the camera catches her cigarette midway between gasps. There is another figure obscured by a pillar — it’s at the GPO — who, possibly, is saying something to the young woman with the hairclips. She has a listening cast to her torso and shoulders. It’s not something she wants to hear.

In front of her, a lady in a knee length, tailored coat is purchasing something from the newsstand. A man with very shiny shoes — they pull focus in the shot — is taking a sideways glance at the woman in the coat, or at least in her direction.

Venetia paused for a moment, taking her time to imbibe these essences: what it is to be alive at a particular place and time captured, like ghosts, on film. And then it struck. The woman at the newsstand was the one with Roland the other night.

Then she looked back at the girl at the GPO. There was something very familiar about her too.
14.
‘Caroline’s on my case about getting you to send in some stuff —
whatever, I’ll get to that. But what I really wanted to ask was, do you
remember that cute little kid who came over for a chat down at the
Quay. Chambray shirt, several piercings. Remember? Well he’s had the
chop. I can’t believe it. He was gorgeous and he was only about
seventeen, I thought. Apparently he was more like twenty-five or six.
Even seven? Which means I must be ancient because people that age
look young to me these days. I’m really thinking about having an eye
lift. What do you think? Anyway, he’s got a show on in Newtown
which I thought you might like to take a look at. I can cry into my
beer at what a waste of human hunkdom, but apparently it’s done
miracles for his voice. I’m thinking Thursday — call me back. And
send Caroline, Chazza something, because she’s driving me insane.’

Beep

Josh was good at the vernacular of answerphones. When Venetia got
bored she would play back some of his more choice specimens.

Venetia stood before the mirror. Would she make a good transvestite?
She turned this way and that. Held a finger to the bridge of her nose
and lifted it up towards her forehead creating a shorter, perkier nose
than her current model. Scrutinized the sun damage on her neck and
chest and then collapsed onto her futon with a groan.

Staring at the ceiling her thoughts roamed directionless and her eyes
traced the familiar cracks and crevices. Then she found herself
staring at the shape jutting out from the bedroom wall which had
caused so much irritation at first, but now was part of her seamless
unseeing occupation of the space. It had, she realized now she really
looked at it, a door in it. She had stared at it unseeing for so long that
it’s transformation into a cupboard was uncanny. It was all painted in
the same anonymous off-white, but there it was, the distinct framing
and indent of a cupboard door. More the door of a hutch – what they used to call the opening between the kitchen and living room through which trays of drinks and food could be passed and dirty dishes returned. A kind of separation between the working heart of the house and its social façade. It was a class thing. Or a bourgeois pretension. Or simply a convenience unnecessary in modern open plan housing design. But this was not a hutch. This was something even more intriguing – a device by which a tray could be drawn between floors in a large house. The thing her mother had described as part of a well-heeled childhood, something the servants sent the laundry basket upstairs and down in or delivered a breakfast tray to an invalid with a single rose in a slim pewter vase.

Venetia danced around the room. She hopped up and down on one foot. She stubbed her toe on the doorjamb doing a pirouette.

She held her ear up to the cupboard door and fancied she could hear banshees wailing. Wind rushing more like it, or at least water rushing through ancient pipes.

She plucked up courage and boldly prodded the hutch door to see if would open and then left off, because the phone rang. It was Robyn who launched into a tirade at something someone in the media or in politics or just in the supermarket queue — it was difficult to follow because all of these scenarios were mashed together with too much information about different varieties of caviar which, and this was where Venetia attention went spiralling off into the blue yonder, she thought she heard Robyn say she was buying for her cat — and then there was a knock at the door.

‘Excuse me for a moment.’

‘I was just incensed —.’
And Venetia put the handset down letting Robyn's voice continue on and become a tiny scratching sound.

It was Dan. He said there were some plumbing problems again which meant a workman would be around tomorrow about eight in the morning.

'Great.'

'Can you tell your neighbour?' He twitched his head in the direction of flat number three.

This was a reference to Tara, who had recently raised the number of the house's inhabitants to three.

As soon as he was gone, Venetia managed to prise open the Dumb Waiter with a fork. Inside were some paint tins, light enough to suspect they were all but empty. Lids stuck down tight. Some doweling stirrers and old newspapers. No secret cache of written materials. No love letters or diaries, no postcards, sewer diagrams, photographs or even shopping lists. As an archaeological find, it was pretty unspectacular only it belongs to a building whose owner is still alive, in other words she should leave it where it is. But then she notices something concealed in darkness at the very back of the platform. A small collection of glass tubes and a bottle of something that might be turps — clear liquid at any rate in a bottle you might see in a hardware store. Mixing his own paints?

Venetia was startled from this reverie by a knock on the door.

Dan the Handy Man again.
He was blathering on about troubles with the roof tiles, leaks in the parapet wall and in the service.

‘Can you come back in half an hour?’

‘I've got to be across town at half ten. I won't be long.’ He made a motion to shoulder his way in, but Venetia said quickly.

‘Ten minutes – just give me a moment to get myself dressed.’

‘No worries. I'll make a call.’

Ten minutes. She checked the clock. Probably less given Dan’s impatience — to return the Dumb Waiter to its pristine state. What if he notices that something’s missing? She looked under the sink for empty boxes, paper, anything that can substitute for what she was preparing to hide. To steal. She pushed the word to the back of my mind and started moving. She tore open the hall cupboard and pulled the bottom two drawers out and emptied them onto my bed. She hesitated for a moment and then emptied a third.

Breathing heavily she tried to fit the dusty tubes and bottle in the drawers. They didn’t sit well. She tried stuffing them one way and then vertically. Eventually she gave up. Three minutes to go. She abandoned the drawers and looked around again. Nothing. No suitcase big enough, no boxes. In desperation she dragged the stuff through to the bathroom and placed them in the bath. Black soot and paint flecks sat in the water remnants of her shower. Not ideal, but it wouldn’t be for long. She then threw a pile of a pile of clothes from her bed on top to simulate a huge backlog of washing. Cringing all the while putting clean, folded clothes on top of the filthy debris.
Dan was back knocking at the door just as she pulled the shower curtain across to conceal the mound.

‘Hi. Look I won’t be long.’ He was already inside.

‘Any leaks in here?’ He eyed the pile of clothes on the bed and the empty drawers.

‘Spring cleaning.’ Venetia volunteers.

The he opened the door of the Dumb Waiter, looking first at the broken paint on the edges of the door, then shining a torch up into the cavity.

‘Bloody rat-trap. I hate that thing.’

Then before Venetia had a chance to stop him he was in the bathroom and had turned on the shower — hot and cold.

‘Hey.’ She dashed into him on the way out.

‘No sweat I started your washing for you.’

She manages to counterfeit gratitude for as long as it takes for his back to disappear down the stairs. Then she went back to look at the ugly mess in her bath, cursing and swearing, Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck.
'I knew you’d ask. Sooner or later everybody always does.' Tara lit another cigarette from the end of the one in her hand and stared into the middle distance.

Tara’s flat faced west, so was a bit dingy first thing in the morning. She also had a different view over the back lane from Venetia; closer to the garbage bins and the overgrown old disused dunny where feral cats had made their home. Apart from that she had a lovely touch of whimsy about her decorations. Chinoise silk dressing gowns, hoarded from her great grandmother (or some vintage clothing store in Stanmore) depending on how many gins she’d had; large ornamental fans and postcards from the 20s and 30s.

'I suppose you’re right. There’s a fascination with it. I guess because women are brought up on romance and finding your one true love —.'

'It's just a way of earning a living.'

Venetia’s newest neighbour had a soft spot for any film star (many of them from the silent era) with blonde finger waves. Occasionally if V, as Tara called her, showed up to borrow some milk or something if Con’s corner store wasn’t open, she’d find Tara down on the floor with a wash of sparkling beads and buttons spread out over an embroidered shawl. Venetia would watch, unnoticed, as Tara would place the beads in a particular order and then ‘undo’ them and start all over again. When asked what she was up to, she looked at Venetia for a moment, then simply stated: ‘Because they’re beautiful.’

In the evening Tara’s environment came into its own. As the sun set behind the flats on the ridge, her world became orange — as startlingly warm and glowing as Venetia’s was white and dazzling.
first thing in the morning. She had inherited a collection of jazz and blues records from someone in her past and would put on something suitably mournful and sensuous about my man done this or my man done that. Her mood was different in the evening and Venetia put it down the encroachment of her work. Now she looked at Tara’s slender shoulders stooped forward as she chewed on her nails between puffs. She was in what Venetia had mentally labeled as her ‘shutdown’ mode. Very frail, and to Venetia, very beautiful.

‘I owed a lot of money to a dealer. It started as a way to catch up. Listen, am I going to get paid for helping you out. You know, giving you my story?’

Venetia looked down at her notepad. 'I'll see what I can do. The magazine . . .’

‘That's just it. I got pushed out of my other flat for using. Now I'm off the street, I gotta show DOCS I can keep a stable home, so I can get my daughter back. DOCS have put her in care.’

They had spent a lot of time commiserating each other on bad choices of individuals in their lives as part of a ritual of looking through magazines, smoking cigarettes and trying new hair colours. This was the first time she had mentioned to V about a daughter.

‘Sure you don't want anything to eat?”

‘Nah. But a twenty would see me straight for a few hours.’

And so saying she waltzed off to the shower.

‘Straight?’
'See me right.'

Venetia must have looked too serious, too concerned.

‘Nah. Just a couple of Bourbons. Can’t work when I’m skanked.’

‘You’re asking the wrong person. I’m broke.’

Venetia left her to her ablutions wrestling with her conscience. How did Tara get the flat in the first place? Estate agents were pretty strict with their reference checks. They had been with her. She strolled up over the pedestrian bridge that joined Womerah Avenue with Kings Cross. She prowled the streets gazing into the alleyways for instalments in the soap opera called life. As Venetia well knew there were ways around these things. She passed the groups sitting on the pigeon spattered park and the touts on Darlinghurst Road.

‘Come on ladies, bring in your blokes. Turn ‘em on then take ‘em home.’

Once home again, she picked up the mail from the front hall table and sorted through a couple of bills, an overdue notice from the video store and couple of other letters that didn’t belong to her. Something addressed to Ms Tara Lincoln. It was hand written and contained something more than a single sheet, but what? There were a few flyers for pizza deliveries and one for a new gym with an opening special and finally something for a D. Hawkins. Right address, but who was that? Looked like a power bill or electoral office — anonymous looking envelope with a PO Box return address. She thought she’d do the right thing, redirect it and put it in the mailbox next time she was out.

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'Have you had a bowel movement today,' a young woman in navy pyjamas swooped in, took Esme's wrist and gazed at the watch pinned to her chest, then plumped up the pillow behind Esme's lower back. 'Doctor will be around later. You've got some visitors. Aren't you the lucky one.'

The old woman's eyes flickered towards Venetia then landed back on the shapes that appeared and dissolved on the screen.

'I've left a package of your favourite lozenges on the bedside.'

This from the young volunteer who brought around treats and used magazines on her way home after school. She was earning points towards her Duke of Edinburgh, she told Venetia brightly.

Another young woman appeared at the door, this time in pink pyjamas and a shower cap of the material computer components come wrapped in.

'Tea?'

'Mrs — I mean Esme? You want tea?'

'How is your mother today? I'll need to check her chart,' the woman in navy cut in. 'She's got swallowing difficulties.' Venetia's protestations at this point were taken as concern. ' 

'Hasn't the matron been in to have a chat yet?' And she exited expertly with a bundle of bedclothes in her surgical gloves.
Venetia balanced a teacup and broke open the biscuits from their plastic wrapper. Some refugees in Afghanistan climbed onto a UN truck. Esme gurgled.

'What's that Mum,' Venetia blushed and looked over her shoulder into the corridor. No one was about. 'You ok?'

She gurgled again. She was having difficulty holding up her head.

'Should I get the nurse?' Venetia held some tissues to Esme’s mouth which was spilling saliva down one side of his chin. The old woman coughed and then her eyes bulged. Chin shaking. Was she trying to say something?

'— a boy.'

'What?'

'B, B. Boy.'

'What boy?'

'Your father.'

'What?'

Esme's head fell forward. Venetia ran down the corridor for help.

'She's had another seizure. We've got her under observation. When the doctor arrives we'll give you a call.'

'Do you have any idea when?'
'Look it's all under control. We've revived her. She's in intensive care. The doctor's in the middle of his rounds and he'll call you sometime this afternoon.'

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The two litre container of milk she had bought the day before for economy's sake had leaked all over her fridge and kitchen floor which is why she jumped and hit her head on the corner of the kitchen table when she heard a voice behind her. One of the hairclips keeping her fringe out of her eyes gouged her scalp.

‘Sorry Luv, I didn’t mean to startle you like that.’ Dan was standing over her holding out a large handkerchief.

‘If you've got some ice, you might wrap this around it and get it onto the wound — you'll have a nice lump there otherwise.’

Two trickles of claret-coloured blood slid down Venetia's cheek. She was sitting in a puddle of milk.

‘Look I just wanted to reassure you about the break-in.’

‘What?’

‘You didn't hear anything? That's good. I guess. But maybe not. They just took some of the old lady’s jewellery. Probably nothing really valuable. And some cash from the girl upstairs.’ He twitched his head.

Venetia was sitting stunned and her head hurt.
'Where do you keep your towels? I think you might need a trip to Emergency. Get your things and I'll run you down. Don't worry about the mess. It won't go away.'

With shaking hands she changed her jeans and grabbed her purse and checked that, this time she had her keys.

'You look a bit pale, Lassy. But you'll be right. I just wanted to let you know we'll be changing all the locks because the burglars also took some of my power tools and my big ring of keys.'

He dropped her at the entrance to Emergency. 'Gotta go. They'll put you right. It's nothing serious I bet.'

When she got back from the hospital with five stitches in her head it was pitch black in her flat. The streetlight was out. She walked through to the kitchen and trod in something sticky. The milk had dried into patches. She reached out to switch on the light. Nothing. There were some candles and matches in her bedroom. Or had she returned them to their place under the sink?

Try the kitchen first. The whole street was out. She took off her shoes and took baby steps forward. She could hear her own breathing. Again she felt something under foot. Something moving, with fur. This time she staggered back and ran barefoot through the living room, stubbing her toe on the coffee table. Rats. She knew. She knew there were rats and now she had touched one. She stood with her back against the hall cupboard.

She didn't dare move. Yet she dreaded the thought of a small furry, darting creature coming near her. She whimpered and placed her hand on the front door knob. What should she do? Nothing moved and her breathing started to fade to normal. There was an abnormal
quiet through which she could determine some other being, some
other living creature, she thought, was here with her breathing too.
And then she saw it. Two eyes in the darkness. Two eyes watching her
watching it. She slowly opened the apartment door and moved
forward slowly, feeling her way with her feet. In the glow of her
mobile phone from her bag she could see one of the kitchen chairs
over turned. She advanced towards the green light hands
outstretched, ducking down to feel for the edge of the coffee table.
All at once the streetlights, her kitchen light and the refrigerator
thermostat cracked on. And a tiny grey bullet flew out between her
legs to the landing outside.

000

'It was a cat. I'm sure it was a cat. Just lock your door and get some
sleep.'

'What are you doing tomorrow?'

'I'm in the middle of something. Can't really talk now. Just hang tight.
You'll be fine. Call me tomorrow. No. Make that Thursday.'

000

Returning to her front door, Venetia saw her neighbour Tara's pale
green satin dressing gown disappearing up the staircase. Her door
slammed behind her like a full stop, before Venetia had a chance for
pleasantries. As she reached the first floor landing, Dan's bulk
emerged from Mrs Meares' apartment, back first, as he completed
some round of instructions to the old lady Venetia assumed was
concealed somewhere behind him.
'Tuesday week. Yeah, some time in the morning,' he was saying as Venetia brushed past. He nodded hello and then she realised he was actually talking into his phone. The interior of Mrs Meares' flat was in darkness. But as there was no further movement, no face emerging from the gloom, she could not think of a ploy to linger on the doorstep to have a sticky beak, she pulled out the key for her door.

Dan's eyes flicked up towards her as he listened into the device at his temple. She smiled and was about to turn back to her own business when she had an idea.

'Dan?' she said taking the few steps back down to the landing. He held up a hand, nodding. He was now cradling the phone on one shoulder while he wound some nylon cord between his elbow and hand. She waited, shifting her weight from one hip to the other thinking the better of this foray. But she had launched into it, so felt like she should stay. His one-sided conversation droned on.

'Yes. Yes. Sure. Yep. Will do. No worries.'

She turned to abandon the idea and put a foot on the lower step. Dan again held up his hand.

'Excellent. Yeah. Absolutely. No worries. You're on.'

Venetia's foot stayed ready to take the step up towards her door, increasingly ready to remove herself from this interminable social purgatory.


Then finally he rang off and turned to her.
‘Sorry about that. What can I do you for?’

The nylon rope refused to shape itself into an obedient coil and he hoiked it together with a yank.

‘Look I just wondered. This'll sound silly but I …’

‘Well come on, spit it out.’ He clutched the rope in front of his girth and a smile creased the corners of his eyes.

‘I just wondered if anyone else had complained about the rats. I'm sure we've got some. I hear scuffles in the dumb waiter, sort of scratching sounds and …’

‘In the what?’

‘The dumb waiter. Or whatever you call that cupboard thing in my bedroom.’

‘Oh you mean the ventilation shaft thing. Look I wouldn't be surprised at anything in these old buildings. There's plumbing issues. There used to be a creek running under the foundations and — have you seen the way the pavers out the back are behaving?’ His hands made pictures and his eyebrows described the mayhem.

‘I don’t think we're talking vermin though. The odd pigeon might get stuck up there. I'll get the pest guy to have a look ‘cause that's more his area. I'm not saying it's impossible. Might get him to put a few baits around, can't hurt, but don't tell the old dear, reckons her dogs eat the stuff. And they're not real good looking sorts as it is. Her dogs I mean. Right you are. Gotta be off. There’s the phone again.’
Roland called. ‘Someone’s been snooping around the construction site. This is a very important project — the future of Sydney’s water supply depends on it — but we’re not getting full cooperation from the Councilors or the subcontractors.’

He was pacing her flat as though giving a lecture to a silent audience.

There were issues to do with their property settlement. Venetia was desperate to get her hands on the money, but she knew Roland would resist any sense of urgency or pressure from her side. He would resist and probably enjoy the process. So she told herself to breathe. Slow down. Smile. Nod. There were allegations from both sides of Parliament about cronyism and even Roland’s own job might be in jeopardy.

‘And the latest from the lawyers?’ she finally slipped in.

‘No news. They’ve got to recalculate my super fund. And they think a re-valuation’s necessary now on the house, since the whole process has taken so long, property prices might have shifted in the meantime.’ He was gazing out the kitchen window.

‘You realise the people across the road can see right in here.’

Can we just fix a date for this thing, Venetia was screaming to herself internally.

‘Fine,’ she said. ‘No, I’m. . .the curtains were making me feel claustrophobic.’

‘What’s up?’

‘Oh, nothing.’
'That means it's something. I've been reading that book you gave me.'

'It's nothing to do with this — I'm just tired from some research I'm doing. It's just taking longer than expected. That's all.'

'What's it about?'

"Don't really want to discuss it.'

There was a moment or two of silence.

'Right then. Well, I'm going to be pretty busy with this submission for the next few weeks. It's going up to Parliament for approval. It should be very high profile and I should get a few jobs out of it, once it's all given the go ahead.'

Again there was an uncomfortable silence.

'Ok,' he said. 'I just thought we should talk these things through. Find out what your thoughts are.'

'Sure. Oh look, someone's at the front door. I better go. I'll call you soon.'

You idiot! She thought to herself afterwards. Why did she say she would call him soon? She would prefer to strangle him. She would prefer to sit under the spotlight of a Nazi interrogation, she would eat nails, she would — what did it matter. You might as well get used to it. There was never going to be an end to it.
The Dumb Waiter was ruining my life. I don’t mean it was an intrusion. Far from it, I couldn’t drag myself away from it – better than TV. I had caught a glimpse of a young woman in the one of the photo frames on Mrs Meares’ mantel. It’s the eyes that haunt me. And I imagine it is she – the daughter who did away with herself. And she seems to be looking right at me. And another thing. She looks just like me.

Later the same evening she thought she heard voices again in the courtyard, but this time she put the pillow over her head and forced herself to go back to sleep.

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‘So you want the editorial report. That’s right. Ok Chazza. Ok. Pardon? Well pardon me. Well excuse me. We’ve all got challenges.’ Josh was standing with one hand on his hip in Venetia’s stairwell, chest like a baritone, speaking with controlled violence into his phone.

‘How about never. Does never work for you?’ he said, then slapped the phone shut and strode past Venetia into her flat. He turned like a mannequin and then mouthed, ‘Bitch!’.

‘Have you got a smoke?’ he said after a noisy sigh. ‘I know you smoke. And a drink. Vodka. Glass of wine. Cooking sherry?’ He plumped down on her old frayed rocker and swayed forcefully back and forth.

‘What’s happened?’ Venetia held out a packet of cigarettes expecting him to take one. Instead he took the packet and lit one with a tiny lighter and returned both to his breast pocket.

Venetia stood and watched while he took a few long drags and exhaling looked around for an ashtray.
'Please explain?' Venetia saw a pillar of ash growing on his cigarette and dashed to the kitchen for the cracked saucer she used for the purpose. ‘The suspense in killing me.’

‘Do you always talk in clichés?’ He was waving the thing around and she handed him the saucer just in time. ‘I thought you supposed to be a writer, someone with a bit of individuality.’ He held the saucer aloft, took another drag and lost the ash in the process. ‘Look,’ he stabbed the cigarette in her direction. ‘I can’t think without a drink in my hand. Haven’t you got anything here.’

They went down the hill to The Bay and sat in the beer garden with a couple of schooners.

‘That’s better. I think if I have to make up any more excuses to cover for Caroline any more I’ll explode.’

‘So…why don’t you start at the beginning.’

‘Wait a minute. I’m not sure we can stay here. See that bloke over there.’

‘Which one? There’s a about a dozen blokes over there.’

‘The older one. In blue overalls.’

‘Actually, that’s Dan. He’s the handy man at my apartment block. I should go over and say hello.’

‘Wait. Don’t. Don’t you dare. Just pick up your beer while his back’s to us and we’ll go back inside.’
'But —.'

'Just do it.'

They started towards the dark interior of the bar. Venetia began to have déjà vu.

'I've been here before I think.'

'I'm not particularly interested in your drinking itinerary at the moment. Sorry to be so blunt. You don’t realise what a close shave that was.'

'No I don't. And you might not be interested in where I have or haven't had a drink, but I suddenly remembered this pub. Roland and I once came here and we had a dreadful row —.'

'Look I don’t mean to be rude. Which is really unusual for me, but if that man had seen us . . . well, both of us might have been fired. Or worse.'

'Worse? I can't be fired, I —.'

'A detail. We'll be black listed. Dead meat. Do you always ask so many questions?'

'Can you please tell me what's going on.'

'Get me another beer. No, on second thoughts we better go somewhere else. I'm having a hell of a day. Just remember that.'
They bought a bottle of red and walked back to Venetia's flat. She wasn't really having a good time. All this seemed a little melodramatic.

'God, now I wish we'd bought some Green Frogs or Snakes,' Josh threw himself down length-ways on Venetia's sofa.

'Do you want tea?'

'Yeah. Let's have a cuppa. I'm all over the shop.'

Venetia put the kettle on, and watched as her guest's eyes closed on her. The kettle boiled and when she turned it off, there were gentle snoring sounds coming from the living room.

Asleep, Josh looked about ten years younger. She thought she might take her tea into the bedroom and have a snooze herself when a knock at the door startled her out of her plans.

'Sorry to disturb.' It was Dan.

'Dan! I, um. What's up?' Venetia looked at him wide eyed.

'You see we've lost some, er, connections . . .would you mind if I took a quick look at the gas pipes.' He seemed to be hunting for the right words.

'Ah, look I . . .I'm right in the middle of an important assignment. Do you think it could wait? I'm really behind. Is it serious?'

'I, er. Yeah, I guess I could come back. Listen, there was a chap hanging around the front door earlier today. Looked a bit suss. Do
you reckon you could let me know if he shows up again. Tall, brown hair.’ Dan held his hand a few centimetres above his own head.

‘Sure. Wait, yeah I think I’ve got your number. I must have. Ok. Thanks,’ she started to close the door again.

‘Are you alone?’

‘Yes. No, look I’ve got a visitor.’

‘Oh I see. A very pressing assignment is it? Well I won’t disturb you,’ and he gave one of his theatrical winks. ‘But let me know if you see anything. Cheers.’

Josh woke with a start a bit over half an hour later and Venetia enjoyed teasing him about how bad his snoring was.

‘I don’t believe you. But it’s too horrible even if it’s a little bit true. Just so hard getting old. Soon it’ll be sweet young things expecting me to take them out to expensive dinners. When I feel like I haven’t had my due of them myself! Thank you.’ Venetia passed him a glass of red wine.

‘Are you going to explain what all this is about, or are you going to continue to binge and collapse in a heap like a lump of lard.’

Josh snarled then sat up and took a long pull at the wine. ‘A bit young,’ he said through pursed lips, then took a deep breath. ‘I owe someone some money. It’s more than money actually, but the net is that I said I would do something — perform a service — for someone. And there was money involved. You’ve probably already guessed there was sex involved. And no, I don’t normally charge. Though of course, there is an element of being a high class whore when one is
taken out and wined and dined and then taken shopping for two hundred dollar ties and five hundred dollar shoes. And then asked to “perform”, but — that’s just part of the game when one is having an 
affair d’amore. Ok some of these affairs are very brief, over in a . . .’ he snapped his fingers in front of his face.

‘You don’t have to tell me the gory details . . .’ Venetia found herself saying.

‘Gee thanks. I mean, if I'm going to spill my guts, the least you could do is pay me the compliment of being titillated.’

‘Of course, tell me your worst.’

‘You see it wouldn’t be the first time I had, shall we say extended my boundaries of good taste in order to live the high life. You know how expensive Sydney is. Anyway, normally I choose, I'm in control. Then every now and then since I've worked for Rainer, there'll be some overseas visitors who need to be entertained and they're not content with picking up the local rag and calling for an Asian bi-guy. Or a Sven with massive pecs. Or a hairy koala. Or any other delicacy they might imagine is going to get them up and get them off. They want an intermediary — someone who can take them to a club and introduce them to a circle of “friends” — then they don't feel so bad cheating on their wives with a fella. They can tell themselves it was all part of being seduced by some Sydney bad boys. And, you know, what happens on the road, stays on the road. And sometimes —.’

He suddenly deflated like a balloon and picked up his glass again. Venetia noticed his hand had slight tremor in its journey from the table to his mouth.
‘I thought Stuart was the squeaky clean family man and it was Jack Burrell who was the man about town.’

‘Just two sides of the same coin. Burrell is the bon vivant, the guy who will go to the opening of a paper bag, who’s had more flash bulbs in his face than Linda Lovelace had cock.’

‘And Rainer?’

‘He’s got this multi-faced competition going on . . .’

‘Competition?’

‘Yeah. Anything Jack does, he’s gotta do better.’

‘Sounds like siblings.’

‘You might be more correct there than you know.’

‘They’re brothers?’

‘Let’s just say there are rumours. One of them’s legit and the other’s a bastard. Don’t know. Maybe no one does. It’s just a good story. But they are like the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition, only nobody elected them. They both just want to be cock of the walk, to be immortal. And don’t we all?’

‘Whatever it takes.’

‘What?’

‘Something I read. Jack Burrell said that when he began lobbying for a new water treatment plant for Sydney — one which he would control.’
'Of course. Control is the whole kooky thing, to quote The Goddess, Joan Rivers. Or maybe Marcia Hines said that. Is there any more wine?'

'No. That's it. What do you want to do now?'

'I can't go home. I think you're stuck with me — at least for the night. Is there a spare mattress?'

'Are you kidding?'

'I guess that's a No.'

'What about Caroline?'

'What about her? She's no blushing rose. She's possibly more ambitious than Rainer and Burrell put together. But she doesn't like to get her hands dirty. Or should I say, any more. She's paid her dues. I think she's waiting for Mrs Rainer Senior to go and then she'll move in on Stuart. Or Jack. I don't know where her loyalties lie, except with herself.'

'I suppose I could get take away and another bottle.'

'Now you're talking. I need to lie low,' with which he reclined again, touching the back of his hand to his forehead.

Venetia couldn't quite believe him to be serious. Or at least seriously in trouble. She pondered for a moment on the implications for herself if it was something requiring the law. But when she looked at Josh flicking through the channels on the television, he seemed no more than a harmless, though bratty, kid. She'd hardly lead an exemplary
life herself and would find his companionship tedious if he had. Nonetheless she looked both ways as she emerged from her flat and again as she stepped into the street a bit later on her way to collect the take away.

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‘Who would you have’ to your last dinner party?’

‘When you say “last”, what, am I coughing up blood or something. Sounds like I should be inviting St Vincent’s Emergency.’

‘You know what I mean — your last, your ultimate dinner party. You know, it’s a game like who would you most like to sit next to on a plane or what will they write on your tombstone. In fact “ultimate” does mean “last”.’

‘Well I can see you’re in a cheery mood. A couple of bottles of red and a vindaloo and you’re suddenly Dr Frankenstein. Ok. So I guess Shirley Bassey. Princess Diana. Do they have to still be alive now or can you raise people from the dead for this little shindig?’ He was yawning and scratching his chest through the two top buttons of his shirt.

‘We can make our own rules. Oh I know, we could also play, Casting Your Life: you know who would play you in the movie of your life.’

‘Did I drop off and wake up in a Pollyanna book, because I’m thinking you really ought to get out more.’

‘I’d have Graham Greene.’

‘Who’s he?’
'Probably Nureyev or who was that other famous ballet dancer — the Russian who went mad.'

'I'm a bit rusty on my mad Russian ballet dancers. Sorry, I'm usually out cruising bars looking fabulous, drinking and talking to people. Come in spinner! Are you just sitting at home thinking up fictional dinner parties. Why don’t you just have one? Wouldn’t you want that on your, well let’s not talk about tombstones, what about on your CV?'

Venetia had to admit he had a point.

'Would you help me?' she said. 'I mean help me organise it. And how would I pay for it? Let alone, who would I invite . . .'

'You see that's where you've just slipped way off course. You have a dinner party for a number of reasons: to impress people, to seduce them, to show off, and' the hand went up again, 'yes, to thank them — I knew you were thinking it was all high camp nasty. You start by deciding what you’re having a dinner party for.'

'To celebrate life.'

'Ok. Ok Pollyanna, that’s a good start. Why can’t you just celebrate life on your own?'

'So how come you’re suddenly so Dr Phil about all this. Are you going to turn the tables and get all deep and meaningful on me now?'

'Hang on a minute. And by the by, don’t you think Dr Phil is cute. He really does the “older man” thing for me — not. If I'm playing make believe anything, I'll be the male incarnation of Martha Stewart, after
she made several millions and before she went to jail and had to wear
those horrible orange overalls. Can’t they come up with a better shade
of orange? So as your homemaker style guru I’d say, you are having a
dinner party to celebrate life in your newly single state. It’s a
declaration to the world that you are available. And that determines,
who you invite, which night of the week, and what you serve.’

They were both silent for a moment and Venetia swilled that last of
her Shiraz. Josh went for a slash and burst back into the living room
saying,

‘Hey didn’t you write something about dinner party disasters? Let’s
work on that. Let’s make the theme: “Calamity Janes”. Everything has
to have “smashing” or “accident” in the name. We’ll have Rockmelon
Smashers to drink or, better still Molotov Cocktails . . .’

“Wow, what’s in them?”

‘And we'll eat, let's see, what's French for “mistake”?'

000

The masonry drilling went on day and night. Occasionally Dan or
someone else would emerge with a face covered in white dust like
someone out of 9/11.

Venetia had sketched up several stories for the magazine. There were
the mentally ill who had been kicked out of institutions following the
Richardson Report and were still wandering the streets looking for
safe haven. As real estate values rose in the city, no body — not real
estate agents, not property developers, least of all residents —
wanted half way houses dampening its rate of growth.
There were the indigenous ghosts and the indigents from country towns that had dried up after too many years of drought and the international commodities price tumble.

Then there were the runaways.

‘Let’s have more of them.’ Caroline, herself no less, had left a voicemail in response to Venetia’s outline.

‘The others warrant a mention — but only a mention. We’re not bloody social workers. But runaways have the potential to get mixed up in all sorts of quasi-criminal activities. They can be victims of crimes. . .Hell, they’re probably responsible for many of the break-ins around the place. I think there’s some really good potential there.’

_Beep._

16.

‘Time is like money, you don’t find it, you make it. Who said that?’ asked Venetia reading from her journal.

‘Somebody incredibly wise who didn’t have period pains or pimples and whose boyfriend or more likely girlfriend …’ stuttered Tara as she hopped from the bathroom to her bedside with a broken thong in her hands.

‘Why?’

‘Because it sounds like something a bloke would say. And therefore —’ she paused holding up her hand pre-empting her companion’s
protest, ‘— therefore he was a heterosexual because he wasn’t going to step out of the mainstream.’

‘What are you trying to say?’

Tara was now working a hairbrush through her locks as though taming a band of rebel mercenarys.

‘Every time I log on to have a chat with Chet, blubber features is also online. Coincidence, no?’

‘You're paranoid. Or perhaps Chet's been thinking, what's good for the goose . . .’

‘How long did it take you to practice that sneer?’

‘I didn't want to see how one media magnate was all over you like a fake tan, don't pretend you didn't know I was going to be at the kidney foundation do because we talked about what we were going to wear – admittedly a few months ago, because at the time you thought you were pregnant and might not fit your bronze off the shoulder number and wondered if I had anything larger you could borrow,’ Venetia warmed to her subject. ‘I remember it well. You, svelte as a Finn Crisp and worrying about a smidgen of muffin top, and how I felt like I was swimming in a fat suit as I exited the conversation to go find my jogging shoes, after which I twisted my ankle in the park and had to retire to the sofa with a box of cinnamon donuts and a couple of Buffy the Vampire Slayer episodes.’

‘I have a new found respect for you girl.’ She had coerced her hair into a severe chignon and was now applying lipstick with equal determination.
‘Because of Buffy?’

‘Nah, I prefer bonnets and bustiers. It’s the cinnamon donuts. I just can’t see what people rave about in Krispy Kremes.’

‘I gotta go do some work,’ said Venetia surreptitiously slipping the sudoku from Tara’s newspaper into her notebook. ‘Are you around later on?’

‘Maybe. Chet said we might go jogging.’

‘You?’

‘Horizontal style. We’ve found this amazing picnic spot near the Gap. Just nobody goes there and the sun and a nice little bottle of Chardy and well, we have to get our exercise somehow.’

‘Well I wondered if you wanted to try out that new Gisela Bunchen pilates tape.’

‘I think I’ll be getting my workout all the same. Now I better go earn some cash.’

Venetia pulled a face. ‘I wanted to play the dinner game with you.’

Tara frowned, sighed then straightened up and tapped a finger on her chin, ‘Um, Bill Clinton, Mahatma Ghandi …’

‘Ghandi at a dinner party! That’s an interesting twist.’

‘Patricia Highsmith …’

‘I didn’t know you read books…’
Tara threw her keys at Venetia who successfully ducked and they knocked over a lantern that narrowly missed the floor, being saved by the beanbag.

‘It’s only because you fancy Matt Damon in the Ripley movies,’ gasped Venetia between laughs as she dived and rescued the keys holding them out of Tara’s reach. The girls tussled for a bit and then Tara gave Venetia a peck on the cheek and exited reminding her to lock up.

Venetia sat for a while. Tara’s space. So different being in someone else’s aura. On your own. Pretending to be them. How you’d wake up to this or that. The different smell in the bathroom. Their wetness on the towels.


Venetia fondled the spines and picked out the Rich, idling on whether having such a surname guaranteed fiduciary success, and found the volume fall open at the following lines:

Today, a fresh clean morning.
Your camera stabs me unawares,
right in my mortal part.
A womb of celluloid already
contains my dotage and my total absence.
17.

As Jack Burrell today looked at it, you do what you can, you take what you can and, as he would put it displaying a vernacular developed during his formative years in America, ‘you get where you need to get going to.’ He’d done well at school and taken a scholarship to an Ivy League institution where he’d met the son of a well-known newspaper proprietor. The rest of his regularly updated bio on Wikipedia read like a press release. And his face was as recognisable as a billboard.

Venetia took a U-turn and sunk down to do up her shoelace as they passed. She wasn’t absolutely sure, but she could take a guess — she’d only met him once with Robyn and yes, the man with Caroline looked suspiciously like Jack Burrell. Surely that was a no-no for anyone on the Rainer side of the court. And Rushcutters Bay was along way from Palm Beach. Burrell had a yacht so maybe they sailed here. Far fetched for me, but who knows what the rich get up to on their weekends. But they were holding hands. Long time friends? Looking into each other’s eyes? They had to think nobody would know them around here. And it is true that people on the north shore think this (South of the Bridge) is another planet.

Forgetting about them for a moment, Venetia scraped up enough coins for a saving shot of caffeine.

‘Chilly for April don’t you think?’

Charlie at the kiosk had a rapid-fire line in conversational openers. He was some kind of refugee from the corporate life and knew everyone from the corporate trainers and dog walkers who serviced the houses on the Point, through to the regulars who did more coffee supping than training under the plane trees.
'You reckon you know everyone who comes through here?'

Charlie chewed on something. ‘Try me.’

‘They’re a bit far away but see the couple – she’s in a red sleeveless padded jacket.’


‘That’s the one.’

‘Out for a stroll in the sunshine and still wearing outfits that look like they’re from a Burberry catalogue. Rodd & Gunn. Him at least. Her, more maybe, Loewe or Hermes.’

‘Whatever, do you know them?’

‘Can’t say I know her. He’s a regular with – well I thought she was his wife. At least she was last time I looked – she had a flash new engagement ring and was going on about the fixtures and features of a new pad she the hubby had bought.’

‘Doesn’t mean he’d bought it for her. And him?’

‘Yeah well I’ve mostly seen him on his own, so he must live somewhere around here – or not. Maybe he’s just got property or a boat.’

‘I mean, what’s he do? What’s the goss on him.’

‘I know, don’t get your knickers in a twist, let me get to it.’ His jaws worked faster.
‘There’s something riding on it for me.’ Venetia took her coffee and slipped Charlie a ten. Held up her hand when he offered her change.

‘Thanks. I’m saving for the Special Olympics. Look I don’t know, but I know he’s in big business and I’m not talking only the legit kind. Sonny – you know big Maori guy, trains some of the Roosters – he’s well in with this chap – no names of course, but he happens to have a last name same as the guy who was Lady Di’s butler.

‘Ok.’ Venetia blown into her coffee and fragrant steam rose to her face.

‘Well,’ Charlie gazed off into the white yachts on the Bay. His eyes seemed bleached against the deep tan of his skin, like they’d been left on the deck of a ship.

‘Sonny’s been helping with the distribution end of — the mystery gentleman’s — business if you catch my drift. And snowdrift just about says it all.’

‘Snow?’

‘Well ice really. You don’t let me get away with anything. There’s also, and this is more Sonny’s end, steroids, human growth hormone. Remember when Sly Stallone got busted recently?’

‘Yeah, but he was bringing stuff in.’

‘Sure. So they impound Sly’s mickey – guess where he picks up what he needs to keep himself chick-worthy while’s he doing the logies? Sonny. Now, don’t get me wrong Sonny’s no crook. It’s just how these businesses are run. A hairdresser knows you want to look schmick but there’s no money, at least for the individual hairdresser in
peroxide, so they might have ways of getting you something to make a big evening really go off. You know, they get you in the massage chair - you want to believe you're really doing the red carpet at the Oscars and not just watching it on TV... Limousine drivers, concierge's bellhops, door men, tanning salons - they're all trying to make a bit on the side.'

Venetia nodded and polished off her latte.

'What sport are you competing in?'

'Air hockey.'

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'What exactly is the Foundation? I mean, what does the Foundation do?'

Robyn steadied herself against the washbasin. Her lipstick was smudged and he mascara had run. She tossed me the keys to her Alpha Romeo and asked me to drive.

'I need a huge favour. This package has got to go to an address in Point Piper. Just drop me home and you can keep the car for the weekend.'

'What about your doctor's appointment?'

'I know it's just not going to happen.'

Not for the first time Venetia felt she hadn't been paying adequate attention and now was in the middle of something not at all pleasant.
'Please.'

The car drove like a dream. Pity the beautiful gear changes were punctuated with Robyn throwing up out the side window. A motorcycle cop appeared in the rear vision mirror and flagged them over.

'You ladies all right?' He leaned both hands either side of the car door.

'My friend’s not feeling well.'

'I can see that. Would you mind counting to ten slowly towards the device. Thank you.'

He stood away from the car and examined the results. He spoke into the two-way radio on his lapel, keeping his eye on the car.

'That'll be fine. But make sure you get your friend off the road and somewhere safe as soon as you can—.'

At that moment Robyn opened the door and heaved onto the pavement.

'Sure.'

'I was going to say it’s an offence to drive with any part of the driver's or a passenger's head or body traveling outside the vehicle. I can call you an ambulance . . .'

'Look, we're not far from her place. I think it'll be quickest just to . . .'

The policeman nodded and stood aside.
'Where do they get those guys?' Venetia was holding a tissue to her nose. Robyn hadn't opened the door quick enough. Damn electronic locks.

‘They just seem so . . .’

‘Careful,’ Robyn was lying back with her eyes closed, but a bit of colour was returning to her face.

‘They just seem so clean.’

They drove in silence for a moment sharing a smile.

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‘Twenty bucks standard exterior wash no wax; twenty-eight, interior vacuum, window buff; thirty-five tyre black, diamond polish —.’

‘Just do the lot.’ Venetia kept her knees together as she turned sideways in her seat. The temptation to play the part was irresistible. Leaving the keys, Venetia strolled or rather, sashayed toward the car wash café.

She didn’t want to see their faces when they saw what was on the passenger side. She'd kept the windows open from Robyn’s place to here.

The coffee was surprisingly good. Or did it just seem that way because she had a set of wheels for the weekend and an advance from the magazine. Caroline had apparently liked how some of the research was ‘progressing'.
She watched the teams of blokes at the end of the process swarm over the cars like choreographed bees in their yellow polo shirts. Then the realisation hit: she had left the package on the back seat of the car. She went out the pay queue, but Robyn’s car had already been swallowed by the behemoth.

Back in the café she watched intently for the Alpha to emerge.

‘You having the works?’ The guy behind the counter had no customers and a clean counter.

‘Yeah,’ Venetia stopped digging her fingernails into her palms and flashed him a smile.

‘It takes a while. You’ve got plenty of time if you want another coffee.’

He had his hand up at the espresso machine, ready.

She glanced out at the worker bees again and shrugged, ‘Ok.’

‘A while’ was much longer than she could ever have imagined. They must have done ten other cars before the one in her care emerged and she had updated herself on the status of every Hollywood marriage-rehab-baby-ball-gown-nightmare on the planet.

‘You have a good weekend now.’ She had been there so long, the guy behind the counter was going to miss her.

There were chits to sign and receipts to request and then when she slid into the seat she had to negotiate her way between two SUVs that formed a phalanx to left and right of the car wash driveway.
Eventually she was out in the stream of traffic heading for home when she remembered again and turned around to look at the back seat. The package was gone.

She doubled back, but it was a few minutes before half past five on a Friday. The whole of Sydney had unleashed themselves onto the streets, or were trying to get home so they could get changed and then go out again. Bars throbbed. Motorcyclists performed risky manoeuvres endangering jaywalkers. Panhandlers threw buckets of soapy water over car windscreens to finish their day's work, inciting road rage in the process. Venetia had to park blocks from the car wash and by the time she'd walked there, the driveway was roped off and a smiley face sign said ‘Come back tomorrow!’

Robyn’s mobile rang out. The second time it went straight to voicemail. Tara wasn’t picking up. Her only other choice, she thought would be Josh.

‘I'm in a bit of a pickle.’

‘Wow. Gee that sounds terrible. Do you want to hear about my day?’

‘No really, this is more than a little pickle, it’s more like a gigantic Polsky Ogorky.’

‘All right already. Stop talking dirty I'm at the office. I'm about to leave. Where should we meet? I'd really like to change —.’

‘This is not something . . .Oh forget it. There's nothing you can do anyway.’

‘Oh, this sounds really good. I'll be over right away. But if anyone sees me in this “it's Friday, everything else is in the wash” outfit, then
you’re a marked woman. After you’ve told me all about your huge, throbbing problem, we can party. Incognito!

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Later that evening, there is a knock at her door.

‘Yes?’

A young man, unshaven was standing with a cloth book bag over his shoulder.

‘You probably don’t remember me —.’

‘No I don’t.’

‘Yes, I’m sorry to bother you but, I saw you at Victor’s. I was out the back.’

‘How did you know where I lived?’

‘I’m afraid I followed you. I sat at the back of the bus but I didn’t approach because you looked exhausted and probably wouldn’t have appreciated being woken up.’

‘I’m not sure I appreciate this. What do you want?’

A crack in Mrs Meares’ door appeared.

‘I really just thought we couldn’t go and get a coffee or something, but I realise now this is all a bit weird, so why don’t I just give you my number. Here, I’ll write it on a piece of paper.’
‘Why would I want your number? Nothing personal.’

‘Please, there are so few people in this country who are good to talk to. I’m used to Europe.’ He was checking over his shoulder. There was an eye peering out of the door on the landing below.

‘Please go away. There are plenty of people out there probably just waiting to meet you. What’s your name?’

‘Raoul. Raoul. I’m from Czech Republic. I’m a cook.’

‘Raoul? Look, I have a boyfriend —.’

‘I don’t think so. You are always a loner. I see you often in the streets.’

‘Look I’ve got to go. Time to go. Please. I have to ask you to leave.’

‘You don’t understand. They are watching me. I need place to cook.’

‘Somehow you’ve got the wrong idea. I really do have a boyfriend and he will — be very angry. . .’

‘Not a problem, would he mind if I called, just for English practice.’

Mrs Meares door creaked shut.

‘We can meet him along. Bring him along. I am lonely. Very lonely.’

Venetia pushed against the door. Raoul had a boot stuck in the jamb keeping it open.

‘Help!’
‘Do not scream I have a knife. I did not want it to be like this.’

‘Get out of here!’

‘You will do what I say and I won’t hurt you.’

The lights in the hall – which are on an automatic timer suddenly blacked out.

‘Mrs Meares! Call the police!!’

The lights went out in Mrs Meares’ apartment.

‘Please get your foot out of my door!’

There was a sharp pain in Venetia’s forearm. The knife tip had dug into the muscle and she lost her hold on the door.

‘Ok, you listen to me.’ Raoul was standing over her shining a torch into her face. ‘This is a message from The Management. Stop interfering in people’s business that doesn’t concern you. You have a pretty face. I could be easily destroyed.’ The knife was touching her neck just under the ear.

‘Knives leave fingerprints, but acid is quick and clean.’

The torch went off and the pain in Venetia’s arm came back.

She knocked on Mrs Meare’s door. She listened for noises inside. All seemed quiet. She knocked again. Just as she was about to give up she was encouraged by the sounds of footsteps inside. She ran to the landing light switch and pressed it on. When she turned around Mrs
Meares was on the landing with a saucepan in hand. Venetia must have screamed and then she was drenched with cold water.

‘There that’s what they do to alley cats on heat. Bitch!’ And so saying she slammed her door.

Indignant Venetia stood for a moment trembling, and then ran up to stairs to Mrs Meares’ door. She raised her hand to knock but had the feeling that the old woman was probably standing right behind the door with another pan full of water. Venetia heard a bolt slide – either open or shut and didn’t wait to find out which. She was back up in her room in a trice. Panting and dripping inside the closed door.

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The radiologist had pointed to a white shape in my mother’s MRI. The tumour, which had taken up residence in her brain, and was wreaking havoc with her health. He handed her an envelope with a journal cum letter written before the anaesthetic.

I finally figured out what was wrong with me and Marjory gave me a card. It had a single line address on it and a phone number. The voice on the other end told me to come the following week after three in the afternoon with two hundred pounds in small bills and not to eat or drink anything after dinner the night before. And of course not tell anyone where I was going.

I’d written to the Registrar asking for a personal loan. He hadn’t questioned it, but the request for cash raised an eyebrow.

The sound of water came clearly through the paper-thin walls. I had been greeted at the door by a grey haired woman who showed me upstairs and then vanished.

I didn’t see her again, but a man appeared in his braces with a cigarette out of the corner of his mouth and told me to undress from the waist down.

Several cigarette butts were lying on the floor at the foot of the table. He removed a layer of crumpled butcher’s paper and asked me to lie down. The ceiling need painting and I felt cold as the
rubber sheets were lain over my legs, which were strapped at the ankles.

Then somebody was knocking at the door. The man didn't wait to see who it was, he told me to get dressed. ‘You'll have to come back tomorrow.' I started to say, 'What about my money?' But he brushed me aside and had his coat on before I was even out of the stirrups. All alone, I pulled up my stockings, shaking, shocked. Tears are welling in my eyes and streaking my face with mascara. I had actually put on makeup — spat into the tiny black block to make myself look respectable for the ‘event’.

Before I am complete there is a tap at the glass door from the hallway.

‘Who is it?’

‘Roger.’ It was the Registrar. 'I was a bit worried about you and wondered if you were in the mood for a cup of tea?’

He looked around the room at the butts, at my disheveled appearance.

‘Here.’ He held out a perfectly pressed white handkerchief. ‘Put your hat on. I assume I've interrupted things in time.’

I nodded and dumbly followed him down the stairs into the street.

Later we sat with hands around cups of cocoa, a plate of sandwiches in triangles between us.

‘No please.’

‘Go ahead.’

‘I can't eat.’

‘It'll do you good. You look pale as a ghost.’

We exchanged pleasantries and before the hour was out it was agreed. We would marry the next day and Roger wouldn't ever ask for an explanation, but raise the unborn child as his own. My hero. What else could I have done? That Norman had possessed me body and soul would be my secret forever.

On the wedding night as Roger gently parted my thighs and lifted my flannelette nightie, I took an in-breath and dived like a paratrooper from the aeroplane of my former life.
She remembered my mother's blackest rages, Venetia as a child cowering in the corner while the clothes hoist helicopter Medusa swung wildly over her head. Secrecy is better. Never really share with anyone else what plans or preferences have formed are forming in parallel with the words slanting through the dark leaf cover.

‘Are you ok?’ Venetia rounded the bed gave Esme a kiss. Angus came up behind her with an armchair and encouraged her to take a seat.

When she'd raised the alarm about Raoul, Angus Tan had been assigned to her after the attack.

‘Is this about the break-in?’ Venetia was standing at her front door leaning on the jamb conscious she wasn’t wearing very much. They had determined, they said in their preamble, that she was the one who called the police a while ago – about two and a half weeks - about some screams heard in the middle of the night.

‘I'll just take some details.’ Tan was out with the pencil and a small pad.

‘We’re here about some armed robberies that have been taking place in local pharmacies. Precursors they’ve been after. But we’re also tracing the whereabouts of a missing person who is also wanted for questioning in relation to the offences just mentioned.’

‘Precursors?’

‘Ephedrine and pseudoephedrine. Common ingredients in over the counter allergy medication that are used in the manufacture of meth also known as ice.’

‘Have you come across this woman?’
Tan pushed across a mug shot of a young, white female holding a number to her chest.

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Tara was sitting in a silk dressing gown at Venetia's kitchen table lighting a cigarette with a black eye and a cut lip.

'Don't ask. Please it's the last thing I want is to draw attention to it.'

'But you could go to the police.'

'Yeah. And about how much sympathy do you think a 'lady of the night' gets from our boys in blue?'

'But you can't —.'

'I don't want to be a 'registered brothel worker' or any such crap — I'm only doing this to save up enough for a law degree. . .'

'But the police were here only today talking about a missing person.'

'Yeah, so?'

'Don't know it's just some spooky shit's been going down.'

'You want to be a real friend?'

She looked at me through watery eyes.

'Just go get me some peroxide.'
‘Peroxide?’

‘No, not for my hair – it’s a good disinfectant and it’s get this swelling down and get me ready for tonight?’

‘You’re working?’

‘We’re not all related to people who keep us propped up with cash.’

‘I can lend you —.’

‘I’m going to see my pimp stupid – I have to look the part in fact it’s the way we girls get workers comp. He’ll love the fact that I have a black eye and a cut lip, but I’m covering it up – dressed to kill.’

‘Have you heard of this woman? I pushed the mug shot towards her.’

‘You’re pushing it now. Ask a different question.’

There was a poster on the wall of the police station – it was covered in pictures of missing persons. Eventually I found the face of the person the policemen had spoken about earlier to me the one whose tiny picture I held in my hand. She had a nice smile. It was one of those where you see a lot of gum and you couldn’t imagine for a minute that she would be involved in anything dodgy.

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Mrs Meares door was ajar. Venetia was on her way down to collect her washing when she noticed it swinging freely. She was about to let it pass, then remembered the recent break-ins.
‘Hoo-roo? Anybody home?’ When there was no answer Venetia checked she had keys and phone before venturing further into the apartment.

‘Mrs Meares. I’m your neighbour Venetia. I just noticed the door was unlocked, thought I’d check on you.’

There was a peculiar smell. It was the usual mixture of animal, piss and cabbage, plus something else. She jumped back. She could see an orthopaedic shoe on the end of a leg extending into the passageway from the living room. She dialled the emergency number.

‘Ambulance. Oh, and police. It’s an emergency.’

Venetia hopped from one foot to the other. She stuck her head around the doorjamb and saw Mrs Meares lying on her back with blood emerging from behind her head. She didn’t dare go any further into the old woman’s space. She was clutching a framed photograph. She wanted to prop her head up, but knew she shouldn’t touch her or try to move her. Where was Dan when you needed him? She ran down to the front door and made sure it was unlocked, then propped it open with a set of spare phone books languishing to hand.

Looking up and down the street proved fruitless. There was nobody about. Even Con’s shop was shut.

Back up the stairs, and she forced herself to stay close to the body. Was even being there corrupting the crime scene, if it was a crime? Nothing else in the flat looked disturbed, though she’d only been in there that one time prior.

She mustn’t touch anything. But she couldn’t help but look. There seemed even more spoons and photographs than before. Every inch
of wall space was filled. And there were books she hadn't noticed last time. Books on hydrology, tides and wave theory, annual reports from Sydney Water going back years. In the kitchen dark red liquid in a beaker that stank. Some sort of science experiment.

The picture in the prone woman's arms was one she had noticed before. It was of a family gathering. Black and white, it had a group of mixed ages. The blokes had long hair and flares. The children were barefoot in shorts with bowl cut hair. The women wore glasses with Edna Everage peaks on the side. A guy at the back had the bloke's equivalent: glasses framed in thick dark rounded squares. Horn-rims? She didn't know, they just reminded her of 50s or 60s movies. Nerdy, but almost fashionable again. Hadn't her own mother uncharacteristically souvenired just such a pair?

'We'll need you to come down to the station to answer a few questions.'

The police officers were polite. The ambulance had asked for next of kin and she looked blank.

"'Mrs Meares is her name. And I believe she owns this house. I don't know anything else about her.'

How Venetia wished there was someone to call right now. Tara had become a ghost - she was nowhere. She had tried her flat several times and even, because someone somewhere had made a mistake and her key opened both doors - even Venetia had experimentally opened her door on a night when she was reasonably sure Tara would be out.

'I did this one, twice successfully,' Venetia had unwisely shared this confession with Josh one night. 'I knew where her hashish was kept.
Had a glass of her Morris of Rutherglen Tokay and browsed her records and books. The second time I had a comb through her wardrobe and even a try on of one of her skimpy stripperama outfits. I found myself curiously turned on.'

The third time she had knocked first – only lightly, no point waking the other residents especially old thunder thighs. No answer so, as before slid the key into the lock, the door began to open and though it was dark inside Venetia, the intruder was confronted with a roar – a male voice came barreling out of the bedroom and all she saw was the flash of a Chinese dressing gown as she backed out and quickly ran into her own apartment. Venetia was sure he’d seen who it was – or at least would have guessed that the intruder had flown up not down the stairs. But she heard footsteps track downstairs and out the front door – then a voice yelling

'Who is it? Who the fuck are you? Fucking coward!'

After a moment the door was slammed again and the footsteps lead back up the stairs to Tara’s.

'They were too quick – gone, fucking coward.'

Then Tara’s door shut too.

Venetia slid to the ground and held her door shut with her back trying to control her breathing. So close, so close. She must never do that again, she swore. And already she regretted some of the outfits she hadn't tried, and wondered if she’d left any traces, incriminating traces – fingerprints on the Tokay bottle, or the hash tin. One of Tara’s regulars was a cop, she’d told me. It was either Barry or Donald – one or the other – they would often come over together, but one of them was engaged. But not to Tara. The other guy was very sweet
on Tara and was trying to wean her off the game. Or so Tara said. But
Venetia had been wondering where she got all her jewellery from and
now she had to question exactly whose apartment she was minding in
Rushcutters Bay these past weeks …

There was a story in the papers about a millionaire developer who
had pulled down one of the stanchions in one of his properties
because there was, or he believed there was a cocaine haul plastered
into its core. Apparently he’d been duped and he simply wrecked a
month’s worth of building and made himself a target of the drug
squad in the process. But there had been a history of bad debts with a
concrete company of which Jack Burrell happened to be the major
shareholder. Venetia scrabbled through her newspaper recycling bin.
She was sure those units were in Rushcutters Bay. She could not find
the piece on the apartments, but what she did see was a small ad in
the personals: a father asking his daughter, reported missing on such
and such a date, or anyone who knew the whereabouts of his
daughter to contact him. ‘Words cannot express my remorse.’ The
father’s message rang out from the crumpled print.

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‘I am not honest about what really scares me.’

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She sat staring at her father’s death certificate. It’s ghostly
photocopied edges containing so little, and yet so much.

_Cause of death and duration: Broncopneumonia — 1 day;
cerebrovascular accident — 3 days._
At least the end had been short, but, ‘accident’? What exactly did that mean? That less than a week prior you could be mistaken for thinking he was ‘fine’, at least in the polite, uncomplaining sense. And yet he had been missing for half a century.

She could mentally walk down every byway, every lane on the way home from school. Every car that passed, every man of a certain age and stature — he was supposed to have been tall — were potential keys to fill in the gaps of her family’s history. And yet, here in her hands she held the incontrovertible evidence of both her father’s existence and his non-existence.

*Occupation – not any*

*Conjugal condition at date of Death — Married.*

At yet and yet. He had never been spoken of freely or openly. There had been occasions when her mother, presumably, thought about him. Possibly they even corresponded, or communicated through lawyers. Was his absence one reason for her mother’s almost pathological war against accumulating anything resembling a memento? And what was this place where he ended his days — a doss house? A home for sad, single gentlemen smelling of boiled cabbage and furniture polish? Or worse.

The certificate gave the name of the informant as one D. Hawkins, ‘Friend’ at the same address in East Burwood, Victoria. He was buried at Springvale Cemetery. Buried, not cremated as was the family’s convention – so there would actually be a grave with his name on it. Her mother would say it was all irrelevant. She would stare into space if the subject came up and turn the conversation back to recent history — breakfast, lunch, her weekly shopping expedition. Something. Anything. There were no stories to tell. There was no
memory, no secret past. There was only the present and we should simply get on with it.

What was wrong with Venetia that this approach didn’t leave her satisfied. It was impossible to live a life ‘no strings attached’. She had tried. But all she had achieved was a kind of ghosting of her silhouette. She was a mass of unconnected strings waiting to find a connection.

She put the death certificate back into its plastic sleeve but continued to look at it.

If deceased was married— (1) Where and .. .. (2) At what age and.. .. (3) To whom .. ..  All were answered Unknown, Unknown, Unknown.

And finally, Issue in order of birth, the names and ages .. .. Unknown.

This was Venetia. Unknown. On this register — this network of official papers she was a lacuna. A bureaucratic anomaly. Or perhaps, a commonplace.

She turned away and looked out the window.

‘Anything wrong?’ she could hear a co-worker asking her. Maybe yes, maybe no, she heard herself reply. I better get back to my research, she thought.

Who was this friend who had been the ‘informant’? The language of officialdom was risible. Venetia tried to picture a fellow inhabitant of a boarding house. Well meaning, but perhaps a bit shabby. Both down at heel concealing hip flasks of whiskey in their tweed jacket pockets.
She was in the middle of some theoretic piece of bumph that she would have to translate into plain English when the realisation hit. Of course his ‘friend’ was the woman he had left her mother for. And a wave of nausea overcame her so strong she had to pick up her things and make excuses to get out into the sunlight. Her mother's face - a sometimes beautiful but sad face - hung like a watermark across the blinding Sydney summer’s day. In a few moments Venetia’s emotional tidal wave passed and she kept her sandwich down. She hailed a cab and was at the State Library in minutes.

And then something else occurred to her. Initially she had felt sad for her father — the details of his personal life expunged from the record, the official record at least. Then she realised that this ‘friend' may have suppressed knowledge of her deceased partner's family - ie Venetia — that it could have been the ultimate revenge. And just as suddenly Venetia felt a surge of sympathy for the woman and curiosity about who she really was - apart from this anonymous death certificate informant. Where was she from, what was her story about. It was heresy pure and simple. One wasn't supposed to side with the baddies neither at the movies or in life. But somehow she always had - not ultimately. Obviously Venetia, like most audiences wanted the hero and heroine to be united, for love to triumph, for good to vanquish evil. But were we talking about evil here? Was there a place for life’s ‘losers’? Though of course by pursuing this line of thinking, ‘sympathy for the losers’, she was making it plain to anyone who cared enough to look, that she felt she was one of them. Not one of the shiny ones. And perhaps D. Hawkins was a loser too, a loser who had loved a loser.

What had started out as a search for her long lost father — the father beyond the snippets that Venetia's mother had allowed to slip over the years — now became a desire to also find this ‘other woman’. Find the woman that he eventually found comfort and happiness (?) with.
Really, she thought, I'm letting my imagination run away with me. Or was she? She looked again.

Under the words — Certified by — was the name D. Hawkins followed by the same address as my deceased father. Then on the last line spaced a good two to three centimetres from the full stop after Burwood came the word describing their relationship, standing isolated, almost as an after thought, or at least in a category answering to a question someone must have put. It said: Friend.

Friend.

The longer Venetia stared at the word the weirder it became. Capitalised and constituting a sentence, a statement and a category all on its own, the word seemed to mock the world of registrars and administrative clerks with its intimacy. ‘Spouse’ might have been the alternative, a word denoting ownership in all its legal ramifications; a fitting rejoinder to ‘What was the deceased's Conjugal Condition at date of Death?’ ‘Spouse’ was cool, even cold and redolent of duty, un-gendered and non-specific about domestic arrangements or feelings of attachment or otherwise.

This was silly. Ridiculous. What was she sitting here in the State Library café pondering on a mysterious person's identity and even their motivations. And it was person, because at this distance who could say whether her first assumption about a bloke who had made friends with Eliot at the boarding house or the pub hadn’t been correct. He’d have rocked up to the undertakers when they couldn’t find any trace of family and signed the paperwork, then picked up his felt hat and fingered the triangular part at the front of the crown, then headed back out a little more purposeless than usual, but only a little. He too no doubt had ‘Occupation — Not any.’
But even as Venetia swilled her leafless tea cup she could divine that, whether she would ever be able to prove it or not, the inferred story of a female companion, who had not been his wife or 'spouse', but who knew he was married to another was the more compelling. She knew he was married, but either did not know or chose not to dwell on or make public the name of this other woman — nor, speculate on the delicate matter of his notional issue. She was his friend. Euphemism or not, she had stood by him and was there at the end. The question mark applied between brackets like so (?) beside his death date on Venetia's mother's family tree spoke volumes about the disconnection, just as the word 'Friend' did here about its opposite.

How could one piece of official paperwork — an incomplete one at that — produce so many theories and open so many doors that could never be walked through? She was about to pay up and go, when yet another hypothetical door flew open.

What if they owned a house or something of the sort and Eliot's 'friend', since she had survived him, would inherit it, except if it were found that there was a wife and child surviving. Venetia and her mother were of necessity secrets — like those distant relatives who show up at inconvenient moments in 19th century novels like Jane Eyre. Imagine the days and weeks following the death, thought Venetia sitting spellbound. During the turgid last days when Eliot lay ill and incapacitated, they would have discussed the ‘arrangements’. Supposing they had agreed, given the length of time he had been absent from his wife's life, that his only obligation was to his ‘friend’, which was honourable, but created a potential legal obstacle unless they lied on the death certificate. Or perhaps his motivation wasn't honourable. He wanted to believe he had forgiven Venetia's mother for whatever had driven them apart, but deep down he was incapable of it. Just didn’t have the presence of mind or the skills. Or was too lazy to really think it through — rigidity being a value that is at least
consistent. But official lying doesn’t seem probable. Too risky. More realistically, Eliot had never given his friend any detail. Was so out of touch with his former family he could in all conscience not talk about their whereabouts, or their well being. He had been honest with her regarding the fact that he was married — helping her to realise why he couldn’t make ‘an honest woman out of her’. Basically he was trapped, couldn’t afford a divorce, who knows? But he hadn’t gone into details, had not told her names, dates, times so she would not be compromised when he was gone and could honestly answer Unknown, Unknown, Unknown.

And then he was gone. And there was probably the usual notice in the paper. And D. Hawkins sat at home day after day, night after night worrying when the knock on the door would arrive steeling herself for the confrontation, which never came. And she stayed in the house. And she played the widow, knowing there was another ‘official’ widow. And her grief just ate her away.

Ah, what a beautiful story. Not beautiful really, more sad. Everyday sad, suburban tragedy complete with villains and witches and sexual betrayal and revenge. And heartache and painful drawn out cancers, in Venetia’s mother’s case and sudden pulmonary distress and cerebrovascular accident in her father’s. And death. Just death.

Description— Where and when died .. .. South Melbourne.

Presumably a hospital. Was there a sudden collapse in the backyard or had he carried a cough through summer from a particularly cold previous winter? His friend had urged him to stop smoking, but his pipe was an extension of his arm and he’d lost the stomach for rich food or even alcohol beyond a wee dram of an evening.
Dead now. Her father. And presumably D. Hawkins too. And only what is written survives: the signature of the registrar on Mervyn Brian van Geyzel about the corpse from 34 Bettina Street. No 5323/68 D

Had this hole in the fabric of mother's life produced someone who rarely reminisced about her childhood, who combed her hair and brushed her teeth and decided what we would have for dinner and liked sad stories like Grimm’s fairytales and Oscar Wilde.

And what would have happened to the house?

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So Venetia was telling her story – blurting it out even - to anyone who would listen. ‘Poor little reticent ole me’. Not any more. She had tea with some of the people from the mag – there was a sense they’d all heard her plight and were sympathetic.

‘I read a Cleo story about women who just suddenly find themselves in bed with their female friend – just as en experiment, right? And then they’re really, really worried that they might have ‘turned’ – and it all goes ugly and they can’t talk to their friend about it and the more embarrassed they are the worse it becomes and their friend suddenly reckons they are gay and …’

‘So what happens then?’

‘I don’t know my colour was ready or something and I had to go to the basin.’

‘I couldn’t help overhearing you gals chinwag here, and I reckon it’s hot stuff all this gels popping into bed with other gels and should be
encouraged — these people need to be encouraged (waving wine glass in the air) — and we chaps should be allowed to watch. Paid entry of course. I mean admission — shit (there goes the wine)."

Three AM. Why is it always three AM when you wake in the middle of the night. Don’t carp at me, all right it’s not the middle, but it seems equidistant from the shores of waking nighttime and the morning. Sometimes the traffic takes a swell, roars awake and then it’s difficult not to lie there and listen to it. Venetia seems to always be awake then. That was when she heard Mrs Meares the first time, going on about her daughter. To the cumquat tree. That was when she realised she had been had so to speak. That Roland had betrayed her and she was only a heart beat away from murdering him.

How foolish, suckered, naïve, Hans Christian Anderson was she that she had really bought into his, ‘I’ve got to go to the States for my work — for my sanity.’ She is not sure now listening to the traffic on the overpass slowly growing in volume as the night sky fades to pale, not sure he actually said the last part but you get the picture.

These are the sorts of conversations Venetia has with herself at three AM. There are others. There is a stream of invective she can paddle up or down about, now that there was going to be no advance on the now non-existent ‘book deal’ on water (that’s right, a whole book about water) that Caroline forget to mention had been trashed through her relationship with one Jack Burrell. She was now in hiding. Perhaps, Venetia thinks, I should send her my power bill.

The sounds of an aeroplane overhead reminds her that she, Venetia Glass will be on one soon herself winging it to New York City to find Lola and have her last hurrah. And not in a festive sense. She envisages a show down — not Lola’s style at all, who is all slippery
postcard-style well and having a wonderful time. *What's your problem?*

‘I want her to say to my face that she used me and that she had been a cowardly blimp for walking out of me without closure.’ Venetia does not actually enunciate these words, but this is the net of it.

Some how at three AM you can believe these things about yourself that you are capable of confrontation on this scale, of writing that letter, of walking into that room.

Venetia was seriously in trouble about the Dumb Waiter though because a wall was going to be demolished on the ground floor to open up two apartments into one. It was possible that this would either unearth her writings — and whether this would be embarrassing or revelatory is hard to say. Or, perhaps it would bury them, her body of words, forever. Like a suffocated scream ... She could use up hours just imagining she could hear that stifled moan. But what could she do, she would have to admit she knew the existence of this passageway to the past — and that she had appropriated its contents and its knowledge if she came forward. And then there is the mailbox key. There is no number on it, but she has a suspicion that it belongs to Mrs Meares or did — and that the answer to her identity might lie in a small black box (like a flight recorder) at the Post Office — no forwarding address.

‘And where should I forward my own mail while I'm gone? And will I really change my name to Lola Danton, now I have her mother's birth certificate and can get a passport in her name ...’

Robyn said she was holding her stomach ‘as we speak’, it was giving her hell. Her voice down the line said she had been stuffing herself with all sorts of food throughout the day. When toast didn't appeal
anymore she switched to soup. When soup lost its appeal she turned to cereal. When cereal and porridge in various permutations began to wane she turned to gummy sweets – frogs, milk bottles and snakes.

Something clicked in Venetia’s brain — frogs and chocolate freckles. Yes, a woman who used to work part time in the library at the magazine would save up her daily calories so she could have lollies — a bowl of them — for lunch. It was an interesting take on dieting. She said she couldn’t resist eating some lollies at some point so she began substituting her lunch calorie allowance for lollies. Any way the reason she was suddenly pertinent was that she was a qualified research librarian — someone who actually knew their way around a database and could find things, who knew where to look.

The holy grail of Venetia’s searches at the state Library had been finding where her people were from and where Mrs Meares’ people were from. But really she realised she should have also cross-checked any connections with Lola. After all, it was Lola whose life would provide the most interesting detail.

‘But in the end it was really all about the fallacy of thinking we are really only one person.’ Venetia was trying hard to explain this to Thomas who was back in town for thirty-six hours and could care less. He was frying lamb chops and chopping coriander in Venetia’s kitchen and even though it was only eleven in the morning he was sipping on a glass of red wine (‘It’s midnight by my body clock.’)

‘For instance,’ Venetia persisted over the sizzles and snaps. ‘I pile books up on my desk, ones which are interesting me at that moment in time, and the having them all there in front of me is as if to say — there, keep these top of mind – except I can’t. There are too many of them and eventually they become swamped by many others and ultimately I could have the contents of my entire bookshelves in piles
on my desk — or, put them back on the bookshelves. I do not read books serially, however I cannot be a part of more than a dozen books at a time ...

‘You know something?’ Thomas leaned his elbows on the rose Laminex table top. He looked fetching in his sharp blue business shirt, though his eyes looked bleached and pinprick-pupil tired. Venetia didn’t enquire how he stayed awake for thirty six hours straight — and the ten hour flight shift after that. But his fingers agitated the stem of the wine glass and he flew around the small kitchen faster than a fiddler’s elbow.

‘So I put them back on the shelves,’ Venetia, seemingly equally wired, or almost. ‘Sometimes they will go into a sort of ‘recent top ten’ kind of catalogue. Except this ten are quickly over taken by the next ten and the ten after that and they become just a shelf of books without any particular cataloguing or systematic arrangement. And that’s when I loose the thread. That's when, what tied all these books together becomes obscure to me – or the 'me' I am at that particular point. And then it hits, maybe not immediately, possibly in a week or two. Maybe a month or a long time later I want one of the books that had been in one of these long-standing piles and I won’t be able to find it. I'll have a distant recollection that possibly this particular book had fallen out of favour – too simplistic, too predictable. Who knows? Somewhere I must, but the steely logic of filing and disposal I had on that particular day has somehow vanished, or become inaccessible to the person I am now. I am unable to put myself in that other person’s position. I can’t make the kind of connection, reach the same conclusions as that other me who decided where she would put the book. And hence it is lost. Until searching for it — standing with my head turned sideways to the shelves for hours I find something else which I haven’t read recently or at all and take that to my desk and apropos of nothing, start a new pile, a new shortlist. It's chronic.’
'Chronic's right. You know what, Hon. You think too much. I get that you’ve had it tough first with Roland being a shitty scumbag and then, what — you say you think you're a lesbo, but — what? Be a lesbo — except I wouldn't go the whole buzz cut thing on your face.’

Thomas means well. Thomas is your man if you are in town for thirty-six hours and want a good time. But this doesn’t help Venetia determine what she, Venetia should be doing, what her ‘story’ should be, nor how Venetia extricates herself from this drift.

‘I must go back to sleep. Three AM really is a very muddled time of day to be thinking too much. I got up at three. I always seem to be awake then. It’s as if I lead two lives, and in one I’m perpetually in the dark.’

‘Which one?’

‘Don’t look at your watch. I hate that, you know I hate that. Roland used to —’

‘Go back to bed. I've got people to meet. I'll call you later, let myself out.’

Mrs Meares was lying with a transparent mask held to her nose and mouth by a blue elastic band. The egg-shaped device clouded occasionally as she aspirated and a ticking sound came from somewhere behind her bed head.

There was a film of perspiration on her forehead and upper lip and the arms lying on the outside of the bedclothes were purplish-blue. There were livid bruises on her cheeks, neck and a large piece of
plaster across the bridge of her nose. I was holding a bunch of freesias when the nurse came in.

'Wakey, wakey, Mrs Meares, time to take your blood pressure. Excuse me,' she said moving around me towards the right side of the bed.

Mrs Meares eyelids fluttered open half way her hands pushed and flapped making it difficult for the nurse to attach the Velcro band around her arm and she squealed when a device like a large peg was placed over the tip of her index finger.

'Take that thing off me. I don't like it.'

'Is she all right? I can come back another time.' Venetia watched some black substance move down the tube taped to Mrs Meares nose.

'Now, now, dear. I have to see how much oxygen you've got in your system. Tisk. It's the seventies, I'll have to turn your oxygen up and don't pull the mask off.'

'It’s uncomfortable.' She was a child in a bag of graying skin.

'Behave yourself. You want to get out of here at some stage don’t you? Here, you’ve got a visitor.'

A pair of rheumy eyes followed the line of where the nurse's head had flicked as surely as if she'd drawn a line.

'I live upstairs Mrs Meares. I heard you weren't well and brought you some flowers.'

'You'll have to speak up, she’s half deaf and go closer, she can hardly see.'
‘You had a nasty fall they said. How are you now?’

‘She was up and about yesterday, I think she's exhausted herself. But she hasn't had a single visitor to date so thank god you're here.’

Venetia stood as close as she dared. She wasn’t sure now whether she wanted the old woman to recognize her.

‘Shall I find a vase for the flowers then?’ Venetia said after a moment’s silence.

She wandered off to find the nurse's station and as she reached it she saw a familiar figure striding up the corridor heading towards the room where she had just left the old lady.

Ducking her head back into the room to follow this familiar figure, Venetia saw him embrace Mrs Meares and put a box of biscuits at her bedside.

‘You’re not looking too bad you old coot. You gave me a scare. Now don’t you get too much of that happy gas in you – don’t want you blowing the cover. What’s this then? Oxygen mask? Looks a bit flimsy to me, maybe it might just fall off your face.’ And so saying he loosened the blue elastic and the mask fell forward onto Mrs Meares chest. He had a swift look around and then retreated from the room.

Venetia went back inside and placed the flowers in their vase back on the table, took a look at the packet of biscuits and then some alarm went off and doctors and nurses came charging into the bedside shouting and she retreated from the scene.

She wasn’t sure what she should do about what she had just witnessed. Was Dan somehow related to Esme? Or an enemy of sorts?
Why would he want to kill her — had he really tried to kill her? It had been difficult to really hear what he had said to her. His back had been to Venetia and his bulk had interfered with her vision of the patient. Perhaps she had pulled the mask off herself again. It didn’t look like a mercy killing and her gut told her it was possible. But then why bring biscuits to your victim and then leave them there to be discovered.

The papers were full of the near death of a crown witness in an embezzlement case who could not be named, but who remained on life support pending the trial.

Jack Burrell was headlines shaking hands with the Premier over a new deal on work place agreements. He and his wife Robyn were also in the sports pages grinning over a new filly born to their Randwick stables. And of course Robyn was given a Guernsey in the social pages as the patron of a new wing for the Children’s Hospital — in particular for children undergoing renal dialysis waiting a transplant. There were calls from the health reporter for families to be fingerprinted for donor matches ahead of the need in order to ‘speed the life saving process which enabled the living to thrive at a time of mourning.’ And there was a delicious sounding recipe for poached squid in its own ink.

The jack hammers started at a quarter to seven in the morning to dig up some ancient sewer pipes and lay the infrastructure for a modern water reticulation and sewer system which was part of a pilot instigated by our local member. And Venetia had three voice massages from the travel agent saying that unless she confirmed and paid for her ticket immediately she would lose the seat.

Meanwhile her own mother was back on her red velvet couch flipping through magazines as someone in pink gingham did her toenails. She
didn’t recognise Venetia when she looked up and simply asked the woman attending her nails to be softer. ‘You’re digging into the nail bed.’ She still had quite a remarkable vocabulary for someone with virtually no mind.

Venetia went home and stared through the window damp with the continual showers of autumn. And didn’t know what to say to Angus who was to appear at her front door step at any minute expecting them to go out to tea.

‘I couldn’t choose the weather, but I hope you like this place. It’s a bit of a favourite of mine.’

It was on the mezzanine level of a small, but elegant hotel Venetia had never laid eyes on in her many years as a Sydneysider. Potted palms and Victoriana gave it a vintage feel, but it was teamed with quite contemporary sandstone walls and vivid table settings.

‘I love it. Particularly the green tea cups!’

‘I proposed to my first wife here.’

‘I don’t know how to respond to that.’

‘Don’t worry, it isn’t jinxed. And frankly I like the place a lot more now that I don’t have to think of it as “our place”. It became an issue in the property settlement and I demanded that I keep this as my very own discovery and she could go and mope over tragic poetry books at the Feminist Bookshop café in Glebe.’

‘I see. You two seem to have had a uniquely civilised approach to dividing your worlds. Unlike Roland and I —’
'Why what’s the score with you two.?'

'Well we hardly see each other. He’s very involved with environmental issues. His new wife/girlfriend, I'm not sure if they’re married actually, is in the management of a conservation organization. Or its catering arm. They attend global sustainability summits and I guess in that sense we – he and I – don’t have a stamping ground anymore where we might cross swords, or paths.’

'Sounds like there are still some live issues there.’ Angus signaled the waitress and ordered tra for two.’

'There are and in fact I think I’d rather not talk about them, or him or any of the past.’

'That's a pity, because I would like to get to know you and I'm a bit of a history nut. Well, even that’s not quite accurate - I'm actually a forensic nutcase. No, I know I don’t have the hair for CSI, but I love unpicking people's lives and motivations.’

'Unpicking eh? You don’t knit by any chance?’

'No but my Mum, being a good equal opportunity and early proponent of equity and diversity taught me as well as my sisters to knit. The fact that I'd rather knit a story about a case is, well, is a fact - and probably means you won’t be getting many jumpers out of me.’

Venetia gazed at the menu sensing she was not actually on a date after all, but she waited as the sandwiches and patterned china arrived.

'Devonshire tea – with a twist?’ she read from the menu. ‘What’s the twist?’
‘They give you maple syrup instead of jam and cream cheese instead of cream Sounds odd maybe, but its great.’

‘You’re not a foodie by any chance? I’ll have one of those and Lapsang Souchong.’

‘The original. I love anything with food in it. But my problem is I can never decide when I'm confronted by a menu, so I usually just have whatever the other person is having. I'm admitting this up front because it used to drive my ex crazy – even drove a wedge between us.’ He piled cream cheese on the scone that threatened to dwarf his hand.

‘I can cope. Knowing this though, I might try and trick you into eating something really disgusting and then go into kitchen and change mine, leaving you stranded.’ There was scone flour on her upper lip.

‘Well now I know your strategy I'll be onto it,’ maple syrup ran down between his index and second finger and he caught it with his tongue. Some matrons in melon coloured suits shot him a glance.

‘And I'll go to the kitchen after you and find out what you've changed it to and change mine to that.’ He wiped his hands on the napkin he had tucked into his collar.

‘Then I could go to the kitchen again – sounds like we’d never get fat because we’d be walking rather than sitting to eat.’

‘Seriously, I'd like to get to know you and I would like to feel you could share with me stuff about your divorce or past relationship, because you know I've been there.

‘You’re sounding a bit …’
'Metrosexual?'

'Yeah, maybe. Also, perhaps a bit—'

'Pushy?'

'Do you always finish other people's sentences?'

'My second greatest fault according to Sandra.'

'Listen. Let’s drop the forensics for the moment — and before you tell me what your first greatest fault is and talk about what you're doing now and what you want to do in the future. If we can have a futurist breathing space, then I might feel comfortable digging up the past.'

'You can’t have a “first greatest” because the greatest would be the first. Also the Futurists were all about speed meaning they didn’t have breathing space.' He sat back smiling.

'So you're well read and a bit of a pedant.'

'A bit. I'm losing my touch. Ok. I'm going to New York on secondment for six months and I'd like you to come with me.'

'What! '

'Tell me that's a scream of excitement and not horror.'

'There's a bit of both. And the horror is that it would be so easy to say yes, without even thinking about it.'

'Then why wouldn't you?'
‘Because I hardly know you — ok’ Venetia held up her hand, ‘I know, that’s why we’re here. But well, on what sort of basis would I be coming?’

‘Look, I couldn’t quite this out the other day. I really, really like you and think we could be more than friends. But I’m gay. I thought you knew that. The failed marriage, the pug dog. The afternoon tea, the snakeskin boots.’

‘What do you mean more than friends?’

‘Just because I’m gay doesn’t mean I don’t want to have a special relationship with a woman — someone who understands me with whom I can be intimate — not physically — but emotionally. There’s just something about you that attracts me — I can’t think about my future without including you in it.’

‘So —’

‘So you could come to New York and stay in the same apartment? Obviously in separate bedrooms and do whatever you want to do — but I would have thought New York was an ideal place for a writer.’

‘You are seriously tempting me. Are you kidding? I can’t think of a better place for a writer. But what’s the catch?’

‘And I’d pay your airfare.’

‘But why?’

‘Because …’

‘There’s a catch isn’t there.’
'It depends. It depends whether you think being part of my family is a “catch”.'

'Family?'

'I'm bringing my five-year-old son.'

'So I'd be a sort of nanny.'

'Not all the time, but I'd hope …'

'And, I'm guessing, I'd make it easier for you professionally and maybe even free up you evenings so you could go cruising the East Village, or wherever people cruise these days.'

'I'm actually thinking something more integrated than that. I don’t have to hide my gayness at work any more - those days are gone. Divisions even need to prove they’ve complied with diversity rules and need gay detectives and officers on their teams. So I'm in demand. No, I sort of, and call me naïve, I sort of thought you were someone needing a family — or at least somewhere to belong, and I need a companion. Something I've never had — the gay scene can be incredibly bitchy and lonely. There are groups that become friends, but then rivalries come into it when people are attracted to the same person and then there’s no support and particularly when you have a child.' His arms ended up lying along his thighs, palms facing up.

'That’s a long speech. Where does Sandra fit into all of this?’ His eyes resembled a puppy dog. Venetia looked across at the matrons.

'She needs a break. She's found someone new and they want to get married and have a long sabbatical style honeymoon. She deserves it. I think they want to do the SAD thing — see Australia and die — or at
least he does, he’s much older than her. Anyway, she’s stuck with short school holidays for the next twelve years so we suggested enrolling Ben, that’s my son’s name by the way, I’ll show you a picture of him in a minute. So Ben’s quite young for his year and I suggested we hold him back from school for six months. He can attend a language school in New York — see I’m not thinking you would want to be a full time nanny or anything, but you could pick him up from school and take him to the movies when I’m working late and then we could take turns doing things in the evenings — or go out to do family friendly things — which apparently, in spite of what you think, New York is packed full of. And the best bit for you is you have your days free to explore New York and write and you’ve got a really supportive friend who, ok you don’t know me now, but I’m really very loyal.’

Venetia had lost her appetite somewhat. She wasn’t sure if she was relieved. She wasn’t really ready for a new romance, but it had seemed an interesting, even exciting possibility. On the other hand, a trip all expenses paid could be a really comfortable arrangement.

‘It’s sort of like an arranged marriage, without the marriage.’ She brought her gaze back to the Golden Retriever in front of her.

‘Yeah, sort of. Will you do it?’

‘When were you planning to leave? In three weeks. Oh, but you could take a month if you needed it. I’ve got to sort out the lease on the apartment and the school for Ben and there could be a bit of down time while I put it all together. You’ve hardly touched your Devonshire Tea.’

‘I’m not hungry any more, though it’s good. I think I’m too full of the possibilities. Talk about dropping a bombshell in my lap.’
‘You and me would make a really good team.’

Caroline, at the mag was put out. Dan was pleased, and kind of relieved, as if he’d put his hopes on something like this happening. Robyn was too busy to take my calls or answer my emails and anyway, I could still write for her from New York, in fact Venetia could become More magazine’s US correspondent. She began to draft a letter to the real estate agent and placed it on the table near the phone. She wasn’t sure how much notice she had to give – but thought four weeks was plenty. Though she would miss the place. This seemed like the whole world to her when she had moved in. And Mrs Meares’ antics had made it seem the epitome of an eerie; perfect for a writer seeking an alias under which to create. Victor up the road (she had ditched Coluzzi’s and found better coffee and less intrigue up the road at Victor’s), Con, now the magnate behind a hideous development excrescence no longer the proprietor of the corner store — Don and Alinta up at the cop shop. And Tara. How would she break it to Tara? Except a note was slid under Venetia’s door in the night saying Tara had absconded without paying her rent and any information about her whereabouts given to the police, or private detective agency, would attract a reward.

The hall table contained a business-sized envelope bearing the logo of one of the large legal practices. It contained a legal letter addressed to Venetia to the effect that Caroline, as representative of Centralex was within her rights to slap a writ on her for breaking her contract by not submitting The Water Book manuscript and would be requested to turn over all research and copyrights, blah, blah. This came with a hand written cover note from Caroline herself (or possibly Josh acting for Caroline — it was difficult to imagine the dominatrix ever picking up a pen for anything beyond signing a shareholders agreement and Josh had forged her signature so often it was probably difficult to tell who exactly did manage More) to the effect that, she (Caroline) was
expecting a happy occurrence soon and that, in the circumstances, she would release Venetia from her commitment (please sign the attached etc etc) and to please stay in touch because New York was supposed to have some darling children’s clothes shops. *And you might do some shopping for me, it’s the least you can do.* and *some people always landed on their feet* and *here she was holed up craving chocolate chip cookies and unable to fit into any of her clothes and therefore a social ‘parihya’* (she couldn’t spell it, but this is where Venetia felt Josh’s hand in the correspondence cookie jar because it would be just like him to keep reminding Caroline that the gossip columnists had it in for her).

Robyn eventually got back to her through Josh and confirmed some of her suspicions Josh had been promoted to Global Assistant Director, as Caroline had risen to the upper stratosphere as Vice President Asia Pacific and was only to be seen stepping out of limousines in Tokyo, Hong Kong and Shanghai (though she was always behind dark glasses and huge coats, newspaper or magazine held up to shield her from the glare of the paparazzi flashbulbs). She was dubbed one of the richest, most influential women in Asia and fairly soon after this there was a sharemarket scandal because sold all her Centralax shares options (only days before their price crash on Wall Street) and took over at the helm of the rival publishing firm. Meanwhile her portrait was removed from *More’s* reception in North Sydney. Heads rose from light boxes and desks as the sounds of the compactor tore through detritus to make way for a new magazine office fit-out.

Josh was speaking so fast on the phone that Venetia had to ground herself just to stop being blasted into atoms by the energetic charge of it.
‘Can’t make it a formal arrangement of course but you are welcome to submit story ideas through the agency. We haven’t a legal president for buying US copy from an Australian based in the States and I’d have to have a chin wag with Simon about what the union rates are for foreign correspondents and whether we could still pay you in Australian dollars, or there are other benefits that might accrue through just bolstering our relationships with the parent company. So I’ll get a formal decision from Robyn when she’s available and send you something in writing. In the meantime you really must keep me posted on what’s happening at barneys. I worked there one summer when I was straight out of uni. I’ll send you the name of my old boss, I want to keep a finger in the retail pie – it’s sizzling at the moment.’

Robyn was obviously back on the Rainer side of the equation. But Venetia was sure she would not be able to describe how she had been able to achieve it.

Dan kept Venetia at arms' length saying to just let him know if she needed anything. He’d been so grateful for her intervening in his mother's illness. Until the day before the day before her departure, when Venetia realised she hadn’t sent the notification to the Real Estate Agent. In spite of the relatively stable financial situation she was in she had baulked because she would have to pay a month’s rent to cover the time to find a new tenant — which they probably wouldn’t have any problem doing and they’d just pocket the surplus. My, my New York cynical already, thought Venetia as she dusted off her suitcase. Then a phone call came through and she agreed to meet someone at Hernandos for coffee. Hernandos! Venetia never had coffee at Hernandos.

‘What have you done with your hair?’
‘What haven’t you done? Byron is full of dreds. You almost feel bald if you haven’t got hair down to your knees. Well actually I’ve been up in Mullum and Nimbin.’

‘No wonder your eyes look red.’

‘Shit, do they?’ Tara took a bottle of Murine out of her bag and applied a few drops in each eye.

‘You know somebody’s got a warrant out for you.’

‘Oh, listen to who’s got the cop talk down pat now.’

‘Shut up, I’m serious. They can’t be after you for a measly few weeks’ rent.’

‘You are so naïve. You said yourself you were surprised at some of the company I used to keep.’

‘Jack?’

‘Shhh. Just forget anything and everything you know or have seen in that regard. Do you know anywhere I can hide out?’

‘Funny you should ask.’

Venetia told Tara her idea.

‘But how would I get my mail – I’d be discovered if they saw my name on the mail, in the hallway.’

‘I’ve got a mailbox. I found the key. It’s yours. Just pay the rent and don’t abscond, as they say. For the duration, you’re me.’
'But Mrs Meares?'

'She’s in a coma, or just about. They don’t think she’s going to pull through, and I think there may be reasons that some of her family – or their associates don’t want her to. Have you got any cigarettes?'

'You told me not to let you smoke.'

'Did I?' That was weeks, months ago.'

Tara shook her head and lit a cigarette, then held the packet aloft. 'Gee. I liked the old bat. Though I think she was as mean as — a real busy body.'

'Just keep your head down. And I'll be back in six months.'

'Or not. Your nails are atrocious.'

'If you do decide to leave, let me know, because I'll do the right thing with the real estate people then. But you can stay as long as you pay the rent. What do you mean atrocious?'

'What about the phone, gas, electricity.'

'I've had the phone cut off and there's only electricity — but that’s all included in the rent.'

'I don’t know what to say — thanks.'

'That's OK. I missed you when you went.'

'I missed you too. But you kind of kept to yourself. Are you really ok with this marriage of convenience?'
‘That’s what it’s called. Yeah, it’s worth a try. It’s worth a free trip to New York.’

‘Nothing’s free. Nothing. Remember that. And don’t forget to write.’

Venetia read in the paper that a row of terraces was under dispute — would it be torn down to make way for a new freeway extension or would the conservationists preserve a part of Sydney’s rich heritage?

She stored the boxes from the Dumb Waiter in a rented storage space (a different one, but it smelled the same) and posted a letter to herself in New York with the details of the security code and signatories. Dan’s solicitor was going to look after it if she decided to stay longer in New York. He was still be very friendly and helpful, said he would cover with the Estate Agents if anyone got suspicious. Meanwhile she started reading a few books about children and the care of.

The streetlight once again shone into the living room devoid of furniture, bar the futon bed and a few boxes which Tara alias Venetia could take care of.

Lola had responded to an email and said she would gladly meet for coffee once Venetia had settled in. Roland was busy on a whaling boat somewhere and through a crackling ship-to-shore line wished Venetia all the best and a promise to let her know if there were any reason they needed to stay in touch. Or something like that.

Robyn dropped a flyer into Venetia’s post office box about kidney donation with a note scrawled on it — *You can keep the key*…

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