

Creative Writing Component:

'In Two Minds'

and

Dissertation Component:

'A Singular Voice'

Jennifer Albertson
B.A.

This thesis is presented for the degree of
Master of Arts (Creative Writing)
of The University of Western Australia

English and Cultural Studies

2007

ABSTRACT – NOVEL

'In Two Minds' is a novel of false beliefs. Set in contemporary Sydney, it deals with the relationship between two sisters in their late thirties, Kara and Linda Hille. Told in the second person singular from the point of view of the elder sister, Linda, it is based around the neurological delusion of the younger sibling, Kara. Kara wrongly believes that their mother, Stella, has been replaced by an impostor, 'Mrs. Whitegloves'.

For the greater part, the narrative 'you' relates events in the sisters' lives and deals with issues such as the consequences of condoned child abuse, the dilemma of human cloning and the future of 'the brand' in the light of contemporary global marketing. Linda, an advertising executive, struggles with a formidable work-project, an account that is lost to a competitor, and the mistaken belief that she is responsible for her sister's plight. Shocking graffiti about herself, which appears at the same time as she wins an advertising award, proves to be the catalyst that brings beneficial change to her life. Through the tragedy of confronting her sister's devastation and her own challenges, Linda leaves her job, believing this will allow her to start again - differently.

In the final chapter, the difference is registered in a shift from the second person to the consolidated first person method of narration.

ABSTRACT – EXEGESIS

The dissertation 'A Singular Voice' documents aspects of authorial, psychoanalytical and literary significance in the creation of a fiction which draws on personal material confrontational to the writer. It also discusses some wider (non-fictional and other) uses of the narrative 'you' in order to establish the literary tradition in which the novel 'In Two Minds' may be situated.

This dissertation examines the use of the second-person singular pronoun 'you' as narrator, mainly in contemporary fiction. It concentrates on the ways in which the narrative 'you' was employed to achieve a 'cover', mask or persona for the 'I' behind the text in the novel 'In Two Minds', and explains why it was necessary to seek such subterfuge. It describes how certain grammatical and rhetorical resources were used to build and maintain 'cover', while at the same time allowing the narrative 'you' to express a particular aspect of the fictional protagonist, address the reader, and sustain the story of which it is the intradiegetic narratee.

Related narrative elements include construction of the characters through the use of the narrative 'you', for example the narcissistic mother, Stella; the phantom double, 'Mrs. Whitegloves'; the sufferer of Capgras' delusion, Kara; and the ultimate bearer of the singular 'you' voice, the protagonist Linda.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	Pages i, ii
Table of Contents	Page iii
Creative Writing Component: 'In Two Minds'	Page 1
Dissertation Component: 'A Singular Voice'	Page 193
Bibliography	Page 242

'In Two Minds.'

A SINGULAR VOICE.

The use of narrative 'you' as 'cover'
for confrontational personal material
in the novel 'In Two Minds'.

Do you have the patience to wait
Till your mud settles and the water is clear?
Can you remain unmoving
Till the right action arises by itself?¹

¹ Lao-Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, trns. Stephen Mitchell (New York: Harper Collins, 1988), 1.15

The tide's been high for ages, now it's on the turn. This is the peak of change, when ragged eddies fringe the shore and waters recede to expose shining wet-flats. Long-legged ibis forage, strutting the salty sands, reclaiming at this inter-tidal time their territory. On days like this the horizon is easily lost, diffused with clouds or sunk in choppiness, but at this moment a shard of light pierces the bay's ruffles with an arrow of pale mauve-grey.

A few squat ducks keep busy in the thicket of grey-green rushes where the stream of fresh water trickles in, gleaning with their viridian bills what is left of the day's picking. The ebbing tide slops lazily up the slope towards a clump of bamboo, a garden plant transported here in the aftermath of last summer's torrential rains. Small translucent waves go and come, come and go, sighing in and souging out.

This bay is so deceptive. These east-coast waters look benign, but they're the same that took my sister and left me awash. Turgid currents, born at the source of the greater Hawkesbury, flow invisibly swift and deep in the race around Lion Island.

With each barefoot step I shatter another brittle layer of fragile tide-line. I am listening to *The Tango of Copenhagen*, not dancing now but moving gently to its rhythm, touching the smooth jade goddess that hangs around my neck. Tank's whiskers brush the back of my legs, he follows so close behind.

Those scruffy clouds have filled with ink, fat drops of it begin to hit my face. As I and my handsome black companion abruptly turn for home, the office cell phone, the one I thought was lost, falls from the pocket of my burnt-orange weatherproof and lands on the wet sand. I stoop to pick it up and, curious to see whether the battery is still charged, turn it on.

The brashness of its ring-tone cuts the air. Without a second thought, I step to the edge of the bay and hurl it out over the water, as far as I can. A stilted version of the opening bars of *Dvorak's Humoresque* – purchased, at my suggestion, for use as The Agency's electronic signature – fades to nothing and finally goes plop.

Tank leaps like a spring kitten.

Chapter 1

While dressing for the gala, you hesitated over your Jimmy Choo four-inch heels. Now you're glad you didn't wear those strappy stilettos, although they'd have looked fine with this backless yellow silk Akira. The Manolos you chose instead are better for walking serenely up steep stairs onto the stage. You are one of those people who always appears confident, to have it all worked out, but inside you're quaking. It feels like there's nothing there.

Your name's been called. You are this year's Oscar winner. As your ears ring to a sweet staccato of whistles and applause, you smile at familiar faces in the audience – your colleagues and your peers. Waving his arms is Luke Trimmer, the talented young zealot who's sworn to become the Global King of Copywriters. Caro, your PA, jumps about beside him.

Behind them is Piers, your art director. Piers Ferrier, Brit to the core, Royal College of Art; trencherman, problem solver, interpreter and more. You've always had a predilection for the Pierses of this world, their ability to solve the trickiest of problems, their astonishing sense of design. Piers would have liked the Oscar for himself, no doubt he's envious.

At the end of the row sits Aria Blenkinsop, global headhunter extraordinaire. And next to her that gorgeous hunk, Han Malik, with Mai, his Vietnamese wife. Han wrote the catchy tune to your winning Szu Szu jingle. He deserves an Oscar too, but they don't give them to musos and besides, Han's doing very nicely thank you on the success of Szu Szu.

Then there's Xianna Tree, tapping perfect black talons, her fingers heavy with silver rings. Xianna's the neo-Goth who heads up Client Service. As the story goes, she started work in the traffic department, through which every piece of creative work has to pass, a job that suited her well because it required her to be in from sunrise to sunset, six or seven days a week. The perfect way to make sure her already pale skin remained dead white.

There are several others you don't see, but you know they're here. Your account director, Al Knappstein, for one, and Teri Dare. They must be at the back, or upstairs in the circle.

When the awards have been given and all the speeches made, you excuse yourself and whirl down the marble tiled corridor, partnered by the glittering Oscar. Your wrap flies up behind as you swing through the door marked *Ladies*.

You reel as you see, scrawled in dried red nail polish across a long wall of mirrors, four shocking words: 'LINDA HILLE IS DEAD'. A paralyzing tingle creeps up the back of your neck to the base of your brain and you clutch the coveted award as though your life depended on it. In a moment you're desperate to refresh your face and get out of here; you bang the hollow figurine of brash faux gold down on the vanity and grope for your evening-bag.

Clunk/ splat.

Rattle/roll.

Silence.

Your lipstick's fallen out and landed at your feet, leaving a mess on the white floor. The flash of indelibility gives you an idea, and, gathering what's left of the expensive tube, you use it to scrawl 'S-E-X-Y' as thickly as you can over the word 'DEAD'. You wash your hands, smear gloss along the line that is your mouth, and run your hands through your short-short hair, spiking it up. In less than a minute you're out the door, walking briskly along the same corridor, the Oscar toppling from your bag.

As you enter the theatre, you meet the eyes of Teri Dare. Dreading what she might be thinking, you quickly look away and then, spying Luke by the EXIT sign, make for him.

'Clever lady. That Akira's gorgeous! And, another award. Where do you keep them all?' He bends towards you like bamboo, his large soft lips brushing your still-hot cheek. 'Congratulations.'

'Hey!' You stop to admire his costume art. 'Don't *you* look good tonight.'

'Boy George? Or Oscar Wilde?' Luke shows you both his profiles, slipping easily between the two. He winks and shakes his shoulders. 'Wanna go to *Zoeff's*?'

The two of you leave arm in arm, behind Forrest Shore. Shore's with Felicity, his fourth new wife. They don't seem to want to stop and talk. Felicity is someone you don't know much about; a tall girl with shoulder-length streaked-blond hair and a model-thin look, she first appeared last year as Forrest's private secretary. As she leads him towards their dark green Jag, he glances back with a corporate smile, his hand raised in the thumbs up sign.

A while ago, you had close dealings with this man. Before that, when you were merely a consultant, he would not have known you. The big change came with Szu Szu. Your 'He next to Me' campaign began to win awards and The Agency claimed it as their own. Suddenly they were desperate to have you. On the lunchtime advice of Vin Hoo, ad-biz's hot accountant, you named a whacko figure and chose a blue-black cabrio. The cost of the car was a sticking point, but you hung in until you won it, along with a few other advised essentials like an eighteenth floor office and a to-die-for harbour view. With her twenty-inch wheels and sculpted rump, she answers to the name Bette Blue. Luke adores the way she handles, especially on these bends.

'Oh, Bette. Oooo, what divine bodywork! I *love* the looks from other drivers when I paddle shift her big V8.'

Bette Blue is a taste of Luke's future, his chance is coming and he knows it. You glance as his hat blows off; his close-cropped hair is coloured green about the face, the rest flows black from a topknot.

Clouds with flat grey bottoms scud the post-midnight sky, bowing to a strong capricious southerly.

'What happened, anyway?' With the top down like this, Luke has to shout above the rushing wind.

'Got a shock in the loo,' you say, shouting back. 'Someone had been in there, with a message.'

'Like what?'

'Like, 'LINDA HILLE IS DEAD'. In huge red letters, across gigantic mirrors.'

'Dead?' He laughs. 'Dead smart!'

The road to the beach is silver, winding through fractured moonlight, reflecting in pool-like sections, glinting like shards of glass. At the base of the hill lies the ocean, black as a cobalt mine, blank as your mind is about who could have done this.

There are stragglers along the verge, couples at The Pavilion. You and Luke stroll towards *Zoeff's*.

'I wanna pick your brains,' he says perfunctorily. 'About Teri Dare'.

You stop.

'You don't think ...?' He stares at you in frank amazement.

You shrug and walk ahead.

Luke's a life member of the club, so they make a fuss of you. A table at the back, beside the mini grove, low-lit for privacy. He orders drinks, Luke knows you love champagne.

'D'you reckon Dare knew about it?'

You purse your lips and shrug. A moment later, while you're still clinking glasses, he says, 'C'n I ask a teensy bit more about New York?'

'Sure, Luke, always. But you don't need me to keep telling you. Whitman was right when he said Manhattan was proud and passionate - mettlesome, extravagant, mad! The Big Apple's golden, or it can be. But you have to need to live there now. Work's not enough.'

'Yeah, yeah, yeah, Linda! Though don't forget, you *were* there ...'

You stare, daring him to go on. When he says nothing more you smile and raise your glass.

'How about a weekend on Fire Island, Luke? Or somewhere nice upstate? A mill-house on the Hudson? A clapboard on Shelter Island?'

He rolls his eyes, thrusting his shoulder forward and tilting the tip of his chin. 'You are way out of date with Fire Island, Linda. It's happening somewhere else.'

You laugh. 'And somewhere else, and somewhere else. There's always somewhere else, the fun moves on.' You sip some tender bubbles, undeniably French. 'But Luke. You need Dare if you want it all.'

He frowns and he twiddles his pretzel. 'That Teri Dare's a tough lady to catch.'

Still awake at four, you're fighting through the blur, endlessly churning through a fuzzy mental list of who was and who wasn't there. You swallow two aspirin, drink half-a-litre of water, and make a Lapsang Souchong from a teabag. You carry the frail porcelain cup Helena sent from Japan last Christmas with hands that set it rattling on its delicate matching saucer. You curl up on the couch beside the purring shape of Tank, the cat.

You're stuck on that glance from Teri Dare, the spin to end all spins. Last year Forrest Shore went to London to seek Dare, and to everyone's amazement succeeded in poaching her. She'd first attracted his attention around the time of the final Blair election; some say it was she who masterminded the strategy that got Blair in again, against all odds – though whether this is true or not is anyone's guess. Charming stuff, like sending an actor dressed as the Grim Reaper to an opponent's rallies. Teri Dare must have cost The Agency a heap, but Shore seems to think that she is worth it, even if she knows *zero* about brands.

One thing you admire about Dare is the way she looks. With straight white-blonde hair trimmed below the ears, she wears tailored men's suits, silk shirts and cuff links. Sometimes a fedora.

Is restroom graffiti her style?

Come morning, you find yourself still crumpled on the couch, a washed-out blob, pale purple bags under your eyes. Even feeding Tank his can of gourmet sardines in anchovy jelly seems like a huge chore. If this is what it's like approaching forty, do you want to know?

Your brain won't stop complaining as you stoop to pick out a pair of non-distressed Calvins and a plain white Gaultier tee. Gingerly holding the Blahniks you wore last night, you place them lovingly beside your

other favourites, the Choos, Diors, and Rossis. Then, with a single glance, you review the rest of your colour-coded collection: highs, lows and assorted heels; walkers, runners, sneakers; knees, calves, thigh-highs and ankles; wedges, slippers, flats; strappies, clogs, sandals, thongs; lacers, waders, sailers, riders; ballets, pumps and courts.

The only thing missing are moccasins. According to Luke, moccasins are the cardigans of footwear – completely devoid of *zhuzh*.

You are on your way to see Helena. She's just returned from Japan. Lena is the friend who's been closest to you for ever, who knows your sore spots: your sister Kara, your mother Stella, and the cute but lazy Fergal, who used to be your man. You bound up weathered stairs with wide wood planks to an older block, typical on this side. Everything has been rethought, redone, there's a touch of Santa Fe about it. Chunky sculptural textiles on interior walls, paths lined with terracotta urns and fat potato-pots. As you pass discreet little courtyards you see dark vines trailing upwards, occasional red flowers.

She is waiting for you on the landing, you greet with cries and hugs. Inside her borrowed apartment you feel near to the heart of the city; between here and the Opera House, ferries loom by on the big lens. A wall of sheer plate glass makes the perfect frame for Lena, palely filtered light shines her hair to purple.

'Mine, for as long as I want,' she announces, raising her arms to the view. 'It was worth coming back just for this.'

Once again you're nursing a tall crystal flute of cold French bubbles. And smiling to yourself, remembering those times when your friend has tried to persuade you to give up advertising: 'For your own sake, Lin.'

Again she confronts you.

'Tell me. When did Fergal leave?'

You pull back from the view. 'About six weeks ago.' You shift on the couch. 'He'd stayed away for ages Lena, months; it was his third long trip in a year. And when he did come back, it wasn't for me. He was out of funds.' You swallow hard. This is the first time you've talked to anyone

about the break-up. 'He got off the plane with a stupid look on his face. Said he'd fallen in love.'

'With?'

'His step-cousin.'

She looks at you in amazement. You force a laugh.

'Vast family clans like theirs have everything, Lena. The Foleys are bankers, politicians. In New York, one of Fergal's uncles is a painter, another an opera star. But it's in Paris that they're at their most seductive. Actors, gallery owners, restaurant patrons. Step-cousins.'

'*Cousine, cousine!* My, how the French do love them.' Cautiously she asks you, 'Was she younger?'

Bubbles catch in your throat; you give a spluttering cough.

Quickly she goes on, 'Anyway what was Fergal doing, *en famille dans Paris?*'

You shake your cracking head. 'He's hopelessly be-smitten by big names. Can't help himself.' You shrug. 'He likes hanging out with them.'

Your eyes are drawn beyond the thick glass wall to the watery carpet that stretches from here to the business district. As something painfully large squeezes itself into a box at the back of your head, the surface glints and shimmers soporifically. 'The way I read it was, Fergal was tired of me. And I was tired of all his bills.'

After a while she asks, 'Still taking acting classes?'

'Never did get back to it. Anyway, I don't see myself as a star.'

'Well,' she smiles wickedly, 'It is in the family. Look at Stella.'

You laugh. 'I suppose, in her own way, Mum is a star. But d'you know what? Stella believes that she's been overlooked. Last week, when I phoned to see how Dad was, she told me how hard her life has been. Again. As far as Mum's concerned, she's been denied every chance she ever deserved.' You shake your head in desperation. 'Stella thinks she's still got priceless treasures to give to the world. She's waiting to be born. To her last hour, her dying moment, my mother will always wish she was a famous actor doing Shakespeare ...'

'Chekhov?'

‘Both. When we had a Chekhov exercise at *Actor’s Warehouse*, I based my Arkadina on Stella.’

Helena looks wistful.

‘Funny,’ she muses, ‘I’d have sworn I saw Stella in an old Bette Davis movie. Bette was beautiful when she was young.’

You nod. ‘In *Jezebel*.’ You turn back to the view. ‘Stella was beautiful, too.’

After a while she asks cheekily, ‘You weren’t Fergal’s other-mother, were you?’

‘Helena! How can you be a mother and a husband?’

But your friend isn’t laughing; she’s nodding slowly, studying you. ‘Mm. You were like a husband, the way you provided. You were too successful for him, Lin.’

You shiver.

‘Lin ...’

You know what she’s going to say.

‘... thought of giving up da-da-da-da lately?’

You stare at the watery bowl that is the city, blinking thoughts away. You wonder how to tell your best friend this; you know she won’t approve. Your tone sounds empty as you blurt, ‘They’ve made me Global Creative Director.’

‘Uh-huh,’ replies Lena without enthusiasm. ‘That’s not the poisoned chalice, by any chance?’

You shrug. ‘It’s the job every man wants.’

She raises an eyebrow, quizzically.

‘And, woman?’

‘Or, rather, wants to try. And you’re right, of course, it could be a woman. Last night I saw the writing on the wall.’

The same cool southerly that blew your thoughts about has turned the bay into a choppy spread of waves that splish and splash against the bow, setting the boat astruggle. As the ferry turns to face the strong clean blow, the weather looks set in. While regular passengers ignore the signs, poring over their books and magazines or gazing into space, tourists on the deck lament it loudly, clad as they are for the beach.

In less than twelve minutes you and Helena are at Circular Quay, boarding the bus that goes around Hyde Park and into the bustle of Oxford Street. By the time you reach Cinema One the champagne kick is fading, you're in a pleasant daze. Slipping off your shoes, you sink into well-worn plush. The movie's an oddly beautiful one, polished, French, undemanding.

By late afternoon the wind has dropped. You wander together down cobbled lanes, admiring the fine old buildings of the Victoria Barracks, until you find the big art bookshop. Helena likes to immerse herself in images of sculpture, drawing, painting before she starts to work again on her ceramics.

Afterwards you take coffee in a chic little courtyard, next to a single tree. Yellow leaves cling to the half bare branch. Lena says she must be gone by six, out somewhere with Ted. You've known Ted for years, he's a friend of Lena's family. Tall and fair skinned, a grazier with mega-hectares way out west, his hair is thinning but he has the air of a prince about him. Ted always had girlfriends scattered around the country, but lately his women have begun to fade, as his mother Blanche did recently. In the end she ate nothing at all. In some ways, Helena's like a fond niece to him. When she isn't living in an artist's studio in Paris or a potter's household in Kyoto, he takes her to big balls and parties. She dresses up and looks quite beautiful.

Now she regards you sternly.

'We must do this often, Lin! I know Sydney and I know you.'

But while you're mouthing, 'Love to', you're thinking that you'll never find the time.

You turn your attention to the blue-washed café front, tracing its faded brushstrokes with your forefinger.

'Linda!' Helena suddenly exclaims, her eyes wide. 'You didn't take on The Kara Thing?'

The Kara Thing has been with you for years. It still makes you feel guilty. You were the one who was supposed to look after your little sister. You should have gone with her to Derinda.

You were twelve years old. You'd won a scholarship to Raltrick, the girls' country boarding school that was close to your father's parents' farm at Inverbrook. You were so excited. Papa and Oma had offered to fix your uniforms and books; you wanted to go off early to stay with them. Kara begged to be allowed to come too, but your mother told you she was going to Derinda. Your father couldn't take the time from work and although he'd told your mother to go by herself, she refused. She insisted Kara go with her. Stella was always wanting to return to her home town, saying it was a daughter's duty to visit her mother. But neither you nor Kara had ever liked staying at Grannie Sherde's.

After you'd been at boarding school a few months Matron called you to her room and told you that your little sister was gravely ill. She'd undergone a lengthy operation. Matron said no more, and you dared not ask. You spent hours making a card for Kara, fixing on the front a green-and-copper gum-leaf from Inverbrook, painting in a background of blue sky. You sent it to the hospital address but received no reply.

The first time you came home from Raltrick, you were shocked. When you saw Kara again you realised something was most terribly wrong. As kids you'd always shared your secrets, laughing and romping with boundless energy. Now your bouncy playmate was thin, withdrawn, restrained; doubting, suspicious, cautious. She refused to play games any more, even her favourite ping-pong. She seemed afraid to run or jump, fearful at the thought of any quick movement. Where once she'd wanted nothing better than to ride her pushbike, now she would not go near it.

Your sister was hard to understand. You had to get used to the way she spoke. She'd slipped back to the distinctive 'w' sound she'd used before she learned to say 'r's. This was annoying to you and it made her seem babyish. She was aware of each idea only as it came to her, moving from one thing to the next without connecting them. She had some memories from your times together in the past, but they were isolated. She was mixed up about time, in some peculiar way the past

was like the present to her. Her words were often slow and stumbling. She'd have to stop and search for what she wanted to say.

Kara had also developed a confused, and confusing, attitude towards Mum. Stella had taken to wearing white gloves all the time! This newly-acquired habit of your mother's seemed merely ridiculous to you, but it appeared to drive Kara mad. Your sister claimed not to know who Stella was, flatly refusing to talk to her or look her in the face. She acted morosely in her presence and would not be dissuaded. At first Dad used to belt Kara for saying Stella was not her mother, but after a while he saw that no amount of punishment could make her change her mind.

Soon after you first encountered Kara's crazy new ideas, she stood one day at her bedroom window and pointed to your mother, in the back garden, hanging out the washing. Stella was wearing those stupid white gloves and Kara kept insisting it wasn't her. Your mother had never in her life worn white wrist-gloves, she said – and in all honesty, you couldn't argue. The woman in white gloves, your sister explained, was a phantom, capable of anything. Kara swore Mrs. Whitegloves had threatened to kill her, and she sounded most convincing.

Then it struck home. Although you were frightened to think of such a thing, you knew without doubt that the figure your little sister clearly saw, and called Mrs. Whitegloves, must be real to her. The Kara Thing was far from a silly game.

Stella's way of dealing with The Kara Thing was simply to dismiss it. She'd toss her head disdainfully, as Stella can, in a gesture that was tantamount to saying, 'Very well, my girl. If that's how it's to be ...'

Only sometimes, late at night, when Dad had gone to the makeshift bedroom he'd made for himself in the shed, would your mother stand outside Kara's bedroom door.

'If you're not careful, my girl, there'll be *nothing* in your life; you'll fail at everything if you keep on like this. If you think you'll succeed at getting your own way, you're wrong. You'll find out! When you walk out of here, into the uncaring world, you'll remember what I've said – and you'll be

sorry. *My word you will!* You'll wish you'd been a different girl. You're going to find out soon enough, missy, mark my words! How empty you are inside. You're nothing but a hollow drum, a vacuum. Nothing, d'you hear? You'll end up with nobody. No-one will ever want you.'

You never knew what to do. You'd count to one hundred, loud, louder and louder, competing with your mother's harsh, shrill tone. To no effect. In the end you'd grab the rubber plugs you wore for swimming and jam them in your ears, laying your hands over and sticking your head under the pillow. There you'd lie, stiff and rigid, trying not listen, praying for the sweet release of sleep. Next day you'd feel terrible, because your mother had berated Kara and favoured you.

When you were small, you'd felt the mighty change that came with Kara's birth. Not just in your mother's shape, her whole demeanor. She didn't tell anyone but your father she was pregnant, not even her mother. And although you could see a lump growing in her tummy just above your three-year old height, she never explained what it might possibly be. One day Stella went away to hospital and had a baby. People said that she'd refused to hold it, or have it near, even though it looked like her, with a mop of curly dark hair and startling light green eyes. Dad had to care for your little sister, feed her, change her, everything. Later he handed her over to you, saying, 'Someone has to look after Kara, Lin; I can't be here all the time. You'll keep an eye on her, won't you?'

Your mother never smiled any more, or took you anywhere, not even to the beach, the way she'd sometimes done. And she forbade you calling her Mummy. From then to this day you've called her Stella.

Kara claimed repeatedly that although Mrs. Whitegloves looked and sounded like Mum, she wasn't Mum. Astonishing to you was the way she'd go on inventing and reinventing stories about this; her powers of fiction were awesome. If someone had written down everything Kara had ever said about her lost 'Mum' it would rival *The Arabian Nights*. At the drop of a hat she'd recite fanciful, intricately embroidered tales.

'Poor Mum is wandewing in the desert. Last night I saw a scorpion wun across her chest. And now, oh no! Here comes a horde of hornets and an army of ants.

'Mum's sleeping now, but she's not safe. She's lying among the goats in a bleak wavine, the sides of it go up to heaven. Now she's awake, searching for a drop of water. The only place for her to look is in the fold of an old leaf that's caught some of the dew.

'Climbing, that's what she's doing! Mum is climbing a mountain, looking at a vertical cliff. How can she get up there? There's no way, uh, unless she puts her bare feet into the cavities of a dwipping, slippewy wock she's hanging on with fwozen toes.

'I can see Mum now. Lonely, by herself, twudging along the howizon. If she's not careful she'll to be attacked by a swarm of stinging bees!

'Oh, dear. Mum's been cast adwift in the open sea on a waft of logs. No food, no water, no sail. Tossed by gales, carried by waves as scawy as the ones that weck big yachts. Now she's being pelted by towwential wain, deafened by thunder and lightning.'

Mum, Mum, Mum!

The rest of the family were no help. Your mother and father avoided all talk of your little sister, and your paternal grandparents, Papa and Oma Hille, appeared to know nothing – or if they did they never let on. The official position, tenaciously held, was that your sister was putting on a ridiculously extended stubborn act. But you, who were closest to her, knew this wasn't so. Kara was unable to trust her mind and body, to take them for granted. At times she was afraid she was going to die. She described her inadequacies as being like a fall, or swept away in a flash flood, or struck by a meteor from the sky. She pleaded with you for help. Something was wrong with Kara, no question of that. But while this was quite clear to you, it didn't seem to occur to your parents. You never understood why they didn't *do* something: seek advice, take her to see someone.

Kara put up a brave front. Strangers would sometimes become confused, seduced by her continuous fluid storytelling into thinking she was confident, even aggressive. But when you were alone together she'd

flounder, searching to make sense of simple things. She had no idea what or who to believe in. She'd look at you in desperation – oh, how you know that look. It still has enormous power.

When your sister turned eighteen, she fled. On the day she left for Europe she said that Sydney held no attraction. 'At school they told me this was a geological wonder,' she announced, 'We were supposed to be living on something unique, a sandstone plateau with downward cliffs and pretty harbour foreshores. I used to wonder at the ancient tree-ferns, Fedewation lawns and wound wose gardens. But now this place stifles me, I hate humidity mixed with wain. It makes mould grow amuck. And there are insects on the hedges, wising up in clouds. I'm fwightened of those moths. I have to go.'

You feared for her and wondered how she'd fare in a place where she knew nobody. But there was nothing that would persuade her to change her mind. She took with her one suitcase, and what seemed to be a book. She carried it in a brown paper bag and hugged it like a baby. The rest of her childhood possessions simply vanished. Her room was redecorated and styled as a bridge room, although Stella never played bridge.

After your sister had gone, your mother would talk, at length, about how she'd had to bring up a most difficult daughter. Beyond this Kara was never mentioned. When your sister sent you a letter or a postcard you'd take it with you on home visits, but after a perfunctory glance Stella would cast it aside like a contaminated object. Only later would Dad find a way to pick it up and pocket it.

Once in London, Kara put her last one hundred and twenty-five pounds into taking a cooking diploma. She'd worked at a café in Sydney's east and liked it; now, to her credit, she managed to gain qualifications. Afterwards some friends invited her to join them in a catering business; she shared their rambling cottage at East Hendred.

Oxfordshire Organiques specialised in small occasions within a radius of the dreaming spires. Kara told you it was hard work but fun, and allowed her to mix with a variety of people, sometimes in extraordinary circumstances. That's how she met Merton Earl, the man she was to

marry. He was mad about her food, amazed at the way she cooked for texture as well as taste. When Merton was seventeen, a squash ball hit him in the face and broke his nose. The injury mended and plastic surgery straightened out the bumps, but afterwards Merton found he could taste only sweet and sour. He confided in Kara, telling her that his unfortunate anosmia was like colour-blindness. His story touched your little sister; she's always sympathised with disadvantaged animals and people.

Soon they started seeing each other every weekend. Merton would drive down to stay with Kara at the cottage. A few months later you received an unusually long letter, and for your sister it was daringly open. She wrote about her dream of settling with Merton somewhere in North Oxford, describing the kind of house she'd love to have: a Victorian semi, with an upstairs and a cellar, a garden with a chestnut tree, snowdrops, crocuses, climbing roses, lilac, forsythia, viburnum, violets, and a clematis vine. A walled garden, with rustic bricks against which she might grow a climbing purple damson or a Bramley apple.

Not long after the wedding, however, Merton decided to abandon academia, where his prospects were undoubtedly bright, for a career in business. He left Oxford, a move that took Kara back to London and threw her into a lifestyle not of her choosing. She used to dress in simple cotton skirts, blouses and knits and, in winter, a felt-lined Burberry that she'd found at Oxfam. She'd even started riding a bicycle again. Transplanted to the big city, however, she thought she must become a smart young thing.

As Mrs. Merton Earl, your sister seemed at first transformed. Not better nor worse, but different. She set about re-inventing herself, assuming the role of a busy middle-class wife. Those who knew Kara less than you might have been convinced by this: she worked hard at perfecting her new persona, and in many ways she appeared to succeed.

Merton's aim was early retirement. Some years ago, when you were staying with them in London, he'd quaffed his after-dinner port and talked at length about how he intended to acquire a castle in the west country,

or a *manoir* in the Dordogne. By then, he said, he'd have enough funds to be independent of what he called 'the system'.

Kara was swept away on Merton's credo, one that relied on childlessness and the unfailing hard work of both partners. Your sister assumed that this partnership meant equal sharing. She had no idea where the boundaries lay – or indeed that there were any. She'd taken her husband on trust, expecting him to do the same.

During the first years of their marriage, Merton was successful. But Kara increasingly found she was living a life that wasn't her. Although she managed to keep her past hidden, its effects hovered. Your sister was far from home, and the experiences of her childhood had damaged her defences. On the other hand, those youthful troubles had made parts of her strong. She seemed to find ways of dealing with her instabilities, relying on resources from somewhere within. The only hint that things were anything but right came when you found yourself back in London again some years later.

Kara had described herself, Mrs. Merton Earl, as walking a tightrope.

One morning a few weeks ago, in the early hours, your front door bell rang and kept on ringing, waking you from sleep. When you groped in the dark to peer through the viewer you saw, to your astonishment, your sister lying in the outside hall, a small bag by her side. She mumbled something about flying to Sydney from London, and when you asked her where she'd been staying she said she'd spent last night in the nearby park.

By then you were aware that her marriage was over; you knew she'd been through a gruelling divorce. But no one had told you she'd been left with nothing. Shocked and desperate at this news, feeling guilty all over again for the misfortunes of her life, you offered your sister The Beach. On one condition, that you continue to come up at weekends, whenever you wanted, and bring friends. Kara was welcome, but The Beach was to remain your house, the clever investment Vin Hoo advised when your star began to rise.

The trouble was that everything had to be done Kara's way. This secretly annoyed you, even though each change she made was carried out with her extraordinary aplomb. Even as a little child, Kara had displayed your Grannie Sherde's exquisite eye for *things*, from rare Limoges dinner-plates to pieces of Clarice Cliff. In the guise of Mrs. Merton Earl, her flair for collecting had flourished and become refined, the interior of the Earl's residence in Hampstead, a modern four storey affair purchased by Merton one Saturday without consultation with your sister, was always ready to be photographed. Strangers saw her house in magazines. Now she pleaded with you to let her cover the bay-facing windows, something you'd avoided at The Beach because of the priceless views. You told your sister you'd prefer interior shutters, but for Kara only curtains would do. She must be sure, she said, that she was able to look out while nobody could look in. What's more, she rearranged the furniture in a most curious way, to face the doorway of each room. She said she must know if anyone was about to enter.

Kara also took it upon herself to change the locks, infuriating you by spending what little money she had on expensive security hardware. This included one extraordinary affair which, she explained, could not become a hinge. In London she'd researched the question of locks down to the last degree and found that people who want to get in a front door, a back door – any door, even one that's heavily protected – might unscrew the hinges and pivot the bolt. Slowly, very slowly, you came to realize that as well as not being able to live in a house that was overlooked by any other building, your sister had to feel defensibly secure.

The other Saturday, while you were helping her settle in, Kara had one of her panic attacks. You'd seen this before, years ago, so you knew what to do. You sat her down on the outside bench and encouraged her to breathe deeply and slowly, and drink lots of water. Then as she lay under your mohair blanket, you used your massage oil to stroke her neck and back, gently talking her down.

When she was calm, she started on one of her long-winded rambles. She was talking about times before your boarding school days, when you were kids on holiday at Inverbrook.

‘Days of Apricots, that’s what I call them. Wemember the green alfalfa, the dry, dry hills? The sheep and walnuts, wheat and haystacks? The paddy-melons and the wock-salt?’

‘Wemember us, in our cotton cozzies, you chasing me and me chasing you? Wunning through the orchard, past the pear trees and the peaches, the persimmons and plums.

‘Linda! Are you still there?’

‘Wemember how we used to shout and toss our sandals in the air? Hurl our towels? Slide and slip, bump and slither, down that grassy bank?’

‘What was I saying, Lin?’

‘Uh. The Cwossing was our favourite, wasn’t it? The Cwossing at Cwessbed Creek. Remember the wind-wush? It went plop, plop, plop, like the base of a cello. Ferns and logs, bendy trees, feathewy casuarinas, white cedars.

‘Inverbwook water was sweet, wasn’t it? Water you could *drink!* Fresh from the wange above, polishing the black gwanite.

‘We called it The Chinese Pool, because of the willow tree. Just like the one on Oma’s plate. We’d play there for hours, splashing and floating, paddling and kicking. Then we’d climb out on the bank, you and I, and sit quiet and still ...’

Once she was feeling better, you persuaded her to walk with you the length of Schnapperman Beach, past the pier and through the golf-course. At the ocean side you ran ahead, stripping off your top. *Aaaah!* The cobalt-blue Pacific was rolling high, crashing on coarse sands, sculpting them into near perfect fan shapes. Your body broached the chill as you dived through towering waves or swam against the undertow.

Your sister never likes to shed her clothes because of what she calls her ‘sea of scars’, the ugly patchwork left from her childhood operation. So she sat and watched, cross-legged, in her long blue and white Indian cotton skirt.

That night, as you were enjoying a glass of house bubbles, Kara dropped a bombshell. You laughed at first, thinking she must be joking. But when you saw she was serious, goose-bumps invaded your arms.

'I want a child,' she announced abruptly, '*without being a mother*. If animals can do it, why can't I? The sea-horse has made mothers unnecessary. The father sea-horse grows the embryos in his pouch and gives birth to the babies himself. It's proven, they're his clones.'

Telling yourself to take things slowly, you put your champagne aside.

'Kara, surely? It takes a male and a female to make a baby.'

'Ah,' she shook her head, 'You don't understand, do you Lin? We are, all of us, male and female. They'll use both parts of me to make my clone.'

Another of Kara's imaginings? The only thing you knew was that any further argument would be useless. Despite this, you heard yourself continuing with a string of ill-informed objections.

'... and a hundred embryos have to die to produce one clone. Yet they still carry life-threatening diseases.'

Kara burst in. 'Why can't you understand? You, of all people! The only reason for me to live now is to have a second chance. My life's in ruins; it's making me mad again.' She puts her forehead in her hands, then looks up at you. 'But my clone will be able to start all over again. Uh. She'll make the most of her life.'

'Kara! How can you be so wrong? What about Dolly the sheep? She was *born* old, so she died young. Everyone knows that! And please don't mix up personal identity with genetic identity. Your dear little "spitting image" could turn out a holy terror.'

'But the first cloned cat had normal kittens!' Your sister became calm. 'Soon they'll perfect the human clone. And when they do, all those little details will be sorted out. They will! Therapeutic cloning is driving everything, it's happening as we speak. But however long it takes, I can wait. Age doesn't make the slightest difference. They can clone Tasmanian tigers.'

All at once you felt exhausted. 'Kara,' you said weakly, 'even if you *could* clone yourself, it would cost the earth. Where would you get the money?'

'From my divorce.'

Your jaw dropped.

'Yes, I *know* it's over. But there was only one reason why there was no settlement. Merton didn't have the value of his shares. It wasn't his fault, Linda, it was his accountant's. Poor Merton has so many business interests, he had to have the finance heard in the High Court. But when the day came, he was just too busy; that's why the case was adjourned. When I get better, when I'm feeling well again, I'll go back and finish everything. Then I'll have money, more than enough.'

'But Kara, Merton's re-married – to his mistress! Don't you know what happens once the other woman claims your "ex"? If you haven't got what you want by then, forget it.'

There was a long pause. You heard yourself sigh deeply. Again you felt guilty. Rationally, it wasn't your fault. But you still felt it was.

'Look, Kara, I'll make a bargain. If you can find a suitable psychiatrist, psychologist, therapist – I'll pay.'

It didn't take her long. The next week Kara told you she had found him on morning radio, drawn by his accent and the music he chose: *Dido's Lament, When I am Laid in Earth*. When you asked her what he did, she said she didn't know. She thought he was some kind of mind doctor.

'I don't *care!*' she added defiantly. 'I know by his voice he's a healer.'

His name was Hugo Mezzner, and on the radio he'd been talking of his research. So Kara phoned around until she found him. He wasn't easy to locate, but she persisted. Finally she got to speak with him and tell him something of her long-term symptoms, also of Mrs. Whitegloves.

Quickly you discovered that this man was European, from Vienna. He was in Sydney because of his Australian wife. Apart from a demonstrated brilliance in neuroscience, he'd studied for many years with an important man in Paris and a great woman in Zürich. Reliable informants told you, enthusiastically, *we're lucky to have him!*

Although your sister was able to sustain her enthusiasm, you knew if you didn't take her she'd miss her appointment. You moved hell and high water to leave The Agency in time to get through Friday traffic, driving boldly into the University, through the main gates, and parking in the first available space. Kara insisted she wanted to find her own way, so you sat on a wooden bench near a sandstone wall in a quadrangle, by a jacaranda tree, enjoying the unaccustomed break. You let the jacket of your McCartney suit slip from your shoulders and, loosening the straps of your pale-blue Choos, relished the touch of late winter sunshine on your shoulders and your back.

Kara returned about an hour later, and told you of the meeting. She was excited, stumbling more than usual over her words.

'An odd building, cwammed in between two others. The entwance led to a maze of passages, all with the same stale paper smell. I took a wong turning, I thought I was lost. But then I doubled back, coming at last to a most ordinawy door with a wire basket scwewed to it, and the announcement "Monday Meetings" above. The basket held a bunch of dog-eared photocopies, on top was a paper titled *Archetypal Shifts in Western Thought Post 9:11* by Dr. H. I. Mezzner. I wanted a closer look, but the door opened and there he was.'

'What's he like?'

'A stocky little man with a beawd and not much hair,' she giggled. 'Bwown leather sandals and white cotton socks. But he smiled, he was fwiendly. He talked to me as though I was one of his students. I knew from the start he was intewested.'

'Did he check you out?'

'Yes, in that way he was like any other doctor. Asked me lots of questions, you know, about Mum. Uh. When had she disappeawed? Where had she gone? Where was she now? Things like that. And who was Mrs. Whitegloves? He took notes all the time. He could hardly believe I'd never been tweated, I had to convince him. Uh. Then he asked if I dweamt, and I told him no, I haven't had a dweam since Dewinda. Anyway, he wants to do some tests. He's suggested I should see him

twice a week, not at the University, but in his Dee Why rooms. At the sessions I can talk or stay silent. Uh, uh.'

You were about to cross The Harbour Bridge, aiming to take Kara back to The Beach and stay the night, when she told you how much this was going to cost. You glanced at her in astonishment, wondering whether you'd heard right.

But you had made a promise.

Chapter 2

It's the ideal conference ensemble: bias skirt with a neat, cropped jacket and a good line through the back. You choose a grey silk Chloe shirt to soften it. Not the black-pearl earrings this time; instead, garnet studs. Discreet jewellery is in again, so it has to be the necklace Fergal gave you. It hurts to pick it up, but you shut your eyes and quickly fix the clasp. A minute later, when you check yourself in the bathroom mirror, the red beads glistening at your neck, you feel a pang. It's the deep blue electricity of that same old longing.

Today Jimmy Choos are definitely out, you'll be on your feet for hours. Something more sensible, perhaps. Sergio Rossis with medium heels, unusual enough to look interesting. Rossi builds in comfort, though your first choice will always be Choo. Old-fashioned perhaps, but Choo understands legs as well as feet – dressed up, to party, or down, for work. Choo and only Choo can elongate your calves and lend your thighs a pleasant tension that seems to make them stretch. Out of humble reverence, you sing a small Choo-ditty you once composed:

'Choo, o Choo!
It's gotta be, gotta be,
It's just gotta be you
Yoo ... hoo
Choo!'

This morning you are on the way to pitch the 'Rebranding of Branding', known as Project RoB. The outdated image of branding has to go; at least that's what they're saying. But hasn't branding been around since men first owned cattle? Napoleon placed his laurel-wreath on the imperial throne of France? Bin Laden claimed the territory of terror?

All Creative Directors need personal branding – tattooing, body-piercing, outrageous or expensive clothing, a whacky choice of car. At boarding school you learned how to hold your own amongst girls from established families, and those with money. Later when RG, the Chicago designer who became your Madison Avenue mentor, advised you to always keep pitching yourself, you understood exactly what he meant.

'Hi!' Helena, on the hands-free.

'God!'

'Goddess, please.'

You laugh. 'I haven't even reached the Bridge.'

'Big day, to-day?'

'Mm, sort of.'

'Thought I'd catch you, see what you're up to. How about another movie? Or a meal?'

'Can't do, this week.'

'Weekend?'

'I have to see Kara. Why don't you come to The Beach?'

She hesitates. 'Is that OK?'

'Of course! I'll just tell her.'

In this street, crammed with tall buildings, Lena keeps fading,

'... business of the death threat?'

'What? Oh, that.' You crane your neck to see the traffic still blocked.

'Well it wasn't Teri Dare, we know that much.'

'We?'

'Me and Luke.'

Her voice is playful. 'And when do I meet Luke?'

You shriek with laughter. 'It's like that. Not.'

'What, then?'

'I'm teaching Luke the ins and outs of ad-biz. Although he's already discovered some of the best "ins" for himself.' The idea tickles you.

'Luke's a bright boy, street-wise; he'll go far. All part of my pension-plan, Helena! Luke says he'll ply me with freelance when I'm old and grey.' You smile, wryly. 'But no, he did go to extraordinary lengths with Teri Dare. Even slept with her.'

'Ah.'

'Which is over-the-top, since Luke prefers boys.'

'So does this Dare know anything?'

'She told Luke she was there before me; she saw the words on the mirror.'

The stress of your job, a condition of mind and body you always say you hate, is one of your addictions. Calling Helena, especially when she's away, provides a kind of antidote. It's only during recent weeks, when she was traveling in the remote areas of northern Japan, that you were out of touch. Before that, your frequent long phone conversations used to infuriate Fergal; he never understood how much you needed to talk to the person who's always there.

At Raltrick some of your fellow-students had despised you for being a scholarship girl, but never Lena. To Helena Vergil and her family it made not the slightest difference. You were supposed to spend short holidays and long weekends at your grandparents', but Lena's mother, Pat, would often ask Oma if you could come home with her to Mountbrae, the property next to Inverbrook. Beside the Hille's modest farmstead, Mountbrae stood grand and proud; the Vergils lived in style. Helena's brothers, Dan and Ewen, away at their own boarding-school, used to bring their friends home, too.

When your school-days ended you returned to Sydney, but you didn't live at home. Instead you roomed at the Vergils' Elizabeth Bay flat. From Helena's mother, and her mother too, you learned many little dexterities and gained useful insights, such as how to put a signature to the way you dress. Your own mother, Stella, despite her utter dedication to appearance, was never the sharing type. She kept her secrets to herself. A dress, a bag – anything Stella happened to fancy that belonged to someone else – could provoke cold sparks of envy.

The Agency chose you to head up this global pitch because you're the one with the brand-record. It was you who invented Szu Szu, and, as with Szu Szu, the answer to RoB lies in your experience. If Linda Hille knows anything, it is how to create a brand.

The line 'He next to Me' hit an erotic vein, and the He Guys that went with it gave Szu Szu unique personality. This new underwear brand zoomed into being like the Phoenix rocket: you realised it was successful when Misses Average began to cover their bedroom walls with He Guys

posters. But better still than the original pants-and-bra concept was its extension into jocks, tees and gees. Gay clubs, here in Oxford Street, at the famous London *Heaven*, also another big one in San Fran, began to produce their own saucy cabarets using your catchy line. When 'He next to Me' became a Village People-style anthem, Szu Szu took off; now it's hailed as the first-ever trans-sexual global brand.

At the pitch you'll use that never-fail device, a proven history of brand-success. You'll show the original cheat-a-matic from the legendary Szu Szu pitch, the one that won the account for The Agency. You'll power-point the evolution of the He Guys, quoting snappy little verses from the jingle. You'll lead a sing-along of the chorus:

He next to Me
next to Me
next to Me
and He next to You –
Szu Szu!

You'll shimmy, shake and tap-dance like the sturdy show-pony you are. With a tireless smile, you'll hand out fresh new Szu Szus in an assortment of styles and sizes, and the latest, most-wanted colours.

On your return to The Agency you find Luke has raced you back. He's holding court in the eighteenth-floor foyer, surrounded by the juniors and a few creative teams.

'Linda! I was just telling them how wonderful you were. *La diva in flagrante...*'

Curiously, moments like this repel; you hate post-morteming cold pitch. You wave, slipping by the crowd and sliding off in the direction of your office.

'How'd it go?' asks Caro.

'They liked it.' You smile. 'Hey, and I love your yellow pumps! Did you get them at Givallos?'

Caro nods, pleased, as Luke's head appears around the screen of woven steel-and-silk that separates your office from the rest.

'Ab Fab, as usual,' he interjects.

'They love all that stuff, especially from Linda,' says Caro.

Luke slides the length of her desk, slipping his arm around your waist.

'It could only have been better if she'd worn her Dolce and Gabbanas,' he says, at the same time examining the texture of your jacket. 'But I still like these old Armanis.'

This is the office you've always wanted, high above the Harbour: the large window in front of your desk has the same viewpoint as the Brett Whitely painting hanging behind it. The Bridge is at your feet, with its familiar chunky pylons and double-arch, then the Observatory, on the other side the Opera House, Fort Denison and Lady Macquarie's Chair. Ahead is Centrepoint, to the west Darling Harbour, Glebe Island and the Anzac Bridge.

As you open up your computer, there's a knock on the glass wall.

'Wonderful honey!' says your account director, Al Knappstein, letting himself in. 'Want to know what the buzz is around town? It's ours! We'll know for sure Friday.'

'Wow,' you say flatly. 'If we do find out, Friday, my brain won't stop the whole weekend.'

'As good as ours honey. Ours! I'm drawin' up the schedule right now.'

'Al! You've got such a lovely family, why don't you spend some time with them?'

'You know as well as I do honey. The Client's gonna want it.'

'Al, let's wait, please. The Szu Szu shoot's on Monday, that's the next thing.'

'When can you make a RoB meeting?'

'When you tell me we've got RoB, we'll talk. I'm out 'til Wednesday.'

'OK OK. Wednesday. I know we got it!'

The well-known shoe fetishist does not like wearing shoes at all, once at home. Now barefoot with a glass of your house bubbles, you curl up ready to zone out. But Tank, who's been eyeing your every move, chooses this moment to jump on your lap. His yellow eyes close, his engine starts, and in less than ten seconds he's drowning in ecstasy.

Your mind is running on a loop. For some crazy reason you can't stop thinking about Fergal, probably because RoB is dangling the Big Apple. If you get this huge project it will mean spending time again in Manhattan. And that's where you and Fergal met.

For all sorts of reasons you'll always love New York; the chance to return is a sparkling lure. You and Ferg were happy in your SoHo loft, at least for a few precious months: anonymous, private, cosy, ensconced in your own little whirl, far from the cries of 'toy boy' that rang when you came back. Your hand goes to your throat, you feel the beads with the river pearls in between.

You recall that Saturday when you first went over to the east side to audition with Arnie, the ageing Renoir devotee who ran *Actors' Warehouse*. It was once a derelict sweat shop. Enthusiastic amateurs had fitted it out with wings, a stage and upstairs storerooms. You listened to the haunting strains of the Jacques Lousier revival. Even before the auditions had begun you noticed Fergal sitting in a circle of would-be actors; then, when you'd started to read, he'd turned his chair around at ninety degrees and would not stop gazing.

But you didn't speak. It was a week later that he asked you to come out to his share house in Belmore. You never drove in Manhattan. From the start, you'd sworn you wouldn't; you liked treading the blocks, being part of the sidewalk throng, wearing trainers with your tailoring. So after work on Thursday you took the train from Grand Central, and when you emerged at Belmore there he was, waiting, wearing an old green duffle and leaning against a light post.

Seeing Fergal outside the safe enclosure of *Actors' Warehouse* brought with it certain awkwardness. You'd walked along the sidewalk quite a way before he pointed to a bulky building, large and shabby, more or less what you'd expected of a house where artists and students roomed. Inside it was full of awkward corners, heavy stair rails, pokey halls, unlikely vestibules and cupboard-like rooms.

The sight of Fergal's even younger housemates made you feel like an intruder. His room was in the basement, opposite the kitchen: there was a day-bed stretched along one wall and, on the floor, a double mattress

covered with a cotton blanket. Whether this had been installed especially or whether it was a fixture, you never got to ask. You barely got to place the bottle of Australian wine you'd brought on the nearby table.

You loved the idea of being with an actor. Those you most admired were actors, writers, artists, musicians and circus performers, people who, unlike yourself, had the courage to follow their dreams. Fergal Foley seemed to offer something exciting, different from the lawyer, banker, dentist, you'd seen before. You dreamt he'd find success – and soon – then any inequalities between you would dissolve.

He took you to the Bronx Zoo. You forget now what it was he so desperately wanted you to see, the hammer-headed python or the black orangutan. What you do remember is moving from cage to cage, close behind him, gazing at the back of his curly copper head in a state of mind that you had heard of, seen, and read about, but never thought could apply to you. You might have wondered at yourself if you hadn't been entirely consumed, utterly preoccupied, with one thought. That night he shared your SoHo bed. By the weekend Fergal had moved in.

The eleventh day of September dawned clear and beautiful. It was the kind of clean bright blue morning you dream of, through times of snow and smog and rain clouds. A day when it would have been a joy to walk out of the office at lunchtime, stroll down the avenue and lie for a while on the grass in the Park. You'd got up early, as usual, and gone for your walk; as you crossed at the corner of Harrison and Hudson you'd caught the sight of the two silver towers soaring into the spotless sky.

At 8.45 you were taking a shower. You didn't hear the crack of what Fergal told you later had sounded, over that part of the city, like a giant supersonic boom. He suddenly burst in, trying to say something over the fast-running water. But before you could grasp what it was, he'd rushed downstairs again. When you emerged with still-wet hair the TV was on and Fergal glued to it. Only then did the first shocking sense of the enormity, so close by, begin to hit. You and Ferg held each other tight, transfixed and gasping, as the second explosion came.

Friends from *Actor's Warehouse* began to call, the phone did not stop. Mostly it was someone looking for someone, looking for someone else. Before mid-morning you heard that Sam, the friend who'd shared with Ferg at Belmore, was thought to be among thousands who were missing. Acutely struck, you and he decided you couldn't stay inside doing nothing. You had to go and look for him. As you paced the blocks to get downtown every bit of masonry seemed covered in a pulverized, unthinkable grit; it made you shudder. Was the end of Pompeii like this? Would the world finish nothing but a spew of sickening grey-white stuff, a tickertape of ATM receipts? You turned into Broadway and, at the corner of Liberty Street, got the real impact of the murk that was burning your nostrils.

All the way from SoHo there were clusters of wondering people, briefly exchanging news about the damage to the Pentagon and further air strikes. Or uncertainties about what, exactly, were those aircraft droning overhead. But at the site there was only an occasional fireman clad in orange, looking like a great slow moving mantis on the rim of chaos. Or a lonely figure in a surgical mask. When they moved, clouds of ash rose up around them.

The rest of that day was spent running from emergency ward to emergency ward, hospital to hospital, every kind of makeshift site. You mingled with the crowds, covered in sticky ash; wherever you went you could taste that stuff, its particles seemed to want to get right inside. You began to smell your hair; it had bits of grey-white matted all through. You went from place to place, frantically asking anyone and everyone whether they'd seen Sam. It wasn't until later that you heard that Sam had not been downtown at all; he was safe in Massachusetts, visiting his brother.

In the evening you and Fergal returned to the loft, to eat and catch the latest. But before long you found yourselves needing to go out again. The city seemed to feel the same way; stunned twos, threes, or singles lingered in the park, wandered down the streets, sat on fire escapes, or trod the sidewalk.

Late at night, on the way back to the loft, you caught sight of The Chelsea Hotel's vintage sign, covered with the weird white stuff. A layer

of it was sitting on the neon like dirty snow. The fact that the Chelsea was still there, for a start, made your soul feel better. Once inside the lobby, drinking in the musty Gothic atmosphere, you and Ferg allowed yourselves to fall in a heap on the sofa. You stayed a couple of hours, sharing your horror and your shock with some of those who came and went.

Afterwards you went back there every Sunday. Perhaps you needed to reconnect with something still too raw – to touch the wound, see if it was starting to heal. The Chelsea reminded you of the old New York, the one before that day, and you found this comforting. It was a relief to greet again those so-high ceilings and funny fans, the marble staircase, the now-familiar patterns of the lead-lights; to breathe again that air, lofty to the dome with seediness. Besides, you loved to imagine you might see the eccentric ghost of Quentin Crisp, a spun-out Patti Smith. You came to adore every last one of the old photographs; Tennessee, Edith, Henry, Janis, Jimmy, Dylan, Jack and Gore began to seem like family. Arthur Miller said, once, the Chelsea wasn't part of America, it was too surreal. But after the world as you'd known it fell apart, the place seemed to you almost homely.

By the end of that year Fergal was bound to return to Ireland, you to Sydney. You flew to Dublin with him, and one night when you were visiting a quaint pub near the old Foley home he announced he was coming to Sydney. The next day his mother made a point of taking you aside and telling you something you thought at the time to be odd: whoever loved Fergal, she'd said, wonderful though her youngest son was, would always have to be the breadwinner. You were shocked and indignant, uncomprehending. It almost seemed as if Mrs. Foley was laying a curse. You pleaded with her, telling her how much you believed in her son. How you were sure he'd find his way.

She looked at you sadly but said nothing more.

Early on Saturday morning Helena went to the fish markets and some of the gourmet shops on Harris Street. When she arrived at Jackson's Landing she presented you with a ravishing basket of fresh swordfish, olive bread, soft cheeses, Modena vinegar, extra-virgin olive oil, a leafy bunch of tarragon and a kilo of ink-squid linguine. On top lay long stalks of red grevillea and greenish kangaroo-paw, tied with two colours of raffia.

Now aiming north, you feel a surge of love for Bette Blue; she gleams with schmick dark pride along the road.

'How's work?' says Lena, lifting her sunglasses.

You grimace.

'That bad?'

'Not yet. But it's coming.'

After the RoB news had broken The Agency went *ape*. Forrest Shore himself rang down to congratulate you. Then Al began piling on the pressure.

'Listen Linda honey, let's get down to work. What d'y say, huh? When can we start on this great new project? Now?'

'Al, it's great that we won RoB. But ...'

'Big feather in your cap honey.'

Al, a middle-aged ad-man from Dallas, Texas, has modeled himself on old Jack Lemmon movies. His trade mark is an endless supply of neat bow ties, perky button-down collars and coloured striped shirts. You leaned towards him, tweaking his tie of pale yellow silk.

'Feather? In my cap? Al, that is the quaintest thing! But you do know, already. I won't be back in The Agency until Wednesday.'

'Yeah honey, I know I know. You got the Szu-Szu shoot. OK honey, let's do a deal. I'll take somethin' off your hands if you agree to come in, Tuesday.'

'When? At midnight? Al! Anyway, what could you possibly take off my hands? Not the shoot, not the editing.'

He was pacing by the window. 'I'd like to be able to take the other thing, the rag-trade pitch. Get someone else to do it. But, you know

that young guy Jock? The one I brought over from Knudsen's? Now there's a sharp young cookie. Jock met our prospective rag-trade client at a dinner the other night, and what d'you think? That guy told him he's looking for only one thing: "a Linda Hille to do a Szu Szu".'

You groaned. At the same time you were agog.

'Jock told him straight. That boy's so proud of you! Linda Hille's our GCD.'

'And ... ?'

He shuffled in nervous silence.

'Al! What's up?'

'The guy said it's impossible. Linda Hille is dead.'

You could hardly wait for Al to leave your office before you started to explode. As you got up from your desk and moved towards the windows, you thrust your chair back, catching your ankle in the process and tearing a hole in a brand new pair of Christian Dior tights. The words on the mirror were bad enough, but you'd been telling yourself it was a one-off – a cruel joke played by someone who must have been drunk or drugged at the time. You stared blindly at the city spread below: its watery tentacles stretched in all directions, threatening to wrap themselves into a tiny ball inside your head.

Bette Blue follows the shape of Narrabeen lakes, beneath the high-rise of the plateau. Most times, when you drive past, the forest wears the faded green of a khaki shirt. But now there is more yellow in the air. Against the canvas of a windless sky, spirals of bush-smoke wind slowly upwards. A stand of old angophoras, beginning to flower again, blends into the spectral mix.

'Yesterday we heard about this humungous project,' you tell Helena as you turn onto Barrenjoey Road. 'The big one.'

'I thought Szu Szu was the big one.'

'Na, Szu Szu's a baby. This one's huge!' You wrinkle your nose. 'But with much less room for style.'

She peers at you blankly.

‘Style, Lena, style. As in Szu Szu style? Brand personality. The He Guys?’

‘Oh.’ She looks vague. ‘So you’re going to be busy.’

‘Busier. With Szu Szu, and my global soap account, and all the rest. Like, you know – the Creative Department. Luke, Piers, Caro. And I have to keep pitching new business; hiring and firing. Hiring means using every wit I possess in the pursuit of parking spots. Parking spots! For people I desperately need who will not budge from any another Agency, even for bucks, unless they have a guaranteed car-space: under, beside, next to, or, at the most, within one block of The Agency.’

‘And then there's Kara,’ says Helena.

Dee Why, Mona Vale. These first bright glimpse of Pittwater always give you a thrill. Once past Avalon, you feel you've made it across the great divide. Your house is the last along this shore, not the sea but the bay. Your clever architect kept the feel of the old cottage, leaving most of the façade intact. But she extended it, adding ensuite bathrooms and a state of the art stainless-steel kitchen. She put a vast entertaining deck on the bay side, inset with a pale aqua-green pool, an outsize pizza oven and a huge gas-barbecue, all down the side of a series of sleep-out cabanas. Both the side fences were already lined with poplars, and a craggy Kentia palm, planted long ago, stayed at the centre of the buffalo lawn.

As you approach Palm Beach you start to feel quite nervous. You quickly pull yourself back into line, flattening your stomach muscles to hold in any feelings that may be starting to well up. Kara used to pretend she wasn't jealous of Helena, but her dislike of your school friend was obvious; she'd often accused you two of being thick as thieves. She had the same attitude to all the Raltrick mob. Granted, those girls could be cruel, laughing behind their hands, letting out rude taunts and using encoded language – you knew that all too well yourself. And whenever your peculiar little sister happened to appear, telling her crazy ‘Mum’ stories and wearing shapeless, too-big clothes, she was an easy target. For Kara couldn't help standing out, no matter where she went. She was

stark and defensive as a lizard on a rock. Your Raltrick schoolmates used to make a game of hunting the weakest and letting them have it; they'd stand around and laugh. You were as much to blame as anyone, you felt helpless to do anything but go along with it. You were perfectly useless. You didn't even have the guts to stand up for your little sister, although if you really admit it you were the only one who could have tried to understand.

Kara had once told you, 'It's them against me, Linda – and you belong to them.'

Now you spy her on the porch, watching out for you.

'Kara, remember Helena?'

She nods, barely.

'Kara!' Helena jumps from Bette Blue, her arms spread wide. 'Great to see you.'

'Is it?' says your sister coolly.

'Yes, of course,' says Lena, acting unfazed, reaching for the basket. 'See what I brought ...?'

Kara shrugs, pursing her lips, but the ice is broken.

A short while later you hear her in the kitchen saying, '*Nero di Seppia*. How nice!' She's found the linguine. Then she tells you, 'Oh Linda; Kikki Frankfurt rang; someone stole her palm with your mobile number. Is that the quite mad Kikki from *The Cooking Show*?'

'Uh-huh.' As you find a vase for Lena's flowers, you laugh at Kara's describing Kikki as 'quite mad', although of course, when you come to think of it, that is how Kikki comes across. A bit too much Bolivian marching powder over the years perhaps, it's been her weekend chill since the eighties. 'I met Kikki when Crane's was my client, remember Crane's soups? No, I don't think you had them in England.' You place the floral arrangement in the centre of the kitchen table, a frank attempt to re-instate your place. After all, this is your house, or was; sometimes these days you wonder. 'Anyway, Kikki was a humble stylist before she was discovered.'

'Does the gweat Kikki Frankfurt cook? Or did she just get lucky?'

'Mike Neal's the cook. *The Cooking Show* was his idea. But he needs someone to spark him.'

'Which Kikki does?'

'Which Kikki does perfectly. I have to hand it to Mike. There was a ridiculous number of cooking shows, DVDs, books – getting sillier each week. Mike decided it was time to tell the big wide world which were the good ones and which were the duds, and to everyone's surprise the show took off. Now it's a rolling juggernaut! As their marketing people say, "everyone has to eat, so everyone's fair game". They defined their audience as "anyone with a mouth". Kikki spends her time visiting the classy restaurants, mansions on the harbour, fabulous properties in the country; she interviews niche cheese-makers, vigneron, great chef legends. She doesn't write or research anything, herself, mind you; they feed it to her. All she has to do is front.'

As Kikki finally answers, you say, 'Oh, hi ...'

'Darling! How *are* you? Listen, I'm having a little thing tonight; sorry about the so-short notice.' You stifle a laugh; you'd forgotten that Kikki's a walking, talking cliché. 'Would you like to bring your English sister, the one who married an Earl?'

'Ah, Kikki, remind me to explain that sometime. I've got a feeling Kara ...'

'Well, as long as you can come. Krug, darling – and lots of Nambucca oysters, flown down this morning. Tasmanian gravalax, wait 'til you taste it. And more of my latest discoveries: Swedish Dill Sauce and King Island Triple Crème Fraiche, the kind you won't find in the shops; giant kosher caperberries, you'll eat them like grapes! You dip them in ...'

'Uh, Kikki. I've got Helena Vergil up here this weekend.'

'Helena de Vergil. The Helena de Vergil? Potter and sculptor? Is she back? Last I heard she was in Tokyo or somewhere. Good heavens darling, do bring her, and don't forget to say I'm an *owner*. That beautiful thing, you know, the most wonderful pot, the best she's ever done. The huge centrepiece from her *Senses of Kyoto* exhibition, last year at *Object* ...'

'Yes, look, she'll like that. Um, can I ring you back?'

Helena's out on the deck, leaning on the railing, watching the small yachts race.

'Kikki Frankfurt wants us over at Whale Beach tonight.'

'Really, does she? I met her once, at an exhibition. You might think I'm crazy, Lin, but I really missed *The Cooking Show* while I was away. Kikki is so hilarious! She makes me laugh. The overload of bling – that frantic hair. And a touch of Barbara Cartland these days. Too much makeup.'

'They use a medium-shot. She doesn't do close-ups any more.'

'Well I don't want to go.' Kara's come outside to tidy things.

'You're the one who should be going, our real-life cook! You know, if you were very nice to Kikki, she might possibly ...'

Now you've hurt her. Again you are guiltily reminded of your Raltrick days, your allegiance to others instead of your sister. Your upper body flushes with shame, you're afraid that everyone will see the redness spreading at your throat like a rash. You strive to make amends.

'Just kidding, sis,' you tell her hastily. 'Of course you'd prefer to stay.'

You've been at the party half an hour when you catch sight of Fergal. The impact of having him materialise in front of you is felt from head to toe. For weeks you've been dreading bumping into him, this was the last place you expected it to happen. You've caught the merest glimpse, but you never could mistake the carriage of those shoulders, the not-cut of the hair. He's out with others on the balcony, passing around a joint, communing with empty air and the crashing sound of waves. As you watch, a man wearing a suit coat, shirt and tie with knees-out old blue jeans sidles up to him. You move within earshot.

'Dragon lady? You mean Linda?'

'Yeah, Linda Hille.'

'We split.'

The speaker continues to mumble as Fergal turns away. That's when he sees you.

You step closer. 'Hi,' then turn to face the other. 'I'm the dragon lady.'

He splutters in his drink. 'Uh, Jason Nile.'

You blank him, inclining your shoulder towards Fergal.

'How come you're here?' You ask in a low voice.

'With Rosa Payne.'

Another shock. Your knees start to tremble, suddenly your skirt feels too short, uncomfortable, barely covering. 'Rosa? From The Agency?'

He nods. 'She's Kikki's god-daughter.'

'Oh, nepotic city! Everyone who's anyone is related, has been related, or is about to be related – if not in one way, then another. They live next door, they play tennis together, their children go to the same school. And ...?'

'And, what?'

'Are you seeing her?'

As he shrugs, your cheeks feel hotter than hot coals. 'What happened to the step-cousin?'

'Well she's not about to leave Paris, is she? And I...'

He shrugs. 'You with anyone?'

'Lena.'

'She's back! Well that'll keep you happy, you can talk all day and night.'

'Don't have time right now.'

He gives you a damp half-grin, 'So what's new?'

Rosa appears, sliding an arm through his.

'Hi.' You force a smile, but there's that pang again, down somewhere deep that you don't want to know about, don't want to think about. You have to get away. 'Excuse me. See you later.'

You turn and walk anywhere, blindly marching in the other direction. Until you bump – bang! – into the offender.

'Huh, Jason Nile!' You stifle an embarrassed giggle. 'Why did you call me the dragon lady? You'd never met me.'

'I'd heard about you.'

'Oh?'

'You're a diva. You always have to have it your own way.'

You think, quick and hard. 'According to Sumi Jo, there are no divas any more. Just hard-working, talented professionals.'

'Who's Sumi Jo?'

You give him a withering look. 'Someone who *is* a diva! But yes, I do have it my own way; they pay me an awful lot of money to make sure I do. Otherwise my ideas would become something else. And when the job is over, when we've made it, everyone is happy. Musos, directors, editors, stylists, camera-guys, couriers. Even clients.'

'Well, Ms. Hille.' He leans toward you, one arm extended, hand spread flat against the nearby wall. 'Schottes was voted the top new production company last year. Did you know that? And I'm the one who runs it. But you've never deigned to work with Schottes, have you? Schottes doesn't even get to quote!' He uncurls a sneer. 'You have your favourites.'

'Heavens Jason, doesn't everybody? But I pick the team for the job.'

'Yeah? What about brown-paper packets?'

'No packets.' You shake your head and raise both palms to show they are empty. 'No boys. Girls. Children. Drugs. Deals. Gifts of antique furniture. Property down-payments. Bottles of Grange.' You shrug. 'I don't own a carpet-bag.'

'Ah! The great Linda Hille is incorruptible.'

'Everyone's corruptible, Jason; we are all flesh and blood. I stay out of trouble.'

He waves his card in the air. 'Ms. Hille, you could have the lot! Let Schottes show you how.' He wears a transparent grin. 'We know how to treat a lady.'

'A dragon-lady?' You grin. 'I like your chutzpah, Jason.'

Helena is surrounded by admirers, chattering animatedly. The emerald-green of her kimono sings out against the beige sandstone wall.

Downstairs there are groups of people in darkened corners, sniffing, swallowing, snorting; as you walk by you see, out of the corner of your eye, piles of white powdery stuff, small pale tablets, lumps of *ice*. Something you'll always thank Kara for is that you've never tried hard drugs. Once, when you were home on holiday from Raltrick, she cornered you and said she'd read that drugs had been found in a boarding school. She asked you straight whether Raltrick girls were into them. She told you how she'd experienced the effects of morphine before her operation, when she was so ill that she'd almost died; for Kara, drugs

like that were a part of dire emergency or death. She could never forget, she said, the nights and days when she'd been suspended in a black abyss, between the pain of gangrene and the miraculous relief that came from the needle. For her it was ludicrous to think anyone could inject themselves with this *something* that was so powerful it could obliterate everything, even life. If a person took drugs like that for fun, said Kara, where might it possibly lead? To a mind-space from which there was no return. She was convincing, as Kara always is, so much so she made you swear, there and then, you would never touch such things.

By the time you reach the far side of the games room, you're glad to be outside. With your cream-and-magenta-stripe faux-antelope Choo stilettos in one hand, a glass of champagne in the other, you exit the double-doors and, picking your way through the rock-garden, take the stony path down to the beach. Cool damp sand oozes wetly between your toes.

Sitting on a suitable rock, you rest your chin in your hands. You can't help thinking about that other enraging thing you've been pushing to the back of your mind, the unthinkable LINDA HILLE IS DEAD. You contemplate the black ocean, telling yourself you're just having a bad run – especially tonight.

You stare at the mighty Pacific, its waves close and dark, their white tips powering towards you through the night. The rip-tide sucks back all that's left, then builds it up again to crash and thunder.

'Linda? I thought it was you.' In the half-light you can see that Helena has a man with her.

'Ted! Who isn't here tonight? Did you see Ferg?'

He nods. 'We did exchange a couple words. Who's that girl? He didn't waste much time.'

You *grrrr* and shake your head. 'And she works at The Agency.'

'I'll get you another drink.'

Helena sits on the rock beside you as Ted, ever the gentleman, starts the steep climb back to Kikki's house.

'Bring the bottle,' you call after him.

'Since when has that been on?' Helena asks vigorously. 'I thought Ferg was supposed to be in love with ...'

'... his step-cousin?' You shrug. 'Seems he can't afford her.'

'Can this Rosa afford him?' She drops her tone. 'Is that why you came down here?'

You stare at bluish cavities in the sand.

'There was a lot going on.'

Together you sit, listening to the din of the midnight beach.

'Have you settled things with Fergal, Lin? Has he gone?'

'Yes, he's gone. He's gone. He didn't want much, just the bush block.'

'The bush block! I thought it meant a lot.'

You shrug. 'Meant, Lena, meant. Oh, I suppose I might still have fantasies about living in the country, in a beautiful place like that, some fine day. But this is the least-messy solution.'

She shakes her head. 'You're being far too sentimental, too generous. You should reconsider.'

'Oh darling Lena, I'll think about it,' you hug yourself across the chest, reaching around to your back, holding yourself for comfort as you shiver. You're starting to feel cold, but brighten as you see Ted coming back with more champagne.

'Here you are, Linda, only the best. The last bottle! I had to search for it, mind,' he laughs good humouredly, 'but I always know where to look. I sniff it out. I used to order this basic Loire stuff by the crate, you know, from Market Street; DJ's imported it for their own label. Best value anywhere! And when people saw it was from David Jones they assumed it was even better than it was.' He chuckled. 'Always serve the good stuff first, the way Kikki did with the Krug earlier. Then you can get away with anything.'

When the three of you arrive back at The Beach the curtains are drawn and the shutters fastened. The French doors to the living-room are locked, and through a fuzzy champagne mist you realise Kara's done her

nightly lock-up. You search frantically in your bag, only to find useless old house keys.

You sigh, stumbling to reach your mobile.

'For Gossake, Kara, less in!' Your voice is hardly recognisable. 'We can't get past the kidjen.'

Flopping face down, you lie on the outdoor table like a spent rag-doll.

'Does she often do this?' whispers Lena.

'Yes.' Then you shake your head. 'No! She duzend. Nod when I'm here. She musdave forgodden.'

After some minutes your sister emerges from the darkness like an ethereal mimi-spirit, draped in your Spanish white-on-cream sarong.

'Sowwy, sowwy! I did what I always do ...'. She stops and stares at Ted.

Stumbling towards your sister, you tap her on the chest. 'Kara, you musd know Ded. Evrawon knows Ded.'

'Never saw him before in my life,' says Kara.

'Ded? Ded's Heln's uncle, sordof.'

'Uncle!'

Helena steadies you and smiles at Kara. 'Not really,' she says quickly.

'And I'm not her lover, either ...', says Ted, giving your sister a toothy smile. 'Just an old family friend begging a bed for the night.'

'Ded! For Gossake,' you tell him earnestly. 'Dake de cabana nexdo Lna.'

'Keys,' says Kara, handing them to Ted. Drawing the sarong closer about her, she eyes him curiously, then dissolves into the dark.

The next morning you wake late with more than one pain in the head. You turn over slowly, so slowly, to face the pillow. This habit of seeking solace in champagne has got to stop; it may not be so bad this weekend, but with Project RoB looming you had better soon quit.

You stare fixedly, for some time, at an undistinguished place on the ceiling. Thoughts of last night's party flit in and out. Kikki knew Rosa was bringing Fergal, of course she did. That's why she wanted you there at such short notice. Kikki loves to meddle in other people's affairs, it gives her a vicarious sense of satisfaction. Right at this moment she is probably

ringing someone who's texting someone who's telling someone else you sat on a rock at the beach by yourself while Ferg and Rosa played on.

The second pillow looks like you've made love to it. You probably have. The top sheet is twisted around you. You sigh as you put a tentative foot out of bed, accidentally stepping through the fine Belgian lace of your D&G polka-dot net skirt. Usually you're so, so careful with such things, but this morning your bedroom floor testifies to the state you were in when you crashed last night. One of your best Jimmy Choos is nowhere to be found, the other has a piece of precious leather gouged down the back of the heel. Damn! You must have scraped it on the steps at Kikki's house. Slowly you pull apart the curtains Kara closed before you came in last night; the harsh mid-morning sunlight sends you staggering, reaching for your fluffy white cotton gown.

'Where's your lovely sister?' says Ted, rising to greet you.

'Kara?' Your hair's a mess, and under both your eyes are smudges of green mascara. You could only ever appear like this in front of your closest friends. 'About now, Kara swims. In the sea.' You yawn. 'Is that coffee?'

'Why didn't you tell me you had a sister like that?'

'Ted, please.' You regard him wearily. 'Not Kara.'

'Ted has a weakness for slim women,' says Lena mischievously.

You wince. 'Thin women, you mean. Very thin women.'

'I was only admiring her.' He looks around, feigning innocence: boy star in a silent movie. 'What's wrong with that?'

Keeping a straight face, Lena changes the subject. 'We were just talking about Inverbrook,' she says. 'Ted was up that way last week.'

'Mmpp. Gunnedah.' He gulps down the last of his coffee. 'I flew back via Mountbrae to look at a bull I was thinking of buying. In the end all I got was his semen.' He chuckles. 'But the old Hille place, you know, Inverbrook, is looking good, you'll be pleased to hear. They've had some nice rain.'

'Why don't we go there for your fortieth, Lin? You could fly us up, couldn't you, Ted?'

You say nothing. You know this could be your last day of freedom, so it's no time to start planning. As you blink yourself further into consciousness, you decide to take a swim in your hard-won, expensively maintained pool before the weather changes. Scraps of grey are flecking their way along the horizon, clouds of the most untrustworthy kind. Clouds like that can blow up and cover the sky, then east coast drizzle sets in.

You grope in the gloom of the one cabana you keep for yourself, locating a brief bikini-bottom amongst the tangle of everything, including a pair of green shantung Geiger courts you thought you'd lost.

'Carpe diem!' You cry as you take the plunge.

Settling on dead man's float, you lie face down in water that is warmer than the sea. As it wraps itself around you, you imagine on your interior screen that you are an elongated figure floating in a sunken bath, the fluorescence rippling between striated shafts of pearl and peppermint. You, suspended, untouched by ... splat!

Ted's jumped in like a schoolboy.

Kara graces the kitchen in your Rothbury Estate apron, a baggy cotton tee, a pair of old capris, and the quaint Seven Dwarfs gold bracelet she never takes off. In front of the cabanas, you and Lena lounge in banana-chairs, pretending to read the colour magazines and the *Atlantic Monthly*. Ted's stretched out by the pool on the long Jarrah bench, snoozing under the *Review* from the weekend paper.

Lunch is set on the long pine table, under the big black market umbrella. Kara's found your coral linen cloth and plucked three cerise hibiscus from one of the bushes that survived the renovations; they float serenely at the centre of your ancient pink-and-cream Spode dish. This is the first time since her return she's been so inspired. Your sister's one of those rare birds who can produce a perfect mayonnaise from nowhere, then add a little something that transcends the delicious. Today it's a squeeze of fresh lime juice and a handful of Thai basil, pounded in her mortar with a couple of Fremantle anchovies. It seems, however, that she is not enjoying her own repast, she's pushing bits about her plate. Only

the black food interests her: the *neppia linguine* with a handful of steamed mussels, a swish of Modena balsamic, a scattering of shiny Beluga.

Afternoon sunshine flattens the further dimensions; Monet himself might be responsible for the swirls of Prussian blue embellished with violet shadows, warm wet greys and thick rich whites. And the single stroke of carmine that's a sail. For a while the clouds stay bright; sometimes they hold like this all day, while layers of mauve eucalypts guard bayside shores and Scotland Island lies outlined in thin alizarin. But now its shape is starting to fade, blurred to haze in drifts of coastal smog.

As Ted and Lena rise, you grab the opportunity. You've been waiting to ask Kara, biding your time; it's the reason you wanted to come up here this weekend. You felt you couldn't broach the question on the phone.

'Um, how's the analyst?' You ask, trying to sound casual.

She pushes her plate away like a recalcitrant child. 'Mezzner? Fine.'

You silently count to three. 'That all?'

'HM never says much,' replies Kara, turning her head to the right, pretending to study something or nothing in the dim northern distance, way past Lion Island. 'So it's hard to tell.'

Chapter 3

Ted drove Lena back to town, leaving you with Kara. You'd have killed to stay another night but you are due down south on a film call way before dawn. You keep a small collection of clothes here at The Beach, but nothing much: assorted tees and Calvins in various degrees of wear, a Sass and Bide, a D & G – the now-wrecked skirt you wore to Kikki's party. But you can't appear in just anything at a shoot, not in the company of those who have made it in Hollywood. You must mix nonchalantly with the crew, as though you dwell at the heart of the film business. It's cool to look the part, if only to impress Mr. Szu Szu when he drops by to see how his money's being spent. You must get home and sort your wardrobe.

'Something, before you go?'

Kara's question prompts you to be getting back. You shake your head. 'Things to do. Like weather-check.'

But she gives you a rare glimpse of her charming side. 'Not one of my cwoute omelettes? I could pick some nice fwesh salad.'

'Mm. O.K. I'll finish my room ...'

'Why bother? Close the door.'

You wrinkle your nose. 'I hate coming back to stale mess.'

She cracks some big brown eggs into a bowl and, on neat squares of kitchen paper, drains little piles of crisp brown croutons that she's made with day-old rustica. You can't resist your sister's omelettes, you never could. She does them French style, with not more than a trace of water to fluff the eggs – using a fork, never a whisk – and her light touch. It's the deftness of her wrist that's intriguing: she carries out the most ordinary kitchen tasks with aplomb, in ways that can't be faked, even by adepts on *The Cooking Show*. Kara's right hand moves the pan across the flame with enviable skill, her left gently forks up the edges of the eggs. Then she lifts the pan to let what remains of the liquid flow into the small vacant spaces below. When the base is set but the top still runny, she sprinkles in the croutons and, after waiting to let them warm through, lifts the pan with a flourish.

The delectable light-brown object she puts before you is set in curving furrows. Gazing at it now takes you back to the time when you and Ferg drove through the Loire Valley. Stopping at Routiers along the way, you were surprised to find that French truck drivers demand, and get, such elegant food as a matter of course.

You mumble, mouth half-full, 'I don't know why Mert ever let you go, Kara. He must regret it every mealtime.'

But oops, she's hurt again. And she's indignant. 'No-one but me will ever know him, Linda, that's the truth. Merton, and his anosmia ...'

'Lack of taste, d'you mean?'

The acidity of your comment bites hard. 'All right, if you must, put it that way. But no-one will ever understand him, or love him, the way I do ...' The look she gives reminds you that, with your sister, the motto must be as it's always been, *assume nothing*. 'And don't call him Mert!'

'Come on, Kara. You're not wasting sympathy on that man, are you?'

'I've told you before. It wasn't his fault, it was mine. I was ashamed at letting him down, having one of my episodes.' She looks at you in desperation. 'I'd thought, when I left Sydney,' she gives a sardonic little laugh, 'that my twoubles were all over. I imagined I'd outgrown them, left them behind. But one day I woke up thinking there was a wazor-blade stuck in my throat. I was afraid to move. I thought if I did, I'd be fatally cut. I lay on the bed, paralysed with fear, for hours, before I could try to get up.'

You're trapped, there's nothing to do but listen. You realize that Kara is telling you something she's probably never told anyone, except perhaps Dr. Mezzner.

'I couldn't walk down the stairs. Wemember how that house had four floors, four levels, and an intercom? A wide staircase? In the end I couldn't face it,' she lowers her eyes, 'I went down backwawds.'

You feel again that potent sibling-guilt, shaking and stirring. And, bubbling on top, the froth of anger. You're angry, so angry, with that cad. He got away scot-free, leaving you lumbered.

'Why didn't he help you, Kara? He was supposed to be your husband.' You get up and start to pace. 'And he pulled that dirty trick with the

divorce judge. Didn't you say they wore the same club tie? Your Honour Mr. Justice, who-was-it? I can just see him, entering the courtroom ...' You feel like an actress as you stride about, gesturing, 'I could hardly believe your description. The judge looked over at Merton and said, "Lovely day for squash". How crass is that?'

'But Linda, you have to understand. In England, sports Blues often wear their club ties.'

'Sports Blues? Don't you mean sports men? Strangely enough, Kara, I do understand. The tie can still be a powerful boy-sign. I know from our research. On the He Guys.'

She glares. 'If you think Merton wigged what went on, Linda, I must have given the wong impwession. He would never do that.' With both elbows on the table, her chin rests in her clenched hands. 'I'm the one who knows him, the one who understands; that's why I'll always love him.'

'O Kara, Kara! Merton didn't love you.'

'Why do you say that? How do you know?'

'Because I asked him. After you'd told me about walking the tightrope. I was concerned.' She frowns, but stays silent. 'Merton told me straight.' But you're careful not to mention that after he had said, 'No, I don't love her', he'd added, 'because of something physical'. As it is, your sister's sensitive enough about her 'sea of scars'. Instead, you grab your plate and thrust it loudly into the sink. It makes a crashing sound, then settles with a discontented roll. 'C'mon sis, if Merton loved you, he'd have found a way.'

Suddenly you're aware of Kara's pale fragility, the whiteness of her skin, the wanness of her look. The gold Seven Dwarfs bracelet, something she'd begged Merton to buy her – from an ad in the *New Yorker*, of all places – glints on her tiny wrist. She looks like a waif. Fearing you were too harsh, you stop behind her chair and touch her shoulders lightly with the tips of your fingers.

'Um,' you say tentatively. 'You're not getting too thin, are you?'

'I've been thinner,' she snaps, wriggling away. 'And don't mother me, Linda! Uh. You know I hate mothers.'

‘Very well, if you really want to know, I feel more like a father, giving you a home and paying for your therapy.’ You pout. ‘Especially when you won’t tell me anything.’

She looks through you, unseeing. ‘You’ll get it all back one day, Linda.’ She nods her head. ‘You’ll see.’

But you stay looking hurt, the way she often does.

She forms her next words with some effort. ‘Oh Lin, I do want to explain. When I’m with Dr. Mezzner, something happens. I call it being Mezznerised. It isn’t hypnotism, more like a twance. I’m swept away to somewhere else, the past, the future, the dreams I can’t have.’

At length you raise your eyes.

‘And Mum?’

‘Yes, Mum. Mum, Mum, Mum! It always comes back to the same old thing. Stella and Mrs. Whitegloves.’

You sigh. ‘So you still think Stella disappeared?’

Kara looks defiant. ‘I don’t think, I know. I was there.’ Unusually, her voice becomes stentorian. ‘Mrs. Whitegloves appeared from nowhere: she took over my life. I never saw Mum again.’ She quietens, mumbling. ‘I must have told you that a million times.’

You shrug helplessly. Then in frustration at the eternally stuck state of your sister’s vision, you blurt loudly, ‘Kara, please! Stella is Mum, and Mum is Stella. Mum just happens to wear white gloves. There’s no Mrs. Whitegloves.’

‘Good,’ says Kara, getting up and moving away. ‘If you think that, fine, but never ask me to visit.’

‘Don’t you care about Dad?’

She’s in tears. ‘If I could visit Dad and only Dad, I’d be happy. But Mrs. Whitegloves never let Dad out of her sight. Uh. And I don’t expect she’s changed.’

As you open your front door at Jackson’s Landing, all is quiet. Usually Tank, who always knows when you’re approaching, sits in the hallway waiting. But not tonight.

‘Tank,’ you call. Then, louder, ‘Tank!’

Not one whisker-squeak. You dump your bag in the bedroom. You know he's not in here, he can't get under the bed because it's a low Italian one with solid ends and sides.

Eventually you find him behind the legs of your lately-acquired Mies van der Rohe buffet. Oh, how you used to worship the Seagram's Building, cutting over there from Madison in your lunch-hour to perch awhile by the pool, near the playing fountain, gazing at the bronze façade and the matching walls of curtained windows wrapped around it. This buffet is the only thing you'll ever own by the great man; you bought it as a tribute and it gives you satisfaction to see it, an original, in your living room. Right now Tank's eyes are the same colour as your favourite skyscraper. They reflect out of the darkness, speckled and bright.

'Tank. Oo, what's up?'

Still no answer. When Tank acts like this, he is getting his own back. Four times out of five you can go to The Beach and he'll simply treat you with disdain for ten minutes when you return; the fifth time he carries on like this.

'Tank,' you say warily. 'Have you been camping in my Eames chair?' You glance to see the careful layers of covering have been disturbed.

'Tank! You wouldn't dare to start thinking about that if I'd been here. Eames chairs are not for cats, even one as God-like as yourself. Come on, you can't stay there. Do I have to crawl in and get you?'

This cat has known from the time he was an adorable, irresistible kitten that the seat and arms of that particular piece of furniture are *verboden*, yet he persists. Although you've never been quick enough to catch him stretching his fine sharp claws across its precious leather, you have seen the evidence.

Ah, here he comes. Slowly, hesitantly; he is not rushing into your arms. He sniffs the air as he reaches the front leg of the buffet and twists his body nonchalantly, not quite sure what reception he will get when he emerges.

You laugh and shake your head. You love the sharp white blaze across his nose, paws and chest, the distinguished symmetry of those

long sensitive whiskers projecting from his cheeks, the black gloss of the rest of him.

Grabbing him gently, you start to stroke his satiny fur. He doesn't resist for long, but moves his butt in accordance with your hand, making the most of your sensuous strokes.

'Tank, oh Tank. You did miss me!' You study his whiskery face. 'I love the way you keep yourself so handsome. My little Victorian gentleman. Yes, I know it's tough. You only tolerate this air-conditioned life. Poor Tank, you spend the whole time sitting alone in that bay window, don't you, gazing towards The Point. Or asleep on your front paws. Do you know what I think?' Now he's starting to purr. 'I think you regret your destiny as a twenty-first century apartment-cat. You dream of being a Pymont mog. You'd have liked that, wouldn't you? When this place offered the danger and excitement of dockland, alleyway and wasteland.' You tickle him under the chin and he tilts his face invitingly, expecting more. 'But Tank, you don't know how hard a cat's life was, back then.'

Eleanor Finch, a lady who has lived long on The Point, gave you Tank as a kitten. She once described this headland as 'a wilderness of cats', telling you how Tank's grandmother had been a huge grey feral, a survivor from a hessian sack someone had dumped in the overgrowth. When she was killed in a rat-trap, Eleanor found her kittens in some bushes near the old meat works and tamed them. One day when you were visiting her you saw this next generation, led by a little back head with amber eyes that peered out at you curiously from behind the fridge. You fell in love. Eleanor picked Tank up and put him in your arms. You knew immediately he was yours.

'It's all right to love these wild ones, they're just as worthy. Tank wants you to love him; he's selected you. Cats always choose their owners, you know, it's never the other way around.'

Now you tell him, playfully, 'You're a devil, Tank.'

He narrows his eyes to a sliver and puts up his tail for more stroking.

'C'mon. I've brought smoked salmon.'

The blinking red light is not from your security alarm, you turned that off as you came in. It's mail.

Voice-mail from Al: The RoB briefing's gunna be on Wednesday honey.

Voice-mail from Luke: Can you pick me up from the tallest palm tree in South Dowling Street around 3? The call's sooo early - 5 am!

South Dowling Street has never been a place to stop at any time, day or night. Luke, beneath a stand of fine old trees, runs forward as he spies Bette Blue. You notice he's taken your advice and bought the tan lined dark blue windproof with the fling-back hood. But you'll have to have a word about those trainers. Wearing shoes like that can blow a whole career, brand a person unsuccessful.

'Good weekend?' He slips into the bucket-seat beside you.

'Not long enough. You?'

'Bit of a party, Saturday. Darlington. With some lesbian friends. Fab rave. But I made sure I was tucked up nice and early last night, ready for the He Guys.' His body shivers. 'Oooo! Can't wait to see them in naught but the naughtiest.'

You give him a lacklustre grin, all you can muster after your late night.

'I spent yesterday at The Beach. Nursing my hangover.'

'The Beach sounds wonderful. When are we invited?' He looks at you and giggles. 'Or are you hiding something?'

You shrug. 'Only my little sister.'

'Didn't know you had a sister. Is she like you?'

You shake your head. 'Kara's an English lady. Sort of. She lived there for yonks.'

'And you're keeping her at The Beach?'

You have to admit the He Guys are a bit of all-right. Before sunrise it's your pleasant duty to check the exact shade of tan makeup on sixteen beautiful male bodies. As they mount their horses and move off, you pretend to study a black-and-white monitor near a brazier with a licking red flame; then, sitting in a director's chair, you try to look wise. Really,

though, you don't have much idea what's happening, other than the order in which the sequences are to be shot. The sand-hills are in the way.

All seems well, even if this is starting to look like a mini-update of *Lawrence of Arabia* with overtones of *Gladiator*. The mood is right, and that's what matters. You have promised Mr. Szu Szu his new blockbuster will contain strong strains of *eros* (*eros* is the buzzword of the month). You chose this director because his latest feature simply oozes *eros*, while carefully explaining that Szu Szu's *eros* must be subtly different, with subtext linking back to the market-mode.

By eleven, morning tea has been and gone. You're bored. Piers, on the other hand, sustains great enthusiasm, talking animatedly with the director of photography. They're discussing diagonals, how the edges of the sandhills could cut together to fall like the closure of a fan, or a pack of cards. You decide there's nothing here for you anymore; you'd do better back at The Agency.

Bette Blue glides towards the city, settling comfortably into the Castlereagh Street Car Park. There's a private shoe-view nearby today, you thought you'd have to miss it.

Three pairs of semi-sensible Manolos and one utterly divine but totally un-sensible pair of Bivianos later (you think you may never wear these shoes, but you love their red audacity) you tell yourself your purchases are modest, considering what you might have spent. There are advantages to a pre-sale day, like this, in the invitation-only sanctum of your preferred retail store, with its marble floors and elevated vases of flowers, wafting fragrances and tinkling baby-grand. A valued customer like yourself can often make fabulous finds that don't look at all like discounted merchandise.

Purchasing a pair as impractical as this is rare, however. After all, you don't have money to burn. It's incredible to think, but you hardly have a thing left at the end of the month, after you've paid two humungous mortgages acquired in the days of plenty when interest rates were rock-bottom. Vin Hoo advised you to go for both, and go for both you did. You can't over-capitalise those properties, he'd said, they're solid. And then

there's your life-style. Maintaining Linda Hille, the brand, may not cost as much as keeping a modern-day princess, but it is expensive.

Back at The Agency there's nobody about. You've been up for so many hours that it seems much later, you haven't registered it's lunch-hour. You use your iris-key to enter the section, making your way past Caro's desk, gathering email printouts, call reports, odd bits of snail mail. All the reports are from Al, as you might expect. Al has an endless production line for call-reports. Apart from bombarding you electronically, he insists on putting everything into hard copy. What else? Publicity from your Insurance Company, blurb about another upcoming conference. The last thing is a folded copy of *Ad Max*, your name printed on the label. This trade paper is smaller than a tabloid. The front page strikes you.

LINDA HILLE DIES
Szu-Szu star gone
before her fortieth

You fling the offensive thing at the wall, where it clips the edge of your framed needlepoint lines by Robert Frost:

The brain is a wonderful organ.
It starts working the moment you get up
in the morning and does not stop
until you get into the office.

This was your gift from D'Arcy when your internship in The Big Apple ended. You've knocked it sideways, but before you can get to straighten it you see the unwelcome face of Jason Nile.

You push back your chair and open the door.

'Jason! Do you have an appointment?'

He smiles a decadent smile. 'Thought I'd sneak in and catch you.'

'I shouldn't even be here, neither should you.'

'Ha! The shoot was a fizzer.'

Your eyes widen. 'It's going very well.'

He is scornful. 'That why you left?'

'I left because I'm a delegator, though I'm sure I have no idea what it has to do with you. Delegation is a way of ensuring survival.'

He looks perplexed, as you mean him to do.

'Sorry, Jase,' you stifle a giggle, 'Dragon Lady speaking.'

You start to shut the sliding door, but he's got a foot inside.

'Wait a minute, Ms. Hille! Before I disappear, tell me: when do we get to quote?' He takes two boarding passes from his pocket and waves them in front of your face: 'First Class, to anywhere; ready when you are.'

'Ad Max?'

'You are speaking to Jill. How may I help?'

'This is Linda Hille. The Linda Hille reported dead on your front page today.'

'Sorry, Ma'am, don't have a front page to-day. We come out Thursdays. Front page not assembled yet.'

'Oh.' Sheepishly you retrieve the splayed copy of *Ad Max*, tipping it towards the light. You've been had! The outer is nothing but a clever mock-up; inside it's last week's.

'Ah,' you say lamely, 'Thanks. Um, yes, I would like to speak to someone.'

'Hold, a moment? Putting you through to Gary Grenfeld.'

'Grenfeld.' Pleasant tones. Canadian accent?

'Hi!' You try to sound casual. 'Gary? Linda Hille, G C D of ...'

'The He Guys!' There's fun in his voice.

'Right.' You breathe again. 'Gary, I was wondering, would you like a story? Things ... keep happening.'

'Linda Hille. I've been wanting a depth-interview with you ever since The Agency won the Rebranding of Branding. But I heard it might not be easy. Aria Blenkinsop calls you "*The Hille*".'

'Oh! Isn't she over that?'

He laughs and so do you.

'So you do want to talk?'

'Mm.'

'After work? This evening?'

'A drink?'

'Blues Point Inn?'

'Bar Deck?'

'About six? How will I know you?'

'I'll know you.'

For a moment you're taken aback.

'Oh yes, of course. The *Ad-Max* files,' you say soberly.

'And Google. But I saw you at the Oscads.'

Caro's back, you catch her outline in the crinkly glass.

'Linda! What happened? I thought you were out all day.'

'Everything, nothing. I handed it over to Piers. He was in his element.

I'll see rushes tomorrow.'

'Did you pick up your mail?'

'I did, as a matter of fact. Um. How did we get that copy of *Ad Max*?

'*Ad Max*? Came in with all the rest. Funny, now I think of it. *Ad Max* is usually out Thursdays.'

As you slide the glass door shut, she calls to you, 'Linda, will I say you're in? Al's been buzzing around all day, like a blue-arsed fly.'

You raise your eyes to the ceiling and make the sign of prayer.

'I'm not here,' you say firmly.

Chapter 4

‘A couple more questions, off the record?’ asks Gary. ‘I’d like to know what *you* think of brands.’

‘Bread? Catfood?’ You ponder. ‘When it comes to that kind of thing I’m a brand snob, I suppose.’ You look at his face for a reaction, but there isn’t one. ‘Well, perhaps not so much a *snob*, as ... discriminating. Take shoes, for instance. All mine are branded. But I can’t look at brand-names at the breakfast table. Once a week I go religiously to Earthies, where everything comes in brown paper bags. If I have to buy at a supermarket, I decant the washing liquid, whatever, from the branded pack into an anonymous plastic container.’

Gary, tall and wiry with a face that bears faint traces of adolescent scarring, gives an impression of contained energy: he’s already told you he’s about to go trekking in the mountains of Nepal. And he seems to have something else you find intriguing, a calm magnetism that induces trust. ‘I’m asking for another reason. Think stalkers, globophobes, no-logos. Those guys.’

Shocked, you react without thinking. ‘I don’t rate their attention!’

‘Look at it this way. You’re the one responsible for the “Rebranding of Branding”. Getting that right would not be in their interests.’

You sit a moment, then shake your head. ‘Na. The first of this came before RoB.’

You chat on. He tells you he was an investigative journalist, trained in London. So what’s he doing here, running a two-bit rag like *Ad-Max*?

‘Had a long fight with alcohol. Lost my job, my marriage. Now I’m marking time. The Himalayas trip comes up real soon; the job’s been a good fill-in.’

Gary knows what happened at the Oscads, you’ve told him about the words on the mirror. And the comment by your prospective rag-trade client. And the faked-up headline on the front of his paper.

‘Any trouble with email?’

'All our email is encrypted. The Agency operates closed codes.'

'Smart. Personal stuff?'

'Yahoo, at the moment. I keep changing.'

'Very smart. Phones?'

'Nothing odd. I have two mobiles, two landlines, and a hands-off in my car. But I have to confess. I'm a bit of a cyberphobe, if you really want to know. Except for the basics, email and word processing. I never *text*: clunky, takes up too much time. And it can easily be used against you. One of my mobiles belongs to work, the other's for family and friends. No-one at The Agency knows about the second one except Caro, my PA.'

Gary unfolds his long legs. He's sitting in an teak cabin-chair, old ship's furniture brought here from an auction at some gracious home to decorate this wide wooden verandah.

'So who are your enemies at work?'

'Work?' You feel like you've been stung. 'I don't like to think I have any. Rivals, certainly, like Xianna Tree.'

He looks at you quizzically.

'She's Director of Client Service. She tried to get me fired a couple of weeks ago, by remarking to Al, my account director – who of course told me – that she's never understood a thing I say.'

Gerry laughs. 'Jealous?'

'Mm, perhaps. A natural poison-dropper; she can't help it.'

'Put her on the list. Who else?'

'There are people who are angry. Guys I've never met bail me up, then swear blind some friend of theirs "did" Szu Szu. When I ask them what they mean by "did", I find their friend was a courier on one of the shoots, or something.'

You notice the little laughter-lines around his eyes.

'Come to think of it,' you continue, fired up now, 'work hasn't been very much fun since Szu Szu. Oh, there are plenty of women in advertising: we head up agencies, we're board directors, we're in charge of huge accounts. But women Creative Directors?'

Gary remains quiet, nursing his lime-and-bitters, the only drink he's had in the time you've been here, though you're on your third Veuve Clicquot Ponsardin.

You shake your head. 'Someone wants to get at me. I think it's a woman.'

A row of lights in a patch of green down by the harbour-side shine bright white, flooding a sandstone staircase that leads to the lapping shore.

'The romantic stakes?' Beneath his nonchalant manner this man's as sharp as a filleting knife.

'Well, there's a girl at The Agency who is seeing my ex. But that can't be it. If she wants Ferg, she's got him.'

Together you walk the length of the veranda.

'What will you do after your trip?' you ask Gary idly.

'Get out of the city. Find somewhere up north.' Seeing your interest, he goes on, 'The hills, maybe. Or the coast.'

You regard him doubtfully.

'Are you a surfer?'

He laughs. 'I'm a mountain man. I was born in Calgary. Basically I'm lazy – though not so much right now, training for the trek.' He grins. 'Anyway, I've got us a plan.'

You look at him questioningly.

He returns your look with a steady gaze, an agreement not to betray, and in that moment you decide to go with your intuition and accept his help.

'Let's start with what's-her-name,' he grins. 'I'll arrange an interview.'

The sun disappears behind the Anzac Bridge as you cross to the Western Distributor. A swathe of office buildings, set high against the sky at this edge of the city, becomes a liquid foil of rich royal greens, beaten golds, and, melted in between, lakes of pure rich cadmium. Behind it lies a million office lights.

You ring Helena on the hands-free.

'I've just met a nice man.'

'Lin! So glad you rang. Kara's here.'

'At your place? '

'When you weren't at Jackson's Landing, she came over.'

'How is she?'

'Agitated. Better off once she sees you.'

'I'm two minutes from home. Can you put her on?'

Kara is breathless. 'Linda? I came to Jackson's Landing.'

'I had a meeting after work. Can you get a cab?'

'Hang on, all right! Helena says she'll bring me. Uh ... wait a minute ... she'll take the cab on.'

You seem to have no time to yourself these days. If it's not RoB, it's Kara. If it's not Kara, it's your personal terrorist, the one who wants you out. It's Al, it's Luke, it's one of a dozen others who wait for you to set foot in the place. Whatever happened to those glorious days when you and Ferg used to get up late and enjoy leisurely breakfasts at Balmain? You spent afternoons making love, then partied all night long.

You're about to disappoint your cat. There he sits, waiting inside your front door. Now he's weaving in and out between your shins, begging to sit on your lap. Well, no chance of that; Kara's here.

'Kara! What's up?'

Your sister looks dark and puffy beneath the eyes. She flops on your leather couch.

'H.M.'

'Hugo Mezzner? Something happened to him?'

She shakes her head. 'To me.'

'What's he done?'

'It's what he's about to do. He's leaving.'

'For ever?'

'Thwee weeks. Thwee whole weeks! Can I have a drink? So dwy I can hardly talk.'

'Could do with one myself. What would you like?'

'Not that kind of dwink, a glass of water.'

'Meow!' That's Tank's most insistent, plaintive voice. He's placed himself in your way, between the 1950s Italian-designed butler's tray and the glasses cupboard. His whiskers twitch.

In a careful, conciliatory way, you tell him, 'Yes, Tank,' and call, 'Sorry Kara, I have to feed the cat.'

Your kitchen window has a full back-harbour view, not as grand as Helena's, with the Bridge, the Opera House, and ferries on the run, but interesting nonetheless. Lead-orange tankers and grey carships used to turn below in what seemed not enough space, a circle so tight you'd think their bulk could never be accommodated.

By the time you've got Tank's favourite delicacy into his bowl Kara's right beside you.

'He's going to Europe.' She looks mournful. 'What am I to do?'

'Take a holiday?'

'You don't understand, do you Linda? Whenever I go, whatever I do, I'll feel the same. I think I'm in love with him.'

'Oh, Kara! Isn't everyone in love with their analyst? Are you sure?'

'One day I'm sure, the next I'm not. To-day I'm sure.'

'Damn. There's nothing in these cupboards except cat food. Want to go around the corner to the fish-place? Or shall I send out for curry?'

'Not hungwy.'

'My darling little sister, you are never hungry. But I must eat. So if you want to talk to me, you'll have to come. This morning, before dawn, I was way down south – that seems years ago.'

She grimaces at the menu.

'So what happened, to-day?'

She hesitates, looking around to make sure no-one is listening. 'I uh ... I went to see H.M. this morning. We had a good session. I felt we might be getting somewhere, at last, until he told me he won't be here. I became afraid.'

'He's not abandoning you, Kara. Everyone has to go away.'

'But something could happen. What if I never see him again?'

'Oh, Kara. If everyone thought like that, we'd all stay put. Where's he going?'

'To a confewence in Vienna, then on to the States. So wisky!'

You shake your head. 'He'll be all right.'

'But will I? And another thing,' she looks sheepish. 'After the session I went to get the bus back to The Beach. But I found myself on the other side of the woad, going the other way.'

'Into town?'

She nods. 'I couldn't stop thinking about him, I was burning up inside. I went for a walk down by Argyll Cut, into a couple of opal shops and the Gawison Church. Then I walked back past the Quay and got on a bus to Woollahwa.'

'Woollahra?'

Nods again. 'I found his address in the phone book, under his wife's name. A big avenue, lined with trees. I hid behind one of them until someone came out. It was the wife, I suppose; she was with two small children.'

Apprehension rises in your throat. 'You didn't do anything, did you?'

'No nothing, truly. Nothing at all. She just put them in the car and dwove away. But as the bumper was disappeawing I started to feel this huge wave of jealousy. It made me think, all over again, about cloning myself. Ewevyone has a child but me.'

'And me.'

'You have never wanted one.'

'Who said I've never wanted one? I've never had the time.'

'Why don't you clone yourself? We could go to Italy together.'

A shudder runs through you. 'You should know by now, Kara, I don't believe in clones. Haven't we had that discussion?'

'Something has to change.'

'I thought it was changing.' You order another glass of champagne. 'What's this Dr. Mezzner all about, if not change?'

She shakes her head in despair. 'It's all taking too long. I want change now.'

This morning at the gym you were able to forget, for a glorious half-hour, how Kara now occupies both your retreats. Last night she'd told you she was afraid to go back to The Beach by herself, so you made up a bed on the couch. But she'll have to go back, whether she likes it or not; you cannot manage without your space, a room of your own. Creativity has never been helped by home invasions, and hardly any of the thinking you are so well-paid to produce can occur at work. Your office hours are taken up with red tape, admin, meeting after meeting.

Now you're sitting in the dark of the theatrette, endlessly watching He Guys galloping over sand-hills. Piers is pleased, but when insists on staying for the edit you find yourself wondering.

Arriving back at The Agency, you encounter Luke and Xianna in the eighteenth-floor lift. Seeing them together like this strikes you as odd; their paths don't usually cross.

'Linda! How's it going?'

'Great! What are you up to?'

Xianna gives you a dark maroon smile and jingles her shiny black fingernails. 'Luke's helping me with the party.'

You look vacant.

'Don't say you don't know, Linda. It's Vampire's Christmas, again.'

Inwardly you groan. 'Yes, right. When?'

'Saturday. And don't forget a present for The Dracula Tree.'

As you walk to your room, Luke follows like a puppy.

'How do the He Guys look? I bet they're utterly divine.'

'Yep, more wondrous than ever! You're going to love them.'

'I wish.' He speaks in a semi-whisper. 'And what about that other stuff? On the mirror?'

Something tells you to hold back, now you've talked to Gary. 'Oh, nothing. That seems to have died down. Anyway, what were you doing with Xianna?'

'Getting some of the Oxford Street boys to perform the He Guys anthem. You should see what they're doing to your chorus!'

All day long you've been haunted by a dream that will not go away, bits of it keep floating back. Kara was wandering in a dense, gloomy forest. It reminded you of a remnant of old Caledonian forest you'd hiked in, one dreadfully wet holiday on the west coast of Scotland, with Bob, your dentist boyfriend – the man you were seeing before Fergal. In the dream, Kara was on a narrow path, her face swirling in and out of thick white mist. She was rooted to the spot, starting at a sign post with a strange word written on it: 'Indarde'. Then the scene changed to a group of tall brick chimneys with terra-cotta pots on top. You've seen those chimneys somewhere before.

And at the end of the dream a male voice, clear as a bell, said 'Indarde'.

'Indarde, indarde. Indarde holds the answer.'

You can still hear it. You wish it would go away. There are too many things happening to-day, like an interview with a young woman graduate who wants to be a copywriter, in about four minutes. Then a meeting with Al, to develop a strategy for the coming rag-trade pitch. You have to impress that guy who thinks you're dead.

Caro, on the inter.

'Linda, Gary Grenfeld. Put him through?'

'Thanks Caro. Hi!'

'Hi, Linda! I thought you'd like to know I've spoken to Ms. X. She told me if I want a profile, I must do it properly. She's invited me to her party.'

'Vampire's Christmas? Yes, why not? I mightn't make it, myself; I don't know yet. I have a small problem with my sister. She's staying with me at the moment.'

'Can't you bring her?'

'Kara?' You swallow. 'Mm. Kara's kind of different. She doesn't enjoy those things.' But Gary's suggestion – unexpected, practical, supportive – gives you a nice feeling.

'I was surprised when I talked to Xianna. She sounds intriguing.'

You can't resist. 'Are you fond of Goths, Gary?'

'Goths?'

'Xianna Tree is the Queen Goth; she has been since the '90s, more or less unchallenged. She's still going strong. Since she became our Director of Client Service, the annual client party has been a winter Christmas, aboard the good ship *Vampire*. With presents from "The Dracula Tree".'

'Sounds scary.'

'Never. Not in a million years! Xianna's all bluff.'

You like his laugh.

You're still smiling when Teri Dare bursts in.

'Linda!' she commands breathlessly. 'Come upstairs, right now? Forrest wants you.'

'I've got a meeting with Al.'

She shakes her silvery head.

'No you haven't. You haven't got a meeting with Al.'

If you think your office has a view, it does, but only one; Shore's suite has harbour views on every side. A chisel-faced, square-chinned man with a cultivated presence, Shore sits behind his huge, empty desk. Once Dare has seen you in, she turns to go, but he motions her to stay.

'We're going to need you, Teri,' he says ominously. 'Linda, I'm sorry to tell you this,' he then announces, gravely. 'It's a shock to us all.'

Wild thoughts stampede the inside of your head, a cold chill spreads across your back. Is The Agency about to merge with another giant? Or be taken over? Are you about to be fired?

He stops to re-light his cigar. How rude! This room is the only place in the building where such a thing could happen; he must have had the smoke detectors turned off. You hate cigars, but any objection you might have wished to voice is quickly engulfed.

'Al Knappstein's walked. With Szu Szu.'

'What! How come?'

He clears his throat. 'Shit happens, Linda. Not often, fortunately, but it does.' He leers. Or is it a grimace? 'Stealing a prize account has always been one way to start an agency.'

You collapse into a large black-and-chrome Corbusier armchair.

‘He must have been planning,’ you gasp.

Forrest stares at you as though you must be some kind of idiot, stating the obvious. He adds drily, ‘For some time.’

‘What about our cinema commercial?’

‘Did you do the Szu Szu cut?’

‘This morning.’

‘Right. So now it's as good as there.’ He looks at you accusingly. ‘Any fool could finish it.’

Back at your desk, the door firmly shut, you nurse your wounds. Why, oh why, did Al have to go? Without *saying*? Parts of you are hurting. And why is Shore trying to nail you? The memory of shiny red lettering zips through your mind.

Then you're on the phone.

‘Lena, c'n I come over? I need a glass ...’

‘Aaagh! I have to go to the studio. I'm in the middle of my Awo glazes; I have to feed them every day.’

‘Feed them ...?’

‘The way we used to feed our ginger-beer plants at school, remember? They bubble and change.’

‘You'll be in Darlinghurst? So c'n we meet later on, then, at the Korea Baths?’

The Korea Baths give you cheap, unworn, blue cotton kimonos and a skinny stand-up locker for your things. There's a room at the front where you can sit in a cane armchair with a glass of cinnamon chai, or a pot of warm green tea. But first you dunk yourself in the big square baths: one hot, one cold. Clean water cascades in, flows out, flows in, and cascades out again – taking the tension with it. You're left with a tingling sensation all over.

Next you're on a wooden table, shaped to the body; soapy green stuff is slathered on by dainty hard-at-work hands. As they push and pummel, your mind floats away. There's a small girl on top of you: a tiny figure, feather-light, posed as if to wash a floor. She scrubs your lower arms, upper arms, neck, chest and torso, then she's half-way down your

stomach, slipping about in a non-sexy way. She turns you over like a leaf and starts again, on your back. Ouch! You had no idea you were so tight between the shoulder blades. That's where you must have been concealing your dread, the lurking fear you haven't wanted to face, about what's really going on behind the nastiness at The Agency. Her fingers work their way in underneath to expunge what is hiding. You yelp with pain. Once it's released you begin to think of Fergal. Into the surrounding steam, the moisture running down your ruddy face, you shed a big fat salty tear.

Afterwards it's Lee-Sumis for Korean seafood: you're mad for their chilli-coconut banana prawns.

'Where's Kara?' Lena's let her damp hair fall around her shoulders; usually she knots it loosely at the nape of her long brown neck. Tonight she looks so young, the sauna's left her skin soft and bright. She wears no makeup, just a dollop of Parisian *crème d'abricot* across the bridge of her nose.

'I'll phone again later. Couldn't raise her earlier.' The after-effect of the seaweed massage has hit; part of your mind's gone off with the water-fairies. 'But she's still at Jackson's Landing.'

'That why you took time out?'

Your mouth full, you shake your head. 'Not really. I can handle Kara.' You laugh. 'She's at the stage where she thinks she's in love with her analyst.'

Helena shrugs. 'A milestone along the way.' She goes on, 'So why did you want to escape? Because of work?'

You're glad you're only drinking tea tonight, you'll need your wits about you tomorrow.

'My account director walked. With Szu Szu.'

The marine-clean, kelp-weed aroma of the Korea Baths lingers on your shoulders and arms. For a moment you wish you could melt into the atmosphere and descend again, somewhere in the countryside, as rain.

'How?' Helena asks, amazed.

You raise both eyebrows. 'Easy. Had an affair with Mr. Szu Szu's brand manager. She arranged it.'

'That *happened?*'

'From what I've heard. Al not only left us in the lurch, his wife and kids as well. The Agency and his marriage.'

Her eyes are wide.

'And,' you continue, 'he was heading up the giant global project I'm up to my neck in.'

For a while neither of you says anything. Then Helena asks with a half-smile, 'What about this new man? The one you mentioned?'

'It was so good to meet someone nice! And solid. And reliable. His name's Gary, he's from Canada originally. He has country yearnings and Buddhist leanings.'

'Ha.' There's a sparkle in Lena's eye. 'Shall I tell you about my Buddhist?'

'Taka?'

She nods. 'Remember the card I sent you from northern Japan? I was there with him. It was romantic.'

'Dark horse! You didn't say.'

She smiles coyly. 'I thought it was all over. Until yesterday, when I got an email. He wants me to come back.'

'Woo! And he's a Buddhist?'

She nods. 'A Zen Buddhist. You can see it in his work, everything he does. His glazes are far finer than mine.'

You study at her anew, and giggle. 'Two Buddhists! Is this a trend? Can't say for sure Gary Grenfeld is a Buddhist, but I know he's keen; he's about to go trekking in Nepal. In the meantime, he's offered to help me'.

'Are you sure you can you trust him?'

'Yes, I think so; there's something about him. Anyway, I need to, anyway, because something else has happened.'

Tank's asleep on Kara's pillow. But there's no sign of your sister, and no note. And you left the voice-mail off again this morning; you seem to be doing that more and more. You tell yourself this happens by mistake, but

the mistake keeps occurring. Something to do with stress, perhaps? Overload or not, you have to make time to see Eleanor.

‘Eleanor? Hi!’

‘Linda, are you psychic? Your sister's here.’

‘Kara?’

‘We met out on The Point. We were both walking. She told me that she’s interested in old houses, so I brought her here.’

‘Oh. I was phoning about a dream. C’n I come over sometime?’

‘By all means. You're the busy one!’

‘Tomorrow evening? Can’t be sure what time. OK if I call as I leave work?’

‘If it's before seven, just come. Do you want to speak to Kara?’

At The Agency next morning the atmosphere is thick. You haven’t been in five minutes before Dare appears at your office door.

‘Heard about Piers?’ she asks bluntly.

‘No?’

‘Szu Szu's new Creative Director.’

Ouch! It's one thing to be betrayed by an account-person: every Creative knows that account-persons are not like us. But your Art Director?

‘We need a replacement, fast.’

‘Two. However you’ll be pleased to know, Linda, Al's already been replaced.’ She stands at the window, putting a price on your view. ‘Forrest will announce it at lunchtime,’ she says. ‘At an all-staff meeting in the Pool Room.’

A brick hits the base of your gut. You have an awful feeling that Teri Dare is now in charge of Project RoB.

It’s eight minutes past six as you enter Eleanor's narrow street, the small one with the high sandstone wall on the other side. Hers is a diminutive terrace in a neat row; not much has changed behind its heritage façade. She told you once she’d bought it as a slum: the electrics had come in as a bunch of dodgy wires through a hole in the front wall, she’d said. The

Victorian gaslight fittings, set high in hand made sandstock bricks, were still in working order. She'd laughed as she recounted this, remembering her horror at discovering how fragile the ceilings were, made of lath-and-plaster from early colonial days. Later she discovered that elsewhere in this row of tiny houses some ceilings had already collapsed and been replaced with fitted hardboard – white ant proof, of course. The white ants are notorious in these dockland backwaters, as are their mates, the cockroaches; neither cares whether they inhabit the old or the new.

'We don't see rats now, though,' Eleanor chuckles.

Her kitchen table has been cleared of books and papers, magazines and drawing materials, the usual friendly clutter. She sits on one side, you on the other. At sixty-five Eleanor is retired, except for cat minding and helping people with their dreams.

You must be looking less than happy, because she makes a point of cheering you along. But you resist telling her your work troubles; instead you study the envelope back you've covered in pencilled notes. In a stumbling way, you read the scribbled description of your dream: the forest, the mist, Kara's coming and going, the orange brick chimneys with their dark red pots, the signpost with the word 'Indarde' and the disembodied voice at the end.

Eleanor doesn't interrupt, she likes to discuss a dream only after you've read it through. Then she asks you to start again, posing questions that nudge at its secrets.

'What was it you felt, about that dream forest?'

'Lack of light.'

'Why was the going so hard?'

'It seemed like an endless track.'

'Other feelings?'

'Guilt. Frustration. Confusion.'

Eleanor contends that the figure in the dream isn't Kara; its the 'Kara' part of you. But she says the dream might relate to Kara, or Kara's problems.

'What about "Indarde"?' You ask, still puzzled.

'Single words like that,' she replies, 'Are always significant. If you follow them, you often find true meaning. Let's take a look. How do you spell it?'

'I-n-d-a-r-d-e.'

She pushes paper and pen across the table.

'Write it down. Now think of it as part of an email address, perhaps, or the name of a place.'

You shake your head.

'An anagram of anything? Like a clue in a crossword puzzle? The psyche loves that.'

'Two ds; would they come together? "Arddeni"? Sounds Italian, doesn't it? 'Den', no. 'Der'? Wait a minute. It's "Derinda"!'

'Is that a place?'

You nod.

'And what exactly did the voice say?'

'In translation? "Derinda", "Derinda" holds the answer.'

'Holds the answer, contains the answer. The answer lies in "Derinda".

The answer to what?'

It hits like a bolt of lightning.

'The Kara Thing.'

Part 2

Chapter 5

It took some doing to get Kara into the car this morning but here she sits, swathed like a Bedouin woman in a too-big overcoat and your old Missoni scarf.

‘There must be somewhere else,’ she says with vehemence.

‘Sure sis,’ you answer calmly. ‘But Derinda’s perfect, about half-way.’ If you’re sounding like a bad commercial it’s because you have a plan.

Yesterday’s news came as a mighty shock. Curiously Stella had mentioned death a few times lately, but it remains unthinkable for her to have gone like this. Your mother seemed indestructible. A heart attack, for goodness’s sake!

Your father could not have told your sister, that sort of thing has always been left to you. After all, you were the one who was supposed to be responsible for her; when Dad ‘gave’ her to you hadn’t he said, ‘I know you’ll always look after your little sister, won’t you, Lin?’

But before she’d agree to come, Kara went through her usual irrelevancies: silly domestic reasons why she could not possibly leave.

‘I can’t come. I’ve just planted a new bed of lettuces out in the garden. Who’ll water them? They might die before I get back.

‘We can’t leave The Beach with no-one in it! There are so many houses empty at Palm Beach during the week. The owners only come up at weekends. The other day they caught someone camping inside that big house at the end of the lane, down there near the shore: a heroin addict. We need someone there all the time, keeping watch.

‘The hedge-man is due this week, to twim along the front. He might not know what to do if I’m not there to show him. You don’t want it cut wight back, do you? It would look awful.

‘I need to do a big shop at Avalon. I’ve planned it for Monday, I’ve ordered the taxi and evewything. We’re wunning out of things like toilet

paper, you know, and we can't have that, especially if you're going to be bwinging fwiends here up to stay when you get back.'

You didn't catch the rest. Instead you were remembering the time when she had stood up and announced, just as eloquently, why she couldn't stay. But that's Kara. And although you've never really understood – probably never will – it's all too familiar.

'All right,' she said, eventually. 'But for one weason and one weason only. To make sure Mrs. Whitegloves is dead.'

How that stung! Despite years of wearing your sister's moods, learning to be patient, trying to unravel her endless verbosities, you were engulfed by sadness.

All you wanted to do was phone Helena. At first, when she answered, you seemed fine. Then you lost it; a surge that felt primeval threatened to engulf you. Words came tumbling out.

'Only sixty-five,' you wailed into the mouthpiece. 'And in her second prime. It's so not fair.'

She let you cry, then calmed you. The final thing she said was, 'Don't worry, Lin, I'll be there. I'll get Ted to fly us up.'

Next you rang Forrest Shore.

'Your grandmother died?'

The skin drew tight across your cheeks, stretched tissue-thin. You were caught in a blinding flash of anger – something not to be revealed, especially with your boss. What you wanted to do was be short, but instead you heard yourself saying, in a carefully modulated manner, 'It was my mother who died.'

'Sorry Linda, I thought you said Stella.'

'Stella, yes, Stella. That's my mother.'

'Sorry to hear she died.' But his tone was perfunctory, you caught the timbre of boredom in his voice.

'Thanks. Oh, and, Forrest; I'm going to need four days.'

'Right. I'll talk to Teri. She might want to get in a freelance.'

You spoke quickly, summoning your usual confidence. It was a huge effort. You'd pay later with the exhaustion that comes more frequently these days when having to put up a show that goes against the grain.

'Trust me,' you told him, falsely bright. 'We don't need a freelance.' There was a silence, you knew he was waiting for you to offer him something more. You added, 'I've cracked RoB.'

He laughed incredulously, but you knew then he was interested. 'So you've cracked The Rebranding of Branding? No wonder AI called you the golden goose.'

'Just needs more work.'

'Uh-uh. So what can you tell me?'

'Well, the pivot is Re-verse.'

'Reverse?'

'Capital R; e; hyphen, then the word verse.' You paused. 'When we get Piers's replacement – soon, I hope – I'll brief them on it as keyword. RoB is such a vast proposition, Forrest, it needs a new vocabulary. A reverse vocabulary, if you like. I've started exploring anything and everything that pertains to versing. Then re-versing. Right now I've got Luke researching the globality of verse, its origins and meanings. There's more. But to get it over, we need another Piers.'

'Mm. I suppose Teri could hold the fort until Monday ...'

'Tuesday, Forrest. The funeral's in Queensland, Saturday. I'll drive back, Monday, and be in, Tuesday.'

'Why aren't you flying, for God's sake? Tell Caro to get you a ticket.'

'I have a passenger. My sister's coming with me.'

There was a longish wait. 'Fine. But I've got my doubts about the replacement.'

You spoke slowly. 'Um, there is a solution, Forrest. It's ... different.'

'Anything's fair game.'

'O.K. You approach Piers personally and ask him to moonlight.'

He whistles down the phone. 'Hey, that *is* original.'

After that you turned your attention to Tank, giving him an extra can of Gourmet Pussy char-grilled squid with lobster and prawn sauce. But all he did was blink up at you with that well-known look, the one that says he

knows you're about to abandon him. You'd arranged for Eleanor to mind him; Tank likes her, but he put on that same old inner-kitten act he throws every time. He hates the idea of your going anywhere and kicks up a fuss, threatening to poo in the bath or pee in the cymbidium.

While packing for the drive, you'd tried not to act mindlessly, to cease giving undue consideration to which of your current working-hundred pairs of shoes should be worn at the funeral. Not to mention those in the well-loved category, currently museumed in boxes you haven't had time to countenance, let alone dust, since your return from NYC. Desperate to get on the road, you grabbed the first two pairs you could lay your hands on, the patent leather Guccis with a pointy toe and modest non-stiletto heel and a pair of gold Fendi sandals.

The funeral, the funeral!

Try as you might, you could not get your head around the thought it was to be your mother's. Despite some small relief from that first short burst of tears, you still feel numb. Your eyes are heavy while your head is light; it's the strangest thing, unlike anything you've felt before. They say the loss of a parent tells you things you never knew, can this be the start of it? Usually you don't feel your body when you're driving Bette Blue, she makes the ride so comfortable, but now your waistline is constantly uncomfortable. You feel bloated but you haven't over-eaten, in fact you've had nothing much to eat since you heard the news. You've mainly been existing on black coffee.

Stella had found her dream of successful retirement on the Sunshine Coast. She'd quickly become immersed in a religious sect, believers in redemption through Light in The Spirit.

'It's so wonderful, Linda, like finding the gateway to heaven on earth,' she'd gushed when she first told you. She'd sent you a tract with a long flowery spiel and a credo that seemed, to an ad-biz person like yourself, exactly like an old fashioned *purchase proposition*: carefully chosen words, phrased by a marketing expert in a way that was frankly designed to persuade. You made the mistake of telling her, but Stella would have none of it.

'Linda, what I am saying is for your own good. Ignore the good news at your peril! I want the best for you, you know that; you are my hope in the world, my shining light; the one I can depend on.'

Other than that, she refused all further discussion. Subsequently, whenever you phoned, your mother would discuss nothing else, continuing with a wellspring of tidings about her new-found interest. And although you couldn't take this seriously – sometimes catching yourself, on the other end, glazing over and starting to nod off – you had to admit there was enthusiasm in her voice, and that was something you hadn't heard in years.

On your first visit to your parents at Murrumbin Waters, you were dismayed to find that Stella had taken to walking into a gathering, any social event at all, and fixing herself onto some unfortunate man, peering into his eyes and bombarding him with stories of her redemption. Another oddity was the amount of time she devoted to parading her vast collection of dresses, brooches, earrings, beads, scarves, bags, hats – always with those absurd white gloves. She put on a private view daily, having made a catwalk of her bedroom; she spent hours moving with her reflection in the mirror-covered walls. You said you thought it might be bad *feng shui* to have mirrors facing each other like that, but from the look she gave you it appeared she liked it that way too much to change. You couldn't help noticing that the way those mirrors were angled to create a slight distortion, but refrained from further comment.

In her younger days your mother had a thing about hats. From way back, as far as you can remember, she'd been the proud owner of an elegant croc hatbox with brushed-brass locks and a neat embossed key, inherited from her great-aunt Elizabeth. Apparently Aunt Lizzie had been a woman of some character, unusually adventurous in her day; the family claimed she'd acquired this treasure from a stall at a Paris Flea Market, having got from Samaritan to Porte de Clignancourt and back on a new-fangled suburban train, all by herself, one Sunday morning. Later the hatbox had become Stella's most guarded possession, she would hardly let it out of her sight. She'd spend hours trimming a hat with a flamboyant silk-flower, or an exotic imported feather, only to hide it deep in the

interior, a hexagon of pleasing proportions, padded, draped and gathered; a pale mauve womb of pure silk crepe-de-Chine, embossed with Argentinian violets.

Stella always wove a special glamour, she had her own allure. In recent years the remarkable bloom on her famously fine skin had at last begun to fade, but there were still those who admired her.

Kara's finger hovers above the map.

'It isn't the only place.'

'Look sis, you're right.' You give a cheeky grin. 'But good motels are few and far between.'

'There's Bellingen.'

'Too far. I don't want to drive after dusk. Anyway, didn't you say Dr. Mezzner had mentioned going back?'

She gives you a sideways look. 'If I do go back, Lin, it will be at the wight time.'

For a moment you wonder whether there is ever a right time for anything.

'We've not discussed it, if that's what you mean. H.M. never says much, I've told you before. He sits at the end of the woom. It's like talking to myself, unless I do a sand-play. Or wead.' By her look, you know she's about to impart a secret. When you were growing up, there was something Kara always hustled out of sight, something she was at pains to keep to herself.

She's read your thoughts.

'I used to hide my Journal, even from you.' She studies the depths of your navy-blue coat, then raises her head to gaze silently at everything rushing by: dusty-green canyons, up-sweeps of ochre cliff. And in the middle distance a silvery body of water, creeping like molten glass upon the flat.

After a while she breaks the silence with a rare little laugh. 'No kangawoos. Wemember, Lin? Going out to Oma and Papa's on the dirt?'

'I used to count the road-kill.'

'Yuk!' She retreats again into the folds of the Florentine scarf.

'Kara, you were such a city kid! You could've done with a dose of country-kid callousness. Anyway, what about dead galahs? They're everywhere. Our precious fauna is sacrificed all the time. You've been away too long.'

She shakes her head. 'I took it all with me, when I went.'

'You, and Patrick White.'

'And Dowothea Mackellar.'

'And every other Aussie who's ever missed the smell of the bush.'

You laugh together. Then she goes misty-eyed.

'Something I am looking forward to, coming back up here,' she says wistfully, 'is seeing the country again. Bweathing it, smelling it.'

'Knowing more?'

Now she suspects you're up to something. She becomes defensive, eyeing you.

'About myself, d'you mean?'

'Hey sis!' You grin, or is it just a rueful smile? 'Most people never get a second chance. Even the great Hugo Mezzner would tell you that.'

She flashes a hurt, angry glance. 'Except he's gone.'

Kara looks startled as you tell her, quietly, 'I'm making an executive decision. We're about to stop.'

'Here?'

'Near here.'

'Now?'

'Before sunset.'

As you drive off the highway, she lowers her window.

'Doesn't look like Dewinda to me.'

'We're still on the outskirts, sis. Anyway, I think you'll find places like this have changed. It's not wheat and sheep any more, its tourism and passing trade. With a little help from welfare; imported OAPs and single mums.'

She bristles. 'What's wong with single mums?'

'Did I say anything was wrong with them?' Now, of all times, you must avoid an argument. Meekly you mumble, 'I was just rambling.'

Again she stares ahead. 'I wonder how this place survives?'

'Oh, someone had a brilliant idea. To create a great monstrosity – luckily it's way over there – and call it The Big Mushroom. A huge, flesh-coloured thing with a domed-rubber top. The guy who thought it up was clever, he brought in a hot little Sydney agency to "authenticate" a few "local myths". You know, the grove, the cave, the standing stones, that sort of thing. Kids love it! Now there are places around here with "magical powers". The Festival of the Mushroom happens every second-year – at full moon, of course.'

'Is it anything like Glastonbuwy?'

'Oh, much noisier than Glastonbury.'

Morning looms misty-pale. As you pull back the curtains on the large motel window to see that the grass outside is white and frosty and the air grey, almost brumal. You shiver but refuse to indulge the feeling; pulling a cotton wrap over your bathers you make your way outdoors and take the plunge, regardless, into breathtaking icy chill. For a moment you think your body might freeze but, paradoxically, the more you swim the more it starts to warm.

A little while later you, Kara and Bette are passing a high board along the roadside. It welcomes you to Derinda, announcing the town population: 6900.

'Remember that ancient café? The one with the old mirrors? If it's still there.'

Kara hugs herself close, with folded arms. 'I don't want to meet anyone,' she says grumpily.

'Kara,' you plead, 'Who could we possibly meet? There might be a few Sherde rellies around somewhere, but if you ask me they all left years ago.'

Silence.

'What about the house?'

'Grannie left it to Bart. Don't know, after that. The Church! The Institute Hall!' You sound as excited as a kettle at full boil, until you realize Kara isn't interested. She's afraid. 'C'mon, sis. It's not that bad!'

Almost too quietly, she says, 'It is.'

Whatever happened years ago had something to do with Bart. Bart was the last of the Sherdes, born a few years after Stella. People said he didn't look like the rest. His older brothers had green eyes, and Stella's skin was pale as moonlight, but Bart's eyes were dark brown, almost black, and his face had a greyish cast. He was the only one of his generation to see active service, but in previous generations the Sherdes had always prided themselves on producing soldiers. That Bart had fulfilled an important family tradition was openly acknowledged; your father reminded you, as little girls, that Bart was to be respected.

Coming out of the Army soon after his father died, he returned to the family home. But the only thing Bart ever did was to build a high wooden fence on three sides of the large house block. Apart from this, he spent his time by himself, in a detached garage at the rear. Cream paint peeled off the once handsome lattice-ways, jasmine crept over to cover them. Nothing was pruned, the garden grew wild. The pretty garden beds that Grandpa Sherde had always taken so much pride in went entirely to seed; the only things left were rows of rosemary bushes and a creep of poisonous pink oleanders.

When you were small and Kara was still a toddler, Dad had brought you and Stella to Derinda for the Anzac Day weekend. It wasn't that your father was a soldier, he was not, but he worshipped soldiers. His father, Papa Hille, had been born about the same time as this new nation and, as a first generation Australian, he was keen to do as all the boys around him were doing and join the blood-letting. But to Papa's lasting disappointment he had no way at all of getting to the First World War, even by putting up his age, and he was not accepted for the Second. Unwittingly he passed to his son, your father, an invisible guilt about this, together with an admiration that was shared by many of his countrymen. For them, Anzac Day held certain rituals. From the time little Kara could walk Dad took you both to the Dawn Service in Martin Place. It was exciting. You were awed by the hush, the crowd, the bugle, and the sight of important people laying wreaths on the Cenotaph.

Grannie's house was cold in the way that many large, high-ceilinged brick-built country houses are in the early autumn. Dad drove the four of you down town in his new Ford, steering by eerie street lights that emitted an incandescent glow, a bright white burst at the centre, and a burning outer of thin transparent blue. Beyond and above you could see the brightening sky, not yet streaked with crimson, looking like a stretch of threadbare denim washed through with faded night.

Dad parked his new car where everyone could see it, not far from the War Memorial. Kara was still a tiny tot, so he picked her up and carried her. You walked behind, holding Stella's hand. Straggly lines of locals had already lined the street; you looked up shyly to see the creased face of an old farmer, the sad eyes of a widow woman, and, with small flags waving in their hands, a number of town children. All beneath the awnings of Watson's store.

Watson's had once been handsome, its big oblong windows the town's greatest attraction. Those windows had often come alive with model figures clothed in fashion items, white blouses with a touch of lace, beige or navy pleated linen skirts, a daring dash of red scarf at the throat – or sometimes, as window dressers worked, not clothed at all. Once a year they were decked with bunches of balloons and banks of fresh flowers to sell many a Panama hat, ladies' bathing costume, gentleman's umbrella, damask table-cloth, electric toaster, christening mug, or crystal dressing-table set. But when a shopping mall and big box stores opened in a nearby town, only an hour's drive away, Watson's grand façade began to fall to neglect.

Under those wide awnings, the mood was sombre. Derinda had lost an unusually large number of sons and daughters in both world wars, and this was never to be forgotten. Groups of ex-servicemen and women stood proud and straight, the drum major out in front, bearskin above his eyes. At the tilt of his baton, a glint of brass and a skirl of the pipes, the day came to life. The oldest of the veterans was taken in a wheelchair to the middle of the street; others fell in behind.

Stella looked pretty that morning in a dress of smooth beige linen, embroidered on the collar, buttoned down the front. At her neck was a

scarf of white-and-chocolate silk, over her shoulders she'd draped a furry brown coat. She was pleased to see Bart among the diggers, marching in the second-last row. After the Last Post was sounded the gathering broke up, then every Sherde in town went back to Grannie's. There were plenty of uncles and aunts, but no children. Their parents said the kids were busy with this or that. You never saw any of your cousins at that house.

The mahogany table in the dining room was laid with platters of oven-baked vine tomatoes, potted veal, chicken sandwiches, and piles of wisplight scones that Stella had got up to bake at 2.00 a.m. Best of all, to you, were the buttery round pikelets; they came with their own shiny slabs of golden-pink quince cheese that slid about on Grannie's warmed Doulton plates.

Once the tea was over members of the family began to move towards the sitting room. Dad picked up little Kara and took her in with him. That's when Bart grabbed you. You screamed; you'd always hated being close to Uncle Bart. What you disliked about him most was his odd soured-lemon smell. He lifted you so fast and high that the skirt of your cotton dress flew up. Then he turned you around towards his face and lowered you, brushing the front of your panties with his thick blue lips. As you struggled one of the service medals he was wearing swung out and clipped you just above the eye. You wailed, but nobody heard, as he held you down hard in his lumpy heaving lap.

This old café holds a sense of *deja-vu*: the enduring black-red paint, the silver-shadowed letters, the fan-shaped mirrors hanging on metal chains, the rows of dark stained booths. You recognise the pair of brown Bentwood chairs in both large windows, the shiny chrome counter-fittings, the paint-faded mural of Athens stretched along the length of the back wall.

Kara orders only a cup of black tea, but you are ravenous because of the early swim. You decide on fresh field mushrooms, and when they arrive, large and buttery, you remember how your sister likes black food. You ask her, 'Would you like some?'

But her hand goes to her abdomen, as though she's in pain.

'Not hungwy,' she replies.

Out of nowhere there appears a middle-aged face, eroded as desert rock by tough bright sun and harsh dry wind. It belongs to a squat woman with sturdy legs that bow abruptly into her flat brogues. She wears brown stockings and a floppy floral hat, the stitched brim brushes the top rim of her spectacles.

'Scuse me. You wouldn't be old Missus Sherde's granddaughters, by any chance?'

For a moment you hesitate. 'Yes, we are, as a matter of fact.'

'I remember when you were tiny. Beautiful little girls, you were, with lovely frocks. I'm Glore Beatty from up next door.'

'Oh, yes!' This causes Glore to beam, but you can't say in any truth that you do remember. 'I'm Linda, this is Kara.'

You turn towards your sister but she scowls, using the coat-collar as a defense, drawing her neck down tight.

'All wight.' Her muffled comment sounds angry.

Gulping back a dread that Kara might burst out with something embarrassing unless you get her out of here, you turn again to Glore. 'We were just asking, what happened to the house?'

'Want to come up and see? Belongs to my son. Always liked the look of that place, he did. Won the lottery about the same time Bart died, so he bought it. Got 'em all now, along that bit of street.'

'What did you say his name was? Does he live there?'

'Donny, name's Donny; still lives with me. His own caravan, mind, but over my place. Those houses, they're all empty.'

'What became of the furniture?'

'Stored, the lot of it. When Donny got your Gran's place, everything was still there. Come up and have a cuppa, you can see.'

Your sister eyes you impatiently. 'Isn't it time we got back on the woad?'

But now you've caught sight of Glore's pile of shopping. 'C'mon, Kara, let's give Mrs. Beatty ...'

'Call me Glore.'

‘... Glore, a lift up the hill.’

Glore leads the way, outlined in semi-gloom. Richly layered, close-impacted spider webs line the grey wooden window panes; there’s a low-pitched drone from captured flies. You squeeze down a narrow darkened hallway, between a weatherboard wall and a row of cedar wardrobes. Nothing looks familiar, single items are indistinguishable amongst piles of stuff packed upon itself. Stacks of mattresses, heaps of stripped-off beds with antiquated mesh-wire bases that were supposed to last forever. You think you recognise a double bed with the round pink decorations on its uprights; you’re sure those suspended porcelain knobs are the same that shivered and shook when you two stirred in your sleep. Kara was often frightened in that bed, she’d call out in the dark and you would comfort her. Then you’d cuddle up close together and drift back to sleep.

So far your Derinda agenda has gone smoothly, but the enormity of what you’re trying to do is starting to dawn. It hits you as you recognise, through Glore’s frayed net curtains, the orange brick chimneys with the red pots from your ‘Indarde’ dream. This glimpse, so close, proves unexpectedly powerful; normally you can shrug off such things, but you hadn’t expected to feel like this. In some curious way you seem to have momentarily re-entered your dream. The image from your childhood has brought with it a heap of unexpected associations: compulsive attraction, unaccountable fear, daring invitation. And a sense of resistance you know must be overcome.

Glore pours the long-brewed tea from a brown glazed pot, apologizing for the lack of cake. She breaks open a dusty packet of biscuits.

‘D’you think Donny would mind?’ you ask tentatively. ‘We wouldn’t touch anything.’

‘Nothing left to touch, love. He’s taken everything.’ She heaps three white sugars into her cup.

‘Linda ...’ growls Kara.

You give your sister a nervous smile.

‘So if you think he wouldn’t mind, we’ll pop around.’

Glore's back gate is next to the old Sherde house. But Kara's staying put. You know she witnessed awful scenes in there; you remember your sister telling you how afterwards the strange woman had taken Stella's place. She was convinced the impostor, the stranger who wore white gloves, had simply appeared, pretending to be Stella. She'd co-opted your mother's clothes and the rest of her things, including the prized hatbox. Your flesh had crept when your little sister fixed you with a steely eye, crossed her heart, spat over her shoulder, and said, *I've never seen Mum since.*

You have the same flesh-creeping sensation now. But at the same time you're in no doubt this is your last chance to sort it out. You know you have to pull yourself together.

'Come on, we've got this far,' you tell her gently.

'All wight for you!'

'Kara, look,' you say quietly, 'there's nothing in there to frighten you.'

'There was.'

'Was, was. Long time ago.'

'That's where I lost Mum!'

'I know Kara, I know. But Mum's dead. We're on the way to her funeral.'

'I am speaking of Stella!' There are tears of frustration in her eyes. 'Stella was lost. Mrs. Whitegloves is dead.'

You sigh. 'Let's not start, all over again.' You try a change of tone. 'Look, Kara, I really want to see Grannie's house, I'm curious. Please come with me.'

'Well I'm not going in that way.' She points to the hill behind. 'That's the stock woute.'

As you approach from the front, your sister refuses to look. She concentrates instead on the small bits of gravel that are crunching underfoot. With the sound of your footsteps on the long front path comes an image of Grannie's face: you remember how, as a small girl, you'd blackened your copy-book when you told her, enthusiastically, you thought her mashed potatoes smelled like chicken-feed. You didn't get a chance to say how you loved that grainy tang, how it reminded you of

joyous times at Inverbrook, running around the haystack, feeding the chooks with Oma. Before you could think twice, she'd reached for the green quince-rod that she kept by the door.

My, how this place has shrunk. Once austere and daunting, it's now spare and ordinary. The large block has been cleared, even of its hardy oleanders, and the absence of the heavy green wooden verandah blinds makes it look smaller, forlorn.

Strange to see these rooms empty. You remember that Grannie had a weakness for pictures and porcelain; her artistic eye was fine. She'd come from a wealthy family and, as a young woman, taken the Grand Tour. She'd chosen everything in this house herself, and paid for it with her own money: Stella once told you her mother had ordered three Tiffany lamps from a catalogue and had them sent from America. You never saw one of them lit.

In Grannie's day the parlour had been stuffed with stout, curvaceous furniture; only the backs of the handsome grandmother and grandfather chairs, covered in buttoned velvet, were in any way distinct. The light was dim, the dark drapes drawn against fading; slim shafts of sunlight fell in pools on the polished wooden floor.

'See? Nothing here except a lamp-shade,' you announce, poking your head around another doorway.

Kara hugs the lintel. 'This was Bart's room,' she says almost inaudibly. You shake your head. 'I don't remember.'

'I can't forget.'

The rear balcony remains an oddity, an unlikely later addition. Whoever put it there, and why, remains a mystery. As a curious child, standing on tiptoe, peering, trying to push the unoiled door, all you could see beyond was barrenness. Ring-barked hills dotted with the blackened stumps of what were once gum trees.

Now Kara tries the handle. It doesn't budge, so she braces her thin shoulder and goes at it with a thud. It gives, and next thing you know she's lying on the balcony floor.

'Kara! Are you all right?'

'The strangest thing,' she says slowly, her breath short. 'I've been here before, like this. That's how I got The Cwater, this thing above my forehead.' She feels into her hairline for the recession that's been part of her for so long. 'When they pushed me, shouting *dirty little girl*, I came out hurtling, and crashed down on a piece of metal ... about here. It did something to my skull; it split my mind. After that my head hurt for a long, long time.

'I lay face down without moving. I kept thinking they must come for me, and say that they were sorry. But they didn't! They didn't, Linda. I couldn't believe it. I've never got over it. Hour after endless hour, through the heat of the afternoon, on into the night. Uh. It's the longest time I can ever remember. I was thirsty, I was bleeding; I couldn't move. I could do nothing but gaze outwards.' She lifts her slight body, pointing to the ring-barked hill, with its entrenchment of rough red road. 'Staving at the stock-woute.'

Later she stands beneath the trellis, clutching the outsize coat about her, although the day is warming to hot. The garden structure above has a dangerous list; beneath it lie stone blocks from something long gone. Kara perches on one of them, looking around.

'The shed,' she whispers.

You wait for her to say more, then ask, 'What? What's in the shed?'

She seems in a trance, speaking with stops and starts. 'The soldier, khakis and slouch hat. Can't you hear the medals jingle? That same soldier who was here when I was by myself.

'There was an apple box I'd found out the back in the laundry, beside the copper. I cleaned it up and looked for something to put on top of it; I saw an old tea-towel of Grannie's in the bottom kitchen drawer and smuggled it away to use as a cover. Then there were the little things I pretended to sell. Every day I collected silver tops from the bottles of milk and washed them; I dried them in the sun and splashed them with some of Stella's pink nail polish, I threaded them together to make a long snakey chain. In Grannie's embroidery box I'd seen lots of coloured cottons, so I waited until she was having a rest. I crept into the sitting room and took some from each skein. I made them into plaits, all soft and

shiny – they were lovely. Oh yes, along the front of the box I hung bunches of rosemary tied with some of my hair ribbons. Uh. And a yellow rose from the top of the twellis.

‘My prized possessions were those funny old dolls from the chest in the bedroom. You know the ones? I arranged them in rows, then I did their voices. They were my friends, how they loved to bargain! Uh. But then the soldier appeared and spoiled it all. He upped the price. All the time I’d been lost in my own little world, he was hovering, watching from somewhere, waiting for the moment. He took a handful of coins from his pocket and placed them, one by one, on top of the wooden ludo counters I used for money. Those coins made me feel uneasy: I knew what I had to sell wasn’t worth that much. The soldier insisted, he liked those ribbons.’

Your stomach churns. But surely Bart wasn't in uniform?

‘The soldier came out of the shed. What I hated most were his boots. They were so stiff: polished, shiny. He kept them on all the time.’

You’ve heard enough, now you must do something.

Jumping up, you say, ‘Well, he can't be there now! I’m going to have a look.’

‘Oh Linda, take care,’ she calls after you.

At first you hesitate. The double doors are rotten with termites. They could easily swing off their hinges.

It’s dark in there. No, dank. More than dank, smelly; a dense musty odour assaults your nostrils. This place hasn't been aired in years. The remains of a sawdust heap sits like a sad sore in the middle of the floor, part-covered by a long-decayed hessian bag. There’s a most peculiar feeling, as though the ghosts of yesterday are pressing you to let them out. From what you can recall of your childhood visits, this shed was strictly out of bounds, both Grannie and Stella forbade you to go anywhere near it.

You shiver to your soul.

The single window’s blocked, ancient brown paper taped over it. Your urge is to run, but something takes you further. You feel compelled to make a gesture, destroy the dark. You walk towards the window and tear

down the brown paper, but the shed remains gloomy. You cross to other side and gradually free the movement of a metal key, rusted long ago in a black lock.

A shaft of sunlight greets you.

Chapter 6

She didn't fall asleep until you were on the highway. As you waved goodbye to Glore, she asked you to drive along Grannie's street and turn down the hill towards the War Memorial. Approaching the cenotaph you were struck by a familiar sight: a giant soldier, standing high on a granite plinth. When you were small you had often admired that soldier; Dad told you and little Kara how brave and strong he was. Now the alchemy of time and elements has changed his ruddy brashness; he oozes turquoise in lichen-like patches like the sunken bust of a mythical god on a deep sea bed.

Kara urged you to park Bette Blue by the station and then walk back. She looked up, her eyes fixed on the sky above the soldier's head. She began to move her gaze downwards towards his face, holding it there a while. Then she looked towards his boots, streaks of bright copper shining through them in the places that were meant to show high polish. She repeated what she'd done, several times; by the last time she was calm. It seemed she was performing a ritual.

When you asked her what she'd been doing she said, 'I don't weally know. Putting something to wights, perhaps? I can't explain, exactly. But that's how I've always been. How I've survived. I change the memories I can't handle, I put mind-pictures in their place.'

You wonder how Kara will feel about confronting your father. She hasn't seen him for years. Crossing the border, she wakes, and begs you not to go on.

'O.K. But I'll have to call Dad. He'll be disappointed, Kara. Don't you want to speak to him, yourself?'

She shakes her head. 'Just tell him I'm sowwy, I've got a headache. I'll see him soon.'

You suggest an emergency stop at the Casino, and after the usual procrastinations she agrees – on condition you stay the night there with her. You think how much Stella would have disapproved of the

Casino: your mother had a lifelong resistance to gambling, same as her mother; she'd even been known to refuse the gift of a humble scratchie. But it's the easiest option, and not too far off track. You've stayed here before, for the Annual Press & Print Awards. On that occasion you'd had fun – that is, apart from the last morning, when you woke with a hangover so grotesque you couldn't get out of bed. You'd barely managed to grope for the phone, call reception, and cancel your flight.

This place has a buzz about it, a we-never-sleep kind of vibe. In some ways it reminds you of summer nights in Manhattan. Your sister is exhausted; once you've settled her into one of the beds you take yourself to the bar. There's a girl singer in the corner near a potted fig, belting out homage to Tammy Wynette. And a good-looking traveller, opposite. He gives you the eye but you're not in the mood; the last thing you want tonight is a chat-up. You avert your eyes, staying long enough to down a single sparkling glass of Mumm.

Back in the room you sit silent, listening to your sister's steady breathing. You look at the spread of lights below and find it hard to believe that you managed to what you did, to-day. Tomorrow, if she agrees, you'll leave Kara here and drive up the coast.

Murrumbin Waters is a clique of respectable middle class townhouses with an air of prosperous restraint. Uniformly green, meticulously manicured lawns bind this ten-year-old community, its lines of palms and jigsaw of boat ramps on a maze of canals.

Your heart leaps when you see your father waiting by the curb.

'Dad, oh Dad!'

You hug him, good and long, trying to study his face, searching the way he really feels. He asks many things, they come out in a tumble. How is Kara? Where is she? Will she be all right? What does she look like now? He's excited at the thought of seeing her, but you are a little more cautious.

'Don't worry Lin, I haven't forgotten. Many's the time I tried to rescue your sister from the situations she got herself into.'

You say nothing, not because there's nothing to be said but because this is not the time. You smile weakly. Being the control-freak you undoubtedly are, you always have, at the back of your mind, a list of things waiting to be done. And there's one in particular you must attend to now.

What is Stella to wear? Ever since she'd become involved with Light in the Spirit, your mother had talked of death as her ultimate glory. You'd tried to stop her, laughing in an embarrassed way, telling her not to be so silly. But she'd keep coming back to the subject, and only a few weeks ago she'd insisted on telling you, despite your protests, that when the time came you'd find a letter in her top right dressing-table drawer. Now you're looking for it and, sure enough, here it is: a stiff, cream parchment envelope addressed to you. A photograph and small brass key fall out.

Linda,

My final wish is to look as I might if I was alive amongst you at the funeral. I don't want to miss the party. I know, with your wonderful flair and style, my darling girl, you can find a way to make my dream come true.

I want to wear my fine wool suit. It's in the dark red shade of which I am most fond, the kind of wool that's cool in summer and warm in winter. With the cream *crepe-de-Chine* blouse that you, my generous loving girl, brought back for me from Paris. It is the perfect foil for the magenta silk scarf you also chose, that awful year when you went away to Raltrick – you were such a little girl – and which I have cherished with my life ever since.

Please, darling, make my face up nicely; I know that you know how to do it, with all your wonderful film experience. To help you, I have saved a back-issue of *Vogue* with a special lipstick feature – they use all the right colours. I want you to place the snapshot of your Uncle Bartholomew wearing his soldier's uniform in the upper left-hand pocket of my suit-jacket, next to my heart. I think you know that Bart was buried with a photograph of me, I feel this is the least that I can do for him. Drape the scarf loosely at my neck, please dear, and arrange it nicely at the ends, then pin my small grey pearl brooch onto the right-hand lapel of my suit. Lastly, please do make sure to put a nice new pair of white wrist gloves upon my hands and cross my arms in supplication.

Thank you for ever, my darling Linda, my adored daughter who is so like me.

Your loving mother,

Stella

P.S. The hatbox is on top of the built-ins in the master bedroom, the ones with the mirrored doors.

The letter leaves you flushed with embarrassment. It is in your mother's handwriting, but while it effuses about you it neglects to mention either your father or your sister. You're puzzled at this, deeply hurt; it makes the back of your scalp feel as though it's shrinking. There has always been something primeval about Stella, her presence has been known to make a person shiver. You've felt it before and you feel it now. You can't help thinking of your mother as a misplaced goddess.

Carefully re-folding the stiff cream sheet, you place it with the hatbox key at the back of your New York pocketbook, vowing Dad and Kara will never see it. You retrieve the hatbox and, with the photograph, scarf and brooch in your possession, think your task as good as done. But you haven't reckoned on the gloves. You look wherever you can, around the room, but curiously, since your Mother wore those damn things day and night, there are none to be found. Glancing at your watch, know you have to make a move.

On the way to the funeral parlour, you ask yourself whether you really want to view the body. By the time you arrive, your decision's a firm *no*: you tell yourself you might feel more like it tomorrow. You're holding back, in the manner you're accustomed to at work, still acting the professional even though what you're doing now is not what you are professional at. Linda Hille, trying to remain perfect; trying to keep up, as usual; striving to stay immaculate. But you are tense, very tense, and your sensibilities are riding too near the surface. Your temper's on short leash. Your hips and back are starting to ache.

The attendant takes Stella's blouse and shoes, scarf, ring and suit. You've already tucked the photograph of Bart into the upper pocket of the jacket, an act you found repellant. Your stomach turned as you did it. But it was what your mother had asked, one of her final wishes, and although you knew you could never hope to carry out all of them, you could do this. You must admit, however, that you're still puzzled at what she'd said

about a photograph of herself being buried with Bart. He'd died suddenly, just after your parents had moved to Queensland and Murrumbin Waters. Stella wasn't able to attend his funeral, so you went instead. As Bart lay stiff in his coffin, wearing that same row of medals, you and the other mourners stood in the Derinda cemetery awaiting late arrivals. You were still there, in the searing sun, the bugler at the ready, when the awful news came through. The car carrying the latecomers had run off a narrow gravel road and crashed into a tree. A small girl had been killed.

You remember this vividly as you pin the brooch on the lapel. At the same time you dimly hear the attendant, in a pleasant but matter-of-fact voice, telling you that putting metal on the body will mean a more expensive cremation. Something about the cost of fuel.

'Oh, do please just get on with it,' is all you can say.

At last you ring Kara to find that she's fine, if not downright happy, at the Casino. She says she feels safe in the room and the staff are nice to her. Dad asked you to be back at Murrumbin by six; he's expecting a visit from the Pastor. You have time only to race in and grab a sandwich when there's someone at the door. He introduces himself as Irving Matrine the Fourth and, with the unfailing enthusiasm of the gospel preacher, tells you he hails from Topeka, Kansas, where his branch of the charismatic movement began. He's proud to say his father, his father, and his father, too, were all Pastors. Matrine is exceedingly tall and thin, almost gaunt, the way he's dressed gives not the slightest hint of his occupation. Clean-shaven, with longish hair that struggles in waves towards the shoulders, he wears small round red-framed glasses.

Before long he is explaining his beliefs. Outbursts of 'speaking', he tells you energetically, occur spontaneously, and have done since Biblical times. Speaking in tongues, he assures you, is something purely natural, although it was for centuries ignored. Only when a Christian group took it up in California did it begin its phenomenal rise. Now millions of people, praise the Lord, enjoy its blessings each and every day.

Matrine's words, and their delivery, remind you rather uncomfortably of Grannie Sherde's religion – one that defies reconstruction and can still to

this day inspire dread. As a child you found it nonsensical in a scary kind of way. Thank your lucky stars you escaped to an Anglican Girls' Boarding School. At Raltrick you could get away with not much more than an occasional glance at the Bible and a few mumbled words from the Prayer Book. Along with your present discomfort, you are starting to feel guilty again about the life Kara must have led under the scrupulous Sunday eye of your mother.

'You may know that Stella, as a girl,' Matrine announces, 'was obliged to keep her silence on, hem, certain goings-on within the privacy, shall we say, of her close-knit family,' he looks at you, then at your father. You have never heard anything of this. He repeats, 'The son she lost before you were born, Linda.

'Stella's mother told her daughter to always maintain "face". In the Sherde household, "face" was to be kept up at all costs. Say, do you know that old hymn? "Up, up, up, as a pilgrim to the light?" Stella knew that if she always looked her best, she'd be obeying her mother's wish. Stella honoured her mother, beautifully, solemnly, to the very last, with outstanding grace. Just look at her immaculate white gloves.'

You glance at your father but he is staring fixedly at the wall.

Matrine adds, 'Free of stain, a testament to the deepest desires of her beatific soul.'

What the Pastor has revealed about your mother and her family is fascinating. You want to ask more, but with a flourish he turns his attention to you.

'May I ask what business you are in, Miss Hille, may I call you Linda? Your mother often told us how successful you were. She was very proud.'

'Ah.' You knew that Stella had boasted of your achievements and you'd always hated it. However now, at this moment, you are stopped at the mere mention of her name.

You clear your throat. 'I work in advertising.'

His face breaks into a smile. 'What a coincidence! You won't guess what my first job was, in New York City. A message-boy for D'Arcy.'

'You don't say!' But it isn't a surprise. You've been thinking all along that Matrine would do well in advertising. He has the intensity of a global client, fervent to sell the brand.

'Um, "speaking" ...?' you ask vaguely.

He nods; he's been anticipating the question. 'We call it the soul's pooo-uuure enthusiasm.'

'We'll see it, tomorrow?'

He shakes his head. 'A funeral isn't usually the place or the time, Ms. Hille, unless of course, praise the Lord, it *happens*. Some of the people who loved Stella could indeed be moved in such a way, praise the Lord, but "speaking" is more likely to occur otherwise. Our services are held in bigger venues, at set times.'

'Oh. I was hoping to find out why it had such appeal for my mother.'

Matrine's a born charismatic, no doubt of that. You believe him when he says he belongs to a long line of them. He has an indisputable sense of authority and with his elongated features, he looks, in a way, like an ancient Archbishop of Canterbury. You feel yourself somehow drawn to him, at the same time knowing well that this kind of man is not for you. There's a desire to be close, to be included in the invisible net he can throw over an audience and draw in tight.

'Well I am here to testify, to tell you,' he says, smiling broadly. 'What Light in The Spirit offers true believers is something utterly unique.' He eyeballs you in the same way you might have done yourself, when presenting to prospective clients. He continues, 'Stella was given the grace to encounter – and The Spirit entered at her first experience. So much so, she fell on the floor. Of course we were there to support her, and to witness this intimate connection, praise the Lord. She found for herself that the Spirit "art everywhere and filleth all things". We saw it with our own eyes: your mother, bathed in heavenly, healing light.' His cheek flinches as he bites back tears. 'Afterwards, she confessed. She told us: "For the first time in my life, I feel completely clean." '

'As you know from the Bible, my dears, many are called but few are chosen. But Stella was chosen from the start, praise the Lord! And

blessed with the “speaking” gift. Her journey continued and she was renewed.’

‘But, um,’ you manage to say, ‘if Stella could communicate so personally with the Spirit, why did she need a Pastor?’

Matrine smiles, he's been expecting this. ‘Well, Ms. Hille, some people errantly believe Light in The Spirit is revolutionary. But as a matter of fact, we're really quite conventional. Exactly like any other group with a message to take to the world. That's what I – humble servant and Pastor – try to do, while interpreting “speaking”. Please understand, Mr Hille and Ms Hille, please understand what we are not. Light in the Spirit isn't Calvinist; it isn't Methodist. It's whatever you believe it is, an undeniable part of today. Some non-conformist persuasions have, alas, excluded joy, but our aim is to reinstate it. This you will witness tomorrow. You will see your mother's funeral as a wondrous event. A celebration of her joy in the Spirit, and our joy in her.’

He holds up his hand and closes his eyes in a gesture of benediction.

‘Praise the Lord. And may the Spirit bless you.’

When you arrive at the Casino, Kara is ready and waiting. Ready in red, that is. Your sister has not, to your knowledge, worn this colour since she was a child; the sight of her in it now is extraordinary. A deep-rose skirt ending at the calf, below it high black boots; a darker-red top in fine meshy stuff, more the colour of cherries; a cheeky French beret of soft wool-tweed with warp-threads woven through in black.

She must have gone shopping. Everything she's wearing looks new except the boots, a pair of yours she's borrowed from The Beach.

'Black! It makes you look so sad,' she says sympathetically.

Suddenly you find yourself wanting a drink!

You are wearing a black suit, but the jacket has three red buttons and underneath there's a McCartney tee of pale lime silk. Is that sad?

'And you are wearing red!' you say bluntly.

She's defensive. 'Well, I'm not in the least sad. Quite the opposite.'

'Fine. But let me be sad. Sad for Mum.'

Would one of those tiny bottles from the mini-bar really hurt?

She starts to laugh. 'You weally believe it is Mum, don't you? Poor Lin.' She puts her arm around you. 'You must feel tewwible.'

For once in your life you do feel nervous. You wish this event well and truly over.

The minute you and Kara cross the Casino's busy foyer the clouds start to empty. While you were still upstairs the sky turned from cloudless blue to yellowed pewter-grey, the sudden change accompanied by thunder and a spectacular lightning show. Now palms and other sturdy trees bend against the blast; in no time the gutters run brim-full, the highway's under wash.

'It'll pass,' you say, empty words to reassure yourself.

But Kara seems calmer than you.

'I hope so. I didn't bring an umbrella.' She seems contained, even nonchalant. 'I thought I'd go for a walk while you're in there.'

'In where?'

'Well, you don't think I'm going to stay, do you? Once I've seen it *is* Mrs. Whitegloves. Twuly, Linda, uh, that's all I want. Then I'll make myself scarce. If the wain hasn't stopped, I'll find a coffee shop.'

You should have had that brandy.

'So you'd leave me there by myself? My sister!'

'Dad will be there.'

'Yes, with the people who are bringing him. The lady next door.'

'Didn't Helena say she was coming?'

'Yes.' You sound uncertain, unnerved at your sister's sanguinity.

'Linda', says Kara, 'If Helena said she's coming, she is coming.'

You drive on in silence, a silence interrupted by a series of empty rumbles, echoing grumbles, as the tail of the near-spent storm sweeps inland across the Great Divide.

'Anyway,' Kara offers. 'Funewals are like weddings, totally unintewesting.'

'I've been to some great weddings. Yours was one.'

She gives you a withering glance. 'The food and dwink, you mean.'

'Everything. The church at Iffley is magic. The John Piper window! And you looked beautiful.'

'I don't think.'

'Listen, sis, you looked beautiful then and you look beautiful now.'

Her face reddens, if pale smooth alabaster ever can. 'Perhaps this does suit me,' she says shyly, feeling the fabric.

'It's a lovely colour; you must wear it more often.' Almost as an after-thought, you add: 'Um, didn't tell you. The Pastor came around last night.'

'Pastor?'

'From Light in The Spirit'.

You feel it isn't right to repeat what Matrine told you about Stella, it may stir up her memories of Uncle Bart. If you did tell Kara, it might throw her. At the moment she seems settled, but there's always the chance she could launch, unexpectedly and publicly, into a stream of stories about the whereabouts of her imaginary Mum.

‘Irvine Matrine, that's the Pastor, he's an American. Impressive. Can't wait to see him in action. He's assured us this will be a joyous occasion; we'll be surprised.’

‘Well, I won't,’ says Kara perfunctorily. ‘I won't be there.’

You find the old Baptist chapel set behind an even older warehouse. Weatherboard, with pointed gables at each end of the sloping roof, it doesn't look much like a church except for a not-quite-square tower at one end and a crudely arched entrance at the other.

The car park is almost full, there's a crowd milling about. When you took your mother's clothes to the Funeral Parlour yesterday the Director suggested you should make your way to a small side-chapel at the left of the main building.

‘That's it, over there,’ you tell your sister as you park Bette Blue.

As the last of the ragged clouds departs the firmament starts to bling. Reflected too brilliantly from a puddle on the asphalt, the blaring sun stings the back of your eyes. Kara starts on ahead, calling to you over her shoulder: ‘Come on, Lin! I've been waiting for this moment ever since I can remember.’

You follow her into the small rectangular room. It isn't gloomy; as your eyes become accustomed to the light you see a cosy space, lit with candles, decorated with wide silver ribbons and great bunches of white flowers. The ceiling trails a bank of milky-coloured helium balloons.

Suddenly Kara, abruptly turning back, crashes into you.

‘Mum!’ she cries, gripping the lapels of your Matchiveski suit. ‘Linda, it's Mum.’

You stretch to get a glimpse of the face, the body in the casket. You see that it is Stella, composed exactly as she'd wished.

Kara's distraught. She sobs, ‘It's Mum! I know it is.’

Pastor Matrine, resplendent in a silver and black striped suit, black gauze shirt and grey silk-knit tie, appears in the chapel doorway.

‘Welcome to this joyous event! Good morning Linda, and ... ?’

Smiling widely, hands extended, he glides towards your sister, but ignoring him she rushes past, skidding on her knees. The leather of her

boots squeaks along the surface of the highly-polished, hospital-blue floor before she stops near the head of the casket.

‘Mum! Mum! Oh Mum, my darling Mum, I knew that you’d come back to us. What did I tell you, Linda?’ she cries. ‘Look,’ she gasps, ‘The little bwooch I gave her!’

She stares at the small pearl-shell brooch in the filigree frame: the carved profile of a woman, her hair in tight ringlets, curled up like tiny snakes.

‘She must have had it with her ...’ she lifts her eyes to the face, its careful coiffure, the perfect make-up, ‘... all this time.’

‘Who ...?’ Matrine’s close beside you, his voice low, his eyes partly obscured by his hand as though shading himself from a too-strong beam of sun.

Kara tackles him. ‘*Who* am I? *Who* am I?’ she demands belligerently. ‘My mother’s daughter, that’s who I am.’ She puts her hands on her hips, a pose you’ve never seen her use before. ‘Who are you?’

‘Kara, please.’ You try to quieten her.

‘And this?’ she continues, pointing into the casket. ‘This is my precious mother, not the woman you knew.’ She points to Stella’s bare hands, stridently telling Matrine, ‘That woman wore white gloves!’

The pastor looks at Stella’s uncovered hands and throws you a startled glance, just as the robust sound of gospel-singing swells in through the chapel door. Four pall-bearers enter, moving in time to the fanfare: large men dressed in white Harlequin suits, short capes swinging like wings from their shoulders.

‘My sister, Kara,’ you hurriedly explain.

‘Sister?’ Matrine is surprised. ‘But surely Stella only had one child, and that was you?’

The bearers wait for no-one. Moving ahead, they turn the casket towards the Chapel. As the raw, blunt, steely sound of reggae starts to meld and mix with gospel-singing.

‘What do you want to do?’ you whisper urgently.

But Kara isn’t in whispering mood.

'Do?' she answers loudly. 'Do?' she repeats, looking hurt that you should ask. 'What do you think I want to do? This is Mum's funeral, isn't it? There's no Mrs. Whitegloves any more, that witch has gone back where she came from.' She looks at you imploringly. 'I want to be near my darling Mum for as long as I can.'

Gathering your scattered wits, taking your sister's cold hand in yours, you step towards the door. A divine *A Capella* sound rushes at you:

Walk with me, hold my hand
Walk with me, hold me hand
Walk with me, hold me hand
I don't want to walk alone.

Give me courage, show me love
Give me the wisdom to rise above
Grant me serenity, let me know that you're with me
I don't want to walk alone.

Walk with me, hold my hand
Walk with me, hold me hand
Walk with me, hold me hand
I don't want to walk alone.

Show me an open palm:
Maybe when I see your hand I'll open my arms
Sometimes life has a bitter sting
So I ask you to ...

Walk with me, hold my hand
Walk with me, hold me hand
Walk with me, hold me hand
I don't want to walk alone.²

The chapel is decorated in white chrysanthemums. Ahead are tall vases, as in a swish Manhattan foyer, holding fan shaped stems with long green leaves, twisted-willow branches, pink and brown spotted lilies, spikes of Bird-of-Paradise with lapis tipped orange beaks and socketless blue eyes.

² Melanie Shanahan, *Walk with Me*. Song-writer.
Akasa. Albums. 12. Walk with Me. Lyrics.
<http://www.akasa.com.au/ar/releases.php?id=2&trackID=22> 17.03.07

The music changes to a wordless threnody, clear and bell-like, filling the chapel and making your flesh tingle. Coming towards you is a large Afro-American woman with open arms, lines of compassion on her face. Kara is whisked away by another as your hand is sought by a young child, a girl of about nine, with great round brown eyes and dark curling hair. She smiles at you. The voice of the first woman, now your guide, undulates like sea-waves in your ear. 'Your sister's with your father now, and all is well. They've lovingly embraced. So forget your problems, girl, let them go. This day belongs to Stella, the wonderful woman who was your mother. Stella was our friend. That's why we're here. We all loved Stella. So join us in celebrating her life.'

Below the melody there's a low, expectant babble. When you locate Kara again, on the other side, you see her crying and smiling. Directly behind are Ted and Helena; as you watch, Ted moves to sit beside your sister, while Helena joins you. You smile and squeeze her hand, pleased she's near, then look ahead to see that the casket is open and upright, resting on its end. The oddest thing: where your mother's eyes were closed before, they've now been opened. They're turning upwards. At first you recoil, until you hear the choir singing 'Upward, ever upward, as a pilgrim to the light.'

On your return, some hours later, you flop on one of Stella's immaculate couches. You rest your head on the back of it and close your eyes. By some miracle, your parents found themselves better off in retirement than they'd ever been before. Your father's superannuation had set them up nicely. And they'd made a more-than-modest profit on the sale of their Sydney house, thanks to the boom year of the Olympics. Stella had resisted decorating this place in nouveau-Queensland style, although she chose a theme of sugar pink and pale lime green to run right through from verandah to porch. Recently she'd hung a large, bright, gilt-framed Matisse flower print in the sitting room at the centre of a stark white wall.

Stella was fastidious about her house. She'd spend an inordinate amount of time arranging, say, a set of dining chairs to look impressive,

then forbid anyone to sit on them because of the fineness of their silk upholstery. From the time you were small, your mother seemed fussy about everything, but when she moved up here she became obsessive. She would guard her newly-acquired reproduction furniture, not just the chairs, watchful of any visitor who might leave an imprint or the slightest smudge.

As far back as you can remember, long before 'smoking out' was the polite thing to do, your mother forbade cigarettes. You used to be a smoker but you gave it up, cold turkey, years ago. You'd started at Raltrick, down behind the sports-sheds, near the oval, with some of the girls, and continued at Mountbrae house parties, where you would sometimes nonchalantly on Black Sobranies with the aid of a long ebony cigarette holder. But you never dared smoke in front of Stella. Instead, you and your father would go outside and sit together on the back steps, and have the best time – laughing and joking. Away from the rest, Dad would talk more freely, although he never told you anything you hadn't guessed.

Now you hear the murmur of Kara's voice coming from the tropical garden. She and Dad are talking.

Kara used to say she was sure that Dad, too, secretly hated Mrs. Whitegloves. He knew as well as anybody they were sharing their lives with a stranger, but he was afraid to do anything about it. He had no choice but to pretend she was making things up about Mum, but they had no need to discuss it.

At length you get up from the couch to see them sitting by the canal. They're in deep discussion, and from the few words you can catch it seems that Kara is telling him what happened that day at Derinda. As the sun sets, in a burst of flat pale orange along the horizon of a deepening azure sky, mosquitos come out to bite.

Suddenly you are startled to hear your father say, heatedly, 'But Kara, I knew that something had happened. I knew it! Someone had interfered with you, otherwise you wouldn't have had the infection that caused the gangrene. You would have kept the ovary. I asked you about Uncle Bart, don't you remember? You swore that nothing had happened.'

You stay still, almost paralysed, straining to hear every word.

'Dad,' Kara tells him in a voice that is, uncharacteristically, also raised. 'Dad, didn't you know what Mrs. Whitegloves told me?' Then she perfectly imitated Stella's sternest tone. 'She said: If you tell anyone, anyone at all, what happened at Derinda, I'll kill you.'

While the three of you are eating sandwiches and cake donated by the lady next door, your father remarks that Kara was a most sensitive child. This prompts your sister to find the Oxford Dictionary, then sit cross-legged on the floor with the large book open in her lap. She reads aloud:

'Sensitive:

1. Affected by something, for example, plants are sensitive to light.
2. Easily hurt or offended. *Oh yes!* And
3. Wequiring tactful tweekment.'

You're surprised that such precise psychological truths are to be found in what you'd always thought of as a work of factual reference.

Then she targets you. 'Was I a sensitive child?'

You hesitate. 'Um, I'd say ... highly strung. Like a beautiful violin.'

She dismisses your musical metaphor. 'But – did I wequire tactful treatment?' she asks bluntly. You can feel her piercing look, though you're lying on the floor with your eyes closed.

'Mm?'

'Of course I did!' she protests. 'Be honest, Linda, you had to handle me. You and everyone else.'

With the knowledge that, in the past, you'd stood by while others made fun of your little sister, knowing full well she was bewildered, confused and hurt, you gulp back something that's been swelling inside your chest, getting bigger every day. Because you're trying to remain the successful person your mother always wanted you to be, you must not implode or be found weeping in corners, especially now. You decide to take yourself to bed.

'Never mind, sis. I loved you,' you touch her gently on the shoulder as you pass by, swallowing down whatever it is that threatens to choke you. 'See you in the morning, Dad.' You blow a kiss across the room.

'And don't forget,' says Kara, 'Ted's taking me to lunch.'

Despite the unaccustomed weakness in your legs, brought on by the uncertain way you feel, you can't help stifling a small smile as you exit. You've known Ted for years, and seen him with so many different women, that the attention he's lavishing on your little sister doesn't seem quite real.

You barely get to shut the bedroom door before you're taken over. It doesn't seem like you but someone else in your body, you are uncontrollably shaking. Next thing you're face-down on top of the still-made bed. Emotions bigger than any you could remember fling you hard against yourself; it seems that different parts of you are fighting.

When you eventually stagger up to clean your teeth and take your clothes off, you feel nauseous; when you lie on the cool sheets you begin to toss and turn, unable to settle. You try to sleep, but images from Stella's funeral video, 'This Was My Life', keep coming back. In one way, the video was successful. The congregation loved it. And although, in it, your mother was wearing a plain, completely unadorned white pants-suit, most unlike her usual attire, you'd thought she looked good. She'd come across as an enigmatic, well-preserved lady who, praise the Lord, had found light in The Spirit.

But the life of Stella, as portrayed there, was quite unlike any life you'd known your mother to lead. To you it was purely fiction. Included here and there were a few black-and-white stills of your mother as a girl, one with her own family, including Uncle Bart as the babe with his mother, Granny Sherde. The only other live person beside Stella was the little girl who'd held your hand. She'd told you her name was Elektra; she was Pastor Matrine's youngest. The narrator's voice was that of an unknown mid-Pacific male. He'd kept referring to Elektra as Stella's 'inner child', but as far as you could see Elektra bore no relationship to your mother. You, your father, and Kara were not there, not even mentioned. That *hurt!* There was nothing to show that Stella was married, had a husband or a family. You were in your mother's house and you could feel her presence, but you couldn't ask her why she'd left you out.

No peace! More scenes from the chapel service came filtering through. You'd been trying hard to forget the crematorium, get it out of your mind. But again and again you kept driving out of Caloundra, pulling up at traffic lights, always behind the hearse, negotiating roundabout after roundabout. Until you finally saw the blue-and-white sign you'd been told to watch out for, and made the turn onto West Terrace. Until then, you were condemned to gaze again, vacantly, through Bette Blue's spotty windscreen, out, out, out, over choppy grey waters to Moreton Island.

You wanted to weep, but couldn't. You felt a giant elastic band around your head, pulling in tight. Another memory kept plaguing you: the sight of the Funeral Director offering your sister the flowers from the lid of your mother's coffin. The man picked up the sheath of long-stemmed natives – your mother's favourite bromeliads, banksias, tea-tree and gum-tips – and said to Kara, blandly, 'Want these? We're only going to throw them away.'

Next morning, when you finally open one aching eye, you feel cramped and hollow. You know now, without doubt, your mother is gone forever. You feel the void of never having known her, the emptiness of your relationship. Why hadn't you taken Stella seriously? Why didn't you make the effort to find out more about what made her behave the way she did? There must have been a reason. Or reasons. At the same time, you know you're torturing yourself with what are impossible thoughts, because Stella would never have told you anything. Your mother was the most closed, hidden, secretive person you've ever encountered.

Grave. You realise at this moment what that word means. A sense of gravity, a heaviness of the head, arms, and especially the legs, that's what you're feeling. For once in your life you don't want to get up. You start to make the effort, then fall back into the same position. Perhaps a little while longer, then you'll feel better, more like facing Dad and Kara, the world, without the presence of the mother you've always, until now, known was – somewhere – even if she wasn't there for you.

An hour later, you emerge. You quickly find Kara hasn't been to bed at all; she's wide awake, bent on re-discovering Stella. She talks on and on,

but you're still feeling tremulous and weak, barely awake. Pulling your cotton dressing gown tight around your waist, you yawn repeatedly. Then slowly start to make coffee. You have a feeling this is to be one of those endless-coffee mornings. Although you'd rather stagger outside and spend the day in the hammock Stella hung between too well-spaced palms, the next thing you have to do is to go through her things.

'So *you've* got the hatbox. Why didn't you tell me?' your sister reproaches, interrupting your heavy, sluggish train of thought. 'I've been wowwyng about it all night long. You sure it's the one?'

'Kara,' you sigh as you pour yourself a second espresso. 'There has always been, and always will be, only one hatbox. The one from Great-Aunt Liz.'

'The bwoon one, the Vuitton? With the mauve lining?' She jumps from her seat. 'Where?'

'Sis, hold on a minute,' you say grumpily, taking another large gulp of the strong black stuff. 'I know you're excited, but the brain does not engage before coffee.'

She frowns and thumps the table. 'I have to see it!'

'And I must have my coffee. Kara, dear Kara, aren't you just a little bit tired?'

She tosses her head. 'I'm on a wush. I feel good.'

'Great.' You take a final gulp – for the moment. 'Anyway, it was full of papers; notes and letters, probably. A photo or two. Oh yes, and I saw a small portrait-like thing, mounted on white card: a silhouette cut from black paper.'

Her eyes spark. 'Weally? Of who?'

'I'd have to look.' You shrug. 'Anyway, what did you think of the video, yesterday?'

'I hid my face in Ted's shoulder. But it wasn't Mum, anyone could see that.'

'It was Mum, Kara,' you tell her wearily. 'You said so, yourself.'

Kara shakes her head. 'I didn't say it was *Mum* in the video. The woman in the video wore white gloves, didn't you see? It couldn't have

been Mum. You know as well as I do, Lin, if our mother had made a video to be shown at her own funeral she'd have been sure to look amazing. She'd have chosen one of her gorgeous floaty frocks, not that awful white pants-suit Mrs. Whitegloves had on. Beads and bwooches, feathers, Fwench flowers, a gauzy hat like the one in the photograph I used to have at the centre of my shwine, back home.'

You have no choice this morning but to let The Kara Thing drop; if you don't, you might lose patience. But you still can't help being a teensy bit aggressive.

'OK, Kara, tell me. If it was Mum we cremated yesterday – and you know it was, because you told me – where is Mrs. Whitegloves?'

The minute you ask this stupid question, you regret it; all you've succeeded in doing is stirring things up.

'That's not obvious?' She answers sharply. 'Well, it should be! I've told you more than a thousand million times, Linda, Mrs. Whitegloves wasn't human. That's what you have never been able to gwasp.' She rushes on. 'Don't you see? Just as our beautiful mother came back to us in death, Mrs. Whitegloves has vanished. It's the weverse of what happened that day at Dewinda. The evil queen has gone! When Mum weappeared, Mrs. Whitegloves had no choice but to wesume her life as a shade, out there somewhere in the dark part of the universe.' Her gestures make a cathedral-like arch that extends beyond ceiling and walls. 'Shades are the opposite of lights, you know, so she could be down a black hole by now. Anyway, wherever she is she'll be forced to put on a pair of wed hot shoes and dance 'til she falls down dead.'

The hatbox is where you left it, lit by morning sunlight. White-on-white curtains billow gently behind it; hand-made and embroidered long ago on that Baltic island by some unknown family member. Stella must have got them from Inverbrook.

This small L-shape room was your mother's, no one else came here. There are books on the shelves, though nothing of interest to you. Your father, a habitual shed man, lined the walls of his double garage with shelves and took the best of them down there. These are mainly the Reader's Digest Condensed Books that Stella loved to collect – no doubt

with the intention of reading, though it's your guess none was ever opened. Alongside lie the Sherde family Bible, two hymn books, and four Masonic tomes left to Stella by her father. Also more recent bibles, a book of verse by Helen Steiner Rice and Leunig's Common Prayer.

The floor holds stacks of flyers with embossed light-bulbs and metallic halos glinting from their covers: Light in the Spirit's logo. And a scattering of sheet-music, the reminder of your mother's Derinda girlhood.

Ornaments and vases, cups and saucers, painted bowls, the kind of objects your father calls dust collectors. A porcelain peasant girl, her skirt swirled back as though the wind had changed and preserved her in the moment, skipping down a cobbled lane, a full fruit basket on her hip and crocuses in her hair. This figurine is glossy, with a greyish-blue glaze, shiny to the touch and quite unlike the bold, earthy, womanly shapes Helena sometimes moulds. Hers are the ones that stir you, the ones you prefer. Yet there is beauty here, in the eternal springtime of this country girl and the way your mother chose to assemble her highly regarded things. Pride of place is claimed by a Waterford crystal rose bowl, two Wedgwood candlesticks, and a silvered Parisian jardiniere – another gift from Great-Aunt Elizabeth? These were your mother's markers for getting married and having you.

But Kara is in tears.

Seeing her like this softens you; your mood changes. She tries to explain, 'I used to look everywhere for the hatbox, Lin. Searching for it all the time. I was desperate to find it. I hadn't seen it since the day Mum went away, the day I left Dewinda. It was waining then, look at those marks. Pitting, from waindrops as big as hail.' She sits down on Stella's plum velvet-covered lady-chair, a piece your mother must have brought from Grannie Sherde's. 'Don't you see? Here at last is pwoof, pwoof something happened. Sometimes, you know ... I've ... thought ... I was mad.'

All the papers in the hatbox are Stella's; marriage certificate, birth certificates, and an old bank book inscribed to her mother, full of pen-nibbed black-ink entries that record a surprising amount of income, enough to import things like those Tiffany lamps. You ask yourself where

this money could have come from. But of course! Grannie Sherde was born Jane Dee, an English grazier's daughter from a property further north; along with the rest of the daughters she'd have had an annuity from the wheat cheque, the wool cheque, the fat-lamb cheque, or possibly all three.

Next to it is a photograph you've never seen before, of Stella at her wedding: a beautiful, if aloof, bride. The person standing closest to her, looking on adoringly, is Bart. You hold it at arms length.

'No!' exclaims Kara, craning to see it better. 'That's *him!*'

You quickly place it face-down and make a diversionary fuss, laughing over some pictures of yourself at Raltrick, in the school choir, at the athletics carnival, receiving a prize from a dignitary. Yourself, in graduation cap and gown.

'Lin! Wemember this?' Kara's found your mother's shiny gold locket with its tiny key. She gasps as she opens it. 'But there's nothing here.'

You'd always thought that lockets, at least in romantic tales, were meant to hold a likeness, a piece of hair. But Kara is right, this one's empty.

More coffee. Then you discover, in the lining, a rose-gold bangle. You say, 'She must have had this as a girl.'

As you slip it over your wrist, you catch sight of another photograph: yourself again, this time on the arm of Ewen Vergil at a Mountbrae Ball. Stella had always thought you and Ewen were meant for each other; she'd wanted you to become, as she put it, a 'life-team'. Little did she know that Ewen was wedded to heroin, a habit acquired years ago while he was living alone in the Vergils' city flat.

You finger a deckle-edged card with a portrait at the centre, a silhouette cut skilfully, deftly, from matt black paper. It's the one you'd remarked on before.

Your sister's face is very pale.

'Bart!' she gasps, snatching it from your hand. 'There must be another one.'

She rummages in the hatbox to find the matching silhouette: the portrait of young girl with thick plaits, doubled and tied with bunches of ribbon.

‘You, isn’t it, Kara?’ you ask softly.

Chapter 7

It's late as you approach The Sydney Harbour Bridge. As you branch off to drop Helena at Kirribilli, she insists you come up – 'for a minute, Lin' – although in truth you'd rather keep going. With a pang you realise how quickly time has passed since your friend returned from Japan; it's weeks since that afternoon at the Academy when she told you sternly, 'Lin, we must meet often.'

Midnight arrives and quickly departs. It's tempting to stay and watch the luminosity of the inner harbour; you could easily become mesmerised by the slow-moving lights, their red-blue-gold reflections shifting ceaselessly upon the surface of the water. Your friend puts on some jazz, memories of moody Saturday afternoons at the Blue Note. And some old, old favourites of Dad's, Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Dizzy Gillespie, John Coltrane.

You keep returning to your favourite topic: Ted and Kara, the item. You might as well have been knocked down by a piece of dental floss! What happened to Kara's 'love' for Dr. Mezzner? Since Ted started paying her attention she'd entirely changed her mind. And when your father said he wanted Kara to stay on a while longer, Ted insisted on staying too. Neither you nor Lena you knows what this is all about, it surprised you both. Just goes to show, you still don't know what love is do you? What goes with what.

You could spend hours staring at the curling and unfolding of long green furrows ploughed up now and then by a late-passing ferry, a stray launch, a hurrying sail-furled yacht, but tomorrow you're back at work.

'I'd never do a thing if I lived here,' you say as you rise to go. 'I'd be glued to the view, night and day.'

'Funny how we change,' replies Lena. 'I thought I'd never take my eyes away. Now I sometimes hide in the other room.'

On a whim, you decide to call by The Agency. You'll go in quickly and pick up copies of the reports you've missed; at this time of night it should

take only half an hour. You check you have the wherewithal: getting into the unattended building requires a heap of paraphernalia; touch-prints, key cards, number combinations, photo-checks, iris keys.

The underground car park is empty, except for a lonely four wheel drive left by an account guy gone on business overseas. The sparse stretch of concrete between you and the lift, with its pattern of ugly oil-leaks, looks more unwelcoming than ever. The lift is silent until you're about to reach the eighteenth floor, when you hear a series of muffled booms. Spooky, until you remember they're part of the innards of the building: mysterious grinding mechanisms that never cease.

Entering your section, you pick up the contents of your in-tray. Nothing new except a parcel, propped against the wall, wrapped in *très* smart paper. You see that the discreet pattern is made up of rows of subtle branding, engraved in copperplate with the repeated words, 'Gothik Flowers'. Judging by the bulk, shape, and feel, you guess it's a wreath. Did someone think your mother's funeral was to be held in Sydney, and sent it here?

The back of the parcel is sealed with staples, silvery and neat. You undo a few, enough to see it does contain a wreath. But not the usual kind. This one isn't green, as you've always understood a wreath should be, in honour of death and renewal, winter and spring. It's black.

Immediately you think of Xianna Tree. In some ways this smacks of her; on the other hand, it's far too obvious. Cautiously, you unwrap some more of the intricate arrangement: dried stems, xanthorrhoea and spinifex, woven in the manner of the dilly baskets of desert women, decorated with dried native flowers – wattle, boronia, everlastings – and the fire-blackened leaves of angophora and box-gum. It's finished with a bow of flat black satin; tucked behind is a black-and-white card.

GOTHIK FLOWERS

This voucher may be redeemed
on a wreath of choice
for her own funeral
by Linda Hille

You feel a wave of resentment at the cruelty of whoever is crass enough to taunt you this way, at this particular time. In Gary's view, the person behind the run of childish pranks is a rank amateur. But amateur or not, they've succeeded in provoking anger and frustration. Anger at the thought that someone you know, who knows you, could do this. Frustration at not knowing who.

Taking the note and putting it your bag, you wrap the wreath up again and thrust it behind the filing cabinet. A louder noise from the lift-well makes you leap. You've no desire to linger.

As far as you're concerned, the best way to start the day is to get up and go for a swim. Well you're up, but in lieu of a swim you stagger towards the shower. You stand there for ten minutes, luxuriating under mega-litres of water that run sensuously down, drenching your body, waking the still-sleeping parts. On other days you'd feel guilty at such dreadful waste.

To-day you are not in the mood. Wet hair will have to do. Deciding what to wear reminds you again of Stella. Your mother was part of the *this goes with that* era, and at times you find yourself falling back on the basic formula – then adding something of your own that's funky, daft, or otherwise unexpected.

It's blue jeans or nothing. The tight indigo bootlegs you bought last year at *Galleries Lafayette*. With your cheeky brown Akiro cross-back and a clever McCartney short-crop that can lend class to anything. Finished off with your get-me-gorgeous Helmut Lang suede boots. You find dressing like this satisfying, though you'd normally draw the line at skinny jeans and sexy boots in the office.

Would you believe? You forgot to check your voice-mail last night. And you didn't turn on the office mobile. And you neglected to read those Call Reports you'd been so keen to collect.

Voice-mail? You find it curiously uncrowded. A few messages from old school friends, sorry to hear about Stella. Sweet girls, so nice of them to bother. You're touched. You'll have to write to them, or send cards. It's just a matter of finding time.

Seems that your new RoB partners, Dare and Shore, aren't at all like Al, they haven't left one bleep. On the office mobile you find a pile of outdates, a few new messages. A reminder that your creative group is lunching tomorrow at the Maya; a request for you to speak at a corporate event. A promise from Jason Nile – does that guy never give up? He says he'll call again.

And a pleasant surprise, one that causes you to smile. The burry voice of Gary, suggesting you meet.

Since you are ready early, you decide to drive by The Rocks for a short black, a ciabatta roll, and a tub of rocket salad to go, just in case you can't get out at lunch. In a cosy corner of Deli Superga, away from the traffic, with your first-of-the-morning coffee in hand, you remember the wreath. You vow to find out who sent it – and give it to Tank as a play piece. Then you begin to read your reports. Teri Dare's seems to have been written in some kind of double-speak, but soon enough you gather what it's saying. There's going to be a RoB meeting in New York!

'Luke Trimmer will present his research on Re-Versing: Part I of the RoB Project.'

Luke Trimmer will ... *what?* You scan the page, looking from header-down for your name, to find it occurs only once, on the Distribution List. It seems that you, Linda Hille, Global Creative Director, have been left out.

So far the only thing your stomach has received is a macchiato strong enough to wake a sleeping giant. But now the cute blond waiter returns with a series of quick-eyed looks that takes in your boots, thighs, and face; cheekily he asks what else you'd like. His smile persuades you to order brioche, and when it comes he takes great delight in pouring over it, from a height, a long thin dribble of sticky maple syrup, grinning all the while.

Dragon Lady? Certainly! For a moment or two you think about calling by The Sydney Theatre Company to hire the full costume. Chinese red, with a top-heavy head-dress and long silk robe, embroidered with mythical beasts that breathe jewelled tongues of fire, dry-ice flaring from each nostril.

You storm from the lift at the 18th Floor, making for your office with a face like a mask, looking neither to the right nor the left. Caro sees you coming and rightly reads your mood.

'Linda! So sorry to hear about your mother. You poor love. Did you find the parcel?'

'Yes, thanks, Caro. I came in very late last night. Or was it early this morning?'

She looks at you uncertainly, about to say something then thinking better of it.

‘Caro, can you please find Luke? Get him here right away?’

‘How was Queensland?’ Luke croons as though nothing has happened.

‘What I saw of it, fine.’

‘Oooo. What’s wrong?’

You lay Dare’s report in front of him.

‘Oh, that.’ He smiles like a ventriloquist’s doll. ‘Isn’t it great?’

‘Ask me, it’s crazy! What does Dare think she’s doing? You can’t pick a piece of RoB, like that, and present it out of context.’

He brushes this aside with a shrug. ‘A pity you were out of the office.’

‘But Luke, it isn’t possible to separate different parts of RoB. Presenting Re-Versing alone would only cause confusion. And for one good reason. There’s nothing to hang it on.’

‘Linda, you so don’t get it. Like, this is my big chance. You know I’ve wanted this – how I’ve wanted this! – for ever. Once I’ve presented in NYC, I can’t fail. I’ll get my dream-job. It’ll be a piece a cake.’

‘Luke, you’ll find I’m right. The solution to RoB lies in a symbiosis of ideas: not one, not two, but five, six, seven. When they finally come together, they’ll make something else. That will be the answer.’

‘Say what you like, Linda, there’s nothing wrong with starting with Re-Versing.’ He thrusts his nose in the air. ‘After all, you did.’

Shore suddenly appears. You’re surprised to see him on this floor, he has never ventured down so far before.

‘Good to see you back.’

He towers above the desk, and you find yourself spluttering something about Piers. Shore draws up one of the chairs you keep at a small table for group meetings.

‘Now Linda, I’ll come straight to the point. Luke’s told me you don’t want him to follow Teri.’

‘Follow Teri?’

‘She left last night.’

Your throat clears. ‘Um, does The Client really need his hand holding quite like this?’

Shore raises his barrel chest. 'As you are well aware Linda, Al was the Agency's mastermind, getting RoB. He played a big part.'

'So did I.'

'That's right. And we did think of sending you. But there's no way we could spare you, it was bad enough last week. Losing Al Knappstein upset The Client; we had to do something. You understand that, don't you Linda? We have to keep them happy, let them know all is well.'

'But Forrest! Kids, people, clients; no-one's interested in a piece of the puzzle if they can't see the big picture. We need to wait and present RoB all at once.'

He draws himself up in the too-small chair, rearranging his legs. 'I don't think you understand the importance of this mission, Linda. The New York Re-Versing meeting is set to put things back on an even keel. But maybe you're right about Luke. Teri can handle it.'

Suddenly you see red: blinding, dazzling red. 'Is Teri our best presenter?'

'Teri's an extremely experienced woman, Linda.'

You stop yourself; it would get you nowhere. Instead you ask, 'What's happening with Piers?'

'Still negotiating. Willing enough, but asking a motza. A ridiculous amount. The Agency is not prepared to pay it. But we're getting a package together now that will make him see sense – a couple of First Class round-the-world tickets and a few other things, to steer him off cash.'

'Well I have to tell you, Forrest. If you want the right answers in less than two weeks I need Piers *now*.'

You could go on stewing about Dare, trying to suss her agenda, while marvelling at Luke's gullibility. But what you really want to do is track that wreath. There can be few who produce such specialised work, commercially or otherwise. Helena might have a clue, she's privy to the inner sanctum of the crafty world where makers are known by their marks.

'Lena! Don't ask, I'll tell you later. Listen, are you free tonight? I need your opinion.'

'On tantric sex?'

You laugh. 'I want you and Gary to come over.'

'Tonight? Can do, earlier. But I'll need to leave by eight, a party at Sydney College. They're opening their new block.'

Your next call is to Gary.

'Linda! How was it?'

'A journey, in more ways than one. Worked out, though. And you? How was Vampire's Christmas?'

'Mixed. Disappointed you weren't there. I didn't find out about your mother until the boat was under way. Sorry to hear about that. Bet you don't feel much like being back at work right now.'

You find it hard to say anything. He continues. 'Anyway, you didn't miss much. Those parties on the harbour are all a bit the same, don't you think? Whether you're dressed as a ghoul or not dressed at all.' You can hear that grin. 'There's always a mob down below somewhere in a corner, drinking too much, raring for a fight. Or a crack or ecstasy or ice drama, where they have to pull in to unload.'

'But I did get a chance to talk to Ms. Tree. And, tell you straight, I don't think she's it.'

'Neither do I.'

'Too into herself; she wouldn't give you that much time,' he says frankly.

'Mm. And now there's something else.'

Around five-thirty, as you are contemplating a quick quiet exit, wondering how to get the wreath out of here and into Bette Blue without anyone noticing, Caro runs in behind a fuming Luke.

'Sorry, Linda. Luke just barged past me and ...'

'What have you been saying?' He confronts you. 'Forrest's cancelled my trip!' With your hands behind your back, you sign to Caro, trying to tell her it might be better if she left. But she remains, glowering; she's livid. Finally you tell her, 'Thanks, sweetie. Luke and I will have to sort this out.'

‘Sort this out!’ Luke snorts. ‘Sort this out! You’ve already sorted it, haven’t you, Linda Hille. *Your way.*’

‘No, truly. I have no idea what Dare is doing in New York – except it’s got nothing to do with Re-Versing.’

‘What’re you talking about?’

‘Tell me, Luke, why did she have to leave the night before I got back? If her mission is to present Re-Versing, she’d have to talk to me. It would be professional suicide for her to get involved in RoB without knowing where everything fits. And Luke, that jump-on-a-flight-quick thing only happens for one reason: in response to a call. Dare must have a search to run, an axe to grind, an interview to attend, a contact to make – a job she can’t do any other way.

‘The RoB heavies will be down here soon. And as Dare well knows, that is the time to start presenting. Your trip was cancelled, Luke, and I’m sorry. But you’ll see; the Re-Versing meeting will be cancelled too. Dare may have whet your appetite, but the meeting was never going to happen.’

You leave him facing an empty desk, scarlet from the tips of his ears to the base of his neck. In one way, Luke’s right. You do know how much the idea of working in New York means to him. But he’s going to get there anyway, and probably quite soon.

Tank’s ears shoot up and his body starts to quiver as you step into Eleanor’s kitchen. As a rule, when you’ve been away for more than forty-eight hours, your handsome feline displays a certain disdain, but this time he shows how much he’s missed you.

‘Is Kara still with you? What a nice girl. I’ve found some articles for her, photographs, about some of the old houses that were around here.’

‘She’s still in Queensland, not sure when she’s coming back. But we did manage to stop at Derinda. Remember my dream, the Indarde dream?’

She nods. ‘I do. Strong imagery. And you know, dreams with the name of a place in them – even when it’s jumbled, like that – often yield something important.’

Tank rubs himself against your legs and you lean down to run your fingers through his strong fur. He's a proud cat; his paternal ancestors travelled on the steamships, in the old days, back and forth between here and China.

'How's my beautiful boy?'

'Good company, aren't you Tank? But he was pining, Linda. He sat on the shelf near my attic window every day, staring at the bay. That is, when he wasn't asleep. Didn't you, gorgeous?'

Tank tilts his brisk white whiskers sideways, distracted by a whiff of something. Then he eyes you soberly.

'C'mon, you old devil,' you say as you fix the leather strap on his wicker cage. 'We'll get you home.'

Lately you've been thinking how nice it would be to have some time to prepare pretty little cocktail-snacks to serve with drinks – the kind that look so promising in the gourmet magazines.

Or would it?

Today, for some reason, you are feeling jealous of the people in the world who have free choice. You fervently wish your sister would find herself an understanding benefactor who is not yourself, so you can reclaim your space. Since the renovations, it's always Kara who's at The Beach. You haven't been able to enjoy your own hard-won place, not the way you've dreamt about it, the way you'd intended when you took out the mortgage that was higher than the moon. Your own Utopia, that's what The Beach should be. But you haven't had the chance to invite anyone up there yet, except Helena and Ted.

You think of Gary. And for a moment, while ferrying Tank the short distance between Eleanor's house and Jackson's Landing, you fantasize about the possibility of asking this new man to The Beach while Kara's still away.

Arriving home, you dump the wreath unceremoniously in the sitting room and unveil the Eames chair, removing its fifties-style covers. You expect Tank to take this as an invitation but no, his agenda is food.

'Didn't Eleanor say that she'd fed you?'

He feigns innocence. 'Meow?'

'All right. You can have *some*.'

It's milk he's after. Eleanor doesn't believe in giving cow's milk to cats; she says it makes them sick-up fur balls.

When Helena arrives, you save the black wreath story. Instead, you ask her what she thinks about asking Gary up to The Beach this weekend.

'I wouldn't, if I were you,' she answers cautiously. 'Not yet. Not if you really like him. It could frighten him off. And I wouldn't be telling him too much about Kara, either. Wait 'til he meets her.'

Frighten him off? You agree about Kara, but wonder how your fabulous secret – the haven of glossy cool in a setting of bush-beach charm – could ever be described as frightening. Who on earth would be scared by the distant laughter of kookaburras, the tinkle of ice cubes, the occasional 'plash in your peppermint pool? What can be possibly wrong with lazing about in marine coloured light for a whole weekend, pigging out on fresh whiting fillets in crisp tempura batter and yummy Cajun wedges from the best fish shop?

She laughs. 'I was only thinking. Unless Gary's a gold-digger – or in the Palm Beach set himself – it might be a turn-off.'

'Oh.' This is not what you'd wanted to hear. The Beach is the backdrop for your sexiest yearnings.

'Does that mean I can never take anyone there?' you ask her incredulously.

She smiles. 'Don't rush things, that's all.'

The door-bell rings and the man in question stands at the doorstep.

'Gary! You found it, OK?'

He looks around. 'Nice place you've got,' he says as he hands you a bunch of yellow roses and white lilies, floating in baby's breath. They're not orchids, but somehow they remind you of Stella.

You gulp. 'Oh, how lovely! Helena Vergil, Gary Grenfeld.'

A pause in the small-chat. The pop of another cork.

'Didn't you know?' says Gary, interrupting your story about finding the wreath.

'I soon discovered.'

'But it was your present. From under the tree!'

You look at him, blankly.

'The Dracula Tree, at Vampire's Christmas. I was going to keep it by for you, but your assistant – Caro? – said she'd put it in your office.'

'Huh. So the enemy *is* a work mate.' The bot-fly must have contrived to draw your name from the hat.

'Or, someone close to a work-mate,' says Gary thoughtfully.

'Anyway, where is this thing?' says Helena.

Gary picks up the card that accompanied the wreath.

'Vile!' He shrugs, shaking his head. 'And vicious.'

Helena examines the basket-work.

'Any idea who could have made it?' you ask her idly, not expecting an answer.

'The best of this kind of work comes from the West,' she says, thoughtfully. 'From a few artist-practitioners there. But this isn't one of theirs, it's too commercial. Whoever made this used synthetic wire.' She points to a grid of rigid plastic hidden behind a bed of dried leaves. 'See? The artists I'm thinking of would never do that.'

After she leaves, you're about to pour another drink when Gary suggests going out. 'Somewhere like Balmoral?'

'The Bathers?' You're flattered, pleasantly surprised. 'Could I say no?'

On the way, you're careful not to mention The Beach. Or Bette Blue. As it is, Gary's land cruiser is the perfect vehicle for showing off legs clad in French cut jeans and knee-high, soft suede boots.

The small crescent moon rises over middle harbour as Venus appears in the sky and the seagulls settle down for the night. You savour the smell of burning wood in the nearby fireplace. Your shoulders are starting to relax.

'This beach was my favourite,' Gary tells you.

'Mine, too! When I was away at boarding school, I used to love coming back to the rough and tumble of the surf but I loved the serenity of this place, too. The curve of Hunters Bay,' you indicate the soft dunes. 'I

could lie here on my stomach for hours, the sand's so fine. I used to sunbathe on a towel, staring out through The Heads, dreaming of adventures. When I turned the other way I could see this exotic building. I'd half-close my eyes, you know that dreamy state you get into when you're lying in the sun? I'd fix on these long Moorish windows and the half-domed ones, have you seen those? With the row of neat squares above them. There's nothing else like it. The Bather's Pavilion, those old palm trees outside; they let me imagine I was a starlet at Malibu. Mel Gibson was my crush then, in my day-dreams I'd see him sauntering past. Or I'd set this whole Pavilion down on Mulholland Drive – although at that stage I'd never seen Mulholland Drive. When I went there years later it wasn't at all like this.'

'Well I used to come here in the afternoons, after school, and stay as long as I could. Watching the people along the promenade. Sometimes I'd sit on the steps of the rotunda, under the domed roof with the round white ball on top – you know it? Or take a walk further down, to watch the seagulls squatting along that old-fashioned shark-net at the harbour-baths. You know how narrow the beach gets, further down? When it was deserted, I'd race along the strand to the bit that's joined on by the bridge.'

'We used to call it "the island".' You go on, 'It isn't an island, really, but imagining it that way used to add a fizz of excitement, the lure of the unknown.'

You laugh.

'Before The Pavilion was a restaurant it was a place for women bathers. Quite crude, really. Dark-green semi-gloss on cubicle half-doors, sea water dripping onto hard cement from our bare legs. We had to wait in line for the shower, me and all the other girls. I hated having to wear my plain dark-red school Speedos but my mother used to say she couldn't afford any others; at holiday time my school chums all had fashion swimmers or bikinis.'

You will never forget how that thin school racer showed your pubescent breasts; how you began to realise with embarrassment that men stare. You used to come here with the Vergils every Christmas, on

their legendary all-day picnics. They'd join with other families and friends who lived nearby to make a good-humoured crowd. You'd play a silly version of cricket, and between frequent swims, ('stay inside the shark net, kids!'), you'd laze on the grass under the Moreton Bay figs. The trunks of some smaller trees, over on the other side of the road, were the best for tying down tarps; you'd crawl underneath when it got too hot, eating double or triple ice-creams and muscatel grapes, chattering and giggling. When the sun went down and swarms of fruit bats started flitting and squeaking overhead, you'd bury the jacket potatoes you'd brought from home, ready-scrubbed and wrapped in a brown paper bag. By some miracle they always cooked to perfection, buried in the ash-encrusted embers of the barbecue.

Afterwards you and Gary move to sit side-by-side in a Mediterranean-white alcove-for-two, staring out through The Heads to the ocean beyond. It's the view you remember so well. Gary's a natural story-teller; the expressions on his face make you laugh.

'My Dad was a member of the Canadian police,' he starts in a low voice. 'Came to Sydney to help investigate a famous murder, a job that took much longer. By the time it was over, he'd decided to stay. He brought the family down.'

You picture Gary, a gangly youth, perplexed at being transferred from a co-ed high in a northern-hemisphere country to a boy's school in the middle of Sydney. He'd have hated having to wear a grey suit and boater hat.

'At first this was strange to me. The way I chose to sort it, familiarise myself, was by exploring around the harbour. I'd walk to The Quay and board a ferry – any ferry. From the wharf at the other end I'd walk and walk, picking up the return somewhere different.'

'What did your parents think?'

'My mother understood enough; my father didn't notice.' He laughed. 'Unless there was trouble of some sort, he was never involved. Too busy, you know the kind of thing. Up to then I'd always lived in high mountains with lots of outdoor activity – climbing, skiing. The need to walk, and walk

a lot, was natural. Still is. The ferry-wanderings were my way of getting oriented, and developing my journalistic skills. I kept a diary of my explorations, where I went, what I saw, who I met; I wrote it all down. I learnt a lot. Although, of course, places like this restaurant weren't here. In the course of it all,' he turns to you with that grin, 'I fell for this place.'

Is this the time to ask him? Why not, you tell yourself.

'So how long were you married?'

'Six-and-a-bit, about six-and-a-half, years.'

'Were you in London, then?'

He nods. 'I married a Canadian girl I met there. Melanie was a journo, too, on women's magazines. Her job was kinder than the one I was trying to do. Yes, I had the ambition to be an investigative journalist, but in the end it was too tough. Because of the drinking. Hanging out for hours, days, in dives and pubs. No good, no good at all, not for me. As I found out to my cost, one drink is one too many. It sets up a craving, at the same time takes away will-power. I didn't realise it, not fully, until I was into that career. What had happened by then was a change of personality.

'Drinking cost me more than money. I failed in my job, I lost my relationship. I found out later I'd inherited the taste. My Grandfather, my father's father, had been a hopeless soak. I'd never met him; died before I was born. Drinking had by-passed my father, but when I looked critically at my family I found it had claimed two of his brothers. And it sure in hell was out to get me. I could go on, Linda, telling you stories of times where I don't remember anything: where I'd slept, who I was with, how I got home. Drunk-driving, hiding grog, the whole disaster. No wonder Mel left.'

You remain quiet, content to absorb his frankness. You find it refreshing.

You can't help asking, 'Where is she now?'

'Back in Canada. Happily married as far as I know. With a child.'

'You didn't have children?'

'We didn't have a marriage.'

Later, at Jackson's Landing, you remove Tank from the foot of the bed. It's no use pretending, he's got to know he can't take over like this. But he'll never stop trying, hoping to win you for himself alone.

Again sleep doesn't come easily, although you did have a good evening. And, come to think of it, your usually brisk intake of champagne was slowed on account of spending it with a water-drinker. You didn't finish the beautiful bottle that Gary bought.

You long to be held close, to feel wanted and needed. The events of the last two weeks have made you wonder whether your ambition, your success, have left you lonely. Although the power is so seductive, is the sacrifice great. As you lie on your back with your eyes wide open, your heart reminds you how you've lost your mother. You feel sad for Stella's aloofness, her strangeness, the awful life Kara's had to lead because of it.

You're unsettled. How odd it is to have met such an interesting man when he's about to leave. But you don't know whether you're ready for something new. You keep wishing you could cry; perhaps that would dissolve away the past. On the other hand, you don't want to be weepy when you finally get together with someone new. You want to enjoy.

Chapter 8

Caro is the one who confirms that the New York Re-Versing meeting did not take place. She heard it from Shore's secretary, who overheard her boss telling his wife about it on the mobile.

His wife?

'Did he say why?'

'An internal crisis at The Client. As Dare flew in, one of the moguls flew out. That broke up the consortium. Lucky, huh? More time for shopping! You watch. She'll bring back heaps.'

On the wreath detection front, Helena's inquiries lead nowhere. It seems that no-one in her artists' world knows anything about commercial basket making. It's time to contact Caro's stylist friend.

'Beth, hi! It's Linda Hille.'

'Linda! How're you doing? Haven't heard from you in ages.'

'Oh, lately it's been all boys, toys and sandhills. No interiors, Beth; nothing that needed your delicate touch.'

'What's on now?'

'A wreath.'

'Wreath? As in Olympics? Or the funeral kind?'

'Large and black. Black flowers, black leaves, black basketwork. Have you seen anything like that?'

'Can't say I have, but I get the picture. Let me do some homework and get back to you.'

'With a price?'

'A ball-park, yes. Depending on the size, and how soon you want it. But first I must find a maker.'

Luke's on a photo-shoot, Shore's in his den, Dare's still away. Your floor is quiet. Times like this can be unnerving, but with a clear run, no interruptions, you might achieve a lot. You must start to write the RoB pitch.

Suddenly you are stopped in your tracks, reminded of the loss of your mother. You want to be somewhere else, not here. You have to breathe deeply, pull yourself together.

You need a soft quote to begin. From the start you want this bunch of global big wigs, small wigs, any wigs at all who happen to come by, firmly on your side. You want a quote that makes it plain you'll be delivering only the beginning – because that is all this presentation can cover. The more you get into it, the more you realise The Rebranding of Branding is big as! If it ever does happen (and you're seriously starting to wonder, as you try to get to sleep these nights) it will take a whole lot longer.

Ah, here you are. Perfect. It's from Winnie the Pooh: 'We keep looking and not finding, so I thought that if we looked for this we'd be sure not to find it ...'

You confirm to yourself that 9.11 marked the paradigm shift with global branding, as well as most everything else. It's been tossed about ever since.

You start there, taking care not to be influenced by any successful brand histories that came before. They might or might not apply, but that's another subject; in this overview the main point to make is how the big religions have become, since 9.11, the greatest of global brands. Together with the other one that you don't really want to think about - terrorism. Such brands are not, as the old brands were, locked into corporate marketing strategy by way of entire departments devoted to them with supervisors who travel the globe in pairs, like police. The great religions are not confined by race, creed or nation. They're networked, sure, but unlike other brands their ground rules are long-ingrained traditions.

You take a piece of sugarless chewing gum from the back of your drawer. You keep a pack ready for such dry moments; it helps to sweeten things up.

You make a list to PowerPoint on the day: feminine/masculine, past/future, space/place, below/above, and so on. You intend to ask the audience whether they think *grand duality*, something that used to be

considered essential to the marketing of all commercial brands, still exists. Or whether it disappeared with the Twin Towers.

While you're still working your sister rings, sounding unusually bright. She tells you that she and Ted are back at The Beach. Afterwards you wonder, with a small stir of excitement, what Lena can be thinking now, about this twosome. But there's no chance of finding out. This week she's firing the pots she's been working on since she came back; she's incommunicado. Lena sometimes has these closed-down days. She says all artists do.

At seven-thirty on this weekend morning, North Sydney looks sad and lonely; the buildings below are grey and unwelcoming, exuding lead-like dullness. The odd lonely figures in the back streets are creatives from other agencies, walking empty pavements like shuttered automatons, laptops on their shoulders. Their psyches seem to be elsewhere, sailing in endless freedom perhaps, upon balmy seas, soft breezes blowing their hair about as they lie on the deck of the yacht they are planning to buy. Themselves, in their own commercials – written, cast, produced and directed by themselves.

The rest of North Sydney is deserted, even the grounds of the fine old sandstone church on the hill, except for a brisk wind whipping up yesterday's dust. From where you're standing, staring from the window of Piers' old office, you can't help but remember that he walked out on you – with Al, and with Szu Szu. But though you're still smarting, what's done is done; in your day job time is running out. Something tells you to get RoB wrapped up *pronto*.

Before long it's just like any other day you and Piers have ever worked together. That's exciting. And cool, like driving Bette Blue. Cool and exciting enough to light the spark of what must be accomplished this morning. There is an unspoken agreement, an intuition that you share, not to talk about Al, or Szu Szu, or any of the rest. Only once does Piers let something slip, when he mentions re-recording the Szu Szu track. Hello? Would they go so far as to change a chorus so well known that kids sing it in their school yards, grown men in the shower?

Funny, after your shower this morning you came across a cute little G made of guipure lace with a flower at the front and another at each side, all three different and exquisitely appliquéd. You'd bought it on a Szu Szu shoot in Paris last year. You'd taken yourself for a walk on your only spare half-day in the small winding streets of the seventh arrondissement, to poke about in the narrow print shops, antique booths, and miniature galleries. You'd stumbled at length across a bendy lane with a huge shop-window full of dream-like lingerie. So French, so seductive! Next thing you were walking in, telling yourself you were really just looking, with no intention to buy.

This little G sat up and claimed you. The moment you saw it, in its transparent case, lying on a pedestal covered in blue silk velvet, you knew you had to have it. When you returned you put it away – not giving it another thought. Now it's here, in the old Hunt Longchamps bag beside you on the other seat. Together with a fresh bottle of Gaultier's *Fragile* you acquired on the same trip.

The long street runs beside an escarpment at the border of two sleepy suburbs. A lateral valley, covered in low-growing bush, divides them, while an arterial road joins them up again by means of a quaint but solid bridge that was put here long ago. It has bastioned pylons and turreted tower gates, looped together by giant low-slung cables. You find number forty, the house that Gary's minding for his friends Jill and Peter, architects who are away on sabbatical. He greets you warmly and you follow him through to the back. There you see, through twists of budding wisteria that remind you of late-winter weekends at Mountbrae, the width of the urban valley. Its cover of native brush has never known bush-fires: the spread is even, in a shade that's neither blue nor green, a little like Helena's Awo: the mysterious colourless colour.

There are stairs in the escarpment leading to the valley floor; a path descends in zig-zags, lined with smooth river-stones like the ones you and Kara used to find at Inverbrook. At the base there's a small pagoda, next to a delightfully mis-shapen cherry tree.

'For a moment I was in Japan.'

'That's where the owners are,' Gary chuckles.

Talking of the steepness and the snaking line, he explains how he trains on the stairs in preparation for his journey to high places. Seven times each morning he descends to the pagoda and returns.

'How do you keep going?'

'By breathing. A moving meditation,' he demonstrates, taking his breath to a deeper place than the lungs and holding it, then slowly breathing out. 'Gets easier, if you keep on persisting.'

'Like an athlete before the Olympics?'

He grins, knowing that you've understood. 'I guess.'

'When did you start?' you ask, half-amused and half-intrigued to have met, by chance, someone working as hard as this to change their life.

'About four months ago', he kicks a stone that's been sitting by his shoe. 'Not long to go.'

'Well you can't leave now, Gary. Not before my birthday,' you tell him teasingly. 'Helena's giving me a party.'

'When?'

'Saturday.'

'This Saturday? I go the day after. Six-thirty in the morning.'

'C'mon, I want to show you something. The garden I've been making.'

He leads to where a low square sandstone wall makes a boundary for a stream of swept white gravel. It's been combed and patterned with concentric circles and parallel waves, in the centre there's a pile of sandstone rocks.

'A Zen garden. Before Jill and Peter left we had a bit of fun planning it; I agreed to have a go at making it while they're away. The rocks came from all over; they were ready here quite a while, but I had to sit with the space before I could begin. I found out it's a process, more about absence than presence.' He laughs and turns back to the garden. 'This kind of garden is meant to be dry, and those lines and patterns evoke water; the pattern of the gravel represents the path of the free-flowing mind.'

In a large warm room you sit beside a pot-bellied stove, perched on the edge of an enormous armchair, studying the map on the wall. Gary tells you this is not the first time he'll have been in Nepal. After rehab, he knew he had to find something to believe in, something stronger than himself that he could depend on, and his thoughts turned to what was most familiar: the high mountains. First he considered going back to Canada and walking in the Rockies, then someone told him about Buddhism. In the end he decided on Nepal, and there he found his lama, or the lama found him. His return will be the completion of his five-year plan to stay off the booze.

'You're into dharma, and karma, whatever?'

He laughs. 'The Dharma, yes, or trying to be. Karma is fate, it's always here.'

'So you'll be a proper Buddhist when you come back?' you ask, finding it easy to picture Gary as a shaven-headed monk in saffron robes.

He laughs again. 'I don't know about "a proper Buddhist". My lama says there's no such thing. Only The Middle Way. I need to find it; I want to write about the search. In the west it's the grail we guys are supposed to be going after, in the east it's something more amorphous – of the spirit and the mind.'

On the map, you see that the area around Mustang has been carefully studied. Inside a large circle there are a number of routes pencilled in. Gary shows you the way the group will go: the aim is to hike north with sherpas towards Matlany, then turn south. They want to keep to upper-valley trails and stay in small, off-track villages like Garphu and Nyiphu.

By five o'clock, as dusk is falling, you're seriously hungry. But it seems there's nothing here to eat, unless you want a wasabi sandwich. After a frantic search you discover a horde of bachelor's-favourite ice cream – chocolate all through, with lumps of honeycomb – the naughty kind you never could resist.

You pick up the tub and read aloud from the blurb: '1. Find out what people like,' you laugh, throwing Gary an open look. '2. Give them a lot of it.'

You giggle as he snatches the tub away and scoops the contents into a bowl, then picks up two spoons and comes to sit beside you. The ice cream tastes doubly delightful with a glass of cold bubbles from the bottle you've brought.

'Does Homer Hudson do tantric sex?' you ask him in a stage-voice.

'Who said anything about tantric sex?' he spoofs, laughing.

You happen to be wearing your red Bivianos. You discovered them in their tissue paper, in their box, in your lonely office, this morning, exactly where you'd put them on the day you bought them. You hadn't even got around to taking them home. Coming here, in Bette Blue, you'd had a sudden impulse to slip them on, criss-crossing the satin straps up your calf like the ribbons of ballet shoes and hiding them in the legs of your weekend Calvins.

Gary finds them.

In a moment you're sliding gently to the floor, lying on deep soft carpet. He starts to kiss the 'L' for Linda embroidered on the pocket of your Prada shirt. Then he undoes the little covered buttons, one by one, taking his time, lingering, always moving downward. Languidly you stroke the smooth rich cedar of a nearby chair-leg with your index finger, feeling the strong texture of its dark smooth grain.

His mouth brushes your skin, teasingly – almost accidentally, it seems – slowly, repeatedly. When his lips meet the tip of your nipple there's a little explosion of that deep blue electricity, a bout of internal fireworks. At the same time, or later, it doesn't matter much, you realise your clothing has gone; now you're the Duchess of Alba or some other famous nude. Everything has disappeared so slowly, so deliciously, so surreptitiously, you hardly noticed. Even your blue lace G.

Gary is taking off your shoe and kissing your left foot, thoughtfully, tenderly; a new thrill starts to zing along your spine. You're poised for something else exquisite and tremulous, your eyes are closed. You gasp with a thudding heart as he licks your toes so gently you barely feel it. And when you do, you don't believe it.

This lovely man knows what pleasures you.

Now it's your turn. You love his clean, lean smell, lemony and fresh; his body's like the trunk of a tall gum, strong and unflinching. Or a fine long musical instrument, one you can strum like a harp, feather-lightly, rhythmically, teasingly, with the tips of your fingers. You lift his willing arm and put your lips to it, against the soft inside, starting at the wrist and moving slowly up until you find the crook of the elbow. He yelps with delight and turns you over, sliding his hands down, over your breasts, returning his attention to your feet.

His touch is concentrated at the top of the little pyramid of your right ankle, he strokes it with the top of his little finger. With wings, too, it seems, in a light butterfly-flutter.

'You have beautiful feet, Linda,' Gary whispers in your left ear; it tickles and you giggle. 'Such beautiful feet.'

After he parts your legs ever so gently, and kisses the inside parts of your thighs, his lips move slowly, deliciously, to the place that yearns.

Then you know. Whatever time it takes, however long it lasts, will never be enough. You're floating somewhere higher the mountains, soaring like a bird towards Valhalla.

At the start of the working week, you are in a sunny mood. You haven't seen Luke yet, but if an ego as big as his is still smarting, massage might be the way to go. That, or chocolate. When you arrive at his office door, he looks surprised and a little shifty; he snaps on his screen-saver as you approach the desk.

'How's it going?'

'How d'you think?'

'I think RoB's right up your street, Luke. It's made for you.'

'Research, you mean?' he says with studied disinterest.

'Researching and presenting.'

He looks at you mistrustfully through lowered brows, seeking a hidden agenda.

'OK, so it's not the same as carrying the show all by yourself in The Big Apple. And oh, by the way, did you notice? The Re-Versing meeting never happened?'

'If you come back on board now, Luke, you'll have the same audience. Only the location will have changed. You'll be on your home ground, and that is an advantage. What I want you to do is critically important. I want you to talk about companies and corporations in Asia. Find out exactly who they are, especially the hot ones on the scene.'

'Take Japan. There's Toyota, Toshiba and Sony – but what's new? What's going to be new? And what about China, beyond Samsung? Since the Chinese government has declared branded products are its future?'

Ah. Slowly you are winning him back; you can tell from the way he's starting to jot a few things down.

'At the moment, China is going through its own kind of 'me' revolution. You could start there. But remember, China won't be building brands the way we did. China doesn't have the time to sit back, the way America did in the old days, waiting for results. And China isn't classing its markets by age, or wealth, any of the usual; it's working with the growth of intangibles.'

'Slip in a few goodies. Interesting examples of brand analytics. Dare should have all that – and you know how to ask.'

On the way back to your superior cubby-hole you call by the Ladies. Public loos have never been among your favourite places – and remembering the writing on the mirror, you enter cautiously. All is quiet until you're washing your hands. Then Rosa Payne appears.

She's wearing a midriff shirt that highlights a bump at her front, just above the hipster-line. But it's not a muffin top, she's too slim for that. From her manner, a combination of self-satisfied smirk and shy blush, there can be no mistake. You smile weakly. Is the bump you're staring at Fergal's?

'Hi, Linda,' says Rosa sweetly.

'Hi Rosa! How's Fergal?'

She smiles, 'Great! He's working for my Dad. At The Studios, you know.'

You don't, but you pretend.

'Kikki? Hi. It's Linda.'

'Linda, darling! I got the invitation to your 40th. Came the other day. It's only a week away,' she says reproachfully. 'That's very short notice, dear. But luckily I'm free that night; something else was cancelled. And of course the wedding's not 'til ...'

'Wedding?'

'Wasn't I supposed to say? About Rosa and Fergal. You know Rosa's mother, Lucia, is my best friend? Yes, of course you do. I was her bridesmaid. She told me straight away. I thought Fergal was supposed to tell you.'

You give a sniggery little laugh, more a tiny snort.

'It's going to be a very big do,' she continues. 'Nuptial mass at the Cathedral and, in the evening, dinner and Ball at the Club. You do know who he is, don't you, darling? Rosa's father?'

Slowly you are piecing it together. 'Payne. The Payne? The Payne who ... ?'

'Owns The Studios; that's right, darling. Rosa is his only daughter.'

Your desk pad shows two hastily scribbled notes. The first is from Caro, saying she is down around the corner taking coffee with her friend. The other is from Beth:

Hi Linda,

That was a hard task! I tried everything up here, no luck. Found the supplier in Melbourne, *Hats for Tats*, St. Kilda Road. They'll do it for five hundred. Give me a call,
lol Beth x

Melbourne! Only last week you took a brief from your newest client, the one who thought you were dead. He asked you for 'an opening campaign with a Melbourne feel'; he's convinced that this will lend certain a *je ne sais quoi* to his new 'Summer One' campaign. You wrote a couple of lifestyle scripts, which he approved, one of them set on a tram, the other on a speccy penthouse-balcony above the Exhibition Building. The quotes from your chosen Sydney film-companies are in: both are proposing constructing sets and sourcing the major props (including a full-size tram) to shoot up here. At The Studios. But after your encounter with Rosa, and what Kikki's just said, you're beginning to think it might be wise to get another quote.

The phone rings.

'Ms. Hille? Now you're back from the north, how about coming south?'

'Jason!' You shake your head in disbelief. 'Why don't you come up here?'

'For what?'

'To show me your latest reel. And take a brief.'

'You're kidding! 'M I hearing right?'

'You are. I have two scripts that need a Melbourne touch; I'll fax them down.'

'Linda Hille! How surprising you are.'

'Horses for courses, Jason. But I wonder if you *could* do something for me?' He knows he's won a point, you can hear him snigger. 'About an anonymous present, a black wreath that I was given recently. I suspect it came from Melbourne; I'd love to know who from.'

Chapter 9

In the moments before dawn, the sky and the sea are one. The upper half stays still, the lower shivers as a fresh wind blows. The sky lightens, the bay darkens. When the surface of the water is ruffled with the quicksilver of near-dawn the horizon shows itself as solid, a thin blue line.

Hibiscus are the first flowers to be lit. One touch of the sun's white rays triggers their dark-veined petals to unfurl, preparing for the day. Soon all the bushes are covered in blooms of butter-yellow, some as big as side-plates.

The call of the butcherbird came and went, its cascade of bitter-sweet dissonance farewelling the night and summoning in the day. Now on the termite-stump that used to be a mooring post it's the wagtail's turn. She vamps the feathers of her black-white rump as the sky starts to drain to poplin grey. It's still too early for rosellas; they're on the plateau, perched in the tallest gums, preening their green chests or the edges of their crimson frock-coats, brushing up their lavender face-patches.

The shore's deserted, nobody's about. In the middle distance a boat trawling for prawns chugs into sight around the headland. A crow cries as you walk to the end of the jetty and lean down, stretching playfully to touch the painter of the fishing boat moored at its end. You're close, very close, when the swell from a noisy speedboat jolts it clean away.

Ted and Kara stayed the night in town at the flat he's recently inherited. You have memories of that place, years ago, when Helena and her family took you there. Ted's mother was a grand skeletal lady with withered hands and shocking bright red fingernails. Blanche sat like a queen in a high-backed chair; behind her, through an endless run of wrap-around windows, you could see across to Vaucluse and Watson's Bay, a panorama of eastern harbour.

Outside, wearing only Kara's striped jellabi, you try to breathe deeply, the way you can't any more in the city basin. For ages you've been

debating which choice spot on the deck would be the best for nude sunbathing, and at last you have a chance to find out. Recycled boat-decking bridges a spot where two old sandstone walls meet in a clump of yellow honeysuckle. You let the jellabi drop and lie, face-down, on a towel. The slight sun plays upon your back and, with a sensuous thrill that moves through your body, you luxuriate in remembering Gary's touch.

The excitement of your initial encounter switched, this week, to something gentler, peppered with times of wakefulness when you both felt the need to talk. He senses how you feel about your mother, how you haven't got over her death, the fact you didn't see it coming. He keeps telling you not be too hard on yourself. And you do feel that you're softening, opening up, with glimpses of the long-lost sweetness that once was yours.

During that first night out with Gary, over dinner at The Pavilion, you'd felt uncomfortable as he drank a glass of water to your every flute of champagne. It was something disturbingly new. When you'd got the chance, you'd asked him, half-seriously, how to go about giving it up.

He was startled. But then he said what Helena has always been telling you.

'Ever thought of ... '

You laughed, completing the sentence.

'... giving up advertising?'

'If that's what keeps you binge-drinking, yes. If the binge-drinking causes you distress.'

You don't want to think about his going. The difference between Gary and every other man who's been so close is that Gary's growing. Still growing. He probably always will. And you're responding. Something within you is pretending to be quiet, but it calls and keeps on calling. In a short time this man has made you feel that anything is possible – as long as you can go about it the right way, for the right reasons.

The second time you asked him about giving up champagne, he came deliciously close and whispered, tickling your ear-lobe, 'Take up something else?'

In the early hours of the morning, drinking Earl Grey from your Delft mugs, it was he who had returned to the same question.

‘One way to give up champagne, Lin,’ he said seriously, but also with his customary twinkle, ‘is to give up your champagne tastes.’

At the time he was sitting on the side of your bed, fixing his climbing boots. Why this sight should jolt you into stark reality, you don’t know, but it did. For a while you seemed to be suddenly ‘mindful’, in that space Gary calls ‘the watchful state’. You knew then that the small act of tying the last lace was signifying his departure.

Now you’re sitting up and leaning over, exploring the topmost layers of the large wicker hamper the creatives had delivered here, to The Beach, yesterday, although your real birthday doesn’t fall until next Wednesday. By which time, he’ll have gone.

For consolation, here’s a wicker hamper with fifteen, seventeen – no, twenty – intriguing-looking books. The message on the accompanying card, in Caro’s writing, reads:

Dear Linda Enjoy! Happy 40th from your adoring Creatives. XO

At first glance, you are surprised to see how many of the titles remind you of Gary, more of Gary than anyone at The Agency. *Far Journeys* by Bruce Chatwin. And of Helena! You pick up a small silver-covered book, *The Inner Secrets of Tantric Sex*, and laugh and laugh. You turn it over and read, on the back cover: ‘In less than the time it takes to read all these easy instructions your life will change for ever. Your lovemaking will be transformed ... Tantric Sex is not just about sex as you know it, but allowing you to transcend the ordinary and become a spiritual being.’

There’s more to this hamper than meets the eye. Caro has been up to something.

What’s this? A cartoonish male figure of moulded latex, or something harder. Dressed in a dark cloth suit. In one hand is a polystyrene hot-cup with a lid and, on the label, a red sign that blares ‘BIGBUCKS’. You are amused at the large head on this life-like miniature, it’s uncanny

resemblance to Forrest Shore. The other hand displays his well-known thumbs-up sign. You press his tummy.

‘Bonus. Is that a French word?’

You crack up laughing.

‘I can’t promote you. Who would do all the work?’

Oh, my, those old Madison Avenue jokes!

‘Trust me, you don’t really want a window office ...’

Then you’re asleep, another Gary-like volume open on your face. The cover shows snow-capped mountains poised in crystal air, below them a row of tents with a string of tattered prayer-flags reflected, mirror-like, in a polished sheet of what looks to be chilled glass. The surface of a fathomless ice lake.

On Thursday evening you and Helena went again to The Korea Baths. After lazing in the pools you might have taken a massage, perhaps a sauna. But Lena was determined to get you out of there quick smart and over to Double Bay. She talked of nothing but the coming party. You were still not sure about this, yourself; somehow it didn’t feel right to celebrate so soon after Stella’s funeral. But you were happy to go shopping.

You chose a pretty dress. You’d agreed long ago that the party’s theme should be The Eighties, so you made for your favourite retro shop. Helena looked stunning in the first thing she picked up, transformed to a woman of fantasy.

In the other room, you discovered something for yourself. An old Missoni, a soft and slinky sort of dress which, according to Mara, the retro’s owner, ‘simply oozes anima’. You had an impulse to wear it the other way around, to make the plunging back a sexy neckline. But its real beauty is in the Florentine fabric, row upon row of shimmering green-silk fringe. As you sway, it starts to shiver. And when you spin – which you barely had the space to do in the retro’s changing-room – it flies out straight, in striking silhouette.

The shoes are even prettier. You don’t often buy shoes, ooh-er, with a price-tag of thousands of dollars. But the unexpected, perhaps short-lived, love affair which is presently consuming you also has you doing

some strange things. For three weeks past, you'd been telling yourself that the Ernesto Espositos you already had your eye on were too extravagant; last Thursday night they proved too hard to resist. Over-the-top, yes ... also elegant in an Eighties kind of way. Slim at the sides, with a taper of clustered semi-precious stones at the front, bunching and cascading. High heels, and you'll be needing them because Gary is so tall. You've found you both love dancing, but it took another dream for the importance of this to register. In the dream you were dancing with a tall, unseen man, wearing the most spectacular high heels. The Esposito's malt-cream leather is so fine it looks and feels like satin.

It was Helena who persuaded you to drop your other interest, an unusual pair of Blahniks that were far less expensive. Anti-stilletos, with a black strap across each ankle and a whiff of Helmut Newton about them. You knew Gary would have approved, but you didn't want to tell your friend why. Not in a shop as small as this, with the manager and her assistant agog at every word.

Instead Helena told you, without compunction, that if you bought the Blaniks you would have to change the dress. If your dearest friend thinks Nouveau-Gothic Expressionism does not go well with delicate vintage Missoni, she could be right.

Kara's voice wakens you; it's coming from the kitchen. She's instructing Ted where to put the wine and food they've brought. Lying still a moment, adjusting to a now-chilly lack of sunshine, shivering, pulling Kara's jellabi tight around, you marvel at the newly assertive tone.

She comes out looking for you, the Espositos cradled in her arms.

'Linda, there you are. Are these new shoes?'

'Mm. A bit extravagant.' You blink. 'But I'm only forty once.'

'If they were mine I'd put them in a glass case. I'd never wear them.'

'Sorry to disappoint you, sis, but I'm wearing them tonight. Come hell or high water.'

She looks at you unsurely, cupping the shoes like kittens, carrying them carefully as she starts back inside.

'Kara!' You call, after her. 'You haven't said hello.'

She turns back towards you. 'Hi!' She says with a shy smile.

You are further surprised at her nonchalant manner. Your sister does seem to have changed.

You follow her, asking, 'How's Dad?'

'About to start enjoying life, I hope.' She smiles again, now at Ted, who's come up and caught her in his arms. As her slight body moves to please him she continues to cradle your new shoes. He holds her like a child.

When you've finished lunch Kara rises from the table, announcing she will take a siesta. Your sister has never, to your knowledge, thought about sleeping in the afternoon! At this time of day Kara is usually full of fractious energy: washing-up, tidying, digging in the garden, swimming, walking, starting to prepare another meal.

Did Ted keep her awake all night? You think to yourself what a dear old fox Ted is. Glancing from the page of the *Financial Review*, he catches your eye.

'What?' he says, with a look of non-admission.

'Nothing,' you reply, feigning equal innocence. 'Shall we go for a walk?'

He folds the paper and stretches.

'A walk,' he nods, looking at you purposefully, 'And a talk. I've been wanting to catch up ever since the funeral.'

This strip of beach stretches south towards Bilgola, north past Barrenjoey. As you walk, you feel the coarse grains scrunch and spring beneath your soles. Gulls screech overhead. But Ted doesn't seem to be comfortable, he keeps pointing out the obvious: a clutch of maxis, bloated but handsome, headed south in trials from Broken Bay; a dead fish left high and dry; a giant clump of kelp weed, still shiny from the depths, bedecked with orange sea cucumbers that are squelchy to the touch, oozing brown sea-juices.

He stops, turning in your direction.

'Bartholomew Sherde,' he blurts. 'I knew him.'

You gaze in disbelief. 'You knew him?'

He clears a place for you to sit, high on the coarse, warm, ochre-yellow sand.

'I realized at the funeral,' he tells you slowly, studying the minute hairs on the back of his legs, visible because he's wearing shorts. 'The unusual name.' His top lip stretches tight across his teeth. 'Bart Sherde was in Borneo. I was his NCO.'

'Ugh.'

'I know; Kara's told me.'

'Has she? She hasn't told me! Well, not everything.'

'I don't say Kara's told me everything, but she has said quite a lot. She wanted to explain her "sea of scars".'

'Sea of scars!' The three-word-password, the phrase that tells you more than anything how close Ted and Kara must have become. What should you say? Mention Kara's delusion – the best and the worst of it – or let Ted discover for himself?

'Have you ... told her?' You ask at length. 'About this?'

'Thought I'd speak to you first.'

You stare out to sea, as far as a ship can sail.

Finally Ted tells you: 'Sherde wasn't such a bad bloke, Linda, not from my memory, anyway. If he did play around with kids, I knew nothing about it.'

'Well,' you say, turning to him with more anger than you thought could still remain, 'He gave my sister syphilis! When she was nine. It went undiagnosed for months and nearly killed her.'

Ted looks at you sympathetically, helpless to explain.

You think to yourself that syphilis is one of those things that never dies out. Paedophilia, too. Paedophilia has probably been with us forever. These depressing thoughts empty your head of that wonderful, excited feeling you had earlier, a refreshing morning-of-the-birthday-party euphoria. The scene before you blurs to abstraction.

'So you're saying Bart Sherde was a good guy?'

He stands and extends his hand. He puts his arm around you like a brother.

‘A good soldier, that’s all.’

As the cream stretch-limo approaches The Beach, every passing light is reflected in its surface. It’s driver is a dark, cheerful man (‘call me Diffren’) with a square chin and wide almond-shaped eyes, Polynesian profile. In a navy blue jacket and trimmed cap, he’s the discreet traditional chauffeur. He offers you his arm, escorting you from the front door in a royal gesture you’d always thought was reserved for women of a certain age.

It was Helena’s wish that you should feel like royalty tonight; she told you this, to protests and giggles, while you were shopping last week. And there’s no doubt you do, as the limo, with its anonymous black windows, glides to a stop outside the thick glass walls of *Thing – Thinggy*, to the 'in' set – the Church Point restaurant-on-a-pier that’s suddenly become the Northern Beaches' flavour of the year.

Smiling, you step out on thick carpet. As you enter the restaurant, with its high, cathedral-like ceiling, the trio from The Strawberry Hills plays a tango. There’s a cheer from the guests – and a wave from Lena, who’s standing, stunning in black, over by the bar. The tango stops and a male singer starts a Bowie favourite. You laugh with delight as you greet the school and uni friends you haven’t seen in years.

Thing is alive with familiar faces. Not everyone has bothered with The Eighties, but someone (it’s got to be Lena) has decorated the tables with centre-pieces, free-standing graffiti sculptures from the time when this kind of thing became elevated to the realms of high art. Corks pop as a bevy of boys starts to serve peppery vodka oyster-shots and light, delicious finger-food, lime scallops with enoki mushrooms on cucumber, bite-size goat’s cheese gougères, and, just for you, tiny oblong Balmain Bug crisp sesame toasts. Outside, on the deck, a second band plays hip-hop, surrounded by a small group of Eighties-clad devotees. You hear the familiar sounds filtering through the large sliding side doors, mixed

with a steady murmur of conversation, broken now and then by peals of laughter.

Before you can think about a drink, Gary's walking towards you, grinning. Then you're dancing. It's yonks since this happened to you, and, the man can tango. He looks the part, wearing a pale green linen jacket with the sleeves rolled up. He's got the stylised stance, the head held high, the proud expression. You learned to tango at *Actor's Warehouse*, but Gary? This man is full of surprises.

The trio switches to a piece by Vella, the grungy cello suits your mood. You and Gary flow together, moving like seasoned partners. So much so that you quickly have an audience. When you make a final turn on your Espositos, Gary catches your back-bend, to admiring gasps and a smattering of applause.

That's when you notice Fergal, beside him the pregnant Rosa. Her right hand is on his arm, her left flashes a diamond.

You're still dancing when Kikki makes her entrance, trailed by a clutch of youths done up as punks. They keep on coming, there must be eight, no ten, of them. She wears the supreme *big* Eighties outfit, a Vivienne Westwood with a large hooped skirt. The pale mushroom-pink brocade clinch-jacket has wide reverse lapels and outrageous shoulder pads. As she strides in, with a stretch of golden boot, Magnus Goodnersen, *Thing's* Icelandic owner-chef and Kikki's guest-star on *The Cooking Show* last week, whisks her off behind the scenes to taste 'the best of the best, Kikkiburra, only the best.' But by the time the band has stopped for a break she's returned, beckoning you over with a glass of Special Reserve.

'Lovely party, darling. So clever of you to have it here.'

'It was Helena's idea. I wouldn't have had a party, myself. I'd have flown off to Buenos Aires, to tango with Piazzola.'

'Is that his name?' she says, peering at Gary from a distance.

You laugh. 'That's Gary, Kikki. Gary Grenfeld.'

She shrugs. 'A passionate romance?'

'Passionate? Oh, definitely.'

'Well you look divine tonight, that's a very pretty vintage. An old Yee-vays? And I adore those shoes.' She drops her shrill. 'You can be such fun, Linda, but you're so naughty!' She gives you a wink and a nudge. 'I do hear things.'

You're puzzled, blank.

'Aw, come on, darling. That thing you gave Flick Stone. Felicity Shore, as she now is.' She leans towards you. 'She took it very hard, you know.'

'Um, please explain?'

'You really don't know? Oooh! If it's just a horrible rumour, you had better ...'

You frown as she goes on. 'It was a present from that tree. One of those black-penis things they sell in sex-shops. At some silly function, Dracula's Birthday or something.'

'Vampire's Christmas? I always put nice things on that tree. Anyway, I wasn't there. My mother died. I had to go to Queensland.'

'Not this year, darling, last year. Just after Flick arrived. She was so self-conscious, poor pet. Then she was given that hideous thing! I was so ashamed. I didn't see it, I heard about it. It was the talk of her brother's restaurant, *The Stone's Throne*, you know? The hottest thing in Melbourne? Oooo, down there, darling, they can't get over how cruel Sydney is.'

As soon as you can, you make an excuse and find Gary. He's chatting to Rosa, so you corner Fergal.

'I hear you're getting married.'

'Yeah. I was going to tell you. We must grab a bite, sometime.'

'Oh, we must. But ...'

'Don't tell me, Linda. You're busy.'

'No busier than you, Ferg, now you've got a job.'

'You won't guess!' You gasp, once they've gone. 'I've just heard from Kikki Frankfurt that Felicity – Forrest Shore's new wife – thinks I gave her a nasty present. And I'm starting to wonder. She comes from Melbourne.'

'Can you find out more?'

'Jason Nile's still tracking the wreath. He'll be up here, Tuesday.'

Gently, ever so gently, Gary takes your arm, and all at once you're thinking of something else.

'I'd like to deal with whoever it is. But that will have to wait.'

'Linda!' Kara is breathless as she comes off the floor. 'I can still dance!'

'Ted's not bad, either.' You watch in amused admiration as he makes his way towards the bar.

'Neither is that fellow.'

'Gary?' You laugh. 'Even the tango! Must be something to do with his Calgary boyhood.'

'He looks nice, Linda. Where have you been hiding him?'

'It's new, honest. Didn't start 'til I got back. But I never see you these days,' you tell her teasingly.

'Blame Ted,' she replies with the faintest of smiles. 'When we were talking about clones, he said ...'

You squirm, but she carries on, '... he'll take me to Italy. Or perhaps Iwan; the laws there are getting easier. Then he wants us to go on to England, to fix up that business with Merton.'

'Ted's got a barrister mate in London, hasn't he?'

She nods. 'A member of that club.'

'Oh yes, the tie.' You pull a distasteful face. Then, unable to help yourself, tell her urgently, 'Kara. I think going to England with Ted is a great idea. Not sure about the rest.'

She looks at you disdainfully, tossing her head, at that moment the image of Stella. 'You've never understood, have you Linda?'

As she turns to walk away, you see Lexie, an old school chum, waiting nearby with her grazier husband, Richard. Tactfully ignoring anything – everything – they must have overheard, Lexie tells you, 'Lovely party, Linda, sorry we have to go. We must be back in Walgett tomorrow. And we're driving. It's Phoebe's 80th.'

'Then you must go,' you agree as you walk them to the door.

On the massive wooden deck you see Gary's silhouette outlined against the glitter of an unsettled moon. He has his back to you; he's leaning into the wind.

You know the time has come.

'Hey! I met your sister.'

'Kara? I hoped you would.'

'She's ... different.'

'Mmm. It's not so obvious to everybody. Not at first.'

'She's beautiful, almost as beautiful as you.'

You smile at the compliment, although what Gary's said isn't strictly true. Kara is beautiful like your mother; you're like the side of the family that came from that small Viking island, Papa Hille and Dad.

'The Kara Thing's a long story,' you say quietly. 'I'll tell you, one day.'

'When I come back.'

'When you come back.'

You pull a silly face.

'You really are leaving.'

He nods, his eyes on you the while.

'Bad timing, wasn't it?' you tell him ruefully.

Gary shakes his head. 'No, Lin. It was good. You'll see a better person once I'm through.'

You are close in that moment, very close. Kissing, while the crowd stays away; hugging, desperately un-wanting time to pass.

'I'll be in touch, soon as we've finish the trek.'

'When will that be, do you think?'

He straightens his fingers, moving his right hand from side to side. He's uncertain.

'Four weeks, maybe five. At the moment I'd say five. In the meantime, I want you to have this.'

From his pocket he brings something that glints and fastens it about your neck. You feel a smooth object, it's carved fluidity, then look down. On the finest of gold chains, one that reaches between your breasts, hangs a small but elongated dark-green figurine. Antique, it bears a sheen; serene of face, sure of body, with swirling robes.

‘Lan T’sai-ho, Jade Lady of the Tao.’ He grins with slight shyness, a boyishness as charming as it is unexpected. ‘She’ll give you strength. The power of the celestial dragon and the elements of earth.

‘Yang and yin?’

He nods. ‘But why am I telling you? You’re the golden girl, the one who knows it all.’

You shake your head.

Once he’s driven slowly by the pier with one last wave, you stand alone. He’s gone. And you can’t help feeling some bitterness against the timing, the way things happened. Why, oh, why did he have to go? Gary seemed to bring a chance of happiness, freedom – something different.

About two hours later you hear a disembodied voice giving embarrassingly repetitive advice. Then it dawns on you, it must be yours. You’re directing a semi-comprehensible stream of nonsense at the person who is supposed to be taking you back to The Beach. Somehow you have gathered that his name is Jake, and, all things considered, Jake is coping well with the hopelessly pickled you.

A storm is brewing, but you haven’t noticed. You haven’t been aware of anything but yourself, sometimes not even that, since Gary’s departure. Since you began hitting the champagne.

Dimly you hear Ted telling you to get into the boat.

‘U aunt go-ing dat way, r u, Jake? Rogs, hid-den rogs. An done go glose do Scodlan I-lan, will u? De currens, dere, r too strog. Ded, please! Ged in firsd an fine my sista some-where to sid. I’m OK, OK, I dell u!’ You nod vigorously, fending off all offers of help as you make a staggering climb aboard. ‘O - K.’

You are no longer wearing your extravagant party shoes, only sheer tights. They’ve jagged on the splintery jetty, now they’re proving slippery on the deck. A ladder is running slowly up the back of your leg.

Kara’s made herself the custodian of your precious Espositos, bless her. She cradles them carefully in her arms as she finds a seat.

This restored wooden tender once belonged to a handsome private yacht, but you're oblivious. The thrust of the engine throws you forward, then back again. Nothing seeps into your blurred mind through the thump of the champagne whammy. What exactly were you trying to do? Obliterate yourself?

You think you might be sick. You lurch forward, clinging to the nearby rail with both hands, trying to steady yourself. This ride seems to be getting rough, it's a lot rougher than you'd expected. No more than five minutes into the journey across Pittwater the black sky cracks open and a squall arrives from nowhere with a frightening roar. It rains, it pours, walling down; in less than a minute you are wet to the bone. Your flimsy silk fantasy-dress sticks coldly to your skin, your jacket's sodden beneath the heavy-weather mac that Jake draped across your shoulders as you came aboard. You're drenched through; hard drops keep pelting on your face. You can't see anything ahead of you for the blinding rain.

The tender, which had started skimming along with a humming sound, now thumps the water, smashing down at increasingly short intervals with series of juddering thuds. Wave upon mounting wave pile upon each other, the waters build to a frightening height in the gusting winds. The prow points towards the sky.

Now you are being sick, managing to scabble enough of what used to be your manners to spare your sister and your mates the horror of flying vomit.

A rogue wave crashes around you, throwing up more of the biting, soaking spray. Jake throttles back, struggling to keep the boat bow-on to the worst of the waves. It swings out wildly, erratically, and you start to slip, then fall, grazing your leg and back.

In the ominous lull that follows, you somehow manage to stagger up, just in time to see the bow descending into a trough. All around is stark thick black, a terrifying void.

For one dangerous moment you feel strangely drawn towards it, wanting to plunge in.

'Hold on!' yells Jake.

His words are swallowed by a mighty bang. A mountainous onslaught of dark water lands amidships with a blinding crash, and in the upsurge that follows the body of the boat is flooded by wild surf. The thrust of the assaulting swirl almost knocks you down again, the tender lists alarmingly. You cling desperately to the rail.

At that moment you hear Kara scream, Ted shout. Fearfully you turn, not daring to let go, and see, in sickening slow motion, your sister disappearing overboard. She's cradling your shoes.

Chapter 10

How did you get to bed? You will never know. Now, on waking, you feel like you've been flattened under the wheels of a cattle-train, kicked in the head by a buffalo, left on a desert roadside. There's a sore graze down your left side, when you strain to look at the lower part you see it's been dressed with something that's stained your skin yellow, a seal against infection. It takes you minutes to recover from the pain induced by that simple move as you lie rigid, your mind detached and floating.

You drop into uneasy slumber, waking again to find a glass of water on the table beside you. Your body feels no better, the effect of last night's vomiting has left it wracked. You think how Gary must have gone hours ago, he'd be there by now. Or would he? No, not quite. He's probably in Singapore. You hug the pillow next to you and try to cry, but nothing happens. Remembering your small jade Lan, you feel for her, panicked that, like your sister, she might have been lost. When, to your relief, you find that she's still there, you hold her fast, imploring warmth and comfort.

'Please, please, please, make things different! Can I have yesterday over again?'

Then you start to weep for your sister. Weep like you'll never stop.

Sunday drags by in a series of blots and blurs. Having Helena and Ted staying with you at The Beach does help. Of course it does. But through your pain, you see your dear friend looking older, drained. And Ted moving slowly, like a ghost. Faint circles of shiny whiteness have appeared on his forehead, a fragile translucence.

There are detectives all over the house, poking into everything, asking questions. Boffins with disposable bags collect what seems to be the oddest of Kara's possessions, labelling and sealing everything before they take it away. A well-meaning counsellor is soberly practical; a vicar with a small black Bible is keen to help. That's all you can remember.

The next time you wake, you are suffering the aftermath of a nightmare where Helena rang The Agency to tell them about Kara. A female voice answered, saying, 'How many more have to die?'

Your head hurts in a spot curiously similar to your sister's: the place inside her hairline, above the temple, she called The Crater. Only you, and possibly her school friend, Poppy Jane, had any idea the wound was there; Kara had always concealed it, just as she'd concealed her sea of scars. Once and only once did you see Kara's wounds, when she was about to turn fifteen and began to think of boys. One day she showed you her abdomen, a sight you found shocking. There was a central scar, a wide crawl of spidery pink flesh that went all the way down from her navel, an appendix scar to the right of it. A red slash transversed the abdomen to make a cross. You couldn't believe these scars were all from the same operation, but your sister assured you that they were. Because she was so young at the time, and Bart's assault had never been reported, no-one suspected she could have syphilis. They needed an official reason to operate, they decided to begin by taking the appendix. It was as a place to start, an observation point; from there they saw that the gangrene had spread far. You were still trying to take it in when your sister directed your attention to her head, asking you to approve the clever way she'd trained a chunk of thick hair to curl down over The Crater. The thought of all this makes your abdomen feel worse, as though you might start vomiting again.

It was Helena, driving Bette Blue. At least you think so. Was that only last night? You were the passenger. A journey that seemed endless. You'd stared, catatonic, out the car window at the unchanging clear bright sky, so unlike the black sky of the night before. When you arrived she had to tell you how to put one foot in front of the other. She must have brought you back to Jackson's Landing. Yes. To prove it Tank is here, purring like a panther.

Is this another dream, or what is left of it? Kara's in the room. You can see her with unusual clarity. She's as she used to be, her thick double

plaits slipped sideways. They always were too heavy for silk ribbons.

The two of you are giggling, plotting, trying to work out how to get your hands on a bought meat pie – for the reason that Stella forbids it. Neither you nor Kara specially likes meat pies, but your mother hates them as much as she hates chewing gum. At the smell or sight of either she reaches for the broom handle, the household weapon.

Helena sits by the bed as you toss and turn. You are searching vainly for a reason. A reason for being here when Kara's gone.

'The light's too strong,' you say, holding your hand over your eyes. It's a momentary angle of the sun, refracting through the glass bricks of the wall.

'Lin, dear Lin,' says Lena, gently touching your arm.

You turn your face away in shame.

'I'm ... disgusted with myself.'

'None of us feels good,' she answers quietly, taking your hand.

After a while you ask her, tentatively, 'Where's Ted?'

'He went back to Point Piper. He needs time to himself.'

'What is the time?'

'Gone twelve.'

'What day is it?'

'Monday.'

You flop on the pillows, then start forward.

'I must phone Dad.'

'Don't worry, Lin, I've spoken to him. I thought you'd have wanted him to know before he read about it, heard about it. Or saw something on TV.'

'Oh, darling Lena.' There are tears at your cheek. 'How was he?'

'Devastated. Found it hard to speak. You might persuade him to come down here, sometime, Lin. Or you might be able to go up there. You never know.' She gives you a small smile as she straightens your top sheet. 'Chai? Coffee? Cocoa?'

'Milo. It's in the cupboard near the microwave.'

Now you are travelling in time, back to last Wednesday evening. Gary came to Jackson's Landing with his climbing gear, ready for an early-

morning start. The sight of the back-pack, crampons, climbing shoes, electronics gear and, for some odd reason, a cap with sheepskin ear-flaps, piled upon one another in your tiny hall, brought his departure too near. That evening, that night, you'd talked endlessly, asking things of each other you'd been wanting to all along.

You had made love, but slowly, and with less passion than before, murmuring to each other in the close warm dark. It felt right to be together, as if it had always been that way. Then at two o'clock you'd got up to make a cup of tea.

Ignoring Tank's look of disdain (what is this strange man doing here?) you'd removed him from the sofa. Offended, he'd placed himself at the centre of your Bokara rug and glared at the two of you as you lay beneath the mohair rug. Then, just as suddenly, he became bored, and, yawning widely, curled up again and went back to sleep.

Gary told you he'd known for ages about Bette Blue. She was pointed out to him by some friends of his who were car-buffs, months ago; since then he'd often seen you driving through North Sydney. But he knew nothing of The Beach. You described it to him in broad terms but played down the level of luxury, too embarrassed to fill in all the details of the spa with the indoor garden, the way that everything had been put together with such meticulous homage to the perfection demanded by such a temple to materialism. You did confess to having a humungous mortgage there – one that could only be fuelled, as far as you knew, by keeping your current job. Another thing you'd stopped short of explaining was The Kara Thing, you simply said your sister was living up there at the moment.

'You'll meet her on Saturday night,' you'd added with some trepidation.

You'd talked again, and yet again, of Gary's trip. In the end you felt you knew as much as he did about that elevated countryside, you'd caught something of his sense of romance. Much as you disliked the thought, you'd known then that he really was going. Whatever he'd planned, whatever he'd worked for, must be carried through.

'I rang The Agency earlier,' Lena tells you as she brings the Milo.

‘Umph.’

‘They want you to get in touch.’ Then she adds, with uncharacteristic sarcasm, ‘Of course they do! Something about a presentation.’

You catch your breath. ‘I’ll go in, tomorrow.’

‘You’ll do no such thing.’

Tank lifts his head to look at Lena, then at you, then back at Lena. He licks his lips and, with a jerk of his chin, begins to clean the white blaze on his chest.

Your head still hurts, your body’s flaccid. Nevertheless, you intend to get up; you’ve never been one for languishing, probably because you’ve never stopped to acknowledge the flux of feelings churning away inside. It’s always been easier to suppress them than to face them; if you faced them you would have had to deal with who-knows-what, a prospect that is threatening and frightening and now looms larger than ever.

Helena’s mention of the RoB presentation has you back on red alert.

On most days, getting to The Agency seems automatic. You slip into the cushy seat of Bette Blue and she does the rest. But this morning it seems she doesn’t feel much like it; her slick European mechanism is threatening to shudder as you start the ignition. She was due for a service more than a week ago, before you went to Queensland; something else to blame yourself for.

The whiff of something different, circumstance that’s not-quite-right, becomes apparent as you reach the space reserved for G. C. D. It’s surrounded by red hats, the kind they use on road-works. You can’t gain entry and there’s no explanation. You leave Bette Blue in a bay marked ‘Client’ and take the next lift. A couple of juniors gets in, you smile but they stare in the other direction, suppressing small smirks.

At the eighteenth floor you’re hit in the eye – *wham!* The contents of an office is arranged in a ragged line along the corridor wall, and everything is yours. Caro’s desk’s piled high with more of the embarrassing stuff.

‘Linda! I thought you were on compassionate leave.’

'I was. What's going on?'

'To tell the truth, I don't have a clue. All I know is that I'm moving. Two floors down.'

'Says who?'

'Teri Dare. She came back yesterday. She's got a creative team starting Wednesday; says she needs your office.'

'Where is she?'

'Same old place, up next to Forrest Shore.'

As you rear for a fight, Caro catches your arm.

'Linda! Remember? Your meeting with Jason Nile? He's been waiting a while, I put him in the boardroom.'

'Jason!'

'The coffee here's not too bad, I'm on my second cup,' he replies, pulling back his cuff to look at his Rolex. 'They said you weren't in yesterday, Ms. Hille. They didn't seem to know whether you'd be in at all. But I had faith.'

'Who's "they"?''

'Luke T. Rimmer, to be exact,'

'Luke ... what?' Trust Jason Nile to make you laugh, when you thought you never would again.

'Luke. T. Rimmer. That's his name. For real. He became Luke Trimmer by deed poll round about a year ago.'

'How do you know?'

He smirks. 'Don't ask, you wouldn't want to hear.'

You shake your head and blink. 'So what have you got for me?'

'The wreath, or the real work?' he asks sardonically. 'OK. The name of the person who ordered the wreath is Flick, Flick Stone. The girl who made it, Maddie French, says she did it as a favour – Flick's an old friend. Maddie thought it was a joke.'

So it was that stupid bitch. How did you ever let her wind you up like that? She's nothing! You feel a heady mixture of release and anger, a fizzy cocktail that goes straight to your head, making you want to find that

poisonous creature and hit her hard. But you control yourself, enjoying a slow sense of lightening, the gentle loss of not-knowing.

‘Jason, thank you! That’s what I need. I did hear something this weekend,’ you hold onto your throat as the painful remembrance of Kara’s death jolts you horribly. ‘I thought it might be her. Do you know who she is?’

He makes a calculated guess. ‘Anything to do with *The Throned Stone*?’

‘Sister of the owner. And the wife of Forrest Shore.’

‘Wooh!’ He looks at you in faint amusement. ‘Sounds like a heap of trouble.’

‘And – your quote has been approved.’

‘*You don’t say!* Schottes is in?’

‘With a few small changes, Schottes is in. You did have an advantage, being from Melbourne, but the numbers were competitive. And I want you to know, it wasn’t just my decision. The account director had to sign it off.’

As you make towards to the room that used to be your office, you consider the scary new triumvirate: Dare, Shore and Stone. You remember now that Dare stayed with the Shores when she first came to Sydney. For some weeks, until her apartment was ready.

Everything has gone except the empty desk, your computer, and two chairs. Aria Blenkinsop sits in one of them.

‘Hal-lo darling! I was up with Forrest, so I thought I’d pop down. Mind if I sit here?’

‘You’re as welcome as I am, Aria.’

‘I say, darling, have you seen the new Szu Szu?’

Aria’s known for her brusqueness. Her questions often contain hidden truths, wrapped in her self-assured English manner.

‘Haven’t been to the cinema lately.’

‘They’ve kept your words but changed the tune. Or, not exactly – as there isn’t one. But the rhythm, you know, the arrangement.’

‘Hmm! Han Malik will be pleased.’

‘Shitting himself. When Malik gets mad, he goes for the jugular.’

‘Really? I have to say, I haven’t noticed. Han’s always been fine with me.’

‘Only because he owes you, darling. Didn’t you hand him Szu Szu on a plate?’

She lights a cigarette, an arrogant action reminiscent of your C.E.O. and his cigars. You wait for her to ask why your office looks so empty, then you realise she already knows.

‘Don’t mind, do you? Dying for one.’ She fixes you with her beady eye. ‘So tell me, darling, was Dare's trip in any way connected?’

‘With?’

‘With her search for an Art Director. In London.’

‘Dare was in New York.’

‘Oh darling, you are so yesterday! Dare was in New York to have some suits made. Then she went to London.’

You manage to hide what you are feeling by smiling solidly, like Alice’s Cheshire cat.

‘And what did you do about the message on the mirror?’ she continues in a drawling tone. ‘That rude writing at the Oscads?’

Your spine jars, your neck goes stiff. ‘You saw it?’

‘Darling, everyone saw it.’ She yawns delicately, world-weary perhaps or just plain bored. ‘Pardon me. It was still there the night after, you know, at The Movie Ball.’

You wince, but keep smiling. ‘Tell me, Aria, are you doing anything nice to-day?’

‘Not sure, darling,’ she replies, stabbing out her cigarette butt on a tin-lid retrieved from your waste-paper basket – the one thing that hasn’t been emptied. ‘Not sure what you think is nice.’

You’re still catching your breath when her head reappears.

‘And, I meant to say. They’re paying top motza for people like you in Beijing.’

Her visit leaves you seething. How about the cheek of Dare, hiring a creative team?

‘Linda! C'n I come in?’ Caro, by the sliding door.

‘Sure Caro. I’m having a little think.’

She sits down in the chair that was recently vacated by Aria. She eyes you doubtfully.

‘I don't know what to say, Linda, about your sister, I mean. After your mother, it's too terrible. I met Kara ... the other night ... at your fabulous party. I thought she was lovely.’

For a while you can't say anything. Then you reply, ‘Yes, Kara was special.’

After an awkward moment, Caro leaps up and grabs your hands.

‘Hey, Lin!’ she says. ‘I want to do something to cheer you up. Remember that old thing we used to say? When the going gets tough, the tough go shopping.’

You apply some blush and a brush of mascara. You force yourself to go, grabbing your bag and flunking out, committing the corporate sin of leaving the building without saying where you are going or when you expect to come back.

You made the wrong choice this morning. You might be wearing fine hand-woven linen, but it comes with a load of baggage. You wouldn't even own a dress like this, except that it was something you rushed out and bought when Stella last came to Sydney. She'd told you that one of her dear friends from ‘Light in the Spirit’ had recently passed away, and, out of respect, asked you to wear something dark – ‘but not black, Linda, never black. I do hate black.’

Funny, like drinking Milo and eating Vegemite, both of which you've previously shunned, wearing the colour navy is another of Kara's prerogatives you seem to have adopted. But one look in the mirror tells you it's a mistake, especially when you're feeling low. It makes your face sallow.

‘Where to?’ you ask Caro as you hail a taxi.

‘Chatswood Chase? Those chic little boutiques – you know, upstairs in that circular place – the one with the escalator down the middle? Then we can go across to Myer.’

‘All right. But I don't want to see any shoes.’

'Linda!' She looks at you incredulously. 'You love shoes.'

Your face flushes as you repress the urge to tell her how your sister went overboard with your Espositos in her arms while you were drunk. Instead, you mumble: 'Shoes have cost me too much lately.'

When you've done with shopping, you decide to take a bite to eat at the Italian bread shop. In its long window, stretched across behind, they're making pizza by the crisp thin metre.

Reminded of an Italian recipe book in the gift hamper, you ask Caro, 'Um. Who chose the books the creatives gave me for my birthday? It wasn't you.'

She laughs, looking guilty. 'I wasn't sure what to get you, so I rang Helena. She recommended one or two.'

You smile. 'You don't have to tell me which ones! And what about the others?'

'Helena suggested I ring Gary. He's lovely, isn't he? He went to so much trouble.'

Your mouth turns down. 'Just a pity that he's gone.'

'Gone?'

'Trekking, in Nepal. He left early Sunday morning.'

'He doesn't know? Oh, Lin! But he'll be back. It's obvious that he thinks the world of you.'

Your voice fails at the thought of everything that's changed since you lay sleeping in the sun, the rich volume open on your face, last Saturday morning. For a while you play with the creamy top of your macchiato, making crosses in it with the side of the spoon. Only when you feel more composed, still staring at the choc-specked foam, do you speak.

'Caro. Did you ever hear about a gift Felicity Shore was given, last year, at Vampire's Christmas?'

When she doesn't reply, you look up.

She avoids your eyes. 'Ye-es,' she says falteringly.

'You *do* know something!'

She grimaces.

'Someone gave Flick a big black candle in the shape of a penis.'

She looks uncomfortable.

'It was me.'

'You?'

She shrugs helplessly. 'One of those things. Felicity wasn't supposed to come, she wasn't even on our list. She appeared out of nowhere, tagging along with Forrest. We didn't know a thing about her. If I'd half-suspected how strange she can be – much stranger than Xianna, at least Xianna's got a sense of humour – I would never have given it to her. But we were in a rush, you know, arranging everything. Then I had to find an extra present! Xianna was, like, look through all the boxes in my room, stuff left over from the recent dos. And can I tell you? There were some very strange things in there. The candle was the best of them. I wrapped it up in some of your signature paper; you know, from the big roll you always keep in your room.'

You look at her, aghast, flustered at what you might possibly say. You can't tell her what's been going on, she'd be mortified.

'Why do you ask?' she says appealingly.

'Oh,' you splutter. 'I've been meaning to mention it for ages. Whether you knew anything.'

The ensemble you're wearing now is made of soft red wool. You happened across it in Myer and decided, not because the label is one you know, but because it feels right. The semi-fitted top barely covers, but underneath it is a matching bra. The front panels cross to make a waistcoat, and the two vertical slits give it a strong bold look. The skirt isn't anything special, but it's the right length. A pity about the Rossis, but they're the only shoes you've dared to wear, even look at, since that night.

Again you pass the unsightly line of office-mess stretched out along the wall, everything from a stray packet of Tampax to the framed needlepoint. When you arrive at her office door, Dare is fixing her hair in a round chrome edged mirror on a stand at the far side of her desk.

'Linda! I was about to come and see you.'

You sit in a low chair, elaborately crossing your legs, smoothing your skirt.

'I was going to say ...'

'That you've employed a team? Congratulations!'

'Who told you?'

'Now let me see, who did tell me? Or perhaps I saw my things.'

'Oh come now, Linda. We moved those things carefully, very carefully.'

'Why did you move them at all?'

'We thought you weren't coming in. A woman rang ...'

'What's going on?'

'I think you'd better speak to Forrest, Linda, if you're going to be rude.'

'Another family tragedy.' Shore reaches into his large wooden humidifier, producing a fresh cigar.

'Thanks for your concern, Forrest. And Teri tells me she's employed a team.'

'That's right! We thought it only sensible for her to see Severine Smith.'

'Severine who?'

'Hot new London headhunters. And let me tell you, it proved a smart move. Teri struck it lucky, right away. A top young team happened to call by while she was there, and they were interested. What an opportunity, eh?'

If one thing stands out from his speech, it's the word *young*.

'But I thought we were looking for an art director to replace Piers. To work with me.'

'Indeed. And that can happen. In the meantime, we have this great new team arriving to help with the presentation.'

'The RoB Presentation?'

He clips the cigar, preparing to light it.

'When we got the message about your sister we decided not to take a chance. You understand, don't you, Linda? We thought you might miss out ...'

'You're kidding!'

‘Well, you have been building up a history of absences – at short notice.’ He looks at you in an accusatory way.

‘I’m hearing this?’

‘Be reasonable, Linda. The Agency needs new talent, you must appreciate that. And you know who they are? Bernie Shorter and Bea Bonner-Rice. Remember that famous British poster campaign, the "Harrah Bra"? Well, they’re the ones who did it. They put that huge pair of black knockers up all over London. Brilliant, absolutely brilliant! Now they’re doing us a favour, flying down here in a hurry. You’ll agree, Linda, it’s only fair, since they’ll be playing a big part in our global project. They need an office with a harbour view.’

That nagging pain above the temple is back again.

‘I fail to see what role they can play.’

‘How could you?’ he says meanly. ‘You weren’t here. You missed their video conference. That was yesterday. Listen, Linda, these guys will contribute great stuff.’

‘But will it fit with ours?’

‘We don’t know, do we? We had to do the run-through without you.’ His face reddens as he shifts in his chair. ‘Listen, Linda, don’t start acting the prima donna, like we haven’t considered you. We have; we have considered you. All the way. It’s just unfortunate there’s nowhere to put you at the moment but down on the production floor.’

You laugh.

‘Linda, don’t get shirty with me! You know it’s for the good of ...’

‘Bullshit.’

‘What did you say?’

‘I said, bugger The Agency, Forrest. There is a choice. You’re not putting me down.’

‘Linda ...’

‘Linda, nothing!’

On the way out, you pause in the centre of Forrest’s office to take a last look at this museum of minimalism with its Rothko look-alikes, dark matt or shiny oblongs, black-on-black, or black with wine red squares, decorating the walls between the windows and their views.

His face reddens. 'What about the presentation?'

You shrug. 'In my computer, Forrest. You're welcome. Luke will be happy to take over.' You smile sweetly. 'And Caro has the passwords.'

What they don't know, what they'll never know, is that you have purposely left out the punch-line, the money-line, the hook that was to bring to The Agency an abundance of further funds. The key to the conclusion, the most important part, the part about Twenty-First Century 'symbol-ISMS'. How the global mega-brands - Buddhism, Islamism, Christianity, fundamentalism and terrorism - are invisible. It's a small leap from there to the conclusion, 'invisible logos'. You'd planned to *ad lib* that bit, right at the very end, and propose that The Agency examine the concept. The RoB 2 project would have been worth megabucks.

'So you're walking out?' Forrest's face is apoplectic. 'I warn you, Linda Hille, if you do this, there will be consequences. You'll lose your car. You'll never work in this business again.'

As you listen to his voice, you're reminded of something your Madison Avenue mentor, RG, used to say sometimes: 'the marshmallows always win.'

You laugh, a good strong laugh.

'Oh fuck off, Forrest.'

Chapter 11

The mind can be the weirdest thing. On my birthday, when I awoke, I didn't remember I'd reached the age of forty. I didn't remember anything. I could only think, with a sinking heart, of my poor darling sister. I extended a dumb, blind arm towards the empty pillow beside me. I opened my eyes to see Tank had reclaimed his place as principal male. He'd been watching and waiting, biding his time.

Later I made myself go out. I walked slowly, with leaden legs, towards The Point. I wanted to catch Eleanor.

'C'n I come in?'

I could tell by her expression that she knew about Kara. 'I was hoping you'd call by. So very sorry.' She looked at me with sympathetic eyes, giving my arm a little schoolgirl squeeze. 'Like a cuppa?'

Previously I've made it a rule not to talk much about my sister. But Eleanor and I have shared a common bond, as well as the meaning of some of my more puzzling dreams. I found it easy to tell her of my grief. Then she asked about work.

'I could find another job, but Kara's passing has knocked the stuffing out of me.'

She was reassuring. 'You've made the right decision, Lin. Trust your intuition, you're the one who knows. Another cup?'

As she poured some more of the Irish Breakfast she asked, 'Any idea what you might want to do?'

'No,' I said. I felt like laughing at my lame admission. 'Something original; different from what they called 'creative' in my job. No matter how wondrous or funny that was – and a lot of the time it was – there's no more to it than hard sell.'

Previously I'd taken Bette Blue to the works that pamper her. When I went to collect her she was a much happier car, but for the first time ever I found myself paying the bill. *L'addition* for Bette's usual polish-and-tone

came as another shock. I had some idea of what she might take to run, but the true cost of fuel and upkeep had been hidden in The Agency's package. When I rang my lawyer, he told me there was no problem about keeping her – if that's what I wanted – but I'd have to do a buy-out.

I was still mulling this over when I noticed a poster, repeated in a huge solid bank on great stone walls near the city pylon of The Bridge. It was the one I'd done with Piers for Helena's exhibition. Designed to go up in blocks, like this, at arty places in Glebe, Paddington, Darlinghurst, I thought it look fine *in situ*: different, perhaps better. A pair of eyes pierced through spacey clouds to one of Helena's pots, afloat like a great luminous moon in the night sky. As I whizzed by, I caught the words:

ArtWharf presents
THE JAPANESE GLAZE
New sculptural ceramics by
Helena Vergil

On the way to her studio I called by the Post Office. The box hadn't been emptied for days. It was stuffed with bills. The first thing I opened was a card with a pink rose on the front and the simple 'Love from Dad' written inside.

Dad, oh Dad!

There was another, in unknown handwriting. On the reverse it said, 'Open on your birthday'. I hesitated, but found it was from Gary. He must have posted it early on the day he left.

There was a CD, *The Tango of Copenhagen*, music I'd never heard. And a blue-and-white card. On the front was a quote from John Wayne:

tomorrow is the most important thing in life
comes in at midnight very clean
it's perfect when it arrives
and puts itself in our hands
it hopes we've learnt
something from yesterday.

Inside it was written:

Dear Lin, I wish I was with you to-day. I will be, tomorrow. *Let's dance!* Love, Gary

One glance through the open door of Lena's studio revealed twelve pots, large sculptural pieces with complex finishes. The way my friend had doubled or tripled her Awo glazes, letting different streams of them flow together, created patterns reminiscent of Japanese characters.

I held out a bunch of pale perfumed lilies.

'Linda! It's your birthday. I should be giving *you* flowers.' Then, in a double-take, she looked at me sharply, 'Aren't you working?'

'Nope.'

'You haven't?'

'I have.'

She stood fixed to the spot, astonished, shaking her head. She said, 'I thought it would take forever.'

If I needed to cry, which I did, I had come to the right place. I cry frequently these days; ever since Kara's death I've been thinking that trying to cover up my feelings is plain silly.

I told Lena what had happened.

'Why didn't you let them fire you?' she asked, puzzled.

'That's what Vin Hoo told me. He said, "I'd have got you a heap!" But Lena, the plan wasn't to fire me, it was to demote me and degrade me. Hey! If push comes to shove, I'll sell Jackson's Landing.'

'Or The Beach?'

I shook my head. 'Might come to that, but not yet. I want to try living there.'

Lena went to her paint-spattered fridge. 'C'mon, have a Happy Birthday! Compliments of Ted,' she said, reaching for a bottle of his emblematic David Jones champagne.

This was my first thought of alcohol since that night. I couldn't say it held much attraction. I took a tentative sip, and found that to be enough. I was somehow disappointed, but wasn't that what I'd wanted? And what was it Gary had said? 'Maybe you'll need a crisis before it can happen.'

'Heard from Gary?' asked Lena.

I showed her the CD and the card. As she read what he'd written I touched the smooth jade of my little Lan pendant.

She smiled. 'Better than hearts and roses.'

I nodded. 'It's very Gary.'

'I got to know him, you know, just a bit.'

I registered my surprised. 'How come?'

'He rang me to reply about the party. Said he was keen to arrange some dancing, would I mind? He must have known how much you like the Tango, Lin. In the end, he saw to the music – the trio, everything. I'd already booked the band from The Strawberry Hills, of course; you'd told me ages ago how much you liked it. But it was Gary who did the rest, got in the disc-jockey, the hip-hop mob, the extra musos for the Piazzola.'

'I'll see you, Friday night?'

'Of course! I haven't thought beyond ...'

'Whether they'll find the body? When there'll be an inquest? What to do about your Dad?'

Lena is often uncannily accurate, she seems to know what I'm thinking. You nod, remembering the question of the missing white gloves. And that most delicate subject, the loss of his son, the brother to you and Kara. 'I've a couple of things to ask Dad.'

'He'd really like to see you. But come to ArtWharf and forget all of that for a while.'

I sat there looking at the glazes, admiring their highlights of cerulean blue, magenta, purple - not so much envious of what my friend had achieved as glimpsing an opportunity. Could this horrible time of my life be the start of something new?

Lena began to talk again of Taka, her grey-eyed Japanese lover. On the night of The Opening she would know whether or not she had the grant that would take her back to Japan.

'You will come to visit us?'

Quickly I replied, 'Do you have to ask?' But there was a note of alarm in my voice.

The one and only portable electronic object I could find anymore was my personal mobile. I remembered seeing the work cell, too, at The Beach the previous Saturday morning, but couldn't recall what I'd done with it. I thought I must have taken it, my palm, wallet and iPod to the party; they'd gone missing, along with my evening bag.

I jumped when it rang.

'It's Aria, darling.' Her voice boomed in my ear. 'I just wanted to remind you about that Asia thing. I've *mentioned* you up there.'

'Aria!'

'I got your number from Kikki. Told her it was urgent.'

'I didn't know you knew Kikki.'

'Kikki's an old friend, darling. Anyway, what do you think?'

'Think?'

'Linda, I don't like to say this, but mud sticks. The Black Penis Drama went on far too long. It did you a lot of harm in Sydney and in Melbourne. You'd be better off in Beijing. Let me know when you want to start.'

I listened, fascinated. If anyone was going to tell me exactly where I stood, it was Aria.

'Who said I wanted anything?'

'Well, darling, you might feel like that this week. But after a teensy break you'll be down on your knees, begging to come back.'

No sooner had she finished when my mobile rang again.

'Hi, Linda. Han.'

'Han! What's new?'

'Money! They've settled. On the copyright, that is. You heard about that, didn't you? As soon as Mr. Szu Szu got the lawyer's letter, he tried to secure my shit-hot barrister. When he found that I'd got in first, he decided to settle. And here's is the good bit: half of it is for you.'

When Friday evening came, I couldn't go near my shoe closet. Neither could I be fussed about what to wear. The only reason I bothered at all was for Lena. I psyched myself up, imagining I was back in the dressing room at *Actors' Warehouse*; I put the strangest things together and somehow they seemed to work. I found that the barefoot touch looked best with Sass and Bide, so I wore the Moulin Rouge-inspired outfit with a ruffled skirt, striped taffeta vest and long sleeved plunge-down shirt in that same red. I was still drawn to Kara's colours; for days I'd worn nothing but.

Sunset in a cloud-banked sky made a fiery backdrop to the long, grey-painted ArtWharf, the extended old weatherboard building reflected in the harbour's windless surface. The small boats lay quiet on their moorings as a ferrous-painted ship loomed by and disappeared under The Harbour Bridge. Opposite, at the top of the hill, was The Agency.

Helena's agent had invited lots of advertising people. *Vergil* work has become popular with banks and other large corporations, her classic giant ceramic pots are often seen to brighten an otherwise stark foyer or austere boardroom. But I hadn't expected so many adbiz types, especially from The Agency. The moment I entered Artwharf I came face-to-face with Ms.Tree.

'Xianna!'

'I get invited to everything these days, now I've left The Agency. Didn't you know?' Like some strange black bird cleaning its feathers, she shook out the ruffles of her see-through shirt. Her nose-ring glinted with the movement, her earrings dangled. Her hair wasn't slicked-down in the usual way but fluffed about her face like the coif of some devilish angel. As she turned, pausing to lift her arm, the one not holding the yellow-leather handbag in the shape of a Halloween pumpkin, I could see through the low-cut armhole a perfectly pointed, black-tattooed nipple.

'I'm Kikki's new manager.'

'Kikki Frankfurt?'

'Goodness, Linda, you are out of touch. Kikki's started her own Cooking Show. This time she's the cook. Put it all together herself *and*

wrote the cookbook. To-day we've been planning DVDs, in five languages. What Kikki wants is something different, so that's where I come in. There'll be a touch of the Goth about it.' She gives you a turned-down smile. 'My job is to set the mood, atmosphere, that sort of thing. So we're starting with black food. The kitchen's in the crypt of this old church.' Again she lifts her arm. 'And we're doing these art vegetable handbags. Aren't they nice?'

Then I caught sight of Lena, a rare moment by herself.

'Excuse me, Xianna, I must see Helena. Tell Kikki it sounds amazing!'

But in less than moment I found myself jostled on top of Caro.

'Linda! I've been trying to get you. You haven't been answering.'

'No, Caro. I haven't.'

She giggled. 'Listen, The Agency wants its cell phone. They're going spare.'

I shrugged. 'It seems to have disappeared, along with the rest.'

'We've had a hell of a time, you know,' she confided. 'Word crashed on your computer ...'

'Before they got the RoB stuff?'

She nodded. 'Before Teri got to it, anyhow. Don't know about Luke. You should have seen Forrest, he was beside himself! He sent your hard-disk to a forensics lab in Canberra. But it was kind of weird, you know. The computer nerd that came told me it had been programmed to crash.'

'On Wednesday?'

'Yes, come to think of it.'

'My birthday.'

We exchanged puzzled looks. 'Anyway, an announcement popped up in a black-bordered box: The day ... something ... died ...'

'... the music?'

'Yes! The day the words and music died.'

I nodded slowly. 'She even got in there.'

'Who? D'you think someone ...'

Still I couldn't tell her.

'And you did The Presentation?'

‘Did we, *what!* First thing this morning. If I look punch-drunk, it’s because I worked right through last night. Though I did manage to get away this arvo – go home and change.’

‘I love your antique silk.’ I fingered her quilted jacket, ming-blue with a pattern of yellow roses. ‘Who presented? What about “the team”?’

“The team” is a dead flop! They didn’t do a thing. Luke took over, acting like a queen, swanning about. He threatened to leave if he wasn’t made GCD in your place. Had them over a barrel. And, I just heard – the presentation went brilliantly. Luke’s got his ticket to New York.’

‘Is he coming here tonight?’

‘Probably. He went to The Client’s cocktail party, you know, in the back foyer of the Opera House, that one with the amazing views. At around five o’clock. You know, Linda, it surprised me that The Agency made a thing of this,’ she gestured around Artwharf. ‘The publicity came through the system. They even put the poster up in the Pool Room. I had to laugh. Like, no-one but me had any idea you and Piers did it!’ She frowns. ‘Felicity Shore might have been behind that; she’s fancies herself as an art collector.’

‘Hello, Linda.’

I felt the sadness in his voice before I saw Ted’s face. He looked thinner, older, gaunt. I kissed him on the cheek and tried a hug, but he held his body tight.

‘I had to come,’ he said.

‘So did I.’

‘Helena told me you’ve left work.’

I nodded. ‘Pardon the cliché, Ted, but life’s too short for advertising.’

He smiled. ‘For many things. I have this for you.’ He produced an envelope containing something small, hard and bulky. It was Kara’s gold Seven Dwarves bracelet. The sight of it set off an overflow.

Ted led me towards a quieter corner. He put his arm around me in that brotherly way and for a moment I rested my head on his lapel.

‘Jake found it between the planks, down in the decking of the boat. The chain was broken. I had it mended.’

I fixed the bracelet on my wrist. At first it felt strange.

'Did Helena mention? I'm flying out to London this weekend.'

'Ted, no! You are all deserting me. What about the inquest?'

'Don't worry, I'll be back for that, once we know. In the meantime I'll get this started. I want to tell you something. Last week, about this time last week, your sister made me executor of her will. Now you might think that strange, but there was a good reason. We'd decided to get married.'

'Ted!'

'We hadn't told anyone.'

I gasped.

'I'm off to investigate a few things; one of them is an insurance policy. Seems you're the beneficiary.'

'Me?' Another bolt from the blue. 'I didn't know Kara had one.'

'I don't know how she managed to keep it. But she was keen to pay back the money she owed you.'

I first glimpsed Felicity across the room, disappearing into the crowd. A series of taps was calling the gathering to attention. I settled my bare feet on the smooth parquet floor and tried to put her from my mind, listening to the nice things that were being said. I was pleased for Helena that this was going well, she deserved all the praise that was being heaped on her. At the end, her grant was confirmed and I applauded, along with everyone else, although I knew how much I was going to miss her. I thought about Kara just then, too, and wanted to leave, but before I could there was Luke, right in front of me, high on the success of his day. He swept grandly by, swishing his *shtick*, in a black velvet cloak lined with Schiaparelli pink.

'Linda Hille!' He announced loudly, turning to stop in front of me. 'How wonderful you look,' he said drolly, canvassing the nearby crowd with wide-flung arms. 'I've always loved that Sass & Bide.'

I laughed. Luke could not possibly have loved it, I'd never worn it before. But he had picked the right label.

I kissed him, European style, on both his powdered cheeks.

'Where are your shoes?' he screeched suddenly, pointing at my feet. As I stepped aside, he caught sight of the fine gold chain flying out about my neck, the small jade Lan at the end of it.

'What's this? You're not going hippy on us, are you?'

'Introduce me?' Lena was beside you.

'Of course! Luke, Helena Vergil; Helena, Luke T. Rimmer.' He glared at me for using his real name. 'Luke works at The Agency.' I looked at Lena meaningfully. 'He took over my RoB presentation to-day.'

With a flourish of pink cape-lining, Luke made a stand in the middle of the small circle of onlookers.

'The show I put on was the best, though I do say so myself. Had them eating out of my hand.' He glanced around, through his Sixties-revival false eye lashes. 'I started with a great little piece from Winnie the Pooh: "We were searching and not finding ..."'

Huh. I've had my ideas stolen – often – but never flaunted like this, right under my nose. But before I could say a word my fury was diverted.

'Felicity!' exclaimed Helena. 'You know Linda, don't you? And Luke?'

There she stood, tall and blonde, aloof as a caryatid. But her classic image was spoiled the moment she opened her mouth; with her flat nasal Toorak accent she sounded like the shop assistant, Pru, from *Kath and Kim*.

'Oo, hi,' she said disdainfully, turning her angular shoulders towards Helena. 'I've bought your biggest, most expensive piece. I love it!'

Here was my chance.

'And what will you use it for? Your own ashes? Oh, and that reminds me, Flick. Thanks for the wreath.'

Helena glanced at me with wide eyes; Felicity glowered.

'I don't know what you're talking about.' She screwed up her face. 'There must be something wrong with you!' Then she turned to Helena. 'And you can keep your stupid pot, I didn't want it anyway.'

When I returned to Jackson's Landing to collect Tank he was already asleep in his orange wicker basket. He knew what I'd been doing earlier that day, when I had started packing. I shut the lid and fastened it, then

carried him to the garage. I arranged the basket on his rug, ready for our drive.

Now I knew what it was like to be stabbed in the back. But what was that old saying of Grannie Sherde's? *Always keep up face*. On the way to The Beach I reviewed the massive investment I'd made in myself. How advertising used to fascinate, how easily I was caught! Though I had to admit that it had also given me a taste power, the power to move millions with one jingle. More than that, a taste of what money can buy – shoes, designer clothes, travel, cars, furniture, real estate. And it had introduced me to New York. So far I've only worked there, next time I'll play the tourist, be a visitor, take a long look at the new America. I'll board the round-the-island ferry, stroll through Chinatown, walk the foreshore down by Brooklyn Bridge. I'll lie back in the Park's long grass, take in a lot more jazz at the Blue Note. And visit The Chelsea again – perhaps with Gary.

Thus I continued to day-dream, as The Choir of Hard Knocks sang 'Hallelujah'. The slow, sad tone reminded me of The Chelsea – although, it's true, Cohen wrote a different song about that. I joined in, spasmodically, using what I like to think of as my husky cabaret voice.

'Hallelujah, Hallelujah
I did my best, it wasn't much
I couldn't feel, so I tried to touch
I've told the truth, I didn't come to fool you
And even though
It all went wrong
I'll stand before the Lord of Song
With nothing on my tongue but Hallelujah ...'³

By the time Bette Blue, Tank and I were passing through Dee Why, a new thought had begun to hatch. It was about taking Kara's place, the following Monday. Tracing my sister's steps, catching the bus; attending what would have been her first appointment with Dr. Mezzner after his weeks away.

³ Leonard Cohen, *Hallelujah*, (Song. First recorded on his album *Various Positions*, 1984)
<http://www.seeklyrics.com/lyrics/Leonard-Cohen/Hallelujah.html> Leonard Cohen *Hallelujah*
Lyrics 17.03.07

The long vehicle lurched around the bends above Pittwater, swerving and swaying. Even when the bus had left the bay behind, the events of Kara's death were still with me. I'd been plagued ever since by a strange ambivalence, an oscillation between alertness and anathema. Alertness, in case it all turned out to be a grotesque nightmare; anathema as a refuge from reality. With little or no success, I've been trying to concentrate on the 'mindfulness' Gary had talked of.

Something of Gary's advice had worked, the other night. Even though there was no champagne at Lena's opening, which made things easier, I was pleased with myself for saying *no* to the wine that was offered. And I did make a point of leaving early. But instead of 'mindfulness' that day I found myself thinking how it must have been for Kara, travelling alone down here twice a week. She'd once told me that, as she approached Dee Why, she'd wanted to dissolve and disappear without a trace.

I stared at the wide strip of coastal urban-scape, the great grey sweep that stretches inland to the plateau. I remembered how hard it always was for Kara to find her way around: one good reason why she didn't drive. After the doziness of mid-week Palm Beach, Dee Why must have seemed to her like a metropolis; in my mind's eye I could see her puzzling over directions in the busy shopping street. I'd often found her taking far too long to cross a road. Sometimes some kind people would notice this and offer help, but any road, big or small, had to be clear both ways before she would pluck up the courage to try. She'd look from right to left, left to right, repeatedly; she was always nervous, confused and hesitant. I bit my lip, fingering each little figure on her bracelet. I remembered how much my little sister had wanted to get better.

The shabby sixties building was close to the beach. I walked towards its entrance, not barefoot then but wearing a pair of old trainers I'd rediscovered that morning. I stepped with care around the rubble from the next-door demolition site.

On Dr. Mezzner's floor the lift doors opened onto a small vestibule with a polished pine floor, two blue linen chairs and a low glass table. Yellow sunflowers stood tall in a green glass vase. Idly I fingered a magazine, to

find that it was in French; underneath was a well-thumbed children's book. I picked it up and hugged it close. Somehow it was reassuring to know that children could come here, too.

At a minute to eleven, a voice called Kara's name. A woman emerged from the corridor; she was surprised to see me. When I told her who I was she asked me to wait. She quickly reappeared and invited me to follow.

Dr. Mezzner was much as Kara had described him, an unprepossessing man with a small grey beard, above it bright-brown eyes. His lack of curiosity was striking, his manner made it seem perfectly natural that it was I who happened to be there that Monday morning rather than my sister. He ushered me in and I saw the sand-tray standing on stout legs, beside it a bank of crowded shelves that bore a multitude of things: statues of the Virgin, the Buddha, Shiva and Ganesh, beside them Celtic crosses, runic signs, Hanukkias, fish, fairies, houses, castles, trees, guns, tanks, soldiers, cars, buses, trains, rocks, assorted animals, bearded Bin Laden-like figures, police, soldiers, clowns.

H.M., as Kara used to call him, indicated a sort of couch, a minimal extended chair. It faced a small attractive window with a view of the nearby surf-beach, framed by a polished-wooden sill. He fetched a chair for himself, placing it a comfortable distance away, facing and a little to the right. As he waited for me to speak, I remembered how Kara had said, 'Dr. Mezzner doesn't talk much'.

He knew I was distressed, I could see it from his eyes. But he continued saying nothing, except to offer me a glass of water. Slowly I realized that if I didn't speak, neither of us would. Nervously I cleared my throat.

'I'm here instead of my sister Kara, because.' I stopped. 'She's ... dead.'

For a second he gave me searching, knowing look, as though something had been confirmed in his mind.

'How did this come about, Linda?'

'From a boat, in a storm. On Pittwater, last Saturday night. It was in the news.'

'Ah.' He shook his head. 'I returned only yesterday.' His European accent was slight, revealed only in the precise way he phrased some of his words. 'I am very, very sorry, Linda.'

All at once I wondered what I was doing. At first this had seemed like a good idea, but now I wished I'd simply made a phone call. I felt faint, as though I might fall forward. Dr. Mezzner seemed to have the curious power to make me want to tell him things I'd been concealing all my life, unspeakable secrets compounded of fear and guilt, regret and shame. I sat speechless.

He handed me a box of tissues, then gently excused himself and went towards the door, calling to the woman who had shown me in. She handed him a long flat parcel, which he brought over.

'I'm sure you will want this, Linda. It's Kara's Journal.'

'Oh, I'd forgotten all about that! Kara told me she'd kept it.'

Slowly I took the old blue-leather book out of the covering and fingered its smooth worn surfaces. I looked briefly inside to see that it was written in Kara's careful script. The painstaking neatness of each page brought back memories of how hard my sister had tried at everything; the book stirred feelings of guilt stronger than I'd felt. Only when I'd had the time to gather my composure did Mezzner speak.

He smiled. 'Would you like to do a sand-play, Linda? You might find it interesting.'

'I don't know what it is.'

'It's easy. You choose whatever occurs to you from the shelves and make an arrangement in the tray.'

He waited as I put the journal down.

'Take any objects you like.'

'What's the point of it?' I asked blankly.

'The Navajo Indians made pictures in the sand, most meaningful ones. And the Aboriginal people of the central desert used a stick to do something similar: that's where the dots of the much later dot-paintings come from. When you do the same, you join a tradition.'

I shrugged. 'I'll try.' At least it was a diversion, anything to take my mind away from revisiting the self-torture of guilt and blame that Kara's death had magnified.

Dr. Mezzner left me standing by the tray. I wondered if this was some sort of psychological test. Was there a right and a wrong way to do this? Was I to be judged on my selection? I looked around but saw the doctor was unconcerned, reading papers on his desk.

First I chose a small green plastic snake. Then a little boat, a simple model of a house, a toy soldier. I wondered how I might convey water, and when I moved some of the sand away I discovered that the inside base of the tray had been painted blue. I went on. I thought I'd finished, then I saw a small demon-like creature, reminiscent of something from the Ramayana, on a high shelf. I hadn't noticed it before. I picked it up and looked for somewhere to put it. I decided I didn't want it to be in the sand-picture itself, but out of it. So I placed it on the wooden edge of the tray, above and at the back of the scene.

I returned to my chair.

Dr. Mezzner looked up. 'Finished?' he asked with a smile.

I nodded. 'Think so.'

'May I look?'

I shrugged. After a minute or so, he came back and drew his chair a little closer. What was he going to say?

'Thank you for doing that. How did it feel?'

As a matter of fact, I'd found the process intriguing, curiously satisfying. I said so.

'Good, good. It was meant to help. Now I want to tell you that you must stop blaming yourself. About Kara. What she suffered was not your fault. You are not accountable.'

I was shocked, considerably so. How did this man know I was blaming myself?

'But you don't understand, Dr, Mezzner. It was my fault. Always has been.'

'Why do you think that?'

‘Because I was responsible for Kara. I chose to go to Inverbrook, instead of going with her to Derinda.’

‘How old were you then?’

‘Twelve.’

‘Twelve. Now think of a twelve year old, any twelve year old you might know. Would you blame her for choosing to go and have fun on a farm if she had the chance? What child of twelve should be burdened with the responsibility of a younger sibling?’

‘But my father gave Kara to me when she was a little girl. He told me to look after her.’

‘Then I’m sorry to say your father was foolish. We all want to respect our fathers, but sometimes they make mistakes.’

‘I love my Dad.’

‘Of course you love your Dad. There’s no reason why you shouldn’t. He sounds too human.’

‘Anyway, Dr. Mezzner, the fact remains. If I’d been at Derinda, Kara wouldn’t have got into trouble. I knew about Uncle Bart; he’d tried something before, with me. I’d have been able to warn her.’

‘Perhaps so. But Uncle Bart was cunning. He may have raped you too. Have you thought of that?’

I shudder to my shoes. I recall that Anzac Day when Bart picked me up, then held me in his lap.

‘What I am trying to say, Linda, is this. You took the blame for what happened to Kara. You have lived with that far too long.’

‘But her delusion was so awful!’ I start to sob, I can’t help it. ‘I never understood it.’

‘The delusion was caused by the fall Kara had, after the business with your Uncle. When we met, I examined your sister. I suspected that her condition was the result of a head injury. She showed me the recession above her hairline, the one she called The Crater. She told me it occurred at around the same time Mrs. Whitegloves had appeared. Later, when I conducted tests, I found she had sustained an injury to the prefrontal lobe. But a delusion of this kind could have been the result of a car accident, or a fall from a bike.’

'You mean the madness ... my sister's funny speech, her endless stories, awkwardness, the way she thought "Mum" was lost and Mrs. Whitegloves was real? The Kara Thing? It had a physical cause?'

He nodded. 'Sufferers can be found to have an aneurism, but the cause is always physical. An injury to, or pressure on, part of the brain.'

'Could it have been cured? You know, with the proper attention?'

He shook his head. 'Of course Kara could have been helped, were your parents and others more aware. If blame is to be apportioned – and I find that this is never something to achieve anything useful – it lies with the adults.'

I slumped in the chair. I wasn't sure what to think.

'No matter what you say, Dr. Mezzner, it was my fault. My sister ... went overboard ...um ... trying to save my shoes.'

After what seemed like a long pause he spoke again, softly. 'If it will help, Linda, I will tell you a story. Did you know the cottage at East Hendred? Where your sister lived with the people from the catering business?'

'*Oxfordshire Organiques?*'

He nodded. 'Yes. Around the time she met her husband, Merton.'

I nodded, too. 'I remember it vividly. The garden was paradise.'

'Ah,' he said. 'But not always. A bad winter followed that perfect summer and, one weekend when Merton was staying there with Kara, the cottage became snowed in. On the Saturday afternoon, since there was nothing else to do, your sister sat by the fire learning a new card game. She was lucky with her house-mates, they didn't mind helping her. In some ways they understood her. They had been together at cooking school, they were used to her strange ways. And they must have liked her, because it was they who asked her to join them. Anyway, on this occasion, she became engrossed, and it was getting quite dark, at about four or four-thirty, before she realized she hadn't seen Merton for hours. She went looking for him, calling his name, but couldn't find him. She ran between the rooms, but he was not in any of them. She sought the help of Lytton, senior amongst her house-mates.'

'I remember him. We played charades.'

Dr. Mezzner paused. 'Lytton was the first to look outside. But it was Kara who found Merton asleep under a bush, an empty hip-flask beside him. The snow was piled up all around, some of it over him; he must have been out there, like that, for some time. Literally on the point of starting to freeze. Lytton and the others moved Merton as quickly as they could to the bed they used to call, jokingly, 'the great bed of East Hendred' – because it was French, huge, and ancient, and had a high carved back. They used to take turn at sleeping in it.

'So they tried to warm it with hot water bottles. But the thing that actually saved Merton was the heat of your sister's body. Kara shed her clothes and climbed into the great bed with him. She held Merton through the night, wrapped in her warmth, until he returned to a normal state.'

'Why are you telling me all this?'

'Ah, wait. You will see.' Dr. Mezzner pondered a moment, then went on. 'What happened that night was this. There had always been something dark in Merton's life, for reasons we don't know and never will. It was this that lured him into the garden that afternoon with the flask of alcohol. Freud would have called it the death-wish.'

'Death-wish? I thought that was something Freud invented to describe something within himself!'

'Freud believed the fear of death is actually a wish – and indeed he may have found it first within himself. Many things in psychoanalysis were first observed by its exponents in themselves. You can think of the death-wish as aggression turned inward on itself, if that is easier. Amounts to the same thing. Unconsciously, Kara absorbed this as she brought Merton back to life. She relieved him of it by taking it on.'

'How could that possibly happen, Dr. Mezzner? It sounds like catching a cold.'

He laughed, briefly. 'Well, yes. Oddly enough, it is something like that. In my job, we keep a watch out for it. We call it 'psychic contamination'. Shall I go on?'

I nodded, blinking rapidly, finding some of what Dr. Mezzner was saying hard to believe.

'During that night Kara gave Merton a new lease of life. But from this time onwards until the moment that she died, your sister had to carry it along with her own load.'

I swallowed hard. I heard myself asking him defiantly, 'Are you telling me, Dr. Mezzner, their marriage was doomed? It seems ridiculous.'

'Believe me, these things are hard to understand, even for me. But I'm afraid to say that it was most probably the case. Kara's psychological burdens became too great. Brave and willing though she may have been, she was not strong enough. In the end she was unable to cope with the life she was leading. Her troubled state of mind began to show itself first as insomnia, then vertigo, both of which she found to be absolutely terrifying. Then, one morning, she awoke thinking she had a razor-blade suspended across her throat.'

'Oh! She told me about that. It frightened me.'

'No as much as it frightened her. She believed that if she spoke, moved a muscle, her gullet might be cut.'

What Dr. Mezzner had to say was sobering. I needed much more time to absorb it.

'And I thought it was just the delusion,' I mumbled, half to myself.

'The delusion which, as you know, Kara suffered from an early age, can never be called *just*.' He gave rueful smile.

I stayed quiet, then burst in with something I had, for this time, forgotten.

'Dr. Mezzner, I haven't told you! Our mother died.'

'Your mother? When?' He was riveted, awaiting my reply. 'Before Kara's accident?'

I nodded.

This was of the greatest interest to him. 'Did Kara see her?'

'Yes. Kara came with me to Queensland. When she saw the body, she recognized her "lost Mum".'

'How very, very fascinating. What was the actual effect?'

'As far as I could see, exactly that. Kara called our mother, Stella, "Mum". From then on she was happier. She even started a love affair.'

Which was puzzling to me because she'd said, when you went away, that she was in love with you.'

'Ah, yes. That was not "love" in the way you might think. It was an effect of the transference. This is another thing we, in the helping professions, have always to deal with.' He smiled. 'But tell me, what did your sister think had happened to Mrs. Whitegloves?'

'That she'd gone back to where she belonged.'

Now it was Dr. Mezzner's turn to be thoughtful. He bit his lip, staring for a moment at nothing or the filing cabinet on the other side of the room. He brought himself back to the moment.

'Your sister saw Mrs. Whitegloves as ...'

'A simulacrum?'

'Exactly. You are familiar with this?'

I nodded and almost smiled. 'I used to work in global marketing.'

'Ah.' There was a small pause as he studied me. 'You know, your sister Kara was a remarkable person,' he said slowly. 'She was full of surprises. Her delusion amounted to an entirely different way of perceiving things, a distortion of reality where her emotions were hard to handle, or sometimes impossible, because they were not in line with what she saw or thought. People who suffer this kind of thing usually don't travel so easily. Kara had her difficulties in getting around, that is true. But she managed to take herself to and from England, and she came here by herself twice a week. In London she achieved the status of a cook, not a specialized cook, like a *sous chef* or a *patisseur*, but a dependable all-rounder. More remarkable still, Kara sustained the pressures of work, although I must say it was fortunate she was looked after during that time by a nice group of like-minded people. She was protected by the well-paced life of *Oxfordshire Organiques*.'

The residue of recent sleepless nights was beginning to exert its pull inside my eyes. The floor of Dr. Mezzner's room started to swim a little. Stella had gone, Gary had gone. Lena was going, Ted was going. And Kara had gone, gone, *gone!*

I felt I wanted to crawl into a chrysalis and stay there for a season or two, a long time. To fall into a hibernation that would transform what had gone before and bring renewal.

Dr. Mezzner looked me in the face and smiled kindly. 'You are aware of synchronicity, Linda?'

I'd heard that term. Often. But I answered cautiously, 'A kind of serendipity, perhaps? Co-incidence?'

He nodded. 'The word was coined by Carl Jung to describe a coincidence without a cause. It has to do with unrelated events that are connected by meaning. Ah ... but I will say it this way. Synchronicity happens when something from our unconscious minds, the sort of thing we find in our dreams, comes into contact with reality.'

'That happened when I took Kara back to Derinda. It seemed like a time-warp.'

He shrugged. 'It could be to do with another dimension. But the reason I'm asking you, Linda, is this. In the six weeks I was away, the vista of the beach appeared in this window,' he gestures towards the little opening with the postcard-perfect view, the one I'd noticed when I first came in. 'Before that, all you could see from here was rough rendering on old bricks, flaking and peeling. A dirty cream colour. The wall was due for demolition. Kara used to tell me she was waiting for the day it would come down. When the blue of the ocean could be seen from here, your sister said, she would at last be free.'

A strangely visceral feeling began creeping along my legs, up my spine, and down my arms to my fingertips. I shivered as I gazed, with fresh new eyes, at the cobalt blue Pacific framed in that small window.

My purpose in this dissertation is not to attempt a catalogue of the many and varied devices offered by the narrative 'you'. The intricate patterning of

⁴ Deborah Hope, 'Undercover Authors', *The Weekend Australian*, July 14-15, 2007, p. 40

use that David Herman terms 'double deixis' is alone so extensive that it might be the subject of a PhD thesis.⁵ In an essay of this length I will concentrate on those qualities of the pronoun I found to be helpful in constructing a 'cover', mask, or *persona* for the 'I' (occasionally referred to as *the writerly self*) behind the text of the novel 'In Two Minds'.

The ways in which the narrative 'you' may afford such 'cover' requires a play of grammatical and rhetorical resources, primarily in order to loosen diegetic bonds between narrator, protagonist and narratee. In the dissertation, attention will be given to the fluid, shape-shifting ambiguity of the 'you' pronoun and how it has been used advantageously in that regard. It will demonstrate how various 'you' modalities, together with appropriate textual indicators and discourse referents, have been employed to disguise the 'I' behind the text. It will show how the narrative 'you' is able to represent a dominant aspect of the protagonist Linda's character, while at the same time providing narration to inform the reader in a manner not dissimilar to eavesdropping. Although more general uses of the narrative 'you', mainly in non-fiction, will briefly be examined, the dissertation will concentrate on contemporary second-person novels.

In discussing the need for writers such as myself to seek 'cover' in order to be able to realise confrontingly personal material, the dissertation will put forward the case of a contemporary Australian author who found, with the use of narrative 'you', a singular voice that provided sufficient distancing to enable her to write. It will contend that this may also have been the case with writers of other second-person novels.

A previous dissertation, written to accompany a suite of five fictional prose stories, ended with this quote from H el ene Cixous:

'The dead are our first masters, those who unlock the door for us that opens to the other side, if only we are willing to hear it. Writing, in its noblest function, is the attempt to

⁵ David Herman, 'Textual "You" and Double Deixis in Edna O'Brien's *A Pagan Place* (Second Person Narrative)' in *Style*, 1994.
<http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G1-16988714.html> Section 1, para.7 25.03.07

unerase, to unearth, to find the primitive picture again, ours, the one that frightens us.⁶

As I buried my mother, and concluded the whole of my former life, I had finally found my voice.⁷

Only later, when I came to write the novel 'In Two Minds', did I realise the last statement was not entirely correct: I had yet to discover the voice of the narrative 'you'. Since the mid nineteen-fifties I had made various attempts to record Kara's story in diaries and journals, memoir and poetry; also in screenplay. Some twenty-five years later I 'came out' about my troubled childhood and wrote a dramatised account of adolescent life, using elements of the story, as a treatment for a feature film. I chose to write in screenplay format at the time as, after secondary school in Australia, I had left my home in Sydney and gone to London where I was trained as a film and television writer at the American advertising agency, McCann Erickson (now McCann WorldGroup).⁸ Aside from two innovative Creative Directors, David Bernstein⁹ and Desmond Skirrow,¹⁰ my mentor was 'BJ', Robert Brownjohn.¹¹ Brownjohn was the 'Chicago Bauhaus' designer perhaps best remembered for the movie title sequences *Goldfinger* and *From Russia with Love*. My contemporaries were Hugh Hudson and Ridley Scott, young directors who became known not only for outstanding advertising commercials but also motion pictures. From time to time, movie directors such as Nicholas Roeg enjoyed the challenge of the two-minute cinema commercial. In the 1960s David Puttnam was a photographers' representative, later he became a film producer and director.

Over thirteen years in London I was employed by several advertising agencies including J. Walter Thompson, Masius Wynne-Williams and Batten, Barton Durstine and Osborne. At BBDO I was fortunate in gaining

⁶ Hélène Cixous, *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 9

⁷ Jennifer Albertson, 'Dreams Fears and Desires', MA Preliminary dissertation, University of Western Australia, Department of English, 2000.

⁸ <http://www.mccann.com/> 25.06.07

⁹ <http://www.designws.com/pagina/1boekadv.htm> 11.11.09

¹⁰ <http://www.economicexpert.com/a/Desmond:Skirrow.htm> 11.11.09

¹¹ <http://www.aiga.org/content.cfm/medalist-robertbrownjohn> 10.09.07

a second mentor, Richard MacDonald, whose work took him between the advertising business and the motion picture industry.¹² By 1963 MacDonald had designed the production for *The Servant* and was engaged on further motion pictures with director Joseph Losey. He went on to design many more features, among them *Far from the Madding Crowd* with director John Schlesinger and *The Firm* with director Sydney Pollack and actor Tom Cruise. Latterly in London, I became a freelance, writing for film production companies such as Halas and Batchelor and its subsidiary Dragon Productions. On my return to Sydney in 1974 I was again employed in advertising, as a writer/producer and Creative Director for Ogilvy and Mather. I subsequently became an International Creative Director for Masius Wynne Williams D'Arcy McManus. During the latter appointment, I was seconded to New York on several occasions to work with the affiliated Madison Avenue company, D'Arcy.

In Australia, under the name Jenny Nussinov, I won national and international advertising awards, in particular as the originator of a brand-campaign that was used consistently over twenty-one years, *This Goes with That*, for The Sussan Corporation.¹³ From time to time I also worked as a freelance writer and/or producer for projects such as the documentary, titled *Shadow Sister*, on the life of Oodgeroo Noonuccal, (poet Kath Walker).¹⁴ I lived in Kath's gunyah on South Stradbroke Island and brought her friend Judith Wright to participate in the film, the title of which was taken from a Wright poem. In 1986 I was invited to write the anthem for the Nairobi Conference at the end of the Decade of

¹² http://www.hollywood.com/celebrity/Richard_MacDonald/191336 10.09.07

¹³ Jenny Nussinov, *Gelato*. Client: The Sussan Corporation. Writer/Producer: Jenny Nussinov. Director: Patrick Russell. Ross Wood Productions. Sydney, 1980. 30 secs TVC. AWARD: International CLIO.

Jenny Nussinov, *Highland*. Client: The Sussan Corporation. Campaign Concept: Writer Jenny Nussinov. Director: Patrick Russell. Production: Ross Wood Productions, Sydney, 1981. 30 secs TVC. AWARD: FACTS.

Jenny Nussinov, *Feather*. Client: Johnson and Johnson. Writer/Producer: Jenny Nussinov. Direction: Camfilm. Camfilm Productions, Sydney, 1979. 30 secs. TVC. AWARD: FACTS/ Best of Category.

Jenny Nussinov, *Country Road*. Client: American Express International. Writer/Producer: Jenny Nussinov. Director: Gillian Armstrong. Dennis Weedon Productions, Sydney, 1980. 60 secs Cinema/TVC. AWARD: FACTS.

¹⁴ Jenny Nussinov, *Shadow Sister*. Writer: Jenny Nussinov. Director/Producer: Frank Heimans. Cinetel Productions, Sydney, 1978. 50mins.

AWARD: Diploma of Honour, Leipzig International Film Festival, 1979.

AWARD: The International Award, Black Filmmakers Hall of Fame, 1980.

Women (1975-85), also the script for the accompanying film-clip, which was broadcast nightly by the ABC to celebrate the event. This production, titled *We've Only Just Begun*, was directed by Gillian Armstrong through Film Australia.¹⁵

During the years 1982 and 1983 the movie treatment of Kara's story, titled 'The Anzac Boy', was awarded successive development grants by the Australian Film Commission. I wrote two feature-length screenplay drafts. In 1984, however, the third and final draft was not funded. Disappointed at having got so far but failing to realise my project, I conducted a private *post mortem*. Among other things, I saw that for me an attraction of working in screenplay had been the knowledge that whatever I wrote was certain to be changed. Members of the film industry take it for granted that in the process of film production a screenplay will be adapted, sometimes radically, on account of the views of the executive producer, producer/s, director, production designer, art director, director of photography, actors and so on. What Bruce Robinson has to say regarding the changes that were made to his original screenplay for the Oscar-winning *The Killing Fields*, speaks for itself:

The script didn't actually go through eight drafts, but the third act went through maybe five ... I wrote a draft incorporating David (Puttnam)'s wife but he refused to have his wife in the story. Then I wrote another draft incorporating the father, and the father refused to be in it. Then I believe it was turned into a sister. I would have personally gone for the first draft ...¹⁶

Despite experiencing similar difficulties, I acknowledged that the screenplay form had presented me with 'cover': a way of realisation where personal and private material might retain suitable distance from the vulnerable 'I' behind the manuscript.

Was there 'cover' to be found in prose writing?

¹⁵ Jenny Nussinov. *We've Only Just Begun*. Writer: Jenny Nussinov. Director: Gillian Armstrong. Producer: Daniella Torsch. Production: Film Australia, 1986. 60 sec. Cinema/TVC.

(Jenny Nussinov is a *nom de plume* of Jennifer Albertson).

¹⁶ Bruce Robinson, *Smoking in Bed*, ed. Alistair Owen (London: Bloomsbury, 2000), p.49

I had of course to accept that my screenplay had been rejected for a reason, although I could not agree with the reason I'd been given: 'Australia no longer needs films of this genre'. If this had been so, auteur director Jane Campion would not, soon afterwards, have been able to produce her highly-acclaimed movies *Angel at my Table* and *The Piano*, both of which concern stories of abused women and share the same historical/Gothic genre as 'The Anzac Boy'.

I resolved to try writing in prose form, but as the pivotal character in Kara's story has always been the mother, the nature of my relationship with my own mother prevented me. Luce Irigaray tells of sameness and difference at the core of the mother/daughter relationship, amplifying its implied dichotomies and playing with the subtleties of its mirrorings and distortions. Irigaray voices the consequences of the destructive maternal connection, one that makes movement impossible:

With your milk, Mother, I swallowed ice. And here I am now, my insides frozen. And I walk with even more difficulty than you do, and I move even less. You flowed into me, and that hot liquid became poison, paralyzing me. My blood no longer circulates to my feet or my hands, or as far as my heart. It is immobilized, thickened by the cold. Obstructed by ice chunks which resist its flow. My blood coagulates, remains in and near my heart.¹⁷

I knew the paralyzing effect Irigaray describes, for as a result of childhood trauma, neglect and abuse I had swallowed my mother's ice. As I attempted to write with authenticity, my insides remained frozen.

I found the definition and immediacy of attempting to write in a form other than as a screenplay to be overwhelming. I felt that narrative prose offered no buffer to mitigate the harshness of what I had to tell. In 1988 I decided to leave a successful career as an international creative director

and enrol at the University of Sydney to pursue the single aim of learning how to put large numbers of readable words on paper. After I had gained

¹⁷ Luce Irigaray, trns. Hélène Vivienne Wenzel, 'And The One Doesn't Stir Without The Other' in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 7:1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 60

an undergraduate degree, established a second career as a psychotherapist¹⁸, and relocated to Western Australia, I resolved to pursue the Masters Degree by Research in Creative Writing. For the MA preliminary I returned to parts of Kara's story, producing the aforementioned dissertation and a suite of five stories set in the nineteen fifties.¹⁹

The French feminist writer who first become important to me in the search for a woman's way to write, Hélène Cixous, argues that 'We Need a Dead (wo)man To Begin'.²⁰ And indeed it was Cixous' 'young, present, ferocious, fresh death, the death of to-day, today's death'²¹ that finally enabled me to dispel my icy state. When my mother died I resolved to explore the primitive picture again, frightening though it had always been. I was assisted by the words of psychoanalyst Ingês Sôdré:

Memory and remembering are connected to keeping alive in the mind those who have died, and therefore with the whole process of mourning, which implies both keeping an internal relationship with the dead, but also working through the loss

...²²

I sought to hold Sôdré's notions of 'memory' and 'remembering' in consciousness. I found them to be useful outposts during the time of the death of my mother.

My next step was to identify wider barriers to the acceptance of Kara's story. I found there were at least two, the first of which was its location in the abject. Julia Kristeva illuminates the abject in her analysis of the ways which 'proper' subjectivity and sociality require the expulsion of the 'improper', the unclean and the disorderly.²³ Kristeva maintains that what is abjected can never be fully obliterated but hovers at the borders

¹⁸ In 1993 I became a professional associate of the Australian and New Zealand Society of Jungian Analysts.

¹⁹ Jennifer Albertson, *Honourable Fire Rat*, is the first story in this suite (*Southerly Vol. 63, 2*: Halstead Press: Sydney, 2003), pp. 136-142

²⁰ Cixous, p. 7-9

²¹ Cixous, p. 7

²² A.S.Byatt and Ingês Sôdré, ed. Rebecca Swift, *Imagining Characters Six Conversations about Women Writers* (London: Vintage Random House, 1995), p. 213-214

²³ Elizabeth Grosz, *Sexual Subversions Three French Feminists* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1989), p. 71

of our existence, threatening apparently settled unity with disruption and possible dissolution.

The second was the question of the violation of a girl by a male relation who happened to represent one of Australia's greatest icons – perhaps the greatest – the soldier. In this regard, I found the professional demise of the Australian Governor General in 2003, due to his inappropriate comments regarding a victim of child abuse, to be encouraging. I also felt supported by the thoughts of Franz Kafka:

We need books that affect us like a disaster, that grieve us deeply, like the death of someone more loved than ourselves, like being banished into forests far from everyone, like a suicide. A book must be the axe for the frozen sea inside us. That is my belief.²⁴

I pondered on the use of Kafka's metaphorical 'axe'. But I found, once sufficient time had passed, that *the writerly self* had thawed enough for me to start again. When I wrote, it was in a prose form longer than the short story, a memoir. I remained uncomfortable, however, in working so directly with my maternal relationship. No matter what has taken place between mother and child – rejection, betrayal, confusion, misunderstanding, abandonment, heartbreak – the mother remains the life-giver and early nurturer. I could not continue writing without a profound sense of sorrow and guilt.

Soon afterwards I abruptly lost, in the computer, the first ten-thousand words of the memoir. No amount of effort on my part, or that of others, managed to retrieve them. Left was an empty file dated September 9th – my mother's birthday – which again caused me to dread the consequences of writing Kara's story. But I discovered that it is not unusual to feel fear and uncertainty regarding those who have recently passed on. As Margaret Atwood writes:

Having the dead return when not expected can be a hair-raising experience, especially if they are feeling slighted, or

²⁴ Franz Kafka, *Letter to Friends, Family, and Editors*, tr. Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Schocken, 1978), p. 16. Quoted in Cixous, p.17

worse, angry. *Remember me*, as the ghost of Hamlet's father commands, is not the first such heavy injunction to be laid on the living by the dead, nor will it be the last.²⁵

Atwood recommends leaving food out overnight for difficult ghosts. It was comforting to know that others had experienced similar trouble, and in coming to further understanding of this uncanny circumstance I was again helped by Sôdré:

I think constantly about what Freud says quoting Frazer, about how ancestors that are recently dead are seen as vengeful and demanding ghosts. There's a wonderful bit in Brian Aldiss's *Helliconia* trilogy, where one of the characters goes on a journey into the underworld in order to meet their parents, and finds that the dead are just terribly angry ... furious at being dead.²⁶

The existence of such disembodied emotion did not surprise me, more the way it is felt as real by those who are left. Unresolved issues such as the question of my mother's behaviour, not only towards me but also other family members – leaving all mention of us out of her autobiography, for instance – stirred such feelings. Again I turned to the French Feminists. In particular, I found another fragment from Luce Irigaray to be pervasive, profound and thought-provoking: 'forgetfulness remembers itself when its memorial disappears'.²⁷ There is no memorial as great as a mother; I wondered whether Irigaray was referring to the forgetfulness that had been necessary in earlier life to my growth and survival and, if so, how this could possibly be retrieved.

While searching for answers, I learned of a neurological state known as Capgras' delusion. Professor Max Coltheart of Macquarie University spoke, on ABC Music Radio, about a neurological condition where sufferers believe they encounter a phantom double of themselves, or, in the version of Capgras' which particularly interests me, that of a close family member. A parent, sibling or spouse is replaced by an imposter.

²⁵ Margaret Atwood, *Negotiating with the Dead: A Writer on Writing* (London: Virago, 2003), p. 143

²⁶ Byatt and Sôdré, p. 214

²⁷ Irigaray, p. 65

When I contacted Professor Coltheart I found he was to lecture at my university. Hearing what he had to say at the University of Western Australia confirmed that I had come across something of value, and I set about researching Capgras' delusion. I read papers published on the subject by Professor Coltheart and his colleagues which gave me a grounding in some of the symptoms and certain aspects of its manifestation. Ongoing investigation led me to contact another prominent researcher in the field, one who provided further understanding of this complex state-of-mind, cognitive neuroscientist Dr. Oliver Turnbull of the University of Bangor, Wales. Exchanges between Dr. Turnbull and myself included reference to perspectives with which I was familiar through my own psychological analyses and practice as a psychotherapist. Dr. Turnbull proved enthusiastic to the notion of a prospective novel involving Capgras' and provided a number of papers published by himself and others, some of which also deal with wider aspects of false beliefs.²⁸ Indeed I am indebted to Dr. Turnbull's work for inspiring the title 'In Two Minds'.

In the literary sense, I discovered Capgras' delusion to be little written-about, with the notable exception of *The Double: A Petersburg Poem*, by Fyodor Dostoevsky, published in 1846. This novella deals with the internal struggle of its protagonist Yakov Petrovich Golyadkin. The third-person narrator describes a man whose life is on the verge of destruction, due to the appearance of his own double:

Suddenly he stopped short as though petrified, as though struck by lightning, and quickly turned round after the figure – which had only just passed him – turned as though some one had given him a tug from behind, as though the wind had turned him like a weathercock. The passer-by vanished quickly in the snowstorm. He, too, walked quickly; he was dressed like Mr. Golyadkin and, like him, too, wrapped up from head to foot, and he, too, tripped and trotted along the pavement of Fontanka with rapid little steps that suggested that he was a little scared.

"What - what is it?" whispered Mr. Golyadkin, smiling mistrustfully, though he trembled all over. An icy shiver ran down his back. Meanwhile, the stranger had vanished completely; there was no sound of his step, while Mr.

²⁸ See Bibliography.

Golyadkin still stood and gazed after him. At last, however, he gradually came to himself.

"Why, what's the meaning of it?" he thought with vexation. "Why, have I really gone out of my mind, or what?"²⁹

This work differs substantially from my own in that it tells the story of a male character dealing with a difficult psychological state. It also features a form of Capgras' dissimilar to that of the character Kara in the novel 'In Two Minds'; Dostoevsky's phantom double is a literal facsimile of the protagonist. While the motif of 'the double', like the motif of mirrors, is common in Gothic literature, Dostoevsky is unusually precise in his use of this device, keeping it true to symptoms of Capgras' with broken speech patterns and the inclusion of free association and confabulation.

I knew of no other fiction dealing with Capgras' delusion until after the manuscript of 'In Two Minds' was complete. *The Echo Maker* is the ninth novel of American writer Richard Power.³⁰ It tells the story of a male protagonist who has a mysterious accident in his hometown in Nebraska, at the site of the Sandhill Crane migration along the River Platte. The accident puts the 27-year-old truck driver Mark Schulter into a coma and when he emerges he is found to be affected by Capgras'. The delusionary imposter in Schulter's case is his sister, Karin. Karin contacts Gerald Weber, an Oliver Sacks-like figure who writes bestsellers about neurological cases. Weber has his own problems, and so the story continues. Although Mark Schulter's Capgras' symptoms are in some ways more similar to those of the character Kara in the novel 'In Two Minds' than those of Mr. Golyadkin, they also differ substantially. Mark is an adult male who does not have Kara's additional problems: rape-survival, loss of womanhood, and a frighteningly aggressive phantom double.

²⁹ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Double: A Petersburg Poem*, trans. Constance Garnett <http://www.kiosek.com/dostoevsky/library/thedouble.txt> Ch. 5; paras 5,6,7 12.03.07

³⁰ Richard Power, *The Echo Maker* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006)

The possibility of including Capgras' delusion in the novel 'In Two Minds' provided a way of distancing my character's experience from that of *the writerly self*. When I began to write Kara's story again, it took the form of a fictionalized journal, an account of the adolescence of a young girl afflicted with Capgras'. The content was based on material from my adolescent diaries and, as I had anticipated, it fitted well. I was at last free of the constraints of non-fiction, and the introduction of Capgras' enabled me to better deal with the negative characteristics of the mother character. This radical approach was supported by something Antonia Byatt had said during her conversation with Sôdré:

It is wonderful how in a novel you can do something quite different from what you can do in life, which is embody the dead, or the phantom, or the vengeful figure, on an equal footing with the other characters in the book ...³¹

Using Capgras' as a framework I constructed the fictional character 'Mrs. Whitegloves', a Gothic figure who, with her constant wearing of white wrist gloves, echoes the repeated hand-washing of Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth. 'Mrs. Whitegloves' was able to contain the negative aspects of the character Kara's mother, while allowing me to identify and retain the memory of my own mother's best qualities. These I included in Kara's idolized image of her 'lost Mum'.

Even as I was engaged in writing 'Kara's Journal' I feared it may prove difficult for the reader. I myself found it so taxing I had no choice but to abandon it. I realised that any attempt to tell the story from Kara's point of view would inevitably bring back the adolescent depression embedded in it. The effect was palpable. I returned to my exploration of Kristeva's theory of the abject; in an attempt to better understand and deal with it. I was enlightened by this metaphor from Elizabeth Grosz's interpretative commentary:

The abject cannot be readily classified, for it is necessarily ambiguous, undecidably inside and outside (like the skin of milk) ... This skin is repulsive, inducing the subject to retch

³¹ Byatt and Sôdré, p. 215

and choke, because it is the subject's skin, the boundary
between it and the world ...³²

I remembered from my own childhood how I and others used to like the skin of milk, even on occasion fight each other for it, as long as it was fresh enough and sweetened with crunchy grains of sugar. I considered how I might find a way of sweetening the persistently bitter Kara's story.

Discovering the narrative 'you'.

³² Grosz, p.74

'Kara's Journal' (which is not included as part of this submission) had opened thus:

A strange woman woke me, the double-bed I shared with Mum was empty. She said we were going to the station, we were no longer welcome at Derinda. She pushed my mother's brown leather hatbox roughly towards me.

The hallway was dark, no-one else was up and all the doors were shut. There were Belladonna lilies on old Nouveau tiles, gracious in whites, reds and greens. But the floor was cold, so cold underfoot. At Grannie Sherde's the getting of light is always hit-or-miss, a game of chance without the benefit of luck. Her bathroom has a cantankerous and unreliable light: no up-and-down switch, nor cord to pull. Last time I was there it was with Linda, that made it a bit less scary. When Linda and I were together we'd help each other onto the white-painted wooden chair, then one of us would balance on the corner of the great enameled bath that spread its eagle-claws over four shiny metal orbs.

This time I had to climb up by myself to reach the knob, and as porcelain met porcelain the two hard shiny surfaces grated together, scraping on each other, screeching like rats in a cavity wall. Then the bulb blacked out, leaving jagged flashes of light jumping about like a crazy rainbow at the back of my eyes.

I almost fell. I grabbed the basin, then I retched. Or tried to, but nothing came. My head hurt mightily from the blow I'd received the day before, the throbbing wouldn't go away. I looked in the mirror at my pale-yellow face and lifted the hair away. Underneath the mass of dried-on blood I saw a nasty wound, hollow, torn and blue, eating my hairline. I draped a heavy hunk of matted plait over to disguise it. I was shivering, my teeth would not stop chattering.

It was more than just chill.

When I got back to the bedroom, I found the quilt arranged as though it had never been touched. This gave me the oddest feeling and made me giddy, as though I was about to be seasick. I fell on the bed, face down. A minute later I heard a voice from somewhere deep inside me saying, 'Kara, get up, for God's sake! What do you think you're doing, lying there like that?'

It was my father's voice, urging me to save myself. I'd never heard anything so clear. I thought of Dad and I said to myself, 'I'll be seeing him soon. And when I tell him about this, he'll put everything right.' Slowly I got up, stretching the bones of my toes as far as they would go to reach the floor, first one foot then the other. I sat on the edge, trying to think things out, but my brain would not stop hurting. I looked

about and saw that my school-pack was next to the hatbox.

But where was Mum?"³³

In the fictionalised journal, Kara had claimed the first person. And when it came to starting again I could not imagine the thought of any other character taking it over. Gradually the notion of writing Kara's story from an entirely different point of view, that of her sister Linda, became increasingly appealing. Although Linda's life in advertising was not exactly sweet, I felt this approach might offer at least some opportunity for humour – irony, satire, the absurd – with which to coat the bitter pill.

A contemporary novel by an Australian writer, Anonymous (N. J. Gemmell), *The Bride Stripped Bare*, with its use of a second-person 'you' narrator, suggested a possible way to further this embryonic idea.³⁴ I suspected that 'cover' of the kind I was seeking may have been of importance to Gemmell, as the opening words of *The Bride Stripped Bare* reveal a certain amount of concern:

Your husband doesn't know you're writing this. It's quite easy to write it under his nose. Just as easy, perhaps, as sleeping with other people. But no one will ever know who you are, or what you've done, for you've always been seen as a good wife.³⁵

Fears and wishes of the writer are contained here. Whilst Gemmell says 'Your husband doesn't know you are writing this', she is displaying a fear that he might find out – while and at the same time hoping he won't. Similarly, with the phrases 'But no one will ever know who you are, or what you've done', she expresses hope rather than certainty. The material of Gemmell's novel is risqué, bordering on erotica, yet I knew her to be a young wife and mother.

While in London on a university-funded research trip, I met with Gemmell and asked her about the question of 'cover' in her novel. I found that it had been of over-riding importance to her. Gemmell had wanted to publish the work but didn't want her husband, family and friends to think the material it contained was confessional. Feeling the third person to be

³³ Jennifer Albertson, 'Kara's Journal' (Unpublished), p.1

³⁴ Anonymous (N. J. Gemmell), *The Bride Stripped Bare* (London: Fourth Estate, 2003).

³⁵ Anonymous (N..J. Gemmell), p.3

unsuitable for *The Bride Stripped Bare* she began writing it in the first person. She found, however, that the 'I' came too close to the personal – whether imagined or real. She embarked on an active search for another point of view, which she discovered in Jay McInerney's *Bright Lights, Big City*.³⁶ The narrative 'you' suited Gemmell, allowing her to become the observer of her own imaginings and giving a feeling of detachment as she wrote. Gemmell confirmed that she had used the narrative 'you' in a calculated way to gain 'cover'. After talking with her I wondered whether the narrative 'you' might not only offer the 'cover' I was seeking but also a way of articulating the abject.

What is the narrative 'you'?

³⁶ Jay McInerney, *Bright Lights, Big City* (London: Fontana, 1986)

The discovery of the narrative 'you' resulted in what Kuhn calls a paradigm shift: 'a movement with new and more rigid definition'.³⁷ Once engaged with the notion of using it as a possible agent of 'cover', I resolved to learn more. I began my search with a popular contemporary guide to the writing of fiction and poetry. I found the following:

In second person narration the narrator addresses the character directly as 'you' ... Second person narration, like stream of consciousness and interior monologue, is associated with experimental fiction.³⁸

I did not intend my fiction to be 'experimental', at least not in the way of the 'experimental' prose of Beckett in *Company*, or the stream of consciousness in James Joyce's *Ulysses*, (although there are frequent examples of the use of the narrative 'you' in the writings of both Beckett and Joyce). Moreover, whilst the comment from *The Writer's Reader* regarding the way the narrative 'you' can address a character directly was undoubtedly true, what it had to say otherwise need not apply. For instance, in her story *Johnny Panic and the Bible of Dreams*, Sylvia Plath uses a self-reflexive 'you' that belongs to both the character and the narrator (in much the same way that the 'I' functions in first-person narrative). In *Flaubert's Parrot*, Julian Barnes employs the narrative 'you' to directly address the narratee/reader or to replace the generalised 'one'.

A second popular writing manual, *The Writing Book*, offered this:

Using second person is a challenge. It's very limited in knowledge, and over an extended piece it's unsettling for the reader. It can start to sound rather bullying or it can force You to identify with a character you feel very much at odds with. There can be an overpowering intimacy about second-person writing.³⁹

³⁷ Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (London: University of Chicago Press Ltd, 1970), p.19

³⁸ Brenda Walker, ed., *The Writer's Reader: A Guide to Writing Fiction & Poetry* (Halstead Press: Sydney) 2000, p. 77

³⁹ Kate Grenville, *The Writing Book: A Workbook for Fiction Writers* (Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1990), p. 62

I acknowledged that using the narrative 'you' may be 'a challenge' but felt that, with care, the pitfalls of bullying, forcing identification, or creating an overpowering intimacy with the reader might be avoided. I did not see the narrative 'you' as being 'very limited in knowledge'. Jeanette Winterson uses it effectively to create an 'all-seeing' point of view without having to resort to the deific and embracing third-person omniscient – a mode which can sometimes be unwieldy, too large or grand for small stories such as the character Kara's. Here Winterson intertwines the narrative 'you' with 'me', 'he' and 'we' in a stream of melded prose that represents all three persons, singular and plural:

That you were married to someone else meant nothing to me. Which is more important – a dead marriage or a living love? You never chose private happiness over public duty, you asked only that happiness be there – a view from the window, a crack in the casing – that sometimes you could ease yourself out, unclothe yourself, swim in me.

There was never a time when he called you and you did not answer. You asked – without asking – that when he did not call you, there would be no need to answer.

Then you called for me, and no hawk was swifter to the wrist.

I save you from the fire, but the first I could not put out was burning at our feet. Many times have you and I turned away from each other, our faces proud, our hearts seeming cold, and only our feet, which smoldered the clean stone where they trod, betrayed us.

My feet, bare and clean on the cold floor of my penance, left charcoal marks where I walked. The flagstones of your heart have become hearthstones. Wherever we stood, there was a fire at our feet.

'One day this will destroy us,' you said, your lips like tongs, moving the burning parts of me.⁴⁰

A third manual, the useful classic *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, alerted me to another perception of the narrative 'you':

This form of narration occurred in occasional passages of traditional fiction but it has been exploited in a sustained way only during the latter part of the twentieth century and then only rarely; the effect is of a virtuoso performance.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Jeanette Winterson, *The Power Book* (London: Vintage, 2001), p. 68

⁴¹ M.H.Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (Harcourt Brace College Publishers, Fort Worth, 1999), p. 234

This assertion, especially as it is couched in the past tense, may be seen as discouraging. But I found the writer I consider most virtuosic in the use of the narrative 'you', Italo Calvino, to be inspiring. Here is the opening paragraph of his novel *If on a winter's night a traveler*.

You are about to begin reading Italo Calvino's new novel, *If on a winter's night a traveller*. Relax. Concentrate. Dispel every other thought. Let the world around you fade. Best to close the door; the TV is always on in the next room. Tell the others right away, 'No, I don't want to watch TV!' Raise your voice – they won't hear you otherwise – 'I'm reading! I don't want to be disturbed!' Maybe they haven't heard you, with all that racket; speak louder, yell. *I'm beginning to read Italo Calvino's new novel!* Or if you prefer, don't say anything; just hope they'll leave you alone.⁴²

Calvino begins with the use of a feisty narrative 'you' that addresses the reader, advising them how to read a novel which plays throughout with many and various modes of use for the second-person pronoun.

Finally, in a fourth writing manual, *Creating Fiction*, I discovered a more encouraging view:

Occasionally ... second person is used to establish the *you* as the main character of the fiction. Here the you can be the reader becoming a character in the story ... The you can also be the self of the narrator: the narrator is merely talking to itself, but for some reason has decided not to identify itself as the first person ...⁴³

What interested me was not so much how the reader might be addressed, although this was of course important, but how the 'you' might represent an aspect of the narrator in a way sufficiently distanced from *the writerly self*.

⁴² Italo Calvino, *If on a winter's night a traveller*, trns. William Weaver (London: Vintage, 1983), p. 10

⁴³ Fred Leebron and Andrew Levy, *Creating Fiction A Writer's Companion* (Harcourt Brace College Publishers: Fort Worth, 1995), p. 226

Turning to the views of some exponents of narratology I found the personal pronoun 'you', with its ability to play mischievously between reader and narrator, was as much an issue of debate to the serious analyst as it was to the text-book writer. Regarding the origins of the narrative 'you', Denis Schofield notes the writings, in Latin, of Herodotus of Halicarnassus (b. 484 B.C.E.).⁴⁴ Bruce Morrisette cites the work of the geographer Pausanias, born in Lydia in c.160 C.E., who wrote in Greek.⁴⁵ Morrisette also draws attention to the 1920's essay by W. Somerset Maugham, *Beast of Burden*, which makes use of a similar narrative 'you'. The intention is to invite the reader into the scene.⁴⁶ Maugham, like the earlier 'travelogue' writers, had apparently hoped the reader would, through the second-person narrator, gain a sense of the illusion of sharing the experience from the same viewpoint as the author:

At first, when you see the coolie on the road ... You watch their faces... and when you see them lying down ... If you have tried to lift their bales ... But you will be thought somewhat absurd if you mention your admiration ...⁴⁷

Another, quite different, early example of the use of the narrative 'you' is that of St. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, (C.E. 345-430). Monika Fludernick claims that Saint Augustine's fifth-century *Confessions*, which address God in the second person, are autobiographical.⁴⁸ She quotes from Book 1, which begins with invocation and praise of God:

exceperunt ergo me consolationes lactis humani, nec mater mea vel nutrices meae sibi ubera implebant, sed tu mihi per eas dabas alimentum infantiae, secundum institutionem tuam, et divitias usque ad fundum rerum dispositas. tu etiam mihi dabas nolle amplius, quam dabas, et nutrientibus me

⁴⁴ Denis Schofield, Doctoral Thesis, 'The Second Person: A Point of View? The Function of the Second-Person Pronoun in Narrative Prose Fiction', Geelong: Deakin University, 1998.

<http://members.westnet.com.au/emmas/2p/thesis/1.htm> Bibliography 02.06.05

⁴⁵ Bruce Morrisette, 'Narrative "You" in Contemporary Literature', *Comparative Literature Studies* 2, 1965, p.2

⁴⁶ Morrisette, p.6

⁴⁷ Morrisette, p.6

⁴⁸ Monika Fludernick, 'Introduction: Second-person narrative and related issues (Second-Person Narrative)' *Style* 9/22/1994, Section 3: para 2

<http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G116988684.html> 1.07.07

dare mihi velle quod eis dabas: dare enim mihi per ordinatum affectum volebant quo abundabant ex te.

The comfort therefore of a woman's milk did then entertain me: yet did neither my mother nor nurses fill their own breasts, but thou, O Lord, didst by them afford a nourishment fit for my infancy, even according to thine own institution, and those riches of thine, reaching to the root of all things. Thou also ingraftedst in me a desire to suck no more than thou suppliedst them withal; and in my nurses to afford me what thou gavest them: for they were willing to dispense unto me with proportion, what thou suppliedst them with in abundance.⁴⁹

My observation is that Saint Augustine addresses God objectively as 'thee', also subjectively as 'thou'. As far as I can see, these old forms of the second-person pronoun have been retained in this translation for subtle reasons. Nuances of meaning may have been lost had the translator used only the contemporary form of the 'you', which can collapse the delineation between the objective and the subjective. The archaic 'thee' shows St. Augustine's respect for God as he petitions the deity; the Saint uses the 'thou' in a reflective way as his tone becomes more intimate.

A more popular use of the narrative 'you' is to be found in cookery books. Here is the advice Dr. Kitchiner, author of the *Cook's Oracle*, gave in 1829 about how to poach eggs:

The cook who wishes to display her skill in Poaching, must endeavour to procure Eggs that have been laid a couple of days, those that are quite new-laid are so milky that, take all the care you can, your cooking of them will seldom procure the praise of being a Prime Poacher: You must have fresh eggs, or it is equally impossible.⁵⁰

Today's cookery books continue to favour the second-person mode as encouragement to the potential cook – who may then feel, in reading a recipe, as capable of achieving the result shown in the sumptuous photography of the completed dish as the writer. Many recipes adopt the

⁴⁹ Fludernick, Section 3: paras 3, 4.

⁵⁰ Elizabeth David, *French Country Cooking* (London: Penguin Handbooks, 1965), p. 73

narrative 'you', as in the following, for 'Red mullet in a saffron and ginger tomato sauce':

If you find a small red mullet, it is lovely to use them whole. I extract the juice from fresh ginger by peeling it, cutting it into small pieces and crushing them in a garlic press, but you can just grate the ginger if you prefer.⁵¹

There are innumerable instances of the narrative 'you' in contemporary commercial writing, especially advertising and journalism; also in non-fiction. Apart from its over-use in the clichéd and ubiquitous 'you know it makes sense' school of advertising, a more directed, imperative, commanding use often appears in posters, brochures and other publicity. An example arrived by post, with the purpose of recruiting my subscription to a magazine. It was apparently inspired by the dictum of René Descartes, '*cogito ergo sum*', from his seventeenth-century philosophical treatise *Discourse on Method*:

Jennifer Albertson, you think therefore you can.⁵²

Since the 1960s, and the introduction of the 'colour magazine insert' as a feature of weekend and special editions of major newspapers, the use of the narrative 'you' has become an accepted part of journalese. It is often used as part of a loose, 'hip' style that is intended to embrace the reader and bring them closer to the featured subject. The following excerpt from an article about super-model Claudia Schiffer illustrates this:

Her liquid eyeliner, in heavy black, and kind of old-fashioned, had smudged across her nose, which made her altogether endearing. You expect warm, you get cold. You expect a kind of android high-cheekboned expressionless pouting. You get eyes that are hot blue, lively, sparkly and, when she giggles, you get ...⁵³

Particularly in such forms, the narrative 'you' tends to slide into neologisms. In the following, film writer and director Bruce Robinson uses

⁵¹ Claudia Roden, *Foolproof Mediterranean Cookery* (London: BBC Worldwide, 2003), p. 68

⁵² Publicity flyer (London: *The Economist Magazine*, October 2005), p.1

⁵³ Chrissie Iley, 'Love, Actually' (London: *The Observer Magazine*, Sunday August 14th 2005) <http://observer.guardian.co.uk/magazine/story/0,11913,1547132,00.html> para. 2 15.08.2005

it in the interrogative, to introduce an account of his dilemma at being told he had to bow to Princess Anne at a Royal Performance:

How can you bow? It's like Imperial Japan. As a matter of fact I have great respect for the old Queen, and bizarrely, considering my politics, for the Royal Family. Not so much them, but I'm terrified of what might replace them ... If you're after a knighthood then perhaps it's incumbent on you to eat carpet, but what do I want to look down her cleavage for? ⁵⁴

Robinson is being typically cheeky here, with his use of the narrative 'you'. Given the question-and-answer format of the book from which the paragraph is taken this is perfectly appropriate: the tone is contemporary, conversational and light, close to the 'colour magazine insert' journalese previously mentioned.

Narrative 'you' in contemporary fiction.

⁵⁴ Robinson, p. 63

Fludernick suggests that the 'you' began to appear as narrator in prose fiction during the eighteenth century.⁵⁵ The following example is from Nathaniel Hawthorne's story, *The Haunted Mind*:

What a singular moment is the first one, when you have hardly begun to recollect yourself after starting from midnight slumber! By unclosing your eyes so suddenly, you seem to have surprised the personages of your dream in full convocation around your bed, and catch one broad glance at them before they can flit into obscurity. Or, to vary the metaphor, you find yourself, for a single instant, wide awake in the realms of illusions, whither sleep has been the passport, and behold its ghostly inhabitants and wondrous scenery, with a perception of their strangeness, such as you never attain while the dream is undisturbed.⁵⁶

Hawthorne's image of 'unclosing your eyes', combined with his further easy use of the narrative 'you', makes his writing seem curiously fresh; 'whither' and 'behold' are perhaps the only words that date it.

My close reading reveals that by the nineteenth century the narrative 'you' was being used to address the reader, the writer, or both, in short passages of prose fiction – first or third-person narratives. The following is taken from Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*:

The Romanists are strange beings. Such a one among them – whom you know no more than the last Inca of Peru – knows you and all your concerns, and has his reasons for saying to you so and so, when you simply thought the communication sprang impromptu from the instant's impulse: his plan in bringing it about that you shall come on such a day, to such a place, under such and such circumstances, when the whole arrangement seems to your crude apprehension the ordinance of chance, or the sequel of exigency.⁵⁷

In what amounts to an aside, Brontë seems to be expressing an opinion which is not necessarily that of her protagonist Lucy Snowe. Might it be that Brontë is exposing a view of her own, under 'cover' of the narrative 'you'?

⁵⁵ Fludernick, Section 3: para. 1

⁵⁶ Nathaniel Hawthorne, *TWICE TOLD TALES: THE HAUNTED MIND* http://www.gutenberg.org/catalog/world/readfile?fk_files=22522&pageno=2 para. 1 2.06.07

⁵⁷ Charlotte Brontë, *Villette*. Introduction and notes, Tim Dolin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 393

During the twentieth century, the 'you' narrator began appearing more frequently in prose fiction. I am indebted to the doctoral thesis by Denis Schofield, which alerted me to this, as well as to a fascinating group of narrative 'you' modes and their uses. Schofield's thesis also provided a lucid overview and introduced me to opinions of further narratologists. According to Schofield, the most elusive of all categories and types of the narrative 'you' in contemporary fiction is one that is basically rhetorical in character and points to no particular 'person' at all; rather, it is used to designate a generalised object.⁵⁸ As with subsequent examples, (unless otherwise stated), the following comes from my reading of contemporary novels and stories. It is from Susan Sontag's *In America*:

On the ship, that cruel microcosm, Ryszard was nowhere, therefore he could feel he was everywhere, the king of consciousness. You pace your world, as it moves across a surface of unmarked sameness, from one end to the other. It's small, the world. You could put it in your pocket. That is the beauty of traveling on a ship.⁵⁹

In this instance, Sontag employs the narrative 'you' in rhetorical mode to place the reader in the scene she is sketching of migration from an old to a new country. It helps convey the territorial restraint and constriction of a journey at sea, by contrast with the vastness of the ocean which has to be traversed. Joan London also makes use of the rhetorical 'you', in a rather stronger way, to open her story *Letter to Constantine*. The narrative 'you' addresses the main character:

Constantine, you asked me to write. Write, you said, as if setting me a task. These are not times for writing, I cried. But you shook your head.

Constantine, it has been nearly two years now. For nearly two years I've been thinking of what I would write. For a long time I never stopped talking to you. You were my companion, we were on the same journey. Your presence was natural to me as a dream is on first waking. In this dream we still breathed clear desert air.

⁵⁸ Schofield, Part 1: Section 2

⁵⁹ Susan Sontag, *In America* (London: Vintage, 2001), p. 118

Two years, they say, or used to say, two years and you can get over anything. 'Get over': like a mountain or a long stretch of road. A particular landscape has at last fallen behind you. Retrace your steps and there will be a different light or season. You have a sense of perspective again.⁶⁰

Later in the same story the narrative 'you' changes its function. London uses it to muse, also give distance: it creates an impression of something seen in a filmic 'long shot':

You could say what follows takes the form of a painting. A small canvas, a small moment: in a biography it would not earn even one line. At first sight it could almost be an original for one of those Scenes of Paris tourists buy in Montmartre. It has been the light-hearted, consciously naïve, nostalgic style that has been around so long it has lost its origins, which might include Chagall's own later style. Your eye skims, ready for disappointment, for signs of the desire to please.⁶¹

By this time London's focus on Constantine is diminished, so she is able to digress. Only in the last sentence does the narrative 'you' address the reader.

Schofield's categories reveal further uses of the narrative 'you', including 'the addressee model'. In this case the narrator addresses itself as 'you' and describes to itself its own acts and thoughts. It may also directly address the (implied) reader, or a narratee.⁶² A further passage from *In America* demonstrates this:

Of course you have your things to do. Your ways of behaving. If you are a man, anywhere you go, you can always hunt for sex. If, man or woman, you are someone given to more exotic entertainment, such as art, you can spend time checking out the local facilities, if only to deplore their insufficiency. If you are a journalist, you will want to get your fill of the local misery.⁶³

Here Sontag uses what Schofield calls the 'addressee model' in order to embrace the reader and appeal to their sense of adventure. This passage

⁶⁰ Joan London, *Letter to Constantine* (South Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1993), p. 11

⁶¹ London, p. 90

⁶² Schofield, Part 1: Section 2

⁶³ Sontag, p. 119

reminds the reader of the historical perspective of the novel while commenting on the human condition.

Another insight into the human condition, using a similar 'addressee model', is made by Delia Falconer in her novel *The Service of Clouds*. This aside, which poses a question to the reader, reveals an admission which seems deeply personal to the writer. The following passage also shows how the narrative 'you' may be used to insert an intermittent representation of second-person thought into a text that is written predominantly in the first person:

You may wonder how, throughout all these years of withdrawal and approach, I could keep waiting for Harry to disclose his tender feelings, just as he hoped to see the face of God. I can only tell you that there is a certain point at which one comes to inhabit longing.⁶⁴

Similarly, in *Gould's Book of Fish*, Richard Flanagan employs the Schofield 'addressee model' to canvass the reader. The purpose is to correct a supposition:

But if for a moment you dare pause to pant for breath, spare a thought for Billy Gould in his miserable cell. He couldn't run. Because you may suppose that all those prisoners locked up in solitary cells would have been released in order that they might escape the conflagration. And in this you would be entirely wrong. Our guard had retreated to beneath the jetty, refusing to open our cell doors without an order ...⁶⁵

This compelling paragraph holds an urgency that is engendered, at least in part, by the narrative 'you'. This sudden use of the pronoun arrests the reader, causing them to consider whether what the writer is saying might possibly apply to them. The device has been employed to ensure that the reader registers the point.

Schofield defines another use of the narrative 'you' that offers no clear boundary between itself and the 'addressee model'. The pronoun acts in the story as a character, although not necessarily as narrator. Schofield claims that this is perhaps the trickiest of all forms of the narrative 'you' to facilitate, with the blurring of boundaries a necessary

⁶⁴ Delia Falconer, *The Service of Clouds* (Sydney: Pan Macmillan Australia, 1998), p. 201

⁶⁵ Richard Flanagan, *Gould's Book of Fish* (Sydney: Pan Macmillan Australia, 2002) p. 408

consequence.⁶⁶ In lesser hands than those of Italo Calvino it may be in danger of imposing its will on the reader, creating an inescapably stifling situation. But Calvino knows exactly when and how to sustain it. In the following example a set of rather brusque instructions is delivered smoothly by the narrative 'you'. The reader is drawn in seductively:

Of course, the ideal position for reading is something you can never find. In the old days they used to read standing up, at a lectern ... Nobody ever thought of reading on horseback; and yet now, the idea of sitting in the saddle, the book propped up against the horse's mane, or maybe tied to the horse's ear with a special harness, seems attractive to you. With your feet in the stirrups, you should feel quite comfortable for reading: having your feet up is the first condition for enjoying a read.⁶⁷

Calvino sustains this particular use of the narrative 'you' for some time, then changes abruptly to another – and another. Later he uses the personal pronoun to facilitate an aside, breaking into informative dialogue between the narrator and protagonist Ludmilla to reveal the inner thoughts of the narrator, the narratee, or both. There is also a confession:

You're hurt. This hunt excites you because you're pursuing it with her, because the two of you can experience it together and discuss it as you are experiencing it. Now, just when you thought you had reached an accord with her, an intimacy, not so much because now you will also call each other *tu*, but because you feel like a pair of accomplices in an enterprise that perhaps nobody else can understand.⁶⁸

Schofield describes another form of narrative 'you' that can remain a pronoun of address while assuming an aspect of the character of the protagonist.⁶⁹ Thomas Keneally understands this well, and uses it in *A Dutiful Daughter* to play the part of the displaced or disguised 'I'. His 1971 novel opens with a short scene-setting prologue written in the third person, then rapidly moves to the use of the narrative 'you'. The

⁶⁶ Schofield, Part 1: Section 2

⁶⁷ Calvino, p. 3

⁶⁸ Calvino, p. 93

⁶⁹ Schofield, Part 1: Section 2

protagonist's sister Barbara, who is nursing a sick mother and coping with a fractious father, longs for the homecoming of her brother:

You are Barbara's brother Damian sweating by the gate, waiting while a girl called Helen turns her truck on the tiny road. You watch the mauve slime hiss between the tyres while she must reverse and turn, reverse and turn again before she is pointed townwards. You would like to distract the house's eye from her by straight-away opening the gate and jogging up to the door. But, having spent the night with Helen and suspecting yourself of loving her—or better still, suspecting yourself of being unwise not to love and marry her—you feel you owe her a wave-off.⁷⁰

Here the narrative 'you' creates detachment, a distancing. At once objective and subjective, it conveys the split between Damian's desire and the reality in which he finds himself. There is also a definite consciousness of others in the story – as yet not introduced – members of the family that anxiously await Damian behind 'the house's eye'. Later the writer uses the narrative 'you' to convey the protagonist's uncertain state of mind and to give the reader insight into the ambivalence of Damian's character.

It had turned colder. You grabbed for your old wind-cheater, with the St. Moritz badge on its biceps. *St Moritz!* No chance of a Glover leaving jaunty bones on the ski-slopes! In what fit of gaucherie, you wondered, had you bought such a thing? You supposed there was some force in the world that made you swallow your old spasms of inane spaciousness ...⁷¹

Damian is caught between what his homecoming offers him and the charms of what might otherwise be his future. Here Keneally manipulates the narrative 'you' to embrace the inclusion of reflection, enabling Damian to criticize himself and question past actions.

Jay McInerney employs a similar version of the narrative 'you' in *Bright Lights, Big City*. From the beginning of this 1984 novel the narrative 'you' assumes the voice of the protagonist (whose proper name never appears):

⁷⁰ Thomas Keneally, *A Dutiful Daughter* (Sydney: Fontana/Collins, 1979), p. 4

⁷¹ Keneally, p.127

You are not the kind of guy who would be at a place like this at this time of the morning. But here you are, and you cannot say that the terrain is entirely unfamiliar, although the details are fuzzy. You are at a nightclub talking to a girl with a shaved head. The club is either the Heartbreak or the Lizard Lounge. All might become clear if you could just slip into the bathroom and do a little more Bolivian Marching Powder.⁷²

The observational quality created by McInerney's use of the last-mentioned of Schofield's categories sets the mood of the drug scene. It is as though a movie camera with a distorting lens moves uncertainly in and out of focus, recording what it sees and putting suggestions into the protagonist's head:

Nothing seems to be what you want to do until you consider writing. Suffering is supposed to be the raw stuff of art. You could write a book. You feel that if only you could make yourself sit down at a typewriter you could give shape to what seems merely a chain reaction of pointless disasters.⁷³

McInerney's narrative 'you' is palpably a character in the action, one with a natural appeal for struggling writers; it elicits the sympathy of the reader by frankly presenting the protagonist's plight. The reader shares the aspiring writer's frustration at not being able to tell of his life-experiences, also the aimlessness that presently makes him unable to apply the necessary discipline. He continues in the same mode:

You have always wanted to be a writer; a job at a magazine was only your first step towards literary celebrity. You used to write what you believed to be urbane sketches infinitely superior to those appearing in the magazine every week. You sent them up to Fiction: they came back with polite notes. 'Not quite right for us now, but thanks for letting us see this'. You would try to interpret the word *now* – do they mean that you should submit again later?⁷⁴

This use of the narrative 'you' is admirable for the skilled way in which McInerney combines the detachment of a critic with insights into the personal history and ambitions of his unnamed protagonist, thereby sustaining the reader's deep interest.

⁷² Jay McInerney, *Bright Lights, Big City*, (London: Fontana, 1986), p. 1

⁷³ McInerney, p.60

⁷⁴ McInerney, p.61

You were gathering experience for a novel. You went to parties, cultivated a writerly persona. You wanted to be Dylan Thomas without the paunch, F. Scott Fitzgerald without the crack-up. You wanted to skip over the dull grind of actual creation ... Of course, mentally, you were always taking notes. Saving it all up. Waiting for the day when you would sit down and write your masterpiece.⁷⁵

McInerney displays wry humour, addressing himself as the writer with a cool detachment that is stripped of pretence. This allows irony to pervade the text.

Nicky Gemmell, who in the novel *The Bride Stripped Bare* also leaves her protagonist unnamed, told me she had been especially influenced by the use of the narrative 'you' in *Bright Lights, Big City*. It is therefore not surprising that her adopted use of the personal pronoun as narrator has distinct similarities to that of McInerney:

You're busy at the computer because you have to be now. The baby punches its fist up and you yelp at your desk. It feels like it'll break through your skin, it's stretched so thin. Before it felt so cosy-snug in there, as if nothing could get to it. Now at your desk you look down and there's a lump protruding to the left of your navel, a little head; gently, you push it back ...

You have to work. You have to find something else in your life. You're at your desk because you don't know what's beyond your baby's due date or when you'll ever be at your desk again. Your discipline is energized, not scattered and tired and procrastinating like the old self. The words rush and tumble to get out. Work replaces pain, it pushes it out. You are calm and strong as you work, you feel lit. Being at your desk is an antidote, a balm, for it means having a voice, it means saying and doing exactly what you want.⁷⁶

Gemmell's narrative 'you', however, does a great deal more reflecting than McInerney's – to the point of recrimination.

You grab your bag, it's caught around the chair leg and you stumble out and walk down the street, bashing into shoulders and almost walking into posts and wait ... wait ... you hear

⁷⁵ McInerney, p.92

⁷⁶ Anonymous (N.J.Gemmell), p. 341

behind you, but you don't turn back and at last there's the mouth of the tube station in which to disappear, to sink.

What have you done, what have you done?

Your head is in your hands on the tube hurtling home, knuckling your temples, trying to press it all out.

Fool, fool.⁷⁷

Even when the present tense is used, Gemmell's second-person novel holds a reflective, filmic tone: the content seems to have been put through a filter of fine gauze; the narrative breaks down into scenes indicative of screenplay. This is no doubt intentional, both in terms of style and in helping to provide 'cover' for Gemmell's material.

Who speaks? The voice of the narrative 'you'.

The narrative 'you' that Schofield claims is a disguised 'I', with the added ability to become an aspect of the narrator, is the one I chose to use in writing 'In Two Minds'.⁷⁸ Although I had already decided to tell Kara's story from Linda's point of view, I knew that before I could do so I must be clear about the protagonist's qualities.

When we first meet Linda Hille she has reached the top of her career in advertising. She has created a successful brand and won a coveted award. But what is going on beneath her slick, confident, well-heeled surface? Her cold fashionista efficiency? The ability to pluck the marketing

⁷⁷ Anonymous (N.J.Gemmell), p. 175

⁷⁸ Schofield, Part 1: Section 2

bunny from the global hat? Would the character Linda always have to remain so cool? Or would her repressed feelings eventually get the better of her? In order to determine what specific aspect of the protagonist the narrative 'you' was to voice in the novel, I found it necessary not only to examine the character of Linda but also the character of the person who had exerted the greatest influence in her development: her mother Stella.

In my previous writing, specifically 'Kara's Journal', the character of Stella had emerged with exaggerated traits worthy of grand opera. Stella's form of narcissism was so inflated it approached classic examples of the narcissistic mother such as the one Linda mentions: Arkadinia of Chekhov's *The Seagull*.⁷⁹ In the play, Arkadinia is a glamorous actress and absent mother who finally drives her adoring only son to suicide because she can't find time to read the work he has striven all his life to write for her.

Even before Kara's birth, Stella feared she might be carrying a second female child instead of the longed-for replacement for the son she had lost. From the start of her life Kara looked like Stella, so was seen as the closest of rivals. It had always been Stella's mode to 'put Kara down', and this became more apparent after Derinda. From then on the mother not only blamed her youngest daughter for spoiling any chance of recognition and success she might have had in the outside world but also stealing the affection of her younger brother, Bart. This accounts for Stella's vitriol:

... sometimes, late at night, when Dad had gone to the bedroom he'd made for himself in the shed, would your mother stand outside Kara's bedroom door. 'If you're not careful, my girl, there'll be *nothing* in your life; you'll fail at everything if you keep on like this. If you think you'll succeed at getting your own way, you're wrong. You'll find out! When you walk out of here, into the uncaring world, you'll remember what I've said – and you'll be sorry. *My word you will!* You'll wish you'd been a different girl. You're going to find out soon enough, missy, mark my words! How empty you are inside. You're nothing but a hollow drum, a vacuum. Nothing, d'you hear? You'll end up with nobody. No-one will ever want you.'⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Anton Chekhov, *Chekhov: Four Plays*, trns. Stephen Mulrine (London: Nick Hern Books, 1997)

⁸⁰ Albertson, p. 14-15

This speech is nothing more than a series of projections. Stella is describing herself. But the girl Kara cannot know this, and is deeply affected. Linda too is affected, by this and other expressions of her mother's narcissism. When the caretaking mother is a narcissist, she is incapable of forming a healthy attachment to any of her children, even when she might desperately want to. Clinical social worker and psychotherapist Sandy Hotchkiss explains:

She can't help but be drawn to motherhood for narcissistic reasons – an idealized vision of herself as a nurturer, perhaps, or a desire to 'complete' herself by carrying in her body, and bearing a child ... the child is an extension of her, someone who can be used to make her feel special and inspire others to admire her ... The narcissistic mother requires a 'perfect' child to mirror her perfection as a giver and nurturer of life ... the narcissistic mother does not bond so much with the real infant as with the fantasy child of her dreams.⁸¹

In the course of the novel 'In Two Minds', Stella exhibits what Hotchkiss names as the seven best-known traits of narcissism: shamelessness, magical thinking (grandiosity and idealisation), arrogance, envy, entitlement, exploitation and lack of boundaries.⁸² Just as Lady Macbeth, acting unconsciously, personifies extremes of the negative mother, so does Stella. The Hille sisters' mother may (metaphorically) be said to have dashed out the brains of one of her children (the character Kara) while instilling powerful self-destructive elements in the other (the character Linda). The reasons for Stella's narcissism are given to lie in her childhood upbringing, of which little is said in the novel, and the condition furthered by her failure to produce a healthy living boy-child:

'You may know that Stella, as a girl,' Matrine announces, 'was obliged to maintain a silence on, hem, certain goings-on within the privacy, shall we say, of her close-knit family. This, and the loss of her son,' he looks at you, then at your

⁸¹ Sandy Hotchkiss, *Why does it always have to be about you?* (Simon & Schuster, New York: 2003), p.48-49

⁸² Hotchkiss, xvii and Part 1

father. You have never heard of this. He repeats, 'The son she lost before you were born, Linda.'⁸³

By examining Stella's character in this way, I came to an understanding of how the experience of the mother-character might manifest in her elder daughter. During my own psycho-analyses I had found certain theories of Carl Jung to be useful in expanding my way of seeing and feeling in the world. So when it came to defining the aspect of the protagonist Linda that was to use the singular voice of the narrative 'you' I decided to treat Jung's concept of 'the animus' as though it was real. Jung had seen 'the animus' as 'the inner masculine side of a woman'.⁸⁴ He had defined it mainly in regard to its counterpart, 'the anima', which he saw as 'the inner feminine side of a man'.⁸⁵ Although 'the animus' as defined by Jung has been, and still is, continuously debated in post-Jungian women's writing, it may still be regarded as useful. Demaris Weir comments:

Female Jungian analysts have written about women's psychology, especially 'the animus', with a feeling for women's issues and experiences that Jung himself lacked ... In spite of

(these) failings, Jung's psychology, including his psychology of 'the animus', has meant a great deal to many women.⁸⁶

Jung's wife Emma, herself an analytical psychologist, in expounding her husband's theory of 'the animus' rather more empathically than Jung himself, was the first to describe a negative aspect of 'the animus' known as the 'internalised oppressor' or 'self-hater':

First we hear from it a critical, usually negative comment on every movement, an exact examination of all motives and intentions, which naturally always causes a feeling of inferiority ...⁸⁷

⁸³ Albertson, p. 109

⁸⁴ Daryl Sharp, *C.G. Jung Lexicon: A primer of Terms and Concepts* (Toronto: Inner City Book, 1991), p.23

⁸⁵ Sharp, p. 18

⁸⁶ Weir, p.123

⁸⁷ Emma Jung, 'Animus and Anima: Two Essays' (Zurich: Spring Publications, 1957), p.20

Demaris Weir claims that the 'self-hater' is the result of serious wounding to a woman's self-esteem; it feels a certain way inside the woman, has a certain effect on her, and speaks in a certain voice.⁸⁸ Weir is continuing the dialogue that was begun by Emma Jung and taken up later by feminist writers. Mary Daly, who calls it a 'psychic embed',⁸⁹ details many levels of activity for the 'self-hater', showing how it erodes a woman's energies and capacities. Another notable contributor to this dialogue is Doris Lessing. In her novel *The Four-Gated City*, the character Martha Quest offers a literary example of 'internal oppression':

She was completely in the grip of this self-hating person, or aspect of herself.⁹⁰

Martha's 'self-hater' is a compelling and powerful masculine enemy. It assumes a strident, unmitigated form:

Martha was crying out – sobbing, groveling; she was being wracked by emotion. (The voice) was loud, or it was soft; it was jaunty, or it was intimately jeering, but its abiding quality was an antagonism, a dislike of Martha: and Martha was crying out against it – she needed to apologise, to beg forgiveness, she need to please and to buy absolution: she was groveling on the carpet, weeping, while the voice uttered accusations of hatred.⁹¹

At the same time Martha entertains thoughts about how cruel she has been to another character, Mark. These thoughts account, at least in part, for the 'internal oppression' delivered so forcefully by her 'self-hater':

... how could she treat Mark so – how appallingly had she always treated poor Mark! How coldly, how finally, all those years ago, had she dismissed him from her life ... poor Mark who had so little warmth in his life ... She was callous ...⁹²

⁸⁸ Demaris S. Weir, *Jung & Feminism Liberating Archetypes* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987), p.18

⁸⁹ Mary Daly, *Pure Lust: Elemental Feminist Philosophy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), p.139

⁹⁰ Doris Lessing, *The Four-Gated City* (London: Harper Collins, 1993), p.558

⁹¹ Lessing, p.540

⁹² Lessing, p.557

In Lessing's third-person omniscient novel, an unknown narrator further explains:

What was happening was something like this. She would discover herself uttering slogan-like phrases, or feeling emotions, which were the opposite of what she, the sane and rational Martha, believed.⁹³

Finally Martha herself pleads:

There is emotion in the self-hater. Go away, go away, oh please God go away, I can't bear it, just imagine, people live all their lives with you in their heads ... Is this what all those books call 'the pairs of opposites'? Love, hate, black, white, good, bad, man, woman.⁹⁴

The 'internal oppressor' of the protagonist Linda Hille in the novel 'In Two Minds' is every bit as real as Martha Quest's in *The Four-Gated City*, but it takes a different form. While Martha's is openly violent, Linda's is insidious and nagging. Her 'internal oppressor' is Linda's intimate: she takes instruction from it, allowing it to tell her what she ought or ought not to be doing. It manifests as the boss of the action, driving her relentlessly through the ambition of her mother and her own sense of deep-seated guilt. It keeps reminding Linda that she was not present at Derinda. She therefore continues to feel responsible for the rape and injury that resulted in her sister's delusion, as well as the subsequent operation that cost Kara her womanhood, and almost cost her life.

While Linda remains in the grip of her 'internal oppressor' her ability to experience genuine emotion is curtailed and she is able to feel little. She acts in response to its voice, which is represented by the narrative 'you'. This voice puts words into Linda's mouth, inherently asserting that it knows best. It manifests in some ways like a movie-director, observing, questioning, ordering, advising, assessing, arguing, warning, urging, judging. It addresses the protagonist by means of the sexless 'you'. But Linda meets and falls in love with Gary; then a life-and-death crisis brings her to seek a way of out of the dire straits she finds herself in. From the time

⁹³ Lessing, p.561

⁹⁴ Lessing, p.560-562

she tells her boss Forrest Shore to 'fuck off', Linda relinquishes the driving ambition engendered by her ambitious narcissistic mother Stella and at last denies the 'internal oppressor'. Only then is she free to speak subjectively, and can adopt the 'I' which has so far lain dormant. With this awakening, the previously persistent, aggressive, masculine-toned narrative 'you' is no longer needed. Linda's new 'I' voice claims the first person, expressing her feelings and desires as a woman and allowing her to live in the present.

Building 'cover' with the narrative 'you'.

From the start of the novel 'In Two Minds', the narrative 'you' came into robust play. I enjoyed the way it took over the exposition, deciding what was to be told, when and how. I immediately felt it afforded 'cover'; not the kind of 'cover' inherent in a screenplay, but nevertheless an adequate mask or *persona* for *the writerly self*. I found, however, that such 'cover' had to be built and maintained. This relied on providing the reader with constant deflection from the notion of the 'I' behind the text. Primarily, however, the narrative 'you' was required to address a particular aspect of the fictional protagonist while at the same time telling the story of which it was the

intradiegetic narratee. Its use had to be narratologically managed using a variety of grammatical and rhetorical resources.

In the novel 'In Two Minds', the narrative 'you' makes frequent use of represented speech and thought as pronominal stand-ins for *the writerly self*. This enables the constitution of the voice of the protagonist's 'internal oppressor', which addresses itself in the second-person singular. Into this self-address are inserted seemingly factual reports by other characters. For example, when the 'head-hunter' Aria Blenkinsop informs Linda her award-winning brand-campaign has been altered:

'I say, darling, have you seen the new Szu Szu?'

Aria is known for her brusqueness. Her questions often contain hidden truths, wrapped in her self-assured English manner.

'Haven't got to the cinema lately.'

'They've kept your words, but changed the tune. Or, not exactly – as there isn't one. But the rhythm, you know, the arrangement.'

'Hmm! Han Malik will be pleased.'

'Shitting himself! When Malik gets mad, he goes for the jugular.'

'Really? I have to say, I haven't noticed. Han's always been fine with me.'

'Only because he owes you, darling. Didn't you hand him Szu Szu on a plate?'⁹⁵

This kind of self-address, and the second-order fictions it creates, may assist in broadening the perspective of the story while at the same time allowing the establishment of character and plot.

The narrative 'you' may also be employed to create a varied diegetic between narrator, focalizing protagonist, and narratee, as in this account of Kara's relationship with her husband Merton:

Kara had been swept away on Merton's credo, one that relied on not having any children and unfailing hard work from both marriage partners. Your sister assumed that such a partnership meant equal sharing, but at the same time she had no idea where the boundaries lay – indeed that there were any. Your sister had taken her husband on trust, along with

⁹⁵ Albertson, p. 171

the belief that if she gave Merton undying love and unending service, the best way she could, cooking endlessly, he'd treat her the same way.⁹⁶

Here the 'you' narrator relates an opinion held by the protagonist's 'internal oppressor'. At the same time, it informs the narratee. Later in the story it also discusses the narcissist Stella's treatment of her daughter Kara. The following example of self-address contains reported speech, now in the form of indirect discourse:

Stella's way of dealing with The Kara Thing was simply to dismiss it. She'd toss her head disdainfully, as Stella can, in a gesture that was tantamount to saying, 'Very well, my girl. If that's how it's going to be ...'⁹⁷

In the foregoing examples a number of diegetic links between narrator, protagonist, and narratee have been loosened. The intention was to keep the addressee aware and informed of 'backstory' – in relatively brief grabs – whilst maintaining the desired 'cover'.

Maximum advantage was taken of openings in the 'you' narration to insert dialogue, for example between the protagonist and her closest friend. Here Linda asks Helena's advice on her new love interest:

When Helena arrives, you save the black wreath story. Instead, you ask her what she thinks about asking Gary up to The Beach this weekend.

'I wouldn't, if I were you,' she answers cautiously. 'Not yet. Not if you really like him. It could frighten him off. And I wouldn't be telling him too much about Kara, either. Wait 'til he meets her.'

'Frighten him off?' You agree about Kara, but wonder how your fabulous secret – the haven of glossy cool in a setting of bush-beach charm – could ever be described as frightening. Who on earth would be scared by the distant laughter of kookaburras, the tinkle of ice cubes, the occasional 'plash in your peppermint pool? What can be possibly wrong with lazing about in marine coloured light for a whole weekend, pigging out on fresh whiting fillets in crisp

⁹⁶ Albertson, p.19

⁹⁷ Albertson, p.14

tempura batter and yummy Cajun wedges from the best fish shop?⁹⁸

In this way the narrative 'you' allowed characters other than the protagonist to speak with deference. In the foregoing example, the narrator also sustains its self-address while embracing reverie.

Perhaps the most fascinating device available to the second-person writer, however, in regard to the many shape-shifting functions offered by the use of the narrative 'you', is 'double deixis'. Herman argues that 'double deixis' is a name for the ontological interference pattern that is set into play when we read (and by implication, write?)⁹⁹ second-person fictions.¹⁰⁰ He admits that 'double deixis' is difficult to situate, as it is involved in superimposing two or more deictic roles – one internal to the discourse situation that is represented in and/or through the diegesis, and another(s) external to that discourse situation.¹⁰¹ This 'double deixic' pattern involves juxtaposing what Herman identifies as four key modalities of use for the second-person pronoun when it is used as narrator: generalized 'you', fictional reference, fictionalised address and apostrophic address.¹⁰² At the same time, textual indicators such as rhetorical signatures, verbal moods and speech registers must be brought into play to enable the reader to recognise various modalities and sort them as discourse referents. 'Double deixis' (in fact, the use of the narrative 'you' in general), is enhanced by the use of the present tense. Here, a subjunctive grammatical mood is added:

Today, for some reason, you are feeling jealous of the people in the world who have free choice. You fervently wish your sister would find herself an understanding benefactor who is not yourself, so you can reclaim your space.¹⁰³

This mood most often occurs when the reported speech of the protagonist is replaced by reported thought – as she is driving alone in her car Bette

⁹⁸ Albertson, p. 126

⁹⁹ My addition

¹⁰⁰ Herman, Section 1: para. 7

¹⁰¹ Herman, Section 1: para. 7

¹⁰² Herman, Section 1, para 8

¹⁰³ Albertson, p. 125

Blue, for instance, or, as in the foregoing example, ferrying her cat Tank from the minder Eleanor's terrace house to her flat at Jackson's landing.

Undoubtedly McInerney and Gemmell are the writers who exerted most influence on my use of the narrative 'you' in the novel 'In Two Minds'. *Bright Lights, Big City* showed me, among other things, how the personal pronoun may be used to voice the cocaine-affected aspect of McInerney's protagonist and at the same time bring alive the culture of bitchery, gossip and schadenfreude that pervades the world of the glossy magazine, one which in some ways parallels the milieu of global advertising in which my protagonist Linda exists. *The Bride Stripped Bare*, on the other hand, demonstrated achievement of the kind of 'cover' I so desperately sought in order to realize the personal and private elements of my own life as exposed in Kara's story.

When her manuscript was about to be published, Gemmell took two further steps to increase this 'cover'. The first was to adopt the *nom de plume*, 'Anonymous'; the second was to place a letter to the reader on the final page of the book. In it Gemmell said:

You may be wondering why I chose to write this book anonymously. *The Bride Stripped Bare* is a deeply private book, and there are very personal reasons why I didn't want my name attached to it ... The bottom line is that I wanted to write a scrupulously honest account of a woman's secret life, and the only way I felt comfortable about doing that was to withhold my name.¹⁰⁴

Even though I was able, with the use of the narrative 'you', to find enough 'cover' to enable me to write, I recognize that Kara's story might yet present me with problems. In a recent newspaper article, 'Undercover Authors', Deborah Hope comments:

In theory, adopting a writing persona liberates the imagination. This was certainly my experience when I wrote

¹⁰⁴ Gemmell, p.376

a column under the pseudonym 'Alice B' for several years ... Eric Blair didn't want to embarrass his parents when *Down and Out in Paris and London* was published in 1933. According to one version of the story, Blair gave his publisher four pen-names to choose from, indicating he favoured George Orwell.¹⁰⁵

I too am resolved to use a *nom de plume*, if and when 'In Two Minds' comes to publication, to protect living members of my family from publicly aired truths not only about myself but also their grandmother, great-grandmother, and great-uncle. Also to protect myself as, in an age where privacy is increasingly difficult to retain and litigation rife, writers may be accused of abusing the personal material of others in their novel writing. Another newspaper report detailed the case of five peasant farmers in France who beat up an author for revealing in his novel the dark secrets of their hamlet, including adultery, suicide, inbreeding and alcoholism.¹⁰⁶ Pierre Jourde claimed he was attacked by neighbours in the Auvergne after setting his novel *Pays Perdu (Lost Land)* in the community. Although the author changed names, residents of Lussaud recognized themselves as the drunken, lonely and uncouth characters he depicted.

I would argue that the 'cover' offered by the use of the narrative 'you' may well have been sought by writers other than Nikki Gemmell and myself. Although this is conjecture, impossible to prove, it suggests itself to me because the personal pronoun 'you', when used in fiction, almost invariably delivers what amounts to a secretive aside, or a series of them, or reveals material that may be thought of as private or clandestine. As far as I can gather, the narrative 'you' is not usually employed in humorous or light-hearted adult fiction. On the contrary (with the possible exception of Calvino's *If on a winter's night a traveller*, which I consider to be a highly experimental post-modern text), second-person address invariably deals with subject matter that is private or personal or borders on the grim. Keneally's novel *A Dutiful Daughter*, for instance, concerns isolation, illness

¹⁰⁵ Deborah Hope in 'Undercover Authors', Review/*The Weekend Australian* July 14-15, 2007, p. 40

¹⁰⁶ 'Writer "bashed by characters"', *The Weekend Australian*, June 23-24, 2007. p. 'M'.

and sibling love. McInerney's *Bright Lights, Big City* tells of a young writer's life and marriage wrecked by habitual drug-taking. Rex Stout's *How Like a God* describes the protagonist's slow progress up to the room where he will kill the woman whose existence has poisoned his life.¹⁰⁷ In Louis Nowra's novel *Palu*, the protagonist uses the narrative 'you' to address her husband and also to refer to a gecko on her cell wall which acts as confessor.¹⁰⁸ Vladimir Nabokov's *Speak, Memory: An Autobiography Revisited* uses the narrative 'you' in breaks from the main text to address the author's wife Vera, switching to it entirely in the final chapter when Nabokov exclusively addresses her.¹⁰⁹

Samuel Beckett employed the narrative 'you' in *The Unnamable*, the 1953 novel in which he disregarded exposition, plot and paragraphs. Passages such as the following hint that Beckett, too, may have sought 'cover':

you have to say, It's I who am doing this to me, I who am talking about me to me. Then the breath fails, the end begins, you go silent, it's the end, short-lived, you begin again, you had forgotten, there's someone there, someone talking to you, about you, about him ... all I have to do is listen, then they depart, one by one, and the voice goes on, it's not theirs, they were never there, there was never anyone but you, talking to you about you, the breath fails¹¹⁰

As with much of Beckett's writing, here is a profound quality that suggests deeply-felt personal experience; private memories, perhaps, the author has chosen to realise in an objective, removed way.

Morrisette maintains that Michel Butor's 1957 work *La Modification* (translated from the original French as *Second Thoughts*) was not the initial second-person novel to appear in the twentieth century.¹¹¹ He does, however, claim it focused attention on the narrative 'you'.¹¹² Morrisette reports that *La Modification* circulated widely; 'l'innovation de Butor'

¹⁰⁷ Rex Stout, *How like a God*, (New York: Vintage Press, 1929)

¹⁰⁸ Louis Nowra, *Palu* (Sydney: Picador, 1987)

¹⁰⁹ Vladimir Nabokov, *Speak, Memory: An Autobiography* (New York: Vintage International, 1989)

¹¹⁰ Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable*, (New York: Grove Press, 1995) p. 394

¹¹¹ For Morrisette, this was Stout's *How like a God* (Morrisette, p.12)

¹¹² Morrisette. p.1

became the subject of study by Roland Barthes and others.¹¹³ The second-person narration in *La Modification*, which also refuses to follow traditional concepts of plot and characterization, approaches the 'nouveau roman' style used by Marguerite Duras, whose prose appears to proceed from the image rather than being an adjunct to it. Duras employs the narrative 'you' in writings which seem to be autobiographical, although in her enigmatic way she denies 'autobiography', at least in the case of *The Lover*:

The papers have said it is autobiographical, but that isn't true, even if that which is told in the text really happened.¹¹⁴

Duras' interviewer Moix immediately adds, 'She pauses and her eyes seem to smile', hinting that the author is playing with the idea of 'autobiography' in order to protect *the writerly self*. Certainly the use of the narrative 'you' in Duras' short story *The Atlantic Man*, reveals from the start the private pain that is inevitably felt in personal loss:

You will not look straight at the camera. Except when you are told to do so.

You will forget.
You will forget.

You will forget that this is you.
I believe it can be done.
You will also forget the camera. But above all, you will forget that this is you. You.

Yes, I believe it can be done. For instance, from other points of view ...¹¹⁵

Here Duras gives herself permission to wander in another viewpoint, except when called to task, perhaps by order of some aspect of characterization or a necessary structural device. By naming herself 'you', she is able to

¹¹³ Morrissette, p.1-2

¹¹⁴ Ana Maria Moix, *An Interview with Marguerite Duras* in Marguerite Duras, *Two by Duras*, trns. Alberto Manguel (Toronto: Coach House Press, 1993) p. 65

¹¹⁵ Duras, p. 31

forget, sufficiently removing herself from reality. It is possible that Duras is able to express herself in this way because, as a writer of screenplay, notably for the movie *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, she knows what it is to experience 'cover'.

Butor's *La Modification* tells the story of a middle-aged man who takes a train to visit his lover, intending to tell her he has finally decided to leave his wife. But in the course of the journey he changes his mind. Of the greatest interest to me is the possibility that Butor may also have employed the narrative 'you' as 'cover' in this novel. What Morrissette calls 'the moralizing, self-evaluatory tone' of *La Modification*,¹¹⁶ as well as Butor's own definition of the second-person in fiction, '*... celui a qui l'on raconte sa propre histoire*' ('that person to whom one relates one's own life-story'),¹¹⁷ suggests this. More than anything else, the words, 'one's own life story', seem to indicate that Butor, too, may have employed the narrative 'you' in order to realise confrontingly personal material. Butor wrote originally in French, using the *vous* form of the personal pronoun instead of the *tu*, but Morrissette remarks that 'even French critics, such as Delbouille, have accepted the *vous* rather than the *tu* as the character speaking to himself'.¹¹⁸ Morrissette adds, 'The voice which says *vous* (in *La Modification*) is less that of the character than that of the author, or, better still, that of a *persona*, invisible but powerfully present, who serves as the centre of consciousness in the novel.'¹¹⁹

Speculation that second-person narration may have been used as 'cover' by more than one other novelist accords with an encouraging observation I came across when searching in writing manuals to discover the possibilities of the narrative 'you':

Occasionally ... second person is used to establish the 'you' as the main character of the fiction... Why? ... If the story were written in the first person, the piece would seem too self-involved and autobiographical. Even if the piece is autobiographical, or even if it is the narrator talking aloud to herself, the use of second person actively involves us in the

¹¹⁶ Morrissette, p. 7

¹¹⁷ Morrissette, p. 1

¹¹⁸ Morrissette, p. 16

¹¹⁹ Morrissette, p. 15

life of the narrator. If the character were written in the third person, the character would seem too remote.¹²⁰

In my case, as I have explained, the first person originally belonged to the autobiographical character Kara. And the third person was simply inappropriate for a story in which I was so personally involved. In 1965 Morrisette, in his classic work 'Narrative "You" in Contemporary Literature', observed:

Far from constituting a technical 'trick' narrative 'you', although of comparatively late development, appears as a mode of curiously varied psychological resonances, capable, in the proper hands, of producing effects in the fictional field that are unobtainable by other modes or persons.¹²¹

Since Morrisette's publication, the second-person singular pronoun has been established as a narrator in the contemporary novel and become integral to the expression of popular culture. Despite lingering prejudice and misunderstanding, the singular voice which may be created by its use is now a valid option for writers such as myself, who need to hide behind the text in order to realise confrontingly personal material. Among the choice of persons in the narrational palette, it is alone able to express a particular aspect of the fictional protagonist, address the reader, and tell a story of which it is the intradiegetic narratee, while weaving a 'cover' complex or mixed enough to conceal *the writerly self*. But for my discovery and utilisation of the mask or *persona* provided by the use of the tricksterish, manipulative second-person singular narrative 'you', the novel 'In Two Minds' would not have been written.

¹²⁰ Leebron and Levy, p. 266

¹²¹ Morrisette, p. 1

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abrams, M. H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms: Seventh Edition*. Florida: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1999.

Albertson, Jennifer. "Honourable Fire Rat". *Southerly* Vol. 63, 2: Halstead Press: Sydney, 2003, pp. 136-142.

Albertson, Jennifer, "Kara's Journal". Unpublished.

Albertson, Jennifer. "In Two Minds". Unpublished.

Anonymous, (Gemmell N. J.). *The Bride Stripped Bare*. London: Fourth Estate, 2003.

Atwood, Margaret. *Negotiating with the Dead: A Writer on Writing*. London: Virago, 2003.

Augustine, Saint. *Confessions*. Trns. and Ed. Albert C. Outler, Ph.D., D.D., Professor of Theology, Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas, First published MCMLV.
<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/augustine/confessions.txt>. 3.09.2007

Baravalle Giorju and Cari Modine Eds. with the collaboration of Ambreen Qureshi. *NEWYORKSEPTEMBERELEVENTWOTHOUSANDONE*. New York: de MO, 2001.

Breen, Nora and Caine, Diana and Coltheart, Max. "Mirrored-self Misidentification: Two Cases of Focal Onset Dementia." *Neurocase*, Volume 7, No. 3 (2001), pp. 239–254.

Brontë, Charlotte. *Villette*. Introduction and notes, Tim Dolin. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Byatt, A.S. and Sôdré, Ingês. *Imagining Characters: Six Conversations about Women Writers*, Ed. Rebecca Swift. London: Vintage Random House, 1995.

Calvino, Italo. *If on a winter's night a traveller*, Trns. William Weaver. London: Vintage, 1983.

Chekhov, Anton. *Chekhov: Four Plays*, trns. Stephen Mulrine. London: Nick Hern Books, 1997.

Cixous, Hélène. *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.

Cohen, Leonard. *Hallelujah*. Song.
<http://www.seeklyrics.com/lyrics/Leonard-Cohen/Hallelujah.html>
17.03.2007

Corrigall, Jenny and Wilkinson, Heward. *Revolutionary Connections: Psychotherapy and Neuroscience*. London: Karnac Books, 2003.

Cox, Harvey. *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century*. Massachusetts: Perseus Books, 1995.

Daly, Mary. *Pure Lust: Elemental Feminist Philosophy*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1984.

Davies, M., and Coltheart, M., and Langdon, R., and Breen, N.
"Monothemic Delusions: Towards a Two-Factor Account." *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology*, Volume 8 (2001)133-158

David, Elizabeth. *French Country Cooking*. London: Penguin Handbooks, 1965.

Dostoevsky, Fyodor. *The Double: A Petersburg Poem*, Trns. Constance Garnett. <http://www.kiosek.com/dostoevsky/library/thedouble.txt>
12.03.2007

Falconer, Delia, *The Service of Clouds*. Sydney: Pan Macmillan Australia, 1998.

Flanagan, Richard, *Gould's Book of Fish*. Sydney: Pan Macmillan Australia, 2002.

Fludernick, Monika, "Introduction: Second-person narrative and related issues, (Second-Person Narrative)", *Style*, 1994
<http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G1-16988684.html> 1.07.2007

Fraim, John. *Battle of Symbols: Global Dynamics of Advertising, Entertainment and Media*. Einsiedeln: Daimon Verlag, 2003.

Freud, Sigmund. Trns. James Strachey, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. London: Hogarth Press and Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1974.

Fotopoulou Aikaterini, and Solms, Mark, and Turnbull, Oliver. "Wishful reality distortions in confabulation: a case report." *Neuropsychologia* 47 (2004), pp. 727-744.

Grosz, Elizabeth, *Sexual Subversions: Three French Feminists*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1989.

Herman, David. "Textual 'You' and Double Deixis in Edna O'Brien's A Pagan Place, (Second Person Narrative)." *Style*, 1994.
<http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G1-16988714.html> 25.03.2007

Herodotus, *The History of Herodotus, Book Two, 'Euterpe'* (440 B.C.)
Trns. George Rawlinson.
<http://classics.mit.edu/Herodotus/history.2.ii.html> 3.09.2007

Hope, Deborah. "Undercover Authors", *Review/Weekend Australian*, July 14-15, 2007

Hotchkiss, Sandy. *Why does it always have to be about you?* New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003.

Iley, Chrissie. "Love, actually". London: *The Observer Magazine*. Sunday August 14th 2005.
<http://observer.guardian.co.uk/magazine/story/0,11913,1547132,00.html>
15.08.2005

Irigaray, Luce. Trns. Hélène Vivienne Wenzel. "And One Doesn't Stir Without The Other". *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 7:1. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981.

Jung, Carl Gustav. Trns. R.F.C. Hull, *The Collected Works*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981.

Jung, C. G. *Memories Dreams and Reflections*, Recorded and Edited by Aniela Jaffé, Trns. Richard and Clara Winston. New York: Vintage Books, 1965.

Hauke, Christopher. *Jung and the Postmodern: The Interpretation of Realities*. London: Routledge, 2000.

Kaplan-Solms, Karen and Solms, Mark. *Clinical Studies in Neuro-Psychoanalysis: Introduction to a Depth Neuropsychology, Second Edition*. London: Karnac Books, 2002.

Keneally, Thomas. *A Dutiful Daughter*. Sydney: Fontana/Collins, 1979.

Klein, Naomi. *No Logo*. London: Flamingo, 2001.

Kuhn, Thomas S. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. London: University of Chicago Press Ltd, 1970.

Langdon, Robyn, and Coltheart, Max. "The Cognitive Neuropsychology of Delusions." *Mind & Language*, 15.1 (2000) pp. 184–218.

Lechte, John. *Julia Kristeva*. London: Routledge, 1990.

Leebron, Fred and Levy, Andrew. *Creating Fiction: A Writer's Companion*. Fort Worth, Texas: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1995.

Lessing, Doris. *The Four-Gated City*. London: HarperCollins, 1993.

Lao-Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*. Trns. Stephen Mitchell. New York: Harper Collins, 1988.

London, Joan. *Letter to Constantine*. South Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1993.

Mann, Jessica. "Interview: Jessica Mann talks to Doris Lessing." London: *Literary Review*. February 2007, pp. 20-21.

Martin, David. *Pentecostalism: The World Their Parish*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2002.

McInerney, Jay. *Bright Lights, Big City*. London: Fontana, 1986.

Moi, Toril. *Sexual Textual Politics: Feminist Literary Theory*. London: Routledge, 1985.

Morrisette, Bruce. "Narrative 'You' in Contemporary Literature", *Comparative Literature Studies* 2, 1965, 1-24.

Murdoch, Iris. *The Sea, The Sea*. London: Penguin Books, 1978.

Nabakov, Vladimir. *Speak, Memory: An Autobiography*. New York: Vintage International, 1989.

Nin, Anais. *The Novel of the Future*. London: Peter Owen, 1968.

Nowra, Louis. *Palu*. Sydney: Picador, 1987

Pausanius, Greece, 2.1.1.-5.1 (2nd Century C.E.)
<http://www.abu.nb.ca/courses/NTIntro/images/PausanCor.htm>
3.09.2007

Power, Richard. *The Echo Maker*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006.

Robinson, Bruce. *Smoking in Bed*. Ed. Alistair Owen. London: Bloomsbury, 2000.

Robinson, Hazel and Fuller, Victoria Graham. *Understanding Narcissism in Clinical Practice*. London: Karnac Books, 2003.

Roden, Claudia, *Foolproof Mediterranean Cookery*. London: BBC Worldwide, 2003.

Schofield Denis, Doctoral Thesis, "The Second Person: A Point of View? The Function of the Second-Person Pronoun in Narrative Prose Fiction". Geelong: Deakin University, 1998.

<http://members.westnet.com.au/emmas/2p/thesis/1.htm> 2.06.2005

Schwartz-Salant, Nathan. *Narcissism and Character Formation: The Psychology of Narcissistic Character Disorders*. Toronto: Inner City Books, 1982.

Shanahan, Melanie. *Walk with Me*. Song.

<http://www.akasa.com.au/ar/releases.php?id=2&trackID=22> 17.03.2007

Sontag, Susan. *In America*. London: Vintage, 2001.

Stead, Christina. *For Love Alone*. North Ryde: Angus and Robertson, A&R paperback edition, 1973.

Stout, Rex. *How like a God*. New York: Vintage Press, 1929.

Symington, Neville. *Narcissism: A New Theory*. London: Karnac Classics, 1993.

'*The Economist*' Magazine, Publicity Flyer. London, October 2005.

Turnbull Oliver H., Berry Helen, and Evans, Cathryn E. Y. "A Positive emotional bias in confabulatory false beliefs about place." *Brain and Cognition* 55 (2004) pp. 490-494.

Turnbull, Oliver. *Emotion, and the neuropsychology of false beliefs*.

<<http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/pdf/IOP%20Turnbull%20slides.pdf>>

14.15.2005

Turnbull, O.H. and Jones, K., and Reed-Screen, J. *Implicit awareness of deficit in anosognosia: An emotion-based account of denial of deficit*. 2002

<http://staff.psychology.bangor.ac.uk/Members/pss40d/Anosog/Turnbull%20NPA%20Anosognos%23B20B.pdf> 3.09.2007

Turnbull, Oliver H., Jenkins Sarah, and Roley L. Martina. "The Pleasantness of False Beliefs: An Emotion-based Account of Confabulation." *Neuro-Psychoanalysis*, 6,1, (2004), pp. 5-45.

Walker, Brenda, ed. *The Writer's Reader: A Guide to Writing Fiction & Poetry*. Sydney: Halstead Press, 2002.

Weir, Demaris. S. *Jung & Feminism: Liberating Archetypes*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1987.

Winterson, Jeanette. *Lighthousekeeping*. London: Harper Perennial, 2005.

Winterson, Jeanette. *The Power Book*. London: Vintage, 2001.

Woodman, Marion. *Addiction to Perfection: The Still Unravished Bride*. Toronto: Inner City Books, 1982.

Woodman, Marion. *The Ravaged Bridegroom: Masculinity in Women*. Toronto: Inner City Books, 1990.

Young-Eisendrath, Polly. "New Contexts and Conversations for Female Authority". Paper presented at "Feminist Thought and the Structure of Knowledge," Colloquium for Social Philosophy, Pennsylvania State University, Delaware County Campus, April 19, 1986.

Young-Eisendrath, Polly. *Women & Desire: Beyond Wanting to be Wanted*. London: Judy Piarkus (Publishers) Limited, 2000.

Zoja, Luigi and Williams, Donald, eds. *A Global Nightmare: Jungian Reflections on September 11*. Einsiedeln: Daimon Verlag, 2002.