

A tall youth stalked across the fiberglass-strewn factory. Patches of fiberglass had soaked into his worn jeans. The tan boots poking from beneath them were permanently stained with drops of the same substance. His once white t-shirt was thin and splashed with patches and welts of both dried and resinous fiberglass. Welts and splashes on his clothing were replicated in the form of chemical burns on his arms and the deeply-tanned skin beneath his shirt. Chemical fumes and exhaustion had turned his eyes to bloodshot orbs.

Through the huge door a breeze blew across the work areas and cleared the heavy fumes. Several of the workers looked up and smiled.

Once in the clean air and sunshine of the delivery yard his feet dragged and kicked a cloud of dust. It annoyed him to see dust sticking to the resin on his boots. He pulled a pair of leather work-gloves from his hands and without lifting his head he walked across the gravel to the area where the worker's vehicles were parked. He threw the gloves onto the seat of a motorcycle and fussed with some wiring that led from the headlight to beneath the fuel tank

Kneeling at the rear of the bike he tested the chain. It needed to be replaced. He sighed. His father had lent him money to buy this bike in order to assist him to get to work. Like the job he had only had it for a few weeks. He would have preferred not to ride it until everything was properly maintained but it meant doing a full rebuild. That would need more money than he had available yet.

He ran his hands over the front and then the rear tire. The mix of Dunlop and Avon were considered perfect on this type of machine.

A voice interrupted his reverie. "Don't look now but all of admin is at the window wondering why you are playing with this toy in work hours."

OP was shift-boss and a member of the same group of friends. He wore clothes that were almost a uniform for them at that time. Levis, wide belt with a motorcycle or western buckle, a t-shirt and boots, although OP's boots were the special-forces kind that laced all the way up and the motorcyclist's were western harness boots.

OP's ice-blue eyes bored into the hazel eyes of his friend as he asked. "You wanna lose this job?"

OP peeled off his own gloves and casually tossed them onto the hood of the nearest car. He leant back onto the car as though settling in for a while then as an afterthought stood up and checked his rear for studs that might scratch the paint.

"It's that cop" said the worker. "I am losing money working here because of that guy."

OP's eyebrows went up. Every day for a week a motorcycle cop had been waiting just up the road from the factory complex. Every day he had pulled the motorcyclist over and hit him with a raft of fines.

“He fines me if I am in the wrong or not” said the motorcyclist as he unscrewed the cap from the oil tank at the side of the bike. “The guy put a defect notice on the bike for an oil leak just yesterday.”

OP grimaced “It will make his day if he can catch you riding a defected machine.” “This job pays well” he added lamely as though wishing to be reassuring but leaving too much unsaid.

The motorcyclist looked miserable and replied. “The fines are enough to absorb all my pay so far.” “I might try and get out of here before he comes onto his shift and I guess I should hunt a job I can afford to keep.”

He stood and brushed the knees of his jeans. “The old man is getting annoyed at me being unable to pay anything substantial off the loan. He thinks I am making it up or getting trouble because I am asking for it.”

The car park was in the middle of a factory complex and the driveway onto North Rocks Road was almost fifty meters away down a potholed gravel track. OP said he was going to see what was on the road and walked down the side of the building to a vantage point between another factory and some bushes. He turned and sauntered back almost immediately.

“It looks like your nemesis has arrived. He is sitting on the traffic island behind some bushes”

In one of the buildings a grinder screamed its industrial howl. Someone hammered on metal and ear splitting clangs rolled through the air before echoing around the parking lot.

OP was certain someone was phoning the police to let them know when the bike was leaving the factory. They both glared at the staffers still visible and watching from the second-storey windows.

The motorcyclist shuffled his feet for a moment then asked if there was a bottle of oil in his companion’s car. OP nodded and they wandered over to a heavily worked early-model Holden that hunched imposingly among the newer vehicles. They both rummaged around in a pile of bike-parts and tools behind the seats until OP found a bottle of oil and handed it to his friend.

The motorcyclist walked back and poured the small quantity of oil in the bottle into the oil tank of the bike. He looked at the faces in the administration windows and commented that he could probably lob the bottle that far. OP made a sympathetic noise and slid it from his unresisting grasp. He threw it across the parking area into the waste hopper where it landed with a satisfying clang.

“I have no choice then!” declared the motorcyclist screwing the oil cap into place.

They both stared at the bike thoughtfully. OP tugged at the handlebars and asked “These don’t slow you down?”

When the motorcyclist had bought the bike he had been able to do a few things. The first was to organize a paint-job of metal-flake blue so deep the flakes seem to hang in space and he loved that. The second thing he did was actually a few things. He replaced worn tires, air filters, cables, pipes and spark plugs. It was as much as he could afford at the time.

The third thing.. The one troubling them both now, was to give in to the urge to get in people's faces by replacing the standard "steer-horn" style of handle bar with a high set of t-bars (think "ape-hanger" style but straight up then across the top) that rose a majestic fourteen inches from their base. He had been told it was the maximum anyone could have and still be legal. Cops got bug-eyed and blew smoke out of their nostrils at the sight of a bike wearing them!

"Didn't you have a spare set of flat bars for that Triumph of yours?" asked the motorcyclist as he lifted the boot lid of the Holden and rummaged among the parts and tools that filled it to the brim.

OP made a throwaway motion towards a glistening black Triumph Tiger that stood some distance away from the rest of the vehicles. "Pete's Bike." he declared meaning the bars were now a part of that machine. They both walked over to the Triumph and stood thinking.

"He wont mind." said the motorcyclist rubbing his chin.

"Doesn't matter," said OP "Yours has twin carbies and we would have to change the cables." He indicated the single carburetor on the Triumph and both understood that they would also have to change the cables so the taller bars would work.

"Foiled again." said OP. He didn't seem unhappy. Pete might not have been so easy to convince.

"How is she running?" OP asked indicating the motorcyclist's bike.

"The BIKE" was a 1969 650cc BSA Lightning. The cylinders had been bored out to 710cc with high-compression pistons and all sorts of other tricks and tweaks added. The last owner had ridden it mercilessly after doing it up so it needed that rebuild. The drum brakes were on a par with the engine.

"I might need a little head start." said the motorcyclist without emotion.

OP walked back to the vantage point by the bushes. On his return he said. "He has his helmet off and is leaning against the bike smoking a cigarette. I guess that's about as good a head start as you can expect."

He walked over to his car and leaning in the window pulled the motorcyclist's helmet and worn leather jacket from the front seat. Handing the equipment over OP scooped his own gloves from the bonnet of the car and then the pair on the seat of the bike. He headed back into the factory.

"See you up the pub." he said without looking back.

The motorcyclist twisted the fuel cap off and nodded at the full tank. He replaced the cap and twiddled the brake lever for a moment before tightening the cable at the hand-piece. He turned on the fuel tap and the ignition. Standing alongside the bike he primed the carbies then attempted to kick it over. The engine misfired and the pedal slammed into the sole of his boot. People occasionally got broken ankles from kick-starters and although he was prepared he was not in the mood.

“Bitch!” he cursed.

He kicked it over again and was rewarded with a low burble as the engine fired and ran. He lifted the bike off the side-stand onto the center-stand so the vibration would not cause it to fall and pulled the leather jacket on.

His helmet was an old open-face model that had once sported a Confederate flag. He had painted it black over some crackle medium and it now looked as though the surface was peeling off. The colors showed through the cracks. The lining was thin cork. He liked this helmet although he would have been bare-headed had he been able to get away with it. He pulled it on and secured the strap under his chin.

His eye wandered over the bike. It had wide crash bars attached to the frame. They were meant to protect your legs in bushes or in a fall but limited the amount a bike could lean into a corner. He went over to OP’s car and rummaged around until he found a shifting spanner. The brackets holding the crash bars were soon removed and the bars deposited in the boot.

In the window of the administration block people could be seen moving back and forth between the front and rear windows. They knew of the police bike and could see him preparing. Anger made his chest pound.

The bike felt alive as he threw his leg over the seat. British engineers had spent years designing and testing these bikes and this model was the pinnacle of that process. He sat for a moment with his eyes closed. He had chosen this bike because he loved the feeling it gave him. He loved the smell, the look and everything about it. It had not been intended as a racing machine and he sighed inwardly. Today it would be ridden hard.

A pair of aviator sunglasses were drawn from the pocket of the leathers and slid onto his face. The bandanna tied around his neck was drawn over his mouth and nose. He ran his tongue over his teeth as he remembered the taste of countless bugs he had already eaten. The bike rolled smoothly off its stand. He reached behind the helmet and pulled his long hair into a bundle so it would not writhe into his eyes as he rode. The bike clunked into first gear and scrunched slowly across the gravel towards the road.

In the afternoons the BSA would halt at the roadside after slowly rolling down the driveway. It would enter the road and ease up to traffic speed at which time and place it was usually pulled over by the motorcycle cop. Not today.

The long factory wall ended and the bike was almost in sight of the road when the motorcyclist grabbed a handful of throttle. The bike bucked and slid on the gravel driveway before steadying into a sustained slide. The motorcyclist stood on one peg and sliding his other foot in the gravel fought her like she was a speedway machine. Adrenaline pumped through his veins as the handle-bars tried to twist in his hands. Stresses thrust and pulled at his shoulders. He prayed the welds would hold and the tubing would not snap. A vision of being impaled on the tubing intruded on his mind and was forgotten.

The world disappeared. The admin staff and the patrolman disappeared from his mind. The bike and the road became everything.

Delivery trucks had flung a plume of gravel from the driveway into the road and he passed the outer lane and slid halfway across the second before the tires found clean road surface. His hands were almost torn from the grips as his body was thrown from standing on one peg and sliding, to sitting. The engine screamed, the gearbox clunked and the bike shuddered as the chain protested a gear change.

It was a drag race now. There were probably a thousand meters to the first hard corner and then ninety degrees into a side-street. Because of the height of the handle-bars his body was forced to stay upright no matter how badly he wanted to hunch over the tank or move around to create a lower center of gravity.

The patrolman was riding a four-cylinder 750cc Honda. It was tweaked as a chase bike. In this case the Honda out-accelerated the BSA. The Japanese machine had a front disk brake as well.

There were disadvantages that evened the odds for the BSA however!

This Honda was the first Japanese bike the Police were to use in New South Wales. Japanese manufacturers still had much to learn before they made machines of the quality and performance they did in later decades. Four cylinders stood upright across the front of the bike to get air to the cooling-fins. It was fine for that purpose but in hard corners they caused the machine to handle like a hippo compared to the BSA. They were also cranky on bad road surfaces. Throw in some blunt fairings, crash-bars, lights, panniers and sirens and the Honda was festooned with items to hinder its progress.

The motorcyclist held back a little on the throttle and teased the gears into place as the BSA shot up the road and reached its full speed. It was running like a pig and he didn't want to kill her in the first straight. He put the thought from his mind and looked straight ahead. Whatever happened he was committed and approaching the braking area of the first corner. A growing howl intruded over the roar of his engine. The Honda! Somehow he had lost the advantage of surprise and the Honda was reining him in already.

While the crash bars were being removed from the BSA the patrolman had finished his cigarette, replaced his helmet, and hopped back onto his machine. It was more comfortable to wait that way and his sergeant would have been annoyed to see him standing helmet less by the road.

Some surprise had been achieved. When the motorcyclist had hurtled sideways onto the road the patrolman had almost dropped his bike. His training was good enough to see him hit the starter and he was into the chase grabbing handfuls of throttle in fractured seconds.

Behind the full-face helmet the officer was a study in simultaneous malice and glee. He looked ahead and saw perfect multi-lane highway stretching for several kilometers, The Honda was catching the little BSA like a guided missile and it was obvious the motorcyclist had his machine flat out.

The patrolman was certain he was the better man. He had a new machine. His police training made him feel he was the better rider. His uniform made him better dressed. Even his job, a bona fide career, made him better than the working class criminal riding the other bike. He was a centurion chasing the barbarian! A savior of all things civilized!

The BSA was almost close enough to touch when it seemed to disappear. In his huge mirrors the patrolman saw it shuddering and dipping under brakes and dropping back through the gears.

It is a classic mistake of the arrogant to assess the actions of others based on their own limitations and possibilities. The road ahead might be fine for the Honda but the BSA was running like a rat up a drain pipe for the more dangerous winding backstreets that gave it a chance!

The tires smoked and the big machine bucked and lurched as the patrolman fought the brakes in an effort to get into the turn after the BSA. As he watched the BSA used every millimeter of road taking the curve in one clean movement and accelerating hard. There was a puff of smoke as the rubber on the rider's foot-peg was ripped away and he knew his opponent had nothing left to put into the corner. It infuriated him to see the rider sitting ramrod straight and looking ahead as though the Honda didn't exist.

Glee had been replaced by fury. The patrolman cursed and screamed threats into the padding of his helmet as he wrenched on the throttle and hammered through the gears. The big machine launched itself through the corner. He caught the other machine again and pulled half a bike length in front. The other rider continued to look ahead as though the patrolman wasn't there and he willed him to at least turn his head.

Suddenly the motorcyclist's hands began to work the brakes and clutch. The policeman didn't wait to see him drop back this time. They had entered the braking area for another corner and he still had his hand hard on the throttle. The corner was bad. It might have been a t-intersection had it not turned back on itself in an arrowhead. This was suburbia. Stone retaining walls, trees and telegraph poles clustered about at the end of the road. The bike tried to turn around itself and throw him off before he could balance his hands and feet on the brakes and gears. The BSA was in position for the corner and shot behind, around and then across the front of, his struggling machine. His stomach fell as the rear wheel of the other bike almost merged with his front tire. The other rider still didn't acknowledge his presence.

The road deteriorated markedly from this point. The BSA swooped onto a potholed bend that formed half of a vicious chicane winding its way down the gully to High's Road. With too much speed in hand the motorcyclist threw the bike to one side to cut the bend but the rear wheel bit into a deep pothole. It flipped upright and smashed his face into the handlebars as it tried to high-side him over the tank. The sole of his boot smoked and his whole body jarred as he slammed it onto the road surface and fought to stop the writhing machine heeling over. It bounced and twisted as it flipped the other way and then wobbled back in a "tank-slapper" tango!

.High's Road ran around the top of a ridge winding for kilometers in tight "S" bends with bad cambers punctuated by short straights. All along its length driveways were little more than sets of deeply rutted tracks leading amongst the trees. Stately homes and the pony-club set found the thick forest and awful road added to the quaintness and privacy of their surrounds so it remained.

His face burned as he gained control and pointed the agile little bike into the first hard, winding corner of High's Road. At one stage the local authorities had been coerced into widening it to a car and a half but the bitumen surface had eroded at the shoulders until it was barely car width down the middle. It was further compromised by potholes and erosion from streams at different points along its length.

There was no point fighting the bike along this stretch. The only thing that allowed him to get an advantage through here was the fact that he had ridden back and forth many times since he had started the job. Corners had to be planned before they were even in sight in order to get a line through the obstacles. Navigation had to be smooth and disciplined with clean acceleration and almost no braking. Only a purist would enjoy a stretch of road like this and the motorcyclist felt real bliss each time he tested himself here.

Deadly curves flew past in a haze. Little time seemed to pass before he approached the t-intersection that turned onto the major arterial of Pennant Hills Road. This early on a Friday afternoon there would be a steady line of traffic all the way into town. Although there had been no sign of the Honda since the chicane risking a chase in heavy traffic seemed like lunacy.

One of those driveways appeared. It was overgrown and out of use so he turned in.

Some distance from the road the track opened into a clearing where branches formed natural arches and columns. It was breathtaking! He had discovered one of nature's cathedrals. At twenty meters above ground the overhead canopy cut light to a minimum and prevented undergrowth from getting a hold. The ground itself was thick with soft leaf litter and his tires made no noise as he approached the house squatting in the middle. Here and there outcroppings of ferns indicated someone had tried gardening but the place appeared boarded up and deserted now. There was a great sense of peace. The air was thick with rich odors of clean humus and eucalypts.

Reflections caught his attention and he let the machine roll over to a spot where a spring emerged from the bracken that walled the clearing. Bubbling water fed into a deep pond or bowl and then ran across a long flat rock and off into the bushes. He

visualized it draining over the edge of the ridge into sub-tropical rainforest characteristic of the valleys in the area. As the bike stopped he slid off the seat and lifted the machine onto its center-stand. With a few practiced movements he shed his helmet and jacket placing both on the seat, the jacket beneath the helmet.

The bowl was a hollow, half-globe of some polished stone sunk into the ancient sandstone. It could almost have been a natural feature. It was beautiful and in this setting gave the feeling of being sacred. He sank to his knees by its side.

The bandana felt sticky as he pulled it away from his face. There was a substantial amount of blood in it. Exploring with his fingers he flinched at the puffy and painful state of his nose and upper lip. He tested his front teeth and was surprised not to find any were loosened.

The water was icy. He pushed the bandana into the stone bowl and removed it as soon as it was soaked. It seemed wrong to pollute the vessel. Wringing water and blood into the leaf litter several times he rinsed the bandana and washed his face. He felt as though he was participating in a pagan ritual offering blood to the old spirits of earth.

The adrenaline was draining away and it left him feeling tired again. It didn't seem wise to head back onto the road immediately so he cast about for a place to have a catnap.

The house stood on short brick piers. In the days of settlement convicts had handmade the building materials and bricks often had finger marks or maker's stamps on them. Dismantling the piers would have revealed such marks. There was a low gabled roof of corrugated iron sheets. It was painted a dull red and the eaves spread wide over a deep, shady porch on all sides of the house, There didn't seem to be any electrical connections.

A long sofa sat on the porch by the front door. It was of a kind that might have seen use through two world wars and totally in keeping with the look of the building. His boots clomped on the planks of the wide steps leading up the porch and he imagined the scene was a cowboy movie with the jingle of spurs being the only missing sound. The front door had been painted the same dull red as the roof. Decades of weather had split the timbers and eroded the paint into a crazed patina. A brass padlock clasped it shut from the outside.

Over time the wind had blown leaves and other detritus into piles against the door, porch wall and sofa. With the toe of his boot he spread a pile of leaves. Among the plant material were dozens of moth and beetle wings as well as a dried owl scat. Crushing the scat revealed the bones of tiny mammals. There were owls and probably bats living here. He had noted evidence of small animals like bandicoots or even rock wallabies digging throughout the clearing. He figured this place must have been alive with activity once the sun went down.

Gingerly he flicked the first of three cushions from the sofa. It needed to be searched for centipedes, red-backed spiders and snakes although any snakes here now would be slow in the cold. Two sleepy skinks and a beetle were all he could find so he brushed the leaves off and replaced the cushions.

Relaxed and loose he wandered back to the motorbike. The seat was hinged along one side and held by a clip on the other. Unceremoniously the helmet and jacket were dumped on the ground and the seat lifted to reveal a bundle of tools wrapped in cloth alongside a warm, checked shirt. The latter was crumpled and oil stained but it was getting chilly. He pulled it on and rolled the sleeves to half way up his forearms. Closing the seat he picked up the jacket and walked up the stairs to the sofa on the porch.

With the jacket serving as a pillow he fell asleep almost immediately.

Motes of dust floated aimlessly in beams of golden sunlight flickering across the porch and caressing the sofa. Several tiny birds bobbed and chattered at the end of the porch while a flock of hundreds surrounded the spring in a swirling mass of frenetic activity and noise.

He lay still and forced himself to breathe slowly so he would not frighten them. He was touched by the primal potency of life in this place and filled with wonder at the sight before him.

His bladder bought him back to earth. It annoyed him to know he would have to get to his feet to relieve himself. It annoyed him even more to realize that the golden quality of the light falling through the tree canopy meant the day was drawing to a close and there were places he should be. He had overslept.

The sofa creaked as he adjusted his weight. A swirling cloud of birds formed above the rock at the spring and pelted past him to disappear among the bracken at the far edge of the clearing. He felt a jolt of disconnection.

In one smooth movement he jumped down from the porch to the ground by the bike. It didn't look right and his eyes scanned back and forth across the machine. He cursed. The big triangular side-cover that had protected the battery and wiring was not there. He bent forward and with his hands on his knees let go a torrent of abuse at nothing in particular. It must have come off in the chicane. He had to go back and get it. It was too large a piece of the bike's new paintwork to easily replace.

He ran back to the sofa, grabbed the jacket and in a few agitated movements was dressed and back at the bike. He slapped his helmet onto his head with little consideration for his ears. The stand snapped back under the bike as he threw it forward and still feeling there was something sacred here he pushed it to the track at a run rather than starting it in the clearing.

The track erupted in gouts of sticks and clods of earth as he hammered the engine in one long wheel-spin all the way to the road. The toes of his boots drew long marks on the soft ground as he dragged his feet for better control.

It was a slow ride back to the chicane. The bike had to spear off the road once as a car coming from the other direction clung to the bitumen and would have rammed him head on. It was a normal behavior for motorists on this road and would get worse after night fell.

He walked the chicane checking every bush and clump of grass but the side-cover was nowhere to be seen. Deciding it was gone, and close to despair, he was about to mount the bike when a voice hailed him.

A woman stood on the porch of the nearest house. The property was one of those recently opened up to development and the brick home was new enough to have gardens and lawn consisting of little more than muddy builder's rubble. The windows still had the labels on the glass and there were several mats cluttering up the narrow concrete porch in an attempt to limit the sticky clay being tracked through the front door. The surface of the door was raw showing neither paint nor varnish. There was a toddler's play cage in view within a front window

She was dressed in a loose house-dress. It was decorated with large cream daisies against blue foliage. On her feet was a pair of Dunlop runners. Her reddish hair was held in an untidy bun. Several wisps had escaped and hung in a fetching way across her face.

"Excuse me." she called, "Are you looking for this."

She waved the side-cover in the air as she walked down the stairs and along the driveway to meet him. "I used to have a boyfriend with a bike like that. I thought I should get this thing off the road before it was damaged. I knew you would return for it."

Now that she was close he could see she wore no make-up and sported a sprinkle of freckles over her cheeks. She smelled of soap and talcum powder. His eyes roamed over her long neck and the soft skin at the base of her throat before he could force them back to her face. She had noted his attention and blushed although her eyes sparkled back at him.

He fumbled for something to break the moment and naively asked, "You say he used to be your boyfriend. What happened to him?"

"He died in a work accident." she answered. "He was twenty six years old."

Attractive women engender strange reactions in men and unable to stop himself he continued along a vein of conversation that led from naïve to stupid.

"So." he said, "He had a good life."

Her head lowered and she looked directly into his eyes. It was as though she had speared him emotionally and for a long moment he wriggled inside while she considered the remark. A light seemed to come on in her eyes.

"How old are you?" she asked.

Almost eighteen!" he barked relieved that her gaze had softened and whatever was happening to his belly had also eased.

She laughed and despite his superior height ruffled the hair on the top of his head as though he were a puppy. He didn't have a tail or it would have been wagging. "In that case," she said, "yes, he had a very fine life indeed."

A shrill scream rent the night. It started as ear-piercing and rose to brain splitting continuing until it developed the decibels of a space launch.

"That will be my little darlings calling me back to my other life." she joked.

She walked quickly up the driveway and broke into a run when the noises began to simulate a cage full of monkeys being boiled alive. Arriving at the top of the stairs she shrieked orders in a voice every bit as piercing as her children's. All too soon he was dismissed and forgotten.

He started the bike and realized he had not asked if the patrolman had gone past her or if he had even made the corner. The thought evoked a pang of guilt. Although the constable was an asshole he didn't wish him any harm. The BSA burbled as he rode up to the arrowhead intersection. In the glow of street lamps a thick black skid mark slashed across the corner. Waist-high retaining walls stood either side of a driveway at the end of the road. The skid marks had not stopped at the gutter but continued between the retaining walls and halfway up to the house. Damn, that was close! Laughter overcame guilt as he imagined the highway patrolman heading back to base for a clean pair of trousers.

By the time High's Road had been negotiated again and he was on Pennant Hills Road his body glistened with perspiration. He had been run off the road twice this time. The second time he had ridden as far over to the side of the road as he could and the car had still bounced across the potholes and followed him into the scrub. He figured the driver had lost night vision or been disoriented and aimed the car at the brightest thing in the windscreen. His tail light!

The two vehicles had stopped several meters apart in thick scrub. The car was undamaged although it had crashed through several small trees. He leant the bike against a convenient tree and wandered over to the car. The seat slapping against his butt as he bounced through the bush had reminded him about his full bladder. The headlights of the car lit a swirling cloud of dust and leaves. He unzipped his fly and allowed a stream of steaming urine to flow onto the hub cap and wheel of the car.

"You fucking animal!" yelled the driver from within his vehicle.

The motorcyclist nodded happily. He was especially pleased that the air was cold enough to cause the stream of pee to steam. Steam was a great effect! A bonus!

The guy in the car lit the air with profanity and finished with, "What if my wife was in the car?"

The motorcyclist flipped the droplets off his penis and returned it to his pants. As he pulled up his fly he wandered over to the driver's open window and stuck his head through. The driver retreated across the bench-seat to flatten himself against the passenger side door.

Thoughtfully the rider said, “I don’t mind sharing.”

In the glow of the headlights the motorist was balding and chubby. He wore a brown paisley shirt tucked into a tight pair of green and orange tartan pants with flared legs. A wide collar held the folds of his neck in a brutal grip. A necktie boasting a fist-sized knot spread to become a river of white nylon cascading over his paunch. Fashion could be unkind!.

“Please,” he begged, “I will give you money. I don’t want to fight.”

“Do you even have any money?” asked the motorcyclist.

“I spent the last of it at the gas station.” the guy admitted ruefully.

No longer listening, or caring, the rider said “If you reverse carefully along your wheel marks you will end up back on the road.” He stepped back and waited. The engine idled. Dust and the occasional leaf continued to fall through the glow of the headlights. He stuck his head back into the driver’s window. The guy yelped and remained pressed against the far door.

“You gotta be kidding me!” he growled spinning on his heel and stalking towards the bike. Now he knew how the bogeyman felt.

He had not gone far when gears crunched, once and then, twice. The flustered motorist finally forced the column shift to do his bidding and accelerated backwards through the scrub fishtailing as he went. Missing his entry tracks he smashed through several bushes and onto the road spreading rubble everywhere. Trailing leafy branches he disappeared off into the night.

Wearily the rider kicked branches and rocks from the road. In the distance he could hear the sound of a car revving hard as it bounced through ruts and potholes. The many small gods of unkind thoughts sent him a vision at that moment.

There was an immense office building filled with floor after floor of equally spaced desks divided by low screens. Somewhere in all that ruthless industrial order sat one particular desk. A glass jar with a smiley sticker on the side stood on the desk. In the jar was a strangely colored fluid and floating in the fluid was that guy’s brain.

## CHAPTER

Relief ran through his body as he saw the driveway he was searching for. There were no streetlights on this part of old Showground Road. He touched his brakes several times and stuck out his arm to indicate the turn. The car behind was hurtling towards him as though he didn’t exist. He gunned the bike into the driveway sliding on wet grass and bouncing off deep muddy ruts. The bike stopped a few yards up the track and he gave in to temptation.

“Fuck!” He yelled in the general direction of the road. “You are crazy, stupid, ignorant, murderous mutha-fuckers!”

Perspiration made his hands slippery on the controls as he gave the bike a touch of throttle and continued into the darkness of the long driveway

Quite a distance along the drive he would have come to several small clapboard huts built to house workers now long absent. Next to the huts was a huge chicken pen overgrown with lantana and blackberry brambles. The chickens were also absent and the pen was rumored to be populated by bad-tempered and venomous snakes. Beyond that the track opened into grassy paddocks. The stables at the bottom looked decrepit but were dry and comfortable for those horses still agisted on the property.

The tack and gear shed was a treasure trove of tools, saddles and whips, all covered in decades of dust, but still serviceable having been well maintained throughout their working lives. It sat against the opposite fence from the stables in the general direction of a deeply eroded gully and creek. Twisted Eucalypts provided shade for the animals. Blackberry bushes clumped along the fences attested to the rundown condition of the place.

Halfway to the huts the bike turned left and entered a yard dominated by giant slices of sawn trees. The slices were as tall as his chest and almost as wide. Counting the rings indicated they were cut from trees which had stood for hundreds of years.

To the left standing between him and the road was one of the first houses ever built in the area making one it of the oldest in the country. Unlike the house he had seen earlier this house was built to dominate the entire property which sloped away in all directions apart from that facing the road.

The walls were of pale sandstone. They were almost a meter thick in places and although one could not see them from this angle the house had wide porches around two sides. Like the other house this one had a roof made of sheets of corrugated iron.

The front of the house was a largely unused porch, overgrown with shrubs and flowering things as well as some fruit trees. It was stunning in spring and throughout summer.

He was looking at the house from the rear. Several large windows dominated otherwise featureless walls on this side. They gave views from the family room, kitchen and a bathroom. Stone steps worn into shallow curves by over a century of constant use led to a simple door at the back and was the main entry used by the family.

Directly ahead across the yard ahead of him stood a field occupied by well maintained roses. They were laid out in rows with military precision and stood chest high. Long-stemmed roses were sold at a roadside stall. They were cared for by the father who now lived in one of the cottages being separated from his wife who occupied the big house. The roses were known for their excellent quality and some of the plant stock was said to be very ancient indeed. That field ran past the house to be bordered on one side by the road. It was protected by a barbed wire fence, an embankment and ditch.

Diagonally to his right and down into the valley was a deep orchard boasting plums and apricots. Although it appeared overrun the trees were well maintained and gave good crops of fruit in season. Invisible in the distance across creek and gully but occupying the other half of a wide valley bowl was the local showground

At the edge of the yard about fifteen meters directly opposite the back of the house was an old tractor shed. It ran parallel to the rear of the house with double doors dominating its narrow rear wall. There was a single door serviced by a wooden ramp at one end of the wall closest to him. A muddy path had been worn from the steps of the house to the ramp. There was a semi-circular garden with a large Aloe Vera plant beneath a widow in the middle of the wall with the door. Like the house it had a roof of corrugated iron.

The tractor that dwelt there had been sold or repossessed when the property had wound down and workers ceased being needed. The shed itself became a playhouse for the children and was known as the Cubby. When the daughter who was now his girlfriend needed her own living space she had moved into the Cubby affectionately retaining its childhood nick-name.

He turned off the ignition and allowed the bike to roll into deep shadows between the shed and a plum tree. The sudden darkness blinded him so he sat and waited for his vision to adjust.

A light came on at the rear of the house. A worn screen-door slapped against the stone wall and a girl pattered barefoot down the stairs. A year younger than he and barely tall enough to reach his chest she was attired in nothing but towels. A large cream towel contained her hair in a high turban while another spanned her body beneath her arms and stopped at her thighs. He felt guilty. She would have showered just before he was due to arrive and waited until the night's destination could be discussed so she could pick the appropriate outfit. He was more than a couple of hours late.

Jenny stopped halfway down the path and looked confused.

“Where are you?” she called.

The window released a crescent of light into the yard but only deepened the shadows around him. He would have kept silent and enjoyed the view but she was shivering.

“Here.” he called back.

He barely had time to stand and brace his feet before she flew across the lawn and leapt into his arms. Claspng her to his chest he was assailed by the delightful scents of shampoo and soap. He lifted her from the ground and whirled her around.

“Why are you so late?” she demanded breathlessly.

. The towel had been held on by simple folds and finally giving in to the demands of gravity it slipped off and disappeared in darkness beneath the bike. Shocked she cast her eyes into the deep shadows about their feet. His hands grasped her shoulders and he held her away from him so he could appraise her naked body. She had a

curvaceous figure with large perky breasts and a trimmed triangle of gold thatch at her groin. Punches rained on his chest and shoulders as she squealed and fought to escape.

Looking desperately towards the house she exclaimed, "They will see me!"

Unable to find the towel she ran from the shadows and up the ramp into the Cubby. Her naked form passing through the light cast by the window ensured she would be seen if anyone was looking.

The screen door almost disintegrated as it hammered against the stone wall. Floodlights abolished the shadows and Jenny's mother appeared at the top of the stairs.

"What the hell is going on out here?" she roared.

Mary, as she insisted on being called, was no shrinking violet. Although not tall she was imposing and had the weight and muscle to wrestle much larger men into submission. The motorcyclist moved to the middle of the yard and stood under the floodlights with his hands away from his sides so it was obvious he held neither weapons nor towels.

"I am glad you are here." he said. "I was innocently sitting under the tree on my motorbike when a naked girl dropped out of nowhere and landed on my lap." Scratching his head he added, "I don't know what to think. I may be psychologically damaged!"

Like a crocodile stalking a drover's dog Mary started down the steps.

"You will be damaged alright mate! That girl is my daughter."

He made sure he had room to flee by slinking back one pace for each she took. Feigning indignity he spluttered. "That was your daughter? My god woman it is too cold to be leaving naked children about the place!"

A look of pure wickedness crossed Mary's features. "That child is too fat to feel the cold." she bellowed.

The wail of indignation from the Cubby was met with gales of laughter from the kitchen window. Mary must have had a few of the girls over to play cards.

Jenny appeared at the door of the Cubby buried deep in the folds of a pink bathrobe. It had once belonged to someone considerably larger. Clinging to her feet was a pair of blue bunny slippers that denied her attempts to look dignified! She stormed down the ramp.

"My towel fell off by accident." She pouted, "I am not fat, you just saw me naked and you must know I am not fat!"

Snorts and choked laughter floated down from the kitchen window above their heads. Mary turned her face to the invisible group. "Behave yourself!" she ordered.

"Why should we be the only ones behaving ourselves?" asked a mutinous voice.

"Ill get naked for you deary." said another female voice impudently.

"Maybe when its warmer." he suggested foolishly.

Jenny punched him.

"Don't encourage them." begged Mary.

A chorus of voices replied with variations of "We will keep you warm." And "You will not feel the cold when I get a hold of you!"

Mary turned and started to climb the stairs yelling, "You have all had enough to drink, I am hiding the booze!"

Another voice called from the window. "I bet he got an eyeful."

"All I did was to check her for damage." He countered.

"Stop now." someone said, "I think Eileen is having a heart attack." Another burst of laughter was cut off as the window slid shut

Jenny grabbed his arm and dragged him through the door of the Cubby making sure it slammed with a loud bang. She stood him in the middle of the room. It was the size of a standard single-car garage. Everything in the room was old enough to be antique and had matured on the property along with generations of the family. Deep rugs covered polished boards on the floor. At one end a king-sized bed took up an entire wall. Over the bed there was a window that looked across the orchard. Warm eiderdowns covered the immense mattress and scatterings of pillows and cushions allowed it to be used as a lounge.

There was an old cupboard with double mirrored doors and after that, along the wall from the bed, was a pile of bean-bag chairs. In the space at the rear by the double doors was a circular table with four antique kitchen chairs. Under the window along the other wall, opposite the bean bags, was a dressing table with a large mirror. The dresser overflowed with make-up and perfume bottles. A small table lamp had lace placed over the shade and provided soft light.

They stood looking into each other's eyes. Neither of them thought about anything they just drank each other in. It was over a minute before she reached up and caressed his swollen face with the back of her hand. Their eyes didn't part and their bodies didn't move apart from rocking slightly as they took a breath.

"That must have hurt." she whispered.

She stood on her toes and he leant forward and kissed her. Standing like this she was too little to kiss him without him bending his head forward.

“It hurt.” he said quietly.

She reached up so his head was between her hands and drew him to her so their lips were barely touching. Their breath mingled.

“Does this hurt?” she whispered between his parted lips.

He stayed like that. He could feel the warmth radiating from her body, smell her scent. He lost himself in her eyes.

“I love you.” he whispered. He took her lip between his teeth and bit it gently. She stopped him.

“What happened?” she asked.

He sighed. “It was just a bad day at the office.”

She slid a finger across some of the scars and chemical burns on his arms. She knew where they came from. She wouldn't push for information about the other injuries.

“You need a shower.” she said. “It will make you feel better.”

He picked up a bar of perfumed soap from her dresser. “What if I go behind the Cubby, strip off, and soap myself with this? You can rinse me down with the hose afterwards.”

She shivered imagining the stream of chilled water.

“Other boys will line up to kiss you if you use my soap.” She teased.

“This place is full of women.” He replied. “Any soap around here is going to be of the perfumed kind.”

“Go inside, stop by the laundry and grab a block of Sunlight laundry soap if you are concerned about smelling too nice. Then ask Mum if you can use the shower in the house.” She handed him a bulky paper bag.

Looking inside he saw a pair of underwear, a shirt and pull-over. He recognized everything except the pull-over as clothes he had left here after he had been soaked riding over in the rain. He lifted the pull-over from the bag. It was thick wool with a big, warm, turtle neck. He raised a questioning eyebrow and she shrugged.

“It's been here for ages.” She informed him. “Mum suggested I keep it as a spare for you.”

She pushed him out the door.

CHAPTER

Friday Night, continues, going for a shower and OP

The air was chilly and bracing. The ground was covered in soft shaggy tufts of grass. A track of black mud snaked its way through the grass to the sandstone stairs which led into the house. He took a moment to inhale the aroma-laden night air and look into the sky. With the external house lights off there were brilliant lashings of stars overhead.

He hurt all over and he was tired. Muffled voices floated down from the kitchen. Occasional creaking indicated Jenny was moving about in her flat. At home a meal and a bed beckoned but he had to get back on the motorbike to get there. He shuddered at the thought of the noise and the traffic on a Friday night. He looked at the Cubby and thought about her. A pang of some unknown emotion pulled at his stomach. There was no place to take time growing up anymore. Things happened and he was a part of a world that seemed to have become relentless. Pushing the emotion away he climbed the stairs to the house.

The door opened into a large room. The carpet was deep underfoot and had been good quality when it was new. A few small chairs sat around the edges with a coffee table against one wall. A low light from the kitchen door on the far side of the room threw everything into soft shadows. Above the coffee table was a payphone with some of its innards hanging out.

Mary seemed to drift into the room from another door. Like her daughter she was wearing a large dressing gown. Hers was a deep royal blue. Beneath the gown she wore layers of clothes and on her feet were a pair of soft slippers also blue.

Low conversations with occasional ceramic clinks floated in from the kitchen and he imagined the women sitting hunched around the table clutching deep cups of tepid coffee while they played cards.

She looked into his eyes for a moment.

“You look exhausted; you can’t get back on the bike like that.” she informed him. “Tell her highness I have told you to stay the night.”

He had been wondering how to broach the subject. He had never stayed overnight before and although he thought she knew he had made love to Jenny it had never been spoken of. He almost asked Mary where he could bed down and realized that speaking of it would mean it would need analysis and become difficult or require formal treatment or something he could not put words to. The question would be dishonest in a way and she might put him on the couch in the main house just to teach him a lesson.

“Go and get in the shower. I will grab you a towel. Didn’t you have a change of clothes around here somewhere?”

He waved the bag of clothes in her direction.

“Ring your parents.”

She nodded at the phone “We tried to stop the girls building up an immense phone bill by getting a pay phone but they lassoed some poor guy into pulling it apart so they didn’t need to pay.”

It still works.” she said reassuringly and then shook her head. “They are little bitches sometimes!”

His mother answered the phone. They had been waiting for him to call so they could go to bed. She was unhappy that he was not coming home but mollified to learn he was staying at Jenny’s place rather than going to a party or heading to the pub.

He put the phone back into its cradle on the wall and trudged through the lounge into the area at the front of the house. Several rooms opened into the hallway. There was a bathroom and several bedrooms.

The bathroom had been redecorated in the nineteen twenties. Like the rest of the house it had been lavish in its day and the good quality of the fixtures caused the room to appear used and comfortable rather than shabby. It was festooned with perfumed soaps, floral towels and other signs of female habitation. Jenny’s younger sister, Sarah, swept into the room and grabbed a pair of knickers that had been hanging over the mirror. She kept her eyes to the ground and blushed furiously as she scampered into one of the bedrooms.

He had expected the hot water to energize him but after a few minutes he was almost asleep standing up, his legs felt like lead and his eyes kept closing on their own. Out of the corner of his eye he noticed the door was ajar. He knew he had closed it firmly before getting into the shower. He turned so he could watch it in the mirror and noticed it move slightly as though someone was holding the handle unsteadily.

There was a loud slap! The door shut quickly and he heard Mary’s voice.

“Your sister will kill you if she finds out you were spying on her boyfriend in the shower!” she said in a fierce whisper that carried through the door.

“You didn’t have to hit me so hard!” wailed a girl’s voice. A door slammed.

A tired chuckle escaped his lips. With her ears sensitized to superhuman levels by the depth of her embarrassment she heard him through the wall and over the noise of running water.

“Mum, he is laughing at me. Why don’t you just kill me now?”

Mary replied, warning him as well as reassuring her. “He is not going to tell anyone. He doesn’t want Jenny to know any more than I do.”

He turned off the water and climbed out of the shower recess. There was a knock on the door, it opened a little and Mary’s hand pushed a huge crème colored towel through the crack. She had run it in the spin dryer while he had been showering and it was fluffy and warm.

“I am going to marry you.” He shouted through the door.

“Oh no!” she said from somewhere up the hallway. “I have done my time. I have borne several evil children and an ex-husband. God has punished me enough.”

From the distant kitchen women yelled “amen” and burst into laughter.

He took his time getting dry. The steamy air lifted all of the scents to his face and surrounded him with a sensual cloud.

## CHAPTER

The large outdoor lights lit up the room through the curtains. They were only used when strangers came. A quick glimpse through the window on the way out and he saw the door to the Cubby was wide open despite the cold. The main interior light was on and Jenny sat on her bed where she could be easily seen from the house.

He knew the visitor was male. The door was locked open so the male visitor would not be alone with her and so he, her boyfriend, would be reassured. Mary would periodically glance out the window and if Jenny was not visible she would find an excuse to go down and see what was going on. There were other signals between them to indicate she was safe or frightened or the guest had left.

The guest was OP. The black Triumph he used instead of the car sat by the door of the flat. The motorcyclist sighed. He had wanted to get into bed and sleep. He wondered what to do about food. He had not eaten in several hours and did not feel comfortable raiding Mary’s fridge.

OP leant back in a chair at the back of the flat. His booted feet were on the table and he was almost buried in an oil-stained World War 2 trench coat.

Indicating Jenny he said “She made you a sandwich and some hot chocolate man.” He stuffed the remnants of the sandwich into his mouth followed by the last of the chocolate drink. “She is a damned good woman”

Jenny glowed for a moment before heading for the door saying she would see what else was in the kitchen now that he was out of the shower. She would spend some time with the women in the house so the guys could talk.

OP looked him up and down “Shit, you look awful. Did that cop catch up with you after all?”

“Nah,” he said “Handle bars got me. The ‘Beeza’ tried to throw me over the high side and I stopped it with my face.”

OP barked out a short laugh and without missing a beat launched into telling the events at the factory after he left.

He didn't expect the story OP told.

Earlier in the week the management had held a meeting with all of the workers. They had explained that everyone was the member of a big family here. They were happy with all of the workers on the floor at the moment so everyone could expect to be there a long time.

Most of the crew had been hired in the month before with just a few long term union guys as a core team to teach them the ropes.

One of the guys had a girlfriend in the office. After the police bike had chased the motorcyclist off down the road a few things had come out. She had overheard that the management had only hired the new crews to work on a few large jobs they had to get through quickly. It was planned to fire all but a few of the new guys as soon as the jobs were done. They expected those jobs to last not much more than another fortnight! So much for job security!

All of the new crews had walked off the job as soon as they discovered which way the wind was blowing. They had felt even more justified when they discovered that the skinny women who lorded over the office supplies had a nephew who was a hot shot highway patrolman. One big family indeed!

They both stared into space for a while after OP finished his tale. Jenny slid into the room and plonked two steaming cups of hot chocolate on the table.

"I will make you a sandwich when greedy guts is gone." She said indicating OP with a toss of her head. OP grinned at her and she rolled her eyes and went back to the house.

OP got to his feet. "Don't get hooked up with any work you can't get out of." he said. "I have already organized something at the chicken processing plant up the road. They said they have places for two experienced farm workers in a week or two and I told them to stop looking I had both places filled. Don't make me look foolish by not being available." he said looking grim. He took a sip of the hot chocolate.

"I would stay and finish this but I only came over to fill you in on the day's events. I am taking Annie out for a drive tomorrow. We might pop in here and pick you up."

OP and Annie had been going out for a while although they seemed to be together rarely. Annie was a trainee nurse and her time was filled with study and hard work while OP also worked hard and seemed to have an endless number of places he needed to be.

The motorcyclist gave a non-committal nod. They both knew he had been worried about getting another job. The news came as a huge relief but guys didn't show they were concerned.

He walked outside and chatted while OP started the bike and eventually headed off into the night.

A few minutes after he returned to the Cubby he heard the screen door of the main house slam against the wall. It meant Jenny had her hands full and had opened the door with her foot. He held the door of the Cubby for her. She slid into the room balancing a plate with bacon and eggs on toast. Her eyes were bright with pleasure at the look on his face.

“You are proud of yourself aren’t you.” he said accusingly.

Mary must have told her he was staying the night and the extra trouble Jenny went to with the food was a sign of her delight at the way things were panning out. It was also an opportunity for her to play hostess and right now he was not a lot different from a doll at a child’s tea party. She had him all to herself!

After he had eaten he went behind the Cubby to the tap and brushed his teeth. Rather than letting him lay down Jenny guided him into a big pile of quilts and cushions she had formed on the bed. He was upright but lain well back and supported. It was comfortable and he started to doze while she chatted to him.

Jenny nudged him awake. He must have been asleep for several minutes. He squinted as his eyes adjusted to the light. She was sitting on the bed surrounded by boutique shopping bags and different kinds of makeup. He groaned. She lifted his hand and drew a line of lipstick across the back. She took another lipstick and drew another line. Several lines later she nudged him and lifted his hand so it was in front of his face.

“Which of these do you think goes with that pink-silk suit I wore the other day?” She asked wrinkling her brows and seeming to think deeply on the matter.

He knew he was in a trap. She wanted him to give her some kind of insight into the workings of color and cosmetic efficiency. He wanted to ask her which particular pink-silk suit she meant, he could not remember it. Thinking himself adult and wise he clamped his mouth shut until the urge passed.

“Don’t you usually spend time with your girlfriends to work this stuff out?” he asked desperately trying to find a way out of giving an opinion.

“I used to,” she said “but they don’t come here much since we have been going out so I have no one to ask.” She pouted and looked sad. He felt guilty.

Cursing inwardly he had an idea. “Why don’t you phone them? I can sling you a few bucks. Go to a movie or something”

She cocked her head to one side and looked at him without saying a word.

“I would like that,” she said evenly “I do miss talking about clothes and things.”

The words had sounded emotionless and he looked at her suspiciously. Her face showed no emotion. It was a warning that should have leapt out at him but exhaustion had numbed his senses and almost shut his thought processes down. The warmth of the room and soft bedding lulled him into a fogged, thought-free, state of somnolence.

He closed his eyes and drifted off. While he snoozed he sensed her moving around him. Somewhere in a peaceful dream he realized the room smelled strongly of acetone. He forced his eyes open and jerked the hand she was holding up to his eyes. The bed was scattered with nail-polish bottles. Each of his finger and toe-nails had been painted a different color.

Her face was lit with a glow of total and pure innocence. “Which of these should I wear on my girl’s day out?” she asked him

She took a bright red lipstick and mashed it into her lips. When it was thick and slippery she leant over and kissed him all over his face so he was covered in red lip marks.

“I was naked in front of my mother’s friends!” she taunted. “They all felt sorry for me for two whole hours before that because my thoughtless oaf of a boyfriend couldn’t bother to call and tell me he was late. I was so embarrassed” She said, the pitch of her voice rising as she bit off the words.

“Does this one go with my non-existent pink silk suit.” she asked him giggling wickedly and burrowing her icy hands through his clothes and onto the bare skin of his belly. He writhed in an attempt to slip away but was trapped in the folds of bedding.

“You are so busted. I have never had a pink suit of any kind!” she hissed as she clamped her arms around his body and started tickling him mercilessly. I love watching you try to worm your way out of trouble, you big fibber.” she said tormenting him even further.

He bellowed and writhed against the bedding but she held him and kept tickling. He filled his mouth with saliva.. She drew close to gloat again and he licked her face from chin to forehead. Drool went up her nose. She reared back clawing at her face.

“Ugh. You animal!” she cried.

He rolled out of the blankets and she leapt to her feet trying to escape. He flipped her tiny body into the air. She almost touched the roof before dropping face down onto the bed. Pinning her down with his body he started to tickle her. She screeched like a wild animal in a trap. He tickled her more and she screamed louder.

BOOM! The building rocked on its foundations. There was a grunt of pain. Mary’s panic-filled voice came through the door.

“What are you doing to my baby?” she wheezed.

“HE IS TICKLING ME!” screamed Jenny twisting helplessly in his grasp.

“You bloody bitch!” growled Mary “I thought something terrible was happening. I bruised my tits running into the stupid door!”

All movement inside the building stopped as they both stared at the door between themselves and Mary. He lifted his weight off Jenny and she rolled over to face him. Her eyes were wide and she slapped a hand firmly over her mouth in an attempt to stop the laughter. It came out anyway. Her attempts to smother it made it come out in snorts and gasps.

Mary heard.

“That is right.” she exclaimed, “Laugh it up. I am suffering and my Devil’s daughter of a child is happy.”

They could hear her muttering as she walked back to the house.

He bent down and kissed the thick lip-stick around Jenny’s mouth. He kissed her all over her face leaving lip marks everywhere. Her eyes met his and he stopped. She twisted her fingers in his hair and held his head so she could kiss him properly. He jerked his face back as her lips found the bruises and cuts.

“This stuff is going to get all over the place.” She said indicating a red mark on the pillow.

They cleaned the gunk from each other’s faces using tissues and hand soap from a blue pump bottle with white, plastic butterflies down the sides.

Among the cushions on the bed was a stuffed bear. It was a black and white panda with a wide red collar that stood as tall as she did. She leapt into the bed, wriggled under the eiderdown and was laying with her back to him hugging the bear. He stripped to his boxers and t shirt before sliding in behind her. He pushed his face into her hair enjoying her clean scent before throwing an arm protectively over both of them.

The gravity of the moment was not lost on him. An emotion he was sure had never before manifested itself to him rushed through his stomach and filled his chest with warmth before creating a lump in his throat. He was allowing himself to drop off to sleep savoring the idea of being her protector when she flung herself around suddenly and pushed his body away furiously flailing at him with her hands and feet. Confused he drew back to the far side of the bed, almost rolling off onto the floor. She turned back to face the wall and cuddled the bear again. He hesitated for a moment and then tentatively drew himself closer and threw his arm over her. She whipped her body around with a violent twist and began flailing at him again.

Totally unable to understand what was going on he let rip. “What the fuck are you doing?”

She looked exasperated. “I am ticklish! You breathe down my neck and I can’t stand it. It really, really tickles. I thought you were doing it on purpose!”

She rolled back to her position facing the wall and snuggled up to the bear. The unexpected withdrawal of the warm feeling left a spark of resentment. In order to

torment her and move his mouth away from her neck he moved his body a short distance up the bed. (reconsider)

This time when he threw his arm over her it covered her ears and face. He sighed happily. That would annoy her enough to make him feel better.

She rolled onto her back. "Excuse me," said a muffled voice. "Your armpit is on my face!"

"Have you always complained so much?" he said rolling his body so there was a little more weight on his arm and she couldn't shrug it off.

He felt her mouth open wide beneath his arm and she took a deep breath. Thinking she was about to try and escape he pressed harder onto her face. She chomped hard on the soft skin under his arm. He threw himself backwards to the edge of the bed. Picking the moment perfectly she kicked out launching him over the edge.

Caught by surprise he lay on his back staring up at the ceiling. Rolling on to her stomach she peered at him over the edge of the mattress and he was not surprised to see her eyes alight with mischief. When she was in this mood she needed feedback from her victim so he lay still and stared up at the ceiling. After a while a pillow floated through the air and landed on his chest. He didn't move.

Another pillow appeared over the edge of the bed. This time she held on to it and pounded him over the head. He stayed still looking at the ceiling. Frustrated she got to her knees to get more power into her swings and hit him with several fast blows.

"No!" he said. I am hurt! Get some help." He grunted painfully.

Her head cocked to one side and she struggled to decide if it was a trap. He gasped and kept his eyes up to the ceiling.

"It's my back. I think I landed on something." He let out a raw grunt from deep in his belly.

The look on her face changed from mischief to concern and guilt. Climbing off the bed she knelt over him and cradled his head in her arms.

"Ouch," he wailed. Don't move me you might make it worse."

"What do I do?" she begged almost in tears.

In a snap the front of her night gown was in his grip. Throwing his weight and twisting her at the same time he spun her over and pinned her to the floor. Pressing his lips to her neck he blew long raspberries against the flesh of her throat. His tongue licked her from chin to forehead again and he stood up leaving her clawing at the drool on her face. He walked around collecting the eiderdowns and pillows that had scattered about the floor. He took the opportunity to swat her in the head with a pillow before flopping onto the disheveled bed and lying on his back with his arms spread wide.

There wasn't long to wait before the silence annoyed her enough to bring her to her feet. She had decided the other side of the bed against the wall was her natural place and crawled onto the bed and over him making sure he got more than a fair share of elbows and knees as she went. Immediately on arrival at the other side of his body she realized her favorite pillow was not on the bed and she clambered back across his prone body again making sure to dig in her knees and elbows as much as possible. Having found the pillow she dropped it onto his face.

"Oh sorry, I meant that to go next to you." she proclaimed innocently before clambering over him once again and treating his ribs and chest to a diet of elbow and knee.

Stretching his arm so it was beneath her she pulled the eiderdown up and tidied it so it covered them both. Then with her head on his chest her body stretched alongside his much taller frame.

"This is so nice." she said unexpectedly.

Neither of them had ever actually slept with someone they were going out with. They had had sexual experience but had never lain down for a night with the person in their own home.

The motorcyclist felt her body along his own. The aromas, the light caress of eiderdowns, the soft lights and her warmth all drifted about in his tired mind to become a sensual feast on a level people only experience once or twice in their lives. It occurs for the blessed few the first time we experience something so unexpectedly wonderful with our minds open and unburdened by any pre-knowledge or expectation.

She ran her hand down his chest and into his boxers. She cupped his testicles and curled her head against his chest.

"I can hold you like this all night." She said savoring the idea.

She lifted his boxers and looked at the erection. "I can look at you whenever I want. I have never had a boy I could just play with

Heat rushed to his ears, his groin, and back to his face. She took her hand away from his groin and put her head on his chest.

"I can hear your heart." She whispered.

She put a hand on his chest and slid her body as close as it would go leaving her head over his heart. He kissed the crown of her head which was all he could get to. He had just shared one of the most sensual and beautiful experiences of his life and he wanted the immense glow he felt to dissipate as slowly and unhindered as nature and the gods would allow.

He didn't know he had fallen asleep until he woke the next morning



Saturday, waking in the Cubby

Consciousness rose from sleepy languid warmth. Clean scents surrounded him and he wasn't prepared to spoil the pleasant state immediately so he lay with his eyes closed. There was a low shuffling sound repeating in the room. He turned his head slightly and half-opened his eyes adjusting to the morning sun that streamed in through the open curtains.

It was a posed tableau. Jenny's feet were pulled up beneath her body on the tall wooden chair. She wore a warm yellow and pink pajama shirt and pants and was intently laying cards in a ring on the table in front of her. The noises he had heard were the cards sliding across each other and being placed on the table. Along with the ring of cards in front of her were a candle and a low vase of fresh roses with dew still evident on their petals. Next to the vase a little brass cone with three short legs released slow wisps of incense smoke and beside that several books lay open. Her bare feet were being warmed by a single-bar, electric heater beside the chair.

He uncoiled himself from beneath the eiderdown on the bed and pulled on his jeans. He stumbled sleepily across the room and slumped into one of the chairs by the table.

Several small piles of Rider-Waite tarot cards were laid out in a Celtic-Cross pattern. She tapped the pile representing those things affecting the person immediately and raised her eyes to him for the first time since he had awoken.

"This is strange." She noted "The book tells me this is one thing but I keep feeling it is some tangent of that."

He tapped the top card on the pile and replied. "The last time I saw this group with the High Priestess in this position I came to the conclusion that the person I was reading for was either hiding a pregnancy from her partner or had decided to ignore the signs from her body and was hiding from the fact she might be pregnant. It was the latter. She went to a doctor and he confirmed it."

"The book just suggests that the meaning is hidden by the presence of that High Priestess." She replied biting her cheek thoughtfully and looking into his eyes.

"The grouping is very feminine." he lectured. "It has a lot of strong female and creative energy. You have decided to read the reference to things hidden as meaning they are hidden from your reading rather than being hidden in some other sense. If that is how you feel then it may be correct to decipher it that way. The meanings you get from your cards will evolve to speak to you individually rather than being like a book with its meanings the same for all readers."

"The books are guides. The idea, as I see it, is to use the book to give general outcomes and meanings but things like the meditations and mind exercises should develop your ability to sense deeper meanings and wider implications. You will sense a story with the intuitive mind that may even oppose the actual book meanings."

"I don't think I will ever do formal readings for paying sitters." She replied "I don't mind practicing with my teacher and other students but it seems to me to be a part of a

path rather than an end. I don't want to be assisting a sad person to find that tall dark stranger..... *extend and blend with the story*

He nodded. "Same here. I feel the need for constant seeking good outcomes for life such as relationships and job news is a low use of all that study and introspection. I feel the need to be asking the crass questions on day to day life as a carnival use of a skill. I tend to use them to train my mind to attach itself to and extend its intuitive powers. I also wonder if we are fooling ourselves by thinking we have a passive tool here rather than some form of connection that limits its power to an agenda of its own.

"If you look into the Major Arcana it is also a guide to the stages of the student's path. I think that is the hidden secret some of those books hint at. I think some the ideas it suggests and the layout of the student's path may be quite powerful in the sense that you are never really sure the situation you find yourself is anything but an accident of fate if there is not some marker to your progress."

She shrugged. The idea of another layer of meanings was something she would come to in time. "What about the magic? Aren't you an occultist?" Jenny asked pinning him with the intensity of her eyes as well as the question.

"He wasn't happy about the question as it raised other questions and problems. He sighed then answered. "It seems I have to give this study and practice a name and that is one that covers the widest mix of the things I am looking into right now." He explained. All of the books I have been able to find locally that discuss the various types of spiritual and mystical practices and ideas seem to have been contaminated by Christian prejudice. Books of quite simple old Celtic practices are presented as Devil worship and witchcraft. I don't even get the whole witchcraft thing. Those old Christians must have had a special spite-gland to come up with such derisive stuff about the old healers and pagans!"

Jenny stared at her cards willing him to stop there. He rightly blamed the Christians for the tragic loss of a great body of learning and culture from the pagan religions across the world. He was trying to separate superstition from the parts of pagan beliefs that may hold depth and meaning to students beyond that culture's time. He was convinced that the same rules or practices would be applied across all humanity but were distilled and filtered through culture, technology and superstition of the civilizations it served. Some part of the original pure ideas must remain or be available through trial and error use of the ritual and the study of practices across the whole of humanity. So much of it had been destroyed or was buried in Christian superstitious bile.

He could see patterns of common practices, beliefs and outcomes emerging among his studies but he knew it would be years before science had enough anthropological and archaeological information to begin to decide if the practices grew from common discoveries across a wide range of human ventures or from one human ancestry which spread across much of the planet. He blamed the Church for being in denial for centuries and putting studies of this kind back hundreds of years. He understood he was a lowly worker in an academic backwoods. With nobody to share his ideas he struggled with the concepts and could drive her to the edge of her patience very quickly by bombarding her with ideas that were well outside of her interests.

“Will you go through some of those exercises with me?” Jenny asked him. He had shown her some relaxation and breathing exercises as well as one for emotional and mind centering. She liked him to lead her through them. It seemed she was able to get more from them when she was a passive subject rather than acting alone. ....

The door of the Cubby rattled and jiggled against the door jam.

“That will be the piglet” said Jenny referring to Sarah. “She will have breakfast.”

She uncurled her legs from beneath her and stood suddenly. She cried out and dropped to the floor howling. “My legs are numb!”

Knowing she would not die immediately he rose and opened the door. Sarah bustled into the room wearing the huge dressing gown that seemed a uniform for mornings and evenings around here. She held a tray with mouth-watering, grilled lamb-chops surrounded by a salad of sliced tomato, lettuce and beetroot. Alongside the plate, on the tray, was a deep glass of orange-juice and from the pulp and pips in its depths it was freshly squeezed.

“Did you make all this?” he quizzed Sarah. She stared at his feet blushing and moved to leave through the door. He had forgotten about the shower.

“Piglet is the little mother around here.” said Jenny, somewhat disdainfully. “Leave her alone in the kitchen and she will cook for everyone within range.”

He was annoyed at Jenny and recognized the competitive nature of the sister’s relationship.

He waved his hand at the tray. “This is a great breakfast, I don’t get breakfasts like this at home!”

Sarah looked up and smiled. She had a pretty smile with a deep calm gaze and he smiled back happy to be making some ground against Jenny’s insulting nickname and the embarrassment of the past evening. Sarah moved to back out the door but Jenny started to writhe on the floor and howl.

“Pins and needles! Oh help, it hurts like crazy.” She leapt off the floor and landed full length on the bed still writhing against the painful return of the blood to her legs.

“Make it stop somebody, help me! Don’t just stand there, do something.” She gasped.

Unseen by Jenny, Sarah threw him a look of malicious satisfaction. The competition between these two must have simmered for years.

He grabbed one of Jenny’s feet and lifted it into the air. Sarah followed his example and waited for instruction.

“Holding her foot in the air slows the blood to her legs, rub them a bit and they will be normal again in no time.” He told Sarah. He wasn’t certain his idea had any merit but

sometimes it was better to be seen to be doing something than to appear to be doing nothing or waiting for ideas. The treatment wouldn't kill her even if it was useless.

Talking to Sarah over Jenny's head and the look of pleasure on Sarah's face at the ungainly position her sister was in set Jenny off.

"You are enjoying this you fat toad" she cursed. Her sister was certainly not fat but equally she was unable to disguise the pleasure on her face.

"You had better start running you bitch," Jenny howled. "I am going to punch your silly face when I can stand up."

Sarah stood back and looked at her sister with her eyes full of innocence and hurt.

"I am happy that I am able to help my sister whom I love!" she said managing to keep her face straight.

"That is it!" yowled Jenny, lurching to her feet and hobbling towards her sister with murderous intent oozing out of every pore.

Sarah leapt backwards slamming the door open and disappearing. The sound of her feet pounding up the path to the house was followed by her voice.

"Mum, Jenny said she is going to kill me!"

Mary yelled into the morning. "I will punish you both if you keep starting fights so early in the day" Her voice was tired and non-committal. She heard something like this several times a day and was not going to give the event any more fuel by over-reacting.

Jenny swung to face him and in one of those mercurial mood changes she was famous for fell back on the bed and said in a kittenish voice. "I like you rubbing my legs, keep going."

She presented a leg to be rubbed holding it in the air with a sweet smile on her face. Obediently he rubbed her calf muscle and allowed his efforts to morph into a light massage he had learnt in a martial arts class as a way to relax injured muscles. She purred and lay back with her eyes closed