CREATIVE WRITING COMPONENT:
BAD BOY BOOGIE — THE ADVENTURES OF BON SCOTT

DISSERTATION:
BON SCOTT AND THE BLUES LYRIC FORMULA

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ABSTRACT

Creative Component:
Bad Boy Boogie — The Adventures of Bon Scott

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Bad Boy Boogie — The Adventures of Bon Scott is a historical fiction on the life of Bon Scott. Scott was the original singer in the Australian band AC/DC. He was 33, in 1980, when he died. The novel intentionally blurs the boundaries between fact and fiction. By drawing on available literature and interviews with people who knew Scott, the novel develops a picture and chronology of his life. With this picture I distorted the chronology for dramatic effect. Some of the characters are based on real people, and some are fabricated. The objective is to bring Scott to life. The hope is that readers will get a sense of the context and circumstances that bought about his choices.

The intended style of the novel is the picaresque form. The rogue protagonist, Bon Scott, works his way through life moving from one injustice to another. Scott meets most challenges with wit and humour. He is barely able to hold his job and often flirts with the boundaries of criminality. When it appears the main character has finally achieved his goal, once again something or someone conspires to restrict his advance.

The novel is separated into six chapters, covering the most important periods in his life. The first chapter follows Scott’s juvenile delinquent phase. He is sentenced to nine months in detention and discovers his desire to be a rock and roll singer. Chapter two sees Scott in the pop group the Valentines. In chapter three Scott is in Adelaide-based band Fraternity. The chapter ends with Scott crashing a motorcycle and ending up in hospital. Chapter four follows Scott’s involvement in the early days of the band AC/DC. Chapter five traces AC/DC’s rise to success and concludes with the ejection of the bass player from the band. Chapter six details Scott’s health decline and simultaneous rise to the top of the music world.

Bon Scott and the Blues Lyric Formula examines the question of how Bon Scott employed the blues lyric formula in the music of AC/DC. My argument is that because of the apparent ease of Scott’s delivery, little scholarly attention has been paid to the quality of his lyrics.

To begin with, the dissertation aims to outline general theories in lyric formula literature and oral poetry studies. I draw on theorists such as Milman Parry, Albert Lord, David Evans and Michael Taft. To ground the dissertation historically, I give an outline of the social context and history that brought about the conditions for the creation of blues music. With this background I then describe and present the blues lyric formula as presented by Taft. Some objections to this model of the blues lyric formula are examined.
The dissertation moves to represent aspects of Scott’s life and examine how Scott was able to use the blues lyric formula. I attempt to show that because of Scott’s intimate musical knowledge, he was able to work within and build upon the blues lyric formula. Systematic comparisons between Taft’s twenty most common blues lyric formulas and Bon Scott’s lyric are undertaken. I conclude the dissertation by examining the importance of Scott’s work in relation to the blues lyric tradition. My conclusion is that Scott’s lyrics have a claim to the blues tradition both as a continuation of that tradition and a worthy addition in their own right.
For Bon Scott, life on ‘the road’ was a series of ongoing performances. The process of recording was also a performance with the band preferring to record ‘live’ with limited overdubs and sound effects. Scott carried with him notebooks within which he would jot lines and ideas for songs. These notes would remain in draft form until the band entered the studio, where the lyrics would be considered in relation to the music and then edited in relation to a concept that would suit the tune in question.

In the fiction part of this project I attempt to recreate the moments in time when Scott wrote the drafts of the songs which then become the compositions. I take it as a presupposition that Scott was so highly skilled and knowledgeable in his craft and that he was essentially composing and performing ‘in his head’. Put more clearly, Scott did not need the band to help draft the composition. The performance may well have taken place alone. Nevertheless it is misleading to suggest the performance is as complete and compelling without the expertise of the other members.

To recreate the ‘moment in time’ is a major element in historical fiction. It is also, as Lord argues, an integral part of oral poetry studies (Lord, 2000, 13). It could be argued historical fiction has a formula as much as the traditions of epic poetry or blues music. The concept of verisimilitude, or truthful similarities crosses the work of both fiction and non-fiction. To ‘truthfully’ and factually represent Scott’s life would take thirty-three years, the amount of time he lived.

In my research, I discovered that many of the resources on Scott’s life were unreliable. Many of the dominant myths were distortions of Scott’s character and often events were fabricated to support the view of that character. A peer-reviewed, academic biography of Scott’s life is a project yet to be undertaken.

By interviewing people who knew Scott, I soon learned that the majority of the quotes in authoritative texts were not word-for-word transcriptions of interviews but paraphrased sound bites recreated later. Many interviewees have become disgruntled with the manipulation of their memories. Journalists and writers were perpetuating the myths rather than critically analysing them. I do not present these inconsistencies as a sort of trial of process. Rather, the point is to suggest that my own processes will be, and are, flawed. My conclusion then, is that it is better to say the work is completely fictional.

I need always to start from the sources that are reliable, and these are the lyrics and letters we know to be the works of Scott. In the creative component of this thesis, I have taken these letters and lyrics and attempted to recreate the moments in time when they were written. Some of the letters in the novel are based on letters Scott wrote, and some are fictionalised. The lyrics in the novel are intended to be read as imagined drafts of the songs that would be published on the AC/DC albums. The dissertation aims to disclose the tradition to which those lyrics belong.

CONNECTIONS BETWEEN FICTION AND DISSERTATION
Statement of candidate contribution:

I certify that this thesis has been written by me, and reserve my rights as the author of this work. This thesis contains only sole-authored work, none of which has been published and/or prepared for publication under sole authorship.

I certify that all the sources of information and assistance used in the research for writing of this thesis have been properly acknowledged.

I certify that the work in this thesis has not been previously submitted, in whole or part for the requirements of any other degree.

James Quinton
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BAD BOY BOOGIE — THE ADVENTURES OF BON SCOTT

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I won’t tell you a story, tell you no lie
I was born to love til the day I die.

Bon Scott - *Bad Boy Boogie*
I blame school. All this sitting still and same old, over and over. Some old bastard’s version of hell for kids. As soon as the bell rings I run and go to the primary school where Dereck, my little brother, is picking his bag out of the pile on the verandah. We walk home over the bridge, stopping to watch the boats slip by and the ships get loaded.

“Anyone pick on your accent today?” I ask him, as he climbs on the white railing, his hair blown flat.

“No, Miss Sidebottom won’t let em.” He squints into the sun. Rods and lines flick back and forward beneath us. I’ve been in detention a few times for fighting with the other kids for the way I speak. Mum says to ignore them and come straight home. Where the two highways join I see ahead a few kids carrying sheets of tin, the good ones from the brewery bin. They’re heading for the big hill. There hasn’t been any rain for a few weeks so the grass will be fast. I send Dereck home and run to catch them.

Me and Darren, the stevedore’s kid, and his little brother Mark walk by the brick houses with lemon and olive trees out front. We’re all puffing by the time we get to the top, struggling with the tin in the wind, trying not to cut our hands. The park is a long rectangle that droops in one corner and lifts up at the other, like a raised bed sheet. You can belt all the way to the house fences at the bottom, but everyone normally rolls off on the flatter bit in the middle.

There are other kids here, from the other side of the river. One kid named Brian, an Aussie kid I’ve seen at school. An old lady sits in the sun watching us. The port towers trail off in the distance. A couple of magpies walk around, digging in the dirt.

“Race ya,” says Brian, flicking his chin up. “Us two against you three, first one to the fence.” I look at Darren and Mark. Mark is ready, Darren doesn’t look so sure.

“I’ll race you myself,” I say, grabbing the tin off Darren, putting it on the cusp of the hill. Mark doesn’t say anything. He jumps behind me and grabs my belly. We bump forward a little, my feet outside the tin. “Lie back and hold on tight,” I tell him. He doesn’t say anything, we move forward again, the drop scary.

Darren yells “on your marks, get set,” I pull the edges back, “go.” I see the ocean and the houses and then I’m facing the grass and the whirring in my ears gets louder. Mark grabs me tight, his cheek on my back. I nearly lose grip on the tin as we get to the lump and then the real steep bit starts. We’re beating them.

I yell to Mark to lean forward. The tin gets hot through my shorts. They gain on us but there’s not far to go, we’re gunna win. We start to veer right and they start to veer left. They’re gaining and they’re right on us but there’s no way to stop. They smash into us, the tin getting caught in the ground when I let go. I put my feet up and kick Brian in the back and he slams into the fence and Darren crashes into us.

Dust gets in our hair and teeth. I stand up and I’m about to ask Darren if he’s alright. I can
see grass burns all over the bottom of his back when someone hits me hard and slams me to the
ground. I’m in a head lock. I can’t breathe and then I’m ripped up and flung over and he gets up
and kicks me in the head.

“Whadya smash into us for you idiot?” he says.

“You smashed into us” I say, my ears burning, my back itchy, blood dribbling from my elbow.
My shirt is ripped.

“Race you again and see who won fair and square,” he says. We start walking up the hill.
Darren follows me and he smiles when I tell him he’ll be alright.

“Try and get me in a headlock again and you’re dead,” I say, bits of sand in my mouth.

“Kick me in the back again and I’ll flatten you.” We set up our racing sheets and immediately
he and the other kid hop on. Darren stands there scared.

“What’s ya mate, a sissy?” says Brian, half his face covered in dirt.

“Get on Darren, get on,” I say. As soon as I feel his arms around me, I’m off, I don’t wait.
They must have the same idea because by the time we hit the jump we’re neck and neck. I lean
forward and go flat out. I’m not stopping this time. The wooden fence is getting closer and we’re
winning. I look back and they’ve rolled off. Then the fence is on us I pull the sheet up but it’s too
late. Everything goes dark and we tumble and we hit the fence hard.

I get to my feet and Darren has landed between me and the fence and he’s lying there in a
heap and he’s bawling his eyes out and twisting on the ground, banging his legs into the fence
like he’s having a fit, making an awful sound. He gets up holding one arm with the other, his face
blood red tearing streaming and his chin all wrinkled. I try to help him but he starts running and
all these people are coming from their houses and I know he’s broken his arm and I know it’s my
fault and word gets around quick and I’m supposed to go straight home after school so I start
running toward the river up the hill by the water tower and then down through the paperbarks
into the black sand. I keep running along the shore in the cold shade the trees out over the water.
I keep running until I’m out of breath.

In the cave there are lolly wrappers and a pile of ashes where some big kids must have had a
fire. I can’t breathe properly and wish I had my puffer. Tiny black flies fill the holes in the cave
ceiling. Out the cave opening I see tree tops and yachts and fast moving clouds. I hear the clang
of factories and a few seagulls. By the time my breath slows enough for me to not hear it there’s
voices outside. I poke my head out and when I see it’s Brian I call for him to come up. You gotta
climb between two big rocks to get inside and I move over to let him in.

“You know him?” Brian asks.

‘Who?’

“The crying kid, dummy.”

“Not so much,” I say, “but I’ll get in trouble anyway.” He shifts forward onto his knees and
pulls out a small red tin from his pocket and pries it open with his dirty fingers.

“Tried this stuff before?” he asks, lighting a match. He brings the flame to the white tip and
begins drawing on and off. Flies stir overhead. The end grows brighter and brighter and he takes
a lung full and grabs the base with thumb and and forefinger and hands it to me like a pair of
cissors. I hesitate.

“Here,” he says, sounding distant. The paper feels strange, the stick wobbling in my fingers. I
take a draw and the other end fires up veins turning black. The feeling of acid exploding in my
throat like toxic confetti. I start coughing. I try to stop but can’t. He grabs my hand and takes
the joint back. Spit fills my mouth. I swallow. “You get used to it,” he says, sucking back on it
like he’s done it a thousand times before.

His dark eyes go glossy. His lips curl at either end as he half winces. He hands the joint back
and I have another go and cough violently again, the taste like dirt and vegetables and ash. Then
my hands and feet start tingling, then my arms and shoulders and then my head. A new feeling,
tingling all over making my legs light my scalp itchy.

“Give me the fucking thing” he says, so I hand it back and he says I Swanny Rivered it. But he
keeps sucking away and then I feel tickling on the outside of my arm and think it’s a spider or
something so I flick and twist and jump and bash my head on the rocks and Brian starts giggling.
I kick up dust and rub my head and hear more seagull noises.

“Thought it was a wasps, or a bee” I say, settling back.

“Waps, what’s a waps?”

“You know what I mean, there’s wasp nests all around here.”

“Yeah I can’t stand those wasp, sting my on my k-nee.” I look over at him and see him warm
and grinning, BUZZZZzzzzz the sound the zeds feel in my mouth, like small wooden blocks
falling on the floor. I buzz until I can buzz no more and run my sweaty palms over rocks.

“The sun’s almost gone,” he says, lying with his legs folded. “If I had a blanket I’d sleep here
tonight. Too many people at my place.” I see a tattoo under his shirt sleeve and ask him where
he got it.

“Got a mate in Vic Park, gives me a special price.” He shows me the snarling panther in grass.

“Did it hurt?”

“At the time, but only a little bit, like gettin bit by a bull ant.”

“My dad’s got a few tatts,” I add.

“Wanna get one with me?” He lights another match and holds the end until the flame goes
out and he doesn’t flinch from the burning. “We’ll find some money somewhere and drive to Vic
Park on Saturday. After we can go to Port Beach with my sister Betty, you’ll like her.”

“What? For the Johnny Young show?”

“Yeah, you know it?”

“I sing sometimes, in the breaks. But I wanna play drums.”

“Really?” He sits up all excited. “We’re starting a band, me and my mates, we’re called The
Spektors, after Phil Spector, but spelt with a k. Wanna join us?”

“Hell yeah man.” He gets up and walks out of the cave and I follow, keeping my head drooped.

“We’ll practise at my place on Petra St.”

“Okay.” He looks me in the eyes.

“If you’re worried about your parents seeing your red eyes go for a swim and say you opened
them underwater. Ever jumped off the cliffs stoned?”
“Never been stoned.”
“Oh you forget who you are. Better than sex.”
“Never had sex,” I say.
“What are ya? Some kind of poof.”
“No. I do naughty stuff all the time.”
“Oh yeah, like what.” We keep walking on the dirt tracks, the light getting less and less.
“I let grenades go in the river,” I say.
“Big deal, I rolled a boulder on railway tracks. Then when I flagged the train down, they gave me a reward.”
“You know about the fish heads in the swimming pool?” He shrugs his shoulders.
“You know the big white rich house near the water tower?” He asks, letting the branch of a tree fling in my face.
“Yeah.”
“I smashed all the windows.”
“You know the Weetbix factory?” I ask.
“Yep.”
“I blew the hole in the wall.”
“You never?” He flings his head.
“Police came to my house and questioned me and everything,” I say.

Brian leads me beneath peppermint smelling trees and we climb up white rocks with broken glass in the gaps. We pull up on tree branches worn smooth by hands. The ridge, like a small patch of the moon’s surface, is about ten yards above the water. We strip off and the fast wind makes our skin cold and the water lumpy.

Brian has another tattoo of a lion on his back. He throws his shirt on top of his little red tin, climbs up on a mound, outstretches his arms, bend his knees and jumps. My eyes follow his fall and he breaks the water with a clap, the water green to dark blue from the shore outward. He disappears in bubbles and emerges breaststroking as far as you can throw a rock away. YYYEEEEOOOOO he yells and the people in the dinghy nearby start watching.

I crawl to the edge, keeping my weight low, letting my hands do the work. I crouch low on top of the mound with both hands either side. “The more you think about it, the longer it takes” he yells. My heart starts going as I look out and don’t know if I can jump far enough to avoid the rocks. A gust of wind fills my mouth. There’s a patch of dirt big enough to slip on that I dig my toes in. I don’t put my arms out. I don’t fully stand I launch myself outwards my legs folded like a shield to the air I’m falling and falling faster, no control. I feel my insides move upward inside my skin. The air loud. Louder than the tin race. The water big, bigger.

Boosh, my feet and shins and bum crash through the surface and I don’t open my eyes my ears explode and my nose fills with water and I swim as fast as possible up to the top. I blow my nose clean and my hearing returns with a pop. My arms move in the bubbles that float upstream in the current. I lay back and clap water up and see the pink clouds thin and high and want some more joint.

Brian swims back and climbs up to the top. I see his head and he yells out “seeya tomorra
Bon’ and walks off tip toeing on the rocks. I feel scared all of a sudden and climb back and get dressed and begin the long walk home, singing to myself, the lights coming on around the bay, my stomach rumbling. I hold my shoes with two fingers and try to avoid rocks and sticks, losing my balance and knowing mum and dad are going to be real annoyed. The weed has worn off. Feeling has returned to my fingertips and I cup my breath in my hand and have a whiff.

Blue blue, blue suede shoes, you can do anything but lay off a my blue suede shoes. I use the shampoo bottle as a microphone, really in the groove, hitting the notes bouncing off the tiles. I wash my new tattoo, a pair of sparrows nesting in a love heart below my belly button. Well it’s a one for the money, two for the...

“Ron, Ron,” Mum sticks her head in the door, “dornt use aw th’ hot water.”

“Okay mum,” I say, spitting soapy water out my mouth.

“An sin’ loch yerself, ye might be Doris Day, but you’re nae Elvis Priestley.”

“Get out Mum.”

“Spoke tae yer teacher, she says yoo’ve nae bin at school.”

“I hate school.”

“Whit else ye gonnae dae?” I don’t answer, hoping she’ll go away. “Yoo’ve got th’ Empire Games thes Sunday don’t forgit. Ye Faither an’ yer brother ar comin’. Don’t ignair yer brothers, they hae every reit…”

“I wasn’t Mum, can you wait until I’m finished?”

“Don’t argue Ron. Ye can’t ignair them. Ye ne’er play wi’ them. We hardly see ye. We don’t ken whaurn ye ur. Thes Nicht Prowler is out thaur killin fowk, an’ we don’t ken whaurn ye ur. Th’ polis cam tae yer Faither’s wark an’ took fingerprints.”

“I’m not a bloody murderer Mum.”

“Ah ken, but Ah don’t loch th’ thooght ay ye gettin’ hurt.”

“Get out.” She closes the door. I dry off and go to make my way to my room. She grabs my arm.

“Yer grandparents ur comin’ suin.”

“You’ve told me a thousand times,” I shake out of her grip.

“They’ll be stayin’ in Dereck’s room. He’ll be sharin’ yr room.”

At the bottom of Harvest Road, there’s a market garden, a couple of factories and some mechanic’s shops with car yards. The footpaths are crushed limestone and they dirty my polished shoes. After crossing the highway I take goat trails over weedy lots. There’s a musty wool smell from the sheds that make me sneeze. I’ve just enough to buy a bottle of Stones but I have to find someone to buy it for me. I wait in the car park at the Railway Hotel and up creeps this massive orange light over the line of trees back way beyond the train bridge. Either a big plane or someones shifted the port over to the east.

Two women walking their dogs approach and agree to buy the bottle for me. I wait with one
of them on the street thinking of what to say looking up at the moon full and bursting like a blemished orange. The lady gives me the bottle in a brown paper bag and says to share it and they take the path back to the highway through the dunes. I stop on the tracks and take a swig of the sweet tang and see white sand stalking the petrol silo curves. Multicoloured lights emanate from the concrete surf club. I hear bibs and bobs of music, same songs Johnny Young always plays.

I try to kill my nervous energy with the Stone's ginger ale. I exhale and take another scull. Squeeze the bottle hard in my hand. There's the ocean between the buildings and the crash of waves and a brown panel van snakes between the sheoaks, its headlights on high beam blinding me. “Watcha looking at?” the guy in the passenger seat asks but I don't answer, I slide the bottle into my undies against my tattoo and go inside.

The walls are lined with green steel chairs and trellis tables. A couple of girls stand around chatting and pointing at people on the dance floor, a mass of limbs and hair flying. Up the back the band plays on a small platform under cellophane covered flood lights. A tap on my shoulder. Betty wearing tight jeans, high heels, a polka dot blouse knotted at the front. With her is a girl I've never seen before, her lips and cheeks red.

“You know Maria, don't ya?” We shake hands awkwardly. “She's the president of the Spektors fan club,” says Betty. Her blond hair covers the right side of her face, her skin soft and white. Her voice has an accent I've never heard before and she leans so I can hear her over the band.

“I hear you're the new drummer,” the warmth of her neck and the smell of vanilla. I get shy.

“We'll have to wait and see.”

“You gunna sing tonight Bonny?” asks Betty.

“Hope so. If Johnny lets me.”

“He won't have a choice, we'll make him, won't we Maria?” She smiles at me and then turns to the band.

“Where's Brian?” I ask.

“He's on his way. Jesus you boys are joined at the hip. C'mon, lets dance.” She pulls me along and I grab Maria's hand and the bottle in my pants hurts. I pull it out and take a swig, and offer it to the girls.

While we're dancing we start pointing to each other — you keep playin where you shouldn't be playin, and you keep thinkin' that you'll never get burnt — shaking our bums and wagging our fingers. We work our way to the middle as more people leave. The band is coming to the end of their first set. Up the front are more of Betty's friends jiving their hearts out. The song slows and fades and Johnny announces a break. Maria goes up on stage and up to the microphone and takes out a sheet of paper.

“Excuse me everybody,” she's short, and you can hardly see her even on stage. Everyone starts chatting and no one listens and she tries again.

“Shut up” yells Betty, but no one listens to her either. The crowd gets louder and no one takes any notice of her so I jump on stage and take her elbow gentle.

“Hey, hey, listen here, listen people. You lot up the back,” I say, squinting in the lights. One of them points to himself, “yeah, you and your mates can you listen in for a second?” The crowd goes quiet and Maria looks up at me and she's beautiful and her sheet of paper is shaking.
“The Spektors will be playing at the Kwinana town hall next Saturday starting at six p.m. Posters will be placed around town. Thank you.”

“Yeah and Bonny is the new drummer,” yells Betty and then her and her friends start chanting Bonny Bonny Bonny, clapping and jumping trying to get me to sing a song. Some of the band members return to their instruments and Johnny being a good sport comes back on and introduces me. I close my eyes and see Mum telling me to sing like myself and try not to sound like anyone else. She sings in the Scottish club. I can feel everyone watching me, some willing me to stuff up. The band already knows I like Blue Suede Shoes so they launch into that. As we reach the crescendo someone throws a bra on stage and I whip it over my shoulder like a tea towel and pull the microphone off the stand and let rip for the finale.

The song ends and the girls start chanting my name again, but the boys want a toilet break. I step off stage and rejoin the huddle. I feel a pinch on my bum and turn real quick and catch Maria.

“You’re really good. You’re a natural,” she says, pushing her bracelets up her arm.

“Feel like going for a walk?”

“No.”

“Come on, just along the beach a bit.”

“What for?”

“Just to get some fresh air.” Outside are some boys in blue I’ve seen around but they don’t see us and we walk through the car park and the gang in the panel van don’t see us either. After the soft sand of the path we walk along the water’s edge. Lines of seaweed follow the curve of the water that rides up and down the sand. The moon is high and full and the sand is the same colour as the moon. We struggle up the sand and I take my jacket off, pull the Stones bottle out, and we sit down.

“See the Rottnest lighthouse?” she asks, pointing to the horizon. I just want to kiss her. “We learnt in school you could walk to Rottnest not long ago.”

“When, last week?”

“No, silly, ten thousand years ago.”

“I got a tattoo,” I tell her.

“A tattoo, why on earth would you get a tattoo for?”

“Something to do, I guess. Wanna see it?” I stand up and undo my fly. I turn to face the moonlight.

“Did it hurt?”

“Yeah, like hell.”

“Can I touch?” Her cold slender finger traces the outline. I shiver and she giggles. I grab her hand and sit back down. I lean in to kiss her.

“I’ve never kissed anyone before,” she says.

“Neither have I.”

“Ha, sure Bon, I’ve heard about you.”

“What?”

“Things.” She turns away. Her armpits over her knees. She turns back and I peck her on the
cheek. My dick is bouncing around in my undone jeans. I move her hair out the way and kiss her neck, hairspray smell and warm skin. She pulls on my shirt with one hand and lightly tugs my hair. I hear her breathe. With my left hand I cup her boob and feel the wire in her bra. She grabs my hand.

“I’m not sure Bon,” her voice soft. A car engine roars behind us.

“Neither am I,” I say, laughing. She rests her forehead on mine and we brush noses. Breathing deep, my shoulders rise, and I feel nervous again. I unscrew the bottle cap and take a swig. She doesn’t have any.

“Maybe next time Bonnie.” She pushes her feet up, making a pyramid in the sand.

“You been to any of the clubs in the city?”

“Not yet. Our family has a farm near Bridgetown and we usually go away for the holidays, but I want to stay in town this time.”

“I’ll take you.” We get up and start walking back. In the car park is the panel van, some guy pissing and stumbling nearby. I grab Maria’s hand and start walking faster, the club about 100 yards away. Two of them follow us and we get closer but then one comes out of the club and starts walking our way. He’s not so big and stupid enough looking. We go to walk around him but he blocks our path, so we switch back and he obstructs us. I pull the old fake punch to the face whack em hard in the stomach trick and don’t look back and go inside as casual as can be. I find Betty as quick as I can. She’s dancing the twist with some geezer.

“Betty, Betty, where’s Brian?”

“I don’t know, he’s not here yet I don’t think.”

“Didn’t he say he was coming?”

“Yeah, he always does, doesn’t he? He was fixing his car when I left.” In the doorway I see one of the panel van kids pointing the cops our way.

“If you see him, tell him I’m looking for him.”

“What’s going on Bon?”

“No big deal, make sure Maria stays with you.” During the day you can get out through the dunny block but they lock it at night. The only other exit is out the deliveries door through the kiosk, but that’ll be locked too and old Rex will tell the boys in blue if I poke my head in. Only other option is to hide in the ladies for a while and sneak out when the band finishes.

I cover up my face with my hair and sneak in after a bunch of girls come out and go in a cubicle and lock the door. Everything is concrete except the bog roll holder and toilet and paint is coming away from the floor and the fluoro lights are covered in bugs. There’s tear drop shaped piles of wet sand leading to the drain pipes. The smell of seaweed is strong and makes me need to chuck a shit. About four or five girls enter and none of them use the loos, they chat away. I’m about half way done when all the chatter stops.

“Excuse me ladies. Everybody out.” One of the cops. I recognise his voice. Oh, you’ve got to be joking, it’s cuntsable Taylor, the one who questioned me about blowing a hole in the Weetbix factory. A thud on each door and creaking. “If there’s anyone in here don’t be alarmed it’s the police”. I’m in the end cubicle and I lift my feet up and I can see his black boots. He taps on the door.
“Everything alright in there?” I put on my best female voice, which isn’t hard for me.
“MMyes, I have an upset stomach.”
“‘That sure seems to be the case, miss.”
“Wont be too much longer.”
“You take your time, we’re looking for a boy by the name of Ron, or Bon. You seen him?”
“No.” I cough. “Never heard of him. What does he look like?”
“A real short ass. Brown wavy hair, big nose. Why don’t you open the door and I’ll help you. You feeling sick?” The perv, he opens the door and I’ll throttle him. Bet he helps out young girls all the time.
“I’m fine, nearly finished.”
“Alright Miss, you see him you come tell me.” He starts walking out. I wait a few minutes reading the scratches on the wall. *Elspeth is a slut. Wayne Smith has a big dick. Tanya was ere. C.S.L.S.C are shit.* With my pocket knife I add my own little poem.

A nod means yep  
Two shakes means not  
If my pants stick out  
She got what I got.

The band stops and this is a good time to sneak out. I wash my hands and make sure my hair looks good. I check my teeth and catch a patch of blue in the mirror and then there’s a caning feeling on my neck and cuntsable Taylor drags me into one of the cubicles. He grabs my collar and jams his fist into my throat.

“Bon-bloody-Scott. Thought I’d catch you in here you little weevil. I know you’ve been in the dunes with an underaged girl. I know you punched young Stewart in the car park. With every statement he slams me against the wall. “And what’s this?” he pulls the Stones bottle out, throws it in the toilet.

“We’ve crossed paths before, and I’ve got your number sonny. I know you blew the hole in the Weetties factory wall. I could tell you’re lying,” he says.

“Weetbix.”

“What?”

“It was the Weetbix factory, not Weeties, there’s no Weeties factory in Freo.” He doesn’t get it.

“Now I catch you in the ladies. One day when I catch you in the act I’m taking you to the station and you can sing to an empty cell, you catch my drift boy?”

“Well…”

“Don’t you get smart with me, boy. And don’t answer back.” His eyebrows ride and fall, one higher than the other. “You take this as your final warning. I catch you one more time, I’m going to haul your tiny little Scottish arse in, you got me?” I nod. His hairy ears glow red. I can see those dobbers in the panel van and how I’m going to pour sugar in their tank. He lets go. He tries to leave but realise the door opens inward and has to lean back into me so I lean back over the dunny and he gives me one more stare.
I straighten out my shirt, take a deep breath and weave through the crowds and go outside. I’m steaming.

The car park is full but there’s no one around. The roofs reflect the floodlight, with a touch of dew. Where did they all go? The panel van is gone. The cops are gone. My throat hurts from Taylor jamming his fist. I circle the lot a few times planning my revenge when I spot Brian’s station wagon. I check to see if he’s left his keys on top of the rear wheel but no luck. I use my pocket knife and force the driver’s door open and start the car. I leave the lights off until I get out onto the road and drive north. They’ll be at the Snake Pit and I’ll flatten them for good.

In the heath there’s no streetlights, just the odd house light. The road goes inland and follows the train line for a bit. I start to calm a little and wonder what I’m doing with Brian’s car, and without Brian. He’d love a bit of biff. I wind the window down and turn on the radio. Rabbits run into the bushes. I turn into a street lined with pine trees when the car starts spluttering and clunking and jerking against the accelerator. No petrol. The gauge doesn’t work but I tap the screen anyway. I pull over so the car’s half on the road, half off. The inside light is only just bright enough to shine in the back. I dig out a jerry can. Wrapped around the handle is a garden hose. No money, and all the stations are shut, so I’ll syphon some.

On a sandy verge is a Volkswagen beetle. I open the wobbly front bonnet unscrew the cap feed the hose in and start sucking until the sweet burning hits my tongue and then shove the end in the jerry can. I pull the hose above the liquid to hear how much has gone in. Over the rise an engine rumbles and moves up through the gears. The glow of headlights too bright to make out the kind of car. I close the bonnet and take cover behind the bulging mudguards. The car drives up and stops behind the beetle. A floodlight throws a shadow of the car onto the house. Out comes a Jack Russell yapping and yapping running to and fro. On the house, a shadow of a man. My hands grip the bumper. Time to run. I spring to go but trip on a leg and then I’m pulled up onto the bonnet of the car.

“I told you to stay out of trouble Ronald. I told you back in the toilets if I caught you one more time I was going to take you in. Didn’t I?” yells Taylor. The other cop shines his torch right in my eyes. The dog is yapping like crazy, setting off more dogs. Feels like everyone in the neighbourhood is coming to watch. “He’s a stupid little bastard this one” they say to each other.

“What you say his name was?” the other cop asks in an Irish accent.

“Ronald.”

“I recognise him. Burnside and I questioned him last, said his name was Warren.”

“Thinks he’s a smart arse. We got him for stealing petrol, lying to the police, and unlawful carnal knowledge.”

“Carnal knowledge?”

“Shut up” he says. “You can start by putting the petrol back in the tank and then you can spend the night with us at the station.” While I’m funnelling the petrol back they stand around daring me to run off. The dog doesn’t stop barking once. I look up at the moon.

The paddy wagon has two strips of dark blue vinyl padding running either side. The vinyl
is cracked and the inner foam lets out a dead smell when you sit, like a million rotting rats. I lay my head back and feel the car idling. Fumes fill the wagon. I close my eyes and see mum’s facing saying *told you so* when Taylor rips through a turn throwing me across the wagon, nearly breaking my wrist.

“Sorry Warren, forgot you were in there,” they laugh to one another, a pair of galahs.

First thing I smell when I wake up is bleach, piss, and men’s body odour. The metal framed bed has a thin mattress and blanket. I kick the blanket off and sit up. My shoes are gone, my jeans are ripped. My knuckles have scraps and scabs. The song on the radio travels thin and tinny through the station. The walls are brick and painted cream colour. High up, there’s a tight grilled screen inside a fibreglass window. A tiny slit to let in air. My ears burn, my ear drums ring.


“Brian, where am I?”
“Freo station.”
“Did you find your car?”
“Nah, where did you leave it?”
“In Swanbourne, near the tennis courts.”
“Did you get em Bon, you break em in half? I wish I was there. Why didn’t you come get me, couldea smashed them together.”
“Your car ran out of petrol.”
“If you had of got me, I could have told you that.”
“How’d you know I was in here?”
“Wild guess.”

Next door a toilet flushes. A clanging in the locks. Taylor enters with a cup of water and some porridge. He sits his fat arse on the bed next to me. *Morning Ronald*. Hairs poke out of his long nose. A forest of hair on top of his nose as well. Says I’ll be in here another hour and then off to magistrate’s court for a hearing. Pretends to be nice. Says his brother works with my dad. Everyone knows everyone around here. Whole town will know soon. Be in tomorrow’s paper. Then Taylor changes his tune. He says he’ll drop all the charges if I apologise and keep out of trouble. He says he sees ten kids like me come in each week. Says he loses his head from time to time. He warns me they’ve built a juvenile detention centre out in woop woop and they’re keen to fill it.

I tell him to stick it where the sun doesn’t shine. They can give me everything they’ve got. He lets me go and says I’m due at the magistrate’s court in an hour. Says if I don’t turn up, they’ll
double the punishment. Bright sunny day with no wind. Still early and the streets are quiet. I walk around by the parking lot, the department store, under the big figs, through the mall, the bakery smell, the coffee and towards the post office. After walking around like this for ages I finally get to where I think the court is but it isn’t. Turns out, it’s the town hall. I ask this man in a cape with a wig on, a judge or some type.

“Excuse me,” I ask, trying to be all polite, “do you know where the magistrate’s court is?” He’s smoking a fag and he’s walking so fast by the time I’ve finished asking he’s a few yards ahead of me.

“Magistrate’s court, hey old son?” He’s got a big nose and huge eye brows. His suit is black and he wears a black tie. He puts his fag in his lips, shifts his papers to one arm to free up his pointing arm. “See that street there? Well, that’s fucking High Street.” He’s mumbling a bit on account of his fag. “Ya fucking take that street all the way to the fucking railway line. Once you hit the railway line go through the railway station. On the other side of the station is the port. On the other side of the port, pass the fucking art gallery and straight ahead is the court. Can’t miss the cunt.” By now I’m smiling my face off. He’s talking so fast. He frowns at me and looks up the street the way he was heading before I stopped him. “You got that kiddo?” he asks, stamping out his fag, drawing attention to his fancy shoes.

“Got it” I say.

In the waiting room there’s about a hundred people, mainly drunk sailors and locals with black eyes. We sit on long wooden benches, like church benches, and every five minutes an officer calls out someone’s name. The ceiling is real high with beams visible. On the wall a coat of arms, a kangaroo and emu grazing. I wipe my sweaty palms on my dirty jeans. A cop goes in with most people. A couple of times just the cop goes in. I see a kid about my age come out, all sad. This makes my leg start jumping and I can’t sit still.

My name gets called and I get up and up go into a smaller room that doesn’t look like a court room, just a few tables and chairs and a bar that the magistrate sits behind, reading. In walks cuntsable Taylor all clean shaven and straight faced, acting like he’s never seen me before saying yes your honour this and that, licking brown and so forth. The magistrate says I have three minutes, and judging by my case (since I’m a juvi, they want to keep the system freed up), he’ll offer up an arrangement with Mum and Dad.

Next thing Taylor says his piece and he’s getting to the bit about the petrol, lying through his teeth, and in walks me old mate with the wig, the one who was swearing his face off on the street. He puts some papers on the magistrates desk and walks out. The sight of him makes me smile. Then the magistrate slams his hand on the bench.

“Do you find this amusing, Master Scott?”

“Oh, no, sorry, your honour.”

“Have you listened to a word I’ve said?”

“Yes.”

“How old was the girl you allegedly had unlawful carnal knowledge with on the night in
question?"

"Same age as all the other girls I’ve been with, I don’t ask them how old they are. I’m lucky if
they give me the time of day.” There’s a long silence as the magistrate reads through the papers.

“How do you plead to the charges Mr Scott?” I don’t care. What’s the worst they can do?

“Guilty.”

“As a juvenile I’m obliged by law to offer you to the custody of your parents. Although it’s
clear to me your parents don’t have the ability to control you. Where are his parents?” he asks the
woman at the desk. She says they’ve been informed and are on their way.

“Good,” the magistrate says, peering over his glasses. “Master Scott, you have a choice. You
either go home to your parents, attend school every day, or get a job. You will report to a parole
officer every week, and we track your progress. Or, you spend time in juvenile detention for the
crimes committed.”

“I’ll do the time,” I say.

“I’m not sure you realise the gravity of the situation you’re in, Master Scott.”

“I’ll do the time,” I say. My leg bouncing like a pogo stick.

“In that case, I sentence you to nine months in Riverbank detention centre, with the possibility
of weekend visits after three months. Next.” His gavel falls. I’m taken outside by one of the
orderlies. I don’t look at Taylor.

Mum is in the waiting room. She’s carrying on saying oh Ron. When I tell I her got nine
months she bursts out in tears. Then she catches herself and wipes her eyes with a handkerchief.
The orderly says I can wait an hour for an escort or Mum can drive me. I don’t have a choice.
We jump in the Mini and pull out from behind a trolleybus and go uphill where you can look
out over the railway tracks to the ocean and Rottnest. The wind bashes our car. Mum stutters
up the gears, tucking her hair behind her ear, gripping the knob, blues veins in her white hands.
Her blonde hair whips about behind her. I want to wrap my hand over hers and change gears
together, like we used to.

We get clear of Stirling Highway and get a run on, the brown river to our right, green cliffs
to our left. A pelican rocks in ferry waves. People fishing. I wind the window down. Mum looks
at me, serious, disappointed. I turn the radio on. Mum turns it up and starts singing. She has
a good voice and knows all the words. She sings with the Scottish club every week. She always
jokes about how she’s going on tour with them, how Dad and us boys will have to look after
ourselves. We follow the river for about an hour, crisscrossing bridges, going right up to a part
I’ve never been before, real pretty bits you could camp and play in. Mum has to pull over to
check the road book. We don’t speak.

Up a gravel road with vineyards all around, a dog chasing us and barking comes to a stop at
the end of a fence. We approach a big iron gate and tall wire fences with barbed wire across the
top. Everything looks like a farm, boys in blue overalls work in a vegie patch. We park between
some gum trees. Mum sighs. To our left the big prison, inside a second set of fences, taller. We go
into the red brick office building, and I have to say goodbye to Mum here and she starts crying
and that makes me cry too. “Come haem tae me mah bonnie loon” she says, “come haem tae me”. She leaves.

There’s a door next to the front counter, and I sign in and enter and to my surprise the people are friendly and I start to feel relieved. The fighting is over. A doctor checks me out and they give me a haircut and make me take a shower, and give me some overalls. They ask if I know anyone here and I say no. My cell is about three quarters the way down a long dark corridor. The walls are solid, there are no bars. Inside there are two beds, and someone’s things are scattered all about. There’s a fold up wooden table and wooden book shelves. There’s a metal toilet, a basin and a towel rack.

A big guard comes along, throws some boots on the ground, grunts for me to put them on. He waits in the doorway. I say hello, but he doesn’t reply. I look up and he says not to look at him. Boots on, he marches me to the sign in desk in the corner of the courtyard. This is where our movements are monitored. If you’re in metalwork class and want to chuck a piss, you have to sign in first, and get a toilet pass. After the toilet, you sign out and go back to where you were. No pass, no privileges.

The guard shoves me in the back and takes me out to the vegie patch and I pick up a shovel and start digging. There’s about twenty of us. No one is talking. Pretty soon I have my overalls tied around my waist like everyone else. They makes us pick all the worms off the leaves and throw them in a bucket. My back is sore. Silence. No singing, no talking. Songs going round and round inside my head. Crows in the trees and hopping about the place, picking at the grass. One kid, Norman, who is my cell-mate, watches the crows carefully.

Everyday at 6:42am and 9:25pm an airplane crosses our cell window. You can hear other planes during the day, but these you can see. White toys on blue, with a red tail. The window is four hands wide and four hands high. The bars are oval shaped, welded at the tips. On the outside is a grille. Over the grille a fly wire full of holes. The holes let the mosquitoes in, but not out. In the evening they start their buzzing. In the morning I wake up and my feet and face are pocked with bites. Norman says rubbing urine on them stops the itching.

At night we slap ourselves silly killing mozzies. One night we caught over a hundred. To catch them in the dark the trick is to cover your whole body with a blanket, and leave a little opening over your mouth. Norman reckons they’re attracted to your breathe. When they’re above your face you clap em dead. We catch them until we fall asleep. When I wake up my bed and the ground is covered in little black spots. I pick up a few and pull them apart. Snap their bodies in half. Let the blood ooze out. We brush them up into a pile.

Lights out at nine and then the 9:25 plane. You can hear the engines revving up before take off. I hear songs in the build up. A loud rock band shaking your bones. Taking away your blues. Norman is quiet. He’s tall and wiry. He avoids eye contact when you speak to him. We share comic strips and talk about them after.

Nine full moons. Nine full moons and I’m free. Most others have a calendar they cross off everyday. I have an outline of nine moons drawn on the wall. I draw in each phase of the
moon, filling it up every few days. Norman says the moons look beautiful. I ask him what he knows about beauty. He says I better watch it or he’ll pick out the beauty on my face and put it elsewhere. He’s quick. His cheeks bunch up, as if someone stuck some golf balls in his mouth. Next thing we’re wrestling on the floor with the dead mozzies and stinking boots. He’s stronger than me even though he’s more wiry. He says when the Southern Cross is on the horizon it’s time to go hunting for emu eggs. He says he and his brothers used to live in the bush. They used to chop off all the saplings after the bulldozers took out the trees with a chain between them.

Six times a day you hear the bell go off over at Govo, the high school across the river. Then you hear the screaming and laughing and flirting. I imagine I can fly out the window and play with the girls. I need love real bad. Man, you don’t even have to do anything with the girls but be in their company, smell their hair.

Same river leads back to my house. Same river they let us swim in once when the weather got real hot. Swinging upside down on a rope tried to a branch. Reckon I could swim home in a few hours. Norman says to swim to north Freo would take two days. Have to sleep under bridges and steal food. Maybe I will when they let me out. Run across the paddock and dive in and swim back. Feel the cool water. Find parts of the river no one has seen before. Other side of the Narrows I know pretty well, where the water turns from brown to blue. Swim to Pelican Point, then to Point Walter, then I’m home, dripping wet on Mum’s door step.

Dear Bon,

Thank you for your letter. Was nice to hear from you. Mum and Dad and me have been in Bridgetown for Christmas. I love my yellow teddy, thank you. I am moving to Melbourne as soon as possible. Hate this stupid place.

Hear from you soon,
Maria.

HI MARIA,

PLEASE WRITE MORE AS I REALLY LIKE TO HEAR FROM YOU.

DON’T WORRY ABOUT UPSETTING ME BY TALKING ABOUT WHAT’S GOING ON OUTSIDE. IN HERE YOU HAVE TO ENJOY THE LITTLE THINGS. I HAVE LEARNED TO SHAVE. I SHAVE ONE SIDE AT A TIME, A RITUAL I GO THROUGH. ONCE A WEEK THIS OLD DUCK COMES IN TO READ POETRY TO US. WAS EITHER THAT OR SIT IN MY CELL. SHE READ THE RHYME OF THE ANCIENT MARINER. YOU READ IT? ALL THEIR FACES CRACKED AND THE OLD
MAN LEFT ALONE ON THE SHIP ONE DAY SHE GOT US TO WRITE OUR OWN STUFF. HERE’S WHAT I WROTE:

LET ME IN YOUR HOUSE
WHEN YOUR PARENTS ARE ASLEEP
I’M NOT YOUR LOVER
LET ME SHOW YOU MY LOVE

I’VE BEEN BAD FOR MOST OF MY LIFE
YOU’LL SEE MY FACE BELOW THE BRIDGE
LET MY INTO YOUR HOUSE
LET ME SHOW YOU MY LOVE

LET ME SHOW YOU MY LOVE
LET ME SHOW YOU THE SCENE
LET ME SHOW YOU MY LOVE
LIKE IT’S A NIGHTMARE OR A DREAM

WHAT DO YOU THINK? ONE THING I DID LEARN IS THAT MY WRITING ALWAYS COMES OUT LIKE SONG LYRICS. I CAN’T SEPARATE THE MUSIC FROM THE WORDS. LAST WEEK THE OLD DUCK READ US SOME POEMS BY A GUY NAMED ELIOT. I COULDN’T HEAR THE MUSIC. THE IMAGERY WAS GOOD BUT NO MUSIC. SHE SAYS I HAVE A TALENT FOR MUSIC AND LYRICS.

ONE MINUTE I FEEL ON TOP OF THE WORLD EVERY WORD COMING OUT EASY, AND THEN THE NEXT MINUTE I’M SO LONELY AND MISS EVERYONE AND I WANT TO KNOW WHAT ALL THIS MESS IS ABOUT.

TAKE CARE MARIA,

BON.

Friday, Norman and my turn to scrub the toilet block. The big guard we call Monkey waits for us after breakfast. We get given a bucket each, with a brush, a squirt of bleach and some hot water. The block has concrete floors and green tiled walls. There’s steel basins and tiled showers. A gully runs between the showers. A piss trough and five shitters. There’s a locked cupboard with soap and towels. Signs everywhere telling you what to do. *Throw your discarded soap in the bins please.*

We start one end and work our way to the other. We’re on our hands and knees and I can hardly breathe. Monkey doesn’t let us chat. I don’t know what he looks like but I bet he’s ugly.
All I see are his black boots. We've been scrubbing for about an hour, half the job done. I look up and ask for a glass of water.

"Drink the water in the bucket," says Monkey. I stand up and stretch my back and go to drink from the basin tap and get a head-spin. A tingling in my hands and feet. Monkey puts his hand on my shoulder and forces me to the ground and I try to start scrubbing, my hand shaking and I tell Norman I'm going to have an asthma attack and Norman tells Monkey I need my puffer real quick.

"I not stupid," he says, "you play trick to get out of work, you finish the scrub, you have your puffer." He kicks the bucket and dirty water flops on the floor and he says "hurry up or I make you fight each other". I can't get any air in. I try to cough but take a mouthful of bleach fumes and feel sick. I try to talk but can't. I go to stand to walk outside but Monkey pushes me to the wet floor and Norman yells, "he's going to pass out, can't you hear him wheezing?" The green tiles blur. Norman runs and screams for help and Monkey chases after him and I'm breathing though a tiny straw that's shrinking. I close my eyes.

I wake on the grass with the sun in my face. A breathing device in my mouth. On a stretcher they take me to the nurse's station. They ask if I want to ring my mother but I say no, take me to my cell. Taking a suck of my puffer every so often I read through all my letters and postcards. I get to thinking everyone sounds so sad and bored on the outside. Maybe they don't want to make it sound like they're having too much fun cause they don't want to make me sad, but I couldn't get much sadder.

Pull the pillow over my head and get so sad and angry and feel like I have no control and hate Monkey and how he has control and Norman and I have none. I punch and kick the bed and pillow. Norman comes in says I better slow down or have another asthma attack. He lays crossways on the bed with his feet up on the wall. He's quiet and still and reads a comic. He giggles very now and then.

"A horse walks into a bar," he says, scratching his face, "barman says, why the long face?" He looks at me upside down.

"Not now Norman, I'm not in the mood."

"You cry enough to water a camel. You given up huh?" You wanna hide under that blanket forever? I don't answer. A couple of minutes later he does a fart. "You know they say jail changes a man?" his voice is getting all excited.

"Oh yeah," I say.

"Yeah, I used to be white." His feet start pattering on the wall. His calf muscles wobble, the room fills with his laughter.

"I'm gunna get him," I say. He pushes his feet off the wall and we square off. "One day I'm gunna get that Monkey bastard, get him good," my shoulders and lips tense.

"Oh you the man, hey Ronald? Big king dick. Bet you got it all figured out. Only thing you got figured is out is how to be miserable. I tell you what. You're not going to nothing. You're never going to win. Like punching a wall of sand those fellas."

"Oh yeah, what makes you the expert?"
“Sixteen years they give me. I’ll be thirty when I’m out. I stabbed one of em.”
“Jesus Christ Norman, what happened?”
“Off season, they’s picking on my dad, in Toohey’s Gardens, you know it?” His eye brows pokes out, creases in his forehead, a lump between his eyes bolted with blood.
“No.”
“Don’t matter. You’re not gunna stay stuck in here. No you gotta jump for one of those planes and shoot for the sky, unna?”
“Hey?”
“Understand?”
“What about you?”
“What about me?”
“What are you gunna do?”
“There’s a Nyoongar trick I’m trying to learn. Turn into a crow and fly off.” He holds his palm out and slowly brings it to my face. I go with him. Some kind of ritual. Gets to be his right hand in my face and I can smell the bleach, see the lines in his palm. Then he slaps me real hard on the forehead and jumps back on his bed and starts laughing.
“What’d you do that for?”
“Mozzie,” he says and shows me the blood on his fingers.

“How long you got left in here Bon?”
“Two months?”
“What are you gunna do when you get out?”
“Join a band.”
“Oh yeah, you gunna rule the world, like Elvis, or the Beatles?”
“Maybe not Elvis, more like Chuck Berry, the master.”
“Go on then Chuck, sing us a number.”
“What? Now?”
“You not gunna sing now, when are you gunna sing?” Then he starts singing.

Everyday it’s getting closer
Goin faster than a roller coaster
Love like yours will surely come my way
A hey, hey, hey.

I know it’s Buddy Holly and join in.

Everyday it’s getting faster
Everyone says go ahead and ask her
Love like yours will surely come my way
A hey, hey, hey.
I open my eyes. He's sitting cross legged, clapping, bouncing on the mattress. His big tongue slipping about. From the next cell they're yelling “eh you two lover birds, give it a rest, you sing like dying dingoes”.

“It’s hard without instruments,” I say.

“Gotta listen for your own rhythm,” he says, his voice a little dry. I stand up and start dancing. My stomach expands and contracts. I clench my toes and focus on the sound. I close my eyes and see the crowd at the Port Beach stomp, all their faces. I make words up.

Mum and dad were out at work
My brothers were out at school
They left me home alone
Singing and playing the fool

When I open my eyes I’m not facing the way I thought I’d be. Norman is lying on his bed, blanket pulled up. His eye lids squint, his lashes all clustered. I lie down as well. The lights go out.

“Got that footy match in the afternoon,” he says. He’s a gun player. “You gunna play this time?”

“Alright,” I say, “you boys need a win.”
I get up and chuck a shit. Earliest bird gets the freshest air. The valve is broken in the cistern, and water drips onto the back of the bowl, making a brown line. Everyone is still in bed, except Darc, who's gone to get the paper, milk and bread. There's no stopping the bastard. I stare at the back of the door.

When I arrived at Maria's her parents were starting lunch. Through the sliding door I could see the table set, some of the nosh spread out. I knocked on the door and Maria answered and she gave me a big hug. As soon as her father saw me he left the dining room and went and sat in the lounge room. He was banging on the T.V. trying to make it work. He had no chin and his hair was combed. Maria had warned me he was strict. Her mother had to take his lunch into him. We ate. I tried to be as polite as possible and thanked Maria's Mum for the food. Eventually he gave up and turned the T.V. off and sat by himself. I grabbed two beers from the fridge and offered him one.

“How are you, Mister Van Dyke?” I said, leaning on the door frame.

“Good” he said, moving back in his seat.

“My dad tells me you're keeping well.”

“Mm”

“Would you like a beer, Mister Van Dyke?”

“No.”

Gabby starts banging on the door telling me to hurry up.

DEAR MARIA,

HOW ARE YOU TWEETY? HOW IS PERTH? STILL WINDY? ARE YOU COMING TO MELBOURNE SOON? SORRY ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED WITH JOHN FARNHAM THAT NIGHT. I GOT CARRIED AWAY AND DRANK TOO MUCH, AS USUAL. NOT MUCH I CAN SAY ABOUT THAT OTHER THAN I'M A FUCK UP.

SCORED THIS FLAT ON DALGETY ST IN ST. KILDA. IT'S GOOD OTHER THAN THE ROOF LEAKS, THE CATS PISS EVERYWHERE AND THE JUNKIES ON EVERY CORNER.

LAST WEEK WE DID A COCA-COLA COMMERCIAL AND TWO WEEKS BEFORE THAT WE DROVE UP TO SYDNEY, NEWCASTLE AND BRISBANE. SLEEPING ON MATTRESSES ON TOP OF THE GEAR IN THE VAN.
ANYWAY THE REASON WHY I AM WRITING IS BECAUSE I THINK WE SHOULD START SEEING OTHER PEOPLE, DON'T YOU? WE HAD A GOOD HOT GO, BUT WE DON'T SEEM TO BE ABLE TO GET IT TOGETHER. ON THE PHONE YOU SAID YOU DIDN'T TRUST ME. I HAVEN'T BEEN WITH ANYONE ELSE FOR AGES. I MISS OUR DAYS IN EAST FREO WHEN IT WAS ONLY ME AND YOU AND THE RADIO AND OUR TOASTED EGG SANDWICHES.

HOPE YOU GET THIS BEFORE YOU BOOK YOUR TICKET. I'M GOING TO BE AWAY THAT WEEKEND.

LOTS OF LOVE,
BON.

On the outside of the envelope I write a message to her father: OPEN THIS AND I'LL PUNCH YOUR LIGHTS OUT.

I put the kettle on. Soon after, Gabby walks in, dressed for work.
“Morning Bon,” she says, starting to make eggs.
“What are you guys doing today?”
“Same thing we do every day, rehearsing then playing tonight.”
“That’s not what I meant, smartypants.” There are yawns and groans from the lounge room.

Egg whites flap in the pan. Seven of us in this two bedroom flat. There’s Darc, our roadie. Gabby, his girlfriend. Wyn, our guitarist. Ted, the bass player, and Paddy on drums. Lastly, there’s Vince, the other singer. He stayed somewhere else last night. Every morning we pack the mattresses away and practice. Darc walks in looking like someone kicked him in the balls, his eyes all watery. He’s wearing white sand shoes, jeans and a blue sports jacket. He throws the shopping on the floor.

“Darc, what’s the matter?” asks Gabby.
“My number’s up,” he says. He’s a little fella, smaller than me.
“Your what?”
“Twelve, number twelve. I’ve got the call up,” he says.
“Show me,” Gabby grabs the letter out of his hand. I pull a chair out for him. In my mind I see Dad and me in the Mini. The Swanbourne barracks. Two rows of fibro buildings, stained with bore water. An army office.

“This is bullshit,” Gabby says, snapping me out of my daydream. Her neck extends.
“You can get out of it mate,” I tell him.
“How?”
“Fail the test,” says Gabby.
“Be useless,” I say.
“He’s already an expert at that Bon,” says Gab. Darc and I don't laugh.
“I’m serious,” I say. I had a test in Perth about three years ago, after Riverbank. My parole officer made me. All you have to do is fake a permanent injury, or pretend to be a homo.”

“Fair dinkum?” Darc looks at me hopeful.

“They said I was socially maladjusted.”

“They were right about that,” says Darc, smiling, a gap in his two front teeth, “I could go to jail.” He’s slumped in his chair, as if he’s about to fall off it. Gabby has to go to work. She kisses him on the forehead, grabs her bag, and goes. I take out the mull tin from the second drawer and hand it to Darc and start making tea and eggs for the both of us. He re-reads the letter.

“Fuck em’,” he says, grimacing, crow’s feet around his eyes. “I’ll go bush. Stupid fucking war. These pricks at the top never get sick of it. If people come and invade us, we’ll just drop our things and go, but to be plucking guys who are twenty years old, in the prime of their lives.” He waves his fork around.

“It’s been good knowing ya,” I say, taking a toke.

“You cheeky bastard.” There’s a knock at the door. Probably Vicki, our next door neighbour. She’s a bit loopy, and from Adelaide. The groupies aren’t due for another few hours. “You making cookies?” he asks.

“You burned them last time,” I say.

“Still got us stoned.” I pull the dough out of the fridge. More knocking at the door.

“Answer the door, Bon,” he says, sucking on the roach.

“You answer the door. Why should I answer the door?”

“I got the ballot, mate. I’m off to Nui Dat. They’re gunna blow me away.” He sticks out his lower lip. Ted and Wyn and Paddy are awake, lying in their blankets. Bloke smell. I push the curtain with the back of my hand. A brunette wearing glasses and freckles fidgets at the door. Wet footmarks on the concrete path. Under her arm two long plastic tubes.

“I’m an arts student at Melbourne uni,” she says, “do you want to buy one of my paintings?”

“We don’t have any money,” I tell her. I imagine her naked. She has wide, farm girl hips, large nipple pads. She is looking past me into room.

“We don’t have any money either, that’s why I’m selling my paintings cheap. Come on, you must have five dollars or so.” She is desperate, but not for sex. Neighbours watch from their balconies. We’ve had complaints about groupies hanging around.

“What’s that smell?” she asks.

“Cookies,” I say.

She barges by me and into the kitchen. The boys are cleaning up. I go into the bathroom and brush my teeth and hair. When I finish Ted is shining his shoes, Wyn is tuning his guitar and Paddy is eating a bowl of cereal. In the kitchen, the girl is pulling her paintings from the tubes and laying them on the floor. Darc flings a tea towel over his shoulder and raises his eyebrows.

“Last night’s show,” says Ted, not looking up from his red boots. “Too much Vince, you have to sing more Bon, he’s killing us.” Wyn looks up briefly, winding the machine head on his guitar.

“Vince does all the organising and promotion, Ted. We’ve talked about this before. We’d be stuffed without him. You wanna go schmooze with all those Melbourne wankers?” I say. Darc
opens the oven door and checks the cookies.

“I’m not talking about kicking him out of the band. Just changing the direction of the music a bit. More Jethro and Santana and Stones stuff instead of this nick-nack-paddy-whack rubbish.” Wyn’s finished tuning and starts warming up. Darc takes the cookies out and takes to them with the egg flip. The earthy mull smell is strong. The girl starts eating, blowing the steam off. Darc and I smirk.

“Why did you sit there?” he asks me.

“What are you talking about?”

“I mean, out of all the places in the flat to sit, you sat there, how come?” His little eyes are bloodshot. A Hank Williams record comes on from the living room.

“I felt like it, Darc.”

“What do you call that one Charmaine?” Darc asks the girl. “The one that looks like a jockey riding an elephant in the jungle.”

“Looks more like a bird in a spaceship to me,” I say.

“It’s me riding a unicorn,” she says, sipping a glass of milk.

“Oh.”

“Oh, yeah, now I see it, you look different,” says Darc, enjoying this game.

“What about that one?” says Ted, pointing.

“That’s definitely a purple waterfall falling into a pool of yellow sand,” I say.

Adds Darc, “I reckon it’s a big gum tree that’s been eating too many plums.” She looks up at us, her eyes glazing over.

“Or a jacaranda with the flowers falling,” joins in Wýn.

“Some kind of tree, isn’t it?” asks Ted. She stands at the sink, arms locked straight, palms flat against the metal. She stares into the sink. Then paces the kitchen. We look at each other confused. She looks up into the window.

“Mechanical flying kangaroos,” she says.

“Ahhh,” says Darc, clapping his hands, looking back at the canvas, “I never would have guessed that. You see the roos, Bon?”

“She’s not talking about the painting Darc, I think she’s hallucinating, how many cookies did she eat?” I say.

“A couple.”

“Feel like getting some fresh air, Charmaine?”

“I’ve got two sisters and a brother,” she says, her hair all messy. She starts to look a bit sick. The front door opens and Vince walks in, he’s got bell bottoms and a purple sweater on.

“What have we got here then, sweetheart?” he moves in. She shakes him off. He sees the tray with the mull cookies, picks one up and starts eating. “So you’ve been getting stoned while I’ve been out booking shows?” Crumbs fly from his mouth, he waves the biscuit about. “Guess where we’ve got a week long residency starting on Friday?”

“Where?” asks Ted.

“Jan Juc,” says Vince, excited.

“Jan Juc?” says Wýn, playing his guitar.
“Jan Juc? You’ve got to be joking,” says Ted.

“Where the fuck is Jan Juc?” I ask.

“Some surf town near Torquay,” says Darc, watching Charmaine. She’s on her tip toes, looking out the window.

“Where’s Torquay?” I ask.

“Near Geelong. Jesus, Bon, don’t you know anything?” says Vince.

“Not as much as you Vince,” says Ted.

“Jan Juc, Jan Juc, where the fuck is Jan Juc,” I sing.

“I thought we were working toward going to England,” asks Wyn.

“Here we go, me against the rest of you again,” says Vince, he looks like a frog when he gets angry. Ted and Vince have been at each other for weeks. “I’m out there talking to dozens of people trying to get us gigs, and I have to come back to this shit?”

“Every time I put a show together you take over anyway,” says Ted, crossing his arms.

“Calm down everyone,” says Wyn.

“Nah, fuck him,” Ted stands up, “we all work as hard as each other, don’t come barging in complaining we never do anything.” The front door shuts, Paddy leaving.

“I never said that,” says Vince. “Bonnie boy, back me up, you know how hard it is to get a residency.”

“I love Jan Juc,” says Charmaine, “my parents have a holiday home there.” She looks terrible.

“You boys got her real fucked up,” says Vince.

“My dad, he’s a cop, he kicked me out,” she says, her eyes rolling in their sockets.

“Come on darling, let’s take you home,” says Darc, picking up the paintings.

“Who’s got some money for one of her paintings?” I ask.

“What for? They’re terrible,” says Ted.

“Who cares what they look like, we’ve got to get rid of her,” says Darc. Ted and Wyn pull out some coins and lay them on the table. Darc and I start to carry her out to the van. There’s a few groupies waiting by the brick letterboxes out front. The neighbours are watching us.

“They’re gunna think we drugged and raped her,” I say.

“I was thinking the same thing,” says Darc, clutching one of the tubes under his armpit.

“Stand her up.”

“Stand up Charmaine, that’s a girl.” The apartments are long and face the road. Stairwells break the buildings up. Out the back is the car park and a grassed area with clotheslines. We get her onto the passenger seat of the Kombi. Darc’s little body jumps up and down pumping the accelerator. “You coming?” he asks.

“Nah, this’ll be good training for you,” I say, “ambulance driver in the army.” There’s a thud on my upper arm.

“Watchya doin Bon?” it’s Vicki, our neighbour. She goes to grab my balls. I pull back.

“Stop it,” I say. Darc revs the engine, and begins to reverse.

“Charmaine,” Vicki yells, her voice is deep and booming.

“Keep quiet,” I say.

“What for?” she says. She follows the car out of the driveway. When Darc stops she stands
at the door and taps the window. “Charmaine,” she says again. Darc leans over and winds the window down.

“You know her?” Charmaine’s head flops from one side to the other.

“Yeah,” she says, “know her from Adelaide.” Darc revs the engine and drives the Kombi back to its original spot. He gets out and picks Charmaine up, tells me to grab the tubes.

“She’s staying with you Vicki,” he says, “open your door.”

In the car park behind the apartments, Darc has his head buried in the engine bay at the back of the Kombi. He’s going to drop us off, as he has the army medical on Monday. Ted, Wyn, Paddy and I pile all the gear in the car park. Darc has to pack it in a special order. While he’s doing that we buy some flash bombs and I fire off my letter. I go to the chemist and get some extra asthma puffers. When I get back Darc is jamming some mattresses on top of the gear.

Vince arrives in a station wagon.

“Whose is that?” I ask him.

“Borrowed it, mate,” he says, poking his tongue out.

“Nice of you to let us know,” says Darc, “could’ve packed differently. The other boys can go with you then.”

“I’ll pick up the P.A. as well,” says Vince.

“You can get the weed too,” I tell him.

“No worries mate,” he says, putting his arm on the door frame.

“You wearing that?” he asks, nodding at me. I’m wearing denim shorts and a singlet.

“Yeah, what’s wrong with this?”

“Got your new costumes?”

“They’re upstairs.” He drives away and I go upstairs and start packing my clothes, puffy shirts and flared women’s pants. *Fuck him,* I’m not wearing this shit anymore. Darc barges in and says he needs a hand, push-starting the van. We pull out onto Dalgety St in the shade of the figs. We head out of the city, the factories thinning out.

The train slowed on the outskirts of Melbourne. Through the factories we moved. I watched out for the station names. The windscreens of the cars were covered in frost. A man stood on his bonnet and pissed on his windscreen. He looked up and waved at the train. Spencer Street. The station was massive, almost five times bigger than Perth station. Ten lines of tracks. Passengers were slowly waking and lowering their luggage from the overhead compartments. Ted still slept. Wyn woke him and stood up in the aisle. His usually combed hair is all frazzled and messy. Vince is already organised and standing at the door with his bags. He flicked his head upwards to suggest everything was good. He had everything under control. We made it. The doors opened. Cool air smacks our faces. I picked up my bags and Ted’s bass. We all piled out and gathered on the platform. Vince held a small piece of white paper. It was Ronnie Burns’ phone number.

On each side of the highway farmhouses and green paddocks. We stop in Geelong to buy food. “Don’t let me forget thongs, Darc,” I say. We pull open the glass doors. To our right more glass windows with sale posters. The high ceiling has lights hanging off them. Plastic chairs, bins,
buckets, mops, irons, aprons, torches, flags, lollies, washing powder, washing boards, shampoo and all sorts of stuff. A girl at the counter, a bored looking blonde. We are the only customers. There are some novelty aprons with wombats on them and another set with fake boobs. I slip one on. Darc has found a pogo stick and starts bouncing along an aisle. The springs squeak. I wrap a feather boa around my neck, grab some egg flips and potato mashers and ask the girl where the thongs are. Without looking up from her magazine she says “middle of row five.”

“You got the small rubber ones?” I ask, “I don’t like the big cardboard ones.” She looks up and I pout and she giggles. I strap some of the air fresheners shaped like little trees to my armpits and I ask her which scent she prefers. She says I better stop or I’ll get her in trouble. Aren’t you looking for trouble? She steps back placing her hands on the pole behind her. Her breasts poke out. I like her freckles and crooked teeth. A bouncy ball flies from Darc’s direction knocking over a stand of fly spray. I sing “I’m Louie the fly, I’m Louie the fly, straight from rubbish tip to you”. I run around the counter performing for her, using the masher as a microphone.

“Where are you guys from?” she asks. I grab a few wigs and throw them in the air. Darc comes out holding some old ladies pink fluffy slippers.

“These what you’re looking for, Bon?” I try them on, too small. I flick them in the air. She keeps pivoting on the pole watching us. I lean in and read her name badge. Juliette. I make up a song for her.

Juliette, golden hair so long, who’d have thought you could be so bad.
Juliette, you just go your way, leaving me alone, and sad.

Darc bounces by on the pogo stick, his Popeye forearms poking out. He holds a tambourine that jangles as he bounces. Juliette throws a boa at him and it gets caught in the springs and he goes flying into a stack of black plant pots. She and I laugh our heads off. Darc starts walking toward us like a martian with pots as hands. “I am Frank from Frankston, you will”… the office doors slams.

“It’s my boss,” says Juliette. Darc and I run up an aisle and hide.

“What’s all this mess,” he yells at her. He’s dark haired and wears a cheap suit. She doesn’t answer. He’s bending over picking things up. “Juliette, answer me, this is the last time I will ask you.” She starts weeping. “Every time I leave the store you screw up. You arrive late, you undercharge some people and overcharge others. I’ve nearly had my lot with you.” I feel so bad. It’s not her fault. I walk up to the front desk and tell him not to punish her, to leave her alone. He looks at me with the fake boobs and feather boas. He stares at my tattoos.

“You know this guy?” he asks her.

“No, he came in just now,” she sobs. The manager threatens to call the cops.

“No, we’ll clean it all up,” says Darc.

“How many are there?”

“Just me and him.” We clean up and I find the thongs I need. “Lend me a few bob will ya Darc?”
As we enter the corners, the Kombi leans and the pale trunks of the paperbarks stick out beneath the green tops. Glimpses of the ocean. A small hawk hovers. A kangaroo runs out onto the road and Darc dodges it and keeps driving and the roo jumps beside us and then veers off into a gully. “Suicidal little bastards” he says. The black knob is broken off the handle, but I manage to wind the window down and smell the sea salt and seaweed and the waft of bushes that smell like lavender mixed with whacky tobaccy.

The surf club is similar to the one at Port Beach, but bigger. A two storey job, with roller doors on both sides of the building. Long boats and showers on the ground floor and upstairs glass windows all around. Where there are walls they’re covered in photos and first place ribbons and dried out shark jaws. I walk straight to the beach. Over in the distance, great sandy cliffs all jagged like a cheese grater. A bloke walks along the bottom of the cliff with a board under his arm. I strip off and run into the freezing water, diving over the waves. I stand on a sand bar. I wipe my eyes and clear my nose and see Vince standing on the balcony, watching me. I feel him thinking about the band. I can forgive him the way the others can’t. He’s ambitious.

A large wave approaches and I duck dive through the face and emerge where I can’t stand. I swim overarm for while until I feel a strange tingle on my arm. Stingers. When I return Darc has most of the gear upstairs. My arms and chest are covered in goosebumps and my nipples are erect. I ask the club manager for some vinegar and go into the kitchen and pour some on the stinger welts. Vince is making some sandwiches.

“Nice of you to help us,” he says.
“Guess we’re sleeping on the floor,” I say.
“Lucky I bought the mattresses,” he says, trying to make a joke.

People start arriving around sunset. I grab a bourbon and coke and go sit on the balcony. Darc is running around like a maniac setting everything up. He has trouble getting the P.A. working. He sets the flash bombs up and we’re ready to go. Vince comes charging out, all dressed up.

“You getting ready?” he asks, heaving. His hair is all straightened and bobbed at the shoulders.

“We’re going on in ten minutes,” he says, “get ready mate.”
“I can’t,” I say, sucking on an ice block in.
“Why not?”

“Don’t have my costume.”

“Oh, for fucks sakes,” he says, “don’t expect to sing any songs tonight” he says, and goes back inside. The wind bends the tops of the bushes and they spring back.

“Gday” says a bloke, handing me a bourbon. A surfy guy with long red hair. “This is Keith, Johnny, and I’m Stuey,” he says.

“I’m Bon, Bon Scott. You blokes live here?”

“Up the road.” The place starts to fill up and some girls start dancing on the wooden floor near the stage. Darc keeps running back and forward between the mixing desk and microphones. He looks over and flings his head for me to get up. The band plays Everyday I Have to Cry. I’m starting to get a bit tipsy, but good tipsy. The song finishes and there’s a break between songs while Wyn tunes up. Paddy fixes the position of his drum stands.
“Not a bad band,” says Stuey.

“You reckon?” says Albert. Wyn starts playing the opening riff from *Good Times Bad Times* the new Led Zeppelin song. Ted waves me over. Paddy joins Wyn with his high-hat. I walk as casually as possible to the stage and take the mike stand off. The first verse has finished and I join Vince for the chorus. Darc lets some firebombs go off, smiling from ear to ear, and the girls start screaming and there's high-pitched whistles from the balcony. I give it everything:

I don’t care what the neighbours say,
I’m going to love you each and every day.

We fade out like on the album, and the whole room erupts in applause. We launch into *Helter Skelter* straight away and the next two hours blast by, Stuey bringing me bourbons through the set. Wyn and Ted and Paddy playing great. By the time we finish I’m sweating like a pig.

Outside I hear “they won’t be coming back anytime soon” and a jangling at the door then the door flies open throwing the streetlight on us. Even though my ears are ringing I hear the lights fire up, one flash, two flashes, then the lights on right above us. I don’t dare to look, except at Darc, who’s really going for it. The girl under him, her hair flayed out on the floor, plastic cups and a foldback speaker next to us. The girl under me looks over to the bar and starts lifting her pelvis more. “Come on” she says. They all notice us and start cheering and yelling.

Darc lets out a kind of hiss and starts coming, his girl arching and grabbing his back, and he convulses and then collapses on her. I follow not long after, not really feeling like a proper
climax. I pull my dick out and roll over and put my shorts back on. The barman puts some music on and they start drinking. I apologise to the girl, but she doesn’t seem to care, she goes over to the bar and starts drinking. They’re playing a drinking game called *Song of the Gooniebird*, like pass the parcel, but if the music stops you have to drink. The barman lets us drink whatever we want. Darc drives back to St. Kilda.

Ted shakes me. My head feels like it’s about to explode. There’s a banging at the door. I’m lying on the floor, no mattress, no blanket. There’s a light on behind the bar. Vince is asleep on his arms, slumped on a table. Wyn is walking towards the door. BANG BANG BANG. “Open the door, it’s the police”. Two blue uniforms barge in. My mouth is so dry. They start going through all of our stuff, looking inside the bass drum, the guitar cases, turning Wyn’s acoustic upside down. Then I remember the weed in the back of the speaker box. I try to wake Vince but he raises his head like a long neck turtle, and falls back to sleep.

“You got a warrant?” I yell.

“This your place is it?” the tall, skinny cop yells back, his face full of scorn. He starts poking his arm inside the bass cabinet and I know we’re done for. Ted and Wyn sit at my table, their costumes stained. “Well, well, well,” the cop says, holding up the bag, “what have we here?”

“I would say that’s marijuana,” the other cops says, taking a whiff. “Is this yours?” he asks Ted, who looks at me. The little one pulls out a note pad and starts scribbling. The big one runs out to the car and returns with some kitchen scales. Just under half an ounce. Three fingers. Seems no point in lying or trying to get out it. I give them our names and addresses. When they leave Ted and I pour ourselves a whisky and go back to sleep. The sun is rising.

I wake up at about noon, still drunk. Flashes of last night come to me as I lay among plastic cups, cigarette butts, streamers and empty bottles. Vince sits at one of the tables, smoking a cigarette, drinking a coffee. Wyn is outside on the balcony playing his guitar. Ted is behind the bar and offers to make me a coffee.

“Why didn’t you wake me up?” asks Vince, the blue infringement papers on the table in front of him.

“Morning Vince,” I say, feeling like there’s a knife in the back of my head.

“This is fucking serious Bon, why didn’t you wake me up?”

“We tried, you were as dead as a door nail, asleep on the bar there.”

“I could’ve stopped them,” he jabs his smoke out in an ashtray.

“There’s nothing you could have done,” says Ted, handing me a coffee, “they came in and started searching, they knew there was stuff here.” He pushes his hand up into his face and drags his fingers over his eyebrows.

“So you expect me to take the fall for this?” says Vince. “I’m not taking responsibility for something I wasn’t even awake for. Who gave them my name?” I watch the yellow bubbles circle in the coffee. “Who gave them my name?”

“It was all over in less than half an hour wasn’t it Bon?” says Ted.

“You can't have it both ways Vince,” I tell him as he moves his seat back. “We tried to wake you up. We couldn't. So either we woke you up and you gave them your name yourself, or you were asleep, because you were too pissed to wake up, and we had to talk to the cunts for you.”

“I would've talked them around,” he says, puffing up his chest. Ted and I look at each other and start laughing. Wyn walks in from outside and Paddy comes in from a swim.

“Oh yeah, Vince what would you have said?”

“I don't know, I would have thought of something, since I'm smarter than all of you put together.” Ted and I laugh again. “You seen this Wyn?” Vince asks him, waving the blue paper.

“Yes,” says Wyn, his soft eyes look tired.

“So you're all in it together?” says Vince.

“Fuck off Vince,” I say, “it was all of ours.”

“Not if I wasn't awake, it wasn't. Not if I never smoked any of it.”

“You had some yesterday afternoon you lying prick,” says Ted. “You were the one ordering us to roll up, going on about how idyllic this place is, remember?”

“No.”

“Oh this is ridiculous,” says Ted.

“Nothing we can do about it now,” says Wyn. “I don't want to be stuck here all week with you arguing either. I told you, all of you, the band was to be drug free. But none of you would listen. None of you ever listen to me in any case. There's rules for you two,” he points at Vince and I, “and there's rules for the rest of us. All I ever wanted to do,” his eyes start watering and he picks his guitar up, “was to play music and have fun.”

He looks outside, light shines in his face, stubble around his mouth. “We made an agreement remember? We were all going to be in London in twelve months. That was a year and a half ago. Instead we're stuck in this shit hole arguing with each other, again. I don't care who takes responsibility.” He kicks a chair and walks out and down the stairs.

The Kombi putters into the carpark and starts high-revving once Darc pulls to a stop. Been hanging for this sound most of the week. My safe place was the water away from the bad mood of the others. We carry all the gear down the steps while Vince argues with the manager about money. I jump in the van and sand falls out of my thongs and onto the floor. There's small blisters where the straps rub. We putt up the hill between the paperbarks. Darc stops at a lookout to watch the ocean, but I just want to get out of here. Vince and the other boys speed by up and over the hill. On the radio are fire warnings, like a role call for all the towns in the area. I'm happy to be with Darc, just me and him.

“Get some new jeans mate?”

“Yeah, thought I’d let my hair down,” he says, waving his hand over his balding head. “I got out of it. I failed the test Bon, you bloody beauty. No nasho for me!”

“What'd ya do?” I ask.
“I did what you said. They play a recording, to test your hearing. They change the volume and ask if you can still hear it. I told them I’m a roadie and my hearing is damaged.”

“That’s true.”

“Fuck you mate,” he hands me a joint. I take a long toke, the tingling sensation relaxing my muscles. A dead fox on the road.

“Then they give you a sight test. I passed that one, to make it seem proper. Then I fell over in the balancing test. There were heaps of people there, half of the cunts looked like they were ready to get blown up. You gunna share that thing?” he yells, over the engine noise as we go uphill.

“Anyone would think you haven’t smoked all week.”

“I haven’t,” I say, “we were raided.”

“What?” he looks over, frowning, his little arms over the steering wheel.

“Cops came in after you left, found the stash, gave us a court order. Vince was asleep, he tried to weasel his way out it. Said the weed wasn’t his.”

“That silver tongued prick. He was the one who kept nagging us to buy it.” Cows munch in the fields. A farmer waters small trees with a water tank rigged onto his motorbike. A green sign pointing to Sunshine. Up that road is where Mum and Dad and Dereck and I first lived when we arrived from Scotland. Mum drove Dad to the station. I sat on Dad’s lap and we sang songs together. He taught me some drum beats, tapping on his thighs.

I see myself in the side mirror. My bloodshot eyes, messy hair and three day growth. My feet up on the dash. Off to court again. I’m such a piece of shit. Everywhere I turn, everything I do. I promised Mum and Dad I’d never get busted again. Ruined my relationship with Maria. I snap out of it, paranoia from the weed. A hitch-hiker on the side of the road, swivels as we pass.

“Should we stop Darc?”

“No room mate,” he says. “Hey, I was thinking. You know that arts student, what’s her name…Char…”

“Charmaine.”

“Yeah, she said her parents had a holiday home in Jan Juc.”

“And her Dad was a cop,” I say, “you reckon she told her Dad, who rang the Victorian cops?”

“Maybe she told him by accident?” he says, slowing to a set of lights. “You know what the pigs are like, looking for any chance to take some long haired hippies down.”

“I’ll ask Vicki, she’ll know. Don’t tell Vince, though. Don’t want to give him another excuse to try and get out of it.”

Back to the shade of the figs of Dalgety Street. Heaps of cars parked outside our apartment block. On the verge a crowd of people, holding microphones, a TV cameraman as well. The neighbours on the balcony. Darc drives out the back. We look at each other confused. I step out of the van and three people run up and shove microphones in my face. I recognise them from Go-Set, and RAM. One of them is Ian Meldrum, always scratching for a story.

“How do you respond to the drug possession charges?” asks Ian. Fuck, this is out of control.

“The Valentines are the first band in Australia to be charged with drug possession, how does
“Bon, will you be pleading guilty or not guilty to the charges?” I look up at the sky. May as well say something.

“They should realise that what we do is right for us. We respect a lot of things about their job, but they shouldn’t persecute whole groups of people just for being different.” They all look amazed. Quite impressed myself. “The government deserves a few ripples. What year is it? 1950? They’ll be the last to legalise homosexuality, and pot will be the same.” I can feel my heart beat faster and my ears go red. I pick up a couple of guitar cases Darc has unloaded and climb the steps. At the top I put them down, and hug Maria. A lightning feeling goes between us.

“Hello Tweety” I say, smiling.

“Hi Bon,” she says. Gabby goes and talks to Darc.

“Did you get my letter?” I ask.


“Don’t matter, good to see you,” I say, “let’s go inside.”

“Aren’t you happy to see me?”

“Yes. Of course. What makes you think that?”

“You looked shocked.”

“Well, you would be too if you had to deal with them.”

“I arrived on Friday, and Gabby said you’d be back today.” Her voice is deep for her little body.

“Here I am. You want a cup of tea?” The boys come and go dropping off gear, talking about the journalists. “You have something smudged on your knee,” I bend over and lift her smooth, white calves. She licks her finger and wipes the smudge away. “Looks like paint from the balcony.”

“Gabby says you were caught with marijuana? That true?” she tilts her head sideways. Her blue eyes meet mine.

“Yes.”

“What’s going to happen?”

“Go to court, probably get a record,” I say.

“You don’t care?”

“Yes. I care. But there’s nothing I can do about it.”

“What other drugs do you take?” she says, pressing the tea bag against the side of the cup.

“I’ve had heroin once.”

“Anything else?”

“No.”

“You’ve changed so much Bon,” she sits slowly on the chair, holding the cup in two hands. Vince enters. He smiles at Maria, she doesn’t smile back. He’s sweating on his face, his armpits and chest.

“Hello Maria,” he says, his voice rising and falling.

“Hello Vincent,” she says.
“How are we?”

“Very well, thank you Vincent.” She bats her eyelids. Her teeth are straight. She brushes lint off her skirt.

“You still upset about the…” I shake my head at him. “Oh, for fuck’s sakes,” he walks out, “stuck up moll,” he says, his voice fading.

“Creep” she says. He tried to crack onto her in Freo once. He was giving us a lift and I was inside getting some things.

“Have you been going to Church?” she asks, a hopeful look on her face.

“Oh yeah, of course,” I say “I go everyday, I pray to God he’ll put an end to all this misery.”

“Bon, sarcasm doesn’t suit you.” I bite my bottom lip. She’s right. “Nobody is asking you to live the way you do. You can ask for forgiveness anytime. I know about the gang-bangs Bon.” Her face contorts.

“Who told you that?”

“Was obvious Bon, you think I’m stupid. There’s no way we’re getting married if you keep going on like this. Ever since that day at Brian’s on Petra Street. Remember? You were meant to be rehearsing. You and Sharon Jarvis. Remember?” her voice raises a little. I square up to her.

“What do you expect, Maria? I can’t be with someone for three years and all we do is kiss.” I remember we slept in. Maria was late for work. She jumped into the bread van. There’s no passenger seat. We were driving across Fremantle bridge and I looked across and she’s sitting on the loaves of bread, so cute, my little cream sandwich. Her soft skin, her little bit of makeup. I came home from work, and see her shoes on the floor. The way they are thrown told me how her day was.

“You said we were going to get married. You were going to wait for me.”

“Things change Maria.”

“So you were lying?”

“No, I wasn’t.”

“What about the other girls then, you think I’m going to let you screw whoever you want? You know, I think your problem is you have this romantic idea about yourself. You think everyone’s going to be in love with you all the time. It doesn’t work like that. I’m glad I never let you…”

“You know what? Stuff this.” I say. “It’s true, it’s all true. I fucked up. You’re right. You win Maria. I give up.” The taste of bourbon in my mouth. I’m crying. She sits there playing with the button on her sleeve. A car horn beeps outside. The red headed neighbour who must park in his spot.
“Spot me a pie, Uncle?” I ask. He’s squatting so he’s eye level with the warmer. His leather jacket hangs outside his legs, touching his boots. A harmonica pokes out his chest pocket. He strokes his beard and looks like a wizard.

“A pie, eh? Good choice.” His voice is muffled through his bushy beard. “What kind of pie you want?” he points inside the glass, “steak, steak and kidney, steak and mushroom…”

“Steak is good…” I say.

“Chicken, chicken and vegetable, lamb…”

“Steak.”

“Steak,” he says, standing, throwing his head back, opening his eyes wide.

“I’ll pay you back as soon as I can, and the rest of the money I owe ya.” He fobs me off as the bakery lady comes and grabs the pies and slips them into paper bags.

“You want a coffee as well?” he asks.

“Take away?” she asks. Flour covers all of her chest. Uncle and I look at Bruce and J.B., whose faces are lit up by the light of the slice cabinet. Behind them, tables and chairs, all empty.

“You want sauce?” she asks Uncle.

“I’m saucy enough,” he says. He pays and we walk outside. Autumn in Adelaide, summer yellow turning green. Double storey buildings with balconies. Cars parked all along at an angle. The hills way off. A freezing wind blows in from the ocean. The band’s dog Clutch comes running up and starts begging.

“What happened with the trailer of bricks?”

“Oh yeah, well.” He sits on one of the chairs between the footpath and the road. “After I unloaded them all on her front lawn, stacked them neatly, blisters on my hands. She comes up to me, from you to your pie wrapper away, and tells me she doesn’t want that colour any longer. I told her she had already paid for them.”

“You didn’t even lay them?”

“Nah, they’re in the trailer.” He points across the road. Beneath a gum tree his white ute and trailer, triple parked. My yellow motorbike is next to John’s truck. Bruce and J.B. join us at the table. “Good pies huh?” Uncle asks, a rattling of paper bags. He hasn’t even taken a bite yet, he’s rotating it around, deciding the best entry point. We’ve got our mouths full, steam floating out our mouths and bitten pastry. We eat in silence when the bakery woman comes out, broom in hand. She apologises and says “unfortunately” these tables and chairs are for dine-in customers only. Clutch wags his tail at her. Bruce rolls his eyes and tells her “okay” and we all go to get up and she walks back inside.

Bruce Howe is our bass player and band organiser. He can grow a beard. All I can muster is goatee and some advanced bum-fluff. Nope, if he fully shaves he’s back to beard in four days and trimming his nose hairs every morning. Sometimes he misses a few and they glisten in the light when he’s talking. The rest of his hair had long since disappeared on top of his scalp, but
he makes up for it everywhere else. His brown eyes are warm, but they'll go all fiery if you cross him. That don't usually last long, as he moves on quick. His oval shaped glasses sit neatly on his nose and he pushes them up whenever he bursts into a laughing fit. He's like my big brother. When you talk to him, everything seems like a big hassle, but secretly he's working out a way to make everything cool.

He and John, the drummer are from Adelaide, and they dragged us over here from Sydney. There's three Johns. John the drummer, and John, or J.B. the keyboard player. Uncle's a John too, but we never think of him as John.

“What’s going on with these arts government gigs Bruce?” I ask.

“Oh, don’t get me started,” he says, wiping pastry shards off his belly. Bits dangle in his beard. “Bunch of imbeciles. It’ll be worth it once we get on the road, but at the moment I’m busier than a one armed taxi driver with crabs.” His puffy cheeks lift before he’s finished his sentence. We all laugh. The woman inside gives us the evil eyes.

“You watch Humphries’ last night too?” asks Uncle.

“Yep, what a funny bastard. I’ve been having these daily phone conversations with the arts guy. They’re going to pay us properly, but there’s all these stupid rules they’ve concocted.” He scrunches up his pie wrapper and pulls his custard tart close. He sits on the front edge of his chair and leans on his elbows on the table. “For starters,” he says, pulling on his little finger as if to make a point, “no girlfriends.”

“What?” I ask.

“Yeah, I’m not shitting you. No girlfriends, wives or flings, they reckon.”

“Why not?”

“They say they’re not paying for extra people, and they don’t want us rooting around causing trouble in the towns.”

“That’s bullshit,” says John, “what is this, fascism?”

“What else?” asks Uncle.

“We have to play at strict times and finish on the dot,” says Bruce. A postman rides up, dismounts and pats Clutch.

“That’s easy,” I say, taking my last bite.

“We have to have afternoon tea with the oldies a few times.”

“Okay.”

“No swearing at any time.”

“Fuck off.”

“No drugs.” Everyone looks at Uncle. He smokes a lot, but doesn’t drink. Out comes the bakery woman again. She's fat, and her face looks like a smashed up truck.

“I’m not going to ask you lot one more time, if you don’t leave I’m going to call the police.”

“That’s proprietorial discrimination,” says Bruce.

“I don’t care what it is,” she says.

“Call the cops then,” says Bruce. “…And one more thing,” he turns back to us “this bureaucrat named Richard has to come with us. On the bus, staying in the same hotels, eating at the same restaurants.” She folds her arms and goes inside.
“What is this, *The Godfather*?” I ask.

“Have you finished it yet?” asks Bruce. The roar of a blue Monaro drives up the road and back again, parks next to John’s truck.

“Nearly,” I put on my best italian accent, “My reading is like-a-tortoise. It is slow, and takes very long time. Very long time.”

“I wanna read it after you, Bon,” says Uncle.

“When do we leave John?” asks Bruce.

“Tomorrow, can you tell Mick?” Mick’s our guitarist. “I already told Ralph, he’s getting the bus ready.” Ralph is our roadie. We call him Ralph cause he looks like a cartoon character. The bus came on the boat, back from England last week.

“Bon bloody Scott,” I hear. Walking towards us is Pat Pickett, from Melbourne, he’s tall, gaunt and sick looking.

“Well, if it isn’t Pat Pickett, the one and only. What brings you here?” I stand up and shake his hand. I introduce him to everyone.

“Had enough of Melbourne,” he says. “So I got my last dole cheque, and I thought I’d come see you. Jeez it’s quiet here. They all said Adelaide was quiet, but I didn’t think it would be this quiet, you can hear a nun fart.” Everyone laughs except Bruce. Pat’s missing some front teeth and the ones he’s got are yellow and black. “Haven’t seen you since the Valentines’ last shows, when was that? Three years ago or something?” He grabs a chair from the other table.

“Yep. We’ve been to London and back since then.”

“Fair dinkum? I heard yous won Hoadley’s but hardly nothin since. What else happened?”

“We flew over. Most of us. Put the bus on a boat and all our gear inside. Stayed there for two years, did a tour of Germany, but we came back with our tail between our legs.”

“Jeez you look different mate, bet you’re still getting your end wet every second day. Got any spare?” says Pat.

“Nah, I’m married now. Well, only just,” I say.

“That good hey?” he says, pretending to box with me, “let’s go to the pub and play pool.”

“Not right now,” I say, “but come over later, I’m staying at Norwood parade. The big red brick joint, you can’t miss it.”

“Have a look at this, have a look at this,” he says. He cocks his leg, puts a lighter in front of his crack and lets a fart go up in blue flame. We all laugh again, except Bruce, who looks inside the bakery. We all stand up and start leaving. I offer Bruce a lift on the back of the motorcycle but he declines. Says I ride like a maniac. My little yellow Suzuki, too small to hurt anyone. At the traffic lights I drag the cars and lean over the handlebars and feel good and free and alone. The wide streets are handy ‘cause you can see cars coming from side roads and swerve to miss the ones that don’t see you. By ten at night you have the roads to yourself. Bruce says he won’t be coming to my funeral if I crash. Says I could hardly walk when I got home the other night. I never feel *that* drunk at the time, just the next day when I wake up.
Our house is wedged between two hotels and a chicken shop. There's a front door with some sash windows, but we only ever use the back door, down the gravel driveway. I park on the grass next to the outdoor dunny. There's a big tree that fills the back yard, toadstools grow there in winter. Anne and Cheryl, Bruce and J.B.’s wives’ have some herbs growing near the clothesline. We never lock the back door.

My turn to clean the kitchen and bathroom. I put a Them record on and get into it. A family of magpies come to the door and start singing. I give them some mince and have a little sing along. Jonathon’s club in Kings Cross. I was auditioning for Fraternity. I entered the front door and heard the owner saying he doesn’t want some Valentine joining. My heart sank. Bruce said I join or he leaves. Getting stoned with Uncle. I walk down the hallway, dark figures move in the frosted glass of the front door. In my bedroom I pick up clothes off the floor, smelling them to see if they’re clean. There’s a murmur in the bed giving me a shock. Irene’s golden hair all over the pillow. I sit on the bed. On the bedside table packets of tablets, an empty glass, a half done drawing and our wedding photo. A white envelope on the floor. I pick it up.

“That’s not yours,” she says, her voice like a broken motor.

“I’m putting it on the table for you. What are you doing home?”

“Can’t you tell I’m sick? she says.

“Nothing unusual there,” I say.

“Very funny, nothing unusual about you being home. Found a job yet?”

“Yep, we’re going on the road tomorrow, this government gig. I’ll be able to pay you back…” she starts heaving and coughing then finds the phlegm in her lungs and spews it up, grabs a tissue and wipes the green into the white. She rearranges the blanket, warm air and her smell fills the room. I lie next to her on my back. I find my copy of Barry McKenzie and start reading. Maybe this’ll cheer her up.

I have a little creature
I guess you can call him a pet
If there’s something wrong with him
I don’t have to call a vet
He goes wherever I do
Whether sleeping or awake
God ever help me if I lose my one eyed trouser snake
Oh me one eyed trouser snake, oh me one eyed trouser snake…

I sing and sing my heart out and make the bed bounce. No reaction from Irene. We drifted apart in London. I flick the book forward a few pages. Maybe this’ll work.

I was down by the old Bondi Pier
Cracking tubes of ice cold beer
With a bucket full of prawns upon my knee
When I swallowed the last prawn
I had a technicolor yawn
And chundered in the old pacific sea.

Her shoulders jolt a little in the blanket. I place my hand on her thigh. “Hug me,” she says. My heart jolts. She must be really sick as we haven’t hugged in weeks. I curve my crutch to her bum with the blanket between us, pull my chest to her back. She is delicate. Her hair smells like lollies and it tickles my face. Her body jumps as she coughs again. Car noises outside. “I went and visited Vicki this morning, on my way home from work.” Vicki is Uncle’s girlfriend, the girl from Melbourne who lived in our apartment block. She moved back to Adelaide and introduced me to Irene at the Largs Pier one night.

“How is she?” I ask.

“Not good, she’s in the hospital, they’re going to keep her in there for at least a week, maybe longer.”

“What happened?”

“She went to the doctor last week,” her voice is warming up, “she told him she was having evil thoughts, mainly at night. The doctor, can you believe it, said that she might actually be evil, and gave her all this medication. She said the meds didn’t do anything and gave her more nightmares. But she went back a few days later with the plan of knocking herself off. So the doctor gave her another hundred and forty pills. *Drongo.*” She coughs and grabs my hand. I feel a woody starting. She speaks deadpan, and to the wall.

“So she goes home, eats a whole packet of raspberry shortcakes, and pops the bottle of pills. All of them. Annita says she walked in and Vicki looked like a stunned mullet, lying on the lounge room floor. So Vicki says *I’ll go see the doctor* cause she didn’t wanna disturb the baby, she gets to the doctors, oh and she caught the tram, this is the bloody detail she includes. The same doctor, the one who gave her the pills, and she starts vomiting all these capsule and biscuits. The doctor rings the ambulance and says she has a brush with death, like the grim reaper with a broom instead of a sickle,” she says.

“Far out Irene, far out” I say. “What are we going to do?”

“What do you mean?”

“She can’t do it all on her own. Is Annita going to look after her?”

“Uncle isn’t going to do it. He doesn’t know which way is up half the time.” I thrust my doodle into her bum a few times.

“Stop it,” she says, “I’m sick. Don’t start thinking we’re back on again. I told you I’m looking for somewhere else to live. You blew it when you stole the rent money off the fridge.” I roll off and onto my back. Singapore airport. Irene and me argued for hours. It was a bad time for everyone.

“I might be gone by the time you get back from the country. Might have found a place in Prospect.”

“Prospect, what’d you wanna live in Prospect for?”

“Why do you care, you’ve got this Margaret woman, or Silver, or whatever she’s calling herself these days, you can live with her.”
“I only slept with her once, it meant nothing.” I see Margaret’s beautiful face, like an Italian goddess.

“Oh really, she’s married too you know,” she says.

“You haven’t filed for divorce yet.”

DEAR MARIA,

LONG TIME. HOW’S LIFE? I HEARD YOU MOVED BACK TO PERTH AND OPENED A FEW SHOPS THERE. GOT SICK OF MELBOURNE HEY? MUST BE TWO YEARS SINCE WE LAST SPOKE. YOU SINGLE?


ABOUT A YEAR IN THERE WERE A FEW EXTRAS WITH SOME BABIES POPPING OUT. THERE WERE SOME CRAZY TIMES, BUT WE COULDN’T GET HALF THE SHOWS WE WANTED CAUSE ALL THE LONDON MANAGERS WERE ONLY LOOKING OUT FOR THEMSELVES AND THEY RECKONED WE WERE FIVE YEARS TOO LATE FOR THE MUSIC WE WERE PLAYING. COMES A TIME WHEN ALL THE BLOKES HAVE TO GET A JOB CAUSE WE’RE NOT PLAYING ANYWHERE, BUT IT WAS GREAT TO BE LIVING IN LONDON. I’LL TAKE YOU THERE ONE DAY.

SO NOW WE’RE BACK IN ADELAIDE. GOT THIS GOVERNMENT TOUR IN THE COUNTRY FOR BIT OF DOUGH. MUM SAYS I HAVE TO BE BACK IN FREO FOR CHRISTMAS SO MAYBE WE CAN SPEND A DAY TOGETHER? GO TO THE MOVIES OR SOMETHING?

CATCH YOU SOON TWEETY,
LOVE,
BON.
The chrome Fraternity tour bus brakes and squeaks and hisses. The door opens slowly at first, then fast. Ralph, wiping hair out of his eyes, waits for it to open while Bruce, J.B. and I wait with all our gear on the footpath. He jumps from the bottom step, over the gutter and onto the curb. He says a quick hello and starts loading up. The government guy Richard rocks up, wearing a tweed jacket with black elbow patches, red corduroy trousers and a paisley cravat. He shakes our hands. I ask, if he likes the name Dick and he says no. He jumps on the bus sitting up the front. After a bit of arguing about whether or not Clutch can come, we get going.

First stop is Aldgate where we pick up Mick, and John and Uncle. The bus struggles up the hill through tall trees and small villages. A motorbike speeds past us—Margaret and I rode in fog. It was freezing cold, with low visibility—Ralph steers us on the long zig-zag to Strathalbyn, the engine brakes hissing, bolts of lightning and lines and lines of vineyards. From Strathalbyn we cross the Murray River, driving the bus onto a chain-ferry. We follow the Coorong and pull up at the Millicent town hall, where we are to play tonight. From here we criss-cross farming country to Bordertown, Renmark, then head west to Clare. The days are mild, the nights are cold. We keep to ourselves. We play well and stick to Richard’s rules, ducking off to have a joint or two every so often. Everything is going swimmingly until Richard decides to make a little speech. Before we get off the bus in Port Pirie, he blocks off the door, all suited up, and asks us to listen for a few minutes. Outside kids ride circles and the air is hazy with dust.

“Gentlemen,” he says, clearing his throat and rocking his tie side to side, “a few words, if I may.” His voice is bit like Mickey Mouse’s. “I have to admit, when I was given this assignment, I had my reservations.” He hops on his toes at the end of every sentence. “I had watched your outfit on television, and judging you merely by the way you dressed I thought you were a bunch of degenerate no hopers. I went out of my way to be on this assignment as I was certain you gents would break the rules and cause headaches wherever you went. My reservations were unfounded. Throughout this tour I have found Fraternity to be one of the most professional groups I have ever worked with, certainly within the arts community. When I return to Adelaide I intend on writing the highest recommendation I can.” I look around. Behind a chair, Uncle is rolling a joint. John, the drummer is looking out the window, a pissed off expression on his face. He’s still annoyed no girlfriends are allowed. J.B. is asleep. Mick and Bruce are listening, and they look at one another with raised eyebrows. I take a sip of whisky from a small bottle I have stashed.

“That mean we can have a few drinks tonight?” sings out Bruce, “I’m tonguing.”

“Not so fast Brucey-boy…” says Richard. Ralph opens the front door and we shove past him before he finishes.

You can never get lost in Pirie, because of the smelter stack. In the air a mixture of smoke, and dust and salt. My nostrils are instantly itchy. A swarm of oldies outside the Central Hotel, a brick corner setup. They enter one by one like bees in a hive. The dining hall has arched windows and exposed beams. On the walls are copies of famous shearing and forestry paintings. Bruce, Uncle and I sit together next to Carol and Len, a couple from Port Augusta. They smell of sherry and
cigarettes and order two bottles of shiraz. Len is thin, his skin sags and tiny red veins look ready to burst in his cheeks and nose. Carol crosses her big arms over her belly, below a scarf and about five necklaces. Her face is heavy with make up. She wears a brown wig and stuffs tissues in her bra. I get the feeling they could drop off at any moment. Carol leans in and whispers something in Len’s ear. She points, leans back and laughs loudly. A silver haired man in blue overalls.

The room fills up and it’s loud with voices and chairs scraping and clangs from the kitchen. Before we finish our drinks Len tops us up. Bruce puts his hand over the glass and says they’re different kinds of wine, but Len frowns at him and starts pouring. Carol takes a mouthful and says “cheers”. Uncle holds a wine glass up to the light, like he’s figuring out how it’s made.

“Bet you boys can’t wait to get out of here,” Carol says, the glass still in front of her face, “full of stuck up farmers who think they own everything.” She finishes the wine in another gulp, leaving lipstick all over the glass.

“We…” Bruce starts.

“We’ll sort em out, won’t we Len?” she says. “You have to make your own fun.”

“We’ve been here before,” I say, my mouth moving funny from the wine. “About two years ago, wasn’t it Bruce?” He’s reading the menu, his glasses on the ridge of his nose. “Bruce, remember when we caught the train to Perth?”

“O’course,” he says, his face lighting up. Len offers him a cigarette, which he accepts. “I’m telling the story now, it’s too long.”

“Oh, go on, we’ve got all day,” says Carol, wiping ash off the table. He looks out the stained glass window, gathering his thoughts.

“The band was doing some shows in Perth,” says Bruce, “but there was no back-line equipment there, you know, P.A., fold backs, mixing desks and all that stuff.” Smoke swirls above our heads.

“Probably still isn’t” I say, holding back a sneeze.

“I’ve always wanted to go to Perth,” says Carol, “never got around to it.”

“So Bon and I got asked to put the van on the train. He didn’t need any encouragement to go on a road trip home for a few weeks.”

“You’re from Perth, Bon?” asks Len.

“Yeah Freo,” I say, “but I was born in Scotland.”

“Why didn’t you drive?”

“The road isn’t sealed all the way,” says Bruce, ashing his fag. “Everyone else got to fly. We packed up the van and drove up here from Adelaide. There was a few hours between loading the van and then the train leaving.”

“No,” I tell him, “the van went on one train and we went on the passenger train, remember? We had to wait overnight in Kalgoorlie for the van to catch up to us, remember?”

“Yeah, yeah, that’s right,” says Bruce, a frown fading from his face. A waiter drops a tray of glasses. I see Mick and J.B. at another table. They start bringing out soup and bread. “We had a few hours to kill, so we went to a pub down the road there. Outside the pub was rows and rows of motorbikes, Harleys mainly.”

“You didn’t want to go in.”

“Well, I was wearing pretty much what I’m wearing now.”
"I don't blame him," says Len, "I got beat up once in Port Augusta."

"Bloody Ron, he drags me inside, and the whole place goes quiet. We go up to the bar and order some beers. There's about thirty of them, black leather, tattoos, beards," says Bruce.

"They look like me pretty much," I say.

"Some of them were playing pool, but most of them were watching us. And what does Ron do? He goes up to the pool table, puts money down and challenges them. Ten minutes later, they're buying him rounds of beer, getting along like old mates."

"We nearly missed the train," I say, buttering my bread. "We had a travel allowance from Hamish, remember Bruce?"

"That's right, fifty bucks each wasn't it?"

"How long does the train take?" asks Carol.

"Two nights to Kalgoorlie," says Bruce.

"It's all a bit of a blur, we were on acid most of the way," I say.

"Oh yeah," says Bruce, a cheeky smile coming over him. "We sat in our cabin all night tripping off our heads, watching the stars out the window, with all these emus chasing the train. At about four in the morning, we stopped near Maralinga for fifteen minutes or so. Near where they had the nuclear tests." Len grunts. Uncle, a pacifist, opens his eyes up wide, a kind of nuclear bomb exploding in his head. The waiters start bringing out the meat and three veg. I gotta wee real bad. Carol keeps topping our drinks up.

"Every now and then, you'd see wild cats watching the train, freaky things. We got going again and the sun started to rise, and Ron and I stood in the passageway spinning out, didn't we Ron?"

"This strange fog," I say.

"The sun was huge, the biggest I've ever seen it. All these greys, and oranges, and purples. The bushes in the distance stationary, the ones up close all blurry."

"The train guard was watching with us."

"That's right, he said he'd never seen anything like it, and he'd worked on the train for ten years. Anyway, we moved into the dining car for breakfast, all these brass fittings and white table clothes. We're sitting there tripping out and this ex-Vietnam guy…we'd seen him the night before…he was off the planet…he was shoving his fist in everyone's faces…trying to pick a fight. The train workers tried to restrain him, but that made it worse. He was smoking these tiny cigars. Ron and I thought we were gunna cop it, cause we look like hippies…"

"You thought we were gunna cop it," I say, mopping up the gravy with a bread roll. He had a huge nose, I remember that much. Carol and Len are listening. Another woman next to Bruce is listening in as well.

"…there was a whole bunch of them in uniform…this nasho's waving his fist at people and we're coming off the LSD. All the other passengers are freaking out and moving back to their cabins and what do you reckon Ron does?"

"He punched him?" says Len.

"Len!" says Carol.

"No," says Bruce, "he stands up, sticks out his hand and says Gday mate, my name's Bon Scott, what's your name?" Bruce sits back, smiles, closes his eyes, and shakes his head from side to side.
“He just wanted someone to talk to,” says Carol.

“Yeah, he was a bit messed up, but he was a nice bloke really,” I say, watching the sediment in the bottom of my glass as I finish it. I’m feeling a bit dizzy.

“There were fights all over the country at the time, all these army guys and protesters fighting,” says Bruce, starting to slur.

“There still are,” says Len.

“Yeah,” says Bruce, sweat on his brow, “so we sat there talking to this guy for about three hours, buying shots of whisky, he and Ron getting along like they’d known each other for years. Then all the other passengers come back for lunch and this guy stands up and says listen here, you lot, have a good look at these two, they’ve got more guts than the whole lot of you put together, they can think and act for themselves which is more than I can say for the rest of yas, or something like that.” Bruce tucks into his food. Len and Carol are half way through a smoke. The waiters start collecting our plates. A loud car drives by. Me and Mum and Dereck and Graeme on the same train. I’m just a kid. The land is as big as the ocean.

“Is that it?” asks Carol, working a toothpick.

“What?” asks Bruce.

“Is that the end of the story?”

“Oh no. Get this,” says Bruce, this is my favourite bit. We get to Kalgoorlie, and we’ve got a night to kill before the train arrives with our van. We’ve got forty dollars or so to spend on a nice hotel with a bath. I wanted to have a full meal and a good night’s sleep and Ron decides he wants to spend our allowance playing pool and getting pissed.” They look at me.

“Man after my own heart,” says Len.

“We only had about an hours sleep since we left Adelaide,” says Bruce, looking at me.

“Forget about that,” I says, “let’s go for a walk, have some lunch, check out the red light district and worry about where we’re gunna sleep later.”

“I wasn’t going to waste my money on whores though,” says Bruce, pushing the last of his lamb in his mouth.

“I’d been there a few times,” I say. “There are these rows and rows of tin shacks where the girls get the miners to come in.” Bruce is all excited by the story now. Carol tops us up again.

“Yeh, so we go from pub to pub. The Oriental, the Commercial and the York. I think we got kicked out of a couple. Gets to about eight at night and I says to Ron “where are we going to sleep?” He goes away and comes back ten minutes later and says he’s found somewhere for a dollar. In disbelief I follow him out the back of the Commercial and there’s all these sheds with these steel framed beds. No mattresses, just springs. No floor, just dirt. It’s boiling hot inside and there’s no light either, just some tiny holes letting in the star light.”

“We didn’t need a blanket,” I tell Carol and Len.

“I don’t know why I went along with it, I think we were starting to run out of money by then,” says Bruce. “So I says to him right, well, I’m not sleeping until much later and we left our stuff there and went back to the pub and kept drinking until after close.”

“I had to drag you out of there. And then you kept trying to walk off into the desert” I tell him.
“I don’t remember that bit,” he says. “I remember it took us ages to open the door. In the end we get inside and it’s pitch black cause our eyes can’t adjust and I’m feeling my way around,” he waves his hands around in front of him, “and I feel a face, and then some shoulders. And I didn’t wanna feel any further and I says to Ron,” his voice goes all high pitched “Ron, someone’s sleeping in my bed. You’ll never guess what he says, I don’t know where he comes up with this stuff.” Bruce lifts his elbows out wide, making fists in front of his chest that he bounces with each word, and says “someones been eating my porridge as well.” Bruce flings his head back, veins popping out around his temples, Carol’s throat blocks and smoke comes out her nose. Len taps the table three times.

“We had to find another shed with no one in it,” I say.

“Oh it was classic,” says Bruce, wiping tears from the outside of his eyes, “I’ll never forget it.”

I stand up, holding onto the back of the chair and the table. The room spins. Len grabs my arm and nods. I grin at him and make my way through the hall to the mens. I burp but keep my mouth shut and the stink comes out my nose. At the piss trough I brace myself with a hand overhead. In the mirror I take some deep breaths and tell myself to keep it together. I wash my face and scrub my teeth with my finger to try to remove the red stains. In walks Richard, as chirpy as a willy wag tail. He doesn’t seem to notice how drunk I am. Probably had a few himself. I get stuck with him for a few moments while he talks about how much he loves Australian towns.

The venue is a brand new building. A white box with wood panelling. You enter on the ground floor, go up a flight of stairs and then find your seat in the bowl shaped auditorium. The lights in the ceiling match the lights in the aisles. The chairs smell new. On the stage, Ralph works flat out. I say hello and jump up on the stage. We’re due on in about half an hour. We play thirty minutes to the oldies, then have a break and then play to the kids.

Backstage, John, our drummer is getting ready. He’s pissed off about the rules and how he can’t wait to get back to Adelaide tomorrow. In walks Bruce. He’s got a girl in each of his arms, grinning like a goose. Two birds I’ve seen him with in Adelaide. John’s face gets all angry, his arms are crossed.

“So this is why you didn’t want any girlfriends or wives to come?” he says, a few sets of drum sticks in his hands. Bruce looks shocked.

“Hand on a sec, hang on,” says Bruce. “I only just ran into them outside, they saw we were playing.” The girls look like they want to leave.

“Bullshit, you didn’t want any of the women here cause you didn’t want Anne finding out,” yells John, his Adam’s apple rising and falling, a lump forming above his nose.

“I’m telling the fucking truth,” says Bruce, the pitch of his voice getting higher. Uncle pokes his head in and says we’re on in five.

“Well, fuck this,” says John, “I’m ringing Sue, see if she wants to drive up for the night. I’m sick of all this rules bullshit. You wanna see if Carol wants to come, Mick?” he asks. Mick is standing up strapping his guitar on.
“Alright,” he says.
“I’ll see if J.B. wants to ask Cheryl, and Uncle wants to ask Vicki. You wanna ask Irene, Bon?”

I miss Irene, but I’m not sure.
“What, you gunna ring them now?” I ask.
“We’re about to go on,” says Bruce.
“Oh, shut up Bruce,” says John. Bruce shakes his head, lets go of the girls and asks them to meet him afterward.
“You make up your own mind, John,” says Bruce, “but if you screw this up and we don’t get paid because of your bullshit, then don’t blame me.” Bruce picks up his bass and tunes it quickly, turning his back to John.
“That’s right,” says John, “it’s never your fault, Bruce the blameless. Wanker.”
“You been drinking?” asks Bruce.
“It’s obvious you have,” says John, pointing to the red wine stain on his shirt.
“Alright, alright,” says Uncle, thumbing his dungarees, “that’s enough, all hands on deck,” his voice muffled by his beard.
“You lads ready to go on?” asks Richard, all excited. “Now remember,” he says, “no swearing.”
He goes on stage and gives an introduction. J.B. is already at out there, sitting at his organ. We open with *Seasons of Change,* our single. I play recorder in parts but the band doesn’t really get it together. You can’t see the audience. We all make mistakes at different times.

During *Grand Canyon Suites* Uncle starts a harmonica solo, spinning and twirling around. The song builds up in the middle and he’s getting lost in the music. J.B. is about to let rip when Uncle’s foot misses the front of the stage and he goes flying into the first row. All these grannies shielding themselves from him. He jumps back up on stage quickly and finishes the song.

“Alright there Uncle?” I ask him on the microphone. He gives me a thumbs up. “You all having a good time?” I ask the audience. No answer. “Alright, let’s get this shit over with,” and we play through *Raglan’s Folly.* We finish with *Livestock* and jam out for a while at the end. The audience claps slowly, the lights brighten, we don’t bow or wave. I want a drink straight away. Backstage we relax for a minute. Bruce says we should go to the pier. In walks Richard, he looks stressed out.

“What were you thinking?” he asks.
“Wh..what are you talking about?”
“The swearing. There’s been complaints. You said shit remember?” he’s a foot away from me, looking really concerned.
“You’ve got to be joking, Dick.”
“No, I’m not joking, Ronald.”
“Well, for f***s sakes,” I say, “this is just bullshit, most of the oldies swear more than I do.”
“Rules are rules Mister.” He runs his hand through his hair. “Don’t let this happen again.”
“C’mon Ron,” says Bruce, “let’s go for a walk.”

The sun beats bright on the quiet streets. The footpaths have large holes and cracks in them.
The eaves of the shops are covered in cob webs. Up ahead is a bottle shop. Bruce goes inside and I go to the phone booth.

“Hello, Spunk, how are ya?”

“Oh Ron, what do you want? I’m busy.”

“Sorry Rene thought I’d give you a call, haven’t talked to you in nearly a week.” Kids ride their bikes along the road. “John and Mick are ringing Sue and Carol, they’re gunna drive up here to Port Pirie. You wanna join them?”

“No, Ron. I’m not coming. I don’t have any money left after you stole the rent money.”

“What?”

“The white envelope, dummy. You took it didn’t you?”

“No.”

“Well, I can’t find it anywhere. Disappeared the morning you left.” A kind of painful feeling rushes through my chest, from one arm to the other.

“Maybe someone else took it?” I say.

“You’re not getting out of this one, Bon. That’s it.” She hangs up. Fucking hell. I smash the handle on the glass wall. Fuck.

Bruce stands outside the phone booth holding two paper bags. I tell him what happened. He says not to worry about it and we walk to the pier stretching out across the gulf. White wooden barriers all along the left side. Grey boards tilt when you step on them. A cold wind blows. The water is dark with seaweed, but clears the further we walk out. Fishermen sit on the edge, little white eskies between them, buckets behind. Set lines are tied to the galvanised ladders. White sunlight rings sit below the surface. A pelican stands on the only light post. Two fishing boats and a trawler bounce against some old tyres.

At the end of the jetty there’s a metal frame for weighing fish. A group of people stand looking over the edge. In the water you can see thousands of stingers and jellyfish. Their long tentacles sway in the current. Their tails are like flames if they touch your skin. Two young boys pace back and forth, wearing only undies. One of them says to the other, “go in if you want, but I’m not going in, not with those stingers”.

I take a swig from my quart of whisky and hand it to Bruce. I take my shirt off and tie my hair back. I take my boots off and roll my jeans up. My armpits stink.

“You going in, you crazy bastard?” asks Bruce. I just raise my eyebrows at him. The kid in his undies watches me, looks at my tattoos. A small ladder covered in seagull shit goes half way up the fish tower. My feet scrape on the rusted metal as I lean back and climb to the top. All along the pier, people are watching, shielding their eyes from the sun. I’m level with the roof of the tall cray boat. I hold onto a thin rod. A gust of wind blows and I wonder how deep the water is. The stingers are invisible but I can make out a few jelly fish.

Bruce is chatting with the kids, his arms crossed. More and more people walk towards me. Too late to turn back now. I look up at the horizon. Brian and the cliffs. I put my feet together and let go of the rod. My heart is pounding. I jump outward. My eyes widen. I throw my arms
out wide, trying to keep my legs tight. Whirring in my ears, like an engine revving, louder and louder, head first I fall and fall. I bring my hands together in front of my face. I slightly over pitch, the water smashing my ear drums. I dive deep and open my eyes. A school of herring, Ripple in the sand. I start breaststroking toward the pylons, toward the boat hulls. Pausing for a moment, I let out some bubbles, black figures lean on the edge of the pier.

On the surface I gasp for air and grab onto the ladder and go up a few steps. Mussels cling at the water level. Salt taste. My chest heaves. The little kid comes down the ladder and I work my way past him. At the top slithers of water weave through my chest hair. Applause erupts in the gathered crowd. Bruce hands me my shirt and boots. We start heading to the shore, to the smoke stack pumping white, and I take a big gulp of whisky. The little kid keeps following us.

“I think he likes you, Ron,” says Bruce. We reach the concrete ramp covered in sand. My feet are a sand sponge. The boy grabs my hand. I squat down and grab him by the shoulders and tell him we have to go. I look back a few times as we get closer to the auditorium, the kid stands there watching us.

“You're on in ten minutes,” says Ralph. I run out to the bus and find my bag and put on a fresh pair of jeans, a large brown belt and a flannel shirt. I can feel the salt on my skin rubbing on the clean cotton. Big swig of whisky makes my body shake.

I run back inside and Richard is giving his introductory speech. We walk on to disjointed applause. This new building has a mechanical floor at the front of the stage that lowers and turns into a dance floor. About three hundred faces look at us wide eyed. There are two cops in each aisle. They stop the kids enjoying themselves.

We open with Cool Spot, a percussive song with loud guitar and organ solos. It's a song you can dance to, but the kids don't dare stand up. Our drummer plays much louder than in the sound check and everyone else creeps their volume up. We rip straight into Livestock, Bruce's walking bass-lines filling the room. He's wearing a black leather jacket and going for it, sweat shining on his forehead. His glasses keep slipping. Uncle presses a few pedals and spins off into his own world. His harmonica disappears into his beard. He sounds more like a guitar than a harp. The kids look bewildered. They've never heard a band this loud. Some look paralysed.

One of the boys in blue is chatting to Richard at the back of the room. Richard shakes his head and says something behind his cupped hand. At the end of the song Richard works his way to the side of the stage, grabs Bruce's attention and tell him to turn it down. I turn to the crowd and say “looks like we have a few what-nots here who want to tell us what to do.” A few of the kids cheer. The cops shake their heads. Richard looks furious.

John counts us in for Summerville and I let myself go in the climax singing “this is my home”, rising an octave for the ending. After the song I ask one of the girls in the front row how she's doing. She gets all embarrassed. I look as many kids in the eyes as I can and say “we are under orders not to say shit, or fuck, or any other swear words so if you hear any let me know and I’ll tell your parents.” They all laugh. A few gasp. One of the cops points at me and makes a throat
cutting motion.

We finish the set and waiting backstage is Carol and Sue and Vicki. No Irene or Bruce’s wife Anne. They couples pair off and go out the back door. Richard comes up and tells Bruce he’s washing his hands of us, that he’ll try to get the money, but no guarantees. I go to the toilet and when I return Bruce has buggered off. Four cops come in. They wear black uniforms and their trousers are neatly creased. They crowd around and smell like starch. The big guy grabs my arm and pushes me into the manager’s office.

They throw me in the chair and lock the door. The grey haired one sits on the table with his legs dangling. He adjusts his belt. His gut hangs out his shirt. He takes his hat off and hangs it on the picture on the table. The big one is behind me, with his hands on my shoulders, and the other two on each side. All their balls are at my eye level, I could easily punch their lollie bags back into the deli.

“What’s you name, son?” the grey hair asks.

“Bon, Bon Scott,” I say, looking at his shoes.

“This is Constable Mackenzie, Jones, and Roberts.”

“Cuntstables,” I say, nodding.

“I’m Sergeant Holt. You want to tell us why you elected to swear at the audience?”

“I wasn’t swearing at—”

“You going to arrest me?” I ask. I’m starting to get worried. What exactly do they want?

“Shut up,” says Jones. I inch forward in my seat using my arms. The grip tightens on my shoulders and he pulls me back. The grey hair mumbles behind his hand to Roberts who then goes out of the room.

“What’s this stupid parrot tattoo on your arm for?” says Jones. He has a scar between his upper lip and nose. Roberts comes back in and says there’s no one out there. He hands a revolver to Holt.

“Where the fuck is Bruce?” I ask, looking Holt in the eyes.

“What did we say about swearing?” says Jones, turning red.

“Seems your friends have abandoned you, man,” says Roberts. Holt turns his watch on his wrist, then decides to take it off and lay it on the table. There’s an aerial photograph of the Eyre peninsula on the wall.

“We’re going to play a little game,” says Holt. “It’s called hide the hippy.” He takes his badge off and puts it next to his watch. “Hand me your gun, Jones.” He takes the gun in his freckled hand, flings the chamber out and removes the bullets. He puts the bullets in his top pocket. I look him straight in the eyes. They are dead.
“Look,” I say, “I didn’t mean it. I’ll do anything you want, you name it.” Roberts laughs.

“I’m not cleaning the mess up this time,” says the big guy, his voice deep vibrates through his hands.

“You’ll do as you’re told Paul,” says Holt. He’s putting one bullet back in the chamber. The weapon is black and oozes black. Holt opens the chamber again and shows me one bullet in there, the end is gold. He flicks the cylinder with his finger and looks up at the ceiling. He takes a deep breath and closes the chamber without looking. He stands up. “Put him up against the wall,” he says. The big guy lifts the chair by the arms and throws me and the chair against the wall. I put my knees through the plasterboard. He grabs my collar and pulls me up, choking me. One of them punches me in the stomach and I fall and can’t get air. I’m gasping. Sweat is pouring out of my palms. Holt grabs me by the throat and slams my head against the wall, his silver fillings are exposed as he talks.

“What did we say about swearing? Everyone has rules to follow, you little prick. We got men dying overseas for us and lazy bastards like you living off our taxes. The cities are full of em.” The end of his nose is thick, like a big callous. I close my eyes. The Vietnam guy on the train. He only has one arm. He winks to me.

“Get stuffed,” I say, “I’ve never been on the dole a day in my life.”

“That so? Well who’s the government guy paying all your bills? If he wasn’t here, you’d be dead by now.”

“Okay, okay, jokes over fellas,” I say “you made your point, can you let me go now?” I try to look them all in the eyes, but they ignore me.

“This is no joke, sonny,” says Holt, the muscles around his eyes twitch. He drops off the table, and grabs my cheeks, pulling my lips together. The skin below my eyes hurts. This is getting serious. These guys are evil.

“Ya wahn wop wow?” He lets go of my cheeks.

“What did you say?”

“I fucked up okay, c’mon guys.”

“They’re all sorry behind closed doors,” says Jones, playing with the envelope opener.


“I didn’t say I was sorry,” I say, gripping the arm rests tight, my bum clenched. They all start laughing, but they’re faking it. My heart is pounding. I feel sick. Holt lifts the gun up and points it at my face. His hand is shaking. He puts his left foot behind his right. The hollow of the barrel is death. I look away but the big guy turns my head back.

“This is your last chance to say sorry, you little fucking cunt.”

“This is gone far…” says Roberts.

“Shut the fuck up John,” says Holt, waving the gun to one side. “Move out the way Paul,” he says, his voice shaking. He pulls the hammer back. “Look at me,” he says. “Look at me or I’LL PULL THE FUCKING TRIGGER.” I open my eyes. Blue carpet, wooden desk, black pants. I look him in the eyes. They’re lifeless. “You don’t think I’ve buried guys like you before? I’ve lost
count of the amount of wogs and boongs with concrete blocks tied to their ankles at the bottom of the Spencer. Eh Jones?” Jones looks like he’s about to vomit. Holt looks at him.

“Oh, for Christ’s sake, you lot are a bunch of girls. His face turns red. He grimaces, and turns his head slightly and bares his teeth. His arm lowers, the gun is pointing at my chest. He brings his other hand up to steady himself.

“STOP STOP STOP,” I yell, “you fucking evil mother fuckers.” Holt shakes his head, shifts the barrel to the side of my face and pulls the trigger. I jump. Just a click.

“Let’s go,” he says, putting his watch and hat on. They follow him out of the room. I’m breathing so fast. I’m so tense. I look at the palms of my hands, that are shaking uncontrollably. I hold out my fingers, they’re playing a piano. I shake my head, make a fist and run my hand through my hair.

“FUCKING HELL,” I yell. *Fuck me, fuck me dead.* I look through all the drawers looking for booze, anything. In the filing cabinet some port. I scull and scull nearly finishing the bottle. I spill it down my neck and chest, in my beard. I pick up the picture Holt put his hat on. A guy and his wife on their wedding day, all smiles and sunshine. The frame shakes in my sweaty hand. I start to get my breath back. The urge to drink into the blackness. To wipe myself out. To feel like a ghost, hollow, sick, brittle somehow. A paper and pen I start writing the first thing that comes.

I’M A CITY KID THAT SAYS WHAT HE THINKS
NO SKIN OFF MY NOSE
POLICE KICKING ME WHEN I’M DOWN
AND NOBODY KNOWS.
WHY WOULD YOU SHOOT SOMEBODY
OR EVEN CARRY A GUN?
I AINT DOING NOTHING WRONG
I’M JUST HAVING FUN.

The door flies open and a waft of air pushes my face. Bruce hangs on the handle.

“There you are Ron, I’ve been looking all over for…you alright mate?” His eyes are soft and I love him.

“The cops threatened to kill me.” My eyes water and a big lump grows in my throat.

“Here, drink this” he says, handing me his whisky bottle.

Dry mouth. Dry lips. Dry fingers. Wet, sweaty neck. A plank of sunlight crosses the bus and shines on my face. Beer bottles and wine bottles lie about. I woke up cold a few times, but now I’m roasting. A pair of crows chat away in the car park pine tree. I smell bum and feet. I open a few windows. My stomach muscles ache. Ralph is asleep in the driver’s chair. He smirks. His socks are no longer white. He wiggles his toes.

The clock on the dash says nine thirty. Ralph wakes up, startled. He wipes his face, he has little
dots of sand in the corners of his eyes.

“Oh, Bon,” he looks at the clock. “You’re more than a pretty face.” He yawns and does a stretch.

“Let’s get the fuck out of here,” I say. We walk along the main drag looking for the others in the hotel. We sit outside the bakery. I keep a coffee down, but struggle to finish my sausage roll. Our group grows, everyone getting their brains together. The bloke at the hotel says Richard left early.

We clean and load the bus. As we pull out the cops are next to their cars, watching. They follow us out of town. I tell the story of the roulette, but no one believes me. We drive east, fixing the blinds as the sun moves, and join the highway with the road trains, and bare paddocks and cloven hoofs. Warnertown to Redhill, Red Hill to Lochiel, Lochiel to Inkerman, Inkerman to Prospect, Prospect to Adelaide. We cross the river on King William Road. A motorbike passes us. I shake my head when I think of the argument Irene and I are going to have. The missing rent. What missing rent? A king wave of all my fuck ups and bitterness swings through my chest. Our marriage feels like a blur of ill-considered commitments. Must resist the urge to line up a list of her fuck ups as a defence. I sip beer, hair of the dog, and bounce in the seat as the bus enters the city.

Ralph drops Bruce, J.B. and me off first, as the others need to go up to Aldgate. I walk up our gravel driveway with my clothes bag banging against my legs. I can’t wait to have a shower, and a shave and go to the pub for a Sunday roast. The sun is behind the big tree in the back yard and a strange yellow colour is in the air.

“Someone’s burning off,” says Bruce, cleaning his glasses. On the kitchen table, there are beer bottles, an ashtray with some butts in it and a leather wallet. Bruce opens the wallet, frowning. “Some guy named Pat.” His lips curl downward like he doesn’t have a clue.

“Your mate, from the bakery,” says J.B. I put my bag down in the hallway and start walking towards Irene and my room. Bruce is right behind me. I hear murmuring inside and push the door open. On our bed is Pat and another man with a young girl.

“Oh that’s disgusting,” says Bruce. I shut the door and walk back to the kitchen. Who is the girl? Why are they in my room? Lucky Irene isn’t here. Bruce checks his room and walks in. We look at each other bewildered.

“What the fuck is that?” he asks. He looks really pissed off.

“I have no idea,” I tell him.

“I could tell that guy was bad news,” says Bruce, lighting a cigarette. “Make me one of your special coffees can you Bon? I need some cheering up.” I put the kettle on and start wiping the bench. I pour myself a whisky.

“That poor girl,” I say.

“Should we go in there?” asks Bruce.

“Sounds like it’s finished,” I say. The magpies come to the back door, singing. I stir our coffees and top them up with a dram. The liquids separate on the surface. Pat walks in, putting a shirt on. His tall skinny body has no colour. The veins in his arms stick out.

“I needed that,” he says, grabbing a fag out of Bruce’s packet without asking. Bruce, turns to
face the other way, then gets up and walks outside. “Where the fuck have you been?” Pat asks me, slapping me on the back.

“We’ve been half way across the state,” I tell him, trying to hide the anger in my voice.

“Listen to this, listen to this,” says Pat, bouncing on the tips of his feet, “what do you call a bunch of boongs in a stolen car?” I don’t answer. Bruce walks back in. “A car-robberree,” he says. He claps his hands. We don’t laugh. I smile to humour him. The smile disappears from his face.

“Who’s the girl?” asks Bruce, he looks like he’s about to explode.

“Oh, you wouldn’t believe it,” says Pat, proud of himself, “we met her at the pub. She said she wanted to meet you, Mr Bon Scott from Fraternity, so I said I knew ya, and could hook youse two up.”

“So you brought her back here?” asks Bruce. I pour another whisky.

“What is this, a trial or something?” asks Pat. “Where else was I gunna bring her? Bon said to pop around anytime. At the bakery. I didn’t plan this, we got here and no one was around.” He crosses his arms. The front door slaps and then the other guy walks in. I’m struggling to focus my vision, getting about as drunk as I hoped.

“She gone?” Bruce asks.

“Yep, real youngun that one,” the guy says.

“Where does she live?” Bruce is staring at the fake flowers on the table.

“West beach,” says Pat, “you wanna have a go do ya? Do ya? Eh?” Bruce turns to him, his elbow on the table, I’ve never seen him this angry before. He puts his left hand on his hip, and looks at Pat over the top of his glasses. He speaks slowly, but his teeth show as he speaks.

“No. Fuck wit,” he says, “Bon is going to go to her place and take her out to dinner, and apologise.”

“This is not my fault,” I protest.

“Yeh,” says Pat, “why should he. She knew what was happening.”

“What?” says Bruce, going bright red and standing up. “That you brought her here under the impression she was going to meet Bon, and then you deceived her and took advantage of her?” Spit flies out of his mouth. I finish my whisky and pour another. “Get out,” says Bruce, “Get the fuck out of my house, RIGHT NOW.”

Pat looks confused. He turns to his mate, shrugs his shoulders, picks up his wallet, and goes out the back door. The guy follows him. I hear them talking as they walk away. Bruce pours himself a whisky and we finish the bottle. Bruce chain smokes.

“You better clean the sheets before Irene gets back,” he says.

“Who made you the boss?” I say.

“Ron, don’t be a pissed off drunk. Just change the sheets before Irene comes back, I won’t say—“

“You’re as drunk as I am,” I say.

“Ron, okay, I’ve told you before, I don’t mind you drinking but don’t get aggro.”

“Aggro? You’re the one yelling and screaming.”

“I’m not arguing Ron, I’m not pissed off with you. Irene will be back soon.”

“Irene? Fuck Irene, and fuck you too Bruce.” I go outside, the magpies hop out the way, their
head tilting. I sit on my motorbike and unlock the handlebars. I flick the stand up and reverse it toward the tree. I go to kick start the engine but my foot misses and I fall off and the bike falls on top of me. I laugh on the ground for a while, feeling nothing. I get up and get it started. Bruce is standing in front of me. The centre of the light beam fills his stomach. He grabs the handlebars.

“You’re too drunk,” he says.
“You gunna fuckin stop me, are ya?”
“Think of everyone else Ron.”
“Fuck everyone else, no one gives a fuck about me.”
“Alright, have it your way,” he says. “But I’m not coming to your funeral and I’m not coming to see you in hospital, you stupid cunt.” The flash of the kitchen light.


I correct and pull over to the curb. Hold on to a pole. Look back at the bike lying on the ground, back wheel spinning. Fucking stand. I grab the handlebars and lift her up, swing the stand underneath. I sit on the curb. Spit fills my mouth, my head hurts. Keep swallowing or you’ll spew. Better to walk. Deep breaths. I walk to the middle of the park and lie on my back and look up to the sky. Fucking them. I pull my jacket tight. The sleeves always riding up. Spit at the sky. An airplane flashes. I want another drink. Get up.

“…He came in three nights ago. Head on collision with a car doing about forty…” Who’s that? Hello? Black. I’m floating. Face down I fly over Adelaide the orange lights circle the wide streets. “…Surgery to stop internal bleeding in the left kidney. Three broken ribs. A broken collar bone…” I fall. I lower. As I lower the sun comes out. I go through the earth to an underground cave. A cool, calm lake. There are emus standing in the water. Their necks droop and drink. One of them has mum’s face. I take my clothes off and dive in the water. I stand up on the sand. I’m alone.

Tyre marks circle and shoot off in the distance. In every direction, only the horizon. Some small shrubs. The sun beating. I pick up a dry chunk of mud left by the single track-marks of a motorcycle.

“Ronald, Ronald, can you hear me Ronald? I’m going to take your pulse and take a blood sample.” The high pitched tapping of curtains being pulled back. I can’t see her, but I can feel mother in the room. Breathing machines beeping, a large pipe in my throat. Perforated white sheeting in the ceiling, square pattern repeated. Perforated white blankets pulled tight, like a strait jacket. A television, turned off, suspended from a rail. A bag of chocolate milk drips.

J.B. and I in his ute. My yellow motorbike strapped in the tray. Clutch the dog sitting between us, his pink tongue, his stinky breath. I hand John a tab of acid and take one myself. The beach is long and compact. Tufts of grass in the dunes. I choose a spot on the far away beach and go
as fast as possible only focusing on the spot. A small river mouth up ahead but I don’t slow, I try to go faster and faster whooshing in my ears as loud as the engine. Sand flying up. Splash in the water and try to break through the mouth. The stream yellow at the edge and brown in the middle. I go faster and faster and J.B. screams behind. I pick a spot to try to jump the dunes. The bike jerks beneath me. I fly out of the seat. Acid peaking, all warped. I catch the lip of the dune. The sand collapses. I roll into the water, banging my thigh, mouth full of sand and water. The motorbike back there, back wheel spins, sand circles.

Sleep. Awake, Sleep. A pigeon smacks into the window. Vacuum cleaner noise. Orderlies and nurses chatting. Like two boobs my feet poke up under the blanket.


“Ron, Ron, darling, wake up. Come on now, it’s me, Irene. Can you squeeze my hand?” I squeeze her hand. No strength. My skin sags. Numbness tingles up my arm. Fear. Fear is all I feel.

“We nearly lost you Bonnie,” she sobs. A tissue in her half-fist. “We nearly lost you, a few times.” She sits sideways on the bed. Her hair is tied back. On the chair her handbag and a notebook with some drawings.

“What happened?” I ask.

“You went out into the other lane, straight into a car. You’ve been here for a week. You left all your teeth on the road.” She smiles through her tears. The gap between her two front teeth.

“I’m sorry,” I say. I mean it. “You’re so beautiful, so beautiful, Irene.” Salty tears stream into my mouth.

“Your hands are so cold, and shaking. Your mum and I have been taking turns, she comes in when I’m at work. She’s knitting me a jumper. She’s so nice.”

“My Dad here?”

“No. Just your mum. She says you have to go back to Fremantle when you get a little better. But you can stay with me, if you want.”

“I thought you wanted a divorce?” I ask.

“I’m still angry with you, you pain in the arse. C’mon now, sit up, the nurses said you have to eat lots.” She helps with the pillows and pulls the eating trolley over the bed. A red mash with water on top sits in a metal bowl. Irene stirs it. She has our wedding ring on. “C’mon open up.” I shake my head. “Open Bon,” she says. She loads my mouth up and I try to swallow but mostly the goo slides down my throat. I try to say I don’t want any, but my mouth is too full. “Try not to speak Ron,” she says. “One blink yes, two blinks no. Now, I’ve been thinking. I found a place in Prospect, a little three bedroom bungalow. It has a nice big kitchen and a bath. It’s got gas hot water too, so no more lighting fires for you. What do you think Ron?” I nod. A nurse pokes her head in.

“Everything all right in here?”

“Yes, thank you,” says Irene, twisting, the muscles in her neck make a line up to her jaw. “You remember when we came back on the plane Bon? When we mucked around in the loo while everyone was asleep?” I nod again, trying to swallow. My arms are trapped under the blanket. We
had a quicky, the first one in ages. “You got me preggers, Bon. I’m three months already. It’s due in March.” I try to spit the goo out. She shovels another spoonful in. I turn my head away, a burp wells up in my mouth and exits my nose. I turn to her. She opens her eyes wide and looks at me consoling. I blink twice. “I know, it was a surprise for me too Bon, best to accept these things. Now. Things are going to change. You’re going to have to work and I’ll stay home with the kids.” Two blinks. She tightens the blankets over my chest. Two blinks. “The doctors say you’ll be here another few weeks and then you can move with me and start working on the house.” Two blinks.

Over Irene’s shoulder Mum pushes through the curtain and stands behind the bed end. She kisses Irene. She comes over to me but doesn’t kiss me, saying “Nae a body woods want tae kiss ‘at. Yoo’ve gart a reit mess ay yerself, haven’t ye?” She wears a cardigan and light brown pants. Her hair is greyer. Two knitting needles poke out of her handbag. “Whit, Ron, ye swatch loch ye seen a ghost.”

“Isa,” says Irene, “I was telling Ron about our little surprise.”

“Och, Ron, you’ll be sae canty wi’ wee kids. Ye can kiss ye auld life cheerio th’ noo tho, eh?” I look at them both, a feeling of terror comes over me. “Och aye, Ron, ye won’t sleep fur years. hink ay aw th’ misery you’ve pit me ben.” I try to speak. “Try nae spick tay much hen,” says Mum. “Th’ pipe they’ve got yer throat will ruin yer voice.” Irene and Mum look at each other. Then they both start busting out with laughter. “Hen, Ron, ye pure thocht ‘Rene was pregnant? Ye puir hin’. Ye looked loch ye waur in th’ wey to die.” They stand around feeling happy for themselves until Irene has to go to work. I fall asleep and wake up to see Mum sitting next to me. “Och Ron,” she stands up and keeps knitting as she’s chatting. “I’ve bin tryin’ tae keep them quiet, but it’s nae use. Nae use at aw. Yer faither is sae relieved Ron. You’re going to be ok. He said tae teel ye Sooth Fremantle gart th’ grain final.”

“Yes mum.”

“Ah don’t ken wa yoo’re breakin’ up wi’ Irene. She cares a stoatin’ deal fur ye, ye ken. An’ don’t ye forgit it. She’s much better than ‘at other girl, th’ snob.”

“Maria’s not a snob, Mum, she’s Dutch.”

“Don’t gie aw worked up noo, ye need tae rest,” she says.

“I’m sorry, Mum.”

“Wha?…oh…” she tugs at the wool. “As lang as yoo’re alife. Yoo’ve bin gonnae ben gallons ay thes chocolate milk. Ah didn’t ken ye liked it sae much.”

“I can’t taste it, Mum, goes straight in my stomach.”

“Bruce shoods be comin’ in the-day.”

“Thought he said he wasn’t going to?”

“He did say ‘at. I’ve bin stayin’ at his mother’s. Ah tauld heem he better think twice abit nae visitin’.” She sits at the chair beneath the window. Some ravens fly by. “Bruce says his maw an’ ah ur exactly th’ sam, but we look naethin’ loch each other.” A deep voice rumbles through the curtains. Bruce’s voice. He’s wearing a black leather jacket, jeans and R.M. Williams boots. His boots tap on the vinyl floor.
“Spick ay th’ devil” says Mum. Bruce looks at me and looks shocked. “We waur talkin’ abit hoo ye said yer maw an’ ah ur exactly th’ sam.” I manage a smile. He nods.

“No Isa,” says Bruce, all serious, “you and my Mum don’t look the same, you are the same.”

“What’s ‘at supposed tae mean?” says Mum, offended.

“You both nag the shit out of us,” I say. His face goes all red and then he starts laughing and I join in. But the pipe gets stuck in my throat and I start coughing and thrashing in the bed. I kick the blankets off. Mum sits me up and pats me on the back and then rubs. I feel hopeless.

“We main nag ye, but until ye can swatch efter yoorselves, ah guess we’ll hae tae,” she says. Bruce takes some Phantom comics out of a paper bag and gives them to me. “Ye listenin’ tae me, ye tois?” Mum says. “Us kimmers spend uir whole li’es tryin’ tae keep ye men canty, an’ we’re th’ one’s fa hae tae pick up th’ pieces.”

“Mum!” I say.

“Come back tae Fremantle Ron,” she says. “Forgit abit thes music business an’ bide a normal life wi’ yer faither an’ Dereck. Graeme’s ‘way at sea. Ye can still play in th’ pipe bain wi’ ye faither. He still enjoys it ye ken.” She gives Bruce and I long stares. Bruce picks up one of the comics and starts flicking through.

“Och, ye ne’er listen tae me anyway, what’s th’ use?” she packs up her things.

“Where are you going Mum?”

“If ye hae tae ken, I’m gonnae th’ bathroom, Ronald, Bruce can tak’ caur ay ye.”

Bruce starts playing with the television controls above the bed, his belly hanging out beneath his shirt. The TV is up on a frame. A white spot grows in the centre of the screen.

“Jeez, you get the royal treatment here, don’t ya?” he says, sitting down. The sound comes out a little speaker above the bed. Bruce grabs a bowl of fruit off the table. I look out the window, not a cloud in the sky.

“Oh for fucks sakes,” says Bruce, pointing at the screen, “remember this cunt? Ian Meldrum. Remember when we were filming Seasons of Change at channel nine and he was a dancer?”

“Yeah I remember,” my voice sounds like someone else. “He punched one of the girls out.” I try to sit up, but I’m too weak. “I’ll never forget at some music festival, after we got back from England, he completely ignored me. I went to say hello…”

“…how does he go from dancer to show host? That’s what gets me. I tell ya, the nepotism and corruption in this country blows my mind, man.” He shakes his head. “He couldn’t dance in the first place.” Bruce rejigs my pillow.

“Bruce,” I say, the machine beeping quicker, “I’m sorry Bruce.”

“Don’t worry about it,” he says. “You’re the one stuck in hospital. You got some beauty bruises. Your skin’s all see through…”

“I shouldn’t be here. You warned me.”

“I wasn’t gunna come.”

“Why did you?” I ask.

“My mother told me to.”
“When I’ve got nothing to do I go mental.”
“David-fucking-Bowie,” he says, standing up and getting closer to the screen. “I’ve been watching a lot of these music films lately Ron, trying to figure out where we went wrong…”
“I don’t care anymore Bruce.”
“What the fuck are you talking about Ron? Look at him. See he stares straight into the camera, if you can call him a he.”
“The music. Making it. All that shit. I don’t care anymore.”
“You gotta talk directly to the audience. None of this being aloof. See he hardly ever uses words that end in ‘ING’?”
“I’m going back to Fremantle,” I say.
“Use images and combine them with the story. You have to look clean and sharp. All the words have to have meaning, none of this la la la shit.”
“You listening Bruce?”
“What?” he turns to look at me. He turns back. “Every song has to have a melody and a chorus.”
“Bruce?”
“What Ron?” he says, annoyed.
“I haven’t got the energy anymore.” He throws his head back and laughs. He looks out the window, cleans his nails, using his facial hair.
“You’re just a bit banged up Ron. You’ll be right as rain soon. What else are you gunna do? You stupid bastard. You’re no good at anything but singing.”
“I’ll find something, was thinking about crayfishing again.”
“Yeah, right.”
“There’s good money…”
“You may as well go back to the fertiliser factory,” says Bruce. “Your problem is you’re one extreme or the other…You’ll be better in a few months, don’t kill yourself in the meantime. Bands break up. Shit happens. People get kicked out, they get replaced. You keep your eyes on the prize, Ron.”
A walking stick pokes through the divider curtain and the man in the next bed asks us to keep quiet.

“Anne says hello, sends her love,” says Bruce, throwing a comic on the bed.
“You two going alright?”
“Yeah, we’re okay” he says, shrugging his shoulders.
“Hey Bruce, remember when we worked in the hotel in London?”
“Yeah, course I do,” he frowns, pushes his glasses back up his nose.
“Remember some mornings, I’d wake you up and wait for you outside? Out the front?”
“Mmmm.”
“Remember the little window in your bedroom?” His eyes open wide, and a big grin comes over his face.
“You bloody pervert,” he says, laughing. “Oh jeez, I always wondered why you had that stupid smile on your face, I thought it was the hash.”
GOOD EVENING IRENE,

HOW YOU DOIN SPUNK? IN MELBOURNE BUILDING THE BAND UP, WE’RE PLAYING ABOUT 8 OR 9 SHOWS A WEEK. GOT A SHOW AT MYERS TODAY AND AT THE HARD ROCK CAFE LATER TONIGHT. OUR NEW MANAGER MICHAEL RUNS THE CAFE SO WE CAN PLAY THERE ANYTIME WE WANT.

REMEMBER THE FASHION DESIGNER, MARY, IN ST KILDA? RAN INTO HER YESTERDAY AND SHE STARTED GOING ON ABOUT WHAT A SHAME WE BROKE UP AND HOW LOVELY A COUPLE WE WERE AND SO ON. SHE GOT ME THINKING HARD ABOUT HOW I MISS YOU AND HOW I COULD HAVE DONE THINGS DIFFERENTLY. GRAEME’S IN TOWN SO HOPEFULLY HE CAN FILL ME IN WITH ALL THE DETAILS. HE SAID HE RAN INTO YOU IN ADELAIDE. I’LL SEND YOU THE FIFTY BUCKS I OWE YOU AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. THERE’S A CHANCE WE’LL BE OVER BEFORE WE HEAD TO LONDON, BUT IF NOT I’LL TELEGRAPH YOU THE FORWARDING ADDRESS. GOTTA GO.

LOTS OF LOVE.

BON

“Bon, Bon, come quick,” says Judy, this root rat I’ve been seeing since I arrived in Melbourne. Was good to begin with, but I think I’ve started something I don’t have the balls to finish. I’m listening to the possums scratch in the roof, jotting some lines for a song about hitch-hiking. “Bon, come on, get up. John Lee broke up with Mary, the bastard. She’s all messed up, get out here. Now.” I slip a silk robe on and walk into the kitchen, my feet patter on the floor. Angus and Malcolm’s cigarette smoke layers fill the room. Ralph, our spider, has a blanket over his shoulders. They all have a cup of tea and hand of cards. Angus is nearly naked and his guitar is between him and the table. I open my robe and flash everyone to say hello. Mary’s sobbing, her make up dribbling, eyes red, like the colour of her hair.

“You can do better than that bastard anyway,” says Judy.

“What happened, Mary?” I ask.

“We were at the Bombay Rock,” she’s short of breath, “having a good time. I don’t know, maybe someone spiked my drink, and when I returned from the toilet, he’s kissing this other woman.”

“Fast worker,” adds Angus, throwing down three of a kind. “Whatya got?”
“Did you go up to him?” I say. Judy is stroking her hair.  
“No,” says Mary, “I had to leave, I got to Alma road and thought I’d see if the light was on.”

The AC/DC party house, Landsdowne Rd. Big enough to sleep forty people.

“C’mon, we’ll set you up in the lounge room,” I say.

In the blanket I slide my hand up and grab some boob. Judy puts her hand over mine to stop me. The light outside has gone from bruise to black. I yawn. Her skin is nice and soft.

“Why are all men such fucking pricks?” says Judy, her voice muffled in the pillow. Her hair tickles my face. “Do you even give a shit, Bon?” I bite.

“They weren’t suited for each other, she’ll find someone else.”

“She’ll find someone else,” she says, wiggling out my arms. “Is that all you have to say? You probably think about moving on to the next girl as soon you fuck them, you selfish idiot.”

“I never said that.”

“That’s why you got divorced isn’t it? Couldn’t keep your dick in your pants?” I say, fist the blanket up over my face, she pulls it back.

“No,” I say, “we fell apart in London, Fraternity fell apart, then I had the motorbike accident, you don’t know me from a bar of soap, so don’t start…”

“No. No. No. I don’t,” she says, her pale face squaring up with mine. “You think you’re some big shot, that’s all I know. You never tell me anything. Yesterday you say you love me, and now the boys tell me you’re going overseas, when were you going to let me in on this big secret?” I can tell you, she’s not doing herself any favours carrying on like this. The possums start fighting in the roof as well. Must be the full moon.

“You know the band is going all the way,” I say, “I said when…”

“All the way to the ego farm,” she says, standing up now, her hips poke out. “Get over yourself, you fucking idiot. You’re just another band. AC-fucking-DC. Woop-de-doo. It’s a bloody faggots name. Angus dresses up as a school boy, for Christ’s sakes. The only reason why anyone takes any notice is ‘cause their brother was in the Easybeats.”

“Who told you that?” I ask, about to blow my top.

“Everyone knows, dipshit.”

“Well, yeah, you’re just a stupid junkie, what would you know?” Her arms akimbo. Her thighs bare.

“You’re on the shit too. What are you some kind of angel?” I’ve had it a few times. Overdosed once. Too much for my little body. She starts packing her bag. Her bum jolts, hair flying from side to side.

“I promised your sister I’d come to her party.”

“You’re such a retard, Bon. You come to the party and you see what happens.” She grabs her keys off the dresser, puts her heels on, and slams the door. I try to sleep but my hearts racing. I grab my notebook.

OH HONEY, YOU’RE ALWAYS SMILING
OH HONEY BABY, YOU’VE GOT SERIOUS
SOME SERIOUS STYLING

WHEN YOU WALK OUT THE DOOR ONCE MORE
LIKE A GLACIER YOU THAW
YOU’VE BEEN LEAVING FOR TWO MONTHS
I KNOW I’M A REAL CUNT NICE GUY
HANGING AROUND LIKE A FLY
HANG AROUND BABY, JUST STICK AROUND.

The brothers tune their guitars. A red Gibson SG and a red Gretsch. Their instruments are nearly as big as they are. Their hair covers their eyes. They don’t speak. They slash where the pick guards would be. Their feet tap, the lino snaps, their fingers fly, flick and hammer.

There’s uncut strings at the machine heads. There’s dishes piling up on their bed heads, but they, they don’t notice. Ashtrays, coasters, dirty magazines. Loose change, bottles of milk, shoes on the floor, the heater on full bore. Their guitars twang, and you can make out the tune, they’re working on a song based on a TV cartoon. They bend and squeal, restructure and steal. With some messing, their sick harmonics find a cure.

This train ain’t stopping. This service is express. I lay my body over the tracks, let the riffs roll back, and they kick me, they push me faster and faster. They let me see further than before. No marriage, no babies, none of that. They string you up, string you out, let me show them evil ways. I’ll change my spots when I change my jeans, ya know. They lock on a groove and hold it there for a bit. I see fire and the words these sounds demand. I feel work in their play. My celebrations are a revolt. My laughing images suffer. My time is overdue. They’ve thrown their watches in the bin.

“Fuckin’ hell Angus, your breath stinks,” says Malcolm. “When’s the last time you brushed your teeth?” He speaks as if uttering is a chore, and everyone should know what he’s thinking because it makes perfect sense to him.

“I don’t know Malc,” says Angus, wearing his guitar and undies, “I’m going to the deli, you want anything?”

“You gunna do the dishes even once this week?” asks Malcolm, holding a broom. Angus’ shoulders slump. He was having a good day until now.

“Do you want anything from the shop Malcolm?”

“Just fags. And git me a chocolate milkshake.”

“I’m not getting you a choclo, Malcolm, git your own,” says Angus. “You want anything, Bon?” he wipes his nose with the back of his hand. He has enough energy to power a small town.

“Can you grab some bread, the newspaper, and some rollie papers please Angus? There’s some money on my dresser.” I put the kettle on and start filling the sink. The front fly-wire snaps. We’re nearly out of dishwashing detergent. Malcolm puts some Muddy Waters on. Michael Browning, our manager walks in. We call him Browning. He looks more like a furniture removalist, or
rugby player, than a band manager. He sits at the table with his back to the wall, lights a fag and
starts playing with the ashtray, swirling it. He has a large forehead and deep set eyes. His dark
hair is thin on top.

“Ever heard of knocking?” says Malcolm, helping himself to one of his cigarettes.

“Nice to see you too, Malc. Look, I need you boys to do an interview today, between the show
at Myers and the Hard Rock gig.

“Oh yeah, who with?” I ask.

“Molly Meldrum.” Molly and I go back to the Valentines days.

“Molly! Tha poof,” says Malcolm.

“Hey,” I say, “don’t criticise someone of the likes of Ian Molly Meldrum. He’s very important
in Australia, and can pull a few strings or two. And a few dicks, might I add.” I give em a cheeky
smile. “He’s a real down-hill skier.”

“Yeh,” says Malcolm, “faggot.”

Michael chuckles, and lights another cigarette. I open the window. “Moving right along,” he
says. “The show at Myer is for an hour. Should be a breeze. Then you’ll meet Molly at three. It’s
not live, so don’t worry. Paul Drane will be there, he wants to talk about the Long Way to the Top
film clip.

“Who’s he?”

“He’s the director at the A.B.C.,” says Browning. “Phil’s going to pick you all up, and you
can meet at the cafe afterwards.” I see myself working up the crowd, provoking them with
gonorrhoea talk. I flick the switch and become Bon the rock star. With these guys the thought of
going for it isn’t the same as before.

FROM THE FIRST DAY TO THE LAST DAY AT SCHOOL
I KNOWN WHAT I WANTED TO BE
NO ONE KNEW OR UNDERSTOOD
NO ONE NOBODY WANTED TO KNOW

MUM AND DAD THEY SCRATCH THEIR HEADS
THOUGHT WAS ALL FOR SHOW I WAS WASTING TIME
GUNNA BE THE BEST SOME DAY
GUNNA RULE THE ROOST, YOU’LL SEE
GUNNA TO BE A FIRST CLASS SINGER
GOING GUNNA BE A FIRST CLASS STAR

“What’s the latest on England, then?” asks Malcolm.

“Basically,” Michael’s voice is soft and low, the opposite of Malcolm’s, “Atlantic are not going
to pay, they’re happy to pay for publishing and distribution, but we’re on own own for the first
tour.

“Fucking tight arses,” Malcolm spits. “That mean we keep the profits from the shows?”
“There won’t be any,” says Michael. “First few tours always run at a loss. You’ve seen what happens when we go to places like Geraldton and Katanning.”

“Well, George and I will be keeping an eye on the books.” Browning’s head tilts, I see he’s hiding his disappointment. Malcolm doesn’t trust him.

“Have you got new material?” Browning fires back. I finally get this frying pan clean and place it on the drying rack. Malcolm is insulted by the question, when in walks Angus. He’s holding a paper bag with bread, milk and newspapers. A milkshake in one hand, the straw in his mouth, another milkshake tucked between his elbow and torso. His guitar hangs loosely.

“Old duck at the shop says she won’t serve me anymore, unless I wear clothes,” he says, sliding the bag on the bench.

“I’m talking to Alberts and the bank,” says Browning, wiping smoke from his eyes. “I think we can roll it, but we need to do some bigger shows in Melbourne and Sydney first. Back Street Crawler sound pretty positive we can tour with them, although we’re talking to Ritchie Blackmore as well.”

“We’re ready,” says Malcolm.

“What?” says Browning.

“We’re ready,” says Malcolm, sucking on his milkshake.

“Ok so we’re all set. Between now and then as many shows as possible, and recording whenever we’re in Sydney,” says Browning “Be nice to Molly.”

“What?” asks Angus.

“Molly, the poof,” repeats Malcolm. Angus laughs, half goat, half pig. Angus starts brainstorming.

“Yeh, sausage roll festival, Mt Bulla mate. Umm, rear view Wagga Wagga. Wheelbarrow racer.”


“Mount Bogong. Bacchus Marsh, mate.” We all look at him and laugh.

A yellow station wagon belts up the street, cuts the driveway and digs two deep track marks in the grass. Phil and Mark. Angus, Malcolm and I jump in. “Nice hair Bon,” says Phil. I’m wearing black leather pants, a leopard print vest, and my most comfortable ladies boots.

“Mark, this is Bon, our singer,” Malcolm says. I swing around awkward and offer my hand to shake his. He’s stockier than the rest of us. His hands are soft and a little fleshy. All these guys are about seven years younger than me. They make me feel twenty one again.

“Who’d you steal this car off?” I ask Phil. He has a skeleton key to almost any car. His father is a used car salesman.

“Borrowed it from a mate,” he says, turning to me, smiling.

“Where are we off to then, fellas?” asks Mark, happy and enthusiastic. Malcolm and Angus keep smoking and looking out the window, just another day. Once I realise they’re not answering I pipe up.

“Myers, hope you got a good belt on.”

“What for?”
“To keep your clothes on…”
“FUCKIN watch where you’re going, dickhead,” yells Phil, releasing the steering wheel, letting the car straighten itself.

DRIVING TO A MATINÉE, PLAYIN HEAPS OF SHOWS
WEAVING THROUGH IN THE TRAFFIC, GOING TO A BLOW
TAKING RISKS, LOOKIN GOOD, RUNNING HIGH, RUNNING LOW
WHEN YOU’RE FAST, YOU’RE ALWAYS MISUNDERSTOOD!! HIGH UP ON THE HOOD.

We cross the bridge near the art gallery and wait at the lights near Flinders station. Hundreds of people criss-cross and then trams clack clack by and we weave up the mall and take an alley to the back of the department store. There’s young kids everywhere. AC-fucking-DC. Pat and Ralph are unloading the vans. I got those fellas the job from the old Fraternity days. I go to help but Ralph tells me to bugger off.

In the staff lunch room we sit around a large table. A fridge and bench line one wall, a sink another. There’s a blackboard with all these mottos. On the table a tray with some biscuits and cheese and crackers. Angus taps on his guitar. Malcolm is giving Mark the low down on what’ll happen. We’re only playing for half an hour, so it’s not a big deal. Angus opens his gig bag. A terrible stench floats out, like a bunch of bananas left in a school bag over summer holidays.

Says Malcolm, “Jes fuckin christ Angus, that’s awful, take it outside. You even air it after last night?” By the end of the show Angus was a hot flannel.

In walks Michael, his nose starts twitching. “It’s chaos out there, lads. There’s girls everywhere, the ads must have worked. I’ve never seen anything like this. There must be about seven thousand of them. They’ve scared all the boys away. Most of the floors are trashed. The fire brigade are on stand-by.”

“We’re playing though aren’t we?” asks Malcolm. Angus is shaking his shirt, sniffing it.

“Security are at the front of the stage,” says Michael.

Mark says “well they won’t go anywhere near Angus the way he smells.” No one laughs. Malcolm looks at Mark like he’s just slept with his sister. Angus puts his school satchel on. Phil’s tapping his sticks on his legs.

“Listen up guys,” says Browning, “half an hour and we’re out of here. The store manager only really wants us to play TNT.” He’s kind of nervous. He’s making me nervous. What damage can a bunch of screaming girls do?

“One more thing,” says Browning, jumping backwards onto the bench, kicking the cupboards with his heels. “We’re off to London!” Mark and Phil are all smiles. I have an inner smile. Malcolm, now with his guitar on, waits for silence.

“Why didna ya tip uz thi mornin?” he says.

“I didn’t know then, only found out this afternoon, they’re ten hours behind you know?” Protests Michael, his legs stop swinging. “I wanted to tell you all together.” He shakes his head and mumbles something to himself. Band politics. Best to stay out of it, ya know. In walks Pat,
all cheery, half his front teeth missing. His nose twitches and he's about a foot taller than Angus, messing up the little fellas hair. He pauses. Rubs his hands. He cannot contain his excitement.

“Did you horse and cart Angus?” he says. Mark laughs loudly. “I was thinking about you the other day, what was it? Oh, yeah. I was watching this porno and this chick was playing a guitar, you woulda loved it.”

“Oh yeah,” says Angus, looking up.

“Don’t you worry, you little cunts, I’ll look after you,” says Pat, “now let’s ROCK AND ROLL.”

One by one we walk up. Angus is jumping, his satchel bounces on his back. Mark looks pale, taking deep breathes. I finish my bourbon and throw the cup in the bin. Phil sits down and releases the snare springs. Girls scream and bounce and pull their hair. Some are crying. They have made t-shirts with our names in texta. They’ve black eye liner. Some look happy, some sad. Toilet paper rolls fly.

Security have their arms linked and try to hold the rush back. I grab the microphone from the front of the stage. Mannequin limbs fall at my feet. Bodies rush forward. I introduce us but I can’t be heard over the screaming. Phil counts us in, Malcolm and Angus strike the opening chord. I see Ralph at the side of the stage, his eyebrows raised. He’s struck by a girl who’s rushed around the guards. Angus goes up to a microphone and starts “OI. OI. OI.” They scream louder. I can hardly hear the band. I start singing “You see me ride out on the sunset,” and another wave tests the security link. There’s nowhere to move. Mark is shitting himself. A dummy head smacks one of the guards in the head. He checks his face letting the link go and with another wave of pressure the stage is stormed, girls grabbing my arms and clothes. The music stops and you can hear the rumble of the guitars getting scratched.

I head for the staff room and go out the fire exit and in the stairwell is Angus. We jump whole flights and break out into the daylight, into the alleyway stink. “We better keep running” I tell him and I start away from the mall, dodging puddles. We come out onto the street and there’s a whole bunch of them and I’m getting puffed out. One of the girls sees us and yells so we run toward Elizabeth St. Markets there’s a tram stopped and we jump on. We buy a ticket from the inspector, sweating like buggery. But the tram doesn’t move. Next thing the tram is surrounded and the driver opens the doors and they rush in.

“Oh ladies,” says Angus, his guitar still on. “One at a time, one at a time. Watch the guitar.” Most of the people on the tram look horrified.

Small streams gush inside blue-stone curbs. Drizzle blurs headlights. Black figures hop and step from shelters to trams to keep their feet dry. A bunch of football fans dressed in black and white sing their theme song. We stand and sway holding onto a pole.

We get off and find a row of workers’ cottages. Judy said not to come, but she’ll get over it and I promised Christine. A group hangs out in the front yard, some of them using a vine as a chair. On the verandah a long red vinyl couch. Four women sit with their legs crossed, their
stockings different colours. Their heavily made up faces flash by the fire in the drum. Raindrops hiss. *Ladies.* They giggle at Angus.

The hallway is packed so we head straight for the back, cellophane over the lights. The stereo up. No sign of Judy or Christine. We stand against the wall in the kitchen and I take a swig of whisky. Angus has a swig. “Ok Angus, I’m gunna do the human kangaroo, you watch the master at work.” He sniggers and ash falls on the carpet. I figure I can get naked out the back and do the kangaroo through the house then circle around the alley and jump the fence at the back and put my clothes back on. I open a door and inside there’s three guys and a girl sitting around with spoons, syringes, bags of white powder and a couple of jelly rubbers. A girl is asleep on a bean bag in the corner. There’s a line for the toilet so I find my way up the back and into the car shed. I put all my clothes and shoes on the front seat of the open car. I tuck my lolly bag and old fella between my legs, grab a handful of grass, bring the outside of my thumbs together, tuck my elbows and knees together, and start hopping toward the house. All the girls waiting for the toilet give out screams and laughter. In the kitchen I put some grass in my mouth and chew from side to side. Angus goes blood red in embarrassment. Most of the blokes are unimpressed.

Bounce into the lounge room and some bird grabs my bum. Hop up the hallway, people happily clear the way. I throw my grass in the fire and warm up a bit. I run around the back and jump the fence and open the shed and get dressed. I go to a quiet spot by the back fence and chuck a piss. The grass is wet and squeaks and come up above my boots. Pitch black with the party music circling. *Don’t drink too fast.* At least I’m pissing and not spewing.

I reenter the party. In the hallway everyone’s gathered around, the dancing has stopped and being a short arse I can hardly see over everyone’s shoulders. “It’s your mate, a bloke says, you better get in there.” I push people out the way. In the centre of the circle is Angus, stark bloody naked, except his guitar over his bits.

“Givme clothes back,” he’s yelling. Some tall skinny guy in a flannel shirt. Angus is steaming and spitting like a dog with rabies. The guy holds him on the forehead.

“I haven’t got your clothes, little fella.” Someone pinches Angus’ bum and he thrusts himself forward and starts having a go at everyone.

“Okay everyone, alright, show’s over,” I say, and grab Angus under the arms, the head of his guitar stabbing people.

And then I hear “Yes, show is over Bon.” It’s Judy and she’s poking me in the neck. “I told you not to come here,” she says, “now you and Angus, piss off.” Her puffy fringe bounces and I find it hard to take her seriously.

“Where’s Christine?”

“I told you to fuck off,” she says, pushing me out the front gate, me holding Angus.

“What happened to your clothes Angus?”

“They were in the laundry. I did the human kangaroo and when I went to get dressed someone’d nicked them.” I feel bad and responsible so I take my pants off and give them to him. We walk to the main road looking for a taxi. All the restaurants and cafes are pretty full so we wait on the outskirts for a while. A big brown Ford drives by and then about a minute later drives
by again and this time someone’s leaning out the rear window yelling *go home you faggots*. I start doing stretches and star jumps to make it seem like I’m supposed to be half naked. Angus has his arms crossed and he’s not happy and he asks me not to tell anyone.

A taxi finally comes and slows down, but when he sees us he drives off. I’m about to give up hope and start walking to the tram stop when a little blue Datsun pulls up and the driver leans over and winds the window down. He’s got a cowboy hat on.

“You fellas in a tight spot?”

Angus jumps in the front and I jump in the back with the dog and swag. We start driving along Smith St, the bright lights off to our right, quick whisky shot.

“Where yas off to?”

“Goin to the city,” I say, “to the Hard Rock cafe.”

“No worries, boss, whatchya doin there?”

“Playing a show,” says Angus, “we can get you in if you want.”

“No, that’s okay boss, they won’t let me in with a dog.”

“We can get you in, easy, our manager is the owner.”

“What, you fellas playing *tonight*?”

“Yeah.”

“What’s the name of your band?”

“AC/DC.”

“Never heard of yas,” he says.

The Hard Rock cafe, a large refurbished Georgian joint. Everything is wood, except the half Cadillac above the bar. Framed copies of famous gold and platinum records line the walls. Downstairs there’s a whole floor filled with pin ball machines. The place is pumping. Must be because of the publicity from the Myers show. Ralph is beavering away on stage, his long blonde hair keeps falling in his face, but he never ties it back. We get a good sound in here because of the intimacy. There isn’t really a stage, just a small step and some mikes. Angus and I go out the back. Malcolm, Phil and Mark are sitting around a small coffee table, eating burgers. Angus finds his gig bag and gets dressed and gives my pants back.

“You boys forgot about the interview,” say Malcolm, “we arranged the film clip without you.”

“Oh yeah,” I say, grabbing a chip. “What are we doing?”

“A float down Swanston street, like *Brown Sugar* in New York.”

“With bagpipes?”

“Yeh, but we organised for some Scottish bagpipe players to join us.”

“When are we on?” I ask him.

“Five minutes,” he says, “the support pulled out.”

“What’s first?” asks Mark. His pudgy face looks annoyed.

*Live Wire,* says Malcolm, sculling his beer.

Malcolm and Phil and Mark walk out together. There are minor cheers. Then Angus walks
out and starts provoking everyone with his devil horn gestures, his tongue poked out, his legs like elastic bands. I'll wait until just before the first verse before going out, sneaking in a few more shots of whisky. Mark begins the brooding note over and over. The volume and presence rises. Malcolm turns his volume up and his guitar squeals before he palm mutes. I run out when Malcolm starts strumming the three chords. Get ready for lift off.

A blue spotlight grows stronger and stronger on Angus who's standing on top of his speaker stack. His leg taps to the beat. His face covered by the school cap. Some people laugh at him. He is all the ridiculous parts of ourselves rolled into one. Phil's cymbals are like gold stepping stones. The bass drum kicks in, big and heavy. Ralph lets the smoke machine go.

Angus jumps off the amps, light as, and runs into the audience. They part for him and he nearly falls over. His mouth is open and he looks crazy. His guitar lead gets caught on one of the mike stands, but Ralph is on the job. Angus pauses, as if frozen, cranks his volume knob, the amp hums. I scream “WOOAHH.” The boys go full volume. BANG. BANG. The battle has begun. I wrap the lead in my right and grip the mike with my left. I jump out of the way of Angus who is like a caged rat. I flick my hair back and start singing “if you're looking for trouble,” I open my eyes and stare at a young woman, “I'm the man to see.” I give her a wink.

For the chorus Malc and Mark walk synchronised to the mikes and join me in a call and response, “I'm a live wire” and they repeat “Live Wire.” Camera flashes trap us. When the chorus finishes they return to their spots. Mark and Phil drop out leaving Malc and Angus riffing a Little Richard-type bridge. Once we get warmed up time flies. When the song finishes I scull two bourbon and cokes.

*High Voltage* next. We play the verse and chorus. Time for more call and response. I ease to the front of the stage. “I want you to chant,” I say. “I said I want you to chant.” I take better grip of the mike lead, tense my body up.

“HIIGGH.”

Crowd: “High.”

“I said HIIGGH.” This gets them going. “Okay, come on.” Mark is grooving. He's got the body of his bass up on his right thigh. Malcolm come in licking up, his head jerking. I look at Angus, his mouth open, tongue hanging out. No confusion. Everyone knows where this is headed and the song is going to explode and I'm going to blow. I'm spinning, I'm dancing, this is my time. Angus's guitar growls like a cat fucking. I scream as loud as I can, “I said HIGGH, VOLTAGE, Rock and ROLL ROLL ROLL.” The band takes it up another gear, louder still. The room starts swinging. My hearing goes muffled. I fall.

“Bon, Bon, get up.” It's Ralph. Loud guitars and drums.

“Where am I?” I ask.

“You're in heaven, mate. Hear that guitar?”

“Why are you here then, you bastard?”

“You went too hard and passed out. Here, drink this.” He holds my head up, I open my mouth. Water. He keeps his hand behind my head. “And again,” he says. Bourbon, straight.
“Lansdowne Rd. please mate” says Angus, to the driver. My head flops on the cold, wet window. White streetlights bring out the fog as they flash by. Shadows pan.

“Where we playing tomorrow?”
“What?”
“Where we playing tomorrow Angus?”
“Geelong town hall.”
“That’s right, fucking Geelong.”
“What?”
“Your ears ringing too?”
“Nah, you’re slurring a bit,” he says. Sounds perfectly normal to me, ya know.
“Sorry Angus, I get a bit carried away.”
“Tha’s alright.” We cross some track and my head bashes on the window. My plate moving about in my mouth. We drive by a closed pub, people trying to hail us, yelling and so forth.

“Don’t follow me Angus,” I blurt out.
“What the fuck you on about Bon?”
“Whatever I do, don’t follow me Angus. You got your own way, and getting pissed ain’t it. I don’t know, I just get carried away, that’s all.”
“You’ll be alright by the morning,” he says. “It’s not me you have to worry about.”

NOW I HOLD MY YOUR HAIR BACK AS IM YOUR LOOKIN RATHER SICK BUT WHATS REALLY KINDA FUNNY IS YOUR FRIENDS THINK IM A PRICK. THIS AINT NO LEVEL PLAYING FIELD, THIS GOOD OLD DRINKING RACE YOUR CHEATING AND YOUR BEATING WHEN YOU SIT ON MY FACE.

Rubbing my forehead to loosen the hangover. Nothing a few aspirin and couple coffees won’t fix. Mark pokes his head in and tells me there’s some big ugly bastard who would like to see me urgently. I tell Mark to tell him to come back in a few hours, but he won’t have it. I figure if I go out there in just my shorts he’ll scaddadle fast. I squeeze by Malc and Angus playing in the hallway, amps turned low. A bearded bloke, button nose, upside-down V shaped eyebrows, whisky hair. He’s wearing a holey black polo shirt, his chest hair bursts out the top.

“I see you got your fighting shorts on,” he says. His face snarls. The boys stop playing. He grabs me by the hair and drags me out the front where two of his mates are waiting with their arms crossed, chins up. Too many beers and pies.

“Where’s Judy?” he asks, holding my face close to the blades. Ah, this is the bit where my screwing around comes back to bite me, ya know.

“Don’t know mate,” I say, “you’re the one always bashing her up.” Okay he’s starting to really hurt.

“She tells me you gave her the jack.”
“She’s lying,” I say, “besides it’s more than you’ve ever given her.” Next thing he’s punching me in the face and back and I’m back-pedalling trying to protect my face, big rings on his.
rookers, and he knocks me straight into the rose bush all thorns ripping my back and legs like a newspaper. I kinda like his passion. Another thousand needles in my scalp as he picks me up into the next bush, an almighty whack to the base of my head on the trunk. I can hardly see but what I can see is his black figure and his gut drooping and he says “stay away from my daughter you little fucking dickhead.” Off he goes and I spit out my broken dental plate all bloody. I let my muscles relax and drop deeper into the thorns. Malcolm and Mark arrive to lift me up.

“They smell nice?” asks Ralph.

“You need an ambulance Bon?”

“I need a dentist and a stiff drink.” We get inside and I twist my torso to try get a view of the thorns, pulling em out with tweezers. Bit of a shiner on my eye and a fat lip. In walks Mark to see if I need anything, while the rest of the boys start loading up the bus. He’s being all funny hanging about. Then he blurts out “I think I’ve got the jack Bon.”

Takes an hour and a half to get to Geelong, stopping at a servo for fuel and cokes and pies. We go straight to the town hall, a grand old colonial joint with columns and steps fanning out. Ralph and Pat start unloading. I take some pain killers and go for a long walk, circling the outskirts and then cutting back through the mall. Geelong always reminds me of Darc and I at the supermarket and the poor girl I got in trouble. Bloody Darc and Gabby having a baby soon. The town hall is covered in our posters. In the side entrance Angus and Mark wheel in a black cage.

The hall is long and narrow. High ceiling with wooden slats half-way up the wall. Large square windows are recessed into the white walls. Between the windows a couple of foot long bar heaters blaze red. On the stage, which is about head height Pat is unrolling some leads. Phil drags a stack of plastic chairs into a store room. In the centre of the hall Malcolm and Ralph are chatting to two blokes in cheap navy suits. I sidle up to em.

“I know Rob,” Ralph’s real name is Rob, “but we have to take these threats seriously,” says one of the suits. “Is there anybody you can think of who would threaten to kill you? Even as a joke.” Ralph looks petrified. Malcolm is getting his angry face.

“Last time we were here,” says Ralph, “we had to kick a few punters out, but nothing unusual.”

“What about when the cop cuffed you and put you in the back of his car for swearing?” I ask Ralph.

“Oh yeah there…”

“Who’s this?” asks suit number one.

“This is Bon, our singer,” says Malcolm.

“Got a bit banged up there, son?”

“Just a bit, yeah,” I say.

“A cop’s not gunna threaten to kill me though, is he?” asks Ralph.

“Not likely, though, it’s not out of the question. Tell you what, here’s my card. If anything suspicious happens you ring this number. And if I’m not there, the station will radio us.” He grabs his lapels and repositions his shoulder pads. They don’t say goodbye, their shoes tap on the
“Useless fuckin drongoes,” says Malcolm, “couldn’t work their way outa weeties packet.” His face has gone from angry to serious and he stares off out the door.

“It’s a joke,” says Ralph, “come on let’s get back to work.”

“Where’s ya toolbox?” asks Malc. His fists clench. His neck twitches and he stares at some imaginary enemy. His voice gets gruffer, if that’s possible. “Where’s ya fuckin toolbox?”

“Beside the stage, on top of one of the amp cases,” says Ralph, looking even more terrified. Malcolm storms up to the stage, nearly empties the toolbox, grabs a spanner and three mike stands. He’s talking to himself and spitting and his boots bash on the steps and he walks back. Ralph and I look at each other bewildered. Malc kneels on one leg like he’s about to stab one of the stands and dismantles the base. His shoulders heave and his tiny frame struggles. Ralph tries to help but is silenced.

He stands up, hands us a steel rod each and turns and faces the stage, and sticks his fingers in his mouth and lets out a whistle. Not bad, for a little guy. Everyone pauses, except Angus who’s seeing one of the bars on the cage.

“Git ere,” he yells. So there’s Phil, our drummer. Mark, the bass player. Pat, the spider, and me and Ralph all standing around in a circle. Angus stands on the stage, sucking on a cig. Brandishing one of his weapons, Malcolm says “coupla detectives reckon someone has it in for Ralph ere.” Ralph shrugs his shoulders.

“Don’t worry Malcolm, it’s just a joke…” says Ralph.

“Fuck tha, we gunna find the fucks,” says Malcolm handing out weapons. Mark, with his Neil Young shirt on, loves this kinda shit. Phil and Pat and Ralph follow. I look back on stage and Angus has disappeared. Outside there’s heads in bins, bodies beneath cars, bushes getting poked. Over the road a brown dog sniffs the air. Malcolm and Mark search all the cars along the street. One opens the boot and the other stands ready with bar. A sedan rolls by and they watch it intently.

I’m standing in the sun, starting to feel a little better.


“What?” I have an inner smile. He’s moving his head about, trying to see.

“Fow mmone yeh?” He’s got a toilet brush held aloft, his guitar strapped on backwards. I love this about Angus, he’ll try anything.

“No sign of the killers yet, Angus.”

“Ow.” An old lady sees Malcolm and Mark tapping their swords in their palms. She grips her shopping trolley and walks back the way she came.

“What’s with the gorilla suit Angus?”

“Mumi oo ere,” he says.

“What?” He drops the brush and removes the gorilla head, his hair sticking to the felt. He scratches his sweaty neck and snorts back a nostril full of snot.

“You’re gunna wear a loin cloth and pull me onstage with a rope. I’ll be in the cage on wheels, yer. We pre-cut the bars so I can get out. You’re gunna harass me and I’m gunna get all mad and
chase you up onto the speakers, haw haw.” His eyes light up, getting worked up already. “We set up a rope and you're gunna swing from one side of the stage to the other, out over the crowd.” He's leaning into me with his furry arms and we watch the search party returning empty handed and I get to thinking this is the best job in the world and these guys are all mental.

“So you up to speed with the Tarzan act, Ron?” asks Ralph.

“Yeh, bloody good idea, except it's gunna be freezing cold.”

“Oh, couple of bourbons, you won't feel a thing mate.” I wasn't going to drink today, but with the pain in my mouth and the vibe of the show, a few bevvies don't seem like such a bad idea. A rumble grows from up the street. Up drives a red American muscle car.

“Nice Corvette,” says Phil, his eyes all glassy. He's always tonguing for fast cars, anything motorised, even remote control cars and boats. The Corvette is lipstick red, curved like lips too. He stops right outside us. The windows are tinted and we can't see the driver.

“Maybe that's your guy Malcolm?” says Mark. The engine revs a small thunder. The body shakes.

“Give it to her,” says Phil. The revs go high and thunderous and then the sound shifts to fast spinning. Smoke starts snaking off the back tyres, the wheels squeal. The back end swings 180 degrees, the engine louder still. We lose sight of the car in smoke, the chemical smell becoming taste. The wind blows and the red lipstick returns. Phil and Mark and Pat are yelling and screaming throwing fists in the air. The red blur speeds off. “Fuck yes,” says Phil, “I'm getting one of those one day.”

“Welcome to Geelong,” says Ralph. Angus and I spend the afternoon collecting palm leaves. Mark asks if he can dress up too, but Malcolm says no only Angus and I. Ralph is running backwards and forwards between the mikes and sound desk repeating over and over CHECK, ONE, TWO, CHECK, CHECK, CHECK, CHECK, ONE, TWO. Then he cranks up the reverb. CHECK CHECK CHECK CHECK.

Over the next few hours the fans start to arrive. I'm too amped to eat, instead a few bourbons and chatting with the fans, signing albums and t-shirts. The hall can hold no more. The crowd is loud, waves of laughter rise and fall. Ralph plays his weird sound effect soundtrack. Police are everywhere but everyone's in line. The mayor tries to make a speech, but is booed off. There's girls on guys' shoulders and guys on girls' shoulders, kids sitting up in the window recesses. Malcolm and Mark and Phil go on to great applause and start playing Baby Please Don't Go, a rolling groovy beat.

Behind a curtain Angus gets in the cage. He's so small he can just about stand up. His guitar pokes out the bars. He says he's ready so I strip off and pick up the rope and start pulling. Pat holds the curtain back and the crowd goes quiet wondering what's going on. Then Angus starts jumping up and down shaking the bars and everyone starts whistling and killing themselves laughing. I sing the first and second verse Angus playing his parts in the cage and me harassing him the whole time. I run from one side of the stage to the other feeling a little exposed in my loin cloth. I stop outside the cage and poke my tongue out and the gorilla breaks out and Angus jumps on me and we tussle for a bit the people going ballistic screaming and clapping.

I break loose and make my way to the side of the stage and Angus follows me so I jump up on the speakers. I grab an armful of rope and look down Angus is jumping and I've never seen
Malcolm happier. A wave of hesitation as I look out but too late I grab an extra arms length and swing out and when I get to the middle I look back to the stage getting ready for my landing when I stop dead, hovering above the audience. I look down. A really tall bloke has grabbed the rope and is swinging it side to side, the band keep playing thinking this is hilarious. All the women make their way to the bottom of the rope, a pyramid of sorts building beneath me. I grip my legs tight trying to hold, maybe a thousand people in here all smiles.

The rope sways harder and my hands get sweaty my arms getting tired, biceps hurting, my tongue pressing where my plate should be. I drop about a foot, still arms length above the crowd. There’s a gasp and the band goes quieter, the gorilla watching too. My arms sting and I have to let go falling into a cloud of screams and heads and hands for a moment I float on their shoulders and then I drop the ground hot and smelly and dark. My cloth is ripped off and hands pull all over. I try to stand up. Then Pat and Ralph charge in and grab me. Backstage I whip on some jeans, return stage and finish the set.

“What name is your reservation under sir?” A middle aged bastard, with a strong posh accent peers at us over his glasses.

“Name? We’re AC/DC for fucks sakes,” I say. I’ve had a few too many, and ready for bed.

“I’m sorry sir,” he says, “but we do not allow profanities in the lobby. Unless you can tell me what name the reservation is under, not some kind on moniker, then I cannot help you.”

“Monkier?” says Angus, I’m the bloody monkier.” We all laugh. “Well, a gorilla, actually.”

“Try the name Browning,” says Malcolm. There’s two girls with us, they ain’t exactly small. A few minutes later he gives us our keys.

“The girls are not on the reservation and will not be given admittance,” he says. We send them around the back and tell them to wait by the fire exit. Our room is on the third floor so we jump in the lift. Mark gets out on the first floor, and goes to let them in. Someone’s room that smells like burning toast. The hallway has lights like streetlights on small steel frames. Inside I open the balcony sliding door and the sea breeze nearly pushes me back, sucking through the room and causing the doors to slam. “SSSHHHHH” everyone gestures. Below there’s a swimming pool glowing blue. Mark joins me on the balcony, hands me a bottle of whisky. I take a slug.

“Bet you ten bucks you wouldn’t dive in from here.” Was just thinking of jumping in anyway.

“Make it twenty.”

“Deal,” he says. I grab the bottle off him, take another swig, pull my jeans off, get up on the ledge and jump straight off. Best not to think about these things. I aim for the end with the light, I guess is the deep end. I dive head first, hands outstretched. Explosion entering the water.

My hands smack in to the floor of the pool. I spring my legs off the floor and burst through the surface. “Twenty bucks” I yell. I do a few laps and feel awake. A few people are having some drinks on their balcony. A couple of lights come on.

I get out and the breeze turns my skin to goose bumps, all the boys and the fat chicks have come out to watch me. “Let me in, you bastards” I yell. Phil disappears from the balcony I assume to come let me in. The door to the pool area opens.

“Thanks Phil,” I’m rubbing my upper arms, but it’s the Englishman from the front desk.
“What room number are you?” he rolls his r’s.
“I dun know, came in a few minutes ago.”
“The pool is open from 7a.m. to 7p.m. daily. I’m afraid that without a key, and no form of identification, I can not grant you admittance at this time.” His glasses, held together with a lanyard, rest on his upper chest.
“But I was just at the front desk, you spoke to me.” A puddle is forming on the ground. Phil arrives.
“Bon you crazy mother…oh.”
“You got a key Phil?” He dangles the leather circle between thumb and forefinger. I push past the clerk and fling up the stairs and wring my hair out on the hallway carpet. Phil hands me a joint and I take a few tokes. Head-spin. I walk through the main bedroom, in to the bathroom and grab a towel, one of the girls is on top of Mark in the bed.

I stand in front of the mirror. My shoulders hurt. The blind whips and snaps. I grab the string and open the fucking thing. As I do my stomach rumbles, my mouth fills with saliva. I run my hand through my hair. I swallow but it’s no use. Hot all over. I run to the toilet. I feel how weak I am when I try to lift the lid. The bowl is full of piss but I don’t have time to flush. Frothy spew, coca-cola black, mixes with the piss water.

I lie back against the cold tiles. I convulse and jerk my head over the bowl again. Bourbon taste works up through my sinuses and nostrils. Froth covers the surface of the water slowly. A dark yellow line at the back of the bowl where the water drips. A hand rubs my back slowly. Another pulls my hair back. I don’t fight. All my energy has gone.

“Here honey, take a sip of this,” says one of the girls. I take the glass but don’t drink just yet. I rest my head back, close my eyes. She goes away and when she returns she wipes my face with a warm towel, runs the towel through my spewy hair.

“Come to bed” she says. Her big figure smothers me. I must look like a ragdoll with my bruised and battered head folded to one side. I feel her two hands beneath my armpits and to my surprise she lifts me easily, my sweaty back peeling, my feet dragging, my head hanging as she pulls me around the door back into the bedroom and lays me on the bed. She wraps me in blankets and keeps rubbing my back.

Soft and slow, she says “you’re okay now darl.” She’s huge and half naked. Her boobs pale, her nipples the largest I’ve ever seen. Veins like trees, tiny and blue. Her belly pressed against the bed holds up her boob, her arms as big as my torso. Between the folds silver sweat reflections. She has a likeable face. Her lipstick is smeared. Her eyelashes are really thin. Her big cow eyes open. She is a moving Mt Everest. I look around the room, everyone’s asleep.

I can still taste spew in my mouth, the kind of heart burn feeling in your throat. Even with the blankets I’m still a little cold so I go to get in the sheets. I lift the top sheet and try to get in but my legs won’t go in properly. Someone’s short sheet’d the bed, bastards.

She starts tying her hair up, struggling to reach her arms back. There’s no mirror but she seems to be imagining herself. She starts talking about growing up in Perth and how her father is a wealthy miner and how her mother and her fly to Melbourne for the weekend to go shopping.
don’t tell I grew up there but I ask her a few questions, which suburb she grew up in and where she went to school. At first she goes all quiet and then she answers.

I know she’s lying and I tell her so and then she starts crying saying how she grew up on a farm in Tasmania, about her old man beating her up, about being a loner and running away from Devonport. About how no matter where she is she’s always the same and her troubles follow her and she has to start all over again and so on and so forth.

Another spew wave comes, her perfume nearly tipping me over, my mouth filling with spit. I throw the blankets off and breath deep until the feeling goes. All the boys are snoring their heads off. My head is pounding.

“I’m sick of this,” I say.

“I know hon. It’ll be over soon.” I rest my elbows on my legs and my head in my hands. She keeps rubbing my back through the blanket.

“I mean this battle—sick and hungover over every morning, on the bus in the afternoon, drinking and gigging in the evening.”

“Don’t worry about that now.”

“That’s all I can think about.”

“You want my opinion?” she says, “what I saw last night, the experience I had, the looks on everyone’s faces, happy and fascinated. You got the school boy, what’s his name?”

“Angus.”

“He’s good to watch, but you’re the one. You give the music feeling, and flavour, like a good wine.”

“Don’t talk about wine right now,” I heave.

“Dear little soul. You know what I mean. Seems to me if you can lay off the booze and focus on the music, you’ll be fine hon. Nothing’s a fairy story.” She’s rubbing my hair back.

“Why are you so nice?”

“Look at me Bon, I don’t have a choice.”

“I don’t even know what your name is.” The blind slaps on the window frame.

“Rosie,” she says. “Can you do something for me?” she asks. “Write a song about me? I don’t care if you’re mean or nasty or nice. I don’t care if you talk about how fat I am, I just want to be noticed for once. Can you do that?”

“Sure, why not? But I gotta admit, I just steal ideas from old blues songs. The older the better, cause no one recognises them. I’m trying to write my own songs, but it’s not that easy. Everyone thinks the lyrics are a piece of piss and I can just bang out a hundred songs a day.”

DEAR MARIA,

SORRY TO HAVE MISSED YOU IN MELBOURNE, BUT WE COULDN’T WAIT TO GET OUT OF HERE THERE. I’VE BEEN IN EVERYONE’S BAD BOOKS LATELY SO I’M HAPPY TO BE IN SYDNEY, RECORDING SONGS AT ALBERT’S. GOOD NEWS IS THAT WE’RE OFF TO EUROPE IN A FEW WEEKS AND GOOD TIMING CAUSE THIS COUNTRY IS DOING MY HEAD IN.
HIGH VOLTAGE MADE GOLD ALBUM LAST WEEK AND I SENT MY COPY TO MUM TO PUT ON HER MANTLEPIECE. SHE TOLD ME TO WRITE SOME CLEAN SONGS FOR THE NEXT ALBUM, BUT THAT AIN’T GUNNA HAPPEN. LONG WAY TO THE TOP IS BEING RELEASED IN ENGLAND THE DAY WE FLY OUT, BUT THE BAND IS NOTHING LIKE IT WAS WHEN YOU HEARD IT LAST. I’LL SEND YOU OUR ADDRESS IN LONDON AS SOON AS I KNOW.

TAKE CARE TWEETY,
RON.

We cross Botany Bay’s swamps to Sydney airport. We hardly speak. Mark’s happy to be leaving because the husband of the bird he’s been fucking has started to ask about him at the hotel. We check in our bags and after a lot of arguing they let Angus take his guitar on the plane. On the other side of security is the Countdown camera crew, with Ian Meldrum in his stupid hat. He waddles up and shakes everyone’s hands.

“Hello Ian,” I say, “punched any girls out lately?” He frowns, his cheeks drooping, and shakes my question off. We sit together with our backs to the runway. One of the crew holds a microphone over our heads with a long stick.

“First of all,” he says, “it’s just gone like that, BANG, into the charts.” This cracks me up, I throw my head back in disbelief, he hasn’t been paying attention, as usual. I wipe my sweaty hand on my jeans. “What do you think you owe your success to?”

“Ahhh,” says Angus.

“It’s nothing to do with us at all,” I say, waving my hand trying to collect my thoughts, “our success is due to the taste of the public.” This stumps Ian’s top-down ethos.

“Well you’ve just lost me for words,” he says, frowning.

“But it was a hard climb for a while wasn’t it?” he asks.

“Yeah,” I say, “we worked eighty bucks a night for a while, but Angus rolls his shorts up, you know.” Ian turns to Malcolm and Angus.

“How long has Bon been in the band?”

“Twelve months,” says Malcolm.

“Twelve months,” repeats Ian, surprised. “Bon has been playing in Australia for a long time now, going back ten years to the Valentines, where did you find him?” I put my best old man voice on.

“I was living in Adelaide, getting very old and grey, and this bloke called D, what’s his name?”

“Dennis” says Phil.

“Yes, Dennis Laughlin, an old friend of mine who’s the manager of the band.”

“Wiz,” says Phil.

“He says, ah ‘want a job with a rock and roll band?’ and I went I don’t know if I can do that mate, they’re all pretty young looking fellas, ya know, cause I’m a bit of a grand daddy.” Hard to tell if Ian’s listening or not, so I address him. “Don’t tell anyone Ian, but I was a bit sneaky. They
were a pretty cheesy band. I could see what they were trying to do and where I could take them. Anyway, we went around to Bruce’s basement in Prospect Rd and had a blow. It was incredible. A couple of days later I went to have a medical for a job at the fertiliser factory (I’m lying. It was for a ship painter in Adelaide harbour, but you don’t want these writers knowing the whole truth) and I thought fuck that. So I rang Dennis and said send me sixty bucks for the plane. Two days later I’m singing *Can I Sit Next to You Girl*.”

“How old are you now?” asks Ian, sitting on the edge of his seat.

“I’m twenty eight now. These blokes are nineteen and twenty, and I’m gunna have to keep up with them, so I bought a stack of methedrene. I drag them here and there, usually down.” Everyone laughs. The pilots walk by watching.

“Yeah,” says Angus, ashing his cigarette, “especially when he’s up and down like a human kangaroo.”

“With the success that your music has had in Australia,” asks Ian, “are you going over there thinking you can take on the English market?” I look over at Malcolm. He looks so bored, he cracks me up. Either than or he’s hungover as hell.

“Yeah,” he says, “we’re confident, we’re not over confident, but we’re very confident.”

The area around our gate has six lines of chairs all running parallel. There’s eight of us and we have to sit separately. “You think our plane will crash?” asks Angus.

“Probably and everyone except you will live,” says Malcolm. Angus starts picking his nose and wiping the boogies under the seats. His finger gets right in there.

“Pick a winner Angus?” says Phil.

“Slippery bugger keeps going deeper.” The holding area fills up. On the loud speaker we receive notification the plane will be delayed due to catering complications. Opposite us, a grey haired guy in a tan trench coat stands up and paces back and forwards a few times. He scratches his head. The gates open and we all start lining up. The guy in the trench coat pushes in front of Angus. Angus pushes him back. The guy doesn’t move much and he’s about two foot taller than Angus. He moves back in when Pat, Ralph, Mark, Phil, Malcolm, Michael and I surround the guy.

“Alright. Alright,” he says, and walks away.

Angus takes the window seat, with a spare between us, so he can play his guitar. Brand new strings all shiny. He’s nervous. He opens and closes the window shutter, reads the magazine, plays his guitar, reads the menu, fiddles with the seatbelt. He pops his pimples. “Goodbye steak and kidney,” he says.

The stewardesses run through the safety procedures. The engines go from a dull rumble to a loud roar. Bumps in the run way, house roofs and trees blur, the flaps in the wings move up and down, the landing gear thuds back. The plane tilts I see the harbour and the opera house. My ears pop. Angus clutches the arm rest, his nose twitching like a rabbit. I lay my chair back and pull one of the sleeping masks on.

Me and Maria in our flat on Canning Highway. I was working at the bakery and going to
church to become a Catholic so we can get married and have kids. Petra street East Fremantle. Brian's parents place. Beatles posters on the wall. There was a single bed with stuffed toys. Sharon Smythe and her bangles. We pecked. I kissed her neck and licked her ears. I pulled off her knickers. Voices were outside. She pushed me back and took my belt off, pulling my jeans half off. I sucked her breasts. She opened her legs and I slipped in. She thrust in and sends me over but I had to withdraw as she wasn’t on the pill. She grabs my shirt but cum gets on a teddy.

Maria looked at me mad. I had to apologise for weeks.

A tapping on my shoulder.

“Today’s menu is chicken parmigiana or roast beef,” the stewardess says, pushing the brake on the cart.

“Got any spag bol?” asks Angus.

“I’m sorry sir, I think they serve Spaghetti on the Bahrain leg.”

“I thought they’d serve it on a plate.” He chuckles. “I’ll have the chicken pyjamas then.” The new Superman movie trailer is being projected on the screen. I order a few whiskeys. Clark Kent flies around the world, throws glaciers onto infernos, saves millions of people, rids the world of evil, but cannot fall in love. Lois is oblivious. Two speeding trains going at full speed at one another only have to miss by an inch. He flies home via the moon. I take my compendium out of the net and jot a few lines.

EVERYBODY FLYING ACROSS THE SKY  
SUPERMAN WAS OUT OF TOWN NOWHERE AROUND  
COME ON DARLIN, CHANGE YOUR ATTITUDE  
CAUSE IT’S A LONG WAY DOWN  
WAIT NOW  
WE’RE ALL LOOKING FOR A FREE RIDE  
THINKING ABOUT A GRAVY TRAIN  
IT’S A TURN, IT’S A PLANE, IT’S - A SUICIDE  
AND NO ONE EVERYONE’S TO BLAME

Angus goes to the toilet and when he returns he puts his arms out rising and falling over people’s heads and makes his body into the shape of a plane. “DDDDDDRRRRRRRR” exits his mouth. The seat belt lights come on and he’s asked to sit and the pilot says we’re about to hit some turbulence. He straps his seatbelt on and grabs the arm rests. His energy levels go to another level. I’m pretty drunk by now because Angus doesn’t drink and we order for the two of us. The no smoking light comes on. I look across and Malcolm is dead to the world. Phil is staring out the window.

The pen I’m using bursts and massive blotches of ink spread in my notebook. Angus grabs the pen and starts flicking ink all over the place. The mood on the plane is taking a dive, they dim the lights, but then to make it worse the big fat guy in front of us spews straight into his window, chunks spattered all up the walls, the stench fills the cabin, making me feel sick too.

“Bon,” Angus says, “how long til you reckon we play at Albert Hall?”

“Next week I think, Angus.”
I’m almost out of whisky, the stewardesses are strapped in near the kitchen. Out the window I see clouds. Voomp. The plane drops a couple of hundred feet and Angus the sicko is daring me to kiss the granny near us as he reckons she’ll be up for some smooching as we’re going to crash. So I look over and she’s looking back and I throw her a peck in the air and she doesn’t even flinch she’s pecking right back. She cups her boob as well and I’m put in my place and Angus is cracking up, showing his rotting teeth. If there was a white one in there it’d be a snooker set.

After what feels like a week, we land at Heathrow, greeted by Coral, Michael’s sister and our U.K. publicist. I need a shower. Outside there’s a limousine waiting, long and black, like English clouds. We sip champagne and memories of Fraternity come flooding back. All this means so much to me, I go quiet. The limo does the tour of all the big sights, the boys letting go showing excitement and emotion. We drive over the river near the Tower and Michael thinks it’s a good time to tell us “your first tour has been canceled for now. Back Street Crawler can’t do it. Kossoff overdosed a couple of days ago.”
GONE SHOOTIN’

1977 LONDON

DEAR MARIA,

BEEN TWIDDLING OUR THUMBS FOR A FEW WEEKS BECAUSE OUR TOUR WITH BACK STREET CRAWLER WAS CANCELLED AFTER AN INCIDENT WITH THEIR LEAD SINGER. WE’RE LIVING IN THIS MASSIVE TERRACE HOUSE IN BAYSWATER WHICH IS CLOSE TO THE CITY SO WE’VE BEEN CHECKING OUT THE MUSEUMS AND ART GALLERIES AND THE LIKE.

GOOD TO BE BACK IN LONDON EXCEPT FOR THIS ONE INCIDENT WHEN I WENT BACK TO THE HOTEL BRUCE AND I WORKED AT TO SEE IF ANYONE STILL WORKED THERE AND NEXT THING I KNOW I’VE BEEN WALLOPED ON THE HEAD WITH A GLASS JUG. SURGERY TO RESET MY JAW AND A WEEKS REST TO LET THE BRUISING GO DOWN. BONUS WAS THE MONEY I DIDN’T SPEND WHILE IN HOSPITAL I PUT TOWARD A TAILORED SET OF WHITE LEATHER TAILS. ALSO THE DENTIST’S FINALLY FIXED MY BROKEN PLATE.

WE’RE PLAYING OUR FIRST SHOW TOMORROW NIGHT IN HAMMERSMITH AND THEN OFF TO EUROPE TO TOUR WITH RITCHIE BLACKMORE’S ‘RAINBOW.’ IF THE EUROPEAN SHOWS GO WELL, WE’RE OFF TO AMERICA AND MIGHT MAKE SOME MONEY AT LONG LAST…

TAKE CARE

BON

HI IRENE,

SORRY I HAVEN’T WRITTEN IN A WHILE, I’VE BEEN TOO STONED. THERE’S ENOUGH HASH IN LONDON TO KEEP ADELAIDE SUPPLIED FOR ABOUT A DECADE. A REAL BONUS IS ATLANTIC LET US TAKE WHATEVER RECORDS WE WANT FROM THEIR VAULTS SO I GO THERE ABOUT TWICE A WEEK AND LISTEN TO WHATEVER TICKLES MY FANCY.

I HEARD YOU WERE PREGNANT. ALTHOUGH IT BREAKS MY HEART TO HEAR IT, I HOPE YOU’RE HAPPY. CONGRATS. DID YOU HEAR VINCE HAD A BABY? THE CUNT. BET HE WASHES ALL THE NAPPIES.
I SHOULD BE HOME FOR CHRISTMAS AND BACK IN SYDNEY IN JAN FOR MORE RECORDING. WE’RE WORKING FLAT OUT HERE AND NEXT WEEK WE’LL BE THE BIGGEST BAND IN THE WORD. I MIGHT EVEN BE ABLE TO PAY YOU BACK THE FIFTY BUCKS I OWE YA. AINT NO FUN WAITIN ROUND TO BE A MILLIONAIRE.

LOVE YA, BON.

While Ralph and Pat load up the Transit van, we catch the tube to Hammersmith. The Red Cow, a fairly unknown joint Michael has booked at the last minute because the tour has fallen through the arse. The place is tiny, a dinky little joint that if you jump you can touch the ceiling. There’s ornate ceiling roses and wooden architraves. Near the front door is a small bar that serves one type of beer and ten different spirits. The stage, if you can call it that, is five yards across. The band room is nearly bigger than the front room. We don’t care, we haven’t played in weeks so we’re all bursting out our skins.

There’s about ten people here, and half of those look like they live here. They all laugh at us, at Angus. He provokes them and runs riot. We’re so loud it feels like the building is about to collapse. We play better than ever. Everything clicks. We go full on like there’s a thousand people there. Our first show in London, you never know what press you’ll get. After our first set I walk straight off the stage to the bar. People start leaving. Maybe I’m cursed. Maybe England has it in for me. I order a few whiskeys and start to wipe myself out.

We start our second set. The place is half full. They come in groups of five or more. By the time we play Problem Child, our angular off-beat delinquent song, the place is full. The people at the front are forced closer and closer to us. To my surprise one of them is Margaret, my stunning root rat from Adelaide. When the lights flash I catch a good look at her, smiling and rocking, her hand bag swinging. I gesture for her to meet me out back.

After the show I feel high, real high, like I haven’t in a long time. I’m buzzing. I’m shaking when I pick up my glass. I sit but stand again, my temperature running high. Angus and Malcolm go straight home. Mark’s at the bar. Phil helps Pat and Ralph with the van. I’m pacing up and back.

“Brothel creepers, comfy fookin shoes innai?” I know the voice. When I turn around there’s a stocky bloke with long brown hair and dark eyebrows. Eyes like a wolf. Ozzy-fuckin-Osbourne. “Got a few pairs myself,” he says, giving me a hug. “Would you take a look at this cunt, Thelma?” Thelma and I shake hands, she flicks her massive fringe out the way.

“Fookin brilliant mait, jus fookin brilliant,” says Ozzy. “You guys,” he burps, but holds it in, “you guys are gunna, be, massive. You got it. I’m callin our manager tomorra, you cunts are touring with us. If they don’t bring yous with us, I’m quittin, I don’t give a fook.”

“Ozzy!” says Thelma, giving him a take it easy look.

“Fook em,” he says, “Tommi could take a few chapters out of Angus’ book,” he’s waving his hand with a fag between his stained fingers. “What’s the name of the song with the full on
ending? The one 'bout the child?"

"Problem Child," I say.

"Un-fookin-believeable. Thought my teeth were gunna rattle out me head. The pauses, fook. Wish we wrote that," he moves his hand through his hair. "How long you here for?"

"A while," I say, sweat making my back itchy, "we had some shows lined up with Back Street Crawler, now it looks like we're gunna tour with Ritchie Blackmore."

"Fookin Deep Purple," he says. "You boys won't git along, I can tell yas now. Right. Where's your manager? We'll get him and our manager together, work something out." I see Margaret standing in the door. My heart jumps. She's wearing a blue velvet outfit, her long black hair covering her front.

"Good to see ya, anaway, Bon, you know last time I saw you, after that Myponga show? The one in the middle of fookin nowhere?"

"Yeah," I say, "in South Australia."

"We stopped in Perth to refuel on the way back, to refuel and shit. I stood on the fookin runway and had a fag. Took my shirt off, it was so fookin hot. Swear I was gunna melt. I think I'm still sunburnt." He lifts up his shirt and shows us his tits. "Been about two years, fook me." We have a good laugh. Margaret moves in and we hug, the velvet on my skin, the earthy smell of her hair. A bolt of energy in my body, a sting in my heart.

"Ozzy and Thelma, this is my friend from Adelaide, Margaret," I say.

"Silver," she says, "call me Silver. I had no idea you were playing Bon. I don't travel to Hammersmith usually." She has an energy that's infectious. "My friend Martin rang me during the break and told me get here. I can't believe it's you. So good to see you." Ozzy and Thelma shoot off, Ozzy repeating he'll be in touch. Silver and I sit down and stare into each other's eyes, holding hands.

"What's with the name change?" I ask her.

"Oh, I've been Silver for a few years now. I've been traveling the States, no one calls me Margaret anymore."

"You're not married anymore?" She takes out a small silver case and offers me a cigarette. I refuse.

"No. No. No," she says, "that ended as well." This guy comes up to us. He's wearing a blue jacket that's had the colour stripped by rain. His jeans are torn. He's skinny and pale. He grabs a chair and sits close to us, looking at me intensely. He checks his watch and his shoes smell like mould.

"Hallo," he says. "Name's Leeroy. Leeroy Kincaid."

"How are ya mate?" I ask him.

"Olrite, olrite, can't complain," he says, his voice is like a giant's voice trapped inside a tiny body. "Nice show," he says, "good set you got going." He flings his head.

"You enjoy that did ya?" I ask.

"Oh, specially the little man, what's his name?"

"Angus."

"Fucking mental fuck isn't he? You lot from Australia then?"
“Yeah mate, from the land of Oz.” Silver gives me a raised eyebrow look.

“Oh ay, naw, I meant the band, from Australia?”

“Yep.”

“What’s it like there? Tonnes o unemployment, crime, corruption?” A bubble of spit shoots out his mouth.

“Guess so mate, everything’s a bit strange.” Silver lights a cigarette, her red lips wet.

“We have to get going soon Bon,” she says.

“You got all these scallys hanging round the streets,” says Leeroy, looking at me intense, “beating up old ladies, breaking into houses. There’s nowhere to live, no jobs, nothing to do. The government are telling us to leave. What I want to know is what you doing about it? You got other bands out there, The Sex Pistols, The Clash, making a statement.” I look at Silver and sip my bourbon.

“What do you suppose we should do then, Mister?”

“You should get all your fans, right, when you’ve got em in the palm of your hand, to join us and storm Westminster. Once we’re inside, we’ll stay there until they give the people their land back, if they refuse we’ll burn the place down.”

“What about everyone inside?” asks Silver, frowning.

“Fuck em,” he says. “They got nothin to live for. There’s a hung parliament no matter which way. Might as well start again. Who governs Britain? No one fuckin governs Britain. What a bunch of twats. They want anarchy, we’ll give em anarchy.”

“It’ll never happen,” says Silver, her legs folded tight.

“Why not?” asks Leeroy, getting agitated.

“Everyone’s too stoned,” I say.

“Because the army and police will step in, that’s why,” says Silver. “Don’t you read the newspapers?”

“Oh fuck off,” he says, standing up, pointing at us. “I’m warning ya, when the walls go up in flames, you better know which side you’re on.” He walks off and starts chatting to someone near the door. They look over and point. I look back.

Silver and I take a cab to her place in Islington. Her pad is at the top the top of three flights of stairs, a converted attic. The ceiling rises to a peak in the middle, where a single lightbulb hangs. She had some Aussie artist paint the walls like the night sky. There’s the Southern Cross and Orion’s belt. The room feels much bigger than it is. Her bed is retracted again the wall. A small lamp and a bedside table with books piled high. An oval shaped mirror sits above a small desk with her trinkets full of jewellery and make up. Silver comes out with a tray of tea and some ginger nut biscuits. She’s chatting away the whole time, how her marriage broke up, how she finally left her horrible family, how she flew from Adelaide to Sydney then to Los Angeles. How she worked her way across America meeting heaps of people and having the time of her life.

She’s possibly the most beautiful woman I’ve ever met. Her soft skin has a gold glow that stands out against her dark hair. Her face is so perfect, all the bits are in the right place. I want to kiss her. She is a good story teller and makes me feel welcome. Under the window a chrome
trunk full of records. She finishes her story and apologises for not changing the record, for
talking too much. When she asks me a question I get half-way through my first sentence and she
goes off on another tangent. I take my boots off and put my feet on the coffee table.

“Comfortable there?” she asks. Resting her head on the base of her palm.

“I like to put my feet up, and other parts of my body,” I say.

“Oh God,” she says, amused. “You carry on like you work hard or something.”

“I do. All the touring takes it out of you.”

“Yeah right, I’ve traveled more than you have,” she says.

“Wanna bet?” I say, “we’re going to America next year.” From the bureau she takes out a
wooden box. She takes out a bag of powder and a pipe. Her hair is tied back besides a strand she
lets fall in her face. She keeps chatting, saying nothing about the drugs. I recall Browning in the
hospital, after I overdosed, telling me to stay off the shit. Her hands work fast, tapping, cutting,
taking occasional drags on her cigarette. She takes a toke of the pipe and lets out a sigh. Her
pupils dilate, her eyes are nearly the colour of her hair.

“You want one?” she asks. I’m sitting with my arms crossed.

“No, I’m not allowed.”

“What do you mean, you’re not allowed?”

“The band would fire me if they found out.”

“Wow, man, what kind of regime you got yourself into?”

“Got any whisky?” I ask.

“Have a look,” she says, pointing to the kitchen. “There might be some left after our last party.
I don’t usually drink.” I go into the kitchen and open the cupboards. No booze. I step back and
look up. A bottle of gin. Good enough. Leeroy from the Red Cow. Should we be more serious?
More political? I squeeze some lemon juice into the glass and when I return Silver’s nearly asleep.
Her arms are jelly. She’s elsewhere. I see the pipe on the table. The powder ready to go. I flip the
record over and scribble a few lines.

I GOT MY ADDICTIONS FAVOURITE VICES,
I GOT MY FAVOURITE DRUGS
BUT WASN’T TIL I SAW YOU AGAIN TONIGHT,
THAT I FELL IN LOVE.

DIDN’T KNOW WHAT I WAS MISSING ,
CARRYING AROUND THIS HOLE,
DON’T WANT NEED TO WIPE MYSELF OUT,
NO MORE HARD STUFF.

I SEE YOU COMING WHEN YOU COME MY WAY,
IT’S A FEELING THAT A MAN CAN’T BLUFF.
I’M ADDICTED TO YOU, CRAZY BUT IT’S TRUE,
I FELL IN LOVE WITH YOU.

SHE TAKES STEALS ALL MY CIGARETTES,
SHE STEALS ALL MY BOOZE
SHE SELLS ALL MY FURNITURE,
FORCES ME TO CHOOSE.

THEY YOU TELL ME SHE’S ALL BAD,
TAKE ME FOR A RIDE
SMASH MY HEAD WITH A LOAF OF BREAD,
TIL I WAKE UP INSIDE.

OH WOMAN YOU RUN ME ROUND, ALL OVER TOWN
BUT LISTEN HERE, I DON’T CARE, EVERYONE KNOWS I’M A CLOWN???

One step, two steps, three steps into the bus. My hand slides along the silver rail that curves up and leads into the dark cavern. Phil’s in the driver’s seat, finishing a can of coke. The driver’s seat is black leather. All the others are brown corduroy. I take my place a few rows back, traffic noise becomes a murmur. Grey cloud and thin trees, the drizzle that is Germany. I like to spot the homes, like fishing shacks, smoke rising from the chimneys. This is the last part of our tour of England, Scotland, and western Europe. All the cold food, fast women and warm beer keeps you healthy.

At the venue we're shown our room and get ready. There's a long black bench beneath a long mirror surrounded by white bulbs. Mal is flicking through a copy of Rolling Stone. Angus is restringing his guitar. A guy walks in wearing khaki pants, a white polo shirt with pens in the front pocket. His name tag says Gerard, Promotion Coordinator. He has a round face. Attached to his belt is a walkie talkie that keeps buzzing.

Okay, everybody,” he says, he’s holding a clip board, “Ritchie is delighted to have you on this tour, but there are a few things he has asked you to do and not do, before, during and after the show.” Phil, testing his drum sticks on the ground looks up at me. Malc gets up and goes to the toilet. Angus is tuning up. Mark is elsewhere. “Guys?” he says in his thick accent. “Okay, number one, have lots of fun. Two, no liquids, fire, ash or chemicals to be spilt or thrown on stage. Three, do not enter Ritchie’s dressing room under any circumstances.” Malcolm comes back, lights up a smoke, looks into the mirror and checks his teeth.

“What’s your name mate?” I ask.

“Gerard. Now as I was saying. Four, no one to come backstage until after Rainbow have finished.”

“Excuse me Gerard” I say, “I have a question.”

“Ya.”

“Yeah, um, mate,” I say. “Can I bring my mum backstage? She’s flown over from Australia just
for the show, she loves Ritchie and the Rainbow.”

“Of course your mother can come backstage.”

“Five, no…”

“Can my mum come backstage too?” asks Angus.

“Ya. Just if we…”

“What about your Mum Phil?”

“Yeh, what about my Mum Gerard?” asks Phil.

“All your mothers can come. As I saying, rule number five, make no reference to the Rainbow during your show…” Malcolm, furious, starts reading from the *Rolling Stone* he folded in half.

“Listen ta this,” he says. “*Those concerned with the future of hard rock may take solace in knowing that with the release of the first U.S. Album by these Australian gross-out-champions, the genre has unquestionably hit its all time low.* Lead singer Bon Scott spits out his vocals with a truly annoying aggression which, I suppose, is the only way to do when all you seem to care about is being a star so that you can get laid every night.” Who wrote this? “*Stupidity bothers me. Calculated stupidity offends me,*” says Malcolm, tapping the rolled mag in his open palm.

Angus’ unplugged guitar stops twanging. Gerard gives up on his list.

“I will return when you have five minutes left,” he says, and leaves.

“Fuck em,” says Phil, his voice deep.

“They’re lying,” I say. “I hardly ever get laid, I have to pull myself most of the time. Don’t I? Don’t I Phil?”

“Yes, Bon,” says Phil.

“There goes our chances of an American tour,” says Malcolm. “Where’s Michael? Why isn’t Michael talking to these pricks?” The door swings open and in walks Mark, all excited.

“Oh my god, you guys you better come quick, you won’t believe this shit, quick, quick, quick, quick, quick.” He’s waving like he’s stirring a bowl of pancake mixture. I tell him I’m not in the mood, but he grabs my arm. Phil and I follow him along the corridors, painted purple. We come to a door with a handmade ‘Ritchie Blackmore’ sign sticky taped on. Mark puts his ear to the door, looks up and back along the corridor.

“You not gunna believe this shit,” he says, “I haven’t seen anything like this since Toowoomba.”

“Okay Mark, open the door,” says Phil.

“Quick, quick, quick,” says Mark. Inside there are about two hundred lit candles, mostly matchstick, but some fat coffee tin ones. Strong honey smell.

“How’s about this cunt, eh?” I say.

“What a wally-woofter,” says Phil. In amongst some champagne I spot a bottle of whisky and tuck it in my denim jacket. Mark and Phil start blowing the candles out. I start blowing too, the room filling up with smoke, getting darker and darker. Mark starts laughing between blows, and I start laughing and Phil too.

“Leave a couple lit so we can find our way outta here,” says Mark, having a chuckle. On tour you learn that you can not control everything. Before that, you only have the feeling you can not control everything. Phil opens the door filling the room with hallway light and Mark grabs two six packs of beer.
“Let’s hit the frog and toad fellas,” whispers Phil.

“What’d you do?” asks Malcolm.
“Ritchie’s room was full of candles,” says Mark. “So we blew them all out.”
“They’re gunna know it’s us,” says Malcolm, who’s changed into his black ‘show’ t-shirt.
“Who gives a fuck,” says Mark. Malcolm doesn’t answer but gives Mark an intense look.

There’s a knock at the door. We all act casual, I pick up the Rolling Stone. In walks Michael. He
has one of the tour laminates around his neck.

“I have some bad news,” he says. “There’s been an accident.” He interlaces his fingers. “Ralph
was up in a crane rigging up the lighting and he was electrocuted. He was thrown out of the cage
and fell to the floor.”

“Jesus Christ,” I say.

“The ambulance came and took him to the hospital,” says Michael, who never got along
with Ralph. “They said he’ll be okay, a few broken ribs and internal bruising. I’ve arranged for
a replacement for the remainder of the tour and I’ll look for a more permanent replacement for
when we return to London.”

Who made you the boss?” asks Malcolm.

“Can we go see him in the hospital?” asks Phil. Michael ignores Malcolm and says we might
be able to go to the hospital in the morning but there’s a tight turn around as we have to be
in Dusseldorf early tomorrow. Malcolm runs his hand through his hair and lifts his guitar up
and slides the strap over his shoulders. Angus keeps quiet and knows when Malcolm is in a bad
mood. In walks Gerard, a lighter in his hand.

“Very funny joke with the candles,” he says, “but please don’t make my job more hard.”
Malcolm takes a scull of his beer, and says very quietly, but with great fury in his eyes.

“Get the fuck out. We’re preparing for the show, now fuck off…” Gerard looks like he’s about
to cry. I want to hug him.

“Take it easy Malcolm,” says Michael.

“You stay out of it,” Malcolm says to Michael. “Where are our American visas?”

“Malcolm, calm down,” says Michael, unafraid, looking all of us in the eyes. “You know I’m
working on it. We’ve spoken about this already.”

The sun is out and so are our hangovers. We run out of time to see Ralph in the hospital so
I grab a plastic bag and yellow envelope from hotel reception and duck into the toilets. I never
remember which is which, ‘herren’ or ‘damen’, man or woman. I lay the bag on the floor, luckily
it’s a dry log. Must be from the schnitzels and chips. I finish the second half on the proper toilet,
my stool sloppy red wine dark green sweet pong. I wrap the log several times and spray it with
air freshener. I drop the bag inside the yellow envelope. I ask the concierge for a pen and write.

DEAR RALPH, (BEST SPIDER IN THE WORLD)
SORRY TO HEAR EVERYTHING HAS TURNED TO SHIT. HOPE YOU GET BETTER SOON. SEE YOU BACK IN AUSTRALIA MATE.

BON.

Along the edge I write in big bold letters FRAGILE and the address. We take our usual spots and the bus bumps out. A mixture of old and new buildings and always the vibe of the Soviets across the border. Phil finds an English radio station and we get as far as the first set of traffic lights. Mark yells out he’s forgotten his jacket. So we pull over and Mark runs back to the hotel. Phil and I share a joint as he prepares to enter driving mode. We catch the tail end of a news break. *The forty two year old man's body was found in the bathroom of his Memphis home.* As soon as I hear Memphis I know it's Elvis. Mal and Angus and Michael crowd around the front. I grab my puffer and take a few hits.

“Fuckin hell,” says Angus.

“You seen any recent photos of him?” asks Phil. “He looked totally different.”

“Another one bites the dust,” says Michael, hanging from the overhead rail like a monkey. Mark returns short of breath, his jacket in his fist. We descend the on-ramp of the autobahn, the leafless trees blur. I stay up front and listen to the obituary and they play *Blue Suede Shoes* and *Love Me Tender* and *Heartbreak Hotel* and I don’t even sing along. Cars speed past in the inside lane and the skies are low and overcast. I feel like I’ve lost a friend. I get the urge to write a letter to Maria and Irene and Silver. I look in my seat and take my bag down from the overhead compartment and riffle though. No luck. I look through the whole bus.

“Looking for something?” asks Malcolm.

“Yeah, com-pen…” I scratch my arm, “my black book. You seen it?”

“Nah.”

“Shit,” I say. I ask everyone else, but no dice.

“We have to go back,” I say.

“No chance. We can’t go back now,” says Malcolm, shaking his head. “We, have interviews.”

“I have interviews,” I say.

“We’ll ring the hotel when we get to Ludwig-watchya-call-it.”

“Oh for fucks sakes,” I say. “You went back for Mark’s jacket.”

“We’ll ring em at the next town,” says Malcolm. Fuck it. I sit up the front and roll a joint for Phil and I. Well a black cloud falls over the bus and with it a spell of homesickness of old Ronald Belford Scott. Pining for the sun and the windy fresh air of Fremantle. Dad and Dereck and Graeme all eating sausage and bread in the jarrah grandstand watching the football. Mum buying fruit and veg at the markets, all the people walking around barefoot. Maybe all of my bands are doomed to fail, oh yes.

“Hey Bon mate,” says Phil. In his blood shot eyes is a calmness. He drives to be switched off.
“I got an idea for a T.V. show.” He steers with one hand at the centre of the wheel.

“Oh yeah, Phil, what’s it called?”

“I’m a Real Cunt Job,” he says. “It’s about this bloke named Ron, he’s a real cunt. All he wants to do is to settle down with a wife and kids, and a dog and chickens. But somehow he always ends up travelling, never settling anywhere.” He sucks on a straw in a coke can.

“Sounds like a real cunt,” I say. “I can see him alright, I bet he has brown wavy hair, tattoos, and a missing tooth.”

“Yeah that’s him, you got him, will you—”

“I bet everyone thinks women just throw themselves at him willy nilly.”

“Yeh, closer—”

“I bet he thinks he can drink like a camel but in reality he can only handle two beers and then after that he picks fights with everyone.”

“You got it,” says Phil.

“I bet the cunt never has any money, cause he always loses it or gives it away, ya know”

“Yeah that’s him alright.”

“What a cunt.”

“So, what do you reckon, good idea for a show?”

“Who the bloody hell would watch that?” I ask.

“Maybe you’re right,” says Phil. “But I’ve been thinking, maybe I’ll go back to New Zealand and open a restaurant. Stay in one place for a while.”

We drive the bus onto the overnight ferry and arrive in foggy London as the sun is rising. Dead leaves float and swirl. Phil parks and we all start gathering our stuff, I can’t wait to get to Silver’s place. Michael stands up the front and says there’s going to be a band meeting tomorrow and we all have to be there. I get inside and have a shower and a shave. I take out my dental plate and begin to feel short of breath. A few shots from my puffer.

The basin full of hot water I lather some soap, wipe it along my jaw and bring the razor to my skin. My eyes are all puffed. I need a hair cut. I feel like a ten year old pair of shoes that haven’t had a retread. The pendant Silver gave me dangles from the chain on my neck. My eyebrows need a prune. These stupid tattoos? A lion? A parrot? A snake with a sword?

I move the razor through the soap. A path clears on my bumpy broken jaw skin. Wash the razor, tap the hair out. The meeting. Fuck me. This is it. It’s over. I try to utter the words same as every other band, but I can’t speak. Have they found another singer? I run some more hot water. I pull my cheek skin up and shave along my jaw. No visas. My drug conviction, surely. I wipe my face with the towel, put my plate back in and a smile in the mirror. The drinking? Malcolm and Mark drink as much as me. I look myself in the eye. I wince. Chuck my shaving kit in my room and head for Silver’s.

On the tube I grow more and more excited to see her. Rabbit Warren Street, Whoston, Kings Angry, Saint Pancreas. When we are apart she takes up all my thoughts. Only when the band plays do I forget her. I buy roses and a small trinket box made of wood and silver. London, the
greatest city in the world, if you allow it.

Silver opens the door and she's more beautiful than I remember. My sphincter clenches in excitement. “Oh, Bon,” she says, unamused. Some junkie guy leaves. One of her clients. She wears black jeans, a black leather jacket, her hair is braided. Her waist is white and pure, soft. I tell her about the tour and we drink tea and listen to music and make love. The Southern Cross painting is lit up by moonlight. We fall asleep. Elvis’ funeral. There’s a glass plate over his coffin. Inside he’s awake, and he’s talking. I’m the only one who can see he’s alive.

Pushing on my shoulder. “Close the window,” Silver says, “the mozzies are getting in.” I pull a pillow over my face to drown out the light, the outside noise. She gets up naked and closes the window and jumps back in her hands freezing. I squirm. She turns the lamp on, lights a cigarette and starts reading. “Listen to this Bon,” she says, reading from one of her books. The bed jolts every time she jumps to catch a mozzie.

“I was thinking of very old times,” she puts on her school teacher voice, “when the Romans first came here, nineteen hundred years ago—the other day…light came out of this river since—you say knights? Yes; but it is like a running blaze on a plain, like a flash of lightning in the clouds. We live in the flicker—may it last as long as the old earth keeps rolling.” She interrupts herself, gets out of bed, grabs a pillow and starts slapping at the walls. “Bon, get up, catch it. C’mon,” she says. I open an eye. She could be a model. “Oh I hate them, help me catch them,” she says.

“They’re not that bad,” I say.

“I can’t sleep if I know they’re in here. C’mon help me catch them.”

“Do you have to smoke in bed?”

“It’s my bed, God, I’ll do what I want.

“Yes, alright, but I feel sick.”

“What kind of sick?”

“Like a dull pain. Everything is difficult.”

“Have you been to the doctor?” she asks.


“They can give you a blood test, see what the problem is.”

“This always happens after a tour,” I say. “I’m burnt out that’s all.”

“Well you won’t sleep if there’re mozzies in here,” she says, “I’ll keep you awake.”

“Just ignore them, they’ll go away.”

“What and risk dengue fever, or meningitis? I’ve already got a bite on my thigh.”

“Lucky mozzie,” I say, taking a slurp of whisky. Malcolm looking up at me on the bus. Short of breath and powerless. She claps, and claps again.

“Little bastards, I hate them,” she says.

“I hate you,” I say.

“Bon, please. No need to speak like that,” her voice gets gravelly as she gets angry.

“Quick, get up, I caught a moth, I’m going to put it outside.”

“Put it out yourself.”

“I can’t,” she says, “if I move it to one hand I’ll kill it.”

“Don’t kill it.”
“Well get up and open the window,” she’s really angry now. I don’t answer. The pillow saves me from the charade. I hear the squeaking of the window handle. “Oh shit, see, it’s flying around again.” She jumps in bed, lies down with her back to me, pulling the blanket with her. “Good night,” she says. I don’t reply. “Don’t go to sleep angry with me, it’s not healthy.” I roll over and give her a peck and say goodnight. “You okay?” she asks, her eyes sympathetic.

“They’re going to get rid of me,” I say, a tightness rising.

“Who?”

“The band, I think they’re gunna get another singer for America.”

“They can’t do that,” she says, wide awake, “you virtually are the band. You write all the lyrics, come up with all the titles, do all the interviews.”

“Hardly anyone reads the lyrics, Silver,” I say. They write all the riffs. It’s Malcolm’s baby.”

“Oh.”

“The Yanks won’t give me a visa, because of my drug conviction. The record company doesn’t like me, and…”

“But you’re nothing like how they portray you. The other day I saw an AC/DC poster that had the writing remove these posters and Bon will punch you in the face. And I thought, Bon wouldn’t punch anyone, especially over a bloody poster.” We’re lying face to face, in a blanket-tent.

“I know, Michael comes up with all that stuff. He thinks it’ll sell more records. They’re not going to release Dirty Deeds in the States.” I run my finger along her eyebrow. “I don’t know if I can handle all this touring anymore. I’ve been sleeping the back of vans for ten years. I’m burnt out. I’m losing my voice. The band’s in big debt. All this touring costs a lot of money. Be a long time before I see any of it. They have to keep playing and recording, getting further and further in debt.” Her eyes scan my face left and right. She kisses my fingers.

“I’ve been thinking,” I say, “if you wanted to we could get married and have kids, you know. We could buy a house. I’ll get a steady job. I’ll work at the shit factory in Adelaide again, I don’t care. I can play shows at night for a bit of pocket money. Bruce and I could start another band, easy.” She closes her eyes. “We could live here and save up and buy an apartment and then rent it out and live in Australia for nothing. I’ll help you with your business until we get the money together.” She waves her arm and opens the blanket. Once I’ve said these things it makes sense. She sits up and brings a flame to her white stick.

“I’m only doing this until I get a deposit for a place,” she says, exhaling a stream of smoke, “then I’m working again.”

“You could get your old job back at Adelaide uni.”

“I’m not going back to Adelaide, that’s for sure, not while my sister is there.”

“Sydney then…”

“You know what happened in Sydney last time. Aren’t you still married?” She puts the cigarette in the groove in the ashtray and gets up, wraps herself in a white robe.

“Anywhere you want Silver, you know I love you. I’ll do anything.” She goes into the kitchen and puts the kettle on. She asks if I want a cup and starts doing the dishes. I lay in her warm patch. Outside the clouds have spots of blue and I can hear the street cleaners. I take a swig of whisky and feel the acid burn the lining of my empty stomach. Silver brings in a pot of tea and
some cups on a tray. She prepares a shot for herself, using the same spoon.

“You know what I realised when I was travelling?” she says. Her eyes are sad, like all the fight has gone out of her. “There are two types of people in the world. Adults trying to be children and children trying to be adults. You rarely meet people capable of being both. But you, Bon. You’re like Peter Pan, or something.” She sticks the needle in her arm and draws some blood and squeezes her thumb. She withdraws the syringe and places it on the table. She crooks her arm to stop the bleeding, keeping in every drop. She lets out a sigh and closes her eyes, her black hair spreads out on the couch.

She mumbles. She rolls over but her hair stays still. I get up and cut a slice of bread. There’s butter in the fridge but it’s hard, so I don’t bother. I get dressed and roll myself a joint. I put a Lorraine Ellison album on and stare at the star painting, all these different thoughts, ya know? My eyes blur with tears. I rip a sheet of paper out of a notebook and start scribbling.

THE PRESSURE BUILDS, THE STEAM WHISTLE BLOWS
A COLD HEART IN A BODY BAG, ARE IS LAYING LOW
WARMTH MISSING IN HER NEIGHBOURHOOD OVERCOAT
AND HER CRYING EYES

I SPEND MY WEEKENDS HIDING BURNT SPOONS
MADE MY COFFEE WHISTLING TO HER TUNE
SHOOTING UP, SHOOTING DOWN, THERE IS NO ONE AROUND
GONE BLUESIN’, MY BABY’S GONE BLUESIN’.

A mosquito lands on the page and I slap it, blood oozing onto the page. Since this is my last day with Atlantic I’ll go to their office and borrow as many records as I can carry. I kiss Silver on the forehead, her skin soft, her red nails. The air is thick. The footpath still wet from the cleaners. The street looks the same both ways, lines and lines of terraces. I have to think about which way it is to the station. A tall man, with his hands in pockets is singing to himself hey, you, get-off-a-my-cloud. I buy a little notebook and pen and a bottle of whisky. If I can write a few songs they might change their minds. On the platform dry, dead air whooshes before the train. I slip the notebook in my chest pocket and close my leather jacket and check myself in the window. I have time to kill. When we stop at St. James I see the sign for the museum and jump off. Up the steps and follow the long tunnel.

At least it’s warm inside the museum. There are groups of school kids and oldies. Most of the statues and painting don’t do anything for me but one catches my eye. A naked woman made of white plaster. She has smooth skin and long hair.

“She’s a beauty, isn’t she,” says the museum guard, a fat bastard.

“She’s a bit of alright, I guess, for a statue,” I say. “I prefer the live ones.”

“Oh, but Venus is the greatest of them all. She is the foam that binds ocean and earth. She is the waves that wash up the sand that we build our sand castles from. The same waves that wash our castles away. The pillow that calms man and woman.” His face is scrunched up trying
to focus. “Her sexual appetite is inexhaustible. She would eat you for breakfast, old son.” I’m starting to like this geezer.

“Is that so?” I say.

“One glance from her and you won’t even so much as think of another woman for years, yet she is in every woman’s eyes.”

“Bloody hell, mate, She sounds like a handful. I know a few women like that.” I stand a little further back and cross my arms.

“Yeah, she’s a handful alright, shame she lost her arms.”

“What happened there?”

“Found her like that when they dug her up,” he sounds happy as he says this.

“I kinda like her like that,” I say. “She’s more powerful.” He walks to the front desk and starts chatting with someone else. I take out my notebook. I have to draw circles to get the pen working.

IT WAS ONE OF THOSE NIGHTS DAYS WHEN YOU CLEAR OUT THE HAZE AND THERE’S ONLY ME AND THERE’S YOU SHE ISN’T WASN’T THE FIRST, ISN’T WASN’T THE LAST WE KNEW WE WERE GETTIN’ LOW

I WAS MORE THAN A MAN, WITH THIS WOMAN LIKE A GOD CRASHED TO THE EARTH.

SHE TOUCHED ME TOO CLOSE. A TOUCH TOO MUCH. SHE HAD HER HEAD AT AN ANGLE, STROKING MY CHIN A STATUE OF VENUS AT HOME STEALING MY ANGER, STROKING MY CHIN

Oh shit, I’ve run out of time to go to Atlantic, pick up some records, go back to Silver’s and then to the meeting. Unless I ditch the records somewhere and pick them up later. But I have lost the will to fight. I go out into the dead calm London day. I take a narrow street and make my way to the river wall. I’m forced off my line by busy Londoners. A small stream flows inside the curb outside a pub with green letters on the window. I press on my chest pocket, notebook still there.

I watch the brown sludge sprinkled with white plastic and off-white boats. The sky is sick smog-grey. Two swans take off like pool balls bouncing from a break. Lights and bridges appear behind dark figures walking at me. A man in a suit is badgering a beggar, saying “remember my face, my wife gives you money every week for the last twenty years, don’t ask me again”. At a bend the river broadens a great patch of mud expands below the wall. Holding back tears I sing Sam Cooke to myself.

I was born by the river, in a little tent
And just like the river, I’ve been running ever since.

It’s been a long, long time coming
But I know my change is gunna come, oh yes it is.

I lean on my elbows and watch someone in a raincoat and wellingtons pick through the mud and litter. They empty their bucket into a shopping trolley and not once look up. A paddle steamer festooned with lights, like a powder room, struggles by, and I turn to face the music.

Malcolm and Angus’ house has a concrete stoop that curves up to a white door with frosted glass above it. The light is on. I take a deep sigh and tap the brass bulb a few times. I turn my back to the door. Red buses move between houses with countless windows. I knock again and thrust my hands inside my jacket pockets. No answer.

I lower to street level next to the dented bins and look to the second floor. A rattle on the lock and then the door opens. The outline of Angus, short, shirtless, muscles, shoulder length hair. He lifts the neck of his guitar up and steps outside, looks both ways up the street.

“Bon,” he says, “how’s it garn mate? We’re just having a blow.” He leaves the door open and walks back up the hallway, telephone books and bills all over the carpet. I follow him into the kitchen. Malcolm sits in the middle of the floor, a serious look on his face. He has a dollop of jam on his cheek, Angus hasn’t told him about.

“You wanna cup of tea?” asks Angus.
“Alright, yeah.”
“Kettle’s there, cups are in the cupboard.”
“Whatchya been up to?” asks Malcolm, not pausing his playing or looking up at me.
“Oh, you know walking around, writing some lyrics,” I say. “Wanna see them?”
“Not right now,” he says.
“Where’s everyone else?” I ask.
“You’re half an hour early,” replies Angus, ejecting a cassette from the black recorder, flipping it over.
“Guess what we heard this arvo?” says Malcolm.
“What?” I take a sip of tea, blowing first and slurping deliberately.
“Michael says UFO are looking for a new singer.” I look up at the ceiling. There’s a little bit of dandruff on my shoulder, I blow it off. This is the moment, let’s get it over with.
“This is it then?” my hand checks for my notebook in my chest pocket.
“This is what?” says Angus.
“You’re kicking me out?” I’m choking up a bit. Malcolm scrunches up his nose, frowns at Angus, looks me in the eye for a change, they’re soft and tired.
“Are you crazy Bon? ‘Course we’re not kicking you out, you’re one of us.” My heart is pounding.
“I heard Atlantic want a different singer,” I say.
“Fuck Atlantic. They neva understood us in the first place. If they want blood, they’ve got it. We’re finding a replacement for Mark, not you.”
“What’s he done?”

“He just doesn’t get it, Bon,” says Malcolm. “We’ve gone up a level since we first came to England. He’s more of a headache than we need if we’re gunna go to the States.”

“He never practises,” says Angus. “Never occurred to him to get bass or singing lessons.”

“Why don’t you tell—”

“We’re trying to run a band here, not a kindergarden,” says Malcolm.

“We found a bloke more your age,” says Angus. “Remember a band called Home?”

“And Bandit?” says Malcolm.

“Home rings a bell,” I say. “They were kicking around when Fraternity were here.”

“Yeh,” says Malcolm, starting to act like the bloke I know. “The bass player from that band.”

“What about Mark?” I ask.

“He’s on his way over now. Him and Phil.” I pull my jacket tight. Why did they drag me over here to kick him out? Mark’s gunna think I helped plan all of this.

“You talked to him about it?”

“Given him enough chances,” pipes up Angus. The door knocks and Malcolm gets up and lets them in. Phil stands in the doorway, his face as white as the door frame. I cross my arms and catch Mark’s eyes and let him know I’m not into what’s going down.

“There’s no easy way to say this,” says Malcolm, “but we’re gunna have to let you go, Mark. It’s not working out.”

“You all decided this, did ya?” says Mark, containing his rage. No-one speaks. I can hear Mark breathing. He looks at all of us, one by one.

“It’s nothing personal Mark,” I say, “you’re a great bass player—”

“We want someone who can sing backing vocals,” says Malcolm. Mark looks like he’s gunna punch him out.

“I can. I’ll. What if. How about. If,” says Mark. “If that’s what you guys want.” He looks over to Phil who shrugs his shoulders. His hands are trembling.

“C’mon Mark,” says Phil, “I’ll get a taxi with you.”
I wake up nervous, hot and sweaty. You’d think the nerves would go away. Ten times I wake up and the bed is empty. Adrenaline wakes me up. High temperature. Still wired from last night’s gig. All those happy faces blown back.

Ideas for songs wake me up. Maria wakes me up. Her cool drive. Irene wakes me up. Her warm affection, her easy friendship makes me toss and turn. Silver wakes me up. Her smart conversation, her intellect. Lines, images, my fuck-ups wake me and I cannot go back to sleep. There’s drool on the pillow and the daylight glow from behind the blind. The phone rings.

“How you doin’ Bon? Neeup.” It’s Angus. I go to talk but no sound comes out. I clear my throat into the receiver to annoy him. “Okay, just having a shandy, how are ya?”

“You sound like shit mate.”

“Thanks Angus, you try singing every night.”

“Some show last night, you meet the girl with the missing nipples?”

“See her? She’s here with me. My hotel room was full of naked women when I got in. Took me a few hours to kick them out. You know what they’re like.”

“Yeah right, Bon. We’ll come by in a few hours to pick you up. Got a surprise for ya.”

“What time is it in Australia?”

“How the fuck would I know?” I hear him slurp a cup of tea.

“See ya later crocodile.”

I open the blind. Light whooshes in, everything is brown. Brown walls, brown bed, brown table, brown bathroom. I feel like I’m inside a big turd. An air vent hums. Can’t open the window. The view is straight out to a brick wall. I ring reception and ask them to bring breakfast. I take out a postcard of the Statue of Liberty and start writing.

DEAR MARIA,

I’M IN MY UNDIES IN A HOTEL. WE’RE OUT ON THE ROAD SUPPORTING KISS. THEY BLOW US OFF THE STAGE EVERY NIGHT. THAT’S WHAT THEY TELL US. THIS TOUR IS 100 DATES IN JUST ABOUT AS MANY DAYS. I FEEL LIKE A TEN YEAR OLD SHOE THAT’S GOT NO SOLE OR SOLE MATE. AFTER THE STATES WE FLY BACK TO LONDON FOR A HANDFUL OF SHOWS AND TO RECORD THEN BACK TO SYDNEY. WILL YOU BE IN PERTH AT CHRISTMAS?

THE OTHER NIGHT PHIL AND I DECIDED TO CLIMB THE STATUE OF LIBERTY. LOOKS CLOSE FROM YOUR HOTEL ROOM. TAKES US AN HOUR TO GET THERE AND WE PAY TO GET IN BUT THE LIFT IS BROKEN. TAKES ANOTHER 30 MINS
TO CLIMB HER. WE’RE UP WHERE THE FLAMES SHOULD BE COMING OUT SO WE HAVE A JAZZ CIGARETTE AND PRETEND THE SMOKE IS COMING OUT THE TORCH.

ANYWAY, IT GETS DARK AND WE CLIMB BACK DOWN AND THE GUARD IS ASKING HOW WE GOT INSIDE. HE WAS ABOUT TO LOCK UP. WOULD HAVE BEEN PRETTY FUNNY TO BE LOCKED INSIDE THE STATUE OF LIBERTY. AS YOU CAN SEE LIFE SURE AINT DULL. ANYWAY LOVE, SEE YOU IN PERTH,

BON XO.

Breakfast arrives. Bacon, eggs coffee and hash browns. Don’t know why they’re called hash browns. New York, what a hell hole. When we drove in from the airport our taxis were attacked. You can’t tell the difference between cloud and fog. Sunlight doesn’t penetrate, only a peach coloured ring overhead. If you can get out of the building shade. Been dreaming about coming here for years. What a let down. All the streets are dirty, rubbish everywhere. You have to be inside. Outside I can hardly breathe. Kills my throat.

I mix up my throat soothing concoction of warmed red wine, honey and a little salt. A glass with breakfast and another after to make sure. Gurgle that down. New York, you’re either in air conditioning, or in smog. Try walking around at night without being stabbed. The big rotten apple.

I shave and get dressed and go to the lobby and send my letter off. I ask the concierge if he knows anywhere I can get my throat looked at. He says he knows a great acupuncturist around the corner. Say’s he’ll cure anything. What about a basketball stuck in your throat? “Anything”, he says. “Turn the corner, on West 57th Street”.

One thing you gotta give New York is the people. Ten in the morning, guys busking, hustling, doing card tricks. Fruit vendors, news stands, hot dog men, all wise guys. Chaos. I find the place out the back of a mini-mart. An anatomy picture on the door with the label W.L. Chang - acupuncturist. A small Chinese man in a white robe opens the door, grabs me by the elbow and leads me into one of the rooms.

“What’s your name sir?”

“Bon, Bon Scott.”

“Age?”

“Thirty three.”

“Occupation?”

“Singer. I got this sore thro…” He asks a few more questions, leans over and takes my hand, turns it over and looks closely at my nails. He says to poke my tongue out, turn my head up to the light. He takes my pulse, looks in my eyes. He makes a note. His skin is clear and soft, his veins visible. He says to go into the next room, strip to my underwear and lie on the bed, face up. Lucky I wore undies today. I pull one of the towels over my balls and lie back and close my eyes.
Mr Chang enters the room and says to try to relax. A few moments later the warm feeling of a sponge and then a little pin prick. He’s poking all around my belly and chest. One of the needles feels weird and when I tell him he moves it. He takes the needles out and tells me to roll over.

“My throat”, I say, “it’s my throat.”

“Yes, Mister Scott, but your insides are rotten. You have insides of sixty year old man. I can not fix your throat until liver and kidney fixed. Very serious.” I give in and try to relax. The taste of bourbon and coke fills my mouth.

“You have asthma Mr Scott?” poking a pin in the side of my neck.

“Yes.” This guy is good.

“Oh, very serious.” My pendant necklace from Silver dangles in front of me, I rub it. He tells me to lie still. I start to feel better, looser, more energy. My throat feels a bit better. He takes the remaining pins out and tells me to take my time and get dressed.

I open the door and he’s in his office. I roll my shoulders, open my wallet and pay. He doesn’t look at me.

“You make another appointment?”

“I’m leaving town in a few days.”

“You come in tomorrow?” I buy a soda water and walk back to the hotel through Central Park. Overcast and muggy. Don’t know if the itchiness is a reaction to the pins, or the humidity. Joggers crunch the paths. Dogs sniff at the base of trees. Workers scoop up piles of leaves. An image of Dad comes in a flicker. We’re in Kerriemuir, burning leaves in the back yard. He picks me up and we watch the flames.

Maybe I’ll stop drinking. In a big lake I see a small remote control yacht. Must be Phil. He has all these toys in his hotel room. Cars, helicopters, airplanes and yachts. He’s wearing blue jeans and a white shirt. His jacket lays over a bollard near a little tool kit, packet of cigarettes and a sandwich with one bite out of it. He stands outside a faint line of shade. The little boat is heading straight for us. He steers it in and picks it up by the bottom like a fish.

“Bloody thing keeps leaking,” he says, one eye closed in the glare. He has dark rings under his eyes. He fidgets with a small plug, empties the water and puts the boat back in. The white toys moves away. He comes over and lights a cigarette, wiping his nose. Cocaine. He catches himself wiping and looks at me. His gentle eyes have changed.

“Get much sleep?” I ask him.

“Why?”

“Just wondering. I got up at six, couldn’t go back to sleep for two hours, then woke up again at nine.”

“What are you trying to say? I don’t sleep enough?”

“No. I was just wondering.”

“Yeah, well. Don’t worry about me. You worry about yourself.”

“Just went to the doctor,” I tell him. “Says everything’s good. Fighting fit.”

“Lucky you.”

“Says I should slow down on the drinking though.”

“ Heard that before.”
“You know, you don’t have to drive the bus anymore, we can afford a driver.”

“That’s not what Malcolm said.” He clutches his nose with thumb and finger. “They won’t kick me out if of I do both jobs, will they? I like driving, what’s your problem?”

“They won’t kick you out Phil, but if you’re too fucked to play, they might have to kick you out.”

“Who are you, the band manager? Why are you worried about me all of a sudden? Go find someone else to pick on.” He turns his back on me. A woman runs by, her blonde pony tail swings from side to side. Phil keeps fidgeting with his yacht, sending it back out into the water. For a few moments the sun pokes through the clouds.

“What do think of Cliff?”

“He can play bass alright. I like him.”

“You like everyone.”

“He’s bloody smooth.” I rack my brain for something else to say, nothing comes. I stand up and wipe some dirt from my bum. “I’ll see you at Atlantic later then,” I say.

“See you on the bus?”

“We taking the bus? I though we were getting taxis?”

“Ahmet Ertegun’s meant to be there, a gold platinum thingy presentation,” says Phil. I wipe the sand off my bum and I walk a few yards. “Hey Bon,” he yells.

“What?”

“Get fucked,” he smiles. In the cool of the trees my stomach rumbles and I feel like a ghost.

We get off the bus at the back of Atlantic. A big white building, recording studio, radio station, auditorium, offices all in one. We’re ushered up stairs to the president’s suite by some sexy secretary. The office is lined with framed gold records. There’s a couple of couches and Ahmet Ertegun’s desk. A bar off to one side. We all sit down and he walks in from the dunny door.

“Gentlemen,” he says, “welcome to Atlantic.” He raises his arms out wide and then claps them together. We all stand up to shake his hand. Some photographer snaps away. He has a tanned bald head, rimmed circle glasses over big brown eyes that look straight through you. His mo and goatee cover his lips so when he speaks it’s all sound and no movement. He wears a white shirt with a white tie and dinner jacket.

“Please, sit,” he says, waving his hands. “How is New York treating you? Isn’t it wonderful”

“We haven’t really had…” Angus starts to say.

“Oh, Monica, yes, bring them over dear.” A woman enters with the framed records. She awkwardly passes them to Ahmet.

“Gentlemen, it is with great pleasure I present to you the gold record for five hundred thousand sales of Highway to Hell in America.”

“I think I sold nearly four hundred thousand of those myself,” says Angus. We all laugh.

“Yeah, and I sold the other one hundred thousand,” says Phil.

“Well it wasn’t Atlantic that sold them that’s for sure” I add, joining the wind up. Ahmet’s laugh turns to a frown instantly.
“Boys, please, is something the matter?”
“We just wanna be able to buy some guitar strings, that’s all,” says Malcolm. Monica enters the room again, this time with two bottles of champagne on a tray. She passes one to Ahmet, puts the other on his desk, and collects some glasses from the sideboard.
“You haven’t got any guitar strings?”
“I’ve been on the same set for two years, man,” says Angus. “I take them off and boil them to get the sweat out.” He sniffs and turns away to hide his laughter. Phil grabs the other bottle and starts to unwind the top.
“I got holes in my shoes. I got holes in my jeans,” I say. Ahmet stops opening his bottle and looks at us seriously.
“You mean to tell me you haven’t received the money allocated to you for the tour?”
“No point driving around in a limo if your microphones don’t work,” I say, piling on the bullshit.
“I went to the guitar shop the other day,” says Angus. “I said to the guy, I want a thirty inch speaker. He says they don’t make them. I said, okay, I want thirty one inch speakers in a cabinet. He says they don’t make them. I said I want a guitar with four necks, he says they don’t make them. Fucking America” he starts to smile and we all start laughing and Ahmet begins to get we’re pulling the piss. His shoulders relax and he starts laughing and pouring drinks, the bubbles spilling over. He offers me a glass and I hesitate.
“Oh come on, one glass won’t kill you, call yourself a rock and roll star?”
“I never drink before a show,” I say. Phil gives me a look.
“Well, I respect that…”
“Oh give me a glass then” I say. I swish the fruity bitterness around my mouth.
“You fellas should know,” says Ahmet, “we spent a lot of money on you guys. We’re hoping for bigger things yet. We’re not out of the woods yet.”
“Don’t you worry about us,” interjects Malcolm, “we’re gunna be the biggest in the world. Bigger than…what’s their name?”
“Led Zeppelin?”
“Nah, bigger than them.”
“The Beatles?”
“They’re finished anyway,” I say.
“I sure hope so, for all of our benefits,” says Ahmet, sitting on the front of his desk. “You work harder than any band I know at the moment. The kids in America take to you. You know I listened to your previous record the other day. Powerage. Some heavy shit. You boys have the depth and that means a lot to me. The simpler the better, when it comes to blues.”
“The next one’s gunna be simpler and better yet,” says Malcolm, “you wait. We’re working
some of the songs out now, and we’ll go into the studio with Mutt in what” he looks at me and 
Angus, “March or April?”

“If we don’t die from malnutrition and exhaustion before then,” I quip.

“I hear he’s a bit of a wizard in the studio, this Mutt fella,” says Ahmet, lacing his hands 
together over his balls.

“Robert Mutt Langer, he’s a genius that cunt.”

“What a cunt,” says Phil, smiling.

“Excuse me,” says Ahmet, his white teeth showing. “Oh you Australians say cunt a lot, don’t 
you?”

“We’re not Australian, we’re Scottish,” says Malcolm.

“Gentlemen, let me say this, if I can. We’re now ready to take you to the big time. That means 
we’re not going to be holding anything back. We’re going to use all of our muscle to get you on 

every radio and television station in the country. If they won’t play your record, we’ll pay them 
to play your record. Everyone has a price. Your name will be on everyone’s lips.”

“That’s what you guys said twelve months ago,” says Angus, his upper lip curling, “you didn’t 
even release Dirty Deeds here.”

“Well, I wasn’t aware of that. Listen. This business can change in a second. Don’t be naive 
and think you can just do whatever you want whenever you want. We’re not the bad guys. We’re 
on your side. Whatever happened between AC/DC and Atlantic is all water under the bridge. 
I haven’t seen a hard hitting band like you guys for a long time. You blow my mind. Angus is 
hilarious, even when his pants go missing. So, please, fellas, take it from me personally. Malcolm, 
if you have any problems, you ring me directly.”

“Yeah I wanna talk to you,” says Malcolm. They both walk out of the room.

Phil and Cliff chat away finishing the champagne. Angus, dressed in his school uniform, 
holding the neck of his SG, sits next to me on the couch. For once he doesn’t play his guitar. He 
looks up at the ceiling. He wiggles about. He puts his feet on the coffee table, takes them off.

“Alright Bon?” He puts out a cigarette and lights another one.

“Something on your mind mate?”

“No. What makes you say that?”

“Nothing in particular.”

“It’s just…just,” he takes a long drag of his fag.

“Spit it out Angus.”

“Chicks mate. It’s the chicks, they do my head in.”

“You mean you don’t know what to do with your old fella?”

“No. Yeah, there’s that, but as well, there’s just so many of them. They come backstage and rip 
my clothes off. I try to hide but they always find me. Problem with these American birds is they 
don’t even know the lyrics.”

“Don’t ask me Angus, I’ve been with hundreds of women, there’s no trick, you just have to 
take what comes your way. If you arrive at the party too early, so what? There’ll be another party 
in twenty minutes. The girls love it, that’s all you need to remember. No one is forcing them to
be backstage or anywhere with you.”

“But they do my head in Bon. They’ll ask you for a glass of water, and when you say there’s a jug of water over there they get all upset.”

“Some of them will play games,” I say, rubbing my chin. “You just battle on, tell them what they want to hear. Works usually. We can always hit the road.”

He clutches his face and wipes the snot out of his nose with thumb and forefinger. He frowns, and then looks across my line of vision focusing on a bin in the corner.

“Imagine if everyone saw everyone else the way doctors see everyone. What do they call it? Objective?” He’s starting one of his rants. “Men and women walking down the street naked, not a care in the world. But doctors are the only people who wanna have sex. So when you get sick, doctors can’t keep their hands off you, dirty bastards. You go in for a check up and the docs are humping your leg like a Jack Russell.”

“It’d be a bit weird, Angus. Everyone would want to be a doctor.” He laughs.

“Imagine on a plane or in a restaurant, some poor bugger’s got heart problems, you’ll have about twenty people scrambling to root the poor bugger,” he says.

“Thing is, Angus, women have it sorted. They’re wired differently. A hundred thousand years ago, or whenever it happened, men were walking around with no shirts on, their lollie bags dangling in the wind, women pretending not to notice. So now blokes walk around with their shirts off all the time. A woman takes her shirt off and blokes are drooling and carrying on.”

“I met this girl, Ellen,” he says, “I really like her.”

“Don’t ask me about love, Angus, I haven’t got a clue. Two speeding trains heading toward one another only have to miss by an inch.”

“What?” he asks.

“Exactly mate, don’t ask me. I’ve been married, I can’t even get divorced. I love Silver, but she left me. I hope rock and roll never leaves me. So when do I get to meet her?”

“Who?” he starts playing a few scales.

“This girl, Ellen.”

“Oh she’s coming to the show tonight.”

“Where’s my surprise?”

“What surprise?”

“You said on the phone this morning you had a surprise.”

“Ah yeah, that. We got you a remote microphone, like my guitar.”

“I heard they go flat a lot, more than guitars.”

“Yeah we got you three, to swap between songs.”

Malcolm returns and Ahmet says goodbye and we’re taken downstairs to the backstage area. You can hear the crowd through the big black curtains. The drum kit, amps and microphones are all set up by our roadies. An assistant comes up and says we’re on in five minutes. I take a few big gulps of cough medicine and some pain killers. Malcolm calls me over and we gather around in something like a huddle. We’ve never huddled before. Phil leans in. Cliff leans in.

“Okay,” says Malcolm, “this is it. Angus and I have been thinking, we wanna do a stage act
during Bad Boy Boogie. In the middle part he’s gunna do a little dance and provoke the audience
and do a moonie at them. We then go back into the song with the crescendo as normal.”

“You still want me to do the bass line?” asks Cliff.

“Yeah, you do the build up exactly the same, but later. You’ll know when.”

“So it’s the same, but Angus drops his dacks?” asks Phil.

“Yeah,” says Angus and Malcolm at the same time. We take to the stage one by one. Phil first,
then Cliff, Malcolm, then Angus. The house is packed with about a thousand people. The suited
announcer stands at the microphone.

“Good evening ladies and gentlemen I’m Ed Sharky welcoming you all to the world famous
Atlantic recording studios in New York City for a first in a series of live radio concerts”. The
crowd cheers. “Please welcome AC/DC”.

Cliff starts with the rumbling intro, his bass pulsing in and out. The new remote microphone
feels strange. I talk to the audience. “Can I have your attention please we are live on air, and
we’d like your participation. This is a song for ya, called Live Wire”. The guy at the desk lifts my
volume half way through my intro. One of these strange afternoon shows when the audience is
sober. Have to work even harder. I warm my voice up, “Hell yeah LIVE WIRE BABY”.

Malc and Angus crank the opening chords and we are away. Angus and I point at the kids
in the crowd. We don’t shy away from them anymore. If we can get them to give us a finger or
a fuck you our work has begun. The song finishes. “Thank you very much, we’ll melt the ice
huh?” I say.

Streams of smoke jet up quickly out of the audience and form a cloud in the auditorium. I rip
my denim jacket off, my jeans are tight. The pain disappears once we get warmed up. Lately I’ve
been doing what I call shape shifting. I dance a different style for each song. Problem Child I’m a
boxer. Highway to Hell I’m a crow on a post. Sin City I’m a snake. Rocker I’m a crab. As soon as
the song finishes the crowd start chanting ANGUS ANGUS ANGUS fitting in neatly with the
intro to Whole Lotta Rosie.

Bad Boy Boogie begins with Angus slowly, ever so slowly bending his light strings high. The
lights lower and turn red. He quickens the alternating notes letting the last note ring out then
raising his ear to the audience until they cheer in recognition. He nods in agreement. This song,
when we get it right, is the greatest song in rock and roll history and if anyone wants to disagree
with me I’ll punch them out. Anyone who says otherwise hasn’t stood in the front row and
closed their eyes.

Angus falls on his back and spins around like a poisoned cockroach. His feet flick up. He gets
up and runs around in circles playing furiously in a haze of overdriven drones come blues mixed
licks. He raises his right hand to the audience. Louder cheers. A circle of sweat seeps through the
back of his felt school blazer.

I look at Malcolm and he looks tense, his right leg tapping. Cliff hides behind his mop of
hair, his wall of bass cabinets behind him. Angus drops his shoulders. His two shadows from the
spot lights follow him to the front of the Marshall stacks, the guitar starts to feedback. The high
pitched squeal wavers in the air. The battle between the crowd cheers and and the amp volume
goes on. Phil counts us in with the high-hat 1…2…1-2, full throttle to the engines, BANG BANG BANG BANG like gun shots.

I do my own version of the Chuck Berry duck walk and rip the crutch of my jeans. A little wink to the girls up the front. We play faster than the album version. Phil is off the chain. Malcolm keeps up easily. The lights flash. First verse, second verse, chorus. I raise my voice and jump octaves. The opposites roll off my tongue. The chorus ends, the break down begins, bass and bass drum like a heart beat DOOF-DOOF. The volume lowers slowly.

Angus keeps the same high note going and Phil, Malcolm and Cliff syncopate the rhythm. I run my hand through my hair and shake in anticipation. I go to the front of the stage and ask the audience to clap to the beat. Malcolm and Cliff tease the audience with a fake build up, Phil rim hits the snare. Silence. Tease. Loud cheer.

I go back stage and find my cough syrup. Angus starts to taunt the crowd. He hands his guitar to a roadie. He pries his tie off, twirls it in front of him and throws it off the front of the stage. Jeers. He takes off his jacket, pulls it through his legs and pretends to wank the sleeve. He unbuttons his shirt showing his tiny torso. He pulls the front of his shorts out and points to his penis. His dumb face is perfect. The crowd cheers. Crash from the drums.

He lowers his arms and Malcolm and Cliff lower their volume. He climbs the front of the drum riser and turns his back to the crowd. He unbuttons his shorts. With a short drum roll he quickly flashes his bare bum to the crowd. They throw rubbish on stage in disgust. Angus bows and straps his guitar back on.

I have a few moments to rest while I’m watching. I wipe my face with a towel and take a few hits from my puffer. You know how a certain song reminds you of a place? Even if that place has nothing to do with the song? Bad Boy Boogie always reminds me of Riverbank. The cell and the beds and the books and Norman’s face and his hands and feet on the walls. The planes taking off, the engines roaring. The mosquitos buzzing as I try to sleep and Monkey and his black boots. I compare the engine noise to the sound of the band getting louder and louder and louder. The skin on your face starts to ripple. I nod to my imaginary Norman, wherever he is.

The best band in the world playing our best song. And I’m in it! We blues out and begin the slow creep up to the climax, the jet engines accelerating. The bass moves up the neck getting faster and faster. The drums hammer in with the rhythm guitar that grows louder and looser then Phil opens the high-hat Angus letting the feedback blast through his single note the frequencies filling up until there’s no room left we take off and I reenter the stage and take a deep breathe and sing and we are off the ground.

I won’t tell you a story, tell you no lie
I was born to love ’til the day I die.

The crowd cheers loud and hysterical. Their happy faces look up to us. We shake their hands and thank them. Angus’ guitar sound still swirls as we all walk off stage to the back of the building. I’m ready to collapse. I slink away to the green room, turn the main lights off and lie on
the couch. I rub around my eyes and squeeze the top of my nose to try to get some air in, break
up the sinuses. Suck on the puffer a few times. I’ve forgotten to give the cordless microphone
back to the roadies. There’s a knock at the door. I wish I locked it now. A man enters and starts
helping himself to booze and sandwiches. He talks to himself but I can’t make out what he’s saying.

“Who’s that?” He jumps, puts his hand over his heart.

“Oh fuck. Jesus. Fuck. You scared the living daylights out of me.” He leers in. “Ron, is that you Ron?”

“No, it’s the queen’s mother.”

“Ron, it’s Vince, how the fuck are ya mate?”

“Vince, you cunt, what are you doing here?”

“Here with the ABC, doing a music documentary,” he alters his voice to make it sound
like he’s on the radio “Music to the World.” I heard you caught up with Bruce and the boys in
Adelaide, sorry I missed you man, I was in Melbourne organising this doco, so good to see ya
mate. I’ve got some coke, you want some. We got a sweet allowance from the ABC, but Paul,
the producer, is as straight as, so I got away from him for the night, when I heard you guys were
playing I got here lickety split.”

“I know Paul, he did the Long Way…” I try to get a word in. He starts chopping on the table
with his credit card.

“You probably get offered this stuff all the time being a famous rock and roll star, hardly get
it back home anymore. How’s Angus and Malcolm these days, still little pricks who won’t give
you the time of day? They can play great but they’re little assholes I tell ya, I said hello to them
outside and they didn’t even recognise me. Saw George in Sydney recently, he’s the same. Whole
family’s fucked. The missus sends her love by the way, oh mate you haven’t even met my kid yet,
jesus mate, she’s so beautiful, but I tell you what, it’s good to get out of Australia, backwards shit
hole.” He rolls up a note.

“It’s not that bad,” I say, my voice croaky.

“Alright for you, mister rock and roll star, you get to come and go all the time.” He sucks
up a line, throws his head back, talks like he’s holding his breath. “See some of the girls in the
audience? Oh man, I could go a fuck right now.” He takes a swig of whisky from the bottle he’s
pinched.

“What about your wife and kids? I ask him.

“Fucking little Bonnie, always the romantic,” he messes my hair up. “What’s got into you
mate, you sad or something, don’t you worry, Uncle Vince is here now. Party time.” He claps his
hand and stands up, “have a line mate.”

“No thanks.”

“Have a drink of this then, come on, let’s party.”

“We’ve got another show later, at Madison Square Garden.”

“Oh sweet, can you get me tickets? Isn’t this great Bon? Whoever thought we’d end up in
New York, me and you, the old gang, if those losers in Perth could see us now mate, what a trip
man.” The door opens and Malcolm walks in, grabs himself a beer, changes his shirt and washes
his face.

“Hey Malcolm, great show man, great show,” says Vince, “you guys are great, you really are.”

“Eh Bon, you wanna turn that microphone off? Everyone can hear you two out there.”

“Oh shit, says Vince, picking the mike up off the table, switching it off. “I didn't mean any harm Malcolm, you know me mate, just kidding around.”

“Don't matter,” says Malcolm, “we're outta here in twenty Bon.” Malcolm leaves the room.

Vince turns to me with his eyebrows raised.

“He doesn't fuck around does he?”

“What time is it in Australia?” I ask him.

“Ummm, well, it's a quarter to six here, so about five in the morning in Adelaide. Why?”

“I wanna ring Irene.”

“She's in Melbourne now mate, she's pregnant and everything.”

“Really?”

“Dead set.” A burning sensation pulses through my heart.

“You know who else is pregnant?” I ask him.

“Who?”

“Maria. I caught up with her in Perth.”

“That bitch, mate I told you a thousand times to forget about her. Remember when she accused me of cracking onto her during rehearsals that time. She's full of it.”

We pile in the bus and drive to Madison Square Gardens. Takes about two hours in the traffic creeping over the bridge. We get to the venue and again I hear a rumour that the singer in KISS thinks I can't sing and my voice will give out any moment and I think well fuck them this has to stop they wanna bag us behind our back they can deal with me personally so I find their room, Malcolm follows me because he loves a bit of biff, when I storm inside they're doing all kinds of stretches and warming up and I say a polite hello to Gene putting his make up on and I go up to Ace who has a woman on each arm and I say “what's this crap I keep hearing about you saying I can't sing and you guys think we're shit” and he starts denying everything pretending like he doesn't know what I'm talking about, this gets me real pissed off and I cock my fist to punch him in the face and he cowers and says Bon Bon Bon and no-one even tries to stop me, I look him in the eyes and I see the truth but I'm still pissed off and I kick the chair and then the lamp and immediately I think shit I've broken my toe but I don't show any pain instead I start laughing and everyone else starts laughing but it hurts like hell and I'm just laughing from the pain this bunch of sissies couldn't fight and it would be unfair for me to go for them as they'd end up in hospital so I apologise to the ladies and go back to my room and Malcolm doesn't say anything just starts tuning his guitar and I take my shoe off and my big toe nail is shattered and blood has started seeping through my sock and gushing out the sides of my toe nail and I get some ice out of the rider cooler and a plastic bag and try to ice the swelling as we're on in half an hour might have to do this set bare foot but then they'll know my foot is busted so no wrap some bandages and take some painkillers and a few slugs of my puffer and some more cough medicine and time to hit the
stage another ten thousand kids as soon as we start we blow KISS off the stage once again, sissies.

At the end of our set I don’t wait for Angus to finish running from side to side and up and across the stage. I walk straight backstage and find the bus and enter and lie down. I’m fucked. Rooted. I need sleep. Shivering bad. Oh god, shivering, cold, heart pumping, ears ringing. Just relax. I am a ghost. In the moisture on the window I finger the letters HELL. I run the wet finger over my lips and forehead. So tired. My blood feels heavy and thick. Maybe a drink will fix this? No, better not. Water. Angus and a girl enter the bus and turn the radio on.

“Shut the door,” I tell them, “keep the cold out.”

“It’s fucking freezing in here anyway Bon. This is the girl I was telling you about.” She stands over me, her face dark with the light behind her. I pull my arm out of the blanket and we shake hands.

“You are cold,” she says, in a strong Dutch accent.

“Give me a chance,” I reply, “you only just met me.”

She frowns and says, “No, I mean your hand is cold.”

“Don’t worry about Bon, he’s tough as,” says Angus. She grabs another blanket from the back of the bus and lays it over me. I like her already. I grab the bottle of cough mixture and swig the bitter ooze. They lie in the next bed and start giggling and kissing and being in love. On the radio I hear Hi I’m Allan Handelman and you’re listening to the Allan Handelman show, coming up we’re talking to Bon Scott from an interview recorded last week in Atlanta.

“Turn it off” I say.

“No I want to listen,” says Ellen.

Angus says “Bon does all our interviews, don’t you Bon?” I prop my head up and pull the blanket around my feet. My toe still throbbing.

“If I can talk,” I say. Ellen turns the radio up.

*Handelman: When AC/DC started back in ’76 what was the music situation like?*

*Me: Bad. Real Bad*.* I sound horrible. “Turn it off Angus.”*

*Handelman: For example?*

*Me: Well. We played out own style of music. The kind of music that everyone was into were things like ABBA. And Neil Diamond like, you know. That ilk of crap, you know.*

*Handelman: What gave you guys the incentive, or should I say the insight to know that up the road, two or three years, across the country, across the world, that your music would start vibrating, start getting people happy?*

*Me: Because, because, the people like rock and roll. I’m talking the people like in general. I guess*
I'm talking mainly about people who are like ourselves who are lower middle class, upper working
class, lower working class whatever; you know. We just did what we liked and we figured that we're
not dumb, and there's a whole lot of other people who like the same thing we like. At the time the
radio stations were pushing this um, Linda Ronstadt, James Taylor crap, you know. I heard some radio
station in the mid-west go: "and now the rock music without the noise." And played James Taylor.

Ellen's bracelets clack. Handelman sounds so enthusiastic. I sound drunk. I look out the
window. The letters are starting to blur together. A long line of cars bumper to bumper. The
figures of people walking through headlight fog and exhaust fumes. The after show excitement
I wish I could be part of.

Me: Rock and Rock was staged in 1939, between then and 1945. It went through a crisis in the
60's, that's history.

My chest heaves quickly with short cat-like breaths. I'm a wuss. Whenever I get a cold I want
to be looked after. Lie in bed and drink lemonade and eat Mum's chicken soup. I tune back into
the interview.

Handelman: Let me ask you some more questions, you're doing so well. Can I ask about the song
Let There Be Rock. Now that's a religious song to a lot of people.

Me: Well it was to me, because I come up with the title about two years ago, Let There Be Rock,
and everyone went agh yeah great title, you know, but what do we write Let There Be Rock about? You
know. So I went down to, right underneath the recording studio there's a book shop. And I bought a
bible. I bought a bible. Don't let that soil my career, please. But I bought this bible. Put the book of
Genesis, you know, "in the beginning" I thought fuck what a great title, what a great start to a song,
"in the beginning" you know. It's just like that Rod Stewart song. Rod Stewart did that song "Wake
Up Maggie" and the opening like is just so strong it just has to grab your attention, you know. The
rest can be literally shit, the first line was like, "in the beginning" but then the brain wave, the second
verse, "but it came to pass."

My mother's a Christian, she's a lovely lady and she's a Christian and she goes to church every
Sunday. She says "someone's gotta pray for ya."

An image of Carols by Candlelight comes to mind. Me, Mum and Dad, Dereck and Graeme
in Fremantle, on Monument Hill. Mum has fruit cake.

Handelman: Has she heard your music recently? Has she put one of your records on her record
player?

Me: She heard the new album. She has them all. Before the new album came out, she rang me she
says "oh yeah, what's it called?" I said: Highway to Hell. HAHA. She said "Trust you."
I try to piece together what happened last time I was home. Dereck and Dad and I were drinking on the front verandah, looking out over the river. Remember playing with the next door neighbour’s cat. Then Brian came over and we went into Fremantle and drank. I shake my head when I think about what I might have done. I can’t remember. I feel so stupid.

“What did you do today?” Angus asks Ellen.

“Oh, I went to watch the space movie, the two thousand and one, one. It was very long.”

*Handelman: Right. What was the feeling with the ABBA craze in Australia?*

*Me: ABBA had like 5 hit records in the top ten within the period of a month. In Australia, they did a tour there and they sold out. They must have made millions touring Australia. They played one concert that holds maybe 100,000 people. And they had tickets, like you could buy your air ticket, two nights in the hotel and your flight back for $150. Of which about seventy went to ABBA. Australia was the first place in the whole world that ABBA broke top 10-wise and they still haven’t broken in America. I think they’re kind of finished.*

*Handelman: In my opinion they have a nice style, but they’re so overproduced. So LALALALALA.*

*Me: Well Australia’s a kind of susceptible country. Even a few people like us are. HAHA.*

*Handelman: Do you feel that you would be compatible, or like you could live in this country? Do you feel like you get along with the people here?*

*Me: Well I am going to live here. I’m going to buy a house up in North California. I mean, you know, it’s America. No more need be said, it’s America.*

“I didn’t know you were going to live in North California,” says Angus.

“Neither does my mother,” I say. “She think’s I’m going to live in fucking Spearwood.”

“Where’s that?” asks Ellen.

“A paddock near Fremantle,” I say.

“What’s wrong with that?” she asks.

“The country is beautiful, but the people are fucked,” says Angus. “They kicked us out last time we were there.”

“What for?”

“Flashing his arse everywhere,” I say. Another swig of medicine. I roll over and put the pillow over my head. I wake again when the bus engine starts, the rumble shakes my bones and muscles.

Back at the hotel, staring at the brick wall. In my bag is my new compendium, I pull it out and write Irene a letter.
DEAR IRENE,

I’M GOING THROUGH A FUCKING FUNNY PERIOD AT THE MOMENT. HOPE YOU DON’T MIND A HEART BALM LETTER. DON’T WANNA SETTLE WITH ANYBODY BECAUSE I’M ALWAYS ON THE ROAD AND WON’T BE HERE LONG AND ON THE OTHER HAND THERE’S TWENTY TO THIRTY CHICKS A DAY I CAN HAVE THE CHOICE OF FUCKING BUT I CAN’T STAND THAT EITHER. MIXED UP. I LIKE TO BE TOURING ALL THE TIME JUST TO KEEP MY MIND OFF PERSONAL HAPPENINGS. BECOME A DRUNKARD AGAIN AND I CAN’T GO THROUGH A DAY WITHOUT A SMOKE OF HIPPIE STUFF. I JUST WANNA GET A LOT OF MONEY SOON SO I CAN AT LEAST CHANGE A FEW LITTLE THINGS ABOUT MYSELF (MORE BOOZE AND DOPE). NOT REALLY. I JUST WANNA BE FAMOUS I GUESS. JUST SO WHEN PEOPLE TALK ABOUT YOU IT’S GOOD THINGS THEY SAY. THAT’S ALL I WANT. BUT RIGHT NOW I’M JUST LONELY.

BON.
“Where to sir?”
“Perth, Western Australia.”
“Who is paying for the call?”
“I am.”
“What’s the number?”
“08 644476.”

“Hello Maria, it’s Bon.”
“Hi Bon, where are you?” The sound of her voice breaks my heart.
“I’m in London, we flew back from New York yesterday.”
“Must be about three in the morning there” she says.
“Yeah something like that, I can’t sleep.”
“Are you drunk Bon?”
“I’ve had a few shandies darlin, you know me.”
“Bon, please, don’t call me darling, or baby. I can tell you’re drunk. I told you not to ring me when you’re drunk. You always upset me.”
“But I’m lonely.” There’s a pause. I hear her sigh. I imagine her sitting on the floor in our apartment in East Fremantle, twisting the phone cord in her fingers.
“I’m sorry I missed you when you were here.”
“What are you talking about?”
“I forgot about our lunch. You came to our house, we were out. The neighbours said you practically smashed the door off the hinges.” My brain hurts. Was a drunken week. I thought we met.
“Bon? Do you remember? I spoke to you on the phone the next day.”
“I don’t remember. Guess you wouldn’t have forgotten our lunch if I was Gerald or Jerard, or what’s his name.”
“Jim, Bon, his name is Jim. We have a life together now, and a baby, we’re a family. You can meet us next time.”
“We were meant to be a family. We were going to travel the world together. We were going to live in a little caravan behind the tour bus. Remember? I waited for you. I even went to fuckin church for you.” I finish my whisky.
“No you didn’t, Bon, don’t pull that with me,” anger enters her voice. “You married five years ago, that hurt me too. You had your chance, Bon, it’s over.”
“I’m single now. In two years I’ll quit touring and we can live together, like we always said. I’m moving back to Perth, I looked at property when I was there.” She doesn’t answer. I catch myself in the mirror.
“What’s the matter Bon?”
“Nothing.”
“Why are you ringing then?”
“Just wanted to say hello, isn’t that what friends do? Did you get my letter? I love you Tweety.”
“I know Bon, I love you too, but we can’t be together. You remember when I came to Melbourne? Years ago? When you were living in Dalgety street?”
“Yeah,” I say.
“You remember you sent me the Jones letter?”
“Yeah.”
“I got it, Bon, before I left. I lied and said I didn’t get it. I didn’t have the heart to break it off.”
“You’re joking?” I laugh. “You’ll see, the band is breaking in the states, I’ll be a millionaire. I’ll buy you anything you want. I did it Maria.” I grab a fistful of bed sheet.
“I’m happy for you Bon, but you need help, you have a drinking problem.”
“Why don’t you want to be with me then?” I pour another whisky. My eyes water.
“Bon, this is Jim. Look mate, we’re going to have to let you go.”
“Oh. Hi Gerald.”
“You’re upsetting Maria, mate, piss off and leave us alone.” He hangs up. A few minutes pass.
I listen to the beeps.
“Hello. This is the operator. The other line has disconnected, sir.”

Loud spraying noise outside. I pull a pillow over my ear. Dream of running. Dream of not being able to run. Spraying noise is louder. Just below my window. I open the blind in the bay window. Glass covered in frost. I wipe with my hand. In the blur I see a couple of geezers wearing dirt covered denim jeans and jackets. One sprays, one sweeps. They have the casualness of people who have been doing the same job for years. Birds chirp. In the window frost I write the word SONG. Must write a song today. Just one song.
If not a song, a verse. If not a verse, a title. Have a few ideas. Rock and Roll Aint Noise Pollution. Came up with that one after the caretaker told us to turn the music off one night. Another title Let Me Put My Love Into You. Quite proud of that one. Still need lyrics. Always the same story, struggling through the motions.
I flick through my notebook again and again. I listen to my favourite albums. The bar is raised this time. Less stealing allowed. Everyone is watching. Needs to be me. Needs to be the lyrics people expect, but better, cleaner, wittier.
My eyes sting from lack of sleep. I pour myself a throat concoction. I stand at the window and the street lights turn off. I make coffee. I pace the apartment. I hum a few lines from Malcolm’s riff. Just need the first line, the rhythm, the length, the rhyming pattern, the theme of the song, and you’re on your way. To be clever takes time. To turn a phrase, to elevate a double entendre above a cliche requires an image, a real place to ground the chorus.
Oh, why am I talking to you? You don’t care. You just wanna hear the finished product. I know what you’re thinking, you’re thinking quit your bleating, you wanker, I gotta get up at six every morning and go to work in on a building site and bust my gut six days a week. Just make some great tracks and get on with it.
I sweep the floor, collect all my dirty clothes, do the dishes, change the bed sheets, wipe the oven, order my albums, put the books back on the shelf, make more coffee, have a shit and shave. Ring mum. “Yes mum, I’ll be back later in the year. I know. Yes trying to eat better. No, not drinking so much. Glad you like the last album Mum. Absofuckinglutely. Sorry. How’s work at the uni? How is she? Send my love. I know, only a few years left. How did the choir show go? The choir, you told me you had a show coming up. No need to be coy about it. Don’t need a will Mum, not dying anytime soon. Do you have to be so morbid? Hang on Mum, wait. I’ll call you back.”

A line. A line! Yes. Okay. Okay, now another. Something like that Alex Harvey line about gonorrhoea. No, done that to death. Pub? No, not yet. Concentrate. Wank? Always get a boner when I need to write. Write Bon, for f**k’s sakes.

Malcolm and Angus having a blow today. Go along later and play drums and piece together more songs. We have some ideas from before Highway to Hell.

I’m enjoying myself while I could be writing a song that’s the end, they’re bye bye.
Everybody knows, everybody accepts, everybody knows, let them talk about us you, as they think about me.

Not bad. No good for an AC/DC song though.

I grab the phone and dial. “Hi Silver, let’s go out for dinner, I want to celebrate.”
“Celebrate what?”
“I did it. I’ve been writing all day. I wrote most of the lyrics. I want to have dinner with you. Somewhere in Covent Garden?”
“I don’t know Bon, we’re not meant to be seeing each, remember?” Her voice sounds strained.
“Come on, just for dinner. Forget about everything else.”
“Alistair is here. He might want to join you. You been drinking?”
“Alistair? He never goes out.”
“I know, but Anne is in hospital…He’s nodding, he’ll go out with you, he’ll probably drive too.”
“Okay, so you’re not coming?”
“They got me Bon.”
“Who?”
“The cops. They took my stash and my money.”
“Oh fuck.”
“Lost the deposit for my house. Might have to go back to Adelaide. And I’ve been reading this book and was lying in bed too long, think I might have pulled a nerve or something.”
“Why did you leave me at the station?”
“You left yourself at the station, you idiot. You passed out after you ate the block of hash. You were walking around in circles, and falling over and blacking out. I missed the Stones because of you, you dick. I might be a junkie, but I never pull that shit.”

“I’m sorry.” She moans. I think about lying with her on her sofa, looking up at the painting on the wall.

“You have to think about other people from time to time, you know, you can’t get out of it whenever you feel like it.”

“I know Silver, I’m trying. I’ve been seeing the doctor about my liver.”

“What’s he saying?”

“He says if I stay off the booze it’ll repair itself.”

“You been off the booze?”

“Not really,” I laugh.

“I’m no better,” she says. “Can’t stay off the shit no matter what I try.”

“I’ll shout you dinner, anywhere you want.”

“I’ll see Bon, I’m stressed out a bit, haven’t been the best company lately.”

“Okay, I’ll see ya later then.”

“Hey Alistair, you up for going out tonight?” I take a gulp of whisky.

“Hi Bon, yeah, I’m in Dulwich now, going to leave soon. You had dinner?”

“I don’t feel like eating. Meet me at my place we can go to the Music Machine after?”

“Alright Bon. Where do you live?”

“You been to my place haven’t you? In Westminster?”

“Oh yeah.” He hangs up. Never been the most talkative bloke.

Open the phone booth. Frozen glass. Feel sick. Fucking stand up. Come on Ronald, stand up.

If you’re reading this, then I’m not in hell. That word. Hell. H, E, double L. Has a million and one meanings. A different meaning for each person. Their own personal hell. People fight over its meaning. Some people think hell is all fire and fry. I bet they only have cold coffee.

Hell is a state of mind. A place of punishment. Trapped. You can be in hell without doing anything wrong. Those poor bastards in chain gangs, the slaves and convicts who lived with the blues, who were not allowed to love. Hell is born in the blues. Or blues born in Hell? Those poor bastards working for nothing, living someone else’s lie. The non-existent punishments that won’t let you go. Like your lover who tells you to piss off, making you more trapped. This restless state of mind. The longing heart. Oh, I had a woman, a beautiful woman, but she left me. You come to grips. You bite the bullet and start again. The blues at your fingertips. I hope rock and roll never leaves me.


I’ve written hundreds of songs about hell. Most will never see the light of day. At first I felt bad about using the word, but when no one said anything I kept singing about it, going deeper and deeper. Why should religion control the word? My mum goes to church every Sunday, she’s a Christian. Maybe I’m a Christian? Throw me to the lions. Life and death, heaven and hell, someone’s breath, someone’s bell. Mum knows I don’t pray, but she prays for me.
My friends think I’m lucky. I guess I’m lucky. I’ve travelled most of the most, played to millions of people. I’ve said it before and I’ll say it again, it’s hard work and very few people are cut out for it. Most singers would only last a week doing what I do. Most people would say I’m lazy. A bum musician who offers nothing. A lay-about. A draft-resisting loafer. I tried the nine to five thing. You can stick your golden hand-shake. No way. Bye Bye. What’s the point?

_Gotta piss. Get up. Hold on. Great band._

I’ve had to rely on other people far too often. I’ve always given everything I’ve had to give. If someone needs ten bucks and I have ten bucks they can have it, don’t bother me. You have to look after each other, everyday. People are more important than money. One day when I’m filthy rich I’ll prove that to everyone.

Musicians are the only ones who do well out of war. On the other hand, people are out there killing each other and critics want to be your enemy because they don’t like your music. Who’s thinking wrong? When we have our fans in our hands, we don’t start a riot, we laugh in the pigs faces.

“_Fuck off Alistair, you want a drink or not? Make it a double. A double._”

Some people say you should steer clear of clichés. I go straight for them. Clichés are there for us to play with, to tangle, to mould. If you can give a cliché a new meaning, you’re getting close. To give a cliché a new meaning brings new light to the old meaning. The duality. The opposites working together, the double entendre, as the French say.

Take me. There’s the me that I am, and the me that I want to be. I see myself in different guises. One that stands out is the me where I’m lying on my bed, any day of the week, listening to my stereo as loud as possible. Going for broke, jumping the springs flat. Not this rock music without the noise nonsense. The real deal, you know. I’m in North Freo. Mum, Dad and my brothers are out. I pull back the curtains on the bay windows. Right then the ships in the port toot in some naval chorus singing “Gday Bon, how you doing, old son?”

I look to the south, across the blue river, over the cliffs, to Brian’s house, shooting down grassy hills with the bastard. I look to Maria’s. She’s there with her baby, and Gerald. To Wyn and Ted and the boys. Even Vince, the cunt. Then I look east to Bruce and Irene and Fraternity and Malcolm and Angus and all that is AC/DC. I pour myself a bourbon and lick up a jazz cigarette. Soon the table’s spinning and the first few loops of vinyl come to life, like a reel to reel taking hold. The perfect moment when the power of music is infinite. A power every record shares. That crackling bang. If you listen close enough every record has the musos reaching for the stars. When all the pain and suffering and hell are forgotten. Where all the hang ups and negative comments and doubts and fears and violence have no place. Where all the people who have given up, or never given the chance, or had their chance taken away from them, they too feel alive and free and happy. Here there is no life or death, no afterlife. No hot war, no cold war, no one telling you what to do.

_Eh? Cold metal. Frosted windows. Engine. Put me down. Put me down. I’ll sleep it off._

Yeah, I’ve been to hell, ya know. It ain’t such a bad place. To open your heart to someone and have it torn apart makes you wanna cry. Invites the devil around for lunch. Every show I play, you see it in their eyes. The devil running amuck in their hearts and heads. Kids staring into
your soul searching for answers. The most dreadful sickness has trapped them. They turn to you for advice and I pretend to be strong and have answers and have a drink and give an autograph and shake their hand and have another drink and hopefully their worries have disappeared for a moment. And if they have disappeared it’s time to drink some more. Like the preacher, fail at God’s work and you can blame the devil.

That you mum? Why are we driving? Thought the mini was in getting fixed?
Ronald Belford Scott died on the nineteenth of February 1980, aged 33.

The coroner's report stated the cause of death as acute alcohol poisoning and death by misadventure.

Scott's memorial in Fremantle is the most visited in Australia.
[We could play] anything, jazz, whatever. But we chose to do what we do. Anybody who criticises us is criticising themselves, they’re thinking wrong, we’re not thinking wrong, they are.

Bon Scott (Rock Chronicles, 1978)

Usefulness in composition carries no implication of opprobrium.

Albert Lord (The Singer of Tales, 2000, 65)
# DISSERTATION CONTENTS

## BON SCOTT AND THE BLUES LYRIC FORMULA

### PART ONE

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Bon Scott is possibly Australia’s most known singer in his chosen genre. Some regard him as the greatest front man of all time. Few bands, if any, worked harder than AC/DC during the years Scott was their singer. From 1975 to 1979, AC/DC produced five studio albums and one live album. At the same time they toured constantly, playing approximately 150 shows per year in Australia, the United Kingdom, continental Europe, and the United States.

Since his tragic death in 1980, the myth of Bon Scott has grown. His memorial at Fremantle cemetery is the most visited in Australia, and is listed as a classified heritage place with the National Trust of Australia. For many people visiting Fremantle, Scott’s memorial is high on the agenda. Scott has become a romanticised character who represents a carefree larrikin and humorous entertainer. What Scott does not normally symbolise is that he is one of our most significant blues and rock lyricists.

The nature of Ronald Belford Scott’s lyrics is the main focus of this dissertation. I will examine the way in which the patterns in Scott’s lyrics are evident in common blues lyric themes, and more specifically in Taft’s ‘blues lyric formula’. Perhaps because of the apparent effortlessness of his delivery and execution, commentators have not seen reason to look closer at Scott’s ‘moment of creation’, and how that sits historically. Typically, Scott’s lyrics are glanced over in AC/DC related literature. I will draw comparisons between Scott’s lyrics and the “essential ideas” of common blues lyrics.

In part one, I will outline general theories in lyric formula literature. The thesis will begin by discussing the ways in which ‘oral poetry studies’ and ‘oral formulaic theory’ has developed over time. I will draw on theorists such as Milman Parry, Albert Lord, David Evans and Michael Taft. Parry and Lord were the first to develop a formulaic method of examining the epic poetry tradition. They recorded numerous bards in Yugoslavia during the 1930s. From these recordings they were able to develop a formula for examining the ancient epic poems of Homer, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

Secondly, I will give an outline of the social context and history that brought about the conditions for the creation of blues music. To place the dissertation historically, a brief outline of the blues as a social and historical phenomenon will be conducted. Throughout the twentieth century to the present, blues music has influenced many musicians. Blues music, along with jazz, spawned later genres such as pop, soul, rock and roll and rhythm and blues. This thesis examines the question of how Bon Scott employed the blues lyric formula in the music of AC/DC.

Some contrast between the way blues was created in the southern states of America in the early twentieth century and how the blues was created by Scott in Australia in the 1970s will take place. The blues were disseminated in Australia by way of the English blues revival heralded by bands such as the Rolling Stones, Them and The Yardbirds. Many Australian bands copied these English bands, including the bands Scott learnt in. One of the main arguments of the dissertation is to assert that Scott gained intimate knowledge of the earlier blues artists in an effort to gain competence and authenticity. Artists such as Muddy Waters, Chuck Berry and
Little Richard greatly influenced the lyrics of Scott.

I will then describe and present the blues lyric formula. Evans, a student of Lord went through the United States recording blues artists in the 1960s. He was able to make a wide range of conclusions about the nature of blues music; how it was created and the main themes and subject matter. The central concept of formulaic theory rests upon the notion of the “essential idea” of the poem. In 2006, Taft published The Blues Lyric Formula, an argument offering a systematic way of examining blues lyrics. Taft’s sample size is more than two thousand commercially recorded blues, sung by more than three hundred and fifty singers from the years 1890 to 1945. From this research Taft is able to develop twenty of the most common blues lyric formulas. I present the differing views of Evans and Taft in relation to the blues lyric formula. I conclude that they are both correct in separate ways and that both provide valuable methods for examining blues lyrics. Ultimately, however, I use Taft’s twenty blues lyric formulas because I conclude they provide a simple guide to studying an artist’s lyrics and how they may or may not apply to the blues. Given time and space this thesis would compare and contrast a musicological versus a linguistic study of blues music and blues lyrics. Presumably the conclusions from such a study would disclose many of the ambiguities surrounding the definitions of the blues lyric formulas. Essentially I am arguing that Scott’s lyrics, but not all of them, belong in the blues lyric tradition. I will not be arguing which theoretical position is more sound in relation to the blues lyric formula.

In part two I present aspects of Scott’s life and examine how Scott was able to use the blues lyric formula to produce significant output in a short period of time. Because of Scott’s intimate musical knowledge, he was able to work within the blues lyric formula. A point-by-point comparison of Scott’s lyrics to Taft’s twenty blues lyric formulas will take place. The dissertation then searches through Scott’s work with AC/DC, some fifty songs, to see if his lyrics can be applied to the blues lyric formula. I discover that Scott’s lyrics satisfy eighteen of the twenty formulas. This is the crux of the dissertation, and its validity hinges upon how convincing the comparisons are. I examine Taft’s approach, primarily through the arguments of Evans, but will attempt to provide my own views as well.

To add further proof to the thesis that Scott’s AC/DC lyrics fit within the blues category, a brief discussion of one of the main techniques of blues lyrics, the contrasting pair, will follow. A discussion of the ways in which Scott deserves a place in on the blues, mainly through the motif of ‘hell’ concludes the dissertation. Inevitably, there is a portion of Scott’s lyrics that do not fit into the blues lyric formula. AC/DC were not strictly a blues band. They continued the rock and roll genre, drawing on the styles of blues and rhythm and blues. The story-like narrative songs Scott wrote fall outside the scope of this dissertation. These songs warrant further analysis. An essay on the use of humour in Scott’s lyrics could also warrant further investigation.

One of the aims of this dissertation is to show that Scott’s seeming effortlessness was the product of years of perseverance born out of an attraction to his subject matter. There is a significance to Scott’s lyrics unlikely to be disclosed in this thesis. If the reader can glean some recognition of where Scott’s lyrics sit historically and stylistically, the dissertation will have served its purpose.
Spanning the decades 1920-1960, Parry and Lord ran a series of textual and field studies that compared the themes and formulas of modern Slavic oral poetry with ancient Greek epics, primarily the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. The plan was to “set lore against literature in a rational and scientific analysis of the mechanisms and aesthetics of oral poetry” (Lord, 2000, viii). These ethnographic surveys attempted to compare and contrast oral poetry with written poetry. In 1933, Parry went to Yugoslavia to gain “knowledge of the processes of a oral poetry” which “can be had only by the accumulation from a living poetry” (Lord, 2000, ix). He recorded oral poetry performers with the aim of showing “to what extent an oral poet who composes a new poem is dependent upon the traditional poetry as a whole for his phraseology, his scheme of composition, and the thought of his poem” (Lord, 2000, ix). Put another way, the purpose of the study “is to comprehend the manner in which they [the poets] compose, learn, and transmit their epics” (Lord, 2000, xxxv). It was thought that by comparing and contrasting the different ways individual bards constructed their songs, theorists could then begin to make generalisations about the tradition as a whole. The underlying motive behind the ethnographic approach was to ensure that the ‘theory of composition’ was developed through the poetry, and not grafted on from another critical or theoretical discipline.

Parry uses the basic formula to examine Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. His criteria for the example of a formula is a sentence made up of a simple subject and a simple predicate:

> If one can fill the first half of a line with the predicate, and if one further disposes of a series of grammatical subjects each of which separately can fill the second half of the line, then with the materials one can form as many different lines as one has subjects.

(Parry, 1971, 10)

Parry finds that there are twenty-seven different lines in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, in which Homer forms songs in this way. Parry defines the formula as “a group of words which is regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea. The essential part of the idea is that which remains after one has counted out everything in the expression which is purely for the sake of style.” Parry provides examples such as ‘when it was morning,’ ‘he said to him,’ and ‘he went’ (Parry, 1971, 272). The more frequently a formula is employed is a measure of its usefulness. Homer, Parry claims, uses one formula in particular fifty times to express the idea ‘Athena’. We can thus determine a formula’s usefulness by the frequency of its use. A formula used only once, is not, according to Parry’s criteria, a formula, but a repeated phrase (Parry, 1971, 272). A repeated phrase is similar to a formula but is used more for style than for expressing an essential idea under metrical conditions.

For Parry there are two types of formulas. The first are those that have “no close likeness to any other”. The second is “that which is like one or more which express a similar idea in more or less the same words” (Parry, quoted in Lord, 2000, 275). A group of formulas make up a system. A system is a group of phrases which have the same metrical value and express the same thought.
For example, the phrase: “but when he (we, they) had done so and so” is used in varying ways over 500 times in the Iliad and the Odyssey. Parry provides a chart to prove his discoveries. Parry is careful to remind us that the formulas are at all times linked to tradition and intrinsic to the mode of composition. The poet first must conjure up the story, then the ideas follow which are in turn placed within metrical conditions. In conclusion, Parry argues: “the formulas in any poetry are due, so far as their ideas go, to the theme, their rhythm is fixed by the verse-form, but their art is that of the poets who made them and of the poets who kept them” (Lord, 2000, 272).

The image we derive from Parry and Lord of the Greek and Yugoslavian bard is of someone employed for weddings, wakes and parties. Using the formulas crafted from a young age, the bard is able to sing for hours on end using a combination of narrative imagination and syntactic rigidity. Often there is a long invocation or introduction that is used for every song, to get the singer warmed up. One word begins to suggest another by its very sound. One phrase suggests another not only by reason or idea or by a special ordering of ideas, but also by acoustic value. If the singer is of the Yugoslav tradition, he obtains a sense of ten syllables followed by a syntactic pause, although he never counts out ten syllables, and if asked, might not be able to tell how many syllables there are between pauses. Parry recorded one accomplished performer Salih Ugljanin who was able to sing 12,000 lines uninterruptedly (Lord, 2000, 45).

The ways in which bards used stock epithets in Homeric epics and Yugoslavian oral poetry are important to the argument of this thesis. A stock epithet is a phrase used often enough that a near inseparable association is developed between the description and the object or subject. Well-known Homeric stock epithets are the phrases ‘wine dark sea’ and ‘grey eyed goddess’. Stock epithets are interesting for oral poetry studies and oral formulaic studies in two major ways. Firstly, how the stock epithets are established and secondly, how they are interpolated from one bard to another, and from one generation to another. For example, Cecil Bowra, writing in 1960, and armed with new information from an excavation at Troy, is able to reconsider the epithets of the Iliad in light of the new knowledge. His article “Homeric Epithets for Troy” is separated into three main parts, titled ‘conventional epithets for places’, ‘epithets confined for Troy’, and ‘epithets suitable for Troy but not confined to it’ (Bowra, 1960, 16). Using the systematic methodology set out by oral formulaic theory, Bowra is able to determine which epithets Homer was most likely to have invented himself and which he inherited from others. Bowra is also able to determine if single epithets were restricted to a single geography or evolved generically across a region. From this study he is able to conclude:

[i]f we think that the Iliad was composed in the eighth century by a man called Homer, it is clear that he had very little part in bringing these epithets for Troy into the epic language. They belong to a tradition which he inherited and no doubt expanded and improved. In this matter, as in others, he seems to have been content to operate within the formulae which for the most part were fixed and regularised before he began to compose, and his task was rather to use them with the utmost effect for his own vision of the wrath of Achilles and its dire consequences. (Bowra, 1960, 22)
From this we are able to gather a sense of the usefulness of oral poetry and oral formulaic studies for disclosing the origin and interpolation of epithets and how they work in relation to individual poets and their creative output. In briefly discussing the work of Parry and Lord in relation to the Yugoslavic and Homeric song traditions I have presented some of the complexities of oral poetry studies and oral formulaic theory. It is these theories that underpin this present study of the relationship between blues singers, particularly Bon Scott, and their tradition.
Before we can begin a discussion on Scott’s creative relationship to the blues lyric formula, a brief summary of the blues as a cultural phenomenon is necessary. Without such a summary, no clear understanding of how Scott received and utilised the blues is possible. Where did the blues begin and how did it transform? How does the blues make its way to Fremantle, Western Australia, where Scott lived as a teenager? How do the contrasting regional conditions transmute in the conditions of creation between, for example, Muddy Waters, and Bon Scott? To what extent does the blues remain authentic if not created by African-Americans? In this context, all of these questions relate to issues of cultural identity and ethnicity.

Blues music evolved out of the movement of slaves from Africa to the Americas from the early 1600s to the early 1900s. (Weismann, 2005, 10) The movement of Africans to the Americas as slaves ceased in 1865. Michael Coolen, in *A Senegambian Origin for the Blues?* draws comparisons between the instruments, language imitations and lifestyles of Senegambian music and musicians and blues music and musicians (Coolen, 1982, 74-78). Firstly, there is the similarity between the *xalamkat* (Senegambian musicians) ensembles and the blues ensemble. The former consisted of a plucked-lute, a bowed-lute and tapped cabalash, and the latter a fiddle, banjo and tambourine (Coolen, 1982, 74). Secondly, there are the language imitations “such as the frequent absence of helping verbs (for example, “I go,” instead of “I am going”)” (Coolen, 1982, 76). And lastly there are the similarities of the lifestyles of professional *xalamkats* and bluesmen “who pride themselves on being complete entertainers” (Coolen, 1982, 75). Furthermore, Coolen claims the *xalam* tradition includes a musical structure remarkably similar to the blues; more specifically the kinds of tuning used and melodic and rhythmic patterns employed (Coolen, 1982, 77).

Coolen hesitates to state categorically that there is a connection between Senegambian music and the blues. He states that is is impossible to “demonstrate a one-for-one relationship between Senegambian music and the blues” (Coolen, 1982, 75). However, through the examination of calques (linguistic borrowings across languages) and *fodets* (recurring musical structures):

> it is possible to posit that the *fodet* could have been introduced into the United States as a kind of musical calque, thereby influencing the development of the Afro-American blues, much as African languages, via linguistic calques, have influenced the emergence of Black American English. (Coolen, 1982, 82)

In *Pop Music and the Blues*, Richard Middleton argues that slave emancipation in 1865 enabled the blues form and subject matter. With freedom came a sense of “isolation from the old slave-community; and, as an American and therefore an heir to the American’s belief in personal privacy and susceptibility to personal loneliness, isolation as a newly independent individual” (Middleton, 1972, 16). A period of segregation followed the post-emancipation movement as white power brokers, such as the Ku Klux Klan, regained control of the movement of black people. African-Americans were now separated from white America, and this situation lasted for
the second half of the nineteenth century. Middleton states:

It is now that the complex relationship of the blues to the Negro experience becomes very important. Certainly the blues reflects the experience of this time—but more than that. The bluesman also ‘remembers’ the individual loneliness, and the Americanness responsible for it, which was characteristic of the early years of emancipation, and which the black community, not surprisingly, tried to forget…Certainly at this time the bluesman can be seen as the memory and even conscience of the community, as well as its feelings and consciousness. The tension of his music is part of his completeness and honesty. (Middleton, 1972, 17)

It is in this context that the blues existed in separate areas across America. Blues music was distributed thousands of miles apart in different social, economic and physical conditions. Paul Oliver claims that the distribution of the blues could be compared to a “hypothetical folk music that flourished at once in Copenhagen, and in Rome, London, and in Cairo though bonded by language and national unity” (Oliver, 1990, 3). Wright, in Oliver, argues that blues music evolved out of the working conditions of the American Negroes, and the secularisation of society:

If the plantations’ house slaves were somewhat remote from Christianity, the field slaves were almost completely beyond the pale. And it was from them and their descendants that the devil songs called the blues came—that confounding triptych of the convict, the migrant, the rambler, the steel driver, the ditch digger, the roustabout, the pimp, the prostitute, the urban and rural illiterate outsider (Oliver, 1990, xv).

Here bluesmen and women are considered as mostly outsiders and underdogs. With the use of double entendre, blues lyrics gained a reputation for being subversive. An ironic duality developed in their songs that underscores much of the sentiment of the blues: “when I’m laughing, I’m laughing just to keep from crying” (Weismann, 2005, 8). This preoccupation is reflected in Parry’s notion of the ‘essential idea,’ which in the blues is human suffering and survival. Blues then, requires a transmission of a sense of injustice in order to garner a sense of authenticity. These injustices are manifest in the personal and public relationships of blues performers; from lovers to bosses, to police, judges and politicians.

While blues and spirituals share the use of the blues scale, spiritual subject matter appealed to a higher power and maintained a belief in life after death. The blues, however, preferred a more direct approach, focusing instead on corporeal needs, including bawdy images and double entendres which the spirituals rejected. The standard blues song included a “pattern of twelve-bar stanzas of three lines each, wherein the first line was repeated, giving the singer an opportunity to extemporise if he so wished, a third rhyming line” (Oliver, 1990, 5).

The first publicly sanctioned performances of these musical styles took place in black churches in what become known as African-American Spirituals (Weismann, 2005, 10). Some of these traits include a metronomic sense, or beat, music as function rather than form, call and
response singing, and the use of hand clapping (Weismann, 2005, 9). Over the two hundred and fifty year period of the movement of slaves from Africa to America, arrivals would bring new influences and different musical styles. As Weismann writes: “many slave owners encouraged blacks to attend church, and the imagery of freedom from bondage on earth, escaping to a promised land, must have resonated with the slaves’ own situation of oppression” (Weismann, 2005, 10). The Spirituals would later evolve into Gospel music, a form some consider the non-secular sibling of the blues.

Even though nearly every measure to keep black and white people separated was undertaken, the relationship between black and white performers provided a way of breaking through the barriers. Minstrel shows, where white performers would paint their faces black and sing mock-ups and parodies of black songs, were a way for white audiences to receive and appreciate African-American music. Often the performers would make fun of uneducated black people who struggled with the English language. As Weismann argues, minstrel songs varied in their attitudes towards slavery. Parts of the show might include depictions of the break ups of black families and more supportive relationships between owner and slave. Minstrel shows were highly popular with white audiences in the southern states for the most part of the nineteenth century. However, it wasn’t only the white people ‘stealing’ music from the black people.

Tony Russell, in Blacks, Whites and Blues argues that the influences of black music on white, and white music on black is symbiotic. He claims “the only way to understand fully the various folk musics of America is to see them as units in a whole; as traditions with, to be sure, a certain degree of independence, but possessing an overall unity” (Russell, 1970, 10). This is the scholars perspective, one not necessarily shared by individual performers. Individual black performers felt that their way of singing, playing and performing had been copied and reproduced in other contexts with the purpose of profit in mind. Nevertheless, by the 1930s, there emerges the idea of a ‘common stock’ of songs that both black and white performers could use interchangeably (Russell, 1970, 26). This phenomenon occurs despite notions of copyright and ownership generally associated with publishing. The proliferation of music through records and radio meant performers could dissociate the artist from the performance. More conscientious musicians expressed to their audience where the song was borrowed from (Russell, 1970, 30). The quality of ‘common stock’, was the adaptability of the songs to be assimilated despite race. Russell concludes:

[T]he evidence from twentieth century sources…which emphasises the divergent paths of the traditions, speaks to us not of the past but of the new century and its new mood. As the black man sought rights and equality, the tidily stratified society of the south was disrupted and the races drew apart. As if expressing this conflict of interests and of aims, the black and white musical traditions took different roads as well. (Russell, 1970, 31)

According to Charlie Gillett, in 1941, Broadcast Music Incorporated (BMI) was established to broaden the copyright protection of writers and publishers beyond scope of the American Society of Composers Authors and Publishers (Gillett, 1996, 30). To this day, however, most
early blues records recognise no composer or recording date credits. In many cases we don't know who wrote the song (Weismann, 2005, 10). There are two possible explanations for this. Either the record company producers bought the song outright or the composer was operating in the traditional mode of variation of the 'common stock'. As singers and bands became more famous, they demanded greater royalties. To receive greater royalties writers needed to be credited with the creation of the song (Gillett, 1996, 30). 'Original' songs emerged from this process, along with blues artists who achieved a measure of fame. Some of the most well-known names in the blues include artists such as Mamie Smith, Ma Rainey, Bessie Smith, Blind Lemon Jefferson, Charlie Patton, Robert Johnson, Mississippi John Hurt, Leadbelly and Muddy Waters.

Today, the blues is considered a major musical form with many sub-categories. Some of the subsidiaries of the blues form include classic blues, rural blues, folk blues, delta blues, holy blues, down home blues, and Chicago blues. During the 1950s the more classical forms of the blues became less popular as movements such as rhythm and blues, rock and roll and rockabilly became more prominent. Nevertheless, by the mid-1960s the classic blues forms reentered the public imagination in what is now called the blues revival (Weismann, 2005, 100). The blues revival was facilitated by scholars such as Evans, conducting field recordings and by the growing interest of English musicians interested in the blues.

Rhythm and blues was typified by harsh vocals and loud explicit songs that created an excited atmosphere (Gillett, 1996, 39). The louder instruments such as saxophone and drums were now matched by the amplification of the guitars and vocals. Weismann summarises the main difference between rhythm and blues (R&B) and the blues as follows:

- Blues had a twelve bar structure, R&B did not
- The music on R&B recordings often had written arrangements, the blues did not
- R&B songs use chorus, bridges and refrains and the lyrics often tell a coherent story
- Blues songs frequently dipped into the ‘common stock’ of songs and repeated lyrics from other songs. R&B songs did not, and were considered original.
- Love songs were the main preoccupation in R&B whereas
- Blues songs drifted across subjects
- R&B singers used gospel techniques such as growling, screaming and falsetto.
- R&B took showmanship to a new level, using the instruments as props (Weismann, 2005, 94).

The term rhythm and blues was a more culturally sensitive name designed to replace the name ‘race records’ (Weismann, 2005, 86). Black writers and journalists would often refer to popular African-American music as race records. Gillett claims the label rhythm and blues was replaced by the name rock and roll, although the former label still exists, despite the music having a different style (Gillett, 1996, 30). According to Gillett, a minority group of specialist music listeners helped push for the exposure of rock and roll artists into the mainstream. The group were usually affluent white audiences, or audiophiles. This group sought music outside of the range of choices offered by the music industry. The listeners were more active and tried to
understand the arrangements of the songs and virtuosity of the players. This counter-culture rebelliousness is described as exhibiting “rigours standards of judgement and taste…a preference for the uncommercialised, unadvertised small bands rather than name bands…a sympathetic attitude or even preference for Negro musicians” (Gillett, 1996, 41). These specialist groups helped transform the awareness of artists who were writing and singing the blues.

As already discussed, in America white people were the majority and black people the ‘minority group’. Gillett argues often minority groups experience a progression from exclusion to assimilation to inclusion (Gillett, 1996, 41). Exclusion is when the entire group is denied privileges enjoyed by the rest of society. Assimilation is when a favoured few, such as musicians or sports players, are granted the privileges of the many but withheld from the rest of the minority. Finally inclusion is when the minority group is granted full access to the privileges of society. It can be argued that well into the twentieth century the majority of black blues singers were writing during a period of exclusion. During the 1950s, rhythm and blues singers could experience a sense of assimilation. But it wasn’t until the rock and roll period that the black minority musicians experienced inclusion in American society. In 1955, Chuck Berry became the first black singer to release a rock’ n’ roll hit titled *Maybellene*. The single sold a million copies by the end of 1955. Muddy Waters and Chuck Berry would become important for the kinds of music bands like the Rolling Stones and AC/DC would later create.¹

Muddy Waters and Chuck Berry recorded at Chess Records in Chicago (Weismann, 2005, p 88, 92). From this time, it is in the recording studio that the majority of blues, rhythm and blues and rock and roll songs are created. The social context and circumstances in which the records are made alter the subject matter of the songs. However, as we shall see in the works of Scott, the context can be shifted significantly, yet retain much of the original form. Muddy Waters continued to retain many of the elements of original folk blues and delta blues. These included slide guitar, playing in the blues form, and soulful and direct performances (Weismann, 2005, 89). Chuck Berry, on the other hand, became the icon of the ‘Rocking Chicago Blues’ style after moving to Chicago to help Waters develop the ‘Chicago Bar Blues’ style (Gillett, 1996, 69).

A common element amongst these styles is that they were not only loud and heavily amplified, but also these artists wanted to be successful across a wider spectrum. *Maybellene* was written to a formula to meet the demands of the growing white market (Gillett, 1996, 69). Hence the subject matter consisted of cars, sex and school. Furthermore, Berry’s clear enunciation meant he sounded ‘white’ on radio (Gillett, 1996, 70). The anonymity meant that audiences were concentrating on the music only, and not the colour of the performer’s skin. This raises the question: were the white musicians covering versions of the blues, R&B and rock and roll styles aware of the issues faced by the originators of the form? Was their objective to raise the profile of the black musicians by covering their songs? Or were they copying the style because it was ‘cool’? The answer is that it was a mixture of all these elements.

By the late 1950s, artists such as Waters and Howling Wolf toured Europe. This inspired groups such as the Rolling Stones, Cream and Them, the latter two groups releasing cover versions of Waters’ song *Baby Please Don’t Go*. The Rolling Stones took their name from the

¹ I have chosen to limit the discourse to a few of artists and influences across the blues, rhythm and blues and rock and roll genres. For a sense of the enormity of the movement, please consult Gillett’s *Sound and the City*.
Waters’ song ‘Rollin’ Stone’. These English bands exposed new audiences to the blues. According to Oliver: “the popularisation of the blues in the 1960s, and its considerable popularity today, has been principally a reflection of the growing taste for the music among white enthusiasts” (Oliver, 1990, xxii). The audiences would stretch as far as Australia where a burgeoning youth culture waited for the latest music. Many of the Australian bands would play cover versions of cover versions that had been transformed from the original. It is safe to say the musicians in these bands would often be unaware of where the song originated. Nevertheless, in order to create their own music required some knowledge of the issues and themes addressed in the music they were emulating. It is highly likely that writers such as Scott received their blues knowledge through British incarnations of blues bands. His knowledge would have expanded the further he researched the black musicians.

Ferguson, in ‘A Blue Note On Black American Literary Criticism and the Blues’ (2010) warns against over-generalising blues music as symbolic of African-Americans plight for social equality. He claims that it is too simplistic to use blues music as a representative art form that generated social and legal change. He argues that blues music was originally apolitical and not the centre of African-American culture (Ferguson, 2010, 699). Ferguson argues that blues music has been reshaped, to an extent, by scholars who seek to use the form as representative of wider movement.

Though regarded with a certain doubt, or even disdain, among the majority of black thinkers before the 1970s for its low cultural or even primitive, folk origins, and its fundamentally apolitical posture, the blues enjoys an iconic status today as an almost unquestioned source of practical philosophical wisdom, artistic guidance, and contact with a increasingly remote yet distinctly black American past marked by slavery and legal segregation in the South. (Ferguson, 2010, 699)

Ferguson asserts that the trend in Black American literary criticism has been to use blues music as a “valuable conduit to the past, but one that avoids the loss of contemporary relevance” (Ferguson, 2010, 699). The implication is that blues music is somehow trapped in the past, and that even with blues revival movements, blues music is still used to portray the injustices of the sufferings of slaves from Africa. Blues music, Ferguson argues, has been retrospectively stripped of its “Americaness” by primarily white scholars. But the opposite phenomena seem to have occurred with the white musicians who took up the styles and patterns of black American music. The music of the Rolling Stones and AC/DC is, in many ways, a celebration of America. To emulate the form was to embark on a process of international regionalism. Generating the context in which the form could flourish was part of the work needed to represent a believable performance of blues and rhythm and blues music.
Evans was critically aware of the work of Parry and Lord when he set out to conduct his own survey of blues composition. He was a student of Lord at Harvard. In the introduction to *Big Road Blues* Evans discloses the motivation for his study of the blues stating: “after listening to a number of these records, it occurred to me that a system of traditional formulas existed that accounted for the texts, melodies, and instrumental accompaniments of many blues songs (Evans, 1982, 9). But before he could begin his study, Evans needed to address two problems shared by Parry and Lord. “One was the relationship of a singer’s blues to those of his sources - the other singers that he had learned from. The other was the problem of variation or stability from one performance of the blues to another by the same performer” (Evans, 1982, 10). Like Parry and Lord, Evans went out into the field and conducted his own ethnographic studies in a series of recordings of blues singers.

Oral poetry studies and oral formulaic theory attempt to discover what is being presented and deals with the relationship between the singer and his/her sources. These fields of study also try to establish how the information is represented. In this context, the question of ‘how’ is generally addressed through the notion of the formula. “They [Parry and Lord] have shown that the basic units of composition in the epic are the traditional formula, the formulaic expression, and the theme” (Evans, 1982, 315). In this context, Evans claims that his work in the blues contributes to both oral poetry studies and oral formulaic theory. Nevertheless, Evans cautions against uncritically grafting Parry and Lord’s methodology onto the blues, or any other poetic form:

> Epics, after all, are lengthy, narrative, stichic, and rigidly metrical, whereas the blues are short, lyric, stanzaic, and have their meter carried mainly by the musical accompaniment. We must also keep in mind that not all blues are composed of traditional formulaic elements, and some of those that do contain them are sung from memory. (Evans, 1982, 315)

Blues then, while highly formulaic and composed in performance, also allows for non-formulaic, memory-based composition. In contrast to the performance of epic oral poetry, modern blues needed to incorporate recorded blues that may not have been previously performed in front of an audience. Only after the song is written and recorded could the song be performed. Therefore, while the blues can be examined as an oral poetry tradition, it has also been used in a non-traditional way. That is, its composition is not carried in front of the audience using a formula. Blues songs however can be composed using traditional formulas and themes but not performed simultaneously to a live audience. The audience in this context are those present in the recording studio. The audience, or ‘crowd,’ is imagined.

Evans provides further caution for future blues/folklore scholars. He states “previous researchers often tended to borrow theories and concepts that had been developed for the study of one particular genre of oral poetry or the traditions of one particular culture and apply them
to other genres or cross-culturally” (Evans, 1982, 315). In order to avoid this dilemma, the researcher must conduct their own ethnographic field recordings and studies. But there is, as hinted at above, an important distinction to be made between ‘formula’ and ‘traditional textual elements in composition’. While a singer can use the exact phrasing and words of a previous song he/she is not performing oral poetry in the strict traditional sense. For the latter to occur the composer must not be singing from memory, but composing from formula. In any case there is always a close relationship between those blues lyricists working in a more strict ‘oral’ tradition, composing entirely during performance, and those written and performed at different times.

The issue here is a mnemonic one. Those who perform based on memory, will tend to display limited variation and greater stability in their songs. In the blues it is possible to sing from memory and remain highly formulaic (Taft, 2006, 187). This we will discover in the songs of Bon Scott. Scott created what is known as ‘voice text’, that is, lyrics which were written and rehearsed before recording, but meant to be listened to. Having established a closer relationship with the recording studio, Scott’s mode of operation was to compose songs quickly, and in a ‘live’ way, having only loosely determined the theme of the song based on drafts, or phrases, written beforehand. The themes, I will attempt to show, were grounded in the blues songs he had heard elsewhere. My objective is to present the relationship of Scott’s blues to those of his sources — the other singers that he had learned from.

Evans identifies a series of themes that run through the blues corpus. These themes are based on realistic situations treated imaginatively. That is, the blues singer is permitted to allow their emotions and imagination to run away with them during the song-writing process. Exaggeration is common. For example, in a lyric where there is a separation in a relationship, the singer is entitled to be angry with the other person, and maintain a high level of self pity. The main goal in a blues lyric is to express “such universal facts of life as contradiction, conflict and tension” (Evans, 1982, 19). Below is Evans’ list of the most recurrent themes in blues lyric:

1) Love: dealings in man/woman situations. Can also include rich sexual imagery.
2) Travel and escape. Supports the notion of blues musician as outsider.
4) Alcohol/drugs.
5) Gambling.
6) Sickness and Death.
7) Crime and prison.
8) Authority/hierarchy in the community.

(Evans, 1982, 28)

These themes form the basis for the blues lyric formula developed by Taft. Love, or man/woman situation is a major preoccupation in the blues. Therefore in almost all blues lyrics we should find a greater number of songs dealing with this subject matter. The predominance of love as a theme in blues lyrics is reflected by Son House:
Blues is not a play thing like people think they are. Youngster today, they take anything and makes the blues out of it. Just any jump and say this is the such and such a blues. No, it's not. Ain't but one kinda blues. That consists between male and female that's in love. Two people suppose to be in love when one or the other deceives the other through their love. Sometimes that kind of blues will make you even kill one another. Do anything that kinda love. (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sQ9CS-97KUA)

We could expect that the majority of songs in a blues singer's works to contain mainly love-related songs. There are many other themes in blues lyrics which I will discuss later. Table 1 (below) charts the themes present in songs of Bon Scott during his years with AC/DC. Nearly half of the songs written by Scott deal with the theme of love.
TABLE 1: Themes of the songs of Bon Scott in AC/DC 1975-1979

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Song Title</th>
<th>Love</th>
<th>Work/Wealth/Poverty/Hunger</th>
<th>Alcohol/Drugs</th>
<th>Sickness and Death</th>
<th>Leaving/travel/escape</th>
<th>Being a musician</th>
<th>School/Authority</th>
<th>Multi-Themed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ain't No Fun</td>
<td>★</td>
<td>★</td>
<td>★</td>
<td>★</td>
<td>★</td>
<td>★</td>
<td>★</td>
<td>★</td>
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<tr>
<td>Baby Please Don't Go</td>
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<td>★</td>
<td>★</td>
<td>★</td>
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<tr>
<td>Back Seat Confidential</td>
<td>★</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bad Boy Boogie</td>
<td>★</td>
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<td>★</td>
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<tr>
<td>Beating Around The Bush</td>
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<td></td>
<td>★</td>
<td>★</td>
<td>★</td>
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<tr>
<td>Big Balls</td>
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<td>★</td>
<td>★</td>
<td>★</td>
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<tr>
<td>Carry Me Home</td>
<td>★</td>
<td>★</td>
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<td>★</td>
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<td>Cold Hearted Man</td>
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<td>★</td>
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<td>★</td>
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<tr>
<td>Crabody In Blue</td>
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<td>★</td>
<td>★</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dirty Deeds Done Dirt</td>
<td>★</td>
<td>★</td>
<td>★</td>
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<td>★</td>
<td>★</td>
<td>★</td>
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Taft distinguishes between a structural study of blues music and a structural study of blues lyric (Taft, 2006, p.3). He argues that a structural study of blues music has been achievable because “the musicologist has a system of theories and methodologies that can be applied to the study of blues music. It may be an oversimplification to say that music is a logical and well-ordered mathematical construction, but the fact remains that the physical properties of music can be measured and recorded in a most exacting and scientific fashion” (Taft, 2006, 2). On the other hand, a structural study of blues lyrics, as opposed to blues music, has no theories or methodologies to operate within. “Blues lyrics, like all poetry, involve the clever use of language; they are dependent on special phonological, lexical, syntactical, and semantic limitations and options that overlay the general rules of everyday language” (Taft, 2006, 2). Applying oral formulaic theory to blues lyrics is therefore uncharted territory.

Taft situates his blues lyric formula within a linguistic paradigm focusing on performance rather than competence as a register of what is ‘acceptable’ within the framework of the poetic form. Performance here refers to “actual speech acts” whereas competence refers to “ideal situations” (Taft, 2006, 3). A focus on performance therefore limits a study to examples, whereas a competence-based approach attempts to develop a hypothetical, ideal structure. In deriving rules of formulaic composition Taft’s approach is therefore ‘bottom up,’ rather than ‘top down,’ although he states that this cannot always be the case (Taft, 2006, 3). Bottom up means working from ‘actual speech acts’ to generalisations, rather than the other way around.

To develop rules for a performance-based blues formula, Taft’s sample size is “more than two thousand commercially recorded blues, sung by more than three hundred and fifty singers” (Taft, 2006, 4). He states that this sample is “perhaps nearly one-fifth of all blues songs commercially recorded before World War II”. Taft’s study is largely quantitative, however he does include a qualitative chapter dedicated to one blues writer Garfield Ackers. In that chapter Taft discusses how Ackers’ four songs relate to the blues lyric formula. One of the focuses of this study is to see how Taft’s methodology for relating individual performers to his blues lyric formula can be applied to other artists. Later, I shall attempt to show how Scott’s some fifty songs can be applied to the formula. This study is therefore comparative. Before this is possible I need to further define and discuss the blues lyric formula.

Taft’s development of the blues lyric formula centres on a distinction between commercial and non-commercial recorded blues music. The reasons for this are twofold. Firstly, since the agents of the oral poetry are deceased, without a recording there would be no access to the documents. Secondly, the recordings would need to be commercially available. Taft dedicates an entire chapter to defining what constitutes commercially recorded blues. He then uses this definition to develop a blues lyric formula. He summarises his understanding of commercially recorded blues at the end of the chapter:

The overall definition of blues under analysis in this study (that is, the commercially
recorded blues) included the following features: its texture is the rhymed couplet in which each line is interrupted by a caesura; its text might be best described as a love lyric; its context is the recording studio; and its form of composition is, in the majority of cases, a written, rehearsed, non-spontaneous poetic creation. (Taft, 2006, 24)

The study, while not exclusive of such elements, does not include historical and psychological relationships that led to the creation of blues music or lyrics. There is much literature on the subject, in particular discussing the effects of slavery in the evolution of blues music. As mentioned in the section ‘Blues History,’ Middleton’s *Pop Music and the Blues*, Oliver’s *Blues Fell This Morning*, and Evans’ *Real Big Blues* explore these aspects, for example.

Taft states that there is no one definition of the term “formula” upon which all scholars agree. The problem is that different forms of poetry call for a different kind of formula which necessarily alters the definition of the term formula. “The disagreements are caused, in part, by the different types of poetry that have been studied as formulaic systems: classical Greek epics, Old English and Middle English Verse, and modern Yugoslavian epics, among others” (Taft, 2006, 29). Consequently, formal analysis has broken into two separate camps.

In one camp, there is syntactic formal analysis, and, in the other, semantic formal analysis. Syntactic formal analysis seeks to compare and contrast sentence structure within a school of poetry. The grammatical “pattern that is specific to a poetic form is a subset of the rules of language—a language within a language.” Such a formula would rely on sentence structures which are particular to a poetic form, “structures that would be considered odd or incorrect in everyday speech” (Taft, 2006, 32). Blues lyrics do not contain these peculiarities, however. Blues lyrics reflect everyday speech, although the repetition of lines may seem strange.

Taft’s preference is for semantic formal analysis. This approach attempts to find imagistic patterns within a scheme. The main goal here is to disclose the ‘essential idea’ of a phrase. More specifically, “each blues formula is composed of at least one semantic predication” (Taft, 2006, 32). He goes on to argue: “if a sentence expresses ‘a complete thought,’ then a predication can be formally characterised as a ‘complete thought’ that a sentence expresses” (Taft, 2006, 33). His description for a blues lyric formula can be summarised as:

This predication (PN) is a “complete thought” that consists of a predicate (P) with one or two arguments (A1 and A2). PN typically includes a structure such as A1-P-A2, which in turn generate specific words or phrases, for example, “I (A1) -walked from (P) -Dallas (A2)” (Taft, 2006, 33-6)

Taft goes on to clarify:

Each predicate and argument is composed of a number of semantic features that ultimately generate a word or phrase from the speaker’s lexicon (Taft, 2006, 33).

The remainder of Taft’s definition of the blues formula is succinctly summarised by Evans:
Taft distinguishes between “x-formulas” which occupy the first half of a blues line and “r-formulas” which occupy the second half and rhyme with a formula at the end of another line, the two lines forming a couplet as in the standard AAB stanza pattern. Thus a couplet could contain four half-line formulas (predications). The blues formula he states “maybe defined therefore not by its ‘metrical demand’ but by its placement within the blues line”. “The formula is the structural unit,” Taft writes, and the couplet is “the essential component of the blues”. (Evans, 2007, 483)

I will paraphrase the definition thus far. A predicate and two arguments make a predication. A predication is a complete thought formed from a speaker’s lexicon. These complete thoughts occupy each blues line. A blues line is generally half of a rhyming couplet. This definition for a blues formula strips away what, for many are the most interesting aspects of the blues lyrics. That is, their succinct expression of struggle. Taft’s blues lyric formula contains the promise of illuminating the workings of the standard blues lyric and how blues performers deliberately or intuitively engage with such a formula. The question remains: how does the typical blues sentence/line structure impact on the thematic content found within the verses/songs? Or put more theoretically, how can an empty syntactic structure isolate a region of semantic content? The general answer to this question is that if the lyrics do not fit into the syntactic structure in combination with the semantic content, then those lyrics do not belong to that formula. That artist’s lyrics belong to another genre. The problem with blues lyrics, and attempting to establish a blues lyrical formula, as opposed to say, ancient Greek or Slavic poetry, is that the general semantic content of the blues is one of personal suffering. So long as a lyric addresses that suffering in combination with the AAB stanza pattern it can be considered the blues.

In closing his chapter on defining the blues lyric formula Taft stresses that the formula is a “theoretical construct”. In attempting to give definition to the formula, he thinks analysts have needed to “define the boundaries of the formula” (Taft, 2006, 52). He draws a distinction between analysts of the formula and those who have invented and used the formula, the performers. The analysts, he argues, are bound to the ‘theoretical construct’, whereas the performers are free to engage or disengage with the formula at their will. He states: “the blues singers had no need to explain the way they conceived of the formula or what personal rules of composition they used” (Taft, 2006, 52). The challenge for the analyst is in describing and determining the compositional competence of the performer. One can assume therefore that by using Taft’s predication-based methodology for examining a performer’s compositional competence, we can determine whether the lyric falls inside of the blues lyric category, or not. He concludes the chapter with an admonition:

The more general and unfocused one’s research, the more elusive is the blues formula. For this reason, studies of specific singers, or specific repertoires make the best use of formulaic theory, and show more clearly the nature of formulaic systems than do large-scale overviews of the entire poetic corpus of blues. (Taft, 2006, 55)
In Chapter six of *The Blues Lyric Formula* Taft attempts to examine the blues work of Garfield Ackers under the scope of the blues lyric formula. Later in this thesis I intend to apply the same “theoretical construct” to the work of Ronald (Bon) Scott. Before this can take place however, I will disclose some objections to Taft’s theory of the blues lyric formula.

Evans begins his criticism of Taft’s “step by step description of the rules implicit in the formulaic structure of the blues” by outlining his arguments. Evans summarises Taft’s description of the semantic formula as a “meaningful thought that generates verbal phrases, sometimes substantively different lexically from one another, rather than simply a verbal phrase that might be related lexically to one another and/or syntactically similar verbal phrases” (Evans, 2007, 485). Evans criticises Taft for deviating from the Parry and Lord linguistic methodology that has dominated other systematic approaches to poetry and lyrics. Evans argues that many previous scholars recognised the patterns intrinsic to blues lyrics, but felt the Parry/Lord methodology sufficient, and felt any systematisation of the blues lyric detracted from the content and themes. He claims that Taft’s “definition of it [the formula] as a semantic unit…is so simple that it can also define much of the structure of everyday speech in the English language” (Evans, 2007, 486). If Evans is correct then Taft is simply presenting a formula for everyday speech, rather than blues lyrics. My conclusion is that Taft’s blues lyric formula is a more focused study of the themes found in blues lyrics. Taft’s formulas are a useful tool for narrowing the focus of a study.

While the sentence structures found in stock blues lyric sentences might be so ambiguous so as to resemble ‘everyday speech’, surely the quantitative outcomes of Taft’s study, a survey of more than 2000 commercially recorded blues songs, can reveal to us the predominant themes actually found in the lyrics, rather than what is commonly assumed or surmised by experience. Taft’s systematic approach is useful for determining the influence of blues lyricism not only within the genre, but across genres as well. For example, a lyricist may be working within a musical genre that sounds nothing like the blues, but the lyrics can correlate closely to the formulas as presented by Taft. It is safe to say traditions evolve and the conventions that define a genre evolve as well. By the time Bon Scott began writing blues lyrics in the 1970s, the blues had been performed in one shape or form for approximately sixty years. Naturally then, some of his lyrics operate outside of the formulas and blue genre. It is my aim to show how most of his lyrics work in relation to Taft’s formulas.

Taft concludes his book by asking the question why is the blues formulaic? The obvious answer is that the blues is formulaic because of the way they are written and recorded. There are certain “constraints and freedoms” in the recording studio that “shaped the way they composed the blues, and these factors worked to make the commercial blues concise, aphoristic and ultimately formulaic in their composition” (Taft, 2006, 188). Taft believes that the recording studio brings about a “non spontaneous” atmosphere where the lyricists are attempting to create original compositions (Taft, 2006, 189). This pressure led the composers to fall back upon formulas. In the studio, away from immediate audience interaction, composers are stripped of the ability to entertain and perform in an innovative fashion.

Evans, on the other hand, thinks that this argument is “needlessly complex” (Evans, 2007,
Instead of asking *why blues is formulaic?* Evans requests us to consider *why blues shouldn't be formulaic?* He offers an alternative to Taft's blues formula with these five axioms for examining the blues:

1. Blues stanzas may be linked to one another in a song through association. A word or verbal phrase, a topic or idea, or a syntactic pattern used in one stanza causes the singer to choose another stanza containing the same or a similar element.

2. Blues stanzas may be linked to one another in a song through contrast. A stanza or a group of associated stanzas contains a topic or idea that contrasts with a topic or idea in another stanza or group. Typical blues contrasts are leaving/returning; boasting/self-pity; praise/abuse; love/hate; good treatment/mistreatment; faithfulness/abandonment; and dominance/subordination.

3. Some stanzas say essentially “I have the blues” and state the singer’s general dissatisfaction, ambivalence, confusion, uncertainty, hopelessness, worry, depression, restlessness, and so forth. Such stanzas sometimes function to separate linked pairs of stanzas or stanza groups from one another.

4. Instrumental choruses or breaks also often function to separate linked pairs of stanzas or stanza groups from one another. (Such breaks should be indicated in any textual transcription of a blues.)

5. Blues texts relying on these principles often display symmetrical structural patterns. (Evans, 2007, 491)

Evan's five axioms reflect more naturally to the attitudes found in the blues and blues artists. These axioms have influenced this study and provide some key indicators as to how a blue artists lyrics may belong to the blues as a genre. A axiom by axiom argument applied the lyrics of Bon Scott could be made to develop a case for his lyrics to be included in the genre. I have decided instead that these axiom should be considered together with Taft's twenty formulas disclosed below. In this general theatre of theoretical dialogue there exists a definitive approach to examining blues lyrics. These five axioms could all fit the traditional image of the blues composer as one where he or she is sitting on the front porch jamming away by themselves or with friends. There is a standard blues musical structure that rolls on until someone gains some inspiration and begins to build upon a theme. During the 1960s Evans went to these houses and recorded these blues men and women in what became know as ‘field recordings’.

We can now compare and contrast this model to the model of the recording artist who draws upon traditional elements in the blues, in the moment of their creation. Successful artists had unlimited access to recording studios and their technologies. Gone were the days of writing songs ‘on the road,’ or rehearsing them before recording. This artist is steeped in knowledge of the tradition but does not necessarily improvise in the moment of recording. These artists may work to a formula, but rely on memory in the moment of performance. However, during the recording process improvisation is not out of the question. If a song has a certain feel, or the band is ‘in the zone’ the artist may gesture to keep the improvisation going. Artists such
as Muddy Waters and Chuck Berry typify this category. Bon Scott also falls into this category. Muddy Waters is an interesting identity because he was born on the plantations and moved to the city to become a recording artist. He therefore crosses the boundaries of the traditional and contemporary blues artist. He also toured Europe in the 1960s helping to spawn the blues revival.

There is no question that the blues is formulaic, but the problem is in the nature and definition of the formulaic approach. The answer comes back to the performers and the dynamic and disparate origination of blues lyrics. The answer rests on the performer's attitude to the recording studio, an attitude that would alter from performer to performer and throughout time as commercial interests changed. Some artists, Evans states, simply transferred their blues to the studio, with no 'in studio' composition needed. However:

If they were successful, and their recording careers continued, if they were seeking to emulate the most successful singers from the outset, their blues tended to become increasingly thematic, original and less formulaic…The recording context tended to work against the use of formulas, but it did not destroy it, and commercially recorded blues were constantly being enriched with the songs of the artists who had already had repertoires and an approach to composition dependent on the use of formulas. (Evans, 2009, 496)

As we shall see, this is the trend we discover in the lyrics on Bon Scott. Scott’s lyrics become less formulaic as his career progressed. The final two albums *Powerage* and *Highway to Hell* are allegoric and thematic, whereas the earlier albums lack that cohesion. *Powerage* in particular depicts the man/woman situation and agents in that relationship coming to terms with their own power. *Highway to Hell* is an exploration of life on the road as a musician and compounds the mythic notion of bluesman as outsiders, outside of redemption. My view, and the one shared by both Evans and Taft, is that it is possible for blues lyricists to be original and use formulas simultaneously.
Bon Scott was born in Scotland in 1946. In 1952, the Scott family migrated to Australia, eventually settling in Fremantle, Western Australia. Members of the local church and Scottish pipe band, both of Scott’s parents had an interest in music and performance (Walker, 1994, 22). From a young age Scott was encouraged to play the piano, accordion and the drums. In 1962 Scott represented the Fremantle Pipe Band at the opening ceremony of the Empire Games held in Perth (now known as the Commonwealth Games). Performing from a young age, Scott was novice pipe drum champion by age twelve and under-seventeen champion for five years (Walker, 1994, 32). Scott had a talent for a variety of instruments, including voice, and evidently grew with a predisposition to perform.

At sixteen, Scott was sentenced to nine months detention for lying to police, stealing, and carnal knowledge (Walker, 1994, 38). Riverbank detention centre housed teenage boys from around the State. The centre focused on reform, demanding inmates learn basic literacy and arithmetic. Scott had access to musical instruments, radio and books. I would argue that it is here he developed a letter writing habit he would carry throughout his life.

When Scott departed Riverbank he immediately joined his first band, the Spektors. The Spektors (named after Phil Spector) were a five piece cover band consisting of a singer, two guitars, bass and drums. Scott played drums and occasionally swapped roles with the singer. The Spektors’ repertoire consisted mainly of Beatles, Rolling Stones and Elvis songs.

After approximately eighteen months the Spektors merged with another Perth band called the Winstons. The merger, jettisoning half the members from each unit, created the six-piece band The Valentines. In this outfit Scott was employed as a singer, sharing lead and backing parts with Vince Lovegrove. The band were in high demand in the pubs and clubs around Perth. Again, the main repertoire consisted of Beatles and Rolling Stones covers, but also included songs by the highly successful Australian act The Easybeats. The Easybeats preceded the Bubblegum pop genre that the Valentines would eventually become known for Australia wide. The early shows would also include covers of songs by Wilson Pickett, The Who and Spencer Davis. The Valentines were able to make a living from their music. We can conclude that Scott had started to see music as more of a vocation than a hobby by this time. In January 1967, they played a show to over 3,000 people. Their first single, *Every Day I Have To Cry* was a cover of a song by United States singer Arthur Alexander.

According to Scott biographer Clinton Walker, the Valentines met The Easybeats in Perth and built up a rapport with the band (Walker, 1994, 50). Guitarist George Young of The Easybeats would later become mentor for his younger brothers Malcolm and Angus, founding members of AC/DC. George Young and Harry Vanda of The Easybeats would go on to write three songs for the Valentines: *She Said*, *Peculiar Hole In The Sky*, and *My Old Man’s A Groovy Old Man*. In October 1967 The Valentines moved from Perth to Melbourne, where the music market was more competitive. Over the next three years the band would play many shows, learning their stage craft, including what to wear. As the members’ musical tastes developed, so did their set. The band would play one set of songs for one audience and another set of songs for
another audience. Scott learnt that in order to make a living as a musician you didn't always have the opportunity to play what you wanted.

During this period Scott is credited with writing three songs, *Juliette*, *Getting Better*, and *Hoochie Coochie Billy*. From these songs emerges Scott's Robert Johnson-like high register voice. The songs cross three distinct genres presumably in an effort to see which would sell more. Nevertheless there are motifs in the lyrics that reoccur throughout the rest of Scott's lyrical career. In the second verse of *Juliette* we find:

*Juliette, golden hair so long, who'd have thought you could be bad
Juliette, you just go your way, leaving me alone, and sad
(The Valentines, 1970)*

Firstly, there is a central character who knowingly crosses a moral boundary. Discovering what is right and wrong becomes a central theme in all of Scott's lyrics. Secondly, there is a protagonist who is wronged in some way and victimised. Lastly, Scott's displays his capacity to construct a narrative that involves either irony or an unexpected shift from the anticipation of the protagonist as evil doer, to protagonist as having had some wrong performed to him/her. These themes are prevalent in blues lyrics, particularly those concerned with the theme of love.

The Valentines disbanded in August 1970 and in 1970 Scott joined Fraternity almost immediately after the Valentines split. Fraternity were a six piece consisting of drums, bass, guitar, keyboard/synthesiser, harmonica and vocals. Even though they were stylistically very different to the Valentines, based on his vocal prowess, Scott had been selected to join the band as the single main singer. Fraternity were to be a primarily original band attempting to play the style they felt suited their personalities, rather than chase album sales. Musically erudite, they quickly rose to a prominent position in Australia's popular music scene. Over the next three years they would play numerous shows in Australia before relocating to London, financed by winning a national band competition and their affluent manager. With Scott, Fraternity recorded two albums titled *Flaming Galah*, and *Livestock*. As the name of the band suggests, they pooled their resources and discouraged private ownership of property, including song rights. This makes identifying Scott's individual contribution to the band difficult. Nevertheless there are a few connections to be made between the lyrics of Fraternity and those to come later in AC/DC.

The song *Welfare Boogie* precedes *Down Payment Blues* that would appear on the *Powerage* album five years later:

*Collection on Friday, collection on Friday
The treasury keeper will drop me a line
Spend it by Monday, tomorrow's a fun day
Can handle the road if the weather is fine.*

(Chorus)
Come and sing the welfare boogie,
Come sing with me
Oh you know it will fair thee well.

I find me a lady, I find me a lady
She’ll cheat on the bottle and we’ll double our pay
We’ll save up our coupons, we’ll save up our coupons
Trade them for genuine Mexican pay.

(Chorus)

Well my friend you complain let’s see
That the welfare boogie’s doing fine by me
I got a problem a real social problem
I can’t find employment for more than a week

You might think I’m sleazy
But you know it ain’t easy
Finding employment’s a job for a freak.

(Chorus)

But now I’ve been busted
The wrong guy I trusted
Well they put me in jail
And they’ve thrown out the key.

Things could have been better
But there’s no weekly letter
But my bread and board
They look after for free


The lyrics of this song contain the genesis of multiple motifs that can be found in the later AC/DC lyrics. Tales of life on the road in a band (Long Way to The Top, Highway to Hell, Show Business) expressions of life as an underdog (Riff Raff, Problem Child, Bad Boy Boogie), cooperation of members against an authority (Dog Eat Dog, Live Wire, Rock ‘n’ Roll Damnation), challenging the notion of work within a social hierarchy (Aint no fun Waitin Round to Be a Millionaire, Dirty Deeds Done Dirt Cheap, If You Want Blood) and exploring the concept of freedom and oppression (Jailbreak, Ride On). Most significant is the theme of love. ‘Find me a lady’ becomes a major pre-occupation in Scott’s blues-based work. In Welfare Boogie, tying the lyrics together is the
clever use of inverting the notions of freedom. Scott is suggesting that life in prison is easier than life outside. Scott was able to turn the gambit of multiple themes in this one song into material sufficient for a multitude of single songs.

Between Fraternity and AC/DC, as he was recovering from a motorcycle accident, Scott began to write lyrics more concertedly. Teaming up with Peter Head, an Adelaide-based musician, they created *Round and Round*, *Carey Gully*, and *Up in the Hills Too Long*. *Up in the Hills Too Long* is a frustrated summation of Scott’s musical endeavours:

Well, I feel like a shirt that ain’t been worn  
I feel like a sheep that ain’t been shorn  
Feel like a baby that ain’t been born  
Feel like a rip that ain’t been torn  
Wish I’d done somethin’ so I could boast  
But I’ve had one less than the holy ghost  
And I hear he’s had less than most  
I’ve been up in the hills too long.

Scott’s Sisyphean struggle continued (with life on the road, coupled with a failed marriage and two failed bands) as he entered the new band AC/DC. It is useful to note that Fraternity’s insistence on non-formula was in contrast to AC/DC’s stubborn application to formula. Fraternity sought to be experimental and innovative. AC/DC, on the other hand, tried to build upon a tradition. In AC/DC Scott jettisoned the vibrato and delicate phrasing found in his singing within Fraternity and The Valentines. The rhythm and blues based style of AC/DC called for loud screaming, constant notes and restricted dynamic volume.
Taft offers twenty most common formulas found in the blues lyric. Put simply, these are:

1) I have the blues
2) I come to some place
3) I go away from some place
4) I have a woman
5) I quit my woman
6) I love you
7) I tell you
8) I treat you good/bad
9) I woke up this morning
10) I am worried
11) I have the blues [sic]
12) I cry
13) What am I going to do
14) Everywhere I go
15) I will be gone
16) I'm going back home
17) It won't be long
18) Some thing is on my mind
19) I treat you right
20) I'm leaving town (Taft, 2006, 135).

Taft develops a more complex system of symbols and diagrams to represent his interpretation of the blues formula. My aim here is to make connections between Scott's lyrics and the blues lyric formula, not explain those systems. I will attempt to summarise the formulas as I proceed. Some formulas, such as 1 and 11 above seem duplicated. I will now move through each formula providing an example from Taft's survey and showing how Scott employs each formula in his lyrics. It is important to note that Taft's survey is drawn from “race” records, or commercially recorded blues records from the years 1890 to 1945.

Scott's blues were written in the years 1974-1979. If AC/DC's primary goal were to produce as many songs and records as possible in a short period of time, they required a musical model to assist both themselves and their audience. They had learned from both the Beatles and The Rolling Stones that shifting styles often confused and alienated their audiences. AC/DC then go about developing their own songs based on the rhythm and blues and rock and roll formula. Scott develops an admixture of styles in his lyrics, but the most dominant of the styles is the blues form. Scott does not use all of the most popular blues formulas in Taft's 'top twenty list.' The reasons for this are many and varied, but we can make some preliminary conclusions.

Firstly, even blues lyricists from the period would not be expected to use all of the most
popular formulas from that time. Secondly, in the years 1945 to 1974, many more formulas would have been written and in common use by blues lyricists. Thirdly, a lyricist would not be unique if he/she employed all of the most popular formulas in their works. Some interesting observations have arisen out of identifying which formulas have and have not been used by Scott. For example, Scott does not use the formula “I’m going back home.” If we take the use of formula as a representation of autobiographical elements in Scott’s life, the absence of this formula is truthful in that Scott never does return home, or at least appears ‘homeless’.

It is not the objective of this thesis to wrestle with the definitions and theoretical underpinnings of the blues lyric formula, but to take a survey of formulaic definitions in an attempt to illuminate the workings of Scott’s lyrics. Given time and space, a major study would include a lengthy analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of a musicological versus a linguistic study of blues music and blues lyrics. My approach is primarily semantic, rather than syntactic.

Formula 1: I have the blues. Put in more formulaic terms this formula can be represented as +human have the blues. Taft explains “the predicate might be described as “to contract or to come down with, as in the case of a cold or fever,” and this predicate usually generates one or two surface level verbs: have or get” (Taft, 2006, 90). Some examples Taft provides are:

- Got the barrel housing blues; feeling awfully dry
- I can’t drink moonshine, because I’m afraid I’ll die
  (Gertrude Ma Rainey, 1923)

- I mean I went to the depot, and set my suitcase down
  The blues overtake me, and tears come rolling down
  (Blind Lemon Jefferson, 1927)

In Scott’s lyrics we find these examples:

- I got holes in my shoes, and I’m way overdue
  *I got the downpayment blues.*
  (Downpayment Blues, 1978)

- Well if you’re having trouble with the high school head
  *He’s giving you the blues*
  (Dirty Deeds Done Dirt Cheap, 1976)

Formula 2) I come to some place. Put in another way this formula can be summarised as +human come to some place. Taft explains the predicate as “moving forward” (Taft, 2006, 92). Some examples are:

- I went down to the ocean, just to get a permanent wave
My woman got a new way of loving, man, and it won't behave
(Jake Jones, 1929)

*I went down to the station*, up to the train
Couldn't buy no ticket for shaking that thing
(Walter Vinscon, 1932)

We find these examples in Scott's lyrics:

Well I left my job in my home town, *and headed for the smoke*
Got a rock 'n' roll band, and a fast right hand
(Aint No Fun Tryin To Be A Millionaire, 1976)

Hey Satan, paid my dues, playing in a rocking band
Hey Mumma, look at me *I'm on the way to the promised land*
(Highway to Hell, 1979)

3) *I go away from some place*. This formula is related to the previous one and can be explained as *+human go away from some place*. Some of Taft's examples are:

*I'm going away*, now don't want you to go
I'm going to stop at a place, I haven't never been before
(Blind Lemon Jefferson, 1927)

I've got a girl, her name is Joan
*She leaves here running fast*, chocolate to the bone.
(Henry Thomas, 1928)

And in Scott's lyrics:

*Said now you go your way, I'll go mine*, and that's a start
Doctor Doctor, ain't no cure for the pain in my heart
(Bullet to Bite on, 1978)

She never made past the bedroom door
What was she aiming for? *She's gone shootin'*
(Gone Shootin’, 1978)

4) *I have a woman*. *+Human got/have +human*. Taft describes the predicate as "to posses in a loving relationship". Examples are:
Said I woke up this morning, just about the break of day
*Some man had my woman*, and the worried blues had me
(George Torey, 1937)

If you want me baby, just leave me alone
*I can get another woman* to carry your business on
(Amos Easton, 1932)

In Scott’s lyrics we find:

She’s got speed my lady, *got what I need my lady*
She’s got the ability, to make a man out of me
(She’s Got Balls, 1975)

Old man’s car on a Saturday night
*Got me a woman*, me I feel alright
(Back Seat Confidential, 1997)

5) *I quit my woman*. Taft suggests this formula is the corollary of the two previous formulas; “possessing someone and leaving, thereby dispossessing someone” (Taft, 2006, 96). The two most common verbs in this formula are “leave” and “quit.” Here are some examples:

Depot agent, please turn your depot around
*My woman done quit me now*, going to leave your town
(Noah Lewis, 1930)

Early this morning my baby made me sore
*I’m going away to leave you*; aint coming back no more
(Joshua White, 1934)

In Scott’s lyrics we find:

Feel the pressure rise, hear the whistle blow
Bought a ticket of her own accord, to I dunno

Packed her heart in a travellin’ bag, *and never said bye bye*
Something missing in the neighbourhood, of her cryin’ eyes
(Gone Shootin’, 1978)

6) *I love you*. This formula needs no explanation. Examples are:
I love my baby, my baby don’t love me
But I really love that woman, can’t stand to leave her be

(Robert Johnson, 1936)

Now you wanted me to love you, and you treated me mean
You might give a thought on my mighty dream

(Richard Rabbit Brown, 1927)

In Scott’s lyrics we find reference to love:

I’m as happy as a man can be, too far gone to save
Died of love, and plenty of, just write on my grave

(Overdose, 1977)

It’s your love that I want, it’s your love that I need
It’s your love gotta have, it’s your love guaranteed

(What’s Next to The Moon, 1978)

7) I tell you. This formula can be expressed also as +human communicate some message. Example from Taft’s corpus are:

My mother told me, don’t you weep and moan
Because, son, there’ll be a woman here when you dead and gone

(Leroy Carr, 1934)

In Scott’s lyrics we find:

Wanna tell you a story, ain’t no lie
I was born to love til the day I die

(Bad Boy Boogie, 1977)

All right mama, gotta listen to me
Last chance thrill it’s half past three

(Back Seat Confidential, 1979)

8) I treat you good/bad. This formula can also be expressed as +human treat +human in some manner. Taft also explains that ‘the predicate might be ‘to behave toward’ or ‘to have a certain effect on’. The pre-1945 examples are:

You treated me wrong, I treated you right
I worked for you both day and night
(Bessie Smith, 1925)

Judge, I dont kill my woman, because she treated me so unkind

*Treated me so unkind*, til I swear I lost my mind

(Leroy Carr, 1934)

In Scott’s lyrics we find:

I’m a loser that ain’t lost it, baby you were too good, too good to be true

*What you done no one else could do* now I’m up, I’m up to my neck in you

(Up To My Neck in You, 1978)

You say that you want respect, honey for what

*For everything that you done for me*, thanks a lot

(Rock ’n’ Roll Damnation, 1978)

Wish I knew what was on your mind, *why you being so unkind*

Remember those nights we spent alone, talking on the telephone

(Beat Around the Bush, 1979)

9) *I woke up this morning.* No examples have thus far been found in Scott’s lyrics.

10) *I am worried.* In formulaic terms this can be expressed as *some thing worry +human.* In Taft’s corpus we find:

Oh baby what’s the matter with you

*You worry me woman*, babe, I don’t know what to do

(Barrel House Buck Macfarland, 1934)

I worried a long time ago, and you was happy as as could be

*So now it’s your worry*, I’m glad you have set me free

(Washboard Sam, 1943)

In Scott’s lyrics we find:

It’s another lonely evening, in another lonely town

*But I ain’t too young to worry* and I ain’t to old to cry, when a woman gets me down

(Ride On, 1976)

Then tonight you came home early, packed a bag or two
It's been worrying me honey, just what you're gonna do
(Stick Around, 1975)

11) I have the blues. As previously mentioned this formula is similar to the first.

Well the doctor said “we got to make em dead”
Walking sideways, sideways walking, give me the blues
(Crabody in Blue, 1975)

12) I cry. This formula is simple and straightforward. An example from 1930:

Sometimes he makes me happy, then sometimes he makes me cry
He had me to the place, where I wish to God that I could die
(Memphis Minnie, 1930)

In Scott’s lyrics we find:

Disillusion and confusion make me wanna cry
The shame, you play your game, tellin me those lies
(Hell Ain’t A Bad Place To Be, 1977)

If you leave me you’ll make me cry, when I think of you saying good bye
Oh the sky turns to a deeper blue, that’s how I’d feel if I lost you
(Love Song, 1975)

13) What am I going to do. This formula can also be stated as +human do unspecified action.
It relates to hopelessness and having the blues. An example from Taft’s corpus:

When I get drunk, I’m evil, I don’t know what to do
If I get my good chib, can I get something good from you?
(Edith North Johnson, 1929)

In Scott’s lyrics we discover:

That’s why I’m lonely, I’m so lonely
But I know what I’m gonna do I’m gonna ride on, ride on
(Ride On, 1976)

I know that it’s evil, I know that it’s gotta be
I know I ain’t doing much, doing nothing means a lot to me
(Down Payment Blues, 1978)
14) *Everywhere I go*. This formula can also be expressed as *+human go some place*. There are limitations on this formula in that *go* and *goes* must fulfill the last position in the phrase for rhyming purposes. Taft’s examples are:

Well it’s hard times here, *and it’s hard times everywhere I go*
I’ve got to make some money, so I don’t have these hard luck blues no more
(Bill Jazz Gillum, 1942)

I woke up this morning, I couldn’t even get out my door
Said this wild water got me covered, *and I ain’t got no place to go*
(Kokomo Arnold, 1937)

In Scott’s lyrics there are:

*They said stop, I said go, they said fast, I said slow*
They said up, I said down, I do the bad boy boogie, all over town
(Bad Boy Boogie, 1977)

*Suzy baby get on in, tell me where she wanna go*
(Down Payment Blues, 1978)

15) *I will be gone*. This formula must contain the phrases *be gone, have gone, have been gone,* or *done gone.* (Taft, 2006, 106) An example of this formula is:

*I woke up this morning, my good gal was gone*
Stood by my bedside and I hung my head, I hung my head and moaned
(Willy Baker 1929)

Scott’s lyrics contains an obvious example:

*I stirred my coffee with the same spoon, knew her favourite tune*
*Gone shootin, my baby’s gone shootin*
(Gone Shootin’, 1978)

16) *I’m going back home*. This formula is self explanatory. Here is an example from Taft’s corpus:

*Baby, please forgive me, I know that I done wrong*
*I’m going to get down on my knees, I want my little old baby back home*
(Jack Kelly, 1933)
Only one reference to home exists in Scott’s work, *Stick Around* from 1975:

> Then tonight you came home early, packed a bag or two
> It’s been worrying me honey, just what you’re gonna do
> *(Stick Around, 1975)*

17) *Time won’t be long.* Taft claims this is the most variable of the most common twenty formulas. (Taft, 2006, 108) Taft claims “[a]t the semantic level, the verb *be* is only a signal for the equative predication.” The equative predication is where one argument is equated with another. In almost all cases the word *it* is an epithet for *time*, and refers to a future tense. Examples are:

Tell my dad, I going to leave my home
Now I’m going, I’m going, *and it won’t be long*
*(Gertrude Ma Rainey, 1926)*

Well I’m going away, *swear the time ain’t long*
If you don’t believe I’m leaving, daddy, count the days I’m gone.
*(Louise Johnson, 1930)*

There are no obvious examples of this formula in Scott’s lyrics. The closest we get is in *What’s Next to The Moon* (1978):

Well I tied my baby to the railroad track, cannonball down the line
Givin’ that woman just one more chance, to *give it to me one more time*

18) *Some thing is on my mind.* This formula can also be expressed as *+human have something on +human’s mind.* Some examples are:

I’m kind of worried, *got something on my mind*
That’s why I drink my whiskey, make my faro wait behind
*(Robert Hicks, 1928)*

In Bon Scott’s lyrics we find these examples:

*Little lover I can’t get you off my mind, no*
*Little lover I tried so hard to find someone like you*
*(Little Lover, 1975)*

Too scared to turn your light out cause *there’s somethin’ on your mind*
Was that a noise outside the window, what’s that shadow on the blind
Wish I knew what was on your mind, why you being so unkind
Remember those nights we spent alone, talking on the telephone

19) I treat you right. This can also be described as +human treat +human right. Nevertheless, an example:

I often tell my honey, don’t have to fight
The gal that gets you got to treat you right
(Bo Weavil Jackson, 1926)

Other than the examples provided in formula eight, the closest we have to this formula in Scott’s lyrics are:

Well if you’re lookin’ for trouble I’m the man to see
If you’re lookin’ for satisfaction, I’m satisfaction guaranteed.
(Live Wire, 1975)

20) I’m leaving town. Also expressed as +human leave town relates to a major theme in the blues, travel. According to Taft, there are many variations of this formula. Some examples from the pre-1945 corpus are:

I got the bad feeling blues, keeps me so lowdown
I’m going to pack my grip, leave this lonesome town
(Blind Blake, 1927)

The man I love, I know he’s out of town
And when I find him, he better not be messing around
(Gertrude Perkins, 1927)

Scott employs this formula in these songs:

Heavenly body flying across the sky, Superman was outta town
Come on honey gotta change your tune, it’s a long way down
(What’s Next To The Moon, 1978)

I took an offer in another town, she took another pill
She was running in overdrive, a victim of overkill
I have systematically worked my way through the twenty blues lyric formulas presented by Taft, and then applied Scott’s lyrics to that formula. I have concentrated on the semantic, rather than syntactic aspect of the formula, in order to locate the “essential idea”. We find that Scott fulfils almost all of the twenty formulas, except formula nine, ‘I woke up this morning’. It could also be argued that he does not address formula sixteen, ‘I’ll go home’, instead writing ‘you came home early’. Formula seventeen ‘it won’t be long’ also remains unsatisfied. Nevertheless, I have clearly shown that there is a high similarity between Scott’s lyrics and Taft’s twenty common formulas for the blues.
I will now shift my focus to the concept of ‘contrasting pairs’ to provide further evidence of the blues-based nature of Scott’s AC/DC lyrics. A common technique in blues lyrics is to present themes in contrasting pairs. Evans summarises Taft’s formulas by claiming that their central importance is the way they signify the main themes of the blues; love, travel and anxiety (Evans, 2009, 498). He argues that the formulas only take on a tension, or energy, when they’re used in contrast with one another. This is evident when placing the formulas side by side; I come to some place/I go away from some place, I have a woman/I quit my woman, I treat you good/bad, I will be gone/I’m going back home/I’m leaving town. By doing so, the composer can play with thesis and antithesis but rarely provide synthesis. Blues lyricists do not seek to offer solutions to their problems. Instead, they provide a thesis, an anti-thesis, but no synthesis.

To provide a solution is to contradict a central tenet of the blues, an uncommitted attitude to life. By providing contrasting pairs the lyricist is able to maintain a sense of tension. The tension exists both in emotion and language. Common contrasting pairs are “leaving/returning; boasting/self-pity; praise/abuse; love/hate; good treatment/mistreatment; faithfulness/abandonment; and dominance/subordination” (Evans, 2007, 491). The singer may also contrast images and objects as well as states of mind. Below is a small compilation of Scott’s lyrics containing contrasting pairs.

In Bad Boy Boogie (1978) we find the contrasting pair of domination/subordination:

On the day I was born
The rain fell down
There was trouble brewing in my home town
It was the seventh day
I was the seventh son
And I scared the hell out of everyone

They said stop I said go
They said fast I said slow
They said lost I said no
I do the bad boy boogie

Bein’ a bad boy ain’t that bad
I’ve known more pretty women than most men ever had
All you women come along with me
And I’ll show how good a bad boy can be

We are presented with a character at odds with ‘them’. The character claims to be the seventh son. That is, the seventh son of a seventh son in a line of unbroken males. According to this
folklore the seventh son has special powers. In this case the special powers appear to be the ability to resist the pressures of domination.

The contrast between love and hate is evident in *Hell Aint a Bad Place to Be*:

Sometimes I think this woman is kinda hot
Sometimes I think this woman is sometimes not

Puts me down, fool me around, why she do it to me?  
Out for satisfaction, any piece of action, that ain't the way it should be

She needs lovin’ knows I’m the man, she's gotta see  
Pours my beer, licks my ear, brings out the devil in me

Hell ain't a bad place to be

*(Hell Aint a Bad Place To Be, 1977)*

Within the song there is a tension between the feelings of the protagonist and the actions of the parties in the relationship. The protagonist detests his ‘woman’ “pushing” him down and “fooling” him around but is willing to accept these actions for the affection he receives. The contrast in affection given to the protagonist is the nature of the relationship described as ‘hell’, a relationship not easily given up.

The song *Sin City* contains a literal contrast of images:

Ladders and snakes, ladders give, snakes take
Rich man poor man, beggar man, thief
You ain't got a hope in hell, that’s my belief

*(Sin City, 1978)*

The song is about gambling. Scott suggests a synthesis between the contrasting pair of rich and poor, but the synthesis is a negative one of hopelessness, a central tenet of the blues. This hopelessness is contrasted in the song by a “burning feeling” and a directionless “yearning” that cares little that the odds are stacked against them. The “winning” is in the release of the “burning feeling.”

The theme of good treatment/mistreatment is found in the song *You Ain't Got a Hold on Me*, a cold analysis of dependent relationships:

You can take me to your bedroom, you can take me to your heart
You can take me to a climax, I won't fall apart
But don’t count on me giving it all back to you
Just because I’m hooked on living, don’t mean I’m hooked on you

(You Aint Got A Hold On Me, 1975)

The voice in this song attempts to warn the lover not to misinterpret his/her happiness for happiness within the relationship. The voice is saying I will accept your advancements but do not expect reciprocity. The song *Ride On* contains the contrasting pairs of both leaving/returning and boasting/self-pity. This song is probably the most blues-like of all the songs Scott wrote:

That’s why I’m lonely, I’m so lonely, but I know what I’m gonna do
I’m gonna ride on, ride on

Standing on the edge of the road, thumb in the air
One of these days I’m gonna, change my evil ways, ’til then I’ll just keep riding on

Broke another promise and I broke another heart
But I ain’t to young to realise that I ain’t to old to try, try to get back to the start

And it’s another red-light nightmare on another red-light street
And I ain’t too old to hurry cause I ain’t too old to die but I sure am hard to beat

(Ride On, 1976)

The lyrics maintain a tension between permanence and change, youth and age, innocence and wisdom. The singer tries to set things straight but is invariably hindered by his “evil ways” that lead to travel/returning, boasting/self-pity. It is interesting to note that “I’m so lonely” is not one of Taft’s common formulas. The trope is frequent enough in blues lyrics to warrant recognition. In Scott’s lyrics, what emerges is a pattern of formulas that link the songs together by theme and association. Finally, I present the contrasting pairs of faithfulness/abandonment, in *Beating Around the Bush*:

Smilin’ face and laughin’ eyes, but you keep on tellin’ me all those lies
How’d you expect me to believe honey I ain’t that naive

Baby I got my eye on you, cause you do all the things I want you to
Stop your cryin’ and dry your tears, I ain’t that wet behind the ears

You can throw me lefts, you can throw me rights, but where was you last night?

(Beatting Around the Bush, 1979)
There are a percentage of Scott’s lyrics thus far unaccounted for in this dissertation. These songs relate to the theme of ‘being a musician’. This theme is almost always addressed under the scope of being a rock musician. In much the same way blues musicians continually define and redefine the blues in their lyrics, Scott attempts to define and redefine rock and roll in his lyrics. The songs seek to provide a definition of ‘rock’ both through the lyrics and the musical accompaniment. In this context the songs act as a manifesto for Scott and mark a departure point from the traditional blues lyric theme and structure discussed earlier. Nevertheless, this departure point is based on the formula of the blues lyric, but the theme lies outside Taft’s common blues formulas. The term ‘rock’ was originally slang for sex, but grew to encompass loud, electric, rhythm and blues. As we have seen in the case of Scott, the content of the lyrics for the blues man is not too dissimilar to the content of the lyrics of the rock and roll singer. Scott makes a conscious effort to present himself as a rock and roll singer, as opposed to a blues man. Rock and roll, through amplification, is loud, whereas the blues, particularly in its earlier acoustic antecedent, was quieter.

Generally, the songs implicitly or explicitly acknowledge influential musical genres or musicians through allusion or direct reference. The ‘being a musician’ songs also act to define an audience for the group. The ‘us and them’ message serves to create a ‘inner circle’ for the group. Call and response, a traditional blues and gospel technique is used to activate the inner circle with the live audience. Overall, these songs act as a legitimation process for both the musicians and the audience. On every AC/DC album there are songs which relate to the theme of being a musician/rock and roll singer. These songs are present on every album and act as a contrast to the blues songs, many of which are deal with the theme of love. On the first album we find It’s a Long to the Top (if You Wanna Rock and Roll), Rock and Roll Singer, and High Voltage. It’s a Long Way to the Top:

Ridin’ down the highway, goin’ to a show
Stop in all the by-ways, playin’ rock ‘n’ roll
Gettin’ robbed, gettin’ stoned, gettin’ beat up
Broken boned, gettin’ had, gettin’ took
I tell you folks it’s harder than it looks
It’s a long way to the top if you wanna rock ‘n’ roll

If you think it’s easy doin’ one night stands, try playin’ in a rock ‘n’ roll band
It’s a long way to the top if you wanna rock ‘n’ roll

Hotel, motel, make you wanna cry
Lady do the hard sell, know the reason why
Gettin’ old, gettin’ grey, gettin’ ripped off
Under-paid, gettin’ sold, second hand
That’s how it goes playin’ in a band
It’s a long way to the top, if you wanna rock ‘n’ roll
The lyrics of this song draw upon the experience Scott gained playing with both the Valentines and Fraternity. During the 1960s and 1970s, it was not uncommon for touring Australian bands to drive over 500kms from one city to the next, often sleeping on top of amplifiers in the back of vans. This song introduces the Scottish bagpipes during the solo and outro, an acknowledgment to the band's Scottish heritage. The song continues the overall themes evident in many blues songs. The themes of worry, hardship and oppression are contrasted with the bands desire for success. As one of the first songs written with the band, the lyrics also act as reinforcement to the singer as he begins at the bottom of the musical hierarchy once again. The use of parataxis and repeated caesuras foreshadow the technique used in the song *Highway to Hell*, written some four years later:

Livin’ easy, livin’ free, season ticket on a one way ride  
Akin’ nothin’, leave me be, takin’ everythin’ in my stride  
Don’t need reason, don’t need rhyme, ain’t nothin’ that I’d rather do  
Goin’ down, party time, my friends are gonna be there too  
I’m on the highway to hell, highway to hell  
I’m on the highway to hell, highway to hell  
No stop signs, speed limit, nobody’s gonna slow me down  
Grab the wheel, gonna spin it, nobody’s gonna mess me around  
Hey satan, paid my dues, playin’ in a rockin’ band  
Hey mamma, look at me, I’m on the way to the promised land  
I’m on the highway to hell, highway to hell  
I’m on the highway to hell, highway to hell, don’t stop me

(*Highway to Hell*, 1979)

In contrast to *It’s a Long Way to the Top*, *Highway to Hell* celebrates life as a touring band. Touring is presented as joyous rather than oppressive. When the former was written in 1975, the band were virtually unknown, whereas in 1979, the band were one year away from being one the biggest and most successful in the world.

The notion or concept of ‘hell’ is inverted from a place/state of mind to be avoided, to a place to be embraced. For Scott, the concept of ‘hell’ becomes the connection between blues and rock ‘n’ roll. He first uses the idea to describe a relationship, but later uses the idea to define the outsider or rogue. Put broadly, the blues is an emotional state of sadness, whereas rock and roll is a state of hell. ‘Hell’ as a motif, first appears on the album *Let There Be Rock*. The quasi-religious nature of all blues lyrics can be explained through the relationship between blues and gospel music. The blues singers as outsiders are condemned to hell. Two of Scott’s songs exemplify the lineage from blues to hell, *Let There Be Rock*, and *Hell Aint A Bad Place To Be*:
Spends my money, drinks my booze, stays out every night
But I got to thinkin’, hey, just a minute, somethin’ ain’t right
Disillusions and confusion, make me wanna cry
The shame you playin’ your games, tellin’ me those lies
Don’t mind her playin’ demon, as long as it’s with me
If this is hell, then let me say, it’s heavenly, hell ain’t a bad place to be

(Hell Aint A Bad Place to Be, 1977)

Scott inverts the values of heaven and hell. The traditional blues theme of love, man/woman relations remains present but the context has altered. Scott has taken notions of the devil, or demons that are both objective and subjective motifs in blues lyrics and expanded them to represent a state of ‘hell.’ Like the hell in Highway to Hell, the hell in Hell Aint A Bad Place To Be is an enjoyable place/state of mind used to ironically mock the prevailing value structure inherent in religion. In this new order, to be an outsider, to be aligned with the ‘devil’s music’ is more joyful, playful and ‘heavenly’. For Scott, music, and in particular blues and rock ‘n’ roll music, is his religion.

This belief is exemplified in the song Let There Be Rock. This song is Scott’s swan song and ars poetica (singing about singing). The song defines the term ‘rock’ both on a semantic and musical level. In this sense the lyrics mark a departure point from blues to rock in Scott’s work. Let There Be Rock is a parody of the Book of Genesis supplanting the creation of the earth with the creation of ‘rock’ music. Scott takes elements from the biblical story such as light, land, water and vegetation and replaces them with the key ingredients for a rock and roll concert, such as light, sound, guitar, drums. The lyrics:

In the beginning, back in nineteen fifty five
Man didn’t know ‘bout a rock ‘n’ roll show, and all that jive

The white man had the schmlatz, the black man had the blues
No one knew what they was gonna do, but Tschaikovsky had the news

He said: ‘Let there be sound, there was sound
Let there be light, there was light
Let there be drums, there was drums
Let there be guitar, there was guitar
Let there be rock’

And it came to pass, that rock ‘n’ roll was born
All across the land every rockin’ band was blowin’ up a storm

And the guitar man got famous, the business man got rich
And in every bar there was a superstar, with a seven year itch

There was fifteen million fingers learnin’ how to play
And you could hear the fingers pickin’, and this is what they had to say:
‘Let there be light
Sound
Drums
Guitar
Let there be rock’

One night in the club called the shakin’ hand
There was a 92 decibel rockin’ band

And the music was good and the music was loud
And the singer turned and he said to the crowd:

‘Let there be rock’

(Let There Be Rock, 1977)

In 1956, Roll Over Beethoven by Chuck Berry was released. According to Rolling Stone magazine, the song “became the ultimate rock & roll call to arms, declaring a new era.” (Rolling Stone, 2004, Dec. 113) In the song, Berry sings:

My heart’s beatin’ rhythm and my soul keeps a-singin’ the blues.
Roll over Beethoven and tell Tschaikowsky the news.

(Roll Over Beethoven, 1955)

In 1976, Scott takes these lyrics together with his interpretation of the events of the previous twenty years, suggesting Tschaikowsky has received the news and with great bravado signals that classical music has ‘rolled over.’ Classical music here represents the ‘old’ generation as opposed to the ‘youth culture’. Acting in the role of preacher, Scott identifies ‘the beginning’ point as the release of Maybellene by Chuck Berry in 1955, the starting point for Rock and Roll.

Scott combines Berry’s ‘call to arms’ with his inversion of the values of heaven and hell. Recognising the tradition of both blues and rock ‘n’ roll, Scott is able to expand on previous techniques to develop his own definition of ‘rock and roll’. The term ‘rock’ has progressed from its original meaning of sexual intercourse, to now have a new meaning of its own. The lyrics and music are able to provide the dual roles of the definition of rock and simultaneously act as an example of the new definition. This scenario parallels the claim that blues lyricists can simultaneously use the blues lyric formula and remain original at the same time.
The purpose of this dissertation has been to establish the origin and inspiration of Bon Scott's lyrics during his time with the band AC/DC. To do so I have outlined the theoretical and historical framework for oral poetry studies and the blues lyric formula. Through the arguments of Taft and Evans, the dissertation has presented a sample of the problems found in oral formulaic theory and how they are evident in the blues lyric formula. Although I have attempted to give a sense of the intricacies inherent in the blues lyric formula, there has not been sufficient room to compare and contrast a musicological versus a linguistic study of blues music and blues lyrics. The overall aim was to attempt to systematically demonstrate in what way Scott’s lyrics belong to the blues lyric tradition. The intention was never to highlight the shortcomings of the blues lyric formula itself.

The dissertation is comparative and relies on three images of performers as symbolic representations of their tradition. The first is the Yugoslavian bard, the second the traditional blues composer, and the third the contemporary blues recording artist. Firstly, the image we get of the Yugoslavian bard is one employed for weddings, wakes and parties. Secondly, the image we receive of the blues performer is one where he or she is sitting on the front porch jamming away by themselves or with friends. There is a standard blues semantic structure that rolls on until someone gains some inspiration and begins to build upon a theme. The final image I compare and contrast is one of the recording artist who draws upon traditional elements in the blues, in the moment of their creation.

As a form of oral poetry, the blues was one of the most influential and pervasive styles of the twentieth century. The blues was born out of the African-American slave experience. Blues men and women were the conscience and memory of the community. They sang and played to a series of subtle and flexible patterns that could be considered as formulaic. The formula enabled a standard and common stock of songs that performers could share. The songs emerged out of collaborations between performers who, in their oppressed state, were unaware of the commercial viability of their talents. Not until the mid to late 1940s did African-American music begin to become mainstream. “Race” records were re-branded as rhythm and blues records signifying a shift away from the identity of the performers to the style of the music. The global proliferation of African-American music via radio and record elevated the profile of individual performers who began to claim royalties for the original creation of their work. Amplification altered the live performances as bands could play to larger audiences. Singers and guitarists could be heard over the percussion and brass instruments and distorted guitar complemented the singers screaming.

In 1955 Chuck Berry released *Maybellene* marking the beginning of rock and roll and youth culture. Berry's clear voice sounded, to many on radio, like the voice of white man. African-American musicians were beginning to be included as a major part of youth culture. In England and Australia bands were emulating the styles and songs of rhythm and blues and rock and roll bands. To write your own music, however, required intimate knowledge of the blues form. Blues, R&B, and rock and roll music was politically charged like the folk boom of the early 1960s, was aligned with the black civil rights movement. To emulate the lyrical style meant to fulfill
the notion of the “essential idea” of the blues; that of human suffering and survival. To strike at
the heart of the “essential idea” of the blues required understanding of the blues lyric formula.

In order to be considered as a blues musician, lyricists had to display knowledge of
the tradition. These artists may work to a formula and rely on memory in the moment of
performance. Artists such as Muddy Waters and Chuck Berry typify this category. Nevertheless
to be considered as part of the tradition, lyricists needed to innovate to be considered part of
the tradition. Through the work of Evans and Taft, we have been able to distill the prominent
themes, patterns and formulas found in the history of blues music. Having identified these
themes, I have been able to compare the twenty most prominent formula identified by Taft with
the lyrics written by Scott. As I have shown, Bon Scott’s lyrics in AC/DC satisfy the majority of
the prominent themes found in blues music. Finally we brought this study to a conclusion with a
closer examination of some examples of Scott’s lyrics and highlighted some of the major themes
and techniques in his lyrics. Throughout all of the examination we have maintained, through
oral poetry studies, a sense of the history of blues lyrics as a link between the Slavic and Greek
bards through to rock and rock via rhythm and blues.

To paraphrase Bowra, if we think that *Let There Be Rock* was composed in the 1970s by a
man called Bon Scott, it is clear that he had very little part in bringing these epithets into the
rock and roll language. They belong to a tradition which he inherited and no doubt expanded
on and improved. In this matter, as in others, he seems to have been content to operate within
the formulae which for the most part were fixed and regularised before he began to compose, and
his task was rather to use them with the utmost effect for his own vision of the wrath of Angus
and its dire consequences.
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