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'It's all just a game, you know, a stupid power game': Memoir as a practice in self-surveillance

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**‘It’s all just a game, you know, a stupid power
game’: Memoir as a practice in self-surveillance**

A thesis submitted in (partial) fulfilment of the requirements for the
award of the degree

Doctor of Philosophy

from

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

Angela J. Williams, Bachelor of Creative Arts & Bachelor of
Communications and Media CI Hons.

SCHOOL OF THE ARTS, ENGLISH AND MEDIA

2015

Certification

I, Angela J. Williams, declare that this thesis, submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the School of the Arts, English and Media, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Angela J Williams

30 November 2015

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List of Abbreviations

9/11	Terror attacks on New York on 11 September 2001
ABC	Australian Broadcast Corporation
AKA	Also Known As
CCTV	Closed Circuit Television
CCG	Community Compliance Group
CS	Corrective Services
CSI	Corrective Services Industries (inmate employment scheme)
ICRC	International Committee of Red Cross
KLA	Kosovo Liberation Army
KY	Kathleen York House Rehab
LeT	Lashkar-e-Taiba (Army of the Righteous)
MIN	NSW Prisoner Administration Number
NA	Narcotics Anonymous
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
RIP	Rest in Peace
US	United States of America
VLU	Video Link Up (between courts and prisons)

Abstracts

Thesis abstract

This research examines the process of writing a memoir as an example of self-surveillance, combining a thesis and creative component. The thesis explores how the process of writing a memoir can be understood by examining the analogous practice of surveillance. Supported by a research background that ranges across critical, literary and cultural theory, the Methodology gives a dichotomous ‘problems and solutions’ framework for using textual and discursive analysis to unpack the functioning of narrative identity within three contemporary Australian case studies: *Guantanamo: My Journey* by David Hicks (2010), *In My Skin* by Kate Holden (2005), and *The Happiest Refugee* by Anh Do (2010).

To discover if memoir can be seen to function similarly to surveillance, the surveillant functions, classification and risk mitigation, are examined to uncover the ‘problems’ in the case studies. These functions are discovered through the memoirist’s shift into the ‘narrator’ role and the self-protective aspects that come into play as they position themselves as ‘subject’. Expanding on this understanding, the thesis then asks if writing a memoir provides similar results to surveillance, or how the case studies demonstrate ‘solutions’. It does this by exploring the outcomes of discipline, shown by the shifting ‘narrative identity’ of the narrator/subject, and resistance, to be discovered through their positioning to discursive forces and their ability or inability to challenge and intersect with these.

The final chapter of the thesis takes an exegetical stance to the creative work *Snakes and Ladders: A memoir*, applying the same ‘problems and solutions’ framework to understanding and strengthening my own creative practice.

Creative abstract: *Snakes and Ladders: A memoir*

I used to be a heroin addict, criminal and all round not-nice-girl.

In 1996 I got out of prison for a drug-fuelled crime and promised myself I’d never go back. In 2010 I broke that promise after going to the police as a victim and finding out I hadn’t followed up paperwork from the first time. *Snakes and Ladders* looks at prison in NSW from both the inside and the outside, showing what it’s like to get caught up in the system again after thirteen years of fighting to escape from cyclic disadvantage. My book breaks out of the walls of the prisons and explores the paths that led to my original crime, including an abusive childhood, struggles with addiction

and unhealthy forms of sex work. This compelling story of accountability, tragedy and redemption shows the reality of contemporary women's prisons, and in some ways can be imagined as a step-by-step instruction guide for how to break out of dangerous cycles of addiction and criminality.

In 2003, after getting clean off drugs, I left that world of crime and addiction behind and went to university. Seven years, two degrees and a lifetime later, I forgot to look right as I crossed a road and was hit by a Postie on her motorbike. When the police came to take my statement they arrested me for an outstanding warrant for time I hadn't served back in the '90s. I'd just finished a First Class Honours degree at the University of Wollongong. *Snakes and Ladders* tells the story of the six weeks I spent in prison and the following ten months on home detention. In the process of telling this story, I weave vignettes and memories from my early life that reveal the relationships and complications that led to the original crime. But I also explore the people and situations that allowed me to break free from a life that was going nowhere.

Snakes and Ladders blurs the line between creative non-fiction and critical writing, applying an academic understanding of power and discourse to the social structures that most actively embody these concepts. It takes you inside four different prisons, the maximum security Mulawa Women's Correctional Centre in Sydney, the two medium security prisons at Berrima and Emu Plains, and the collaborative panopticon that Corrective Services and I built in home detention.

'It's all a game, you know, a stupid power game which only works 'cause we play along,' I write in Chapter 2. This book is about how I worked out the rules of the game and found a way to follow them.

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Thesis

To Kathy (not her real name) for listening to me rant about the Panopticon in the 'safe cells' at Mulawa Women's Correctional Centre, and helping to set off the spark of this project. To the Creative Arts Faculty (now the School of English, Arts and the Media) at the University of Wollongong for taking a chance on me when I hadn't even finished high school, and in particular Associate Professor Alan Wearne, who told me at my initial interview that my history would help, giving me something to write about. To my first year CACS (Critical Theory and Creative Practice) students from 2011-5 for helping me get the basics of critical theory solidly engrained and to Dr Joshua Lobb for having me sit in on so many of his literary theory classes and sending me away with my brain racing with ideas. To my Honours supervisor, Dr Nicola Evans, for helping me first find my feet in research, and Dr Kate Bowles who talked through that theory from so many different angles. To Dr Ruth Walker who led me through the first steps of writing such a massive research project. To Dr Sally Evans for listening to me rant until it started to make sense and Dr Pip Newling for helping me nut out the abstract for my creative work. To Kate Holden, Ahn Do and David Hicks, for giving me three such complementary case studies to examine; thank you for sharing your stories with the world. To Wayne Stamp for finding that one Foucault quote that kept hiding from me.

And to my supervisor, Dr Shady Cosgrove - you read all the first drafts, were the first besides my psychiatrist to hear some of these stories, and I couldn't have made it without you.

Memoir

To all the women who shared the stage with me at Mulawa, Berrima and Emu Plains Correctional Centres, I hope I have been gentle with you. To Varuna, the Writers' House, the Varuna Publishers' Introduction Program 2014, my spectacular consultant there, Dr Jo Chipperfield, and in particular Jansis O'Hanlon who let me cry in her office when the trauma overwhelmed me. To my Facebook cheer squad who kept me going when I wanted to give up. To my high school English teacher Craig Ritchie, your encouragement to keep writing was what got me here today.

And to my partner Jo for keeping the coffees coming during the final stages and my amazing son for being my one-person cheer squad through the whole process.

Introduction

This research project combines a thesis that questions whether writing a memoir can be understood as a form of self-surveillance, and a memoir that unpacks surveillance and its effects in its most explicit form, the correctional system. Part One, this thesis, conducts a thorough and detailed examination of the Research Background, presents a clear and precise Methodology, applies this method of analysis to three contemporary Australian case studies, and then delves into an Exegetical Chapter where I put my own creative practice under the same theoretical microscope I have applied to the other case study memoirs. Part Two, the creative component of my research, my memoir, is included as the final section.

The Research Background draws lines of similarity between the functions and outcomes of surveillance and the process of crafting a memoir. This first chapter explores the history of surveillance going back to Michel Foucault and his unpacking of the Panopticon in *Discipline and Punish* (1977), and follows the progression through technological and societal shifts to what we now call the 'surveillance society' (Lyon 1994). It questions the ubiquity of today's surveillance, including the digitisation, automation and individualisation of surveillant practices and tools. Surveillance theory is explored, especially the two operations of surveillance, classification and risk mitigation, and two potential outcomes of surveillance, discipline and resistance. Building on this, Chapter One outlines the ways in which individuals and groups have co-opted the technologies of surveillance to find ways to resist the system, looking at those that invert the surveillance dynamics, reappropriate footage into artworks, or turn the tools upon themselves in a form of self-surveillance. With all of this data being collected, it becomes an official record of us as individuals, which leads into the next section of Chapter One, the operation and functioning of memoir.

The Research Background situates the writing of a memoir as a different version of the official records, with the author of a memoir repositioning themselves as both narrator and subject in the writing of the story. To understand this shift, Chapter One outlines what a memoir is, the rules it must follow and how it differs from an autobiography, referring back, in particular, to Phillip Lejuene (1989) and Paul Eakin (2001 & 2004). The central role of the narrator is explored within memoir, and certain

roles they can take on are examined. One role that is central to the research is that of the “witness” proposed by both G. Thomas Couser (2012) and Julie Rak (2001), where the memoirist is telling a story that must be told, recounting events that they witnessed that have important social or political value.

Chapter One then examines the formation of identity within a memoir, a core element of this research. The conception of identity used in this thesis combines the positions of Charles Taylor (1995) and Michel Foucault (1983a; 1983b; 1997a; 1997b; 2001; 2004), to direct that our memoirists answer both the question “Who am I?” (Taylor 1995, 227-233) and “Why am I who I am?” (Foucault 1997a, 224-228). This position is taken to encompass both Taylor’s understanding of identity as a subjective first-person experience and Foucault’s that identity is something thrust onto the individual by wider discursive forces.

In the final section of the Research Background, two crucial concepts are introduced that allow us to analyse the identity constructed within the case studies. The first of these is “narrative identity” (Eakin 2001, 114-5) which gives a parameter for understanding the self-discipline which is enacted in writing a memoir, linking the crafting of a “normative model of personhood” (Eakin 2001, 114) to the successful conclusion of a memoir. Eakin’s argument is that the self-discipline essential for writing a memoir equates to a form of self-healing for the author. The second element here, Walter Fisher’s concept of “narrative fidelity” (1985, 349-50) questions whether the story “accords with the logic of good reason” (1985, 349). This allows us to examine the outcomes of the case studies and question whether, in resolving the initial conflicts of their narrative and finding a space for resistance, they have found their way to a conclusion that sits comfortably with the reader, and gives a ‘satisfying’ close to the text, for narrator, author and reader.

In Chapter Two, the Methodology, I use theory from surveillance, memoir and identity strands to construct a five-step pattern through which to read each of my case studies. This pattern is based on the functions and outcomes of surveillance – classification, risk mitigation, discipline and resistance – combined with the drives to write a memoir, the shift into narratorial mode, the self-discipline implied by “narrative identity” (Eakin 2001, 114-5) and the resistance inherent in “narrative fidelity” (Fisher 1985, 349-50). While the first step of this pattern, a disturbance which creates the foundation of the

story, occurs prior to beginning writing, a textual and discursive analysis will be used to uncover whether each of my case studies aligns with the expected pattern.

The pattern that I look for is broken into a dualistic problems and solutions framework. Steps two and three, linked to classification and risk mitigation, show the narrator's engagement with the problems within their memoir and how they apply the tools of the memoirist (and surveiller) to identify these problems. Steps four and five, discipline and resistance, show them narrating their way into the solutions to their problems, using the lessons learned from steps two and three to weave into the solutions enacted in steps four and five.

Chapter Three tackles the case studies, *In My Skin* by Kate Holden (2005), *The Happiest Refugee: A Memoir* by Ahn Do (2010) and *Guantanamo: My Journey* by David Hicks (2010). I chose the case studies using two criteria: that they are Australian, with comparative social and discursive elements to my own work, and that they have been written in the last ten years.

Each case study is read through the Methodological pattern, with evidence collected by way of textual and discursive analysis focussed primarily on the narrator and their positioning within the text. Reminders of the relevant theory are included to support analysis of each element.

Chapter Four offers an exegetical exploration of my own creative work, *Snakes and Ladders: A Memoir* (2015). This chapter uses the same approach from the Methodology, looking at the functioning of my narratorial positioning and how I engage with the problems and solutions in the text.

While I did have additional material for this text to my other case studies, namely my own experience of writing, this is only used to flesh out arguments that are supported by textual and discursive analysis.

Chapter Four begins with a recommendation that readers jump forward to Part Two containing the creative work prior to starting the exegesis. While it is not expected that readers will be familiar with any of the other case studies, as *Snakes and Ladders: A memoir* is an intrinsic part of this research, reading it prior to the Exegesis will both provide a broader platform for engaging with the analysis and prevent spoilers.

It is my hope that these arguments – the comprehensive theory of the Research Background, structured reading approach proposed in the Methodology, applications of this problems and solutions pattern to the Case Studies, and Exegesis examining my own memoir – will prove that writing a memoir can be considered as a form of self-surveillance.

Chapter 1: Research Background:

Understanding memoir as self-surveillance

The turning of real lives into writing is no longer a procedure of heroization; it functions as a procedure of objectification and subjection. The carefully collated life of mental patients or delinquents belongs, as did chronicles of kings or the adventures of the great and popular bandits, to a certain political function of writing; but in a quite different technique of power ... [which] clearly indicates the appearance of a new modality in which each individual receives as his status his own individuality, and in which he is linked by his status to the features, the measurements, the gaps, the 'marks' that characterize him and make him a 'case'.
Foucault 1991, 191-2

As the above quote from Foucault shows, the shifting practices of documenting a life, a “case” (1979, 191-2), have reconstituted both the role of the person being recorded and the implications of this recording, shifting the written record of a person’s life into a “means of control and a method of domination” (1979, 191-2). By taking on the task of writing a memoir the author, then, becomes both the recorder of their own case notes and the subject of their investigations. I argue that when one voluntarily takes on the role of surveiller, submits themselves to this “procedure of objectification and subjection” (1979, 191-2), they also take a revolutionary position that enables them to argue back against official structures of control. By tapping into the technologies and practices inherent in self-surveillance, the memoirist places **themselves** in a unique position to uncover and understand their identity; by doing so they challenge the officially sanctioned records of their ‘case’ and reclaim an ‘authentic’ identity. Simply stated, by writing a memoir you can protest the official version of your identity by forming a unique ‘you’ that exists within, around and separate to the official records. While publication of a memoir can create an aura of ‘officialness’ around the record of your life, there still exists a separation between those records and documents compiled by external ‘official’ record keepers and the narrative an individual creates to reflect **themselves**. In my creative work, *Snakes and Ladders: A Memoir*, and the exegetical fourth chapter of this thesis, I actively challenge the ‘official record of myself’, breaking through the stereotypes established by a criminal record, medical history, and academic transcript to uncover a more ‘real’ version of my story.

Writing a memoir is inexorably about identity – the search for, analysis and understanding of identity; however in this research I am also reconceptualising this search for identity as a form of self-surveillance. To contextualise the primary purpose of this thesis, therefore, it is essential to begin with a clear understanding of both what surveillance is and how it functions, as well as what identity is, how it is formed and how this process functions within the life writing genre of memoir. This chapter will explore several theoretical conceptions of identity, referring to Michel Foucault and Charles Taylor as primary sources. In the second half of this chapter the focus shifts to provide an understanding of the ways in which writing a memoir can be seen as a practice in self-surveillance, with the relevance of contemporary surveillance theory being linked to the surveillant practices inherent in writing memoir. Finally, this chapter will introduce a core element of this research, Eakin's concept of "narrative identity" (2001, 114), and explain how, when memoir is framed as a practice in Panoptic self-surveillance, a close analysis of identity 'problems' and 'solutions' can function to uncover the processes of constructing identity.

The author of a memoir holds a unique position as both author and subject. This dual positioning allows for a wider approach to the analysis of the text, opening up new opportunities for the analysis of characterisation, plot development and narrative formulation. The action of crafting an extended self-analysis is inevitably about questioning and understanding one's position in relation to power, for as Foucault reminds us, the primary purpose of self-analysis is "a relationship of self-possession and self-sovereignty ... endowing the individual with the preparation and the moral equipment that will permit him to fully confront the world in an ethical and rational manner" (1983b C5, p3). Through this lens, one of the more valuable aspects of writing a memoir can be seen as the drive to form a stable and functional relationship with one's self or, as Weir termed it, "a relationship of integrity with ourselves" (2009, 538). To understand how this process of self-analysis can be explored through the lens of surveillance, we need to understand the ways in which power and identity function within what David Lyon has termed a "surveillance society" (1994), or a society where surveillance has become so commonplace as to be accepted as 'normal' by the majority of people.

Understanding surveillance

To answer the question of whether memoir can be examined as self-surveillance, we first need to unpack surveillance's functions and uncover how the individual situates themselves in relation to power within a surveillance society. Michel Foucault, a core theorist in the field of surveillance studies, first speculated on the concepts of power and surveillance in his key text *Discipline and Punish* (1977). His analysis of these concepts continues to inform current understandings of the relations between power and surveillance; however as technologies have progressed, so too have theoretical understandings of the discursive power inherent in surveillance. To understand the functioning of self-surveillance as an oppositional or resistant practice within memoir it is essential to explore the contemporary experience of surveillance and the growth of resistance to and through surveillance.

As understandings of the potentials of social control shifted, so too did the theoretical approaches to surveillance. Following the end of the Cold War, with the digitisation of surveillance technologies and the perceived growing global threat of terrorism, the need for a clear understanding of the social control aspects of surveillance grew. Researchers such as Gary Marx (1984; 1985; 1989; 1995; 1997; 1998; 2005; 2007), David Lyon (1991; 1992; 1993; 1994; 2003; 2004; 2006; 2007a; 2007b), David Murikami Wood (2009) and William Staples (2001), moved into exploring the implications of digital surveillance technologies, shifting social and political situations and the widely varying cultural understandings of social order and the need for surveillance. Marx, in particular, can be seen as a bridge between the approaches with his examinations of a new kind of surveillance implied by the shift towards digital communications (1984; 1985; 1989; 1997) and the implications of continuing Foucault's method of comparing developments in corrections to developments in society (1995; 1998). From the early 1990s sociologist David Lyon appeared as a new voice in surveillance studies, approaching surveillance as an extension of modernity (1991), a logical expansion of capitalist society (2004) and writing extensively about Panoptic readings of surveillance and power (1993; 2006). As the field grew in breadth and legitimacy, arenas for the discussion opened up. A prime example of this is the academic journal *Surveillance and Society* which was launched as an online resource in late 2002. The third issue of this journal was themed 'Foucault and Panopticism Revisited' and questioned the relevance of Foucault's theories in the contemporary landscape, the modern conception of the 'urban Panopticon' and

strategies for opposing these structures. This legitimising of the field is further demonstrated by the website *Privacy International* which documents the global spread of surveillance technologies and logs associated breaches of human rights (2011). It is unquestionable that the topic of surveillance has grown significantly, and there are several motivating factors that can be seen to have influenced this growth.

Functions and operations of surveillance

It can be difficult to understand the need for widespread surveillance without reference to its function as a risk-mitigating practice developed in response to the needs of a consumer society. Lyon explores the concept of risk assessment and the growth of “uninsurable risks”, like terrorism and, to some extent, crime (2004, 137). Michael McCahill identifies the importance of this risk-mitigation when linked to commercial practices as it relates to marketing towns and nations as “risk free” (2002, 12). This perspective sees the practices of surveillance like an insurance policy for those situations that cannot be prevented any other way, and this theory can be used to explain the public acceptance of technologies which otherwise might be seen as overly invasive. This is clearly demonstrated by the experience in the United Kingdom, where several influences led to what David Murakami Wood calls a “surveillance surge” where over four million Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) cameras have been installed since 1990 (2009, 185-6). Both Wood and Lyon (2004) attribute this rapid growth in electronic surveillance to two contrasting factors: the ubiquitous public security threat of acts of terror from organisations such as the IRA, and the individualised criminal threat implied by the 1993 kidnapping and murder of Liverpool toddler James Bulger where the perpetrators were caught due to CCTV footage. The horror of ongoing bombings and the death of this child paved the way in the UK for public acceptance of rapidly escalated levels of surveillance. The public response to this localised threat can also be used to explain the global rise in interest in surveillance studies and technologies in the new century.

A second influence on the growth of surveillance as a practice and as a field of study has been the drive towards social sorting and classification, the implications of which can be closely linked to risk mitigation. Foucault detailed the trajectory of categorisation as coming out of the plague-era need to separate the ill from the well and leading directly to the decision to separate the criminal, insane and poor from their opposites (1977, 18 & 195-9). There has, therefore, always been an element of social

sorting within surveillance theory. The greatest concern now, however, is that these categories are becoming more automated, as well as racially and religiously determined as the political and social landscape shifts. Lyon supports this view as applied to modern surveillance practices, seeing that these practices “enable fresh forms of exclusion that not only cut off certain targeted groups from social participation, but do so in subtle ways that are sometimes scarcely visible” (2007, 372). The concern here is that the combination of economically motivated risk mitigation being automatically applied to specific ethnic or religious groups can operate to legitimise practices which increase oppression and subjugation.

Both the risk mitigation effects and the social sorting and categorisation elements of surveillance rapidly escalated following the terror attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001 (hereafter 9/11). In a similar way that the UK public became more accepting of CCTV technology following the Bulger murder, so too the global public admitted the need for greater risk minimisation and racial profiling following the attacks. Public and academic interest in surveillance, security and the technologies of social control increased alongside this. What had been a relatively small field expanded, with explorations of surveillance and theories of social control being applied to examinations of privacy, individual rights, security and crime. A similar body of work appeared concurrent to this, with researchers and authors writing about oppositional practices, or ways in which the public can negotiate and counter-intuit the surveillance technologies and practices as they become ever more common. Surveillance practices shifted rapidly under the weight of developing technologies and the pressures to adapt to the increased perception of globalised security threats. Lyon describes this shift as the move from “centralized and hierarchical” state-based surveillance towards a “decentralized and rhizomic” (2004, 138) approach where fragmented data is collated through software and databases to compile an ever wider and more detailed image of individual subjects. Bureaucratic and corporate-based technologies and networks such as CCTV systems and identity verification practices lost their patina as threats to privacy as new technologies moved to the front of the discussion. While these older technologies still have a place in discussions of surveillance (Wilson & Sutton, 2004), the growth in individualised surveillance technologies is more relevant to this discussion of self-surveillance. Mobile phones that log the activities and movements of individuals are becoming increasingly concerning for many researchers (Eriksson, 2011; Shilton, 2010; Lyon, 1994; Marx, 1997 & 1998; Economist, 2007; Alston,

2007; Dennis, 2008). Websites that monitor individual usage and compile usage profiles are also seen as a concern (Marx, 1995, 1998 & 2005; Aas, 2008; Eriksson, 2011; Gandy, 1989; Lyon, 1993 & 2007; DeBiasi, 2002; Bennet, 2003; Holvast, 2009), while social networking sites (Fuchs, 2010) and corporately controlled algorithmic databases that almost intuitively compile detailed profiles of users (Lyon, 2007, 374-5) are seen as further incursions of surveillance into our daily lives. A further examination of some of these studies will show how modern technologies are taking the place of the Panopticon in everyday life.

How we respond to surveillance, or outcomes

To understand the latent disciplinary potential of memoir as self-surveillance it is vital to first examine the ways individuals respond to surveillance.

A simple foundation for our understanding of how surveillance functions is Althusser's theory of "hailing" (1998, 294-304). This theory is grounded in the idea of the power relations that exist between the subject and object and explains how surveillance positions the surveilled. Althusser posited that when 'hailed' by a person in a position of authority, the individual is forced into responding (or subjectification) by the unequal power dynamics. The authoritative position of the hailer is unchallengeable and, as such, the object of the hailing becomes the subject of power. Within surveillance, the cameras and signs act to 'hail' the individual and remind them constantly of their inferior position within the power relationship. To further understand the psychological impacts of surveillance we return to Foucault and his exploration of "docile bodies" (1977, 135-169). A core concept of Foucault's argument is the notion of "docility-utility" (1977, 137), by which he means the tendency for people to become more obedient and compliant, and hence more socially useful, as they are subjected to discipline. The discipline he speaks of is based around the ideas of control, authority and subjugation, for as Monahan, Phillips and Wood remind us, surveillance is predicated on domination and an assumed relationship of power where the individual is expected to submit themselves to the power of the supervisor (2010, 107). If Foucault's theory is correct, then the undifferentiated discipline and domination enacted by widespread surveillance will show a similar docility in the general populace. Lyon supports this assumption when he states that "compliance with surveillance is commonplace" (2007, 373). It is his claim that since people assume they are always being observed they 'go along with' the system and thereby "the order constructed by the system is reinforced,

and people are “normalised” (as Foucault would say) by the system” (2007, 373). Alston also agrees with this assessment, arguing that “surveillance can subconsciously coerce people, leading to docile, stay-below-the radar behaviour from those who are surveilled” (2007, 17), although he does warn against a simplistic reading of this fact, stating that “it is entirely possible that increased surveillance *can* lead to positive results on occasion” (2007, 17) by which he means reductions in crime and a social perception of increased public safety. Notwithstanding the possibility that these practices could contribute to positive outcomes, it is concerning to imagine that surveillance has become so commonplace and accepted that people will just act as if it is there all the time and hence modify their behaviour to avoid coming to attention. Marx further highlights the risks of capitulating without question to surveillance when he says that “people may be deceived into thinking that control techniques [...] are far more effective than is the case” (1985, 21). He finds that “a variety of tricks are used to make people believe” in the power of surveillance technologies (1985, 21), which emphasises the need for balance both in how surveillance is enacted and in who is controlling the surveillance.

This conception of the individual’s response to the discipline of surveillance, however, should not be seen as an inevitable trapping of the subject, for:

[H]e who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relations in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection. By this very fact, the external power may throw off its physical weight.
Foucault 1977, 202-3

These potential impacts, therefore, are not unchallengeable. In his examination of the processes of resisting surveillance Lyon states that “power is always a social relationship, and is always contested or contestable” (2007, 373), echoing Foucault’s much quoted statement “where there is power, there is resistance” (2008 [1978], 95).

Having situated memoir as a process of self-analysis, then, it is a simple step to see how this analysis can open up an exploration of the ways in which the author/subject “simultaneously plays both roles” and identify any ways in which their self-analysis has empowered them to “throw off the physical weight” (Foucault 1977, 202-3) of existing within a surveillance society. But has it been done? Is there evidence that creative practice can be read as a challenge to the unidirectional imbalances of top-down surveillance? Is there a framework that can explain how self-surveillance in memoir can be read as an act of resistance?

Challenging surveillance

One way of contesting the imbalances of surveillance is by individuals actively participating in the processes of observation and control, taking on, as Foucault stated, “responsibility for the constraints of power” (1977, 202). Jakob Eriksson argues that the problem is not so much with how we respond to the fact we are being watched but that we do not have the option of also watching (2011, 83). He describes this imbalance as “information asymmetry” and argues that the main psychological impacts of surveillance are caused by this disproportion and that “if we weren’t so careful about hiding our differences from each other, we’d come to realize that not fitting the standard stereotype is the real norm” (Eriksson 2011, 82). This argument leads into the concept of individual empowerment by way of two-way surveillance. After all, if the above impacts are to be negated perhaps the answer is to be found in some form of participatory or oppositional surveillance.

Participatory surveillance, or surveillance where individuals or creative groups appropriate the technologies and practices, has become a hot topic for examinations of ways in which the individual or small (often alternative) community can oppose the top-down dysfunction of corporately and bureaucratically imposed surveillance. There are two aspects to this form of surveillance, the first being “self-surveillance”, or surveillance “initiated by the self, using sensors that are in one's control, for the primary purpose of measuring the self” (Burke *et al* 2012, 814). This self-orientated surveillance can take many forms, from the low-tech diary or journal through to the many high-tech weblogging, photo sharing, GPS tagging, physiological measuring, and social media tools available as applications on computers and smart phones. The benefits for the individual of this form of self-surveillance can include improvements to the “individual’s efficiency”, realignment of skewed self-image and stronger “self-understanding”, or, as in the case of Benjamin Franklin, to “inculcate personal virtue” (Burke *et al* 2012, 818). Self-surveillance, in this light, is seen as a disciplinary tool that the individual can use to readjust their internal world, bringing themselves closer to what they see as an ideal model of personhood. The second element of participatory surveillance involves the inversion of the surveillance dynamic where individuals and groups use the surveillance tools available to them, including the self-focused tools listed above, but also drawing on technologies more traditionally associated with governments and corporations, to highlight, emphasise or question the ubiquity of hierarchical surveillance.

Marc Fennel described this process in the 'Video Sniffing' segment of the Australian Broadcast Corporation's (ABC) television program *Hungry Beast* when he described individual artistic protest actions, such as filtering off CCTV footage to create short films, as "playing Big Brother at his own game" (2011). By engaging with the technologies and co-opting them for the express purposes of questioning the need for surveillance or documenting the impacts of surveillance, individuals can argue back against the psychological impacts and power imbalances that come out of hierarchical unidirectional surveillance. While many commentators argue for active participation by technology users (Fennel, 2011; Shilton, 2010; Albrechtslund & Glud, 2010; Dennis, 2008; Lyon, 2007; Economist, 2007; Alston, 2007; Marx, 1998) some take this argument further. Eriksson, as we saw above, argues that the way to break out of the imbalanced power bind, where we as individuals are terrified of losing our privacy and having our secrets exposed, is for there to be no privacy for anyone at all, that all the "curtains" be pulled back and everyone's secrets be exposed (2011, 82-3). While Eriksson's "open curtains" concept is one radical solution to the problem, there are more moderate views that hold hope that privacy and human rights can feasibly be maintained alongside the risk mitigation provided by surveillance technologies.

I propose that one way of considering these individual or collective protests is through the concept I am describing as 'oppositional surveillance', which I argue is active in the process of writing memoir. Oppositional surveillance can be seen as a way of inverting the hierarchical power structures of top-down surveillance as a way for individuals to challenge the psychological impacts examined above. The topic of opposition to surveillance has come to the fore over the last decades. The journal *Surveillance and Society* has dedicated two issues to examinations of ways that the individual can argue back against surveillance; the 2009 issue *Surveillance and Resistance* (v 6, no 3), and the 2010 *Surveillance and Empowerment* (v 8, no 2). In the editorial of the 2010 issue, Monahan, Phillips and Wood claim that as surveillance is all about power, and power is "a set of forces ... that manifest in larger assemblages of material, social and symbolic relationships" (2010, 106), then to recognise or construct oppositional practices involves understanding the ways in which these power relationships act. One clue to how this can work is given by Lyon as he explores the dialectics of control that are active within surveillance. He argues that new forms of leadership will take the fore as the new post-9/11 "rationales for surveillance" are challenged (2007, 374). Lyon explores how organisations such as the global body Privacy

International (a body that tracks the expansion of surveillance practices) act to bring attention to undifferentiated surveillance, and argues that the existence of such protest groups could eventually act to alter the current political applications of surveillance (2007, 374-5).

However, opposing surveillance is not merely the realm of organisations and protest against the structures which support it can be enacted by the individual in different ways. Oppositional surveillance can take several forms, two of which bear discussion in relation to the practice of writing memoirs. The first is counter-surveillance, where surveillance technologies are turned back on the supervisors. This approach is exemplified by a recent study of Australian video activists that analysed the practices of “video activism” or the use of recording technologies by individuals or groups to monitor the activities of agents of state power such as the police (Wilson and Serisier, 2010, 166-8). Wilson and Serisier argue that the expansion in counter-surveillance activities came out of the growth in availability of recording technology, such as camcorders, the general growth of activism and the mainstream media’s failure to adequately report on political and human rights issues (2010, 168). A prime example of such activism is the responses to video footage of the brutal beating of American Rodney King by Los Angeles police in March 1991 (Linder, 2011). The graphic footage was recorded on a hand-held camera by an individual, disseminated by the mainstream media and after the acquittal of the officers involved it was replayed repeatedly on CNN and other networks, a situation which is attributed with starting riots across the city (Linder, 2011). Following these social uprisings and media pressure, the perpetrators were eventually brought to justice in a civil trial (Linder, 2010). As this example shows, the recording of police activities and the widespread dissemination of such has the potential to enact some level of social change. However, Wilson and Serisier warn that “the potential of counter-surveillance to create a transparent utopia of official accountability does ... need to be tempered against empirical studies of particular contexts” (2010, 167). What they mean by this is that while there is the potential for video activism to facilitate the restructuring of power, the personal and societal risks of this form of opposition need to be carefully considered.

The second form of oppositional surveillance often overlaps with the first but also holds relevance for this topic as it relates to the use of surveillance practices in the creation of art. This form is the co-opting of surveillance practices for the production of performance, film, and interactive art. As mentioned, Fennel explored the artistic co-

opting of surveillance technologies in the ABC *Hungry Beast* segment on 'video sniffing'. This process involves intercepting the footage from CCTV cameras using a small hand-held device available for purchase over the internet. The user locates the cameras and uses a process of deduction and fine tuning to tap into the feed from individual cameras, and this footage is then compiled into films. The earliest example of this that *Hungry Beast* could identify was a 2007 short film made by a group of UK street kids who wrote a script, acted it out in front of the cameras and then intercepted the footage to create a short film (Fennell, 2011). Similar projects are created by The Surveillance Camera Players in NY who have been acting out adapted pieces including *1984* and *Animal Farm* in public areas since 1996 (Surveillance Camera Players, 2010). Fennell warns that the practice of video sniffing is a grey area under current Australian legislation and reminds viewers that the owner of the camera is usually also the owner of the footage; however he also explores ways that the practice can be done legally by requesting footage through Freedom of Information processes (2011). The potential for artistic use and interpretation, therefore, can be seen as a different form of opposition as it creates a form of activism that has the potential to engage new audiences in discussions of power imbalances and emphasises the need to question the status quo.

However, in order to uncover the ways in which writing a memoir can be seen as a resistance to the power imbalances implied by surveillance it is essential to explore the ways in which power relations are exhibited, ceded to and resisted by the author/subject in their construction of a memoir.

Narrative and identity in memoir

As suggested at the beginning of this chapter, writing a memoir can be considered as the author challenging the official record, what Foucault called "a procedure of objectification and subjection" (1979, 191). By taking up the pen and repositioning themselves as both narrator and subject, the author of a memoir is entering into an inevitably discursive dialogue with both themselves and their readers.

To understand this dialogue, we will now examine what memoir is, the rules that it must follow, and how identity is formed by the narrator.

What is memoir?

While the terms 'memoir' and 'autobiography' are often used interchangeably there are those who argue for a clear distinction between the terms. Phillip Lejeune defines autobiography as "[r]etrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality" (1989, 4). He tightens this by examining subgenres which, while closely related to autobiography, do not fulfil the requirements of this definition. Memoir, Lejeune declares, while obviously an autobiographical genre, cannot be defined strictly as autobiography because it does not traditionally focus on the "individual life" or "story of the personality" (1989, 4). The definition of memoir, though, has shifted as understandings of the discourses of autobiography have expanded, with the genre of 'autobiography' being superseded by all-encompassing terms such as 'life writing', which covers all forms of personal narrative including memoirs, auto-ethnographies, case studies, diaries and personal online content such as blogs (Eakin 2004, 1). *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms* says that "[m]emoirs differ from autobiographies in their degree of outward focus ... their personalized accounts tend to focus more on what the writer has witnessed than on his or her own life, character and developing self" (Murfin & Ray 2003, 258). Similarly, Gilmore enunciates the witness aspects of the memoir seeing it as "characterized less by a set of formal elements than by a rhetorical setting in which a person places herself or himself within testimonial contexts ... in order to achieve as proximate a relation as possible to what constitutes truth in that discourse" (2001, 3).

The autobiographical 'I' comes with certain obligations. The rules of self-writing have been established by forerunners in the field such as Phillip Lejuene (1989) and Elizabeth Bruss (1976). Three of the most essential rules were described by Eakin as firstly, the obligation of the author to represent the truth, or as close to the truth as the author can provide (2001, 113). The second rule was that the author should not impinge on the personal privacy of others they write about (2001, 114). The third aspect of autobiography which Eakin sees as essential is that the author must "display normative models of personhood" (2001, 114), by which he means that the narrative development of the characters must fall within the bounds of expected patterns of human behaviour and development. He argues that the latter of these is the most important as "[w]hen the public responds to rule-breaking autobiographers, it is the identity function of autobiographical discourse and not the literary function that comes into play" (2001,

115). 'Rule-breaking' memoirists, such as James Frey (Barton 2006), Norma Khouri (Knox 2004) and Helen Demidenko (Robinson 2014), have faced public censure, loss of reputation, and in some cases criminal sanctions, all after having had the identities constructed in their stories questioned by readers.

The model of memoir

To analyse memoir it is important to first understand what makes a memoir, to know the 'model' of a memoir. The term 'memoir', derived from the French word for "memory" (Couser 2012, 19), is widely used, and yet its meaning remains vague and indistinct. According to G. Thomas Couser, the following are some common elements of the memoir sub-genre: memoir depicts the "lives of real, not imagined individuals", is often written in the first-person but can also easily be written in the third person; often "incorporates invented or enhanced material"; "presents itself, and is therefore read, as a nonfictional record or re-presentation of actual humans' experiences"; "can only concern [people] known to, and remembered by, the author", and in many ways "can be a repository for witnesses' accounts of historical events in a way that fiction ... cannot" (2012, 15-21). While this goes some way towards defining what memoir looks, feels and acts like, further consideration needs to be given to the memoir as it exists in the dialogue between author and reader.

To understand the way that readers engage with and understand memoir two final characteristics of the memoir are important. Firstly, the memoir is basically a private conversation between the author and themselves which is made public by publication. In order for a reader to engage with a memoir they must be able to enter into the private system of signification which exists within the author's head. A 'good' memoir will provide adequate clues for the reader to be able to decode the language and by doing so allows a deeper understanding of the author as both narrator and character. As these codes will be coming out of an actual person (the narrator) they may not be as universal or as translatable as those found in parables, crime fiction or advertising, and as such, the author will need to find methods for explaining them, within similarity, difference and contrast, in a way that makes them accessible and understandable.

The second factor influencing the communication between author and reader is the position the 'narrator' takes within memoir, most often as a central character within the narrative and almost inevitably as a subject. While Coulson clearly identifies that

memoirs occur “on a continuum from those focussed on the author to those focused on an other” (2012, 21), he also argues that the personal invades any form of memoir, for “even a biography of someone the author has never met has an autobiographical dimension—because the choice of the subject and the author’s attitude toward him or her always reveal something important about the biographer” (2012, 20). For the researcher, this understanding of the author as core and central to the work is radically different from those conceptions that have come to dominate literary theory. “The living author of a narrative,” Barthes argues, “Can in no way be mistaken for the narrator of that narrative” (1975, 261), except for when the narrator, author and subject of the novel are all the same person, as in memoir. How the narrator is positioned in memoir, as a factual living person, narrator and subject, opens up the way for examining the identity they construct within their memoir. The identification of how identity is constructed in the case studies and what this could mean when considered as a form of self-surveillance is central to this research.

Finding the self: Identity

Many writers have explored concepts of identity, from Hegel’s “master/slave” dialectic which identified the functioning of social inequality (2003 [1807]), picked up by Nietzsche in his examinations of the “master-slave morality” (1973, 62-96), through Rousseau’s redefinition of the concept of morality and his naming of an intimate contact with one’s self (or a complete self-knowledge) as “le sentiment de l’existence” (1959, 1047) and John Stuart Mill’s urging away from the “ape-like [faculty] of imitation” and instead towards an independently constructed identity (1869, at 4). However, two main views have dominated contemporary understandings of identity: Taylor’s “politics of recognition” (1995) and Foucault’s theories of classification, discipline and control (1977; 2001 [1969]; 2004 [1969]). The question ‘Who am I?’ means very different things for these two theorists; however, while a surface reading places them in contradiction to each other, many aspects of these two understandings complement each other.

Taylor defines the search for an understanding of identity as a reasonably modern concern, coming out of developments such as the death of rigid social structures which formalised one’s role and the need within democratic frameworks for a universality and equality for all (1995, 225-34). Taylor’s understanding of identity, as “the background against which our tastes and desires and opinions and aspirations make sense” (1995, 231), is primarily an existential one, with subjective aspects such as

“feelings” (1995, 227), “dignity” (1995, 226-7) and “acceptance” or “recognition” (1995, 232-3) being core to answering the fundamental question ‘Who am I?’ Identity, Taylor argues, is “dialogic”, and we “negotiate it through dialogue” with our significant others, the communities we belong to and those alternative communities we seek out when our communities of origin fail to meet our need for recognition (1995, 230-3). For Taylor, our identities are formed in relation to those (individuals and communities) around us and consequently the risk of malformed or malfunctioning identities, through “misrecognition ... or the absence [or recognition]” becomes the responsibility of all (1995, 225-6). Primarily, however, Taylor finds that there is an obligation to one’s self to seek out a unique and “authentic” identity, for, “being true to myself means being true to my own originality, which is something only I can articulate and discover. In articulating it, I’m also defining myself. I’m realising a potentiality that is properly my own” (1995, 229). This conception of identity, as a subjective, first person experience, can both empower the individual in their independent search for identity and burden them with a responsibility for the malformed identities of those in their direct social circle. What Taylor’s reading of identity fails to take into account is those larger discursive forces which lie beyond the control of the individual, the structures that are active within, below and above the ‘communities’ and that act to mould and define identity with little regard for ‘feelings’, ‘dignity’ or ‘recognition’. While this approach is useful for understanding the internal construction of identity, equal attention must be given to how external systems of power have an impact on identity.

Foucault sees identity as something that is thrust onto the individual by external sources, arguing that “it is also the individual who has to be trained or corrected, classified, normalized, excluded... the procedures [of surveillance and official records] constitute the individual as effect and object of power, as effect and object of knowledge” (1979, 191-2). While Foucault’s understanding of identity shifted in his later writings, certain elements remain stable throughout his writings. Answering the question ‘Who am I?’ for Foucault, means uncovering those intersecting historical and social influences, the “discourses” that have acted to shape the individual, or “subject” (2001 [1969], 1635-6), or what Weir describes as the “sedimentation of normalizing and coercive regimes of power” (2009, 536). Instead of ‘Who am I?’ Foucault might ask ‘Why am I who I am?’ (1997a, 224-228). So, in contrast to Taylor – who sees the formation of identity as a dialogic, resulting from dialogue between the individual and others (including peers and communities) – Foucault sees external forces (functioning within

but separately from communities) acting upon the individual pushing them ever closer to the 'normal'. Even within this push for normality, this discipline towards 'homogeneity', Foucault finds the space for (controlled and hierarchical) individuality because, even as it pushes them towards normality "it individualizes by making it possible to measure gaps, to determine levels, to fix specialities and to render the differences useful by fitting them one to another" (1977, 184). In this reading of identity, however, there is also an obligation for the individual to be suspicious of this "fabricated" individuality (1977, 192), seeing it as another means by which the dominant social regimes have acted to identify, classify and catalogue them within discursive regimes of power. Though much of Foucault's writing on identity is linked to the 'author' (in particular 2001 [1969]), the value of these theories cannot be discounted for a study of memoir, a genre where 'identity' and the 'author' are inevitably interwoven. Some of the more interesting aspects of Foucault on identity and authorship are indicated by his claims that writing involves "a voluntary obliteration of the self" and that "to know the writer in our day, it will be through the singularity of his absence and in his link to death" (2001 [1969], 1624). Even within this absence left by the author, the disciplinary and classificatory forces are still at work, for "the function of an author is to characterize the existence, circulation, and operation of certain discourses within a society" (2001 [1969], 1628). Foucault eventually came to a more tightly focussed understanding of identity when he wrote "Do not ask who I am and do not ask me to remain the same. More than one person, doubtless like me, writes in order to have no face" (1972, 17).

While these two approaches to identity may seem to contradict each other on a surface reading, Weir identifies an intersection between the two with a distinction between Taylor's "first-person, subjective, affirmed identity" and Foucault's "third-person, or ascribed identity" and the ways in which these readings of identity complement and interact with each other (2009, 535-7). Weir finds that Taylor and Foucault agree "that the idea of the pre-given inner core of the self is a modern illusion" (2009, 537) and that "the need to discover and define one's own meaning, and the belief that one can do so, are specific to modern western culture" (2009, 537). So while both agree that the quest for a pre-defined and rigid identity is neither natural nor imperative, they also both acknowledge that within contemporary western society there will be a drive for self-identification, whether category- or existentially-based. While the concepts of categorisation and existential meaning can be placed in conflict, the reality as Weir identifies is that the two work together in the construction of identity. Using the

example of the “icon of dependency [...] the black single mother on welfare” in America (2009, 535), she shows that when asking ‘Who am I?’ the mother engages equally/alternately with the existential Taylorian understanding of her identity as it relates to her position within various cultured and social communities and with her Foucaultian position as being forcefully immersed and embedded into structures of domination and control (2009, 539). The quest to find her identity within the community is equally balanced with the drive to legitimise this position by “getting off welfare, getting [her] kids into daycare and getting a job, no matter how low-paying and dead-end” (2009, 539). So the internal, existential and dialogically-driven question of ‘Who am I?’ can only be answered by critiquing one’s externally imposed relation to discursive structures of power, by asking Foucault’s question of ‘Why am I who I am?’

Within these many contradictions and complications, one unequivocal fact emerges: there is no single identity available to the individual. Instead of a set, solid self-conception there is available to the individual a plethora of “resistant and competing identities” (Weir 2009, 539) which must be acknowledged, examined and explored if there is to be any hope of uncovering an authentic understanding of one’s ‘identity’. These multiple identities are to be found within both the interpretation of one’s place within communities and how this place is formed by the external disciplinary application of classification and discourses. To sum up, the construction of identity, therefore, can be understood most clearly by applying both Taylor’s and Foucault’s readings.

Memoir as opposition

Writing a memoir is a risky activity. Telling the truth to and about yourself and stripping bare the reality of your identity for public consumption inevitably opens the narrator/subject up to ramifications beyond those courted by the fiction or non-fiction (non-autobiographical) writer. Foucault, who imbued his theoretical writing with autobiographical details, argues that “when you accept the parrhesiastic [truth speaking] game in which your own life is exposed, you are taking up a specific relationship to yourself: you risk death to tell the truth instead of reposing in the security of a life where the truth goes unspoken” (1983b, C1, p16). There must be some justification to engage in such a hazardous activity, placing one’s emotional, mental (and sometimes physical) safety at risk to tell the truth about your life and who you are. While it is impossible to list all of the reasons why a person might take such risks, there are some theoretical frameworks which allow us to contextualise and justify this risk

taking behaviour. One such concept is the idea of autobiographical writing as a form of protest.

The idea of autobiographical writing as a form of protest or opposition is not new. Julie Rak introduced the concept of the “witness narrative” to describe autobiographies that shift the role of the narrator away from recounting the psychological effects of a traumatic situation and towards presenting evidence that needs to be seen (2001, 229). Rak’s research examines the construction of autobiographical narratives in cultures where the author’s “subjectivity has not been formed with reference to [the] Western notion of the self” (2001, 229) and examines ways in which the evidence of trauma and abuse is represented by an individual on behalf of a collective identity. The focus here is moved away from the obligations to only write what has been directly witnessed, for:

[I]n witness narrative, elements of the narrator’s so-called self are subordinated not to an autobiographical narrative structure about causality, but to *the recounting of the events*. The narrator *exists* to transmit the event, which may or may not have happened to him or her specifically, and the pressure of the narrative turns to the relating of the event itself so that others may witness it also.
Rak 2001, 229: Rak’s italics

In this context, Rak sees autobiography as “a testament and testimony featuring resistance rhetoric – a form of alternative group memory written *against* official national identity” (2001, 228). The use of autobiographical writing as an oppositional tool, according to this theory, is seen to override the obligations of the author to focus entirely on a subjectively ‘truthful’ representation (where ‘truthful’ is seen as writing only of what you have seen or felt). This situates the oppositional surveillance of the national identity as a valid interpretation of the story being told and opens up the possibility of memoir being seen as a tool of national healing. However, to understand the therapeutic potentials of oppositional surveillance for the narrator/subject of memoir it is necessary to examine how some theorists have imagined character and narrative within memoir.

Governing the self: Memoir and self-surveillance

In the Methodology chapter I will introduce a ‘problems and solutions’ framework to analyse the construction of identity within memoir and its analogous relationship to the operations of surveillance (classification and risk mitigation) and the functions of

surveillance (discipline and resistance). I will do this by combining the above elements with the narratorial actions and positions taken by the author. The following makes clear the links between the surveillant operations and outcomes and the narratorial elements inherent in constructing an identity within a memoir.

‘The problems’: Narrative identity and discipline

One theoretical lens that can be used to define memoir as self-surveillance is Paul John Eakin’s theory of “narrative identity” (2001, 114-5). Just as surveillance technologies function to ‘discipline’ individuals within society, so too, Eakin claims, we are disciplined as children to the “practice of self-narration” (2001, 115). This practice, which occurs through early childhood, defines not just our approach to truth telling but also aids the construction of a functional identity and personality and is one factor in “an integral part of a lifelong process of identity formation” (Eakin 2001, 114). Taking into account the processes of self-narration within the memoir, Eakin argues that it is entirely possible to step away from purely literary readings of autobiographical texts (2001, 124) and to instead examine the constructed narrative of the work as indicative of the author’s identity (2001, 115). His hypothesis is that narrative is not purely a literary form, “not merely about identity but rather in some profound way a constituent part *of* identity” (2001, 115). The surveillant implications of this approach may not seem immediately evident; however, as Eakin applies these principles to several breaches of the aforementioned autobiographical rules, the disciplinary potentials of memoir as self-surveillance become evident. In a discussion of the responsibility of the memoir to present a “normative model of personhood” (2001, 114) he explores the consequences of those who have “no satisfactory narrative [and so] no narrative self” (2001, 119-20). During a discussion of the psychiatric impacts of memory and identity disorders, Eakin suggests that when the narrative identity is unacceptable or unpalatable the outcomes of this, such as hospitalisation or incarceration, can be seen as a “disciplinary [...] enforcing of norms” (2001, 120). By this, Eakin means that the consequences we see enacted within autobiographical writing, such as those described above, can be seen as society’s punishment of the author for refusing to fit within acceptable categories of human behaviour. The ‘punishments’ which occur within the narrative are seen here as appropriate behaviour modifications. This regulatory potential, however, can also be seen to function beyond the narrative’s boundaries, with the process of the author

constructing that narrative into a readable publishable format being also seen as a form of self-discipline.

The classification and risk mitigation potential of the “normative model of personhood” (2001, 114) comes out of narrative’s key role in the application of norms, for as Eakin reminds us “the performance of self-narration confirms that the identity is in working order, [and] this performance easily becomes a primary criterion for normalcy” (2001, 121). To understand this approach we look at Eakin’s definition of the “model of normal personhood” the structure of which he defines as “the extended self, stretching across time” and it is this “temporal structure, sustained by memory, that supplies the armature for the meaning of existence” (2001, 121). With that understanding we can postulate that for those lacking in a narrative identity, the process of self-surveillance that is active in constructing a narrative of their life can function to discipline them into the development of a “normal personhood” by helping them (re)construct the “temporal structure” of their “extended self” (2001, 121).

A further explanation of how this will be applied to identity problems within the memoir will be provided in the Methodology chapter.

‘The solutions’: Narrative probability and the contract between author and reader

While much can be gained from examining the narrative identity of the author/subject within memoir, it is essential to also have a formula for analysing this identity, a way to determine the bounds of Eakin’s “normative model of personhood” (2001, 114). To understand the stories we tell, we first need to understand ourselves as storytellers. Walter Fisher sets out the rules and aims of storytelling in his “narrative paradigm” that establishes the concepts of “narrative probability” and “narrative fidelity” (1985, 349-50). Fisher’s paradigm primarily exists to “offer a way of interpreting and assessing human communication [and] predicates that all normal human discourse is meaningful and subject to the tests of narrative rationality” (1985, 351). “Narrative probability”, in Fisher’s thinking, refers to the formal elements of a story and depends on “whether or not a story coheres or “hangs together”, whether or not the story is free of contractions” (1985, 349). In contrast, “narrative fidelity” is concerned with “the “truth qualities” of the story, the degree to which it accords with the logic of good reason” (1985, 349). ‘Good’ storytelling then, for Fisher, depends on the intersections between narrative probability and fidelity, on the both the ‘formal features’ and ‘truth qualities’ of the story. Human beings, Fisher argues, have an expectation of truthfulness in

communication, needing “some degree of trust, a willingness to participate in the process, a belief in the desirability of the interaction, and an interest in (or expectation of) the attainment and/or advancement of truth” (Fisher 1978 *quoted in* 1985, 352). The distrust that Eakin describes of narrative identities that fall outside the model of normal personhood, can be seen to come out of a perceived breach of this truth-seeking contract between speaker and listener, by a story that does not “satisfy the requirements of narrative rationality, that [does not] offer a reliable, trustworthy, and desirable guide to belief and action” (1985, 355).

The links here to discipline and resistance appear in how the narrator/subject positions themselves in relation to the discursive regimes in their memoir and how they find ways to align their story with “narrative fidelity” (Fisher 1985, 349-50). The path to resistance within memoir comes out of the ability of the narrator/subject to find solutions to their problems which “satisfy the requirements of narrative rationality” (Fisher 1985, 355). We will discover more about how this can be used to find solutions within memoir in the Methodology chapter.

Can memoir be understood as self-surveillance?

This chapter has provided the research context and background necessary to explore whether the process of writing a memoir can be examined as analogous to a form of self-surveillance. It began by examining Foucault’s statements about the documentation of a life and how this practice has shifted from records about the individual being primarily collected by governments and other organisations of power towards the expansive field of autobiography and its subgenre, memoir (1979, 191-2), a move which I have labelled self-surveillance.

To explain the concept of self-surveillance, this chapter first detailed the growth of what has been called a ‘surveillance society’ and provided a background to explain the expansion of the surveillance society, as driven by the factors and outcomes of classification, risk mitigation, discipline and resistance. A core element of this was the focus on the psychological impacts of surveillance and an exploration of Foucault’s concept of ‘docile bodies’ which explains why and how surveillance shapes us into submissive and compliant citizens. These mostly negative impacts of surveillance, however, create a space from which to argue back, a framework for questioning both the need for the surveillance and its impacts on the individual.

The concept of oppositional surveillance, and particularly how this can be used for the development and production of art, provided the framework to understand how a memoir could be situated as an act of protest. Oppositional surveillance, it was explained, functions on the idea of inverting the traditional surveillance dynamics, turning the eyes back onto the surveiller by individuals co-opting and appropriating the techniques and technologies of surveillance to tell a story that differs from the official record. This reading was supported and emphasised by Rak's research into the area of 'witness memoirs' which can be used to tell deeper and more intensive stories of tragedy than those based in a straight news or current affairs frame. With this understanding that the power dynamics of surveillance are not fixed, that there is indeed room for arguing back against these structures, the chapter then moved into a deeper examination of memoir.

With the search for and understanding of identity being seen as the prime motivation behind writing memoir, this chapter examined modern conceptions of identity and how these are shaped by those forces around us, in particular how we form our identities in response to the escalating culture of surveillance and control. In order to understand how writing a memoir can be seen as a form of self-surveillance, this chapter set out to explain the drives behind writing a memoir, namely the formation of a stable and productive strand of identity, or what Eakin refers to as a 'narrative identity'.

The rules of autobiography reminded us that there is a need for autobiography to be truthful, respectful of others in the story and, most importantly for this research, that the author/subject display what Eakin called "a normative model of personhood" (2001, 114). Further to this, the model of a memoir showed that the author of a memoir has an obligation to ensure they write only about what they have experienced or witnessed (as demonstrated in the cases of Khouri, Frey and Demidenko) and that the codes of signification within the text be accessible and understandable to readers. The unique positioning of the author in relation to a memoir, where they exist as both living breathing author and subject of the narrative, was explored in the context of their role as both data provider and data collector.

A detailed examination of the conflicting influences that shape our identities showed that identity is inevitably formed both in response to those forces around us and by how we imagine ourselves in response to both the question of 'Who am I?' and 'Why am I who I am?' The importance of identity, however, became more important

when aligned with the idea of discipline as posited by Eakin's theory of 'narrative identity'. Forming one of the strongest links between memoir and surveillance, the concept of 'narrative identity' argues that not only does writing a memoir allow the author to further understand and contextualise their own identity, but also that the construction of this narrative can function to repair damage that has been done to the individual's self-conception. Within this theory, the 'norm' is seen as something to aspire to with negative outcomes within memoir (such as hospitalisation, addiction and self-harm) being seen as natural consequences for the author's model of selfhood falling outside of 'normative' parameters. This chapter explained how by constructing a narrative of life and experiences, the author may form links between their disparate selves and (re)construct a functional model of their identity.

With these theoretical frameworks established, I will now move on to explaining my methodological approach and the ways in which identifying problems and solutions will be used to analyse and unpack the identities constructed within my case studies and question whether these memoirs can be seen as a form of protest against the official record. I posit in this thesis that by identifying the problems within their memoir, living and writing their way into the solutions, the author is enacting the processes of self-surveillance upon themselves.

Chapter 2: Methodology:

Examining memoir as self-surveillance

Starting from the basis that the Creative Arts research ought to tie together creative practice with theoretical imagining, this argument begins from the assumption that “exegesis plus creative work equals thesis” (Fletcher & Mann 2004). The arguments I raise in this theoretical component are answered by the creative work and the questions left hanging in the memoir are unpacked in this thesis. The challenges of this approach include: combining the intensely personal practice-led research of writing a memoir with the detached theoretical, sociological and cultural criticism; finding a way to balance my theoretical and narrative voices, and somehow contextualising my own creative and theoretical work among their peers without resorting to thousands of words of textual analysis. The limitation I come up against with the case studies is that I only have the texts to read, whereas with my own memoir I also have access to the processes of crafting the narrative. Being able to examine my own process of writing gives a broader and more detailed scope to the analysis of my own memoir than that which I am able to apply to my other case studies and, as such, this means that more space is given to an analysis of my own work.

Given the broad and detailed theoretical background for this research, it seems easiest on the reader to simplify the analytic frameworks. As surveillance, at its core, can be understood as a tool for unpacking problems and solutions, this approach will be translated into an examination of the case studies. This chapter will outline the research Methodology and explain why this approach is the most relevant and useful for this unusual project. The component strands of the Methodology will each be introduced and their potential strengths and weaknesses explained. Following on from this, the chapter will provide frameworks for how the data collected by textual analysis will be contextualised by applying a ‘problems and solutions’ dialectic. It will also explain how meaning will be deduced by examining some converging similarities between surveillance and memoir, namely the drives and outcomes of *classification*, *risk mitigation*, *discipline* and *resistance*. However, to fully show my Methodology’s potential, let us first look at the requirements for a functional and thorough

Methodology and survey some of the methodological options traditionally used by creative arts researchers and that will feed into this approach.

As the primary focus of this research will be the analysis of case studies (including my own creative work), an understanding of textual analysis, most particularly narrative and discourse analysis, is essential. As Alan McKee reminds us “when we perform textual analysis on a text, we make an educated guess at some of the most likely interpretations that might be made of that text” (2003, 1). Analysing the content of the case studies, therefore, is particularly valuable within the parameters of this research as it can allow us to make educated guesses about the identity of the author as they represented it in their text. Backing up these guesses with a firm understanding of the discourses that the author engages with in their text also allows us to examine the wider discursive structures they engage with during the lived experience they detail in the memoir and those narrative drives that they encountered during the writing. Evidence collected from the text can then be examined through the frameworks of narrative identity and probability, and surveillance and power, to further understand how the author’s relationship with themselves and power structures has displayed itself in the text. In my research I will be making claims about the narratorial functioning within the case studies. While doing so it may seem that I am attempting to see inside the authors’ heads, read their motivations; however, this is not true. I will be using textual, narrative and discursive analysis to support my ‘educated guesses’ about the narrators’ positioning and identity based on the words on the page. The research background contained in the last chapter and the supporting theory contained in this chapter will help the reader trace the trajectory of these deductive leaps. The difficulties of my approach are many; however, by taking a broader view of ‘theory’ I hope to overcome them by combining the strands of thinking detailed in the Research Background chapter to create a fluid and personalised theory. The practice of writing memoir is inherently personal and hence unpacking this process can easily be understood by the application of this personalised theory. This approach is unavoidably subjective; however, I hope to overcome the subjectivity of this research by basing it on a soundly articulated theory based in both literary and critical theory.

Analysis methods and backing up my subjective readings

This research will allow me to answer a variety of conflicting questions by placing analogous concepts next to each other and finding the narrators’ problems and

solutions within the memoirs' similarities to surveillance practices. The textual analysis of my case studies, focussed on narrative identity and discourse, will look for evidence that writing a memoir disciplines the author into a believable narrative identity in a similar way that exposure to surveillance within society disciplines the subject into socially acceptable norms of behaviour. The shadows and spaces between these larger concepts, when combined with the "educated guesses" (McKee 2003, 1) of textual analysis, will suggest answers to my research questions. An inductive reasoning approach to the evidence collected will allow me to create possible explanations for the author's narrative development and create the space for conclusions which, while not specifically reproducible, should give future researchers a clear understanding of how I decided upon these findings. All that is left then is to understand the basis from which these 'educated guesses' will be taken.

While the study of surveillance and memoir may seem so radically separate as to be incomparable, the following comparisons should make the links between the two practices clear. The theoretical contexts and background to this study from chapter one identified four distinct outcomes of both surveillance and writing a memoir which allow the two to be compared; classification, risk mitigation, discipline and resistance or protest. Examining each of these from both a memoir and surveillance perspective will create a solid base from which to start examining my case studies.

Finding the problems and solutions

This thesis will use textual analysis (primarily focussed on narrative and narratorial positioning) to identify the problems and solutions in the case studies. To facilitate my approach I am breaking the questions I ask of my case studies down into clear binaries of 'problems' and 'solutions', applying the same approach to my memoir. While this may seem initially simplistic, in combining the functions and outcomes of surveillance with the self-identification and narratorial positioning drives of the memoir, this dichotomy allows for a nuanced and intuitive understanding of how the strands of my theory can be interweaved into a method for reading.

A comparative analysis will be performed on the case studies, with each examined through the frameworks of surveillance and power discourse analysis, narrative identity and narrative probability. In order to prove that writing a memoir is comparable to surveillance I will look for four different elements functioning within the

texts, classification, risk mitigation, discipline and resistance. Evidence that the author is using classification and risk mitigation will show that memoir operates like surveillance and in this way I will be able to identify the problems the author encounters. Similarly, ways that writing the memoir has disciplined the author and evidence that they have used the writing as a form of resistance to dominant discourses will prove that memoir can have similar outcomes as surveillance which will demonstrate the solutions the author found to overcome their problems.

Simply summarised, this is the pattern I am hoping to see in my case studies:

1. Problems appear in the author's world, some flaw in their narrative identity/coherence that drives them to tell this story. At this stage the author may not be aware of the problems as problems.
2. The author decides to write the story, discovers the need and in doing so they shift into the narrator position, taking on all the responsibilities of the memoirist and also beginning the process of self-surveillance through classification and risk mitigation and beginning to see and identify the problems.
3. In the process of writing the story, the author/narrator also becomes subject of their narration, and in doing so they practise risk mitigation in what and how they tell us the story, allowing us to develop a nuanced understanding of their problems.
4. This risk mitigation leads to the narrator becoming aware of those ways in which self-discipline may act to help them solve the problems; in constructing the narrative for us they begin to understand the root causes of the problems and plot ways into solving them.
5. In understanding and unpacking the problems, the narrator becomes aware of their discursive positioning, those external forces that are impacting on or compounding the problems, delaying the implementation of the solutions. In this awareness they find ways to invert the power dynamics and reposition themselves in the relations of power in such a way that opens up the path to the solutions and can be imagined as resistance.

While step one of this pattern lies beyond the reach of textual analysis, steps two to five can be examined by looking for the analogous drives and outcomes of surveillance.

Identifying problems: Classification, risk mitigation and how memoir operates like surveillance

To prove that memoir operates in a similar fashion to surveillance, I will first look for evidence of the author using classification and risk mitigation within the writing of their memoir and how these tools uncover identity and narrative problems. This section will address steps two and three of the expected pattern. These two elements are evident in the technical aspects of the writing and should be primarily displayed by literary

techniques such as how the author describes/defines themselves in relation to other characters in the book, how they classify themselves and others using techniques such as voice, tone and language, and how point of view and subjectification function. This section will demonstrate how the surveillant drives of “classification” (Foucault 1977, 18, 195-9) and “risk mitigation” (McCahill 2002, 12) are analogous to a memoirist’s practice of identifying harmful and dangerous activities in their narrative, which then point the way towards solutions.

Step two: Classification

2. The author decides to write the story, discovers the need and in doing so they shift into the narrator position, taking on all the responsibilities of the memoirist and also beginning the process of self-surveillance through classification and risk mitigation and beginning to see and identify the problems.

Step two is the author beginning the process of classification and taking on the role of narrator. Classification is a process of sorting and categorisation. We use it a thousand times every day and it is intimately linked to both risk mitigation and discipline. When we look at food and decide whether it is safe to eat, when we decide if it is safe to stay at a bus stop with a person or people late at night, or when we judge if we can jump from one cliff edge to another we are using classification skills. Classification is at the core of both surveillance and writing a memoir and the comparisons between its functioning is a strong link between the two topics.

Classification, as discussed in section one, underlies the practice of surveillance. Surveillance cannot function without categories and so depends upon classification to sort, understand and utilise the data collected. As surveillance practices have become more technological, widespread and commonplace, the classification elements have become both more obvious and easier to hide. While the high visibility of surveillance technologies means we always know it is happening, Lyon identified how the subtlety of the exclusions brought about by surveillant classification can function in a way that makes it almost “invisible” (2007, 372) as it becomes more “decentralised and rhizomic” (2004, 138). While a certain degree of classification is necessary for survival, as seen in the examples from the start of this section, in many ways the classification inherent in much surveillance can be seen to be both problematic and potentially exclusionary. In particular, chapter one looked at the example of the racially exclusionary nature of post-9/11 surveillance and how automated classification systems have legitimised racial

profiling and the exclusion of certain classes of people. Classification, therefore, can be seen as both an essential element and a driving factor of surveillance practices; however, this is a classification of individuals imposed by the top-down hierarchical nature of external surveillance.

Within memoir, classification is primarily an introspective practice as the memoirist defines their identity by understanding all the things that they are and are not. As stated in the first chapter, the drive to form a “stable and functional relationship with one’s self” is one of the strongest reasons to write a memoir (Weir 2009, 538). Understanding exactly how this relationship is created, however, requires understanding of how identity is formed and functions (Taylor 1995; Foucault 1977; 2001 [1969]; 2004 [1969]) and how this identity can be understood when it is presented within a narrative (Eakin 2001). As shown in the first section, the construction of identity is a reasonably modern conception (Taylor 1995, 225-34), which involves answering both the questions of ‘Who am I?’ and ‘Why am I who I am?’ – questions that drive memoirists to classify themselves both in relation to their internal existence and how this has been shaped by external forces. Both Taylor and Foucault showed that identity cannot be formed in a vacuum and is shaped by the people, societies and power structures that we relate to every day. Identity is fluid and mutable, but shifts and changes in our identity are also something that needs attention, or “suspicion” as Foucault implied (1977, 192). As our identity is influenced by the structures that we engage with, then both the shifts in our identity and those structures that impact on these shifts need to be observed, catalogued and detailed. Our identity is classified and data collected on what changes we see in response to which structures. The processes used to define and understand our identities, while primarily occurring in private or even internally, can be seen as very similar to those processes enacted in surveillance and in many ways can be seen to carry similarly significant risks to those identified in surveillance. Just as classification in public surveillance acts to identify problems, so too can active self-surveillance show us the author’s narrative problems.

With that background, we can then ask what classification, as it relates to surveillance, might look like within a memoir. The first step here is uncovering the ways that the author identifies themselves as different/similar to other characters within the narrative as well as their readers. This can take the form of the types of language they use to differentiate/identify themselves with others as well as the attention or space they give their character within the text. I will examine the memoirs for concepts that

are placed next to each other, particularly how these set up contrasts with and around the narrator which can then be examined for inductive significance. So, when asking what classification, as it relates to memoir, might look like, the focus shifts from strictly classificatory elements towards more inductive techniques such as varying subjectification and point-of-view. Within this understanding, the narrator's self/other comparison and contrast can be understood more deeply and evidence can be gathered as to the narrator's awareness of problems within their narrative world and their ability to put in place techniques to begin to address those problems.

To summarise, evidence of classification operating within the case studies will be primarily concerned with how the narrator positions themselves in relation to both other characters within the memoir and to their reader, and what this tells us about the problems in their world. Classification may take the form of contradictions, comparisons and lists. It may also take the form of shifting subjectification and point-of-view. If classification can be definitively identified as operating within the case studies, I will then move onto examining whether the memoir and the process of writing it can be understood as a form of risk mitigation and how this can add nuance to the identification of problems.

Step three: Risk Mitigation

3. In the process of writing the story, the author/narrator also becomes subject of their narration, and in doing so they practise risk mitigation in what and how they tell us the story, allowing us to develop a nuanced understanding of their problems.

Step three in the pattern occurs as the narrator begins to tell their story; delving into the second comparable operation of both memoir and surveillance is that of risk mitigation. 'Risk mitigation' refers to actions and activities that reduce the risk either to individuals or society. Many of the decisions that we make when we classify things are based on the principles of risk mitigation. For example, we might decide not to eat that certain piece of food because the risk of contamination is too high, not to jump from the one cliff to the other because the risk of us falling is too likely, to move a few steps (or stops) away from the creepy person waiting for the bus. As seen in the James Bulger kidnapping case mentioned in chapter one, risk mitigation is central to surveillance, as one of the core driving factors behind the dramatic increases in the CCTV rollout in the UK was shown to be the need for public protection. Within the problems and solutions framework, risk

mitigation is the step between identifying problems with classification and implementing the first scaffolding of the solutions. The risk mitigation aspects of memoir are less obvious; however the author's drive to tell the story they have witnessed can be seen as minimising risk both for themselves (that they may not fulfil their role as witness and storyteller) and their subjects (particularly if their memoir deals with controversial or nationally significant material).

When Alston said "it is entirely possible that increased surveillance *can* lead to positive results on occasion" (2007, 17) he was primarily referring to the risk mitigation benefits of surveillance, namely that the risks to citizens can be reduced by surveillance. As discussed by Lyon, the implementation of surveillance technologies can be seen as a form of insurance against "uninsurable risks", like terrorism and crime (2004, 137). From this perspective, surveillance says 'hey, we can't guarantee that we can stop these bad things happening to you but we're going to try as hard as we can and if we fail at least we'll know who did them.' As technology has progressed and surveillance has moved into our pockets through the ubiquitous smart phone, the risk mitigation effects have become even more apparent. As seen from section one, research into these new areas of online and mobile surveillance has been extensive, finding some benefits such as the increased abilities to monitor children, the elderly or disabled and to locate lost information and property (Burke *et al* 2012; Aas 2008; Eriksson 2011; Gandy 1989; Shilton 2010; Lyon 1993, 1994 & 2007; Marx 1995, 1997, 1998 & 2005; DeBiasi 2002; Bennet 2003; Holvast 2009; Economist 2007; Alston 2007; Dennis 2008). Increased surveillance on our streets and in our digital technology is opening up new avenues for control by governments and corporations and at the same time increasing our vulnerability to individual attack by hackers and other unscrupulous individuals. The risk increases exponentially as we take on more and more of the surveillance for ourselves, and store infinitely expanding amounts of our personal information online or in "the cloud" (Burke *et al* 2012).

Before we can understand what risk mitigation, as it relates to surveillance, might look like within the case studies, it is important to identify those risks that are having an impact on the narrator as they enter the story. The identity an author constructs in a memoir is different from the identity they live within. Once the words are placed on paper and the publication process has been completed, the memoir becomes a record of the author's experience, publicly accessible and available for comment. The identity that the author constructs for themselves in the memoir becomes a solid

identity, both part of who they are and have been and separated from them by its concrete and unchanging nature. For as Eakin reminded us in chapter one, the stories we tell of ourselves in memoir are “not merely about identity but rather in some profound way a constituent part of identity” (2001, 115). As stated at the start of the first chapter, this record of the author’s life then takes on an aura of ‘officialness’ and can be seen to lie alongside other official records of one’s life as collected by governments and other surveilling bodies. Telling the truth in such a manner is inevitably risky. There are the risks of legal ramifications regarding actions (either the author’s or others) described in the book, personal implications in relationships with those written about and the inevitable spotlight that will be shone on the identity the author constructs for themselves, a self-narration that Eakin argues must “confirm that the identity is in working order [...] a primary criterion for normalcy” (2001, 121). So if writing a memoir is such a risky activity, how then can it be defined as risk mitigation? According to Foucault this risk of self-exposure is one we must take if we are driven by the urge to “tell the truth instead of reposing in the security of a life where the truth goes unspoken” (1983b, C1, p16). Telling the truth will allow the author to construct “a relationship of self-possession and self-sovereignty ... endowing the individual with the preparation and the moral equipment that will permit him to fully confront the world in an ethical and rational manner” (Foucault 1983b, C5, p3). So the drive to truth telling can outweigh the self-protective urge towards secrecy and silence. As seen in chapter one, another reason for taking the risk of telling a truthful life story can include the need to protest or argue back against some injustice or inequality (Rak 2001, 229).

Risk mitigation, as it might occur within memoir, is inherently tied to the ‘drive’ to write the story. The risk is the motivating incident, situation or issue that the author set out to understand and confront by untangling the narrative. Searching for active risk mitigation within the memoir involves looking for hints as to how the memoirist has developed the narrative identity that the narrator displays and how and why this is leading them towards problem solving. While shifting subjectification and point-of-view can be linked to the question of space given to the narrator versus other characters in the memoir, it has the further value of allowing us to make guesses about those elements of their identity that the narrator wishes to either emphasise or distract us from. Specific instances within the text will be used to uncover this, such as: justifications for why the story needs to be told; explanations by the narrator about events unfolding or concluding; ways that the narrator exposed themselves to risk by

telling the story, and how, if at all, these risks paid out within the story time. Using the theoretical frameworks from chapter one, educated inductions can be made about the motivations that drive the narrator to expose or cover up aspects of their identity. It is within this identification process that the narrator's awareness of problems becomes apparent. For many authors of memoir, journaling and note-taking are essential to both the original recording of the details and often mentioned within the narrative. The processes of cataloguing one's life can be seen here as similar to the surveiller's collection of data. For this reason, particular attention will be paid to any note-taking or journaling mentioned in the text and any subsequent conclusions the narrator draws about them, their behaviours or changes that need to occur. Similarly, mentions of external surveillance of the narrator, either by cameras or people, may show the narrator's acknowledgment that those activities they were involved with while being watched fall outside of the 'norms' of human behaviour and so these examples will also be examined. Within this perspective, defining risks will relate to those things that drove the narrator at the beginning of the memoir, those things they needed to overcome to reach a conclusion with both note-taking and external surveillance seen as risk mitigation, the author writing themselves into the problem-solving phase of the memoir.

If examining classification and risk mitigation within the case studies uncovers problems the narrator is facing and shows that memoir does operate in a similar fashion to surveillance, then all that is left is to discover whether it also results in similar outcomes to surveillance.

Identifying solutions: Discipline, resistance and whether memoir has similar outcomes to surveillance

After proving that memoir functions similarly to surveillance by addressing steps two and three of the expected pattern, it is then necessary to determine whether the two have similar outcomes by looking for steps four and five. To discover whether surveillance and memoir achieve similar results, I will explore the outcomes of discipline and resistance and how, if at all, these show the author finding solutions to their narrative problems. Unlike the first section, which dealt with classification and risk mitigation, the answers to this strand of inquiry are more amorphous and will require a more deductive and less structured approach to analysis. In this strand of analysis we will move away from technical literary devices, towards a cultural theory approach to

the text. The two outcomes of discipline and resistance should be displayed through the narrative development and discursive responses of the author, the wrapping up and solving of the problems identified by steps two and three. As such, this strand of enquiry will examine the narrative identity constructed by the author and whether this aligns with Eakin's theory of the "normative model of personhood" (2001, 114). Within this, I hope to show that the process of writing the memoir has acted to discipline the author, given them a way to imagine shifting their position within the relations of power. The final section will question how (if at all) the author has used the memoir to argue back against those dominant discourses that they encountered within the story time as well as those they challenged in writing the text.

Step four: Discipline

4. This risk mitigation leads to the narrator becoming aware of those ways in which self-discipline may act to help them solve the problems; in constructing the narrative for us they begin to understand the root causes of the problems and plot ways into solving them.

Discipline is another way of comparing and contrasting memoir and surveillance with it being seen as a motivating outcome for both practices, a way of taking those problems that have been identified and doing something about them. Discipline, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, means "to subject to discipline [...] to instruct, educate, train; more especially, to train to habits of order and subordination; to bring under control" (2013). Social acceptability depends, to a great extent, on the ability of everyone to get along. Without common rules of human behaviour, society is unable to function, and to learn these rules individuals are subjected to discipline. If we return to the examples from the previous two sections, eating safe food, judging distances and choosing which people to trust your safety with do not come naturally; these skills are developed (some quite early in childhood) through subjection to discipline. While teaching discipline is primarily seen as the responsibility of parents, supported by bureaucratic organisations like schools and churches, this child-centric understanding of the word can risk distracting from the ongoing processes of discipline we engage with every day. Foucault was one of the first theorists to extensively research the term and its uses, making discipline in practice the focus of his 1977 study *Discipline and Punish*. Discipline, argues Foucault:

[I]mplicates an uninterrupted, constant coercion ... [it makes] possible the meticulous control of the operations of the body, which assure[s] the constant subjection of its forces and impose[s] upon them a relation of docility-utility.
Foucault 1977, 137

From this we can posit that the processes of discipline and control are constant, related to our physicality and practised with intent. Discipline is life long, happens to everybody, and is inevitably grounded in power. The final two phrases, then, of the above definition hold the most value for this research: 'to train to habits of order and subordination; to bring under control'. 'Order', 'subordination' and 'control' are the keywords here which identify that discipline is always based on relations of power. The person/organisation/discipliner holds the power to determine what the subject/student needs discipline in and, merely by being the wielder of the discipline, they take on a position above the subject, subordinating them into a semblance of order, bringing them under the control. The implications for a power-based understanding of discipline become particularly interesting when the comparisons between the external disciplines enacted by surveillance and the more internalised self-discipline that occurs within the writing of a memoir.

Discipline can be seen as one of the core motivations of surveillance, as explored in the first section. Althusser's concept of "hailing" (1998, 294-304) explained how we, as individuals, are subjectified by our responses to the call of authority, how the CCTV cameras and warning signs act to remind us of our subordinate position. Foucault (1977, 137), Monohan (*et al* 2010, 107) and Lyon (2007, 373) all showed us how the power of surveillance is grounded in its disciplinary effects, its ability to make us docile and compliant and to coerce us into going along with the system. The issues raised in the risk mitigation section about individuals taking on more self-surveillance with the take up of personalised surveillance technologies linked to smart phones and other digital devices (Burke *et al* 2012) are also of concern here as it shows that individuals are engaging with surveillance and its disciplinary potentials much more willingly than at any time in the past; however, they do this often without realising that they are taking the role of both surveiller and surveilled. Within that, however, remains the possibility that individuals may be using these self-surveillance techniques as disciplinary tools without realising it. With this theoretical grounding, discipline, as it relates to surveillance, can be seen as both beneficial (when referred back to those harm mitigation and exclusionary drives examined above) and harmful (when

compliance and docility become so widespread as to risk individuality and personal freedom). While the disciplinary potentials of surveillance remain contested, this makes it a fruitful element to examine within memoir, particularly in relation to problem solving.

Discipline, as it is enacted through memoir, holds many similarities to surveillance: it is grounded in the collection of information, with the classification and understanding of this information seen as a disciplining factor. The drives to write a memoir are inevitably about self-discipline as seen in chapter one with Taylor who stated that “being true to myself means being true to my own originality, which is something only I can articulate and discover. In articulating it, I’m also defining myself. I’m realising a potentiality that is properly my own” (1995, 229). This view is supported by Weir who argues that one of the most valuable aspects of writing a memoir can be the formation of “a relationship of integrity with ourselves” (2009, 538). Writing a memoir involves navigating the plethora of competing identities mentioned in chapter one and answering the contradictory but complementary questions put to us: ‘Who am I?’ (Taylor 1995, 227-233) and ‘Why am I who I am?’ (Foucault 1997a, 224-8). This form of self-analysis acts, as Foucault declares, to construct “a relationship of self-possession and self-sovereignty ... endowing the individual with the preparation and the moral equipment that will permit him to fully confront the world in an ethical and rational manner” (1983b, C5, p3). The clearest answer, however, to how memoir can act to discipline the author comes from Eakin’s theory of “narrative identity” which argues that the mere process of constructing a narrative of one’s life acts to lead the author’s identity (as exhibited through the identity of them as a subject and narrator) towards a more “normative model of personhood” (2001, 114). This theory is founded in the understanding that for a person to be able to construct a narrative of their life, they must be able to judge their own story against an internalised metric of ‘norms’ and that by writing the story they bring themselves closer to these norms. “The performance of self-narration,” Eakin claims, “confirms that the identity is in working order, [and] this performance easily becomes a primary criterion for normalcy” (2001, 121). In order to uncover whether the narrator’s identity, as constructed within the memoir, comes to conform to ‘normalcy’ I will examine the arc of development for the narrator’s character and how, if at all, they implement the solutions to their problems. I will ask how much of this character development is influenced by the narrator’s actions and how much of it is externally imposed. I will also question whether this arc of development was obvious or

predictable from the start of the book and how well the solutions intersect with the problems.

Within memoir, discipline as it relates to surveillance should be evident in the discourses that the narrator engages with, how they are positioned in relation to said discourses and whether or not the narrator can be seen to have choice or control in these situations. In order to explore these aspects, I will first need to identify those discourses that the narrator engages with and plot out the main power relations functioning within them (Kendall & Wickham 1999, 34-46). Secondly, I will need to identify the narrator's position and power within these discourses, trying to discover how (by means of people, place, education, lack of power, etc.) the author was placed into a subordinate position in relation to the discourse and when (if at all) the narrator becomes aware they are engaging with these discourses (Kendall & Wickham 1999, 47-54). In order to examine whether memoir disciplines the author in a similar way to how surveillance disciplines the individual within society it is necessary to ask whether a memoir can show how a person situates themselves in relation to power within a surveillance society. Can an analysis of their narrative identity, positioning as a narrator and their conception of themselves as a subject in relation to power show the influence of living within a surveillance society? Three narrative techniques will be explored to uncover the answers to these questions: the positioning of the narrator within the narrative, the tone they use when forming their narrative identity, and the discursive space they inhabit within the story. More simply, I will ask if the author's self-constructed identity supports their finding solutions within the narrative. As the core element of my argument, conclusions reached in this section will be expanded upon in my discussions of resistance.

In order to answer this question we first need to understand the narrator's position in relation to those discourses identified above. Do they present themselves as an empowered or entrenched subject? Does this shift from the beginning to the end? The answers to these questions will give a framework for how to determine whether, within memoir, discipline may be explored through Eakin's model of 'narrative identity' where the author can reshape or re-imagine their identity, by constructing a narrative of their story, into a more socially acceptable format. According to Eakin, writing the story should fix the things that put the author into the bad place where the book starts so I will continue asking, does the author find and understand the solutions to their

problems? Does the self-discipline of writing help them move closer to Eakin's "normative model of personhood" (2001, 114)?

Having identified the problems and solutions in steps two, three and four, I will have now reached the stage in my enquiry that asks whether writing a memoir can function as a form of resistance by allowing the narrator to challenge and push back at the discursive forces that have shaped the narrative problems. The understandings gleaned from the preceding sections will feed into an analysis of how, if at all, the narrator has managed to challenge and invert the dominant discourses they encounter.

Step five: Resistance

5. In understanding and unpacking the problems, the narrator becomes aware of their discursive positioning, those external forces that are impacting on or compounding the problems, delaying the implementation of the solutions. In this awareness they find ways to invert the power dynamics and reposition themselves in the relations of power in such a way that opens up the path to the solutions and can be imagined as resistance.

To understand how step five, resistance, might appear in the case studies, we first need to take a moment to think explicitly about power. I began the first chapter of this thesis with a quote from Foucault which commented on how the processes of recording a life have changed, shifted from the heroic lives of kings and champions being recorded to the minutiae of daily life being held as 'official records'. The reason I selected this as my opening was to highlight the power implications of record keeping and the role that the memoirist has in inverting these dynamics. It was important to begin this research with a reminder of the nature of power and how this relates to the written word, for it is impossible (for me) to write about power without also writing about resistance to power.

On first glance, the three factors and outcomes I have already examined paint a reasonably grim picture of the topic. Surveillance classifies us, is applied arbitrarily to reduce (often economic and bureaucratic) risks, and disciplines us into socially acceptable beings. Similarly, when writing memoir we use the same tools – classification and risk mitigation – to identify problems and bring ourselves closer to the norm, to identify solutions and discipline ourselves to fit in. Within all this classification, risk mitigation and discipline, it could seem there is little room for rebellion, no space for arguing back against the need for subjugating ourselves

to the external powers we encounter. The purpose of this thesis, however, is not only to understand how the drives of surveillance and memoir are comparable but also to see if there exists, within memoir, the potential for resistance against the dominant discourses hinted at by surveillance, whether by having found the problems and solutions we can enact and implement them regardless of any contrary discursive forces at work. “Where there is power,” said Foucault, “there is resistance” (2008 [1978], 95), and we will carry this idea as we move into the last concept that will be looked for in the case studies.

The hierarchical and unidirectional nature of traditional surveillance begs for resistance. The psychological imperatives of Althusser’s concept of “hailing” (1998, 294-304) force us to acknowledge and respond to the fact that we are being watched. The psychological impacts of surveillance, the enforced “compliance” (Lyon 2007, 273) and “docility” (Alston 2007, 17) beg for an alternative, some way of arguing back. Conveniently there is such a way, for:

[H]e who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relations in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection. By this very fact, the external power may throw off its physical weight.
Foucault 1977, 202-3

The very nature of surveillance creates a space for resistance. Self-surveillance can empower people; knowing what is happening and how to argue back can give subjects a more powerful stance. The key to opening this space for resistance lies in understanding the tricks that Marx spoke about when he stated that “people may be deceived into thinking that control techniques ... are far more effective than is the case” (1985, 21). In becoming aware that they are “subjected to a field of visibility”, as Foucault said above, the subject of surveillance can find ways to “play both roles”, to take on the responsibility of the power (Foucault 1977, 202-3). The core of this matter is to be found in the “information asymmetry” described by Eriksson (2011, 82). While the majority of those records kept about us are collected and maintained by external sources, the individual remains incapable of feeling control over their world. However, as examined in the first chapter, there are multiple ways in which the individual can take hold of their informational power and argue back against the impacts on uni-directional surveillance. Some of the forms of resistance that have been suggested by this thesis include: self-surveillance with all of its disciplinary potentials; participatory and counter-surveillance

where individuals or groups co-opt and invert surveillance technologies to highlight the inequities of the practice, and art that responds to and challenges surveillance. I have chosen to group these activities under the term of oppositional surveillance, or surveillance that is practiced with the sole intent of challenging hierarchical top-down surveillance. All of these forms of oppositional surveillance have the potential to both emphasise the potential impacts of surveillance and bring the issue to the attention of new audiences. But how, if at all, can writing a memoir be examined as a kind of revolutionary oppositional self-surveillance and how can this help us to identify step five of our pattern?

With our understanding of memoir as a form of self-surveillance, and that self-surveillance can be understood as a form of oppositional surveillance, a way of arguing back at surveillance, it is easy to then contextualise memoir as a form of resistance. When the narrative problems are driven and shaped by external discursive forces, then the author must engage resistance to overcome them, to move into that realm which Fisher called “narrative fidelity” (1985, 349-50). With the risks that an author must take to write autobiographically, there needs to be some form of payoff: resistance. Like resistance as it relates to surveillance, the key to understanding how the memoir can be resistance lies in the identification of it as an oppositional practice, telling the story that was meant to be kept secret, the story that aligns with “the logic of good reason” (Fisher 1985, 349). While the discipline enacted by constructing a memoir, brought about by the practices of classification and risk mitigation, is important to understanding the core argument of this exegesis, situating this self-discipline as an act of resistance is the pivot of my argument.

To uncover if writing the memoir has acted to discipline the author (as they are shown in the narrator) we have examined the narrative identity constructed by the author and determined whether this conforms to “normative models of personhood” as identified by Eakin (2001, 114). Particular attention has been paid to how the identity is formed in response to discursive positioning of author as a subject of power. Within this, we must also now look for evidence that the combination of surveilling themselves and then collecting their data into a thread of narrative coherence has acted in some ways to correct the problems which led to the initial situations in step one. We must also ask if all the work from steps two, three and four has given the author a leaping off point for enacting the solutions they have found to the problems they identified. To answer this question, we must look for evidence that the narrator has argued back, whether

knowingly or unknowingly, against the dominant forces that led them to the initial place of instability which began the book.

Within the memoir, resistance, as it relates to surveillance, should be evident in how the narrator engages with those discourses that were identified in the discipline section and how they actively invert power dynamics to implement the solutions to their problems. These moments should be shrouded in triumphant affect, the exhilaration of the narrator tying it all together, flipping the dynamic to end up on top on the power stack. How the author has situated themselves as a subject/object in the power game (particularly as it relates to external structures of power) will show their awareness of the need for resistance and the steps they need to take to effect this resistance. Another element here relates to the motivation of the narrator, whether they have taken on the role of a witness within this narrative, telling a story that needs to be told for altruistic reasons. The questions that must be asked include: Do things happen that are beyond the narrator's control which bring them to an understanding of their place in the web of power? What are the precursors/causes of this and are they within or outside of the narrator's control? And, how, if at all, does the narrator's relationship with power change within the text? Resistance, as it relates to memoir, will involve identifying ways that the author has used the technologies and mindsets of the surveiller to allow for a deeper, more precise construction of themselves as subjects who relate to power (finding and enacting solutions) rather than as power subjects (living with problems). In interrogating the case studies I will attempt to discover how the narrator imagines themselves differently in relation to power than 'society' as presented in the book does. Our attention will return again to the narrator's use of language and discourse and what this reveals of the narrators' understanding of themselves as subjects of power. By compiling the answers to these questions I hope to show that by questioning structures of power the narrators found ways to function within/resist against these discourses.

In conclusion, by weaving together the strands of surveillance and identity theory, I have developed a framework to investigate the construction of narratorial identity within memoir. By applying this to my three case studies and my own memoir, I hope to show how the process of writing a memoir can be understood as a form of self-surveillance.

The pattern I will be looking for within these texts, the four steps that lead through classification, risk mitigation, discipline and resistance, should be apparent in all the case studies. Evidence of these steps will be found through a combination of

inductive and deductive textual analysis, supported by the theoretical frameworks outlined in chapter one.

Chapter 3: Creative contexts:

Three case studies

By combining the data collected through the three different theoretical frameworks of power and surveillance theory, narrative identity and narrative probability, I will attempt to find evidence that clearly links the functioning of memoir – constructing a narrative to discipline one’s self into Eakin’s “normative model of personhood” (2001, 114), or a narratively acceptable character – with the disciplinary functions of surveillance which mould the surveilled individual into a socially acceptable individual. As described in the Methodology chapter, this information will be collected by examining the four comparable functions and outcomes of both surveillance and memoir: classification, risk minimisation, discipline, and resistance. It is hoped that each case study will follow the steps of the pattern set out in the Methodology:

1. Problems appear in the author’s world, some flaw in their narrative identity/coherence that drives them to tell this story. At this stage the author may not be aware of the problems as problems.
2. The author decides to write the story, discovers the need and in doing so they shift into the narrator position, taking on all the responsibilities of the memoirist and also beginning the process of self-surveillance through classification and risk mitigation and beginning to see and identify the problems.
3. In the process of writing the story, the author/narrator also becomes subject of their narration, and in doing so they practise risk mitigation in what and how they tell us the story, allowing us to develop a nuanced understanding of their problems.
4. This risk mitigation leads to the narrator becoming aware of those ways in which self-discipline may act to help them solve the problems; in constructing the narrative for us they begin to understand the root causes of the problems and plot ways into solving them.
5. In understanding and unpacking the problems, the narrator becomes aware of their discursive positioning, those external forces that are impacting on or compounding the problems, delaying the implementation of the solutions. In this awareness they find ways to invert the power dynamics and reposition themselves in the relations of power in such a way that opens up the path to the solutions and can be imagined as resistance.

After having read the previous chapters and sections on the rules of autobiography, the reader might be wondering about the truthful elements of my case studies and why I have not discussed ways I will determine the truth or fallacy of these memoirs. Is it not important to know if they are telling the truth? No, is the simple answer. This research is

entirely concerned with the narrative identities and surveillant behaviours and responses as they are constructed within the confines of this thing called memoir. The truthfulness or otherwise of the texts will not enter into the discussion as it is purely the representation of themselves that the authors chose to share that is being examined. Any questions of legitimacy of events, plot development, or characterisation will be dealt with within the bounds of 'narrative probability'.

Introducing the case studies

Three external case studies will be examined in this chapter with a fourth to follow, combining an exegetical and analytical examination of my own memoir. The selection of the case studies has been guided by several different factors including country of origin, easily defined and identifiable discourses and a recent date of publication, defined as post-2000.

The case studies I have chosen for this research are: *In My Skin* by Kate Holden (2005), a text detailing the author's heroin addiction and subsequent sex work career in Melbourne; *The Happiest Refugee: A Memoir* by Ahn Do (2010) a 'coming of age' story which explores the impacts of growing up as a 'boat person' in Australia, and *Guantanamo: My journey* by David Hicks (2010) which explores Hicks' post-9/11 experiences as a US prisoner of war held at the military prison in Guantanamo Bay in Cuba.

The first factor influencing their selection was the decision to focus on texts dealing with Australia. As my own writing is covering a period in Australia between the late 1980s and early 2010s and is dealing with discursive power structures from this period, I decided that it would be best to remain focussed on stories that hold this national and discursive similarity to my own. All three of the selected memoirs were published after 2000.

The second condition I placed on the selection of case studies was that the narrative needed to take place within/around very clearly defined discourses to increase the likelihood of clear data being collected. Covering addiction, sex work, immigration, nationality, prison and recovery from prison, all three case studies can be seen to be embedded within clear and easily identifiable discursive frameworks.

For Holden, the value of this text is the nature of the narrative where a middle-class, tertiary-educated woman eschewed a positive relationship to the discourses of

wealth, education and career and instead removed herself to a shadow world of addiction and sex work. I will attempt to discover whether Holden, by placing herself outside of the normative power structures, was able to find a new way of situating herself in relation to them.

Do's text covers his journey to Australia as a refugee during the Vietnam War, as part of the first waves of 'boat people'. The discourses that have grown out of refugees arriving by boat continue to be felt today and are used as political tools by both sides of politics. As such, Do, who is a professional and well-known comedian, has written a story that is grounded in Do finding his space within the discourses of security, immigration, and the conception of an accepting and egalitarian Australia.

Hicks' text, on the other hand, involves a narrator who spent his childhood and adolescence desperately attempting to separate himself from discursive control, carving out a niche that took him as far from the structures of power as he could get. Hicks' narrative progression involves him coming face-to-face, albeit through many layers of chain link and cage, with the structures he had struggled to avoid. I will attempt to prove that for Hicks, it was only by engaging with and confronting the reality of his position as a subject of power that he was able to find a conclusion to his story.

Case study one: *In My Skin*, Kate Holden (2005)

In My Skin is a love story between Kate Holden and heroin. Set in Melbourne, Australia, in the 1990s, this book details Holden's slide into addiction, her move into sex work to support her habit, and her eventual escape from heroin's thrall. *In My Skin* is written primarily in the first person past tense and follows a straight chronological timeline with some flashbacks. Holden gives brief details of a mostly happy and seemingly 'normal' childhood and a sketchy overview of her time spent at university before sliding quickly into the details of her early attempts at living out of home, relationships and independence, and how her quest for love and acceptance led to her first dabbling with heroin and then falling into sex work. There are very few unexpected twists in this book for a reader familiar with the recovering from addiction/'surviving' sex work sub genres of memoir. However, some elements of the plot seem slightly out of place and some seem to have been introduced to keep the reader aware of the distance between Holden, the sex worker and heroin addict, and the reader (who, it might be assumed, would have little to no personal experience of what she details).

This section will identify the problems and solutions within the memoir and ask whether writing this book allowed Holden to access a different version of her identity that she could use to argue back against the structures of power and discipline that led to her initially taking up heroin.

Problems in *In My Skin*

In *In My Skin*, Holden classifies herself through attempting to understand power and acceptance and how this relates to her dual role as sex worker and heroin addict. Holden identifies herself as what she is not, and decides in doing so that sex equals power. Holden has previous knowledge of both heroin (2005, 18) and sex work (2005, 68) from literature (particularly Anaïs Nin (2005, 13)) and classifies herself against/alongside these images.

“What do I remember of being a prostitute?” Holden asks in the opening line of the prologue to *In My Skin* (2005, 1). This line performs the dual functions of immediately identifying this as an exploration of Holden’s identity and stating that what we are about to read occurred in the past, so it is no longer a part of who she is. The identity that Holden expresses in this book is distinct from the identity she has as she writes these words. It is with these words that Holden declares her move into the second step of the pattern implied by the Methodology, the shift into the narrator position. The opening pages of *In My Skin* set up the expectation of a narrative identity that is different, shocking and uncomfortable. They promise that the identity we see in Holden will be anything but ‘normative’. The prologue of this text fulfils the explicit function of highlighting this difference; it acts to separate the author/subject from the reader through the use of uncomfortable contrasts, placing emphasis on the ‘abnormality’ of Holden’s narrative world.

I remember tenderness, boredom, the ice-creams we would eat at 3 a.m. in front of the television; the smell of cocks, shy men with silky skin, laughter; dark streets gleaming; boys in baseball caps slouching in the introduction lounge, heavy bellies pressing on me; conversations, sneaking cigarettes while fixing my make-up.

I remember the other girls being like sisters, and knowing that to tell them my real name was dangerous. I remember opening my heart to strange men and stroking their faces, smiling. I remember being pounded so hard my face was white with pain. I remember being a prostitute, and being proud of it, liking it.

But what I did is not normal. No? I was naked, I touched people’s bodies, they touched mine, we were alone in a room. Like a masseur, like a dentist, like a beauty therapist. Yes, but I opened my body, they touched me there. Like a doctor. Yes, but inside.

Holden 2005, 1-2

The self-classification by way of contrasts that Holden lays out here is designed to shock and unsettle, with the semi colons and fragmented paragraph structures adding a second layer of disquiet. These paragraphs confront the reader with a series of familiar concepts or sensations that are immediately followed by the strange and unsettling. “Ice-creams” are laid next to “cocks”, bringing to mind the inevitable conclusion that Holden was as comfortable putting either in her mouth (Holden 2005, 1-2). “Sisters”, those closest to us by blood, are associated with danger and secrecy (Holden 2005, 1-2). “Opening [her] heart to strange men” is followed immediately by her submitting to intercourse so painful it leaves her face “white with pain” (Holden 2005, 1-2). Being a prostitute is a reason to be proud, but this “is not normal” (Holden 2005, 1-2). In the final paragraph of this section Holden steers away from the familiar/unfamiliar dichotomous sentence structure, raising for the first time the repeated idea of ‘normal’ as she gives a list of reasons why sex work is normal, raising one of the perhaps unsettling comparisons (for some readers) between sex workers and therapists (Holden 2005, 1-2). In a manner that becomes familiar as the reader enters into the story, Holden sets up a reasonable argument for the normality of her work only to shoot them all down with that final distinction, the definitive line between Holden’s sex work and the ‘normal’: “Yes, but inside” Holden declares (2005, 1-2) and the unspoken conclusion of this statement rings in the readers mind; “Yes, but inside” and could you let them touch you there? Are you different like me or ‘normal’? The final lines of the prologue, however, show Holden’s own discomfort with what she had become: “The smile that I give when I talk about it now is, I can feel, nostalgic, provocative. A brightness comes into my eyes. And, I’m told, a hard look” (2005, 3). The message given to us by the prologue is simply that this book is about finding spaces between the contradictions and a ‘normal’ skin that Holden can slip into to alleviate this “hard look” (2005, 3). The hard look is the first hint of the problems in Holden’s memoir, the first suggestion that classification is at work.

The plot of *In My Skin* carries through with this series of contrasts, a practice in self-classification, with Holden placing herself into familiar and comfortable situations that then quickly shift into the uncomfortable and unfamiliar. The sex industry is inevitably about classification and comparisons, embedded as it is in a commercial transaction based on the attractiveness and sexual appeal of the workers. Holden enunciates the process of comparing herself to the other workers and finding her individual appeal, the thing that clients were likely to pay money for:

Part of me considered myself one of the less likely contenders, I was good looking enough, but not ideal, I was only just getting the hang of grooming. I didn't have the most wonderful arse. I cut my legs shaving. My hair was never quite right. And I talked too much.

Everyone noted that I was educated; most of these women, however savvy and sharp, had no tertiary education. It made me self-conscious but I was proud, too. And so I started to make something of this attribute, rather than camouflaging it. Why not gain attention with something different? It turned out that what was merely 'different' to me was outright weird to some. But not unpopular. And so I became known as much for my eccentric conversation as my sexual attractiveness.

Holden 2005, 157

Holden's self-surveillance in this passage taps into both the economic basis of the sex industry, the classificatory nature of competitive female relations and the strange one-dimensional expectation that brothel clients have of what sex workers should be. However, for us, the value of this is how it identifies Holden's awareness of her own place within these systems, her ability to enunciate the results of her self-surveillance and truly understand the problems confronting her. A reader unfamiliar with the debates about sex work may assume that Holden's chosen career path is the main issue here; however Holden does not see it this way. She addresses sex work in straight prose, showing no narrative discomfort with it: "Performing with my vagina was only an extension of manual work," she argues to herself. "Prostitution," she claims, "seemed like a complex, challenging profession that had enhanced me more than it had reduced me" (2005, 241). So if it is not the sex work that is the problem, then what is?

Holden uses tricky jumps in perspective to show her immersion into heroin addiction and identify for us the core problem in this memoir: how, within this immersion, she let go of her individual identity. On page seventeen she is yet to have her first taste of the drug and while the chapter does begin with her talking about James and using the plural pronoun 'our' – "It was the night of *our* three-month anniversary" (Holden 2005, 17) – she is also comfortable using the individual personal pronoun 'I'. 'I' appears seven times in the fourteen lines of this first page. This shifts very rapidly after she tastes heroin. Her first taste is narratively established as a solo activity, despite her partner James and their friends being present:

The metal approached *my* flesh; there was a sharp sting, the ridge of the needle under the skin, the sucking pressure of blood drawn out, and fluid pressed steadily in. James released *my* arm and *I* licked the tiny spot of blood. It tasted metallic with chemicals. He kissed *me*, in consolation or congratulation. *My* head felt dazzled, from *my* racing heart. But *I* didn't think *I* could feel much else. Sleepy, perhaps. A little spangled with sensation. Proud.

[...]

I was aware of a contented glow, warm in my marrow. *I* couldn't judge how much of that was the drug, and how much was the satisfaction at *my* own courage. Holden 2005, 20: italics added

'[M]y own courage' are the last words we hear from the individual Kate Holden in this chapter; from this point on she jumps into an unsettling mix of second person perspective as she engages with the spell of the heroin and then into a collective first person as she dissolves into a radically co-dependent using relationship where James, the heroin and she all take on a collective identity. The jump to second person is jarring and almost uncomfortable for the reader, the use of the 'you' forces us into engaging with heroin, places the needle in our arm and immerses us into the loss of consciousness and personality which is opiate addiction. This effect is further intensified by Holden's use of the sea as a metaphor for intoxication:

Heroin is like wading into the sea. The first fizz of water at *your* ankles is delicious, shocking. *You're* aware of every cold pulse of water against *your* skin. *You* wade further; *your* temperature accommodates; *you* walk more slowly. The water is still shallow, though the bottom slopes. *You're* delighted as *you* relax into the sway, the buckle of the waves. *You* grin with pleasure, and *you* think, Why didn't I come in sooner? How gorgeous, how thrilling! Then abruptly the sand drops beneath *your* next step, and *you* plunge into deeper water, and *you* can't feel the bottom anymore.

Holden 2005, 21: italics added

That single 'I' that exists in the centre of this passage, as the second-person Holden tries to wrest back her first-person identity for the sole purpose of bemoaning her failure to try heroin earlier, drives home the abrupt dissociation of the rest of this paragraph. In 'wading into the sea' of heroin, walking out until the bottom drops out from under her feet, Holden obliterates her individual identity and grasps for those things that are closest: James and the heroin:

It took about two weeks before I began to realise we were in thrall. That every time the group of us got together the question was, *Shall we?* That we waited with shivering nerves and giddy smiles for Jake the dealer to arrive, in his shiny boots with his well-tended hair and enigmatic drawl, with his little origami packets of treasure. That we were having a better time now than ever before; that if we didn't ring Jake for his wares we sat around listlessly drinking beer, the conversation more laden with effort.

[...]

We glorified in the secrecy the ritual and the closed bedroom door. A deal was fifty dollars, split between the four of us; the money wasn't an issue. The next day we didn't feel bad, but perhaps dozed a little longer in bed; it didn't matter since none of us had more than a part-time job, a few uni classes, the washing up to do.

Holden 2005, 21-2

"The next day we didn't feel bad," Holden says, giving herself – in the role as a collective first-person narrator – the uncanny ability to see within other characters, tell us their feelings (2005, 22); an ability more often associated with the omniscient narrator of a third person narration. In breaking these narrative rules, giving herself the all-seeing eye of the omniscient narrator Holden is making a claim to not only be able to see into the heads and feelings of other characters, but also to be able to speak for them, a power that was granted to her by their communal using. As the chapter progresses we see Holden falling deeper into thrall with both James and heroin and there is a building sense that something needs to shift, that this collective and co-dependent identity she is forming is unworkable. The only times that Holden uses the 'I' for the rest of this chapter is either when she is with James and is directly addressing him or when she is apart from him and directly describing a feeling or action; most of the rest of the chapter involves 'we', 'us' and 'our'. Towards the end of this chapter, their heroin use begins to have an impact on their ability to live. They have run out of money, the gas has been cut off, and they resign themselves to eating uncooked two-minute noodles to save money for heroin. Holden begins to consider the idea of working on the streets (like their dealer Jake's girlfriend) and it is when she raises this idea with James that things begin to crumble, when he pulls away from their collective whole and takes back his 'I':

'I can work,' I said to James one night. 'On the streets. Like Vicki.' I dressed up in my Anais lingerie: lace bra, suspender belt, French knickers. I coated my mouth with lipstick, made up my eyes. Just to practice. Dress-ups, like my thirties frocks. If I worked, we'd have money to buy nice clothes. I was scarcely thinking beyond the underwear.

'Look,' I said, coming out to show James. 'What do you think? Would you play two hundred dollars to fuck me?'

The drugs were slow syrup in my mind. I didn't catch the depth of pain in the look that James gave me.

'Don't do that,' he said 'I couldn't bear it. I can't bear it.'

I stepped forward more slowly. 'But would you fuck me?'

'Yes,' he said. He clung to me. Long cool fingers on my warm bare skin. He rested his face against my belly. '*I would. Me.*'

Holden 2005, 31: Holden's italics

"If I worked," Holden says, "we'd have money," demonstrating that for her the 'I' is completely subsumed, immersed in the love of James and the heroin (2005, 31). James, however, still has his head above water, can see himself within the 'we'. The italicised 'I' and 'me' that James claims back here, given their emphasis by Holden, are the first step to his pulling out of this collusion. The next chapter begins with: "James said a friend of his had found a rehab for him to go to" (Holden 2005, 32). "The idea that he might want

to change things disturbed me,” Holden wrote, “despite the hardship we’d had; as if I’d be left behind again, as if we weren’t happy together. He said he’d be in there for a week. I couldn’t visit him. I couldn’t ring him” (Holden 2005, 32). James is stepping out of the water, leaving Holden to her growing relationship with heroin. While the breakdown of their relationship takes another chapter, wherein is a fall back into using together, each taste couched in the communal ‘we’/‘us’ terms, eventually James finds the strength to walk away, leaving Holden to face the emptiness that she has been trying to avoid:

But I was nostalgic for the early days, and he said ‘I don’t want to think about any of that anymore.’

In bed at night I touched myself, clenching at the memory of James making love to me; the sweetness we had forfeited. My face made the crumpled shape of pleasure, or tears. A huge grief yawned open in me, and then left me vacant.
Holden 2005, 41

That vacant yawning grief will very quickly become core to Holden’s identity; it becomes something she uses to classify herself as different from not only the ‘normal’ people on the daytime fringes of her world but also to the other sex workers and addicts who she shares the night with. Holden here has shown both the classification and risk mitigation drives at work. She has classified herself as existing comfortably within the sex industry, empowered by the work she is doing, but shown the gaping hole of her singular identity left by the combination of James and heroin.

Recognising this hole, this lack of a singular identity is where classification and risk mitigation merge for Holden. It is a hint to us of Holden shifting into the second step of the expected pattern, where she uses the tools of risk mitigation to begin writing herself toward the problem-solving phase of the narrative.

While writing a memoir is an extended practice in self-analysis, the regular process of note taking and journaling demonstrates a dedication to self-awareness and understanding, an engagement, however unknowing, with the practice of self-surveillance. It is also risk mitigation in practice. Holden speaks extensively of her journaling, describing the notebook in her hand as “full of observations” on her gap-year trip to Europe (2005, 11), how she started a new journal for her addiction and listed the dates she used (2005, 24) and that during the peak of her struggle with using the entries became “fastidious, loquacious, repetitive” (2005, 58). It is when Holden writes of her addiction that the value of note taking as form of self-surveillance becomes clear; in her

journal Holden is able to articulate a discomfort with her addiction that is not otherwise given voice:

There was a steely compulsion in me. I often wrote in my journal of how good it would be to be clean, how I was going to get clean, how fresh my life would be next week, next month, how resolved I was—but when it got dark, the thought of the drug muffled all else. I wrote of heroin as a scaly green lizard wrapped tight around my mind, blinking its cold eyes at me, blinding me.
Holden 2005, 39

Identifying the “scaly green lizard” that has her in its grip is only one small part of the analysis, with heroin appearing as a symptom rather than cause of Holden’s malaise, she also uses journaling to identify what is lacking, what has driven her to this place:

Page after page of strong handwriting, fragile feelings. It seemed important to keep chronicling my life now. I wondered, if I died, whether this would be the only thing to tell people what I had been.

I miss the family. I miss talking science with dad. Hanging out with the sis, watching the mad dances and girly stuff, mum’s cuteness. I wish I didn’t feel like a different person to the one they know; wish I weren’t so apprehensive of seeing them.

[...]

They all have faith in me, I know, but doesn’t anyone believe that I might know what I am doing? Or enjoy it? Or be able to tell occasionally if I’m fooling myself?

Holden 2005, 80: Holden’s italics

So Holden has used the surveillant process of journaling to identify her discomfort with addiction, desire to get clean, to find some other way to fill the void, perhaps by rebuilding her ties with family and friends. Herein, she is tracing the first steps towards finding a solution, crafting a new individual personality to replace that lost to the heroin. By identifying the flaws in her behaviour and seeking out solutions, Holden is applying self-surveillance and implementing risk mitigation herself to understand how the solutions can be identified and enacted.

Solutions in *In My Skin*

“At home there were eyes on me at all times” Holden says in her book (2005, 42), emphasising the surveillance that a practising addict lives with. This gaze, this surveillant attention, can be seen as highlighting the risk-saturated nature of her lifestyle choices and can be examined as evidence for the memoir functioning as a form of self-surveillance. However, to prove the argument of this thesis, it is now important to understand what Holden did with this gaze, and attempt to uncover the ways that she used this gaze as a disciplinary tool.

In exploring this gaze and its implications, we follow Holden into the fourth step of the pattern, watching as she begins to apply self-discipline by internalising the classification and risk mitigation already undertaken. This approach is predicated on the disciplinary potentials of surveillance as discussed in chapter one: how self-surveillance can be framed as a tool individuals can use to readjust their internal world (Burke *et al* 2012, 818). It is important to remember Foucault's reminder that once you are aware of being watched it becomes your choice, that you have the option to "assume responsibility for the constraints of power; make them play spontaneously upon [yourself and] simultaneously play both roles" (1977, 202-3) and, in doing so, reclaim your responsibility for your discursive positioning.

The discourses that moulded Holden are clearly identified in the text, often with explicit connections made between her actions and choices and the influences of the structures around her. Holden begins to engage with discourses unknown to many readers, those relating to the sex worker hierarchy, which distinguishes between women working on the street and those working in brothels, between those working to feed a habit and those working without the drive of addiction, as we see in this section:

One night after I'd been at Il Fiore for several months Bernadette was talking about heroin users. I sat there, amid the other girls, saying nothing. They were all making comments, saying that women like that were sad but not good to work with, talking of times they'd had stuff stolen. 'You can tell by their eyes,' said Bernadette. 'Their pupils are small. If you look really closely at someone—' To my horror she got up and came over to me, since I was closest.

She peered into my eyes. 'You can see that their eyes are different.'

I gazed back at her, too appalled to do anything.

'That's how you tell,' Bernadette said, sitting back easily in her corner. I blinked and lowered my eyes. Bernadette went on, describing an experience she'd had with a junkie in the street. She hadn't noticed anything different about me. I was an example of the clean girl.

I had only one small, dark scar on each arm, which I covered with make-up. I'd have to wait in the powder room, where we got ready each night, until I was alone. I always walked with my arms bent. The lighting was low.

Holden 2005, 244-5

In this section, we can see an example of hailing in practice, the gaze turns Holden into an object of Bernadette's observation, which in turns freezes Holden in her spot as the fear of being uncovered, which is carried by the gaze, leaves her "too appalled to do anything" (2005, 244). As Althusser reminded us in chapter one, this process of being hailed is inevitably about power dynamics, the process of recognising the hail and subjectifying themselves to that call, in which the individual both acknowledges and is forced onto the lower rung in an unequal power relation (1998, 294-304). Despite

'passing' Bernadette's inspection, being an "example of the clean girl" (2005, 245), Holden's awareness of her own status as an addict still forces her into a subordinate position to the hailer; she responds to the authority of a 'clean' authority figure. Holden's response to this action, her 'horror' and explanation for the steps she takes to prevent herself being made as an addict, shows her understanding that her using has placed her at the bottom of the hierarchy, that just by being a 'junkie' she is internalising the need for the disciplinary eye. Knowing she was being watched, however, is only one element of the disciplinary forces that Holden engages with. Applying this knowledge to understand her own place within the structures of power, and how she might challenge and resist this placement, is the necessary second step to achieving self-discipline, to realigning her narrative identity in a way that allows her to conclude the book in a manner which brings her closer to Eakin's "normative model of personhood" (2001, 114).

Holden's relationship to power in this book is constantly shifting and its core relocating. As this core heads towards its final pivotal shift, Holden engages with the final step of the Methodology's pattern, inverting her relation to the discursive structure through resistance. It is within her steps towards resistance that we see Fisher's "narrative fidelity" at work as Holden's actions start to make sense, drawing her closer towards "the logic of good reason" (1985, 349). In the early pages where she engages with the discourses of privilege (2005, 5-6), education, feminism (2005, 68) and the search for identity (2005, 157), through to her struggles to understand and enjoy herself as a sexual being (2005, 9 & 72), Holden's power exists as a potentiality, a burgeoning sense of responsibility for her world. However, as we have seen, her love affair with heroin leaves her an almost powerless pawn in the otherwise empowering game of sex work. In order to reclaim some sense of her power, to realign her skewed identity, Holden needs to find a place where she can resist from.

Not surprisingly Holden seeks professional help to attempt to find this space, visiting more than one mental health professional in an attempt to get clean, and address the issues that led to her addiction. However, as is the case with many dual diagnosis patients (struggling with both mental health and addiction issues), her early attempts are difficult and thwarted by the request that she get clean (fix the symptoms) before they can help her with therapy (fix the cause):

I wanted to find out the mechanisms of my behaviour, and adjust the apparatus. But I had no idea how to go about that. I wanted someone to stop me dead, stop my agile mental justifications; someone to shove me against a wall with a hand to my throat and not let me go until I had dug out some truth. But this man just kept saying that he couldn't help me until I stopped using. And I couldn't.
Holden 2005, 47

It's a gradual realisation for Holden that she needs to shift things, to find a platform for resistance, a process wherein she continuously undermines her own instincts. "People became strangers," she writes but then comforts herself with the words "it was I who was in control," (2005, 171). A little later she says:

My fears were emotional, not physical. The only thing I really feared was losing the last of my friends' and family's love, being finally given up on. That was a piercing horror, the thought that there was always still more to lose.
Holden 2005, 179

The true moment of resistance, overturning the power dynamic, occurs with this statement from Holden: "[My] self protectiveness about drugs had become the most repellent hypocrisy" (2005, 228).

The time has come for Holden to brutally assess her choices, work out what it is that keeps her using, despite the risks and fears and inequities, to identify the path out. She has identified the abnormality in her narrative identity and is actively searching for a solution, and since the problem was such a visceral and bodily one, the solution, as she discovers, lies in re-finding her body, absent the drug.

In My Skin is inevitably about bodies. Holden's re-situation of her flesh as commodity and her numbing of it with opiates begs the conclusion that for her to escape from these travails she needs to find a new way into her skin, a new way to live in her body. This obsession with the renewing of her flesh is signposted towards the beginning of the story when she ruminates on the potentially fatal outcomes of her choices:

I looked at my body: its imperfections, its tenderness, its specialness. It was mine, this body. I imagined it dead.

A scalpel slicing a Y-cut up my torso, parting the flesh. My scalp slit above my blue overdose face, and my skull opened for a pathologist's cupped hands to receive my brain. I imagined what a mortuary assistant would make of my tattoo, of the length of my fingernails, of the stubble under my arms. All the little details that would remain for another to see. Would they feel pity for me? Would they notice the fragility of my skin? I remembered James stroking my breasts, noticing a mole on my back. This strange body that I disdained so much. In the bath I wept for how I might die.
Holden 2005, 105

So, for Holden, the path to resistance lies in her ability to find a way out of this disdain, a way to look at her flesh without imagining its death. Writing *In My Skin* was the intellectual equivalent of this imagined autopsy, drawing the unforgiving scalpel of narrative through the flesh of her addiction. Holden needs to find a new reflection of herself that is separate to her history.

We rush now to the Epilogue. Holden has weaned herself off heroin and then methadone, she has finished up at Il Fiore and taken a trip alone to Rome. She has cut her hair short and had a fling with a foreign man. She has returned to Melbourne and walks past people trying to sell her smack with breezy disregard. An undefined amount of time after this, in the Epilogue that exists beyond the narrative time, Holden pulls out her working clothes, looking for a dress to wear to a party. She stands in front of a mirror and tries the dresses on:

I strip and begin to try the dresses on. I'm not sure what I'm expecting. The first is hard to get on. And the next. When I last wore these I was pared down by drugs and sex, my body lean, hard. Now the material is tight across my breasts, strains over my hips. I take each dress off hurriedly, and try the next. The sheer ones are worse: my bulges skulk under the dappled shade of fabric. I can't imagine wearing these even for a lover. I feel blobby and celibate and rather like a child playing dress-ups. I take them off and throw them in a pile.

[...]

I run fingers up my naked thighs, under the hems of the dress, raise it with a mocking smirk towards the mirror. It feels delicious, this gloating. Then I see the empty room, how ridiculous I am. And I let the hem fall, and strip it all off me.

Holden 2005, 286

This 'mocking smirk' reflected back at Holden by the mirror at the end of the story also mirrors the final line of her Prologue at the start of the story: "The smile I give when I talk about it now is, I can feel, nostalgic, provocative. A brightness comes into my eyes. And, I'm told, a hard look too," (2005, 3). Balanced between these two 'out of story time' moments, we find Holden's resistance: she slipped into heroin addiction and sex work, wore them like a sheer gown until she found what she needed from them and then she stripped it all away. Holden resists in a spectacularly effective manner by taking what society might see as a dangerous path, what a magistrate describes as a "life which is clearly causing [her] damage" (Holden 2005, 116-8) and she learns from this, grows from it and finds a place of confidence and influence. Holden argues back against the entire system, and in doing so discovers a way to align her narrative identity that normalises her body, self and experiences to explain that 'hard look' to herself.

Can *In My Skin* be understood through self-surveillance?

But did it work? Did Holden successfully apply self-surveillance to herself while constructing this memoir? And did this allow her to find a narrative identity that worked for her? Remember back when Holden wrote these words in her diary:

I miss the family. I miss talking science with dad. Hanging out with the sis, watching the mad dances and girly stuff, mum's cuteness. I wish I didn't feel like a different person to the one they know; wish I weren't so apprehensive of seeing them.

Holden 2005, 80: Holden's italics

When she travelled to Rome, after kicking the habit and giving up sex work, Holden's sister came to visit her and their exchange proves that Holden found a way out for herself:

Then my sister came over from Australia, and we went backpacking. She made me giggle, with joy at my wellness, and her own bravado at travelling, and we stomped through dusty countries as best friends. The first thing she said when I greeted her at the airport was, 'Your pupils are so big. You look different.' Her laugh was pure joy.

[...]

My sister took a photo of us, our healthy, tanned faces and dirty hair and bottles of orange juice raised in salute.

'I'm so fucking happy,' I said. 'I don't think I could ever be happier.'

Holden 2005, 280-1

Using the "hard look" (2005, 3) and "mocking smirk" (2005, 286) as bookends gave Holden a way to classify herself, find, understand and mitigate the risks she was living with, discipline herself back towards a more normative narrative model and resist the discursive drives of her compulsions. When her sister looked into her eyes, the same moment of hailing that she so feared with Bernadette at Il Fiore (2005, 244-5), Holden's renewed and restabilised discursive positioning allows her to take an equal stance to her sister, and reclaim the equilibrium of narrative 'normality'.

Case study two: *The Happiest Refugee*, Ahn Do (2010)

The Happiest Refugee is the story of how Anh Do found his way to Australia as a 'boat person', fleeing the Vietnamese War with his family, and then carving out his niche as an all-round 'ocker' bloke. The book examines his early childhood in a not-quite-familiar country, his attempts to understand and fit into a primarily white Australia, and, most

significantly for this thesis, his relationship with his father and the path to his own fatherhood. Written in the first person, the narrative employs a spiralling and weaving timeline which takes us from when Do finds out his estranged father is ill as an adult backwards and forwards to moments in his early childhood and teenage/early adult years, drawing us gradually into his marriage and the birth of his children and ending up right back at that moment when he finds out his father is ill. The tagline on the cover of this book gives a clue into how this book needs to be read: “The extraordinary true story of a boy’s journey from starvation at sea to becoming one of Australia’s best-loved comedians”. This is the first idea we get of the narrative, and gives us clues to how the story plays out. As I explore the narrative identity which Do constructs in this book it will become clear that this identity as a ‘comedian’ is essential to Do’s self-understanding and that he has, in writing this book, pulled a ‘bait and switch’ on his readers setting us up through the introduction of his problems for a punchline in the solutions.

Problems in *The Happiest Refugee*

The opening lines of this book lay the groundwork for the rest of Do’s tale, creating an immediate discordance in the reader who expects certain things based on the cover description of the author as ‘one of Australia’s best-loved comedians’:

I am flying down the Hume Highway at 130 kilometres an hour. I’ve lost control a few times but the brrrrrr of those white guide things on the side of the road keep me on track. A steering wheel wet from tears in a very slippery object. I am sobbing uncontrollably.

Do 2010, v

This is not the opening we expect, not the introduction to his narrative that we were waiting for. The opening paragraph establishes the author as distressed, disturbed. His steering wheel “wet from tears” immediately challenges the conception of Do as a light-hearted and free-spirited character, or what we expect from a “comedian” (2010, v). The reader is immediately aware that this will be a story that unpicks the darker side of Do’s life, shows the drive and motivation behind the comedian persona he has created as an adult and the ‘problems’ in his narrative.

In the next two paragraphs we meet the cause for Do’s distress, his father. “I haven’t seen my father in nine years,” Do writes, “I hated him when he when he was drunk ... I feared him even [...] I’m torn between fantasies of a happy reunion with this guy and beating him up” (2010, v). Do’s father, and how he imagines himself in relation to his father, is presented as the core narrative force of this story and, as such, is the

point around which Do's narrative identity pivots and the most fundamental way in which he classifies himself. It is impossible to read this story as Do's alone; it is the story of Do, his father and how Do constructs himself as a man and father in relation to this man he hated, feared and mourned for. It is clear from the very beginning that to achieve Eakin's "normative model of personhood" (2001, 114), Do needs to understand the unclear link between his "fantasies of a happy reunion [with his father] and beating him up" (Do 2010, v).

The book does not focus solely on the negative aspects of Do's life and, as could be expected, many of the darker parts of the story are lightened and emphasised by the use of humour. However, here – at the start of the book – there is no relief for the reader, no way out offered by a punchline. The three pages taken up by the 'Prologue' are unrelentingly dark and depressing as Do tells us that he is driving to visit his possibly ill father who lives in an area of "lower end [...] housing commission" (2010, vi). The end of the Prologue, when Do's father tells him that he has had another son with his new wife, feels like it should be a joke but is not:

Just perfect. Just what I need. A baby half-brother, a stepmum who's around my age and a self-destructive dickhead of an ex-dad who might die soon. This is too much to deal with, and I figure I'll visit just this once and then let the whole thing go, like a bad dream that never happened.

I ask Dad, 'So, what's the kid's name?'

'His name is Anh. I named him after you.'

Do 2010, vii

The reader's semiotic expectation with comedians is that while things may get dark and disturbing, we are going to be allowed a way to relieve the disturbance by laughing, that the darkness exists purely to provide the catharsis when we are hit by the punchline. But with what feels like a not-at-all funny punchline as the final lines of the prologue, the reader is left floundering, attempting to legitimise the darkness of these three pages but without the relief of comedy. Do is immediately challenging us to find our own relief from his story, close the book, walk away from the narrative. He does not give the payoff expected from a comedian's story and the reader is asked to take a leap of faith when they turn to the first chapter that Do's narrative will ease this bleakness and explain how he will overcome the problem of an absent father.

The 'Prologue' of this book is the shift into classification for Do, fulfilling step two of the pattern we are looking for. It tells us what has caused Do's move from person living the story into narrator, what the driving force is that pushes him to tell this story.

In order to form that requisite “stable and functional relationship” (Weir 2009, 583) with himself, Do needs to understand how and why it is that he finds himself driving so quickly and sadly towards this man he thought he loathed.

In *The Happiest Refugee*, Do classifies himself using the dual lenses of ‘Vietnamese’ and ‘Australian’; predicated constantly around the presence and absence of his father, his problem is understanding and internalising this identity. His father is made core of the story from the start of the first chapter, where instead of meeting Do we jump back in time and encounter his father courting his mother (2010, 1-4). Do’s father, Tam, “loud [and] confident and full of ‘everyone can get stuffed’ (2010, 3), saves his mother from a ticket inspector on a train in Vietnam, and wins her heart. Tam as a young man was a rebel prankster who picked all the plums off a tree before the Vietcong could eat them (2010, 7) and walked into a re-education camp dressed as a “high-ranking communist officer” to rescue his wife’s brothers who had been captured (2010, 8). In the opening chapters, Do’s father is the hero who gets them safely to Australia. It is his father who organises the boat to bring them to Australia (2010, 10), paddles a tiny canoe out to meet the boat (2010, 12-3), steers the boat on its long voyage (2010, 18), fixes a seemingly destroyed engine after the boat is attacked by pirates (2010, 21-2) and hacks a hole in the bottom of the boat when he realises that they can only be rescued mid-voyage if their boat is sinking (2010, 26). Do grows up on these stories of his father’s “breathtaking” bravery (2010, 8) and soaks up his “You can do anything” attitude (2010, 33). “Always question your fear, Ahn,” his father says to Do, “There’s almost never a good reason to be scared” (2010, 39).

‘Dad’ is central to the story of Do’s childhood, learning to fit into Australia. He pushes forward the family’s moneymaking ventures, the sewing business (2010, 35-7), the farm with ducks he buys at auctions (2010, 53) and enclosures they build themselves (2010, 58). Do’s father teaches him to work hard, to try, to take risks and to always stay positive: “My father is an eternal, incurable optimist. He has this incredible combination of self-belief, mixed with an addiction to risk taking” (2010, 69). So when his father’s drinking becomes problematic and he starts to physically lash out at Do, before disappearing back to Vietnam for six months, it sets the stage for a split in Do’s self-conception. This man who has always been his hero, becomes a threat, showing how this strong pivot Do has built himself around has the potential to undermine the solid foundation he has been building his burgeoning masculinity upon. His father has given him a “good reason to be scared” (2010, 39):

I figured I might stand a chance if I had a weapon.

It's hard to describe how it feels when you cross that line. When you break through having a fear of your father and decide that you're willing and ready to hurt him. Fear and adrenaline mix like a bubbling poison that eventually explodes and you find yourself scarred and distorted, and you can never go back. You lose respect for him, for authority in general. Then all the things he represents, all the principles, start to crumble and you ultimately lose respect for yourself.

[...]

I went back inside to get my knife.

I returned to the door and my father was sobbing. I was shocked. I had never seen him like this before. Ever. He turned and walked away, and I didn't see him for the rest of my childhood.

Do 2010, 72-3

Do's final line in this pivotal chapter, "[...] and I didn't see him for the rest of my childhood" (2010, 73), is a breach in the chain of self-classification that shows to us the core problem in the construction of his narrative identity. This split in Do's self-conception demonstrates Taylor's argument that identity is formed around "acceptance" or "recognition" and exists as a "dialogue" between the individual and their loved ones (1995, 232-3). This split is further emphasised by Do's narrative response.

One third of the way into the book, Do loses his father and then dives, without comment on this loss, into describing life with a single mother and how he continues to strive for success. The lack of comment Do gives to his own response to his father's leaving shows that he is caught in a bind between the Taylorian and Foucaultian approaches to understanding identity; he is left trying to answer the simplistic question of 'Who am I?' without the discursive frameworks offered by Foucault's expansion of this question to 'Why am I who I am?' (1997a, 224-228). The jump from this tension-filled scene to a discussion of schooling and the financial difficulties his mother faced in keeping the children in a private school demonstrates Do's unwillingness, at this stage of the story, to confront the following three steps – risk mitigation, discipline and resistance – he needs to take as narrator to overcome the problem of his missing father and its impact on his identity. He has classified himself against this man, and even with his absence continues to try to fit himself into the mould of what his father wanted for him. Do's extra identifiers and classifications – 'comedian', 'husband' and 'father' – all relate back to what it meant to be brought to this country by this heroic man and then be forced to grow to manhood without him. Narratively, the next chapter acts to demonstrate Do's need to distance himself from his father following the desertion.

Do's parents had searched for the best school for him, and settled on St Aloysius, with his father deciding on it because of the motto "Born for Greater Things" (2010, 65), and so it is telling that Do distracts from the loss of his father by heading into a chapter which begins with the words "St Aloysius was a great school" (2010, 75). At this school, Do's family's poverty is more evident than it might have been otherwise. Despite all his mother's efforts, Do internalised the impact of being poor at a private school. When he won a prize at his year ten graduation and had to stand on stage in front of the whole school, the words he heard from the audience in his head were: "*For God's sake, how poor are that family?*" (2010, 76: Do's italics). It is within this internalisation of poverty, ever more evident in a single-parent family, that we find Do moving from step two of the pattern suggested in the Methodology to step three. The 'drive' for Do to write this story comes out of the need to explain to us how a young man goes from the trauma of his arrival in this country, cradled safely by his heroic father, survives the loss of that man to drink, violence and desertion, and then grows up to be "one of Australia's best-loved comedians" (2010, cover) as well as a successful husband and father.

With his father's absence, Do, as the eldest son, takes on extra responsibility within the family, situating himself as partial breadwinner and shouldering the burden of helping his mother to ensure the family's survival. It is within this altered role that we first see the signs of Do implementing risk mitigation in his story, and in doing so, moving into step three of the Methodology's pattern, defining those risks that drove him to write the memoir and showing how he develops the scaffolding of the narrative identity he will build upon in the final two steps.

After years of being on the receiving end of handouts and scraping to make do – from the mis-gendered clothes the family was given right after arriving in Australia which saw his brother Khoa presenting to the world as a girl for several months (2010, 28) to the ill-fitting private school jacket which his mother lengthened so that the sleeves were "one colour of grey down to just past the elbow, and then a totally different shade of grey to the cuffs" (2010, 75) – Do knows the reality of scrimping and poverty. Do subscribes to the common perceptions of Australian success: "*As soon as I'm old enough,*" Do tells himself repeatedly "*I'm going to earn loads of money and buy Mum the biggest freakin' house in the suburb and we'll all live there together and it will be our house and the whole world can go and get stuffed,*" (Do 2010, 109: Do's italics).

Do is succumbing to Weir's "normalizing [...] regimes of power" (2009, 536), trying to find the best way as the family's new substitute father to help ease them into the semblance of mainstream Australian society. Do's 'ideal' solution, he realises, is "a lie perpetuated in schools, where you are told you have two options if you want to make loads of money: become a doctor, or become a lawyer" (2010, 109), but also a lie that shows Do's dedication to looking after his family now that his father is gone. So Do enrolls in law at university (2010, 110). As risk mitigation goes, a law degree is unequivocally an attempt to underpin Do's chaotic life beginnings with a Western safety net. However, it is not long before Do realises that "law was perfect for some but not for me" (2010, 113) and enrolls in a visual arts course at Tafe. Do studies the two fields concurrently, working towards a law degree purely for its "value" in getting him a job (2010, 113), but knowing that art held more meaning for him. So despite knowing that he is studying a field that neither appeals to nor interests him, Do continues to turn up to the essential lectures and submits the requisite assessments to get him through the law degree for the singular purpose of getting a job.

Do's childhood teaches him the contradictory value of hard work and good luck, but also how to handle risk. Learning to handle risk, for Do, comes from watching his parents. Both his parents have demonstrated the potential for a good bargain, found at just the right time, but it is in witnessing the radically varying outcomes that Do learns to balance risk and outcome. From his mother, Do learns that hard work pays off, that long hours spent on menial tasks can provide sustenance for the family. When she finds a second hand industrial sewing machine at a bargain price, she takes this as an opportunity to set up a home business (2010, 35). She enlists Do's father in the endeavour and in a very short time they realise the potential for working from home: "working from home meant they didn't need to knock off at 6 p.m. They could keep going, and the harder they worked, the more money they made. All of a sudden their destiny was in their own hands" (2010, 36). The single machine grows into a business as they seek out wholesalers, purchase more machines and enlist the children and other relatives as labour. After an incident with the untrained seven-year-old Do using the machine, with him "neatly cross-stitching that soft bit of skin between the thumb and the forefinger to the cuff of a sky-blue business shirt [when he became] a huge, kid-sized cufflink accessory, one that made a howling noise and bled everywhere" (2010, 36) they train the children in the use of the machines and move the business into a large factory space in Newtown, Sydney (2010, 39). Through everything, Do's mother works endlessly

and tirelessly, even through chronic illness, which leaves her unable to walk. When a doctor confines her to bed and yet Mrs Do insists her son walk her to the machines, Do cannot suppress his dismay and yet understands completely:

What surprised and even shocked me on this occasion was not Mum's willingness to work but that I, instead of willing her to rest, was secretly hoping she would go on, keep sewing, even at the risk of her becoming seriously ill. The fear of having no money was so merciless and overwhelming.

It's a horrible feeling—shame mixed with desperation. I once had an acquaintance who was a junkie and he explained to me his shame of breaking into his own mum and dad's house to steal from them so he could get his next fix. I felt the same watching my mother sew those garments.

Do 2010, 84

The risk mitigation lessons that Do learns from his mother's garment business (including that feeling of shame) is emphasised and driven home by those he learns from his father, leading, perhaps, to the decision to stay enrolled in both the law and arts courses. In the last years of Do's primary school years, his father decides to spend some of the hard earned money from the factory on a duck farm, which is beyond his ability to afford. "Asians love duck eggs," he tells Do, "If this goes well, I'll expand it" (2010, 53). And initially it does go well. For a few years the farm goes from success to success, with the kids spending school holidays roaming the farm, collecting the free-range eggs, and Do's father working hard building sheds, mending fences and making enclosures for a steadily growing collection of ducks (2010, 54-59). However, the hard work that they put into the farm is undone by Do's father's eye for a bargain. The same impulse that drove him to purchase the farm leads him to some bird feed that he sees for sale on the side of the road: "The bargain of the year. 'So cheap, have to buy it'" (2010, 61). A small sample of feed seems positive and so Do's father buys enough food to feed the entire farm and the next morning the family wake to find several thousand dead ducks (2010, 61). The feed was "dodgy" and in one fell swoop, Do's father has destroyed this new path to prosperity, lost out on the investment and, with the collapse of the property market in 1989, sent the family back to sewing clothes to survive (2010, 61). While Do makes no comment on the fallout of this for the family's wealth, it is evident by the abrupt ending of this chapter – "Mum and Dad went back to scrounging out a living sewing clothes in our living room" (2010, 61) – that Do has learned a vital lesson in the risk inherent in taking a gamble, and he learns the need for risk mitigation. "I hated being on the receiving end of sympathy," Do writes as he neared the end of his schooling, "I remember all through school being determined to prove that I could survive without any

outside help” (2010, 109). The risks his father took were too great for Do, too entrenched in possible failure and so he takes the lessons from his mother, the woman who only took risks when they really mattered. In the scene mentioned earlier, where Do’s drunken father comes to visit, she shows what risks mattered to her: “She pushed me back and even through her palatable terror she put herself in a position to defend me” (2010, 73). The risks Do is willing to take are those that protect his family, to give them space from the dangers of the world.

In the penultimate year of his law degree, however, Do encounters a gamble that he is willing to bet on. After a three-day group interview at a consultancy firm, Do is offered a job working “sixty to sixty-five hours a week [...] that paid well enough for us to live a better life” (2010, 137). He’d been doing the odd comedy gig, mostly stand-up at open mic nights, and compares the hours to the consultancy gig. Despite having learned the dangers of risk from his father, at this pivotal moment when he chooses to throw off the consultancy job for being a professional comedian, it is his father’s words that ring in his ears: “When you know it’s right for you, but it scares you, it means you have the most to gain from doing it” (2010, 138). Later in the book, after he has become a success, and made it into the mainstream, Do is asked about a risk he took on a celebrity charity game show where he wins \$200,000 for a poverty-stricken family and whether he’d take the same risk playing for himself. “Absolutely,” Do declares, “There’s only two times in life, there’s now, and there’s too late” (2010, 209). Do gambles on becoming a comedian, and as the next section will show, this was the path into him finding a way to tie the strands of his identity together.

The problems central to Do’s story focus around how he has classified himself in relation to his father, initially framed as a hero but turning into a threat with his increasing drinking, and how Do has balanced the need for economic success with his creative drives. He classifies himself against the heroic figure who brought them to Australia and drove forward the family’s success, but also against the violent drunkard who is a danger to the whole family. When Do drives down the highway to see his sick father, he is racing both towards and away from his problems, confronting the reality that he both loves and hates this man who taught him masculinity. Do uses classification and risk mitigation in a manner that shows his memoir operating like surveillance, identifying the problems in his world that need to be untangled. What is left now is to examine if he

also showed discipline and resistance in his writing to overcome these problems, if he found solutions to the problems.

By starting this story with him crying as he sets out on his road journey to visit his sick father, Do has given readers a clue to the solutions in this book; it will be about journeys and about tears, about how travel can change who we are. The tears that wet his steering wheel as he drives (Do 2010, v) have the same chemical components as the sea water that threatened to swamp the small fishing boat Do's family travelled to Australia in (2010, 16), ruined their food (2010, 18) and flooded through the bottom of the boat after they scuttled it to make rescue a legitimate possibility for the boatload of Germans who found them adrift at sea after two pirate attacks (2010, 25-6). How Do understands himself, within all of his classifications, is linked to water, travel and his father. The ending of his story brings this back around again as he travels to Bobbin Head in Sydney for a family trip where they hire a small boat: "I look across the water and am mesmerised by the beauty of this magnificent setting. My parents set off on a boat trip many years ago to provide their children and grandchildren a better life. And here we are, thanks to them, enjoying this perfect day" (2010, 229). The tears that Do lets fall as he started his story have been bookended by salt water that gives him, his children and wife the buoyancy to celebrate their freedoms. By celebrating this moment, Do centres the role of water in his identity, reminding his readers that identity is mutable and, like water, will mostly follow the path of least resistance. Do's choice to buttress the start and end of his narrative with water uncovers a core element of his narrative identity and allows us to understand the solutions that Do found in *The Happiest Refugee*.

Solutions in *The Happiest Refugee*

It is like water that Do approaches the solutions in this book, flowing around and through the problems, using gravity to draw him towards his conclusions. In both how he enacts self-discipline and how he demonstrates resistance, Do takes the path of least resistance but at the same time gathers up into his stream the many lessons he's learned.

Moving into step four of our expected pattern, the discipline that Do applies to himself in the narrative is fluid and varying. By combining his law and art degrees, doing the minimum to get by in law (2010, 113) and dedicating his time to learning "the craft" of art (2010, 114), Do develops the skills that will later help him to excel in comedy. On

comedy – a craft that exemplified his father’s prankster, laugh it off, shoot for the big risks approach – Do “worked like [he] was possessed” (2010, 139). The spinning out of the positive aspects learned from Do’s father as he comes to excel in this area demonstrate Do’s internalisation of the processes of self-classification and risk mitigation, showing how he has moved into the Foucaultian approach to his narrative identity, giving him room to “render the differences [between his narrative problems and a ‘normal identity’] useful by fitting them one to another” (Foucault 1977, 184). In comedy, Do takes the big risks, taking any gig that involved “getting up with a microphone” (2010, 139), entering competitions (2010, 140-1), and eventually moving into TV (2010, 143), including reality TV such as *Dancing with the Stars* (2010, 199-204) and *Celebrity Deal or No Deal* (2010, 206-209). The only media job that Do ever turns down is a shoot and interview with *Australian Women’s Forum* after he realises chances are he was going to end up at least partially naked for the shoot (2010, 143-4). This shaping and crafting of his public persona can be imagined analogously to Holden’s diary, a form of disciplinary self-surveillance but enacted in the public eye. The choice to say no to the *Australian Women’s Forum* gig demonstrates Do’s growing awareness of his public role and his potential as both a celebrity and a challenge to the stereotypes existing around both the ‘masculinity’ and ‘boat people’ discourses in Australia.

As Do’s career progresses, he also moves himself into a new role, finding new frames of discipline to exert on himself, those of husband and father. Again it is his father’s words ringing in Do’s mind when he decides to propose to Suzie: “‘If you find the right woman, don’t muck around and waste any time, marry her.’ The advice of a father who’d pissed off many years before” (2010, 148). While much narrative space is given to Do’s growing relationship with his wife, Suzie, there is little mention of his children. There are six pages dedicated to describing the wedding and reception (2010, 163-169), with only a single line, predictive in nature, where Do jumps forwards in story time to say, “Years later, when Suzie and I had our own child...” (2010, 168). While the mentions of his children are few in the text, it is obvious from the way he discusses them that the role of father is one that Do takes seriously, learning the lessons of his own absent father. It can also be read as Do protecting his children in the crafting of this story, giving them privacy and the chance to avoid what Foucault called a “fabricated” identity (1977, 192), or one thrust onto them by an external version of their story. It can also be seen as Do following Eakin’s second rule of memoir by protecting the privacy of the others that he writes about (2001, 114). “Suzie and my three boys are the best thing

about my life,” Do says, towards the end of the book (2010, 214), which leads into pure and simplistic narrative evidence of his dedication to the role of father. For two pages we are gifted close-up details of Do’s relationship with his boys, a tight focus which demonstrates that Do has taken on all of the lessons about bravery, risk and loss that he learned from his relationship with his own father. “Recently,” Do writes, “my eldest boy Xavier, a five-year-old asked me, ‘Dad, have you ever been to the moon?’” (2010, 214). Do replies in the negative, with a similar no for any other planets. “‘Dad, I might go one day’” says Xavier (2010, 214). Do takes a narrative step back and says to us, “I channelled my own dad,” before turning to his son and saying, “‘You do that Xavier. You do that ‘cos you can do anything’” (2010, 214).

Do has disciplined himself, flowing like the water that opens and closes his book past the traumas of his life and collected the lessons he has learned in order to succeed where his family had let him down. **What is left** to explore is how he used resistance in this book, and how this resistance led him closer to Eakin’s “normative model of personhood” (2010, 114). **What is left** to answer the two final questions: did Do find a space to understand his identity as a Vietnamese Australian, and did he come to find a peace with his father?

Resistance is built into Do’s very existence; it is a gift given to him by his father and embedded in the name he was given:

It reminded me of occasions in my childhood when some Vietnamese men refused to call me Ahn, and dad wouldn’t let it go until they did.

“It’s his name. Call him by his proper name.”

Ahn in Vietnamese means ‘elder brother’, and it’s a title reserved for someone senior to yourself. So by giving me his son the name, Dad made the world call me ‘elder brother’, and he made his little boy the chief.

Do 2010, 170: Do’s italics

The main form of resistance that Do uncovers in his story is the use of humour, how situating himself as a comedian allows him a space to understand how he fits into Australian society as a man and father. The almost-joke that occurs at the start of the book, when Do discovers his infant brother has the same name (Do 2010, vii), seems forgotten by Do as he writes these words, though for the reader, the irony of an ‘elder brother’ being elder brother to an ‘elder brother’ seems like a protracted punchline, a held-over joke to alleviate the lingering sadness from the Prologue. From a master ‘craftsman’ in the school of comedy, this snippet is a gift to the readers for continuing so far on the voyage with Do.

Stand-up comedy is a not-very-Vietnamese way to earn money, as stated by Do when describing telling his mother of his goals: “There are no stand-up comedians in Vietnam [...] The thought of just one person on stage with a microphone making people laugh for an hour just seemed like a ridiculous way to make a living” (2010, 138). For Do, however, comedy isn’t just a way to make a living but also a means to overcome the “isolated and one-off incidents” (2010, 105) of racism that he encounters. Do tells a story that shows exactly how comedy allowed him to build almost unimaginable bridges, how he used it as a resistance to the discursive lingering of Australia’s once institutionalised racism.

The first sign that his gig is going to be a hard one comes with the MC’s announcement that they will have minute’s silence “for all our fallen brothers in World War Two, Korea and Vietnam” (2010, 181). “*Bloody hell,*” Do thinks, “two hundred guys sitting quietly remembering fallen comrades who were shot by Asian men and I’m waiting to go on to do thirty minutes of funny stuff” (2010, 181: Do’s italics). ““Jesus Christ!”” the MC declares on seeing Do at the side of the stage, then covers with ““Please put your hands together for our comedian... Duncan O’Reilly!”” (2010, 181). Do starts telling jokes to a tense and silent audience. Off to his left sits an old man who makes a gun of his right hand, shooting imaginary bullets at Do as he stands on stage (2010, 182). After trying to ignore him, Do decides to confront the issue:

I couldn’t pretend I hadn’t noticed, and so said with a nervous smile, ‘Sir, you’ve probably killed a few guys who looked just like me’.

Everyone looked on, waiting for his response. It was one word.

‘Fourteen.’

He’d killed fourteen Vietnamese in the war.

[...]

Quitting seemed like a very attractive option at this point in time, but do I just walk off and call it a night before things get worse, or should I try one last thing? Dave used to say that the hard gigs were an opportunity to test your mettle: ‘Learn from them Ahn, treat them like a rare gift’.

I decided to bring forward all the material that would prove I was just an Aussie kid. So I did a number of jokes about bull terriers and Datsuns and housing commission estates, and slowly I was getting a few chuckles. Then I moved onto footy jokes, farming jokes and kiwi jokes. Slowly, slowly, I won them over. The old guys finally realised that if they closed their eyes, this Vietnamese kid was actually just an Aussie comedian up there talking about his working-class childhood.

Do 2010, 182

After the show Do finds himself drinking with several of the old men after one says “Geez, you’re funny for a slope,” (2010, 183) and Do decides to take it as a compliment. He listens to their stories and finds it “wonderful to hear my dad and uncle’s stories

confirmed by Aussie diggers” (2010, 183). Do tells his own stories of how his uncle had been a “sapper [clearing] landmines” (2010, 183) during the war. And this is where the magic happened as they united in the memory of the Jimmy Barnes’ song *Khe Sahn*. The men who’d been so surprised to see this Vietnamese guy get up to tell jokes at a memorial event, see past the colour of his skin to find a familiarity with his humour, the quintessentially Australian coping mechanism:

‘You know why we lost the war, Anh? It was all those bloody tunnels that the communists dug. We could never do that. You know why? Because with us Aussies, for every one guy who’s digging there’s got to be five standing around having a smoko.’ We all threw our heads back and roared.
Do 2010, 183

It’s in the sharing of a punch line, the ‘getting’ of a joke, that Do is able to find a space of limited mutual understanding with some of this crowd who had so loathed him as he stepped on stage, for no other reason than his external racial identity. The shared understanding of similarities and differences is a pivotal moment for Do, which he describes as “the greatest gift, because I have not since encountered an audience even remotely that terrifying” (2010, 184). In his passive resistance, his cracking jokes to challenge stereotypes, Do finds a way to shift the classifications these diggers imposed upon him.

In choosing these stories to classify himself as both similar to and different from the “Aussie comedian [...] talking about his working-class childhood” that these diggers might imagine if they closed their eyes, Do shows us in action the lessons he learned from the water that bookends the memoir (2010, 182); he challenges the discursive forces of ‘white Australia’ using humour, the path of least resistance to create his own space for resistance. However this is not, for me as a reader, the most significant use of humour by Do in constructing his narrative identity.

In my reading, this entire narrative was an act of comedic resistance, with Do using all his skills as a joke cracker, dragging his readers along to the punch line. As he unpacks his classification, risk mitigation and disciplinary actions as a memoirist, it is all leading up to a final joke, which he has set up from the start of the book. The “narrative fidelity” (Fisher 1985, 349) appears here, as the loose ends of the story – the punchline of the joke – is unveiled. The dissonance of a comedian opening a book with tears is finally believable and the story makes sense to his readers.

From the very first pages we, the readers, are left wondering about the health of his father, expecting his death by the end of the book. Each mention of Do's father adds weight to this belief, as he guides us through his relationship with his father from the family's decision to leave Vietnam in a leaking boat, to him leaving Do's mother with three children and no means of support to pursue his own life. As Do untangles his own path to adulthood, detailing his loves and losses and describes becoming a father himself, the mentions of his father become ever more embedded in the reader's mind as a form of memorial. We assume that this book is Do's way of coming to terms with the absence where there should be presence of father and grandfather. The swifty that I mentioned earlier, is, of course, Do's revelation towards the end of the book that his father is still alive, healthy (2010, 227) and that they are working on reconstructing a relationship (2010, 170-3). The fluid path that Do has followed in learning to understand and engage with his father is part of the narrative identity that he constructs. A man who dealt with the very worst in his life by making it into jokes has cracked another giant joke as he unpicks what he needs from his relationship with his father to understand himself as a father.

This is a form of power play, with Do utilizing his discursive authority as a cracker of jokes to 'trick' his reader. This play with power is an essential element of Do's narrative identity, a way of his combining the comedic structure with narrative construction to draw his readers on to the end of the book where the actual punchline occurs. Do's narrative identity is to be found in the interplay between his stated identity as 'comedian' and the obvious traumas and discomforts that he details in the story.

Can *The Happiest Refugee* be understood through self-surveillance?

The joke that Do played on us relates entirely to his father, the giver of the salt water at the start of the book and the buttress of that at the end of the book, and in this joke is the strongest evidence that *The Happiest Refugee* can be understood as a form of self-surveillance. For a book that centred around the problem of Do forming and understanding his identity *sans* his father – the hero, the drunkard, the menace – his narrative decision to trick us into thinking it was also a memorial to this man demonstrates a fully functioning "normative model of personhood" (Eakin 2001, 114). When we opened the first pages of Do's book, we were quickly convinced that this story would end with his father dying. "[S]omething is not quite right," Do writes of that first

meeting after the sad panicked drive down the Hume Highway, “His speech is slightly off. Every now and then he pauses a little too long. It’s not long before I learn that my father has a tumour in his head” (2010, vii). The first chapter drives home this impression of his father’s death by the use of tense. When discussing his mother’s family, Do says “My mother has seven brothers and sisters” (2010, 4) but for his father he says “My dad was the fourth born” (2010, 6). This seemingly careless use of tense acts to move his father into the past while keeping his mother alive in the reader’s mind. Sandwiched between these two moments, however, is a hint to the trickery coming up later in the book, the bait-and-switch, where Do tells the story of two of his mother’s siblings who had near death experiences; one soldier who got drunk, overslept and missed catching a boat which then exploded (2010, 6) and one who was presumed dead from malaria, placed in a coffin, and then awakened and was released after banging on the lid (2010, 5).

We are given hint after hint that part of Do’s narrative identity hinges on his ability to untangle what he learned of parenting from this man, to work out the fiction from the fact. “So often we heard him tell us about something he had done and not really believed it, or thought he was exaggerating. Later we’d hear others talking, confirming his truth [...] We eventually learned not to doubt the lengths and breadths of his adventures or, at times, his stupidity” (2010, 97). The punchline of his extended joke comes just two pages from the end of the book. Meeting his father in an airport with his young son Xavier, the intergenerational paternal unit coalesces as Do’s father picks up his grandson, lifts him up to his shoulder, pulls his son in for a hug and grins the long-awaited words into Do’s neck “‘I’m clean, Anh [...] Doctor says I’m clean’” (2010, 227). In writing the story of himself becoming a comedian, set against the unpicking of this heroic and occasionally horrific father figure, Do has shown us the internalisation of the classification, risk mitigation, discipline and resistance. He has reached the end of the story with a fully intact narrative identity and a way to move forward as a whole individual.

Case study three: *Guantanamo: My journey*, David Hicks (2010)

In *Guantanamo: My journey* David Hicks tells the story of his upbringing as a ‘normal’ Aussie layabout, growing up in the suburbs of Adelaide and his search to find an identity through the many different templates on offer to him. His experiments in identity

consist of trying on and discarding many “uniforms” (2010, 77), including, unfortunately for Hicks, that of freedom fighter in Pakistan in the days following the terror attacks on the United States in September 2001. Besides the Introduction, which pulls us forward in time to Hicks’ detainment in the US Military prison at Guantanamo Bay, the rest of the book follows a straight and coherent linear narrative, told in a clear and sometimes trauma-saturated first person voice. Considering that Hicks spent six years undergoing barbarous treatment in Guantanamo on what were later found to be scurrilous charges retrospectively applied by the US Government (O’Brien 2015), it is surprising that just over half of the book deals with this time. The 228 pages that cover Hicks’ imprisonment are barely adequate to detail the horrific treatment he underwent at the hands of this global superpower. What is astonishing is the progress Hicks makes in fleshing out, exploring and understanding his own identity during the process of narrating this. Considering the international furore and national outrage caused by this case, it is inevitable that Hicks is writing to audiences beyond the typical memoir reader; this book is his truth and response to the US Government who held him illegally, the Australian Government who for six years refused to intercede on his behalf and the media who speculated and hypothesised about both his guilt and motives throughout and after his incarceration (2010, xii).

The narrative identity that Hicks constructs in this book relates almost entirely to his search for an identity and his need to tell of the atrocities he experienced and witnessed, and as such it is probably the most straightforward of the three case studies. As we follow Hicks’ progression through the steps of the pattern suggested by my Methodology, I suspect we will find that, both in living these experiences and reshaping them as narrator of this memoir, Hicks found an identity that he was capable of living within.

Problems in *Guantanamo: My journey*

The first hints to the problems in this book come in the Dedication where Hicks dedicates this book (in part) to “the human beings still detained in Guantanamo” (2010, v). The use of the descriptor ‘human beings’ here, instead of ‘people’ acts as an instant acknowledgement of the inhumanity we are to see in the next few pages and a reminder that the subjects of this tale, Hicks included, are not animals.

Unlike either Holden or Do, Hicks’ memoir starts with an Author’s Note which gives us a direct insight into his move into step two of our pattern, the decision to shift

himself into narrator and tell us this story. He begins this Author's Note with the one question he says he has been asked again and again is "What was I doing in Afghanistan?" (2010, xi), to which he responds with his own two questions: "What could I have done to make the treatment I endured acceptable? Is there any situation which would warrant such treatment?" (2010, xi). The use of 'human beings' in the Dedication, combined with these questions immediately situates Hicks' memoir as a "witness narrative" as identified by Rak (2001, 229). With so much media coverage and speculation about Hicks' role in the conflict that led to the 9/11 attacks (2010, xi-xii), it is hardly surprising that Hicks declares: "The record cannot be left as it currently stands" (2010, xii). The Introduction that follows aims to show the reader exactly where Hicks' version of the record begins, with the absolute dehumanisation and loss of control that resulted from his imprisonment. Like *Do It* it is a challenge to the reader to keep reading if they dare and like *Holden* it immediately places the reader into a world which is not 'normal'.

While reading the Introduction, it is almost impossible to imagine that Hicks can make it to the end of this book to find a "stable and functional relationship with [him]self" (Weir 2009, 538). All of the problems of his splintered identity are made evident in the four pages of the Introduction; he has classified himself according to the strictures of the regime he lives under. Hicks is locked alone in a mesh steel cage inside a building, which is lit twenty-four hours a day (2010, 1). He has no idea of time, though can roughly estimate it based on the contents of the food he is delivered at regular intervals (2010, 1) and by the familiar faces of the soldiers who sit outside the cage, "expressionless, saying nothing," recording Hicks' actions in a "hardcover notebook, bound in green cloth" (2010, 1-2). The book, Hicks knows, is "analysed periodically by psychiatrists, psychologists, behavioural experts, intelligence operatives" (2010, 2). "I have been reduced to an open book for all to read," Hicks says, "I feel like an animal sprawled upon a dissection table" (2010, 2), reminding us again of that descriptor, 'human beings'.

At this stage, Hicks is unable to even consider the question 'Who am I?' much less 'Why am I who I am?' Everything he thinks, believes, does, everything he is, is controlled by the chain fence around him, the never-ending lights and the constant, intentional surveillance. The main question for Hicks at this stage is 'What am I?' Hicks thinks, "I was convinced long ago that there is nowhere I can turn for help; there is no-one who can intervene," (2010, 2) and in doing so he shows the control the system has over his mind.

"I don't bother much these days to conjure up that other life," he declares, "it's becoming more of a fantasy – these four walls are the new reality" (2010, 3). He believes now that this is all there is, all there will ever be; he has lost control of his own reality. What Hicks does in his cell is controlled, "I do not sleep much because my captors tell me it is not allowed," (2010, 3), stripping away behavioural autonomy. And in a final twist of the narrative blade, even the label 'human being' is stripped away, leaving him as merely a subject of his captors' ingenious new forms of torture:

[M]y fears fuel my nightmares – fear of pain, fear of the beatings, fear of the strange mind games I am subjected to. My captors never sleep. They work around the clock, devising new ways to harm me and the other detainees. In other camps I have listened to the screams of fellow prisoners, watching them being taken away for their 'special treatment', listening to their accounts of what they endured when they were returned. These are the experiences that scare me now. They have not stopped. My captors claim they will always continue. There is no warning of these assaults – any time, day or night, I am never safe.

Hicks 2010, 3

The omniscient role Hicks has given his captors – "they never sleep. They work around the clock" (2010, 3) – shows Hicks' internalised powerlessness in the face of these tortures. The animal-like handling of the other captives, "watching them being taken away" and "when they were returned" reduces even movement to the whim of the captors (2010, 3). And the final line, "I am never safe," shows the fear that Hicks lives with, that this will always be his place, he will never escape, he is nothing but an object to those outside the cage (2010, 3).

The Introduction ends with booted feet entering the building, Hicks being shackled and hobbled, blindfolded and directed with "barked orders" to a waiting van (2010, 4). As the van carries Hicks away to his next torture session, the objectification is cemented by the radio message that the driver transmits: "The package is en route" (2010, 4). In four pages, Hicks has classified himself completely. He is an animal, a subject of torture, lost in this nightmare. Hicks, at the start of this narrative, is nothing, but he still finds the space to "wonder when this will end" (2010, 4). As suggested in the Methodology, it is the structures which surround Hicks that have made him what he is, created this fractured and inhuman self-classification (Foucault 2009, 539).

Unlike our other case studies, with Hicks the shift to the third step of the pattern, the risk mitigation put in place to explain his need to tell the story, occurs in the first chapter of the book. Hicks immediately begins the process of unpicking how he ended up in this

cage as a dehumanised object of torture by showing us his path to the cage. The story of Hicks' childhood and early years are riddled with his attempts to find and understand his identity, and in doing so to come to that vital place of a "stable and functional relationship with [him]self" (Weir 2009, 538). From his early years, and in the narration of the story, Hicks is practicing risk mitigation, picking out the strands of his attempts at identity formation which contextualise the unfortunate coincidence of his being in Afghanistan, when captured in the weeks after the 9/11 attacks.

From early childhood, Hicks "felt like an outsider, like I didn't fit in [...] everyone seemed self-consumed while appearing to operate as a unit, a unit I longed to be a part of" (2010, 12). The military language here, 'a unit', implies the 'uniform' that Hicks is searching for. After changing schools, Hicks finds a group who dress as he does, "tight jeans, flannelette shirts, sported mullets," who smoke and drink like he does, and he tried to fit in (2010, 11-2). There was only so far this uniform could take him, however, so when Hicks starts learning welding he swaps the 1980s heavy metal mask for the "blue workman's overalls" and "felt like a productive and included member of society" (2010, 15). At fifteen, Hicks decides to become a stockman, a career that suits his love of nature, camping and adventure (2010, 16-7), where he originally stands out but then "blended in and looked like I'd been in the bush all my short years" (2010, 17). Two years later, having learned the trade, he ends up in Adelaide where he falls in love with a woman with whom he has two children and shifts to working with racehorses (2010, 29). The scant details that Hicks gives of this relationship are far outweighed by the details given about his work with the racehorses, an obvious attempt to protect the identity of his children, again following Eakin's second rule of memoir (2001, 114), but also a telling indication that for Hicks, this is exactly the sort of belonging he is searching for. Describing himself as "heartbroken and disillusioned" when he discovers his partner is having an affair (2010, 33), Hicks claims it took him "roughly a year to accept his family had vanished" after the mother moves away with a new man (2010, 33). The fallout from this ending relationship could be read as contributing to Hicks' next decision, to leave Australia and work with horses in Japan (2010, 34-35), which leaves him feeling the urge for a challenge, and the need to travel to places not usually open to Western tourists. After some reading, he decides that the two biggest challenges will be "crossing the border from Nepal into Tibet" and "getting in and out of Afghanistan" (2010, 39). And it is here that we find the seeds of what led to the cages of Guantanamo; the urge to find a new identity as a daredevil, adventurous explorer.

This is where everything changes for Hicks. While it is obvious that he is on a quest to find what Taylor described as “being true to myself [...] being true to my own originality, [...] realising a potentiality that is properly my own” (1995, 229), he has no way of knowing where this path will take him. At around the same time he is discovering the travel urge, Hicks first hears of the conflict in Kosovo and is hit with an immediate “compulsion to go and help” (2010, 43). Finally, in this decision, Hicks finds the kind of belonging he has been searching for. It has to be imagined that it would have been difficult to narrate this section of the story without making the obvious leaps forward to the consequences of these choices. Hicks has been concerned about finding access to the Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), a group of volunteers fighting to protect the Kosovo Albanians from the Serbian forces (2010, 42). However, as he enters the region by plane this problem is solved:

Fortunately, that uncertain future was cleared up by the young man I sat next to on the plane [...] He asked why I was travelling to his country. I answered that my intention was to secure a hotel room and find the KLA. He told me to forget the hotel – I would be welcome to stay at his mother’s with him – and that he himself would take me to the KLA [...] His family were lovely and welcoming.
Hicks 2010, 46

In volunteering with the KLA, Hicks has found the kind of belonging he’s been seeking. The immediate warm welcome he receives, and the camaraderie he finds amongst the other volunteers (2010, 48-59) finally gives Hicks a uniform he is comfortable wearing. When the KLA come to an agreement with NATO that requires all foreigners to leave the force (2010, 59), Hicks briefly considers joining up with paid mercenaries in Venezuela; however, after researching Australia’s law concerning its citizens engaging in overseas conflict (2010, 62-4) he instead resolves to return to Australia.

Once back in Australia, Hicks makes two decisions that will later be used by the US Government to justify his imprisonment; however, for Hicks they are just a way of furthering his passion for helping the underdog. Firstly, finding that he once again “felt alone, unsatisfied and frustrated with what was happening overseas, and by the lack of interest from those around [him]” (2010, 69), Hicks attempts to find out more about the conflicts centred on Muslim nations and then quickly converts to Islam (2010, 70). In 1999, noting that “Pakistan was the closest Islamic state to the beginning of [his] previously planned Asian overland route” (2010, 72), Hicks leaves Australia again. While Hicks initially joined a religious community in Pakistan it was not long before he encountered another militant group, Lashkar-e-Taiba (*trans.* ‘Army of the Righteous’:

LeT) who were engaged in a freedom fight in Kashmir (2010, 83). The second decision, to join LeT, is the one that seals Hicks' fate; though at the time he thought he was doing what any decent person would do: "Of all the people I met on my travels, whether in Kosovo, Kashmir, Afghanistan or the US soldiers in Guantanamo Bay," Hicks declares, "there was one thing they all had in common: they all thought they were doing a good thing" (2010, 140). After finishing out a period of religious service in Pakistan, Hicks signs up with LeT, hands over his passport and money and heads off into the wilderness for training (2010, 98-9).

Hicks spends almost a year training with LeT (2010, 99-120), before realising he is never going to see action and deciding to return to Australia (2010, 121). It is at this stage that Hicks' sense of adventure wins over and he makes the resounding decision to attempt the crossing into Afghanistan while still technically a member of LeT (2010, 132). His crossing is successful, as is his return to Pakistan; however he'd left his documents behind in Kabul, including his passport (2010, 150). One random day, no different from any other, he sits on a friend's lounge in Quetta, watching the film *The Siege* about terrorist attacks in New York (2010, 148). When the film finishes he starts channel surfing and comes across the footage of the planes flying into the Twin Towers (2010, 148). His first thoughts are that the Islam he knows would never justify this terror and his second a feeling of "a tremendous loss" for the victims (2010, 148-9).

And herein lies the risk mitigation of this entire history, Hicks has been trying to both show and tell an answer to that question: "Why were you in Afghanistan on 9/11?" He has told all the stories of trying to find a place to belong, in an attempt to explain to both readers and himself that one terrible fact. When the attacks happen he is in Pakistan, but the only way he can get home is by crossing that border again to get his passport.

On the way back out of Afghanistan with his papers, Hicks is captured by the Northern Alliance (2010, 174-5) and sold to the US military for "US\$5000" (2010, 179). His time in hell has begun and all the attempts he has made at belonging are soon to be washed away, leaving him as the animalistic object of torture we met in the Introduction.

If we return here to the statement by Rak about witness narratives, "in witness narrative, elements of the narrator's so-called self are subordinated not to an autobiographical narrative structure about causality, but to *the recounting of the events*" (2001, 229: Rak's italics), then it becomes obvious why Hicks needs to give so

much detail about the events leading up to his arrest and his drive to join these armed freedom fighters. The question of his presence in Afghanistan needs to be answered in order for Hicks the narrator to be “subordinated [...] to *the recounting of the events*,” (Rak 2001, 229: Rak’s italics). For the reader to believe what comes in the second half of the book – and that haunting Introduction – we first need to understand why he was there to witness the torments of Guantanamo Bay. Telling this half of the story is Hicks mitigating the risk of the second half being so horrific that without firm and concrete foundations it risks being unbelievable.

For Hicks in narrative time, this seems like a poor place to be left, but for an analysis of the construction of his narrative identity, his history and travels has given us a framework to understand not just his final choice to re-enter Afghanistan but how every step of the way there he was acting under drives that are supported by the understanding of identity formation given in the Research Background chapter. In his travels and decisions to volunteer in these international conflicts, Hicks was searching for a true belonging, a way of “realising a potentiality that is properly [his] own” (Taylor 1995, 229). He has shown us how he classified himself within the system and how he came to be part of the system in the first place; now it is time to consider how Hicks used discipline and resistance to carve his a path towards a way out of the system.

Solutions in *Guantanamo: My journey*

As we begin exploring the solutions Hicks found to align his fractured identity and find some way back to a “normative model of personhood” (Eakin 2001, 114), we will examine how he found ways to enact both self-discipline to the systems he existed within and ways to resist them.

As Hicks moves into step four of the pattern suggested by the Methodology, he is carrying the problems identified through both the self-classification of himself as nothing but an animal – an object to be tortured by his captors – and the risk mitigation that established his story need to fight for freedom and his narratorial drive to create a witness record of the event.

While the ‘discipline’ that Hicks was subjected to within the US military system is an essential and horrific component of his story, for this research the Introduction is enough evidence of the trauma he lived through. The externally imposed discipline of the camps Hicks moves through is a narrative mask to cover the self-discipline that Hicks

finds within himself on the journey as we begin to look at how Hicks used discipline to help lead him towards solutions for the problems he's encountered.

Hicks had been turned into an animal by the system he is in and so it is useful to look back on what he knows of training animals. "Forming a bond with a horse is extremely rewarding," he writes of his time in Japan, "especially when it involves a horse deemed troublesome" (2010, 36). "Problems", such as disobedience or "outright dangerous behaviour," he knows, come from "mistreatment" or "physical abuse by aggressive, impatient people" (2010, 36). And it is with this knowledge of the impact of aggression and violence that he enters the system at Guantanamo Bay. From the very start of his incarceration, Hicks is watching the system, trying to learn the rules and work out how to prevent himself being categorised as a 'troublesome horse'.

One of the first ways Hicks becomes aware of his potential for self-discipline at Guantanamo is by understanding his place within the system of propaganda that the upper echelon of the US military has put into place. "I noticed after my arrival at Guantanamo," he writes, "that the guards took a special interest in me. I soon learned what this curiosity was about [...] many thought that their government had captured hard-core professional terrorists," (Hicks 2010, 217). Hicks realises that the guards were encouraged to be afraid of him, to fear speaking to him – an "English-speaker" – to prevent bonds being formed which might emphasise his humanity to his captors (2010, 217-8). By understanding the strategy behind the stories circulating about him, Hicks is able to (mostly) shake off the stories he hears about himself as a ruthless killer and manipulative liar (2010, 218-9).

Hicks walks the fine line between being in the system and being under the system. Early on, he is warned by International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC) workers that "The most dangerous thing to do is adapt, because you will keep adapting until there is nothing left" (2010, 219). He clings to the ICRC's presence, knowing that their being there means "[he] had not been forgotten; [...] had not 'disappeared'" (2010, 221) but at the same time he never forgets that his captors are "in total control of [his] fate" (2010, 222). By placing these two statements – 'never adapt' and 'total control of his fate' – within three pages of each other, Hicks demonstrates the impossibility of the first and the inevitability of the second. It is hardly surprising then, that Hicks finds himself with no other option than to be "beaten into robot submission" (2010, 233). Towards the end of the book, Hicks writes that he "had become good at mental discipline" (2010,

397), and it was within this balancing act, being the 'robot' but maintaining the memory that he still exists, has not 'disappeared', that shows this mental self-discipline.

There are moments, however, where Hicks is forced to let go of this refusal to adapt, forced to give into the will of his captors, moments where his hope and belief in the system win over his determination to let go of this mental discipline. When Hicks has his first interrogation with ASIO, with Australian Federal Police present, it is the temptation of a chance to discuss his complaints and requests (2010, 242) and food other than cold half serves of military rations and "warm water" that get him to participate in an interview about his actions with LeT and KLA (2010, 243). When the Australians claim that they are there "to see if [he] had broken any Australian laws" and that if he hadn't, "they would be able to get [him] out of Guantanamo" (2010, 242), Hicks breaks, gives into hope and agrees to the interview. For two days he "ate, drank and smoked like [he] never would again" (2010, 243) and at the end hears what he thinks will be his ticket out of this nightmare: "based on the interview they could see no breach of Australian law" (2010, 244). The illusionary hope created by this interview, however, quickly vanishes and from it Hicks learns that false hope is just another way the system is working to keep his mind enslaved (2010, 247). Hicks gives himself a deadline of August 2002; if that passes without his release, he will accept the hopelessness of his situation (2010, 247). By undertaking these experiments in trusting the system, but maintaining his back-up plans, Hicks disciplines himself into letting go of expectations, learning to live under as well as within the system from day-to-day. He lets the monstrosity and monotony of the camps wash over him, but not erode his will to one day become something more than what these cages have made him.

That first hint to the problems in Hicks' narrative identity, back in the Dedication – "the human beings still detained in Guantanamo," (2010, v) – is also the first hint to his resistance, the final path to a solution for Hicks, and his move into the fourth step of our expected pattern. To realign his shattered identity, move forward into step five of the Methodology's pattern and find his "normative model of personhood" (Eakin 2001, 114), Hicks needs to reimagine himself as a human being. If we remember back to the classification section and its analysis of the Introduction, we find there are four ways in which Hicks is controlled within this system; his thoughts, reality, behaviour and humanity. It is through challenging and resisting within these four areas that we are able

to see Hicks inverting the power dynamics – primarily internally – acting and writing himself back into a position of agency, of humanity.

To challenge the control that the system held over his thoughts, Hicks reminds himself and us of the Geneva Conventions. He describes the soldiers joking about them when deciding whether to single Hicks out to “have some fun with” (2010, 203), thinking to himself: “*Haven’t they done enough?*” (2010, 203: Hicks’ italics). In this moment he is acknowledging to us, as his readers, that what he has gone through already has breached these international rules on the treatment of prisoners in so many ways as to be almost ridiculous. Ten pages later, he steps out of story time, explicitly taking on his narrator voice as he introduces chapter eighteen with this quote from then US Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld:

We have indicated that we plan to, for the most part, treat [the prisoners] in a manner that is reasonably consistent with the Geneva Conventions, to the extent they are appropriate, and that is exactly what we have been doing.
2010, 213: Hicks’ italics

By using the firm narratorial position of an introductory quote to present this statement, smack in the middle of chapters filled with breaches of the Geneva Convention, Hicks highlights the politicking and deliberate deceit hidden behind phrases like ‘for the most part’, ‘reasonably consistent with’ and ‘to the extent they are possible’. As narrator, Hicks is showing us here the official US position that it is not their fault if they fail to uphold the Conventions, and hence, blame for the breaches can be shifted back onto the detainees themselves. In exposing the double-speak of the US echelon, Hicks demonstrates that he is wrenching back control of his thoughts, finding a space from which to resist, a platform to prevent his narrator from adapting.

The torturous hyperreality that Hicks is living within could be easy to succumb to if he did not use the self-discipline described above to keep a firm hold on a reality beyond that which was being enforced upon him. Both within story and narratorial time, Hicks shows that he finds ways to keep hold of reality, to draw it close to himself. He remembers being greeted in Guantanamo Bay by a megaphone-amplified voice that declares: ““You are now the property of the US Marine Corps. You have reached your final destination. Welcome to Cuba,”” and while he is told that this was never said, he owns his own memory with “I swear I heard it” (2010, 211). Similarly, when he is presented with a statement by another inmate, which the US government was relying on to incriminate him, some claims “so bizarre [...] that the whole document suggested

the author was not in a clear mind,” Hicks maintains a belief that the statement has been made under duress (2010, 329). When the author of the statement is released a few weeks later, Hicks’ military lawyer, Major Mori, passes on that the statement had been written under interrogation, including “sleep deprivation”, physical torture, and interrogators convincing the writer that Hicks was writing a similar document about him (2010, 329-30). However, for Hicks, possibly the strongest way he resists Guantanamo’s control over his reality is with a refusal to be silenced on the conditions and treatment, despite this leading to several periods of increased torture, deprivation and mistreatment. At around the time the shocking photos of Guantanamo begin to trickle out publicly, in March 2004, the US military instigates investigations where Hicks is invited to testify due to his “past complaints of mistreatment” (2010, 308). The military commission finds his complaints “unfounded” and the Australian government releases a statement that they have “‘assurances’ [...] that [he] had been treated humanely” (2010, 308). Following this, Hicks’ letters from home begin to arrive brutally redacted: “Sometimes entire pages were blacked out so I could not read them” (2010, 309). Later Hicks complains to consular officials about various atrocities, including such things as force feeding inmates, dosing them with laxatives then making them wear unchanged nappies until a “rash [...] spreads across the body”, treating the rash and then beginning the whole process again (2010, 350-2). Immediately following this he is moved to “the notorious Camp Five” (2010, 354) and gets the very clear message: “‘Appreciate what you have and your general treatment, because we can always make things worse’” (2020, 357). Despite these punishments, Hicks is still striving to find some way back into his humanity, some sense of control over his own body, a path to challenge their control over his behaviour.

The third way in which Hicks has been dehumanised is by the rigid control of his behaviour, and so it was by acting outside of his captors’ control that he shows resistance in this area. It is by watching another inmate while in Delta Block that Hicks first hits upon the most effective way he can demonstrate control over his behaviour. The detainee in the cage opposite him, an Arabic speaker, has been becoming increasingly distressed but as the captors do not speak his language or bother to get an interpreter, his symptoms rapidly increase (2010, 246). After several attempts at expressing his rage, the inmate “hacked into his arm with a small sliver of metal [and used the blood] as ink” to write a protest message on the window of his door (2010, 246-7). Hicks states nothing more than “they took him away. I do not know what

became of him; I never saw him again" (2010, 247). It is telling that the next paragraph begins with Hicks setting the August 2002 deadline mentioned above. While he is not stating explicitly that he has discovered self-harm as a form of bodily control, the narrative leap to a deadline for hopelessness gives the reader the inevitable message that he has found a way to achieve bodily autonomy. It takes a significant period of good behaviour from Hicks, and a transfer to Camp Echo, to get the guards to trust him with a safety razor for shaving his face (2010, 344). In this camp there are small food flaps in the doors and Hicks establishes the habit of leaving his razor behind this flap (2010, 344). Eventually, the guards "became slack" and one of the razors is left with him (2010, 344). Using a similar time-heavy approach, he also procures nail clippers, which he then uses to break the blade free of its plastic casing (2010, 345). "Years later," he writes in his firm future narratorial voice, "I was told by a psychologist that because I had lost control of every aspect of my life, this plan gave me a sense of control, that I still had a say in my destiny" (2010, 345). However, after the complaints to the consular officials and the move to Camp Five, Hicks is forced to let go of his suicide plan as the strict surveillance make it impossible for him to enact it (2010, 357). Regardless of his need to let go of the suicide plan, it has given Hicks a momentary sense of control, a way of resisting the system's control over his behaviour and body. He is inching ever closer to becoming human again, at least in his mind.

Hicks' final step of resistance is to reclaim his humanity, and to do this he needs to use all the lessons he had learnt from his self-discipline, use the discursive structures of the system against itself. Hicks needs to do what common sense and "narrative fidelity" (Fisher 1985, 349) demand of him, he needs to do whatever it takes to get out of those cages. After being informed by Major Mori of a message from then Australian Prime Minister John Howard that "under no circumstances would he let [Hicks] return to Australia without [...] entering a guilty plea," Hicks is "shattered" (2010, 382). Hicks knows that the Australian government is playing hardball and "all [he] knew was that there was no way [to] go on living in Guantanamo" (2010, 383). When he is finally presented with a plea deal, admitting he has "provided material support to a terrorist organisation" (2010, 387), and realising there was nothing in the deal to prevent him being returned to Australia to serve out his sentence (2010, 388), he plays the system at itself and signs the deal (2010, 388). He has to "waive all rights to appeal" and "agree that the US has the right to arrest him as an Unlawful Enemy Combatant if [he] ever left Australia again" (2010, 388), but he signs the deal. He knows the deal is "outrageous",

but by this stage is willing to do anything to get out of Guantanamo (2010, 388). The final insult by the system is that before he is released, he's forced to sign documents stating his "plea deal was voluntary," despite being told that if he doesn't sign, then "the Australian government would not take [him]" (2010, 390). Sixty days after signing the plea deal, Hicks is taken from Guantanamo and returned to Australia (2010, 390-3). In an action that aligns with "the logic of good reason" (Fisher 1985, 349), Hicks signs the confession that would get him out of this seemingly endless nightmare.

Back in Australia, in Yatala Prison in Adelaide he is visited again by the Australian Federal Police who asked him to sign a document that is "basically a mirror image of the plea agreement" (2010, 396). Finally free from the constant torture and interrogations, this is Hicks' ultimate resistance, his moment of triumphant affect, where he not only refuses to sign it again, but then also refuses to accept future visits from the officers (2010, 396). He has played the system, an unfair and brutal regime, by following the rules when he needed to and then revolting when he could.

Step-by-step, Hicks has overcome that self-classification we saw in the Introduction, found a way to reclaim his thoughts, reality, behaviour and humanity.

Can Guantanamo: My journey be understood through self-surveillance?

While Hicks claims that his time in Yatala did not offer him psychological healing (2010, 396), his description of the conditions there as a "huge freedom of choice" (2010, 395) has to be read as an improvement on Guantanamo. "The most profound difference," however, he states, is that "after 4 pm it was guaranteed that [he] would be left alone in his cell until the morning" (2010, 395). "I lost the fear of being tortured," he says, "I no longer feared for my safety" (2010, 395). And so while Hicks himself may have seen no healing taking place there, the reader cannot help but see it. Prison in Australia helps Hicks inch his way back towards what it means to be human, without the rush of media and attention that was to follow his release (2010, 397-9).

The first moment of feeling like a 'human being' again is the day of his release, splashing and playing in the water at a beach, where a stranger speaks to him, "one fellow human being to another" (2010, 399). In the months and years that follow, Hicks re-establishes a relationship with his children (2010, 404), begins to address his many health and psychological issues (2010, 404-7) and meets and marries a supportive woman who he feels safe enough to name (2010, 414). In writing the book and understanding the story (2010, 407), he is "slowly able to put the negatives of the past

behind and replace them with the positives of the present and hopes for the future” (2010, 414).

The witness aspects of Hicks’ memoir are brought back into focus in the final chapters of the book. He spends five pages updating readers on the situation in the conflicts and areas he fought, reminding us that the Kashmir are still in danger and many detainees still suffer in Guantanamo (2010, 408-13). However, for Hicks, the most important part of this story, that which lies on the last two pages, is the impact of his part in beginning “an impassioned chain of events in this country, and the world over” (2010, 415-6). He looks over the photos of the protests, at the many people who rallied in his defence. The photos “humble” him, confirm “the reality of what [he] lived through. It was not a dream, not a dream at all” (2010, 416).

By using the tools of self-surveillance, both as he lived through the nightmare and revisiting it as narrator, Hicks found a way to understand his narrative problems and find his way back out of them. In writing his history, using the surveillant tools of classification, risk mitigation, discipline and resistance, Hicks has answered not only the question ‘who am I?’ but also ‘why am I who I am?’ He brought himself back from the animalised and publicly demonised creation of the US Military and global media, and found a cohesive and functional narrative identity.

Can these three case studies be understood as a form of surveillance?

Throughout this chapter I have been using the analytic steps outlined in my Methodology and the theoretical underpinning described in my Research Background to attempt to discover whether writing a memoir can be understood as a form of self-surveillance. Before we move into Chapter Four, the exegetical component where I attempt to apply these same questions to my own creative work, *Snakes and Ladders: A memoir*, it is important to determine whether this chapter has proved the point of my thesis. So have I shown that, by exploring evidence within the text, identifying problems by using classification and risk mitigation, and then solving these problems by applying discipline and resistance, we can understand memoir as a form of self-surveillance?

In Holden’s *In My Skin* (2005), we have seen how the narrator classified herself in relation to power, unpacking the dialectic she established, simultaneously positioning her sex work and heroin use as both normal and abnormal. To follow how she unpacked and enacted this classification within risk mitigation, we watched her using the surveillant tools of note taking and self-analysis to trace a path towards solving the

narrative problems she had identified. As Holden moved into the problem-solving phase of her memoir, we observed her internalising the surveillant gaze, using it as a tool to discipline herself closer to the narrative norm. In moving closer to this norm, we watched her shifting relationship to the discursive forces she encountered, finally seeing the narrator balanced between the problems in the opening pages and the solutions in the final pages. It was between the two reflections we saw of Holden, the “hard look” (2005, 3) and the “mocking smirk” (2005, 286), that we saw her having used this memoir to find the solutions to her problems, to write herself into a “normative model of personhood” (Eakin 2001, 114).

Do’s self-classification in *The Happiest Refugee* (2010) followed a different course to Holden’s as he compared himself explicitly to his father, and showed how he needed to come to understand this dualistic hero/villain character from his childhood in order to recognise himself. The risk mitigation that Do exhibited came from this familial relationship, with him showing us how the path into being a comedian came out of lessons learned from both his father and mother. The problems, for Do, centre on coming to terms with both what his father took from him and what he gave. While the surveillant tools are not as obvious in Do as in Holden, as the narrator moves into the problem-solving phase of his memoir, Do demonstrates how discipline has allowed him space to internalise both the positive and negative impacts his father has had on his world. The resistance he demonstrates to us is a gift shown to come directly from his father, the gift of comedy. The extended joke that Do draws out through the book, of his father’s imminent death, and the punchline of his recovery from cancer, is the moment in which Do’s fully formed narrative identity is made obvious.

Hicks’ memoir, *Guantanamo: My Journey* (2010) was both the easiest and hardest of the three to apply the methodological framework to. From the very first pages, we saw Hicks self-classified as a dehumanised beast, nothing but a target of torture and degradation. The difficulty in analysing this text comes from these initial pages where it is impossible to imagine any human being capable of finding a way back from such a position to any kind of functional identity. We saw that, unlike both of our other narrators, Hicks was unable to even imagine his identity as a “human being” (2010, v), and as such had much further to write himself back from. We watched as Hicks discovered that for him, risk mitigation lay in explaining how this whole situation came about. That within the witness memoir framework (Rak 20001, 229), he needed to tell the story leading into the story in order for his narrator to be believed in telling the

worst parts. The explicit and traumatic nature of Hicks' self-classification and risk mitigation to identify the problems, inevitably led to solutions that would seem alien in any other context. Within the strictures of the military prison regime, we watched as Hicks took tiny incremental steps in self-discipline and resistance, inching his way through pure force of will towards a time when he would be out of the cages, by whatever means possible. In almost any other story, the preparation for suicide would be seen as a problem; however for Hicks, as we have seen, it was the ultimate resistance against the discourse that surrounded him. We watched Hicks as, in the writing of this memoir, he allowed his narrator to move from the unthinkable question of 'what am I?' through into 'who am I?' and eventually 'why am I who I am?'

In all three of these case studies we had a narrator who faced a problem, fulfilling step one of our methodological pattern. Each began with a flash forward or backwards in time to demonstrate their narratorial positioning and the power they held as teller of the story. In each case they chose to write this story, shifting into the narratorial position, taking on the responsibilities of the memoirist and beginning the process by classifying themselves, fulfilling step two of the pattern. With the shift to the role of narrator, each also took on the position of subject, as suggested by step three, and began to practice risk mitigation in both how they told their story and how they understood the problems in their story. Identifying the problems in the story allowed each narrator to understand their potential for self-discipline, move into step four, and allow them to begin to identify their paths towards a solution, a way to truly understand their narrative identity. And in all three of these case studies, the narrator/author has found their way into the triumphant affect moment of resistance, living out step five of the pattern as they find ways to argue against their discursive position and shaping their identity into that "normative model of personhood" that Eakin informed us was so essential to the memoir (2001, 114).

Chapter 4: Exegesis:

Snakes and Ladders: A memoir

Prior to reading this chapter, it is recommended that you read Part Two: Creative Work Snakes and Ladders: A Memoir on page 123. The original pagination has been maintained from the title page to align with the citations in this chapter.

In my Methodology I suggested a simple problem and solution method for applying the very detailed and layered theory of surveillance and power I have uncovered. This chapter is about how the problems and solutions work in my own memoir, *Snakes and Ladders* (2015). I wrote this book for many reasons, but after laying it alongside the theory constructed in this thesis I realised that the benefit of crafting this story in conjunction with this argument is that it has allowed me to find the parts of myself I had left buried, to uncover my own “normative model of personhood” (Eakin 2001, 114). The thesis I have constructed, that writing a memoir can be understood as a form of self-surveillance, has come out of the drive to understand the disparity between the official records of my life and my subjective experiences as they were appearing in the memoir. Throughout writing the memoir and researching this thesis I have repeatedly stated that I am the wrong kind of mind to put into the correctional system. This ‘wrongness’, however, is also a ‘rightness’. I was exactly the kind of thinker that needs to be engaging with this system, exactly the right kind of critical theorist to engage with the big questions of power that are played out when one group of people have keys that they use to lock up another group of people.

“Do not ask who I am and do not ask me to remain the same,” Foucault wrote, “More than one person, doubtless like me, writes in order to have no face” (1972, 17). I wrote this story to discover and strip away my masks, find the core of my identity that is shared by every prisoner and inmate in every prison and, in doing so, to find my cohesive “narrative identity” (Eakin 2001, 114).

In *Snakes and Ladders* I wrote “It’s all a game, you know, a stupid power game which only works ‘cause we play along” (2015, 39). The rules of the game, when I started playing, were clear in my head but I quickly lost them as it progressed. This

chapter tells you how I came to understand them again and see the real me I had been hiding from for so long.

I started working on this manuscript in 2010 while on home detention (though this writing was supported by diaries I kept in prison and a blog I secretly published while on home detention). I was under a strict 'no publishing about corrective services' verbal order, with the threat that I would be sent back to prison if I did, and so starting the manuscript at that stage was definitely an act of resistance, a way of arguing back against the power that corrective services held over me. The first drafts were very difficult, detailing some of the hardest bits of my history. By analysing the problems and solutions in my manuscript I hope to show how I came to be able to live this resistance.

Problems in *Snakes and Ladders: a Memoir* (2015)

In my Methodology I suggested that problems in a memoir could be discovered by looking at how and if memoir operates in a similar fashion to surveillance, in particular by looking for evidence of the author using the tools of classification and risk mitigation. I posited that these elements would be evident in the technical aspects of the writing, including in how the author describes or defines themselves, how they classify themselves, and how they use techniques such as voice, tone and language to shape point of view and subjectification.

I discussed how classification, the Foucaultian practice of sorting (1977, 18, 195-9), appears in memoir as an introspective practice where the memoirist defines their identity by examining the things that they are and are not. I argued that what the author chooses to emphasise or distract from in their self-classification allows us to make "educated guesses" (McKee 2003, 1) about their motivations, motivations that are inherently linked with the problems in their memoir. Classification in the memoir, I argued, may take the form of comparisons and contradictions, it could be shown thorough shifting point-of-view and subjectification, but will be primarily evident in the ways in which the narrator/subject positions themselves within the memoir.

Inextricably entangled with classification, the second outcome of surveillance, that of risk mitigation, is the next logical step to self-identification. When the author makes those choices about what to emphasise and what to distract from, they are crossing the line from practicing classification to implementing risk mitigation.

As identified earlier, risk mitigation as an outcome of surveillance says to the public, 'Hey, we can't guarantee that we can stop these bad things happening to you but we're going to try as hard as we can and if we fail at least we'll know who did them', and within memoir it acts similarly. In my Methodology I identified that one of the core aspects of risk mitigation evident in memoir is the drive to write the story, drawing in particular on Rak's concept of the "witness" (2001, 229) who must tell the truthful story to argue back at or protest some injustice or inequality. Within this framework, the risk that is being mitigated by the telling of the story is the risk to the author that they may not fulfil their role as witness and storyteller and the risk to their subject (including others characters in the memoir) that the injustice may not otherwise come to light. I suggested that evidence of the author implementing risk mitigation might be uncovered in the memoir by looking at justifications for why the story needs to be told, explanations embedded in events that lie outside of the linear narrative, and language that shows the author's relationship to the risks they are taking, such as politically correct or incorrect language and an irreverent approach to oneself or other subjects.

The inevitable entanglements of classification and risk mitigation lead to an analysis that is more of an unpicking than a cataloguing, with the analysis of the two appearing together and feeding into each other acting to illustrate the problems within the memoir.

The title of this manuscript, *Snakes and Ladders*, is the first hint of the problems in this narrative, demonstrating both classification and risk mitigation and showing my shift into step two of the pattern suggested in my Methodology. Very early in the drafting process I began talking about prison and the power that exists within the entire correctional system as a game, "a stupid power game which only works 'cause we play along" (2015, 39). Snakes and Ladders, a childhood game, where your trip to the winning 100 square is shaped entirely by the roll of the die, is an apt metaphor for the shape of the narrative, which details my sudden fall back to a world I thought myself far removed from. It is at once an instant classification of the problems in this memoir as simplistic, based in childish fears, and at the same time, a reductionist reading of a very serious situation. Snakes and Ladders comes from an ancient Hindu game called *Between Heaven and Hell*, playing out the karmic drive where fate and destiny is shaped by the steps you take in life; the ladders are the good choices you make, the snakes are the poor choices. In the westernised version of the game, the inherently moral

messages of the Hindi version are still present, just concealed beneath the cartoon snakes and two-dimensional ladders. The title of this book was not the first decision I made with this memoir, but it did come very early in the process. Stepping off that kerb (2015, 6) was roll of the die that landed me right on the head of a very long snake; while it did not quite take me all the way back to square one, it most definitely felt that way at the time. The repeated motif of this game, the references to both snakes and ladders throughout the text was a reasonably late addition to the structure, being inserted during my residency at Varuna in July 2014, but it had been a framing device in my head throughout the writing. The addition of these recurring motifs brought the shape of the narrative somewhat closer to the lived experience and allowed the problems to become clearer.

The structure of the book, for the most part, reflects a game of Snakes and Ladders. For the first nine chapters, the time in prison and on home detention acts as a framing device, with each 'move' in the prison inspiring flashbacks to both snakes and ladders in my past. This flashing back to explain the scaffolding of the story is a form of risk mitigation, setting out the justifications for how the narrative developed and carrying the reader outside of linear time to present these explanations. The flashbacks are me saying to the reader, 'It is okay, I've worked out how and why this all happened, you'll know by the end of the story how to stop this happening to you.' The thematic links between the incidents detailed in prison and the vignettes inspired by them can be imagined as the toxicity of the snake I have landed on or the strength of the ladder. The utmost powerlessness that one lives when embroiled in the correctional system bears an unavoidable comparison to the die in this game; where I went, who I engaged with, what I ate, did and felt was all shaped by the tools of the system, the officers and their often arbitrary and unpredictable decision making processes.

The problems within *Snakes and Ladders* are often described as or related to snakes, mostly snakes clad in the blue of corrective services officers but sometimes wearing innocent masks of social workers, doctors, and, even occasionally, fellow inmates. By linking the two-dimensional cartoon snakes of the familiar board game with the motivations and intent of characters within the memoir, I have given the reader a simple dualistic classification method. By tapping into the simple 'good/bad' signification known to anyone who has played the game, I link those emotions to the rush of affect that occurs each time a die is rolled and a piece moved.

Snakes and Ladders begins at a point in my life where I had ‘forgotten’ a lot of my history, a place where I thought I was on the verge of overcoming a past which included crime, prison, addiction, and other less than savoury aspects. It was not so much a case of my having written these things out of existence, as just forgetting how bad they had really been. Despite being the kind of person who argued long and loud against ‘glamorising’ crime, drug use, etc., and who inserted the grittier elements of these topics into my fictional writing, I really had forgotten what it was like to be a powerless pawn. I was failing in my core duty of self-classification by disregarding this history.

In the first pages of *Snakes and Ladders*, I am dealing with issues that seem irritating but surmountable:

I’m distracted. February in Wollongong is hot and exciting. If we still put mercury in thermometers it would spend February floating around the high twenties and early thirties, bringing afternoons of armpit sweat and prickly eyebrows. Friday is the beginning of the weekend and in Wollongong this means fishing, boating, camping. It means skydiving over shimmering beaches, hang-gliding from towering cliffs, mountain biking down mountains. Weekends in the ‘Gong in February don’t ask you to take things carefully; they don’t suggest you look left and then right. They don’t want you to be comfortable; they want you to live, they want you to be excited, they want you to step off the kerb.

My little slice of Friday February Wollongong isn’t living up to the promises. I’ve just had a shot of antibiotics in my bum to kill a reoccurring cyst and I hurt. A lot. Following this, my Friday is about getting food for my pets: frozen mice for the snake and crickets for the axolotl. This is an ordeal but the animals say they’re starving. After visiting three different pet shops I finally have the feeders in a bag and am ready to head home. Plans include the lounge, TV, some slow cooking, maybe some gentle housework. My right butt cheek throbs from the bungled intramuscular injection. I’m miserable and distracted.

Williams 2015, 5-6

These are normal everyday problems, happening to a normal everyday narrator. I am distracted, have a cyst on my spine, need to buy food for my pets, but I still have my power. Despite the opening line of the prologue telling you about my past, “I used to be a heroin addict, criminal and all round not-nice-girl” (2015, 3), there is no hint here of criminality, no signs of the problems driving my memoir. However, as my Methodology pattern suggests, a problem must appear and it does so with a bang:

The motorbike is on me before I’ve taken a second step.

‘Watch out!’ The postie is shouting as she tries to turn the bike away. Acrid panic froths across the back of my tongue. I try to move but a shard of burning light reflecting off some piece of chrome at the front of the bike catches my eye. I pivot around this shred of brightness, eyes pinned to the light, body frozen in place. Crickets chirp in the bag hanging from my hand. The bike’s running board catches the big muscle in my right calf and sweeps my feet out from underneath me. I jolt onto the road in a perfect baseball slide, my left elbow leaving bits of itself on the asphalt. The postie is yelling something above me. The road is hot under my scratched palms.

The bus I'd been crossing the road to catch pulls into the stop opposite as I sputter amid the de-sorted mail. Cold sweat and hot shame trickle down me, coating face and ribs and hands with a greasy slick. People sitting on the bus stare out at me as I fluster about, helping the postie collect her mail. Blood trickles down from my elbow, dripping towards my wrist. My heartbeat drowns all ambient noise.
Williams 2015, 6

There is an immediate clash here for the reader in how I am classified. The slow, almost real-time pacing of this section acts to immerse the reader in my experience, drawing them into the sensations of this opening of the narrative and allowing them to identify with the 'normal' version of my narrative identity, prior to being hit with the 'abnormal' (read: criminal, drug addict, deviant) aspects of my identity. Interestingly, in writing this section I had ongoing issues with tense, jumping continually into a past tense when the structure and intent required a present tense voice. For me, this clearly indicates a desire to delegate this story to history, when it needs to be current, an attempt to 'write over' the events without adequately learning from them; I was actively struggling against self-classification. Then the police arrive and "I panic. I don't know why I panic" (2015, 7). The disconnect here, the links between these events and my forgotten history, is not yet clear to my reader, however I articulate it clearly at the end of the section when I say:

It's thirteen years since I went to prison for a break and enter when I was nineteen and I'm about to go back for the exact same crime. A lot happens in thirteen years but one thing that hasn't happened is me going back inside. I've got no idea this is about to happen. So you're one step ahead of me.
Williams 2015, 9

The jump to second person voice here is jarring, deliberately so, as is the leap forward in time, both indicators of risk mitigation at work. It acts to both foreshadow the upcoming events and to give me the space to reach out to my readers, individually grasping them by their mental hand with the line "So you're one step ahead of me" and telling them, and myself, that it is okay, I have done this before; I can survive. From early in the narrative I am attempting to be my own ladder, laying out the rungs of risk mitigation to talk myself (and the reader) into making it through the next 80,000 words to the end of the tale. I am using the second person to say, 'Hey, it's okay; I know there are problems here but I also know how to solve them'.

So what, specifically, are the problems in my memoir?

Firstly, I had lived out the dream of 'bad girl, made good', but had discounted the value of my experiences in my quest for 'legitimacy'. I had misclassified myself by

discounting the value of my experience. I had never really kept my history secret, but then I had never really done anything with it either. I had stopped crime, kicked drugs, found a way to live with my mental un-wellness, but never tried to pass on those lessons, help other people dig themselves out of the same holes I fell into. I had told the stories of crime and prison and addiction loudly at parties and quietly in tutorials, but never really unpacked my path out of them. I had immersed myself in university and academia, thinking and writing critically about power, but never used that lens to examine my own experiences, sat in my psychiatrist's office and talked about how much my experience and knowledge could help others, but never found a way to pass it on. The me who stepped off that kerb thought I could reach this goal of 'legitimate', but that I could only do so by moving completely away from my past, by classifying myself as something other than what I was. For many people recovering from a past like mine, this may be the answer, but for me it was not. Telling the stories again and again was me attempting to value and learn from my experiences, attempting to fulfil that witness drive identified by Rak, but the reality was that I hadn't incorporated the learning into who I was:

'Did you use to be known as Angela Marino?' Dark-Haired Cop says after I open the door and invite them in.

This feels like a strange way to start an interview about the accident. It's more than ten years since I've used this name. I'd forgotten that my police record lived under the name 'Angela Marino'.

[...]

Yeah, so I'm a reformed junkie with old needle tracks on the inside of my elbows. Angela Marino was in love with chemicals and the steel that pumped them into her system. But by 2003 I had changed back to my birth name. Angela Williams was starting degrees in Creative Arts and Media and Communications at the University of Wollongong, seeing an uber-qualified forensic psychiatrist, volunteering to help refugees, penning tortured poetry and thinking about moving out of Sydney to get away from temptation.

Williams 2015, 9-10

As with many of the passages where problems are first identified in *Snakes and Ladders*, the dissociation is made evident through a jump to third person point of view, with my stepping outside of my narrative identity, forcing the reader and myself as narrator to look at the problem from a distance. "Angela Marino was in love with chemicals..." is the clash in my self-classification made evident, the dissonance between how I imagined myself and who I really was.

The convenient dichotomy created by my different names, 'Williams' and 'Marino', allows for a clear distinction between the historical identity and the current

me; however, it becomes clear that one of the biggest issues inherent in this split is my resistance to absorbing and internalising 'Angela Marino' as part of my personality. The clear split between my two parts has created an inability for me to clearly answer, or even understand, the question 'who am I', let alone 'why am I who I am?' I was practising what I thought was risk mitigation by separating the two personas, but as this separation was not founded in a truthful classification it broke the structure of the narrative, which showed in the jumps to third person. The casual nature of the statement, "Yeah, so I'm a reformed junkie" (2015, 10), demonstrates that while I am aware of the impacts of my past, the consequent jump to third person shows the inability to own these impacts. My previous discussions of the theory of identity formation create a framework for understanding this shift to third person and its value as a means of identifying problems within my memoir.

While I had been attempting to locate Taylor's "dialogic" identity (1995, 230-3), there had been a breach in the dialogue; communications had broken down between 'Marino' and 'Williams'. As Taylor suggested, the "misrecognition" (1995, 225-6) of my history led to this breach, this failure to construct an "authentic identity" (1995, 229) as I was unable to be 'true to myself', unable to fully appreciate and articulate the validity of my history. However, as I suggested in my research background, often there are wider discursive happenings beyond the control of the individual that can influence our ability to participate in this dialogue of identity formation. My criminal record is an official document that contradicts the 'made good' part of 'bad girl, made good', and as Foucault showed us, this document, along with the rest of my "official history" has the ability to "constitute the individual [me] as effect and object of power, as effect and object of knowledge" (1979, 191-2). Knowing the socially unacceptable nature of a criminal record, history of drug addiction and ongoing mental illness, led me to situate these aspects of my history as 'deviant'; left me feeling that I needed to disassociate myself from them in order to obtain some kind of 'legitimacy'. I internalised those "normalizing and coercive regimes of power" that Weir described (2009, 536), and in doing so failed to allow myself the space to make them part of my identity. By refusing to absorb these 'deviances', I also refused to give myself space to take the Foucaultian path to identity formation by "making it possible to measure gaps, to determine levels, to fix specialities and to render the differences useful by fitting them one to another" (1977, 184). I refused to allow my differences the space to mean something, to be a

useful part of who I am. I refused to use classification on myself honestly and to confront the raw data of a whole and cohesive Angela, to answer 'Why am I who I am?'

The second problem in *Snakes and Ladders* comes directly out of this first one and also demonstrates my move into the third step of the expected pattern where I begin to take my first stumbling steps towards self-discipline. In assigning an illegitimate status to my history, I had accepted the 'official records' of my life, given them the discursive power to shape whom I became. While denying the right of the criminal junkie me to live within the unofficial classification of Angela, I had allowed it to simmer along in the background waiting for an opportunity to emerge. The discursive reality of being wrenched back into the official records version of Angela was enough to reawaken this hidden classification. The rapid shift shown within the memoir as I internalised the 'greens' (prison-issue tracksuits) and my prison administration, or MIN, number, shows how quickly I came to imagine myself as only the sum of these factors, how quickly the hidden classification data emerged. On Monday, February 8, the night of my arrest, I am able to see the distinction between the two Angelas, able to separate their viewpoints, able to empathise with the historical me:

Angela Marino wouldn't have been astonished to be sitting in the holding cells; she would have had a swear, yelled a bit, made it necessary for them to lock the door.

Angela Williams is surprised to be in the holding cells. She perches on the edge of the steel bench, pale, shaking and picking at the scratched paint and dried gum with a broken matchstick that she found on the floor. She thinks about her son at home, scared and confused and wondering how his mother became a criminal. Angela Marino was someone she thought she'd left behind. Angela Williams cries shamed and silent tears for the stupidity of Angela Marino.

Williams2015, 10

This self-awareness doesn't last long under the strictures of the prison regime. By Tuesday morning, February 9, I have taken on the official record, recognised the missing elements of my identity in the mirror of powerlessness so clearly that I'm starting to think like Marino again:

I think back to the four months I spent in Mulawa on remand in 1996. There were girls I knew then who refused to ever wear green on the outside. They claimed that wearing the prison-standard colour was like a magnet for the police.

[...]

It's so easy – after a night of broken sleep and facing a sentence I thought I'd completed – to convince myself that I'm not here for failing to look right before I crossed the road or for failing to follow up on the fat desk sergeant from Balmain's words. I am sitting on a dirty concrete floor, drinking dirty instant coffee, watching a powerless sex worker pacing in her dirty boots and skirt, all because I chose the green shirt to wear for my interview with the police.

I know this is crazy, know I'm disassociating.
Williams 2015, 20-21

Just as 'I know I'm disassociating', I am also taking a narratorial stance to this disassociation, showing that the problem lies in my inability to maintain a cohesive identity in a world where the colour you wear indicates your relation to power. By Tuesday afternoon I am deteriorating into the illusion of the MIN number, but at the same time I am unpicking those risk mitigation activities. I am falling into a third person voice, separating myself out as an absent narrator to demonstrate the internalisation of the self- and other-classification in action. I am immersed in Angela Marino as I walk into my first of many corrective services strip searches, about to be dressed in the 'greens' again, and talking to the female officer who is watching me undress:

I strip mechanically, crying silently, and this time instead of handing my clothes back she piles them into a green canvas sack, a property bag like those I'd seen rolling past outside. I curse the khaki shirt as it disappears into the bag. Looking at the giant floral underpants and scratchy nylon bras I'm glad I didn't freeball today. She asks me my sizes and pulls rancid green tracksuit pants, a T-shirt, socks and jumper off shelves, tossing them to me to put on. My chest tightens as I pull the T-shirt down over my face. My leather sandals disappear into the sack and when she goes to look for my size in the giant stack of Dunlop Volley boxes they are out. I can go three sizes too small or two sizes big. I choose big. I feel like a clown as I slip into the flapping shoes.

[...]

'Go easy on yourself,' she says, pausing with a hand on the door. While I want to scream and rage at her pity I know that her blue shirt means I need to stand and listen, that I can't just reach past her and push the door open. 'It'll take you time to settle in but try and do it without anyone seeing how upset you are. Don't let them hurt you.'

'Can I get a cigarette and my book now?' Doesn't feel like there's anything else to say.

Williams 2015, 24

The internalisation of this official record, the taking on of the greens and MIN, contributed to my breakdown in the safe cells (observation cells which I was placed into for suicide watch), as I found my theoretical understandings of the functioning of power and surveillance sharpened by the reality of the twenty-four hour lights and the cameras. As I lay under the constant eye of surveillance, I first began to allow myself to think outside the concrete box I was trapped in and start to recognise that Angela Williams had things to bring to this situation:

'It's all a game, you know,' I say to Kathy sometime that night, perched on the very edge of the bed and waving my hands as I talk.

'A stupid power game which only works 'cause we play along. This is how they prove they have power over us. The cameras and the lights and the constant noise and the sleep deprivation. The stupid comments over the buzzer and the refusal to tell us the time! It's easy to control our bodies – but it's our minds they really want to

control. By putting us in here under the constant gaze of the camera they expect us to take on the surveillance so that we always act as if they are watching us.'

[...]

'The whole idea was that if the prisoners always felt like there was eyes on them they would act like there was eyes on them. His idea was a like a circular building, with cells placed in a ring around a central tower. Each cell fills the outside ring and has a large window on the outside and a smaller window on the inside. They put the screws in a room in the centre so they can always see the silhouetted outlines of the prisoners. The crims can't see the guards but they know that they can be seen. They know that they could be observed at any second and so they only ever act in appropriate ways.

[...]

'They have the power over us because we give them the power over us. You flashing your tits at them is a protest – it is you shouting in their faces, "I don't care if you are watching me! I refuse to let you control me!" If they are so offended by your naked boobs then they can switch the cameras off!'

Williams 2015, 39-40

While I knew in my head that it was all a game, it was much harder to know this in my body. I was thinking about the power dynamics playing out but still internalising them, thinking as 'Williams' but responding as 'Marino'. I felt like the snake I had landed on had taken me all the way back to square one and was still a few moves away from a ladder.

The problems, or snakes, in my memoir centre around the idea that I had become an imposter in my own narrative; I lived as if my past didn't exist but tried to 'never forget'. I had left out a slew of data in my self-classification and in forgetting I had created a space for the powerlessness of being back in prison to suddenly and dramatically reshape my psyche and personality, drag me so quickly from Angela Williams, academic, thinker, mother, back to Angela Marino, criminal, junkie, deviant. The ongoing impact of this internalisation is demonstrated most clearly by my application for this PhD when instead of putting my student number, 2536110, on each page of my application, I submitted an application with my MIN number on each page.

My argument, as detailed in my Methodology, is that in the process of surveilling oneself by writing, the memoirist opens up a path to understanding their problems. In identifying these problems I have already been using the surveillant tools of classification and risk minimisation, hunting out the ways in which I have imagined and defined myself, and identifying how those elements have placed me at risk. To prove my thesis that memoir is like a form of self-surveillance, what remains is to identify if and how I used my writing as a form of resistance and whether this resistance

allowed me to discipline myself closer to Eakin's "normative model of personhood" (2001, 114) and narrate myself into some version of "narrative fidelity" (Fisher 1985, 349). In the next section I will show how I used the processes of observing, thinking and writing to realign the divergent aspects of my personality, to bring Angela Marino and Angela Williams back into the same body.

Solutions in *Snakes and Ladders*

Just as evidence of classification and risk mitigation can be used to argue that memoir operates in a similar fashion in *Snakes and Ladders*, I also suggested in my Methodology that the surveillant results of discipline and resistance might be used to understand the outcome of the memoir. Both discipline and resistance are embedded in relations of power, and in understanding power in the memoir we are looking for more amorphous elements than in an analysis of classification and risk mitigation. While the previous section focussed primarily on the literary and technical aspects of the memoir, this section takes a deductive and intuitive stance as it moves towards a more cultural theory examination of the text, looking for narrative development in response to discursive forces, the alignment of the author's identity with Eakin's "normative model of personhood" (2001, 114) and evidence of the author resisting this power. The twin outcomes of surveillance, discipline and resistance, demonstrate the ability of surveillance to reshape behaviour, to set the subject on a new path. Just as the CCTV signs and cameras remind Judy Public not to break any rules, discipline her into more normative patterns of behaviour, so too do the reminders of the surveilling eye in a memoir remind the author to shape themselves closer to the narrative norm.

As posited in my Methodology, the processes of discipline and control are constant, related to our physicality and practised with intent and so we are looking for physical and intentional responses to power when we look for discipline in the memoir. Within all my case studies, as with life, there have been mostly clear distinctions between externally and internally imposed disciplines, those forced upon us and those we create for ourselves, and the origin of the disciplines gives hints about the nature of the resistance required. Discipline, as it relates to surveillance, should be evident in the memoir in the way that the narrator engages with and is positioned against/inside discourse and how, if at all, the author is able to identify and engage with this discursive positioning. To identify discipline within the memoir, I am looking for the narrator watching or writing (using the tools of surveillance on other and self). Discipline in the

memoir can be seen as the author 'rounding out' their own character, tying together loose ends to create a cohesive and believable narrative identity, aligning themselves with the 'normal'. In addition to this, discipline should be demonstrated by the author identifying and engaging with discursive regimes, looking for the holes they can poke in the power structures.

The second and arguably most beneficial outcome of surveillance, resistance, is to be found in these holes that the author identifies in the power structures. If the narrator is able to fully and honestly utilise the data gathered from the self-classification and understand their own risk mitigation drives, which then creates the space for them to enter a phase of self-discipline, laying the newly discovered self into the mould of the "normative model of personhood" (Eakin 2001, 114), then this understanding of their true discursive positioning should give rise to opportunities to fight back. The moments of resistance should leap out at the reader, draped in the exuberant affect of the 'YES' as the die rolls to the number which will move the piece to the ladder that goes directly to the 100 square. This is the story aligning the narrator's progress towards "narrative fidelity [and] the logic of good reason" (Fisher 1985, 349). Resistance in the memoir is those victory moments, when all the thinking, analysis and mental strand weaving come together to give the author a platform to argue back, the moments where Rak's witness drive (2001, 229) is most embodied. Rather than just being positioned by external forces, the narrator takes the reins and shifts themselves into an advantageous position in relation to the discursive forces impacting on their narrative development. To identify these resistance moments, we are looking for shifts in the power, whether the narrator was an active agent in these shifts, and where this leaves them in the discursive web of power.

If, as I write above, the problems in my memoir lie "in forgetting I had left a space for the powerlessness of being back in prison to suddenly and dramatically reshape my psyche and personality," then the solutions are to be found in the moments where I overcame this forgetfulness. Finding these solutions came about by my application of a careful process of self-surveillance. To identify the solutions I will be looking at how I disciplined myself back into a "normative model of personhood" (Eakin 2001, 114), or how I wove the many divergent strands of Angela back into one cohesive narrative whole, and how I used these moments to understand the relations of power in prison to enable and enact my own resistance.

The first hints of my risk mitigation are to be found in the tools of self-discipline I discussed above. As the divergent identities of Angela Marino and Angela Williams battle for control, there is one moment where they merge, hinting at the not-yet-realised cohesive narrative identity: “Stay strong, Angela, I mutter to myself, don’t show any fear” (2015, 23) I write as I first walk into the prison. This singular Angela is the whole that I do not yet realise exists; it hints to the reader that somewhere beyond this schizophrenic self-conception lies a determined and capable narrator. This moment of cohesion displays the shift into the fourth step of the pattern, risk mitigation. I might fail at hearing this pep talk in narrative time, but it shows that on some level I knew the need for a united front in the face of the all-encompassing prison power machine.

The not-yet-cohesive Angela struggled to come to terms with her history (oh, and how interesting that I now, again, drop into that third person), in particular her history with drug addiction, an analysis of which shows discipline in action. The saying goes ‘old habits die hard’, and this couldn’t be more true than with old chemical habits. The casual throwaway line, “Yeah, so I’m a reformed junkie” (2015, 10) harks back to a core failure in the self-classification, a breach in the risk mitigation dam. While I had learned the lessons of recovery and twelve-step programs, figured out how to keep myself safe from my addiction, I had not unpacked or explained the functioning of addiction clearly enough to either the reader or myself; I hadn’t used the data to discipline myself yet. Understanding and articulating that compulsion to use was core to identifying how I found the strength and resilience to survive this second go round in prison. And the first time I told the story, I left that understanding out, failed to display the active and intentional understanding of my compulsion to the reader.

In July 2014 my manuscript consultant Dr Jo Chipperfield read *Snakes and Ladders* as part of the Varuna Publisher’s Introduction Program and was particularly confused by this section where I am locked in with two girls who are just about to use heroin and consider joining them. I am locked in a holding cell, waiting to go before the Parole Board to find out if I am eligible for Home Detention. Two girls in the cell have heroin, I know intuitively, and I also know they’re about to use it. “Breathing in,” I write, “I shake off the urge to race back into the cell and force my way into the middle of the shot party” (2015, 113). I thought I had explained this compulsion with:

The idea of a shot is like a security blanket I take out and sniff when things start to get hard. I don’t know how long I will go without a shot, how far from smack I will get before I’ll lose the urge to use. Part of me fears it’s forever, that every time I

see a fit in the gutter or a person on the nod and have just a little bit of longing for that long lost love.
Williams 2015, 113

But Jo just did not get it. She could not understand why I would take such a risk, why I would so quickly reach for the old soothing bad habits. Jo's incredulity at this response goes back to Eakin's "normative model of personhood" (2001, 121) and the alignment with Fisher's concepts of "narrative probability" and "narrative fidelity" (1985, 349-50) discussed earlier. For a reader unfamiliar with the addictive compulsion, it seems unlikely that I would be taken by this urge to use heroin, right at the moment where things are looking up; this challenges the expected arc of the narrative, seems unlikely. It may seem to the reader here that I am breaching the trust relationship we have built up, challenging Fisher's "narrative fidelity" with this break from "the logic of good reason" (1985, 349). To overcome this distrust then, I needed to offer "a reliable, trustworthy, and desirable guide to belief and action" (1985, 355).

To realign the "narrative probability" (Fisher 1985, 349), I returned to the text and added some important details that had been left out of the draft that Jo read, to build a background and understanding of this insidious compulsion, in particular the first interaction with a doctor during my admission process:

The doctor is a tiny busy man who looks like he's been living in the shadow of the shadows for too long. He looks at the bandage on my elbow and asks if I was injured running from the cops. I tell him about the postie bike and he looks confused; I don't try to explain. He tells me they'll get a nurse to change the dressing and give me some Panadol. I tell him there's Panadeine Forte and antibiotics in my property and he snorts.

'We'll give you some Panadol for tonight,' he responds.

After shining a light in my eyes and ears he pulls out the blood pressure cuff. I see him take in the old track marks in the crook of my elbow as he straps it on and after inflating, listening, deflating, he asks if there's any chance I'm going to have withdrawals.

'No,' I tell him, 'those track marks are very old. I've been clean for eleven years.'

'Hmmm,' I can tell he doubts me, 'not on any kind of maintenance program?'

'Nah, kicked it all in one go. Methadone's too much social control for my taste.'

I like to think this surprises him a bit, that his pause is a moment of thinking, maybe even admiration for my stance. It's not.

'We can give you methadone to help you sleep,' he says, watching me carefully.

I laugh out loud for the first time in two days: 'You've got to be kidding,' I give him my own snort. 'That shit's too toxic for a sleeping aid.'

He shows me out and points me to an inside, non-smoking holding cell with a smirk and snide 'Good luck' and I think bitterly, I'm so going to write about you one day, you little fucker.

The doctor has classified me entirely by the scar tissue in the crook of my elbow and I can see this, know this. When I declare “I’m so going to write about you one day, you little fucker”, I’m giving one of the clearest first hints of the risk mitigation witness urge, the need to tell this story; I’m watching him, watching me, and thinking about what this means for my position in the power relations. But it wasn’t just enough to show why I needed to tell this story, I needed to show not tell how the compulsion can be enacted in the flesh, demonstrate how self-discipline functions in relation to the addictive compulsion. Like any addict will tell you, it doesn’t take much to set off the compulsion, and the impact of the exchange with the doctor shows just a few pages later as the stress of prison begins to set in:

[On] the short walk to Induction a terror of this squat concrete building kicks in hard. I’m having body memories of the things my brain refuses to dig up; chills are chasing each other up and down the back of my arms, leaving tight little goose bumps that sting in their wake. I try to remember how my lungs work. I want a cigarette, a coffee, a swill of straight vodka. For the first time since this Kafkaesque nightmare began I want a shot of heroin, some sweet numbing oblivion. For a second I regret saying no to the doctor’s offer of methadone and desperately grasp at my pocket, feeling for the pouch of tobacco. I’m going to smoke till I vomit when I get into the next cell, I promise myself, smoke because there’s nothing else to do.

Here I am actively admitting my powerlessness in the face of addiction, narrating the discursive positioning that backed me into the ‘need to use’ corner and identifying the coping mechanism (smoking, my secondary drug of choice) that I will use to discipline myself out of picking up the needle. While I struggled with the compulsion throughout my time inside, I did not give in, knowing as only a clean addict can, that one shot was too many, that sticking a needle in my arm was one snake I really had a hold of.

The seeds of my narrative resistance and my shift into the final step of the pattern suggested by the Methodology pattern, however, were sown when I asked the social worker for writing paper and she dug out the “48 page black and yellow striped exercise book” from her filing cabinet (2015, 26). I quickly identified this as my best tool of self-defence inside prison. “Fuck you screws, I’ll fight back however I can,” I write in the safe cells, “I get out my pen and the too-thin exercise book” (2015, 32). I carry the book with me constantly and write out the worst moments as soon as I can, surveilling my own entries to dig my way out of problems and recognise how I’m responding to the prison

regime. When the power games of the Induction unit get too difficult to understand, I write “I realise that the capitals have gone from ‘corrective services’ when I write about this in my exercise book and decide to forgo an edit. This nonsense doesn’t deserve proper noun status” (2015, 50), giving myself the power through literary techniques to strip away the perception of corrective service’s control over my inner world. By removing the capitals, I am weaving the thinking, theorising Angela into the scared, inarticulate Angela. And it is in the pages of the notebook that I find the strength to get through the first real test in prison, to give myself the earliest bit of evidence that I am capable of resistance.

Classification, in prison (rather than surveillance) terms, refers to the process of assigning security ratings to inmates and on paper it is done by a committee, including a caseworker and psychologist. In reality it is done by a single officer. The officer who was to do my classification introduced himself like this:

‘All right, for those that don’t know me, I’m Bentley. Now I know that you’re all a bunch of putrid filthy cunts and I don’t want any shit out here. You’ve gotta wait till we’re ready for you, and no, I don’t know how long. So you cunts start any fights out here, or any other shit, and I’ll hammer you all. Nail your fucking heads to the concrete. I will smash you all down and you’ll be in fucking Segro for six months – even if you’re supposed to get out tomorrow!’
Williams 2015, 52

I am on the back foot instantly, shaken by this reminder of my place at the bottom of the heap. I am thrown by this introduction, this unwarranted rage. I do not know how to deal with the screaming and it has awakened the complex traumas of my childhood. As I sit, huddled on the step, made into a tiny ball to deflect the officer’s abusive actions, I am reacting as Marino 263504, I have lost myself for a moment in the relations of power, forgotten that I am not as much a subject of this man’s power as he seems to think. I have forgotten that he can “only take my power” if I let him (2015, 54). When Classification doesn’t happen that day I go back to my cell, get out the book and write it all down. My handwriting is tiny and tight and anger shows at the end of each pen stroke. But it works. By the time I am ready to go back up against the whirlwind of rage which is Mr America, I know how I will react. As much as it terrified me, I would use my words, value my brain like the system seems determined to prevent me doing. Regardless of his blue shirt and my green, I decide, I will act like we are equals. The first step of being treated like an equal is to question the lack of due process in the proceedings. I have read about Classo and know exactly how it should happen:

‘Okay,’ I take a very deep breath, ‘I was advised that there would be a psychologist and a case manager present to help make this decision. Can you tell me how I appeal against your decision if I feel that it is unfair?’

His brow furrows as he looks across the desk at me, down at my file and then back up at me.

‘I see this is your second visit to Mulawa,’ he says, as if I’ve complimented him on the sunglasses. ‘And I see that last time you were here you were classified ‘C’, maximum security. Can you tell me why you got that classo?’

‘As you know,’ I counter, ‘inmates on remand are automatically given a maximum classo and all of my time here in 1996 was on remand.’

Williams 2015, 56

Mr America’s disregard for my question shows him struggling to maintain the power dynamic. As keeper of the official records and determiner of my fate, his discursive framework tells him that I have no right to ask this question so he pretends it does not exist. My second resistance to his power comes after a serious of Kafkaesque tangling, where he asks me all the same questions I’ve already answered multiple times then classifies me as ‘B’ or medium security. “Can you please explain why I’ve not been classified as minimum security?” I ask (2015, 57). He responds to this question just as he did my last, acting as if my lips moving meant as little as the crows cawing outside in the yard:

‘I’ve got a lot of people to get through today.’ He picks up my file and dumps it on the stack to the right of his desk. ‘If you’ve got any more questions, you should talk to your wing officer.’

‘No,’ I reply, placing my hands palm down on the dusty desk. ‘I’ve asked two questions that you’ve refused to answer. One, I want to know why I’m being given a medium classo after never having reoffended and being back in the system for the first time in thirteen years. And two, I need you to tell me who I speak to about an appeal against your decision since it has been made without due process and by a single person rather than by a committee.’ My hands are steady on the desk and I concentrate on holding them still. The skin of my nail beds turns white with the effort but I’m pretty sure he can’t see this from his angle. I hope.

‘No’ is obviously a word he doesn’t usually hear from people wearing green. Mr America removes his sunglasses for the first time and his eyes are watery. For a second I see him seeing past the colour of my T-shirt and the file in front of him. For a fraction of time I’m a person to him, someone who can think and reason and ask difficult questions. His mouth opens, closes, opens again.

Williams 2015, 57

That moment, where Mr America sees past the green T-shirt and the MIN number, also allows me to see past them. It is the first stepping-stone in my coming to see the cohesive whole and how it will get me through prison. By asserting confidence and the right to be informed, in the face of this discursive monstrosity, I am finding the value of discipline and tapping into the skills I will use to resist the power of corrective services and find a way to reposition myself.

By the time I make it to home detention and encounter Brendan, “the boss of home detention in Wollongong”, I have sharpened these self-discipline and resistance skills through all three prisons (2015, 171). I have watched Delma’s breakdown at Berrima and identified how her position in the stack of power leaves her incapable of voicing her objections to the weight of power bearing down on her (2015, 65-81). I have played the voluntary self-imposed isolation game with Butchy McButch in the Mum Shirl Unit at Mulawa and shown that they only have the power that you allow them to have (2015, 98-100). I have tangled with the super-sleazy Bitchie at Emu Plains and theorised my way into an understanding of how what looks like inmate empowerment is actually an insidious opening into gross and dangerous egregious power games (2015, 123-138 & 154-161). I have explored how power exists within the inmate population and looked at how individuals, such as the indomitable Sandra, act out a constant cycle of resistance to the power imbalances played out by both inmate and officer (2015, 136-138 & 160). But it is in the penultimate chapter, as I wrangle with Brendan and the full implications of challenging corrective services that the strands of classification, risk mitigation, discipline and resistance all come together to show how living and telling this story has given me a space to take that final step to my full narrative potential. One month into my order, on a Sunday night, the phone rings:

‘Our supervisor has looked over your schedules,’ [my supervising officer] tells me, after some rough and sleazy greetings. ‘He’s decided that you’re doing too much and so we’re cancelling your walks.’

The air is sucked out of my lungs as I’m sucker punched by another stupid rule change.

‘I’m sorry,’ I say, ‘could you please repeat that?’

Williams 2015, 170-1

I watch myself responding to this, heavy detail laden description showing the physical impacts of this play with power. The walks were hard work to get, had been arranged to support my psychological recovery from the safe cells and this removal of them feels like a deliberate attempt to undermine my recovery. By this stage of the game, however, I am no longer feeling the onerous weight of Angela Marino, instead I am seeing the ‘her’ and ‘I’ as one feeling, reacting and, most importantly, thinking being. Like Hicks, I am emboldened by my home turf and no longer willing to just accept this kind of discursive power play. I have aligned my self-classification, mitigated the risk of using my voice and found a way to use my theoretical understanding of the world to both discipline myself and carve out my own discursive position. I am totally ready for this battle. I know they

are breaking their own rules, have read the Community Compliance Group 'Policy and Procedure Manual'. This time I refuse to play along. I am finding my "normative model of personhood" (Eakin 2001, 114) and this model of me knows exactly how to react. I write. I write their own policies and procedures right back at them. I make a sound case for getting my walks back. I draft and redraft and on Thursday I hit send on the email. Within minutes the phone rings:

'Is this Angela?' an angry male voice screams down the phone at me.

'Yes,' I reply. 'Who is this?'

'I'm Brendan, the boss of home detention in Wollongong,' the voice yells. 'You're lucky that you're allowed to walk to the bus stop, get on the bus, go to work and then walk around at work. I don't care what crap you downloaded off the internet – I know the rules of home detention and I'm the boss of home detention. I don't want to hear any more about these walks. I don't want you ringing up crying and saying that we've made illegal sanctions on you. You should be in gaol, where you would spend significant periods locked in your cell and not be allowed to walk around at all. And I'll tell you that if I do hear anything else about these walks then when you ring up with last minute changes to your schedule which relate to your work you will be getting told, "No, those changes are not approved", and then you will be breached as you need to give forty-eight hours' notice of changes. And if you want to take this to court, then you take it to court. I am on holidays and you are interrupting my time with my family to deal with your bullshit. If I hear your name one more time, you are back in prison before you can think.'

He hangs up on me without giving me a chance to respond.

Williams 2015, 171-2

Just like Mr America, Brendan the Boss of Home Detention in Wollongong cannot conceive of a challenge to his power. I know he is standing on very flimsy procedural ground and I am very rapidly finding my own power again. I sit down at my computer, write down what he said and give that unfirm stance of his a push by emailing it to my supervising officer. The phone rings again:

Brendan is screaming louder, if such a thing is even possible. The phone speaker distorts his words, crackles in its attempt to transmit his incoherent rage. He yells at me that it's illegal for me to record his calls and that I will be being charged as soon as they can prove that I did it. 'You're going back to gaol for this,' he says before hanging up on me again.

Williams 2015, 172

My new "normative model of personhood" (Eakin 2001, 114) does not like being yelled at but I have learned my lesson from Mr America, university, dozens of letters to the Editor. I write some more:

I write a letter. A meticulously researched 2,024 word letter addressed to Commissioner Ron Woodham at corrective services. I detail the background of the situation, Brendan's abuse of me. I quote, with section numbers, the parts of the Policy and Procedure Manual that apply and the letters from my GP stating that I'm fit to walk and my psychiatrist saying that walking will help alleviate the

symptoms of my anxiety. I use all of my academic and writing skills to construct an unassailable argument.
Williams 2015, 172

Knowing politics and the functioning of democratic power I do not just send my letter to corrective services, but to every politician I can imagine having influence in the matter. I send it to Ministers and Shadow Ministers. I send it to the Leader of the Opposition and my Local Member. It is only with extreme self-discipline that I avoid sending it to the media. I know that for the apparatus to function, Brendan needs to have his moment of asserting his power and so I am not at all surprised when a man I have never met turns up on the weekend for a visit and surprise drug test. He is with a female officer but stands close to the open bathroom door while I pee in the cup. Afterwards:

As-yet-unintroduced man stands in the hallway and blocks my path to the lounge room.

‘I’m Brendan,’ he says. ‘Time we had a chat.’

I lean against the wall and sigh. Of course he’s Brendan, AKA The Boss of Home Detention in Wollongong. And of course he didn’t bother to introduce himself until after the drug test. No better way than to drive home how much power you’ve got over another person than to enter their house with no introductions, stand outside an open door while they pee and then use your body and your position to prevent them moving around their own house. A burlesque of authority, indeed, I think.

‘I’ve read the letter you sent to the commissioner,’ the Boss of Home Detention in Wollongong says to me. ‘I know you think you are very smart, and maybe you are in your world, but I’m smarter in this world. Your whingey complaints aren’t going to change anything. No one in corrective services cares about your hurt feelings and we all know that you only made this complaint because of your emotional instability.’

[...]

‘It’s obvious to anyone that you have serious psychological issues and this is what has led to you reoffending. You really should be grateful to us for doing this; at least we’re forcing you to finally get the help you need.’

Williams 2015, 174-5

In a pattern I am familiar with by now, the person whose power I have challenged attacks, falling back on name calling and attempting to reduce me, in both our eyes, to an hysterical woman whose feelings are hurt. “I’m smarter in this world,” he says, to remind me that all my thinking, research and writing cannot shift his position of power (2015, 175). And it works temporarily as I find myself “sitting on the floor and sobbing by the time he leaves” (2015, 175). But, just like Do, I use a moment of humour, a joke between my narrator and readers, to show that my resistance is still working:

I can feel the tears on my face and turn to the mirror behind where I have been leaning to wipe them away. The mirror is large, with a wooden frame, which I made years ago. As my vision clears and I start to think again my eye falls onto a Wilcox comic from the letters page of the newspaper stuck to the frame. I start to giggle as I realise that Brendan was able to see this the whole time he was berating me. In the comic a tattooed angry man with Brendan's physique and the word 'Security' on his shirt points his finger out of the frame right at my face. 'If you don't behave,' his speech bubble says, 'You'll never write another letter again.'

I'm laughing so hard that I need to brace my hands on the wall before sliding down to sit on the floor under the mirror.

Williams 2015, 175-6

Brendan might think his power is unchallengeable, but my laughter at him and his caricature mirrored in the cartoon tell a different story. When the situation is resolved a few days later, the evidence of the value of speaking up from the bottom of the power heap is clear:

'This isn't the first negative feedback we've received,' [Rochelle, the head of Home Detention in NSW] says. 'It's not okay that he treats people like this and action will be taken.'

'Can I request that he not attend my house in the future?'

'You don't have to worry about that,' her voice sounds tired now. 'He's already out of that position and if I have anything to do with it he won't be having contact with detainees from here on in.'

Williams 2015, 177

It turned out that my smarts did have power in his world and that my words could shift his position of power. In this final test of my ability to maintain my cohesive identity under the weight of the full power of corrective services, I found a way to argue back, showed that resistance from the bottom is possible and that those with power, like Brendan (and Mr America and Butchy McButch and Bitchie), are only able to hold you down if you let them. In learning how and when to argue back, I gave my readers the "narrative fidelity" (Fisher 1985, 349). My narrator showed there was a way to resist and make it to the end.

By the end of this book I have found my moment of triumphant affect; I know how to resist and understand myself enough to be able to.

Can *Snakes and Ladders* be understood through self-surveillance?

Snakes and Ladders begins with a tangled and divided narrator, unable to bring together the strands of divergent life experiences, and ends with a confident and critical thinker who can see the full spectrum of power as it plays out in the system. In discussing surveillance and discipline in my Methodology, I quoted Foucault saying the person who

“assumes responsibility for the constraints of power [...] inscribes in himself the power relations in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection” (1977, 202-3), and in constructing this memoir I have indeed become the principle of my own subjection. I have learned how to weight the dice with a careful blend of intellect, inquiry and (often bluffed) confidence and am moving my piece from ladder to ladder with a hand that barely shakes.

The problems that occurred in my memoir, the fracturing of my identity and the divergence of my history and actuality, were uncovered and alleviated by the processes of classification and risk mitigation. By looking closely and honestly at the development of my intersecting identities, I found a way to rearticulate this data in a way that values and legitimises the experiences of both Angelas.

The application of this newly formed understanding of the cohesive personality then acts, as predicted by my thesis, to open up the space for discipline and resistance to be explored and uncovered. Without the understanding and convergence of the different strands of my narrative identities, it would have been impossible for me to tap into and utilise the self-discipline needed to act out the resistance that carries me through to the triumphant final pages of the memoir.

In *Snakes and Ladders* the process of writing a memoir has functioned like and resulted in similar outcomes to surveillance.

Conclusion

This thesis set out to prove that writing a memoir can be considered as a form of self-surveillance. Starting with Foucault's argument that as lives are recorded in writing, they are submitted to "a procedure of objectification and subjection" (1979, 191), I have proven that by taking on this role themselves, the memoirist embraces a narratorial position of power where they can take back the 'official records', write a story that places them in a unique position to understand, examine and enunciate their own identity. Within this framework, I have situated the writing of a memoir as a form of protest against the official version of the authors' lives that allows the subject and narrator to reclaim a version of themselves beyond those official records that objectify and subjugate them.

Beginning with a thorough review of the literature on surveillance, its history, drives and outcomes, I was able to break this down into two functions, classification and risk mitigation, and two outcomes, discipline and resistance. These categories allowed me to set up a surveillance-based framework to construct my theory.

However, in order to understand memoir as it linked to these elements, I also needed to frame memoir and the search for identity as a form of self-surveillance. With a similar review of the theory regarding memoir and identity, I first explored the rules and motivations behind writing a memoir, discovering the "witness" urge (Rak 2001, 229) that drives a memoirist to need to tell a story. Complementing this, I researched identity theory to find how an identity is constructed, settling on a combination of the theories proposed by Taylor of a "dialogic [...] existential" construction of identity (1995, 225-34) and Foucault's externally imposed "corrected, classified, normalized, excluded" identity (1979, 191-2). Using these two approaches, I realised that not only are our memoirists trying to answer 'Who am I?' and 'Why am I who I am?' but also discovered the power they claim in answering these questions. I found that within a memoir the author's narratorial construction can be understood by examining the "narrative identity" and the drive towards a "normative model of personhood" (Eakin 2001, 114) and the requirement for "narrative fidelity" which helps the story align with "the logic of good reason" (Fisher 1985, 349). By combining these strands of theory, I was then able

to construct a Methodology that allowed for the examination of memoir as a form of self-surveillance.

The Methodology identified how textual and discursive analysis, “educated guesses” (McKee 2003, 1), intuitive leaps and deductive logic could be used to find evidence from the texts (and my creative work), to prove that writing a memoir can be considered as a form of self-surveillance.

To create a stable framework for these deductions, I crafted from the surveillance, memoir and identity theory a five-step methodological pattern, which proved to be evident in all three of my case studies and my own creative work. The first step lay outside of narrative time and so could not be analysed; however, the second to fifth steps allowed for the linking of the four surveillant elements – classification, risk mitigation, discipline and resistance – to the theory about memoir and identity, and how each of these motivations and outcomes can be seen acting within self-narration. To identify problems, I looked at the drive to write a memoir, the classification that narrator applies to themselves and the risk mitigation they use in telling and living the story. To uncover solutions, I found evidence of the narrators applying self-discipline to identify ways out of their problems, shown by their “narrative identity” (Eakin 2001, 114) and then resistance, which brought the story in line with “narrative fidelity” (Fisher 1985, 349) and helped them find their ultimate solution. By applying the simplistic-seeming but also highly nuanced problems and solutions dialectic, I was able to show how each narrator used classification and risk mitigation to uncover problems and how they implemented self-discipline and resistance to narratively overcome these problems.

In examining my three case studies, I used this five-step pattern to uncover evidence in each of the texts that, for the author, writing their memoir had indeed acted as a form of self-surveillance. In each case, I found that the narrator had used the functions of self-classification and risk mitigation to identify the problems in their narrative world, and then applied self-discipline and resistance to forge a path out of those problems.

Each of these case studies began with a problem, and with the narrator emphasising this by using a shift in narrative time to formalise their narratorial role. By shifting into this role, they each classified themselves, showing by self-surveillance the problems inherent in their story world. As each began to utilise risk mitigation, both in

their positioning as narrator and the ordering of story time and events, they showed themselves coming closer to finding a path out of their problems. Within this risk mitigation, for each, lay the seeds of self-discipline and showed the narrator edging closer to the problem-solving phase. However, it was in the resistance that each narrator demonstrated that moment of triumphant affect, the drawing together of their solutions and the way out of their problems.

In applying the Methodology to my own creative work, I had the extra benefit of having been present as subject and narrator, a unique view that I was unable to apply to my other case studies. While this more nuanced understanding did influence and feed into my analysis, it was handled with full awareness that I was tapping into a pool of knowledge excluded from my other analyses.

Within my own memoir, I found the same pattern at work, the same path towards breaking out of the “objectification and subjection” that Foucault warned about (1979, 191). I saw that, for myself, writing this memoir was indeed a process of self-surveillance. The fractured identity which was the problem at the start of my work was unpacked by the use of self-classification and risk mitigation, with the varying strands of Angela woven together through self-discipline to come to my own moment of triumphant affect, the ‘yes’ of resistance which appeared to highlight the solutions.

In conducting this research, I have shown that writing a memoir is identifiable as a form of self-surveillance and that the process of crafting a narrative and shaping a narratorial position is comparable to the operations of surveillance.

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**Part Two: Creative Work
Snakes and Ladders: a Memoir**

**A creative work submitted in (partial) fulfilment of the
requirements for the award of the degree**

Doctor of Philosophy

from

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

**Angela J. Williams, Bachelor of Creative Arts & Bachelor of
Communications and Media CI Hons.**

SCHOOL OF THE ARTS, ENGLISH AND MEDIA

2015

*Note: The original pagination of Snakes and Ladders: a Memoir has been
maintained from this point forward to align with the references given in Chapter
Four.*

Notes on language

Contested terms such as 'screw', 'hooker', 'whore', 'junkie' and 'queer' are used in this book. 'Contested terms' are words that carry heavy connotative meaning and which have been used to cause harm to marginalised groups. The use of these terms in this book is a deliberate acknowledgment of the power of language.

'Screw' is a derogatory term for a correctional officer. It comes from the action of the guard 'screwing' the key in the lock to secure a door. It is used (and explained) in this book as a form of acknowledging the intrinsic power dynamics that exist between guard and inmate. 'Screw' is my way of seeing and protesting my own participation in the games of corrective power.

'Hooker' and 'whore' (sex worker), 'junkie' (intravenous drug user) and 'queer' (homosexual) are all derogatory terms that have been used to disenfranchise and subjugate the target groups. 'Queer' has been reclaimed by gay people, appropriating the insult and inverting the power dynamic. In a similar vein, I use 'hooker' and 'junkie' to self-identify, invalidating the harm these words may hold for me as an individual. My use of these terms does not justify them as group identifiers or give permission for those outside of these disenfranchised groups permission to use them as blanket nouns for sex workers or drug users.

I deliberately do not use the term 'prostitute' except when quoting. The P word has been so heavily co-opted by rescue movements and the connotations of 'prostituted people' have become so weighted with the extra meanings of powerlessness, helplessness and lack of choice that I do not imagine a reclaiming of this term is possible in the current environment. Please never use the P word to refer to me or my story.

The use of the term 'girls' is deliberate. It acknowledges the communal bottom of the pecking order of the women I describe, myself included.

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Prologue

Tell the truth instead of reposing in the security of a life where the truth goes unspoken.

- Michel Foucault

I used to be a heroin addict, criminal and all round not-nice-girl.

In 2003, after getting clean off drugs, I left that world behind and went to University. Seven years, two degrees and a lifetime later, I forgot to look right as I crossed a road and was hit by a Postie on her motorbike. When the police came to take my statement they arrested me for an outstanding warrant from 1996. I had just finished a First Class Honours' degree at the University of Wollongong.

Snakes and Ladders tells the story of those six weeks in prison and the following home detention. In the process of telling this story, I weave vignettes and memories from my early life that reveal the relationships and complications that led to the original crime. But I also explore the people and situations that allowed me to break free from a life of criminality and addiction.

In *Snakes and Ladders* I take you inside three different prisons, the maximum security Mulawa Women's Correctional Centre in Sydney, and the two medium security prisons at Berrima and Emu Plains. Lived experience insights into the everyday reality of contemporary corrections practice in NSW are rarely offered and *Snakes and Ladders* is unique for the honesty and wit I bring to this tough subject.

I'll show you the sex industry and give you an up close understanding of the differences between toxic drug-fuelled sex work and the empowerment of my final sex industry gig as a dominatrix. My history of heroin addiction and crime is explored with brutal honesty, including my processes for getting and staying clean. I trace the drive to addiction and self-destructive sex work back to a childhood filled with abuse – abuse discounted by 1980s society because of the gender and role of my perpetrator, my mother. By exploring the female-only rehabilitation centre that I attended and the lessons I learned through my first stint in prison in the 1990s, I reveal my journey beyond a conception of myself as 'victim with mother as perpetrator' and how I learned to appreciate and value myself as a woman, mother, academic and person.

‘It’s all a game, you know, a stupid power game which only works ‘cause we play along,’ I write in Chapter 2. This book is about how I worked out the rules of the game and found a way to follow them.

What I am about to write may sound crazy to you, and trust me, it felt crazy to be caught up in. What follows is not hyperbole – it does not stretch the truth. What follows happened here, in NSW, in prisons run and funded by the Australian government. Every word of this is true.

Chapter 1

Request for bail: The Accused has refused to make a request for bail

Determination: I have determined that bail be refused

- *Reason For Bail Decision By Authorising Officer*, 9 February 2010

Comments on Brief Assessment: no apparent health issues

Does the person complain of, or show any obvious sign of pain, injury or illness?:

N

Was the person carrying medication or street drugs?: Y

Comments: codeine and antibiotics

Has the person made any other complaint about his/her health?: N

- *New South Wales Police Custody Management Report*, 8 February 2010

3pm, Friday, 5 February 2010

Princes Highway

North Wollongong, NSW

It's early February 2010, and I'm about to cross a road. I thought I was on this, figured I had it covered. We learn this at school, so it's ingrained into old age. Look left, look right, look left again, and go, right? Wrong.

I'm distracted. February in Wollongong is hot and exciting. If we still put mercury in thermometers it would spend February floating around the high twenties and early thirties, bringing afternoons of armpit sweat and prickly eyebrows. Friday is the beginning of the weekend and in Wollongong this means fishing, boating, camping. It means skydiving over shimmering beaches, hang-gliding from towering cliffs, mountain biking down mountains. Weekends in the 'Gong in February don't ask you to take things carefully; they don't suggest you look left and then right. They don't want you to be comfortable – they want you to live, they want you to be excited, they want you to step off the kerb.

My little slice of Friday-in-February Wollongong isn't living up to the promises. I've just had a shot of antibiotics in my bum to kill a reoccurring cyst and I hurt. A lot. After that, my Friday is about getting food for my pets: frozen mice for the snake and crickets for the axolotl. This is an ordeal but the animals say they're starving. After visiting three different pet shops I finally have the feeders in a bag and am ready to head

home. Plans include the lounge, TV, some slow cooking, maybe some gentle housework. My right butt cheek throbs from the bungled intramuscular injection. I'm miserable and distracted.

The bus I'm waiting for is the free Gong Shuttle that loops around the city. It goes two ways – clockwise and anti-clockwise – and I'm waiting for the 'C bus' that will take me home the quick way. The Princes Highway where I wait is a long straight stretch that travels from North Wollongong to Fairy Meadow, four lanes of busy traffic with shops and houses lining the road. On the opposite side of the road I can see the 'A' coming towards me, still two sets of traffic lights away. It's almost at the McDonald's at the bottom of Mount Ousley and I've got time to catch it if I cross the road. There's still no sign of the 'C' coming from Fairy Meadow. It's a longer trip around the anti-clockwise loop but the ride along the top of the cliffs could be worth it. The weekend might be all about my bed and lounge but if I cross the road now, then there will be a chance for some second-hand voyeuring of others' weekend prepping as we swoop along the cliff above the sea pools, surf beach and harbour. Maybe I'll see some pelicans. The bus is still two intersections away as I gather up the mice and crickets and step off the gutter, looking left at the approaching bus but forgetting to look right.

The motorbike is on me before I've taken a second step.

'Watch out!' The postie is shouting as she tries to turn the bike away.

Acrid panic froths across the back of my tongue. I try to move but a shard of burning light reflecting off some piece of chrome at the front of the bike catches my eye. I pivot around this shred of brightness, eyes pinned to the light, body frozen in place. Crickets chirp in the bag hanging from my hand. The bike's running board catches the big muscle in my right calf and sweeps my feet out from underneath me. I jolt onto the road in a perfect baseball slide, my left elbow leaving bits of itself on the asphalt. The postie is yelling something above me. The road is hot under my scratched palms.

The bus I'd been crossing the road to catch pulls into the stop opposite as I sputter amid the de-sorted mail. Cold sweat and hot shame flood over me, coating face and ribs and hands with a greasy slick. People sitting on the bus stare out at me as I fluster about, helping the postie collect her mail. Blood trickles down from my elbow, dripping towards my wrist. My heartbeat drowns all ambient noise. Cars slow down as they drive by, people inside craning to see past the postie and me, trying to see real injuries. The lack of supine bodies seems to disappoint them and they speed up as they pass us. White snowflakes cluster into the corner of my eyes, shock piling up and narrowing my focus to a tiny window of white letters and glistening black tarmac. I'm

sobbing and apologising and the postie lady speaks softly now as she takes the shaking letters from my hands and piles them into her basket. Assuring me she is okay, she looks at my bleeding elbow, swelling calf, asks if there is anything she can do. Cars keep passing us by and the 'C bus' stops further up the road as its rightful spot is filled by our collision and fallout. The driver gives us plenty of space. The approaching police van, on the other hand, puts its right hand blinker on and turns across traffic to enter the street that the postie had been pulling out of when she hit me. The cops smile as they climb out of the van, tucking caps onto their heads. I panic.

I don't know why I panic. This is what is meant to happen. A law-abiding citizen is injured, endangered, afraid, and the hand of the state reaches out to keep them safe. I don't respond like a law-abiding citizen. I panic. Flustered with pain and blood and dizziness, I put my head down, brush off the uniformed help and set off to walk towards the next closest bus stop. I want to escape the eyes of the passing drivers and be at home. Safe and alone.

The dark-haired cop says 'Hey, you, stay here,' but I keep on walking. I head south towards McDonald's, tears puddling down my cheeks and left elbow swinging out awkwardly. Sweat runs from my armpits, stinging the graze on my elbow and slicking my palms even more. I'm about five hundred metres from the crash site, half way to the next bus stop when the cops catch me.

'Now hang on a sec, we just need to talk to you.' The police van turns across my path and into the car park, herding me towards the drive-through waiting bay.

This is even worse than on the side of the road. Early Friday afternoon partiers fill the car park of McDonald's and stare as the men in blue decamp and huddle me against the side of the van. Seagulls who think we might have food swoop in to land on the roof of the van and the tarmac around our feet. A dropped Hot Fudge Sundae melts near the rear wheel.

'Do you have any ID?'

I fumble in my wallet for my driver's license.

The cop looks it over, notes down my name, address, date of birth. He asks me questions about the incident and I grasp for answers. The bag of mice and crickets bangs against my knee as I shuffle my sad feet to a humiliation dirge only I can hear. After he writes down my details the cop asks if I need a ride home, drops me at my house and solicitously offers to call me later to see how I am going.

The house is a disaster when I get home. Piles of paperwork are scattered across the dining table, separate stacks desperately trying to merge. Computer games that haven't quite lost their Christmas newness are piled around the television. Multiple baskets of washing argue for space behind the lounge. Shit.

I clean the wound on my elbow and dress it. Finger the dint in my calf and wonder how long it will take for the tissue to bounce back, how big the bruise will be. I feed the animals, do some roller derby paperwork, reshuffle the pile of bills. Look over a stack of job applications and consider working on some more. Kick myself for not applying for a post grad course by cut-off and think that maybe I will try for mid-year intake. As penance, I fold the washing and tidy the lounge room. Smoke some pot and kick back.

Later, as I'm lying on the lounge, the pain in my neck that has been niggling all afternoon wakes up. This is pain that knows how to wake up. It yawns, farts, scratches its balls and then invites all its buddies over, lights up a bonfire and settles in to party. I go to the hospital.

In the line for triage my mobile phone rings. It isn't on silent. My ringtone is a loud metal song. I fumble while the triage nurse melts the glass screen between us with her glare.

'Hello Angela,' the Dark-Haired Cop says, 'I'm just calling to see how you are going.'

He sounds concerned, a solid defender of the common good, checking up on the progress of a distressed citizen.

'I'm just up at the hospital,' I say quietly, aware of the angry nurse, not yet scared. 'My neck got a bit dodgy and so I figured I should get it looked at.'

'Oh,' he says.

My neck hairs prickle. I don't like single syllables from cops, reminds me of much worse days.

'Well,' he continues, 'since you've attended emergency we will need to get a statement from you.'

'Oh,' I say, 'Umm, do you need me to come in tonight and do that?'

It's the last thing that I want to do but, well, you know... man with a badge.

'Not tonight,' I hear a fear of paperwork in his prevarication. 'I'm back on shift Monday afternoon. How about we make a time for me to come around and take a statement then?'

Monday it is then. Six pm. He reckons it will take thirty to forty minutes of my time. I can handle that, can almost ignore the flutter set off by that 'oh'. I have no idea.

It's thirteen years since I went to prison for a break and enter when I was nineteen and I'm about to go back for the exact same crime. A lot happens in thirteen years but one thing that hasn't happened is me going back inside. For all my paranoia, here in the hospital on a hot weekend in the 'Gong, I've got no idea this is about to happen. So you're one step ahead of me.

*6pm, Monday, 8 February 2010
Staff Street
Wollongong, NSW*

'Did you use to be known as Angela Marino?' Dark-Haired Cop says after I open the door and invite the two men in blue in.

This feels like a strange way to start an interview about the accident. It's more than ten years since I've used this name. I've forgotten that my police record lives under the name 'Angela Marino'.

'Yes, it was my married name.'

My fourteen-year-old son Dex who also carries the name Marino looks away from his computer games and up at the blue uniforms but they don't notice him so he goes back to the digital world.

'I'm sorry, but we need to arrest you,' the cop says. 'We have an outstanding warrant from 2003 that we need to get sorted. It's too late to get you in front of a magistrate tonight but we'll get you in first thing in the morning and you'll be home by ten am.'

Dex's head swivels around, like he just can't quite believe what he heard. He forgets to press pause on the controller and the game bleeps away and keeps playing while he stares up at the cop who's said this shocking thing. The cops still don't seem to see him. I'm trying to process what they're saying to me but also trying not to freak out. If I show that I'm upset, it's likely to send Dex into a panic.

Okay, think about it Angela, I say to myself, you can work this out. The statement makes a strange kind of sense, though the date confuses me. 2003 wasn't really that long ago and I was pretty sure that I hadn't broken any laws in that year, or even that decade. The disorderly days of my youth were a different matter, but since I'd

given up the needle in 2000 my association with crime had shrunk and now the closest I got was watching *Law and Order* and reading books about serial killers.

Yeah, so I'm a reformed junkie with old needle tracks on the inside of my elbows. Angela Marino was in love with chemicals and the steel that pumped them into her system. But by 2003 I have changed back to my birth name. Angela Williams is starting degrees in Creative Arts and Media and Communications at the University of Wollongong, seeing an uber-qualified forensic psychiatrist, volunteering to help refugees, penning tortured poetry and thinking about moving out of Sydney to get away from temptation.

I let the police take me away because it doesn't seem like I have any other options. I call my boyfriend up from his office downstairs and try to explain what's going on but I make no sense. I quit smoking two years ago but figure I'm going to need a crutch for this and so before I leave I go into my housemate's room and leave her a note: 'Liz,' I write, 'Been arrested, stole your cigarettes, see you soon. Love, Ange.'

Before I leave the house I hug Dex, pulling his tear-filled and very scared eyes against my shoulder, try to comfort him when it feels like there is no comfort I can give, promise him it will all be okay and that he'll be okay, I'll be okay.

8pm, Monday, 8 February 2010
Police Cells
Wollongong, NSW

Monday night, hours after our scheduled interview time and I'm sitting in a holding cell underneath Wollongong Police Station. Dark-Haired Cop was wrong. It's taken more than forty minutes. It will take much, much longer.

Angela Marino wouldn't have been astonished to be sitting in the holding cells; she would have had a swear, yelled a bit, made it necessary for them to lock the door.

Angela Williams is surprised to be in the holding cells. She perches on the edge of the steel bench, pale, shaking and picking at the scratched paint and dried gum with a broken matchstick that she found on the floor. She thinks about her son at home, scared and confused and wondering how his mother became a criminal. Angela Marino was someone she thought she'd left behind. Angela Williams cries shamed and silent tears for the stupidity of Angela Marino.

The sergeant behind the charge desk is a robust, rosy-cheeked stereotype of himself. He has the grin of a man who could either laugh with you or pounce on you, depending on which side you approach from. From the way he leans familiarly on the

desk, you can tell he's eking out the days till retirement in this cushy (but vital) admin role. He's the big guy with people skills who's still living on the memories of chasing crims, jumping fences and pulling sidearms. Between him, the charge desk and the row of cells, there's not much space left in the room.

I'm in a tiny Perspex holding cell, one in a row of five, perched on a flimsy metal seat. I watch him from the cell as he empties out the contents of my handbag, cataloguing each item on a property sheet before stuffing it all back into the bag and zipping it closed. My uber cool black vinyl bag, with rainbow space invaders marching across the front, looks particularly alien on the steel-topped bench.

The door to the holding cell is open and the desk sarge tells me I can wander around if I need to stretch my legs. I'm not giving him any trouble and he seems as baffled by my presence in their cells as I am. On paper it's just plain confusing. I've got two university degrees, strong community attachments. I don't look like a criminal – there's money in my wallet and credit on my mobile. I just completed an honours year at uni and wrote a thesis that earned marks in the nineties. I'm looking at a great future. I'm not a criminal.

The young man in the cell next to me has come straight from the back of a paddy wagon and is looking at several assault charges and something about possession with intent. The desk sarge barks at him and speaks to me. They keep cuffs on him while he sits in his own Perspex box next to mine, door closed and locked. None of this makes any sense.

'Angela,' it's Dark-Haired Cop who arrested me, 'Can you come over here for a minute?'

He's standing at the desk trying not to rustle a piece of paper. The desk sarge is behind him with a solemn look.

I don't want to know what's on the piece of paper.

'There's a bit of a problem,' he says to me. 'I've looked over the warrant and you will not be seeing the magistrate in the morning. There's no option for you to apply for bail.'

Cold heat drops from my scalp to my soles, chased by a chilly sweat.

'This warrant is for ten months and one day of incarceration. Tomorrow you'll be going to Mulawa and you won't be released until October this year. I can arrange for you to make another call to let your family know what is happening.'

I don't realise that the silent tears are back, pouring down my face as I stumble back to the cell. The boy in the other holding cell knocks on the Perspex wall between us.

'Don't worry, miss,' he says, young dark eyes filled with sympathy. 'Ten months will go like nothing, you'll be home in time for Christmas.'

The phone conversation with Dex hurts. I know he's safe at home with my boyfriend and housemate, know that they'll look after him till I get back – know this logically, but still feel like the worst mother in the world. I tell him there's been some terrible mistake and that I'll be home soon, that I'll talk to him all the time. The lies are tight in my throat. I don't believe a word I'm saying and every mothering instinct I have tells me that neither does he.

The date on the warrant isn't a mistake. It was from 1997 but was reissued when the system went computerised between 1999 and 2003. The crime I was arrested for had happened back in 1996 and I'd received a sentence of fifteen months' weekend detention. I'd rocked along to five months' worth when my addiction got out of control.

Weekend detention at Emu Plains was like playgroup for drug addicts and criminals. 'Weekends' we called it, like a one-star caravan park. We'd all turn up on Friday afternoon with snatches full of drugs, playing cards in our pockets and enough cash to purchase drugs from other people's snatches when ours ran out. We'd shoot up drugs, snort drugs, smoke drugs – maybe mow some lawns – and then all jump a train to score drugs at Cabramatta after unlock on Sunday afternoon. No one ever seemed to get caught, not even the girl who climbed the fence every Friday night and smuggled back clinking bottles from the pub to keep her spirits up.

Weekend detention got me really committed to being a junkie. Me and Weekends were a good team, if being a junkie is a game you can win. When I started there I was using \$30 a day worth of heroin. By the end of five months I was pumping \$150 into my arm every single day. I had a shot before I got on the train from Newtown to go to Weekends, another in the train station at Emu Plains, somehow mumbled my way through line ups and searches. Ate dinner, had a shot, threw up dinner. Rinse and repeat. By then, things weren't too good outside of Weekends either.

So I switched teams. I went to rehab, blowing off the rest of my sentence.

Rehabs are all about fixing things. Three months into the twelve-month program, team Rehab and I decided to act. Off I trotted, with a worker from the rehab, to Balmain Police Station to 'confront the issue'.

'I need you to arrest me,' I said to the desk sergeant, a fat man with greying blond sideburns and crumbs on his lip. 'I've got outstanding weekend detention.'

'Can you come back after lunch?' he replied.

I came back after lunch.

'Just give me a tick,' he said after hearing my case, wandering out the back of the station. Several ticks passed before he returned.

'I've looked into it,' he seemed positive, unlikely to arrest me right then. 'Your sentence has been commuted to rehab. If you finish the program, you're home free.'

I believed him. I was a fool. Thirteen years later I discovered that he didn't even enter my details into the COPS (Computerised Operational Policing System) database. Thirteen years I've been walking the fine line between prison and freedom. Forgetting to look right wasn't a crime but it was enough to cross that line.

A female cop interrupts my introspection, poking her mousey-but-groomed head into the small cubicle and asking quietly if I will please follow her. I don't get any eye contact. She looks uncomfortable as she leads me out the door of the holding pen and towards a locked room at the very end of the charge room. There is no explanation. So far I've had my property searched and tagged, my fingerprints taken on the new digital scanning machine. I've signed all the paperwork. I think back to my original arrest, trying to imagine what indignity is waiting for me. She still hasn't made eye contact with me. As she pulls a pair of latex gloves out of her pocket I realise what comes next. This scared-looking woman is about to check me for contraband.

I'd forgotten about the strip searches.

I try to remember how nineteen-year-old me responded to strip searches, wonder if I was this scared of getting my gear off in front of someone wearing a uniform. I have a sinking feeling that Angela Marino me might have found it a rush, gotten off on the idea. Poor naïve nineteen-year-old me. I'm getting the impression that I'm going to be remembering a lot over the next few days.

The bathroom we enter doubles as a storage room for cleaning products. It's right next to an ominous hallway. I'm pretty sure from the CCTV cameras and double-keyed locks that in just a few minutes I'll be taken through the last police-locked door and be put into the care and custody of Corrective Services. The police might not be overly interested in naked bodies but Corrective Services love them. This won't be the last time I take my clothes off in front of strangers wearing uniforms. And this time I won't even get paid for it. A strip search accompanies every movement between prisons

and many movements within prisons. I'd forgotten that access to my naked body was no longer a privilege I could choose to dispense. I try to brace myself but fail completely. The cop closes the door and we are alone. The snick of the door closing sucks the air out of my lungs and I'm suddenly cold under my clothes.

The cop looks at the leaning mops and brooms, a rumpled roll of garbage bags, smudged bottles of cleaning products, anywhere but at my face and eyes. She wears the gloves but doesn't touch me. Goes to scratch her face but recoils from the unfamiliar texture. The room smells like some old antiseptic that I used to know. I remove my shirt and since there is nowhere obvious to put it, I drape it over the edge of the hand basin. She leans over, takes the shirt, feeling along its seams for hidden caches of drugs and gestures me back. I remember that they like space in searches, room to move, to see a threat before it happens. When I place my pants on the sink I do it with an extreme lean, far enough back that I cannot possibly excrete a weapon or drugs from them without her noticing. It's all coming back to me now. Strip searches are something like pantomime undressing, lots of big slow movements – and nothing at all like erotic stripping. I lift off my bra and place it on the sink so she can pick it up and feel it. I lean forward from the waist and fluff at my hair so that any hidden things can fall out. The cop looks at the bottom half of my face as she directs me to open my mouth and run my own finger around the inside then outside of my gums. The last step is my underpants, which drop down around my ankles.

'That's far enough,' she says and makes a spinning motion with her finger.

I turn in a circle, stopping to lift up my feet and show her the soles, separating the toes to show her between them, on something like autopilot now. I turn back to face her and she is staring past me at the toilet bowl.

'Get dressed,' she says, and as she turns to open the door, 'I'm sorry.'

I get dressed and the shame that paints my face feels both shockingly familiar and painfully unique. Nudity, I remind myself, is nothing to be ashamed of; we are all naked under our clothes. This public speaking anxiety-reducing tip only works for a second though. As I size up the cop walking out the door, try to mentally undress her, my eyes fall on her handcuffs and I realise that no amount of imagining her naked can balance the power between us. In this giant stack of signifiers of power, I'm right at the bottom.

Then the door at the end of the hallway opens and I am walking past the (suddenly very nice-seeming) female cop, into the care of corrective services. It's been a long time and I never thought I'd be back. The gruff officer on the other side of the door

greet me with a rough 'Marino'. Since I was originally arrested under my married name, my birth name has now become an alias. Do the last thirteen years really exist, I wonder to myself, if it was all done by an AKA? I realise I have ceased to be 'Angela Williams, person' and have become 'Marino, 263504, inmate'.

I suppose that is what happens when you commit crimes. I should have looked fucking right. Or not committed the crime.

*March 1996
Drug Dealer's place
Umina, NSW*

Mine was a grotty, scabby crime that happened in a small dirty apartment above a row of shops in the small Central Coast town of Umina. In 1996 I had just turned nineteen. My son Dex was a few weeks shy of his first birthday. All I could think about was heroin.

There were steel steps leading up to the apartments at the back of the row of shops and before we started up them, Mark had stopped to scatter syringes around the bottom of the stairwell. The plan was that when the police came to investigate the home invasion they would stumble on the discarded needles as evidence of the 'drugginess' of the crime. Brilliant. The fits weren't new. Tiny spots of blood filled the cavity at the base of the needle, leftover blobs of genetic matter from my arm, Mark's arm, Shannon's arm. I was too young and stupid to see this as potential forensic evidence. There were no needles from our other co-offender, my brother Trevor. He was tagging along on this big exciting crime and wasn't motivated by the heroin-shaped monkey that rode shotgun with the rest of us. He'd just watched *Scarface* one too many times and was about to pay a hefty price for that.

While we drove from our parent's house in Woy Woy I argued with Trevor, asked him to go back home, pleaded with him to not play this shit macho game. Toughing it out, on a quest to find his inner Pacino, he argued back from the rear seat of the dodgy white Mitsubishi Scorpion as we drifted down the silent main street of the small town.

Umina is a small beach town that sat across the waters from Sydney's Palm Beach. It was a five-minute fast drive from the closest police station in Woy Woy and twenty minutes from the regional command centre in Gosford. The beaches were – still are – long stretches of smooth sand, studded with surf clubs, caravan parks, new brick mansions and old weatherboard cottages. There was a pub, a supermarket, a handful of cafes. Families with small children lived there for the community, and elderly people

were there to live out their retirements. And, increasingly, in the last decade before the Millennium, there were drugs. Drugs just like the ones we were hoping to find in the flat at the top of these stairs and which we thought would be easy pickings.

It was dark inside the apartment. Somehow the door being kicked open hadn't roused anyone and I stood statue-still in the middle of a stranger's lounge room, listening to the rustle of a large bird whose cage hung on a stand near the front door. There was a small kitchen to our right, open lounge room to the left and beyond that a short hallway leading to what had to be bedrooms and a bath. Pretty much what we expected. Everything was dark. The guy who lived here was supposed to be a massive dealer. A sizeable and well-maintained tropical fish tank in the corner added weight to the argument. Drug dealers and fish tanks go together like, well, fish and water. The drugs had to be there somewhere. The guy who told us swore he kept the stash under the sink – he'd seen him pull it out with his own eyes.

There was no stash under the sink.

Shit.

Shannon had done this kind of thing before and reckoned that we had at least fifteen minutes before the cops would turn up. Even though he'd only been in town for a couple of days, Shannon had somehow found out that the police station at Woy Woy was closed overnight and that the cops would need to come all the way from Gosford. Fifteen minutes seemed reasonable. Shannon was convincing. He'd done this before, also seen *Scarface* too many times.

Shannon opened a door at the end of the hallway, moving air currents around the room. The bird rustled in its cage and sent out a sudden shriek. Its alarm seemed misplaced until Shannon came back into the lounge room dragging a large yelling man with a cast on his leg. Trevor and Mark slipped past him and soon returned with a screaming woman whose face leaked blood from the top. It took me three goes to pick up a tea towel that hung across the end of the kitchen counter, I just couldn't make my fingers work. When I leaned down to press the cloth against the gash in the woman's forehead my mouth filled with bitter bile. I wanted to vomit. I wanted to be somewhere else. I wanted a shot, oh God, I wanted a shot. The woman screamed as she leaned against me, cries barely muffled by the blood running into her mouth and the tea towel that hung across her face. The man with the cast was still yelling behind the wall of fists and feet that was Mark and Shannon. Trevor looked horrified at the woman in my arms, a spanner hanging limply from his left hand. There were still no drugs in sight. I wanted a

shot so bad. A sobbing child came down the hallway, maybe ten years old, and in the distance I could hear sirens. This was the worst crime in history, as far as I was concerned. One person, he'd said, maybe two. Under the sink, saw it with my own eyes, he said.

I decided right there and then that I was a pretty shit criminal. I was so right it hurt.

We ran, scattered, ran some more.

It took the police a few laps of the street before they found us all. We were taken to the surprisingly open police station in Woy Woy and seated with four separate Detectives in four separate corners of a communal office area. I folded after a cup of milky tea and approximately six minutes of questioning, spilling my guts about the whole thing. My three co-defendants quickly did the same, even Shannon the 'seasoned pro'. The sun hadn't even tinted the sky by the time our charge sheets were processed, we were fingerprinted and strip-searched. They gave us four consecutive administration numbers or MINs. No matter how far we all got from this crime, from each other, we're linked forever by our order in the system.

In a few short hours I became inmate Marino, MIN 263504. I served four and a half months on remand at Mulawa Women's Correctional Centre and was then sentenced to Weekend Detention. The court told me I had good prospects for rehabilitation. They urged me to take advantage of the opportunities given me in this light sentence.

At least that's how I remember it.

Monday, 8 February 2010

Police Cells

Wollongong, NSW

Marino, 263504, sits in the corrective services holding cells. She'll hang out here until the transport van comes to collect her on its rounds of the Southern Region prisons and police stations.

I can feel myself disassociating, my psychic camera pulling focus, giving me the distance I think I'm going to need to survive what's coming.

These cells are different to the ones on the next level up run by the police. These cells are big, square boxes with one Perspex wall facing onto a hallway. The transparent wall is reinforced with bars. There's a concrete bed with a vinyl wrapped foam mattress on the top, covered by two white hospital blankets. The seatless steel

toilet is hidden behind a waist-high brick wall to cover genitals but not intent. The doors are not left open here. The floor-to-ceiling Perspex wall opens onto a short hallway with windows on the wall opposite my cell. Closed blinds across the windows block my view of the office where the corrective service officers spend their time. I can't see them, but know they're there. The shouts of male voices, swearing and ranting, tell me there is another row of cells on the other side of the officers' room. I try to keep quiet so the male inmates won't know I'm here.

The shame of the strip search has stained me. I want to become invisible, disappear into the system. I try to imagine how I ever felt I had power, potential, legitimacy. The rational Angela Williams, constructing academic arguments and leading fruitful tutorial discussions is being subsumed back into the tics and twitches of the nineteen-year-old criminal Angela Marino. I'm boxed in by walls of sadness for the younger me as they lock me in.

When I'm placed in the cell they generously allow me to keep my book and pouch of tobacco but I'm told I'll only be allowed one light for a cigarette per hour until midnight. Later, I ask for writing paper and am given ripped-in-half charge sheets from old 'clients' and a truncated stump of lead pencil. I lie on the bed reading the name, address, date-of-birth, next-of-kin and employment details of a person who's been arrested not too long before me. I'm horrified at first at the lack of discretion, this careless disregard as the officer shares another prisoner's personal information with me. I'm sure that some kind of policy exists that declares all information is confidential, certain there has to be. But the absurd reality is that if this policy exists it means nothing. My eyes fill again, for the hundredth time today, at the idea that sometime in the near future some other prisoner could be sitting here reading my name, address and date of birth on 'scrap' paper. Eventually I just have to turn the paper over and write. I scrawl my confusion in tiny tight lines with the stub of pencil gripped right near its point. I light new cigarettes from the butts of old ones until I feel dizzy and spewy. Been a long time since I smoked like this.

As it gets later, the officers get louder. I have to assume they know there are people in these cells, but just don't realise we might prefer to marinate away our fear with sleep. They start out with DVDs, loud explosive action-packed gunfests. The volume gets louder the more the male prisoners, who I can hear but not see, complain. By the end of the second film the dialogue is vibrating the hairs inside my ears and the gunshots are bringing tears to my eyes. Shift change happens.

A casual officer has been brought in to fill a staffing gap in the next watch, which inspires a vigorous industrial relations discussion. A new DVD has been started but is turned down as one particularly verbose officer makes his opinions known. Mr Verbose wants change, and he wants it now. The casual is a little twitter underneath, pacifying, placating, agreeing with the self-appointed union rep. After a seemingly endless and increasingly loud rant I press the metal buzzer on the wall that allows me to communicate with them.

‘What?’ The voice is shockingly loud through the speaker in the wall but only slightly less audible than the echo I can hear from the other side of the windows. It could be Mr Verbose himself but it is hard to tell with the strange doubling.

‘Could you guys keep it down out there? It is impossible to sleep in here.’

There is no answer through the speaker. I am staring into the small metal holes when the door at the end of the hallway slams shut.

‘That should shut her up,’ says a male voice on the other side of the windows and blinds. His voice is neatly cut off by the ramped-up volume on the DVD.

I tear tiny strips of thread from the woven hospital blanket, wrap them around lumps of toilet paper and try to fashion earplugs. The scratchy lumps make the inside of my ears itch and fall out when I move. I’ve been a restless sleeper since my first time inside and I’m starting to remember a pattern. I cry into the pillow and pretend that if only I can get to sleep I might be able to wake up from this bad dream. If life is a game of Snakes and Ladders, I think to myself, then I just hit that stupid long snake that takes you all the way from 99 to 2.

Eventually I fall asleep.

Tuesday, 9 February 2010

Police Cells

Wollongong, NSW

The girl in the cell next door is still dressed for work when I wake up. The officers have unlocked our cell doors so that we can use the shower at the end of the hall and she is out and about. As she stalks up and down the hallway her short skirt rides up and the broken heels of her knee-high boots tip her from one side to the other. One boot has been repaired, black tape wrapped around the ball of one foot. Noise from the exposed adhesive punctuates her steps as it sticks and peels, peels and sticks. She yells at the officers – wants a light for her cigarette, hotter water for her coffee, acknowledgment of her existence. I sit up and roll a smoke, watching her through the open door and Perspex

wall. When I'm done rolling she offers me a light from a match that we share. After a few more minutes of pacing she squats in the door of my cell and starts talking. I can see the grotty crotch of her knickers but try to politely watch her face instead of looking for stains.

She was picked up working the street work area out at Port Kembla on an outstanding warrant. Where she was working is legal – out of sight of schools, residences, playgrounds – so there is only the one matter to deal with. She'll be going to see the magistrate when the courthouse opens and will be home soon after that. A good thing really, as the withdrawals are starting to kick in big time now. I can see a greasy sweat dragging itself out of her skin, the sneezes are starting up (just small bursts of two or three at this stage), and her legs are starting to kick and twitch as the cramps climb up their big muscles. The methadone might be holding her for now, but without a shot in the next few hours she's gonna be hurting bad. I wonder for a second how much a shot of hammer costs now and bet it's more than the \$30 I used to pay. I also wonder how much of last night's takings are still sitting in her property and whether she'll need to get back out there before she can have a taste. If the cops disposed of any clean injecting gear she had and whether she'll need to chase up new fits. I wonder how many more corners those boots can handle.

I sit on the floor outside the cell and drink instant coffee from a polystyrene cup while she picks at the scabs on her thighs and talks over me. She is familiar with these cells, warning me that the water will cut off in the shower after three minutes and telling me that since we're on the end of a pick-up run the bus to Mulawa probably won't be here till late. The heels of her boots are very nearly snapping off and I try to estimate how many times she has paced these floors in the same shoes. The fabric of her skirt is a dull olive green.

I think back to the four months I spent in Mulawa on remand in 1996. There were girls I knew then who refused to ever wear green on the outside. They claimed that wearing the prison-standard colour was like a magnet for the police. For years afterwards I shunned green, walking around the streets like I had a reason to be afraid and avoiding police like they might see through my beige skin to the green stain on my soul, smell the Marino hiding under the mask of Williams. I lived like my power could be taken away at any second, like my body could cease to be my property. And then I forgot. I forgot my MIN number, forgot that I was an inmate. I went to university, started to build a life, forgot about old prison superstitions.

The print on my shirt might be of a derby player – the words might say ‘she who booty blocks, wins’, but the fabric under the print is a muddy khaki colour. It’s so easy – after a night of broken sleep and facing a sentence I thought I’d completed – to convince myself that I’m not here for failing to look right before I crossed the road or for failing to follow up on the fat desk sergeant from Balmain’s words. I am sitting on a dirty concrete floor, drinking dirty instant coffee, watching a powerless sex worker pacing in her dirty boots and skirt, all because I chose the green shirt to wear for my interview with the police.

I know this is crazy, know I’m disassociating.

When the prison transport bus comes I know Marino, 263504, will be handcuffed and taken from this cell. She’ll be driven out of her safe new home of Wollongong and delivered to the super-sized correctional facility at Silverwater. She’ll be strip-searched again by Corrective Services officers. They’ll feel no shame at all, will not avert their eyes for even a second. She’ll be dressed in green and everything she’s fought for over the last thirteen years will be a memory in Marino, 263504’s head.

Angela Williams should have looked right before she put her foot on the road.

The girl in the cell next door is wrong. A transport bus comes for me before lunch. It’s heading back to Sydney and I’m the only passenger. I sit handcuffed in the middle of a row of six seats, with my knees braced against the steel wall of the compartment in front. Wollongong fades like a sad heroin dream as we drive up Mount Ousley. I watch it out the tiny reinforced window long past when I can actually see it. I’m going back to prison. There is still no sense to be made of it all but I don’t have the power or voice to tell them.

Chapter 2

A suicidal inmate and an inmate “at risk” of self-harm are to be managed according to the principle of least restrictive care. Use of assessment cells and the resultant restricted access to amenities are to be management options of last resort.

Placement in an assessment cell is a short term option for inmates with a very high risk of self-harm and/or suicide where other accommodation options will not ensure safety.

- ‘7.17.4.2 Authority’ in *Corrective Services Operational Procedure Manual*, review date October 2007

Tuesday, 9 February 2010

Reception: Mulawa Women’s Correctional Centre

Silverwater, NSW

The transport bus stops at the men’s section of Silverwater Prison briefly but I’m left to sit while they unload other trucks. I can hear the almost-familiar sounds of prison outside – keys turning, doors opening and closing, inmates swearing, officers shouting. I’m glad they leave me alone; it gives me more time to shake and cry, away from eyes that will see this as weakness. When the motor starts up again I pull myself closer to something like together and wipe tears and snot on the sleeve of my hoodie. The reception area at Mulawa has been updated since my last visit in 1996, so when the bus pulls into another space and a large sliding steel door closes behind us I have no idea this is the end of the trip and am surprised when the door is yanked open.

‘Alright, Marino, off you hop.’

The officer who has opened the door is athletic, female, attractive – but wearing a uniform. I look at my feet and the stairs as I climb out, instead of at her. When my feet are safe on concrete I glance up at the new mega structure. So, this is Mulawa reception now. The bus is parked in the centre of a giant covered courtyard, big enough for six of the prison trucks to fit into with room for all the doors to open. Behind us the exit is cut off by a giant rolling steel door, in front the glassed-in reception area, to the left a solid steel wall that towers upwards of twenty feet and on our right is a row of cages made from plate steel with holes drilled in it. The smaller cage at the end is empty but the bigger one seems filled with girls in green who smoke insolently, looking at me with interest.

Stay strong, Angela, I mutter to myself, don't show any fear. The pep talk doesn't work at all. There's a neon aura of terror around me as I put my head down and scurry along behind the officer towards the glass doors that lead into reception. The eyes of the smoking inmates burn goose bumps across the nape of my neck.

'Where should I stick her?'

'Over in the segro cell for now, till we get a chance to search her.'

The segregation cell, thankfully, is on the opposite side of the room to other inmates and I'm grateful for more time to compose myself, to shake off the failure at staying cool.

It's a production line, I think as I stare through the safety glass, a factory for stamping criminals. The officers have a central station, with a desk at the front for talking to the delivery guards, a desk at each side for processing prisoners and a clear view into the rows of cells running down each wall. On my side all the cells are small boxes of glass, each with a steel bench, toilet behind a low wall and TV bolted high up in the corner. All these cells are empty but for me. On the opposite side the cells are bigger, just two of them, with masses of bodies, all wearing the same shade of dark green. No wonder I don't wear green, I think, colour-induced vertigo loosening my neck muscles. It was a lovely day outside, but there's no sign of it in here and I remember a Koori girl on my first trip telling me that 'Mulawa' means 'place of shadows' in the local language. The chill of shadows settles over me like a lead cloak and I slump down on the bench. All there is to do is watch the officers scurrying along their production line.

There's a two-way conveyer belt running down the centre of their island, which looks like it's carrying bags of property. My alien handbag trundles its solitary path into the prison while bulging black garbage bags and green canvas sacks closed with cable ties and tagged with cardboard labels roll out towards the front gate. I'm the only incoming right now, it seems, while the girls in green on the other side are all leaving. I hope that some of them are going out into the sun but suspect they're just going to other shadow places. I want a cigarette but can't get the eye of the officer on my side of the desk. I do get eye contact from a girl in the big cell opposite and she gives me a sad smile. I try to smile back but it feels more like a grimace.

I sit and wait and wait and sit. Eventually, after three different groups of girls are walked out of the cells across the way, the female officer who got me off the bus comes and unlocks me.

'Search time,' she says, with something like a smile. 'Follow me.'

She lines me up against a screen while the officers behind the desk take a photo for my prison ID and then we walk around the centre island and I see my bag, with my cigarettes and book poking out of the front pocket sitting in the centre of a large section of desk under the sign 'Intake'. I ask if I can have a cigarette and she tells me they'll get me tobacco after reception. I then remember that rule from the old days about open cigarettes being contraband and apologise silently to Liz for the almost full packet they're about to throw away.

We enter another cleaning room cum storage closet and I wonder why they don't have special rooms for strip searches. As the door closes behind me the officer smiles and says 'first time?'

'Second time,' I respond, 'but first time in a long time. Never thought I was coming back.'

'Won't take you long to settle in,' she says, and I think I hear pity. Two days ago we would have talked as equals but now I can't even look her in the eye. The shame and guilt of the greens is settling over my soul like a suffocating garbage bag.

I strip mechanically, crying silently, and this time instead of handing my clothes back she piles them into a green canvas sack, a property bag like those I'd seen rolling past outside. I curse the khaki shirt as it disappears into the bag. Looking at the giant floral underpants and scratchy nylon bras I'm glad I don't freeball anymore. She asks me my sizes and pulls rancid green tracksuit pants, a T-shirt, socks and jumper off shelves, tossing them to me to put on. My chest tightens as I pull the T-shirt down over my face. My leather sandals disappear into the sack and when she goes to look for my size in the giant stack of Dunlop Volley boxes they are out. I can go three sizes too small or two sizes big. I choose big. I feel like a clown as I slip into the flapping shoes.

'Maybe you'll be able to swap with someone,' she says as she picks up my bag of clothes. I look at my feet and give a bitter laugh, holding back more tears of shame. If I'd remembered sooner I would have put my sneakers on before the cops took me out of my house, then I'd have shoes that fitted.

'Go easy on yourself,' she says, pausing with a hand on the door. While I want to scream and rage at her pity I know that her blue shirt means I need to stand and listen, that I can't just reach past her and push the door open. 'It'll take you time to settle in but try and do it without anyone seeing how upset you are. Don't let them hurt you.'

'Can I get a cigarette and my book now?' Doesn't feel like there's anything else to say.

She sighs and opens the door, 'I'll talk to the front desk'.

They present me with my laminated prison ID card and then shuffle me into the big cells, the officer at the front handing me the Orson Scott Card book I've been reading as I walk past the desk.

'I love science fiction,' she says, reading the back before she hands it over. 'Is it a good read?'

'Yeah,' I say, 'Much better than the graffiti on a cell wall.'

She laughs, seems surprised. 'Well, I'll look him up. Now don't forget, you've got it at your own risk,' she says, 'we shouldn't let you take it but if it will keep you quiet...' The unfinished sentence leaves me feeling like a troublemaker and I wish I hadn't tried to connect. 'Ask someone in there for a smoke and we'll get you a reception pouch before you go up to the clinic.'

The girl who gave me the small smile is one of six still left in the cells. She offers me a cigarette and rolls a matchstick thin one for me when she sees how badly my hands are shaking. I can't talk to her without crying so sit alone smoking on the floor in the outside cage at the end of the cell. As the smoke smarts the tears out of my eyes I thank the universe that I took up the filthy habit again.

The next stop on my way into the shadows is the clinic where I'm handed a reception pouch of White Ox tobacco, two packets of papers and a box of matches.

'Make it last,' the officer says, as I sign a sheet authorising Corrective Services to take the cost of the pouch from my property, 'you don't get more till buy ups.'

I'm put into a locked cement courtyard with a heavily pregnant woman and a boyish-looking prisoner, both of whom are smoking tiny stinky Ox smokes.

As I sit and roll my first independent 'in prison' cigarette, the pregnant girl comes over.

'Don't roll them so thick,' she mutters like it's a secret, 'you'll use it up too quick'.

'Thanks,' I reply, pulling a pinch out of the smoke and dropping it back in the pouch. When it's rolled my smoke is still at least twice as thick as hers.

I pull out the matches and she jumps in: 'Don't waste them, you'll need them. Use the lighter on the wall.'

Following her waving hand I see a steel plate in the wall with a hole about the size of a tailor rolled cigarette, with scorch marks above it, and a steel button inset next to the hole. 'Hold button for at least 5 seconds' is etched into the steel. I try three times before I get my smoke to light and then settle onto a concrete bench in the centre of the

space, sighing and breathing the smoke out. She lowers her bulk down next to me and I can feel her staring as I smoke.

‘First time?’

‘First time in a long time.’ I feel like this is going to become my mantra.

‘It’s not too bad,’ she says, ‘as long as you don’t start shit and go easy on the smokes’. Her swollen belly bulges and she rubs it with the hand holding the cigarettes. ‘I’m just back here for a check up then I’m off to Emus till the baby comes,’ she says, hand moving in hypnotic circles across her belly, rings of smoke trailing from the butt. ‘They should get you in pretty quick, then you’ll be down to Induction. Fucking hate Induction.’

I don’t remember what Induction is so I ask how long till the baby’s due but before she can answer an officer opens the door and calls her inside. I give a little wave and wish her luck. You too, she says and walks inside. The boyish girl is pacing angrily along a wall so I sit and try to soak up sun, smoking till my turn to walk through the door comes round.

I get called before the other girl, taken in to see the social worker. She’s a plumpish woman with small plastic figurines on her desk, motivational posters of cats and pictures of happy blond children blutacked on the wall. This office has all the markers of a ladder, reminds me of countless counsellors and other helpful types, looks like a way up. She runs through a standard form, asks about my drug use, crime, self-harm history. I’m honest, because I’m a stupid fool who has forgotten that sometimes in this game snakes disguise themselves as ladders. She lets me call Dex, tells me I have five minutes and listens carefully while I try to explain the inexplicable to him. She gives me my reception supplies, a ziplock plastic bag of tiny bottles of shampoo, bars of unwrapped soap and a travel toothbrush and mini tube of toothpaste. I turn the bag over in my hands and the tears I thought I’d restrained after talking to my son start leaking again. To soothe me she reaches into a desk drawer and gives me a full size tube of toothpaste and brush, like it’s a package of gold and frankincense and myrrh. Before I leave I ask if she could give me some writing paper and she looks aghast for a second, then sighs heavily, pulls herself out of the chair and hunts in a filing cabinet before pulling out a 48 page black and yellow striped exercise book. She hands it to me with a half empty Bic pen, says ‘don’t use it as a weapon’, then shows me out the door and points me to the doctor. I feel dirty, like I’ve asked her for too much.

The doctor is a tiny busy man who looks like he's been living in the shadow of the shadows for too long. He looks at the bandage on my elbow and asks if I was injured running from the cops. I tell him about the postie bike and he looks confused, I don't try to explain. He tells me they'll get a nurse to change the dressing and give me some Panadol. I tell him there's Panadeine Forte and antibiotics in my registered property and he snorts.

'We'll give you some Panadol for tonight,' he responds.

After shining a light in my eyes and ears he pulls out the blood pressure cuff. I see him take in the old track marks in the crook of my elbow as he straps it on and after inflating, listening, deflating, he asks if there's any chance I'm going to have withdrawals.

'No,' I tell him, 'those track marks are old. I've been clean for eleven years.'

'Hmmm,' I can tell he doubts me, 'not on any kind of maintenance program?'

'Nah, kicked it all in one go. Methadone's too much social control for my taste.'

I like to think this surprises him a bit, that his pause is a moment of thinking, maybe even admiration for my stance. It's not.

'We can give you methadone to help you sleep,' he says, watching me carefully.

I laugh out loud for the first time in two days: 'You've got to be kidding,' I give him my own snort. 'That shit's too toxic for a sleeping aid.'

He shows me out and points me to an inside, non-smoking holding cell with a smirk and snide 'Good luck' and I think bitterly, I'm so going to write about you one day, you little fucker.

A nurse calls me out again minutes later to change the dressing on my elbow. She rips the adhesive off briskly and scrubs away at the wound with dry gauze. The forming scabs are torn off and the elbow starts to bleed again, but she chides me when I ask if she could be more gentle. When she pours saline across the reopened wounds with no warning I have to remind myself that this is all I can expect now that I'm back in the system, think that I'll never complain again about a real world pathology nurse being a bit rough when they have to take blood from next to my track marks. Out there I might get nastier treatment once they realise I used to be a junkie and decide everything is self-inflicted – in here, I remember, everyone is on the lowest rung. No matter what we present with, it's self-inflicted. She doesn't give me the Panadol but I figure it's more trouble than it's worth to try and argue; I'll just ride out the pain from the accident.

By the time the officers take me to my cell I'm exhausted and can't think about anything but sleep. It's nearly eight pm and the trip from Wollongong to a cell bed has taken me almost twelve hours.

Wednesday, 10 February 2010

*Mum Shirl Unit: Mulawa Women's Correctional Centre
Silverwater, NSW*

Day two as a prisoner, back in the shadows, and I'm thinking that this might not be too bad, that I may have blown things out of proportion in my old memories from '96. I'm in the unit the officers call 'the penthouse', the purpose-built Mum Shirl Unit for psychiatric female detainees. The safe cells in the MSU are 'cameraed', under constant CCTV surveillance, but they are paradise compared to the Induction I'm beginning to remember sketchy details of. The nightlight in the MSU safe cell is dim and soothing, the walls are painted bright colours, there are separate beds for each inmate and room to pass each other when we pace the length of the floor. The officers seem mostly nice, courteous, a little bit human. There's a remote controlled TV in every cell hidden behind Perspex panels. The cells in the MSU are a safe space to observe the mentally less stable. I'm here, the officers tell me, because I've been placed on an assessment order. It will be reviewed in twenty-four hours, but for now they need to keep me under surveillance.

I'm sharing a cell with a younger girl called Kathy – she's nineteen, just like I was the first time, high on crime and being bad, just like I was. We talked shit for a few hours last night and I taught her to roll cigarettes, the same lesson I learned over my first few days back in '96. Kathy's been 'cameraed', placed on an assessment order too, for the scars and scabs. There are ladders of keloid on the inside of both arms from wrists to elbows. She picks at them when she is introspecting, runs fingertips across them when she's telling jokes. They're a security blanket I recognise.

I have to figure that my own assessment order came from the admission to that snake-disguised-as-a-ladder social worker that I'd tried to hang myself eight years before. Hanging, of course, being the worst crime one can commit in prison, one of the only crimes that might break their power over you. In my admin interview, she'd watched carefully as I cried on the phone to my son and then obviously ticked the spot on my forms that tumbled me into a camera cell. I promised her that he was safe with my housemate, that I was just missing him and scared for him, but tears, it seems, are an unnatural response to being surprisingly incarcerated after thirteen years of living in the straight world. It was either her or the doctor who refused to believe I was clean. Maybe the cameras are more interested in whether I'll start sweating and shaking than if I'll start cutting and hanging. Whatever the motivation, I loathe the assumption that I can't be trusted to keep myself safe, can't stay alive without the cameras.

Kathy and I watch trashy daytime TV till post-lunchtime unlock then hang out together on the soft green lawn under the shade of a Moreton Bay fig. If I could get a flat white with two sugars this might be bearable, I think. Even without good coffee, I might just be able to get through this twenty-first century version of prison. Around two pm an officer finds us in the yard.

‘Alright, you two,’ he barks, ‘time to pack your stuff. Your stay in the penthouse is over, we’re moving you to Induction.’

We’re being moved to Induction to make room for less well inductees. We’re both still on camera orders, need constant surveillance, but we’re giving up our safe cells in the MSU for others who need them more. Maybe if Kathy had added to the collection of scars on her arms she’d get to stay in the MSU; pity for her we gelled so well.

As I carry my garbage bag of prison clothes, red plastic cup, bowl and plate, slung over my shoulder on the short walk to Induction a terror of this squat concrete building kicks in hard. I’m having body memories of the things my brain refuses to dig up, chills are chasing each other up and down the back of my arms, leaving tight little goose bumps that sting in their wake. I try to remember how my lungs work. I want a cigarette, a coffee, a swill of straight vodka. For the first time since this Kafkaesque nightmare began I want a shot of heroin, some sweet numbing oblivion. For a second I regret saying no to the doctor’s offer of methadone and desperately grasp at my pocket, feeling for the pouch of tobacco. I’m going to smoke till I vomit when I get into the next cell, I promise myself, smoke because there’s nothing else to do.

When we walk into cell two in Induction there’s a puddle of wet piss spreading across the floor. It’s 2:25pm – five minutes until lock-in, the end of the day for prisoners – and inmates are rushing past the door behind us, clocking the new arrivals. Kathy and I both stop just inside the cell door.

‘Reckon we could get a bucket and mop?’ Kathy asks the officer in charge of the unit, an attractive man with astonishingly vivid full sleeve tattoos of flames, dragons and tribal spirals.

He sticks his well-coiffed head in, waves his tattoos around and snorts dismissively. ‘Don’t know what you two are complaining about,’ his bonhomie expansive, ‘smells like shit next door!’

Pushing us into the cell he hands us our dinner, pre-packaged sandwiches, and slams the door closed, leaving us to clean up the piss with toilet paper and try to ignore the smell.

My body wasn't wrong as it shook on that walk from the MSU. This is the prison I remember, what I'd been bracing myself for. This is Induction. This is what I'm remembering about Induction: Induction is where they put prisoners new to the system. It's the hardest kind of time – the longest bit of your whole sentence, the girls in the yard used to say. Induction is prison built to break us down, make us compliant. The rules in Induction change from day-to-day, what's fine with one Wing Officer is a serious breach with the next. Most of the prisoners in Induction haven't had the time to pad themselves out with a veneer of civilisation. Prisoners in Induction have no supplies, no deodorant, no envelopes, stamps or writing paper. Prisoners in Induction stink. We have no stock of chocolates hoarded from buy ups, no new underwear brought in by visitors, few if any photos of our loved ones. No way to convince ourselves this is 'normal' life. In Induction, prisoners get prison – you get it fast or get it hard, but you get it. By the time they move you out of Induction, I remember now, you're broken down enough to cop anything they throw at you. But we weren't just going to Induction, I quickly discovered; we were going to the safe cells in Induction, the least safe place in the whole prison system.

Mulawa Women's Correctional Centre takes up about a quarter of the Silverwater Correctional Facility, nestled on the banks of the Parramatta River. It squats across a patch of dingy scrub – mere minutes, as the crow flies, from the Olympic Village that housed athletes during the 2000 Sydney Olympics. The facility includes a large section for immigration detention, a remand centre for both men and women, and the kitchens where male inmates make pre-packaged meals that feed prisoners in centres across NSW. The women's prison is in the Southeast corner of the Silverwater complex, and Induction takes up the Southeast corner of Mulawa. This means Induction is closest to the Homebush sports and entertainment venues and if there are concerts on at the arena, the ladies in Induction get something like front row tickets. This is not as exciting as it might seem, as 'front row' means something different when your seat is a bed in a cell and you can hear the music, smell the pyrotechnics, but see nothing.

When I was in Induction in '96 I pitied the girls in the safe cells. Heard the stories about them and promised myself I'd never do anything to end up in there. Inmates talked about safe cells with fear but when officers talk about them they do it in a cocky tone, as if these putrid concrete boxes are the logical outcome of mental illness. They talk like the Mum Shirl Unit doesn't even exist, like there are no other options for keeping what they call 'forensic inmates' safe. The officers bandy around lingo about the safe cells and their inhabitants: 'you've been cameraed', 'she's a hanger', 'we got a

cutter'. To hear them talk, you'd think the safe cells are an appropriate deterrent for scars, tears or distress. From inside the cells it seems like there is no punishment too bad for these crimes.

The safe cell is a bare concrete box designed to keep us alive through our first days in prison. The safe cell is always lit, always in the eye of the camera. It's close to the officers' office so that if we try to hang ourselves or stab each other they can intervene. Well, as long as they are watching the screens and see the attempt. Not everyone gets to go into the safe cells. You gotta really earn this privilege. You know, by being not safe – by being a risk to yourself, to others, to the officers' need to do paperwork.

Cell two in Induction is definitely designed to keep us safe. Bunks in safe cells provide hanging points, the second most popular after the showers, I remember, so instead of a double bunk there's a single metal frame with a handy trundle bed underneath. I imagine one could hang oneself from a single bed but it would probably be more difficult, take some serious thinking about physics and engineering, particularly with those dastardly cameras watching.

Kathy offers me the bed due to seniority. Old fashioned good manners in this place where courtesy is at a premium. Problem is that when we roll out the trundle we discover a design flaw that means she'd have almost a third of her mattress tucked under mine. There'd be no way for me to step off the bed without standing on her face. So, after wiping the piss off the floor with a full roll of toilet paper, Kathy lays her vinyl mattress down opposite the bed and tries to make it up without any of the bedding touching the floor. She's almost successful. Her homemaking leaves an eighteen-inch path between our beds and we use the trundle to store clothes and food that would otherwise have to go on the damp greasy floor because there are no shelves. Apparently you can also hang yourself from shelves. Who'da known? Kathy's feet butt up against the base of the toilet and her head is next to the crack in a taunting door to the outside world that sits in the rear wall of our cell. I remember a hushed conversation from back in '96, a rumour that the door is for removing dead bodies without disturbing the other inmates. At least I'm not sleeping on the floor. I love Kathy for this.

Cell two is a box for keeping rage in, six-feet-by-nine. Solid brick walls are painted a dirty mint green, the floor a muddy dark green. They'd probably call this 'Heritage Green' in a paint catalogue but for us it is close enough to the colour of our tracksuits to just call it 'prison green'. Over the dirty green paint, the walls are scrawled with names and dates and messages to loved ones, both living and dead. The only way to tell the difference is the 'RIP's. Someone has counted down their days in this cell with

charcoal match strokes tallied across the wall. I count them again and again – three lots of five and then one solo stroke – imagining what risk factors kept someone locked ‘safely’ in here for sixteen days. The idea of the scratcher exiting through the corpse door haunts me. I’m determined not to stay that long and when I go, it definitely won’t be through the rear door. Between the graffiti and dirt, the flaking paint is studded with discs of toothpaste, improvised prisoner blu-tac that used to hold photos, letters, drawings from kids. There are two small windows next to and above the corpse door but both are so heavily layered with bars, grills and grates that it is impossible to see through them. Light and dark are the only things to penetrate the layer of screens. Opposite the corpse door is the cell door proper. This opens onto the rest of the unit and has a head high window that looks directly onto the uncurtained shower. The safety of the cell is further increased by not having a television, more possible hanging points on the brackets, I assume. Another way we can’t hang ourselves, thank goodness. We also can’t watch news, zone out on cartoons, check the time in the little box in the corner of morning TV shows. Every other non-safe cell in the unit has a television. Instead of watching television we sit on the beds, smoke cigarettes, and wait for the door to be unlocked.

One day, after I get out of prison I’ll read a one-line review of these cells on a human rights website. An anonymous nurse in Corrective Services sums it up with the haunting words: ‘This accommodation isn’t adequate for animals.’

Kathy and I have no idea these words even exist but we take it in turns to pace the centre walkway, four steps up, four steps back. Animals wouldn’t take it in turns.

Ruminating on the tattooed man’s evident delight at slamming us into the filthy cell reminds me of the fighting-back-from-the-bottom nickname for them – ‘screws’. We call them ‘screws’ cause they screw the key in the lock and with every turn or rattle of the bunch, they remind us of the power they hold over us. In prison, the key equals power and the hand that screws it knows this. We know this.

Screws, I whisper to myself in the stinking cell, you’re nothing but screws. The defiance in my head sounds like the angry nineteen-year-old me. I feel sorry that she got so bitter so quick, sad that she embraced the shields, but love her for passing them onto me to use now. Fuck you screws, I’ll fight back however I can. I get out my pen and the too-thin exercise book.

Thursday, 11 February 2010

Induction: Mulawa Women’s Correctional Centre

Silverwater, NSW

It's early in the morning on my third day in prison when the pins and needles wake me up. They creep up the back of my skull and prickle at my ears. There's been a nit infestation and the prison has burned all the pillows. We have cases for pillows but nothing to put in them. The rolled-up clothes I've stuffed into the pillowcase have formed into hard ridges, which are cutting off circulation to my scalp. I tip my head from side to side, searching for a softer spot. There is no softer spot. Rank sweat drips from my ribs. A dark green T-shirt – the closest I can get to a sleeping mask – has fallen off my face and the endless light pokes under my eyelids. Grunting 'fuck', I roll to the side, flinging an arm up to cover my face. The thick vinyl covering of the mattress squeals underneath as I search for a more comfortable position, the magic spot on my faux pillow that will let me drop off again. No deal. I'm awake. The pins and needles, light, and smell of my own body have dragged me out of sleep. I'm back in the sweat and stink that's a safe cell in Induction. There's still nothing I can do about it.

The idea of being here isn't any more pleasant than it was when we were pushed in by the tattooed screw. Prison is still shit. The cramped cell still smells like piss. I thrash the sheets off and sit up, flinging the shirt away from my head. The dark green tracksuit is a sauna suit, damp **and tacking** to my skin, so I strip it off. The pink prison issue floral nightgown I wear underneath is stuck to my skin. It's the only non-green clothing I've been given. I hate pink. Sydney's in the middle of a heat wave and with the air-conditioning turned off and no circulation at all, the tiny brick cell is humid, hot and stinking. It's still black outside the windows but it feels like a summer noon. I lean over for the pouch of tobacco on the floor next to the bed, plucking stinking floral jersey away from my skin. The plastic of the pouch is sticky with grime it's picked up from the filthy floor. My fingers **tack** to it. I try to hold my breath, not smell my fingers as I bring the cigarette paper up to lick it, but a faint whiff of piss reaches me anyway. I silence a gag, want a coffee.

Two feet away from where my toes hang off the bed, Kathy sprawls on her mattress on the floor. Her rigid limbs are a silent protest at the heat and light. Kathy's long dark legs are bare – she must have taken off her tracksuit during the night – and a wrist is draped over her eyes. As I roll a match-slim cigarette her feet kick a little and then more. She stills for a few seconds then yells out 'fuck', sitting up and ripping off her T-shirt. In panties and a bra she watches me for a second.

Kathy and I are old buddies now. We've shared cells for three days, might as well be married by this stage. In a random act of happenstance, I play roller derby with her aunt. Kathy's the same age I was the first time I went to prison and is there for a B&E. It's like we were meant for each other. She still can't roll cigarettes properly and so I've been doing it for both of us. I'm nice like that. And feel guilty watching her try to roll. Reminds me of Angela Marino's first days in this unit.

'You awake?' I mumble. 'Want a smoke?'

'Fucking, yeah.' She sounds more awake than she wants to be.

I roll till we've got two pitiful smokes. Our tobacco supply is dwindling and it's still days until 'buy up' and fresh supplies. We light both the cigarettes from a single match (also getting low) and pull out the plastic sandwich container we call an ashtray. After the first night back in the MSU when ash and butts fell through scorch holes in the bottom, we lined it with wet toilet paper. The nubs of ash make satisfying sizzles as they drop.

Kathy glares up at the security camera, lurking in its own Perspex cage in the corner of our concrete box. Tilting her head and squeezing her eyes to block out the smoke, she fires a malevolent stream of it at the unblinking eye.

'What time do you reckon it is?'

'No fucking idea,' I groan, 'Haven't heard the rations trolley go past yet – so still pretty early.'

'Wish they'd turn off that fucking light.'

'Yeah, I know.'

Kathy curves her body back against the wall so she can lean her head against it, elbows resting on her bent knees, and gives the camera the double finger. Her dark hair hangs across her narrow face making curtains around her eyes as she rolls them up and looks at the ceiling. I mirror her on the bed and we both sit, looking up at the offending light.

It's amazing that this innocent-looking fixture could cause us so much grief. I've spent hours staring at the light – willing the globe to burn out, the filament to explode. The longer fluorescent tubes were switched off at around eight the night before, leaving the security light on. A small bulb nestled behind the fluoros is left on all the time, supposedly dim enough for us to sleep with but bright enough for the cameras to spy by. The light was worse on the first night, before we scammed six sanitary pads and stuck them onto the casing as an impromptu light shade – now the light turns the fabric of the pads bright white and seeps out between the seams. Not as bad, but still not good. The

light we're living in now has the warning glow of sunlight through bushfire smoke. It brings a constant edge of panic. It never goes away.

We both smoke in silence till we reach the ends. The dying butts have finished sizzling. Wreathes of unmoving smoke hang around our heads. The bottoms of the tobacco pouches are showing on both Kathy's and mine, the last of our tobacco crumbling into shreds. But I want another cigarette. The idea of sitting here and doing nothing is unbearable.

'Want another one?' I ask my cellmate.

Her yes is more grunt than word.

I make more cigarettes.

As we finish them and slump back onto the squeaking mattresses the outer door at the end of the unit is slammed open and the ration trolley moves up the hall, off-kilter wheels clattering on hard concrete as it passes the locked door of our cell. The outgoing 'C Watch' officers yell greetings to the arriving 'A Watch,' who yell back. These officers don't care who's sleeping or trying to sleep; this is the turnaround time for them and they celebrate this fact, just like in any other job. I was right, back in the cells under Wollongong Police Station, there is a pattern here. The needs of the prisoners mean nothing to the screws, the hands that turn those damnable keys – we wait on their power, on the needs of the system.

A screw came around after lunchtime lock-in yesterday and told me I'd been reviewed as not needing the assessment order any longer. I've been ticked off as suitable for a non-cameraed cell, probably due to my lack of self-harm or withdrawal symptoms. But the screw tells me there's a shortage of beds in the prison so I continue to be safe with the cameras, the twenty-four hour lights and the lack of hanging points. And not a single dead body has been taken out the corpse door since we arrived. We're definitely winning this round.

I decide to have one more go at sleep before unlock. My teeth grind themselves as I clutch for the stinking T-shirt to pull over my face, waiting and hoping again for the lights to go out. I loathe the fear in my chest that stops me yelling at the screws to shut the fuck up. With a faint rattle, the air conditioning starts up again. The A Watch screws are prepping for the day and I try to enjoy the cool breeze before it gets so cold I need to pile the clothes on again.

There's no way to track time in cell two of Induction, we have no watches, mobile phones, television or radio and the clock on the wall of the screws' office is not visible

from our cell. Hell, the office isn't even visible, cut off by a wall. They can see us through the cameras but we don't get to see them.

Sometime after the ration trolley arrives I give up on the idea of sleep, sit up and roll another cigarette. Kathy joins me. It passes a few more minutes.

I stink and want to have a shower but can't get to the cubicle. The shower is the most common hanging point in a cell and so we're protected from our own self-destructive tendencies by limited access to the facilities. To prevent shower hangings in this safe cell there is a wall of bars – covered on both sides by solid sheets of Perspex – which cuts us off from the end where the shower is. The extra wall brings the size of the six-by-nine foot room down to about six-by-six. I've walked past the shower on my way in and out of the cell but I'm yet to be able to convince an officer to let me try it. I haven't showered since early Tuesday morning and it's now Thursday. I'd been planning one for Wednesday night in the penthouse, but, well, you know... The stainless steel toilet/sink combo is on this side of the Perspex wall but isn't big enough to consider washing in and the air conditioning is now so icy that a sponge bath in cold water seems masochistic on top of everything else. There's also no sponge so I sit on the bed and try to distract myself from the stench of my body by sparking up another cigarette.

Eventually the door opens for breakfast unlock and we go out of the cell, stinking and manic but out of that cell. We take our cigarettes, matches, cups, plates and jumpers. I roll my exercise book around my pen and slide it into my pocket.

It's just past eight-thirty in the morning when we emerge from our cell and tramp out with the other Inductees to the brick courtyard with a cage roof. Possums and rats have played in the courtyard overnight and before we sit to eat, we clean. We pick up gnawed food scraps from yesterday's breakfast that they dragged out of the unemptied bins. Scrape lumps of both liquid and solid shit off the seats and tables. There is no bathroom or taps in the courtyard and by the time we sit down to eat most of us have smudges of crusted green-brown poo on our hands and clothes. There is not a chance that the screws will let us back in to wash. Even less they'll notice the shit all over us.

We sit and eat breakfast on metal picnic tables, elbow-to-elbow with twenty other inmates. Breakfast is ration packs – small cellophane bags containing a sachet of cereal, a single serve of jam, four tea bags, four sachets of prison-branded instant coffee, twelve sachets of artificial sweetener. There's a single 250ml milk carton per inmate, one of three we'll get throughout the day. It's warm to the touch and I guess it's been unrefrigerated since the night before when it was stacked on the ration trolley. We eat

from red plastic bowls with disposable plastic cutlery and drink from red plastic cups, all prison issue that we got in reception and will carry with us till release. We'll do the dishes in the small cold-water sink above the toilet in the cell when we're let back in for lunch, dry them with our shower towels. No need for hygiene in Induction. To keep them out of the sun till lunch, Kathy and I stack our bowls on the ground under a bench and carry our cups with us.

After breakfast I pace and listen to the others talk shit. It's coming back to me now. Stay quiet. Don't be a target. Avoid eye contact. Stay off the radar.

The group mocks a girl who should be in the safe cells but lied her way through admission. She shuffles and dances, talking to the birds that alight on the metal cage roof. She pulls her shirt up, fondles her own breasts. Calls out licentious suggestions to the male screws who enter occasionally. She talks up her meth binges and suicide attempts. The sun falls in small squares across her face and I envy her the freedom of madness. Have a feeling she won't last long.

Around ten in the morning most of the group shuffles up to the clinic to get pills and methadone, carrying prison-issue photo ID to prove who they are. No card, no meds – despite these same pictures being reproduced on the clinic's files, the general files, the stickers on the methadone dose chart. Occasionally a screw comes through the door, summoning girls to see shrinks, welfare, lawyers. Otherwise they leave us alone.

At noon we are locked back in our cells for an hour for lunch, we wash our bowls and cups, dry them with towels, pick at the unappetising CSI hot lunch in an aluminium box.

We get another quick unlock at one for a pace and bitch in the yard and then six hours after walking out for breakfast we are back in cells for the night. Two-thirty, evening lock-in. The cell door is slammed shut and won't be opened again until morning. The entire prison is locked down before three, though I heard in the yard that in some prisons lock-in is as late as four. I miss looking at the night sky already.

After lock-in, Kathy arranges our dinner in a stack near the corpse door. She piles the packaged sandwiches up next to our small cartons of milk. I make us coffee in red plastic mugs with our last ration of hot water for the day. The heat outside has been stifling, over thirty-five degrees according to another girl who does have a television in her cell. To compensate, the screws have pumped the air-con up as high as it will go. It's freezing in the cell and we've both piled into jumpers and tracksuit pants. We smoke cigarettes and put off eating the sandwiches so we'll have something to do later. I use a broken matchstick to unpick the stitches that hold the elastic in the hem of my tracksuit

pants. It feels like the most productive thing I've done for days. The elastic will be good for making hair ties.

'Wonder if they are watching the cameras,' Kathy says, standing on her mattress and pulling her shirt up, flashing smallish pert breasts at them.

The steel speaker in the wall crackles and a voice attacks us, 'Please keep your clothes on, there are male officers in the wing.'

We both laugh and I almost tip my coffee across my bed. I wonder if it's the same male officer who lingered outside the door when I finally got to shower at lunchtime. I guess he was watching in case I hanged myself; at least I hope so.

After we finish the dry sandwiches, I offer Kathy my Corrective Services branded 'Tasty Dessert' in yellow. While she slurps at the thick cup of theoretically banana-flavoured custard, I stand and stare into the small stainless steel mirror over the toilet. The harsh light strips any colour out of my cheeks and paints dark dripping hollows under my eyes. Days of not washing followed by a single six-minute low-pressure shower and a wash with the urine-coloured prison issue shampoo has left my short brown hair limp and shapeless, greasy strands stealing my sometime sleek bob. It's hard to make out details through the scratches and smears but the blue of my eyes seems pale, ringed by red and yellow. There are blemishes sprouting out of the dry skin under my nose and my lips are white, cracked, red at the corners. No moisturiser in the ziplock bag of toiletries I was issued at reception, no lip balm.

'Do I look as bad as I think?'

Kathy munches another mouthful and tips her head at me. 'Everyone looks bad in here,' she says.

The mirror agrees, though Kathy herself looks positively sprightly. The greasiness which has mangled my hair looks like a deliberate slicked style on her, the light smudging around her eyes could be rumpled last night's makeup and her darker skin tone hides any paleness.

The stainless steel rim of the toilet is covered with another five sanitary pads – a jerry-rigged toilet seat suggested by an inmate at breakfast – but small triangles of coldness where the pads overlap surprise my thighs as I sit down to pee. The pads are rationed because the screws don't want us using them for 'handicrafts' and I'm glad we took the time to sneak these off the ration trolley at lunch. The girl who told us about the hack reckoned a toilet seat was a deadly weapon but as I sit peeing I wonder about the dehumanisation of compulsory cold thighs.

Kathy finishes the cup of faux custard, dumping it into the black garbage bag and twisting the neck to block out the smell of the boiled chicken cacciatore that was lunch. She waits till I'm finished peeing before rinsing the plastic spoon and lining it up with the pile on the top of the toilet. There is faint news banner coming through the wall from the coveted television the girls are watching in the cell next door. I figure this means it's somewhere around five or six pm.

'It's all a game, you know,' I say to Kathy sometime that night, perched on the very edge of the bed and waving my hands as I talk.

'A stupid power game which only works 'cause we play along. This is how they prove they have power over us. The cameras and the lights and the constant noise and the sleep deprivation. The stupid comments over the buzzer and the refusal to tell us the time! It's easy to control our bodies – but it's our minds they really want to control. By putting us in here under the constant gaze of the camera they expect us to take on the surveillance so that we always act as if they are watching us.'

Kathy rolls onto her back and stretches her legs up the wall, watching me upside down as I rave. In full rant I'm much more interesting than the cell walls. Her hair drapes off the mattress, spilling onto the dirty floor but I'm too worked up to point this out.

'It's not a new idea, controlling us with surveillance! I studied this shit at Uni. There was this guy, somebody Bentham, who came up with the perfect prison, the Panopticon. His prison explains exactly why we do the right thing when the cameras are pointed at us. It explains why neither of us is hanging from the ceiling.

'The whole idea was that if the prisoners always felt like there was eyes on them they would act like there were eyes on them. His idea was like a circular building, with cells placed in a ring around a central tower. Each cell fills the outside ring and has a large window on the outside and a smaller window on the inside. They put the screws in a room in the centre so they can always see the silhouetted outlines of the prisoners. The crims can't see the guards but they know that they can be seen. They know that they could be observed at any second and so they only ever act in appropriate ways.

'They never really built this prison – except for in principle. It became the blueprint for pretty much everything. Schools, hospitals, public offices, everywhere in public space you can see the layout he imagined. Rooms with banks of windows on the outer wall and head-high windows on the inner walls. Rooms which make us always feel watched, surveilled.

‘And the cameras are just an extension of this! The cameras make us into constant silhouettes. When we walk from here to the clinic maybe fifteen cameras see us – and it is only a three-minute walk. Right, so they need it, ‘cause we are criminals! But what about walking down the street? The cameras are part of it, but so are the signs! Reading, “This area is under constant CCTV surveillance” every ten metres is as much about controlling our behaviour as the actual lenses! Reminding us we are being recorded is as powerful as actually recording.

‘They have the power over us because we give them the power over us. You flashing your tits at them is a protest – it is you shouting in their faces “I don’t care if you are watching me! I refuse to let you control me!” If they are so offended by your naked boobs then they can switch the cameras off!’

‘And anyway,’ says Kathy, sitting up suddenly, ‘Only dirty perverts put cameras in girls’ rooms.’

‘Exactly,’ I yell, leaping to my feet, ‘Only dirty perverts put cameras in girls’ rooms.’

‘Fuck you, pervert,’ Kathy says to the camera, giving them the finger.

The girl in the cell next door, whose TV we had eavesdropped on earlier, joins in the yelling and hammers on the wall. We both laugh and smoke more cigarettes while I tell Kathy about some of the dirty perverts I have known.

After I stopped using heroin but before I was arrested the second time I worked as a professional dominatrix; I’ve known some very dirty perverts.

*February 2008
Salon Kittys
Surry Hills, NSW*

The man on the table barely moved as I gripped the piercing needle firm between my latex-clad fingers, breathed in, out, and then drove it through the pinch of his skin I held between my fingers. The gloom of the dungeon was offset by a standing lamp I’d directed over my right shoulder to spotlight my work area. There was no blood as the needle went in, perfectly aligned with the row of needles already stretching up the man’s chest. The blood came later, after we pulled them out again. With each pinch and plunge the man tensed a little, toes curled against the vinyl top of the bench, fingers clenched into knots below the thick buckled leather cuffs that bound him to the slab. Another Mistress circled us with a camera, shooting close-up images of flesh and hands.

No faces. No long shots. I'd almost finished crafting the left side of his body and then we'd swap. The client had wanted it this way and we were happy to oblige.

Salon Kittys was a professional house of bondage and discipline in Sydney's inner-city suburb of Surry Hills. Despite the missing apostrophe, Kittys had earned a reputation over twenty years of being the place in Sydney (maybe even Australia) to play with kink. By 2008, I'd been a mistress at Kittys for four years, playing power games under another AKA, Mistress Sonja. Men – and the odd woman – have paid me to do horrible things to them and loved every second of it. I didn't mind too much either. I got off on being a bitch, liked playing with power. Training at Kittys has been one of the biggest ladders in my game, given me one of the biggest boosts. What, you cry, being a hooker with a whip is a good thing? Yes, unequivocally. It gave me the boost in confidence and self-esteem I needed to break out of poverty and addiction and reimagine myself as something beyond Marino, 263504. It gave me a way to understand the problems with power I saw the first go round in prison.

Earlier, in the waiting room, the client had been cool and calm describing what he wanted from the session. Heavy torture and blood play. Humiliation. Some sensory deprivation, photographic evidence. And two Mistresses, definitely two Mistresses. He was stunned, as they always were, by the contrast between me – tall with burning red hair, my generous bosom bursting out of a corset – and my colleague, petite and tiny, even in her towering eight-inch stilettos, laced tightly into leather from her neck to her groin. Business was slow on this balmy summer weekday afternoon and the client's request would be a couple of hours of entertainment to fill the dead time till the after-work clients started to trickle in. We were more than happy to collaborate on this project and the pay would be a boost for what we expected to be a pretty slow shift.

He's getting what he paid for, I thought, as the last of my needles slid home. I ran one gloved finger down the flesh xylophone I had created and laughed with my associate as our client writhed and moaned around his gag. The blindfold turned towards me, away from me, and I knew that he was trying to see past the padded leather.

'Well, Mistress,' I declared, 'I think the time has come to swap! Poor little slavey-poo here has been missing your hands on him and you know how much I just love to watch you work with the needles.'

'Well thank you, Mistress,' she countered, playing the game for all it was worth, 'After watching how gentle you were with the little slut I can't wait to get in there and really hurt him!'

We both laughed as the client whimpered again.

All three of us knew that if the ping-pong ball clenched in his right hand dropped, then the game stopped. All three of us also knew that the chance of this client dropping the ball was slim. This was the game we played as professional Dominatrices; we played at being the dirtiest of dirty perverts, at having the power. We played by pushing our clients just a little bit further than they thought they could go.

Four years, playing the role of Mistress Sonja at Salon Kittys had given me a feel for this game. The first year was mostly training, tagging along with other Mistresses to learn the torture techniques, the safest way of doing them, the best way to seduce, cloud and befuddle a client. The Mistress I shared this job with, Mistress M, had been doing this for almost twenty years and was my mentor for most of my time in the house. She knew how to play the game and taught me well. Mistress M and I specialised in a unique version of good cop/bad cop; this was part of what made us such great buddies and so dangerous in the dungeons. On first meeting M I might have seen her as a snake in this silly game, but she held the dominatrix ladder tight and firm as I navigated its slippery rungs in my stiletto boots and too-tight corset. She was the flip side of the Mulawa social worker; nasty on the outside and soft as cream on the inside.

While M prepared her own kidney bowl of wrapped surgical needles and sealed alcohol swabs I tidied the mess from my play and made sure the client was intact. The camera was forgotten for the moment, sitting by itself off to one side. I fed him cool water through a straw, checked the pressure of the restraints, whispered that he was a very brave boy. He turned blindfolded eyes towards me and his stretched white lips moved against the ball in his mouth. I knew what he was trying to say. What he was asking for. Gloveless for half a moment, I ran my fingers down his cheek, rewarding his persistence with the rarest of things in this dungeon, an instant of skin-to-skin contact. Our moment was interrupted as the Mistress moved to the other side of his head, snapping a second pair of gloves on over her first.

‘Camera please, Mistress,’ she demanded imperiously, a picture of dominance and control.

‘Of course, Mistress,’ I scurried for the camera, leaving slavey-poo to his world of pain.

My hands shook on several shots, making sexy blurred action images. She hurt him more than I did. The client loved it, the Mistress loved it and the camera loved it. The suit, briefcase and phone piled in the corner of the dungeon told me this man was powerful. His submission to this tiny woman told me the opposite.

Thursday, 11 February 2010

*Induction: Mulawa Women's Correctional Centre
Silverwater, NSW*

Back in the safe cell, my story ends and Kathy and I laugh together. A set of keys rattles against the door and I'm struck with a pang of missing M, the dungeons and fake power games. My laugh is hollow in my throat, more sob than I can handle.

The patrolling screw drags his keys across the magnetic tag on the door, recording his collusion with our continuing safety. After deaths in the cells, a recording system was implemented to ensure that officers completed their rounds at the correct time. There's a small magnetic spot on the door of each cell and a corresponding magnetic tag on each set of keys, like a smaller, less visible version of the cameras that watch us. I don't have the space to feel sorry for the poor surveilled screw as his feet scuff the floor and he reaches for the switch and the fluorescent light flicks off once more. He shines an unneeded torch beam into the small room, casting blurred shadows of bars across both of us as he confirms what the cameras have already said – neither of us is hanging from anywhere, we are both free from stab wounds or self-inflicted slashes. All is well in cell two, officially speaking anyway. His feet scuff at the floor as he wanders away. The scuffing holds none of the erotic power-filled promise of Mistress M's stilettos echoing through the dungeon.

Kathy cackles on the floor, clutching her sides as she laughs at him. Puffing hard, it is a few seconds before she can get words out but when she does it's like she's looking past the sadness my head.

'Bet you can think of some great shit to do to him, right?'

Her laughter is infectious and starts mine up again, shaking tobacco out of the smoke I am rolling. She's right; he'd look much less superior with a gag in his mouth, even if it was just a game.

'Fuck yeah,' I say, 'fuck yeah.'

I scrape the shreds of precious tobacco into a pile and try not to drop them again as I giggle and roll on.

The power games of prison might seem funny in our middle-of-the-night hysteria, but I have no idea how unfunny they are about to get. My play with power might have taught me how to handle men, what to say to make them weak, but power in a play dungeon is different to power in a prison cell. Power in a dungeon is a game, a consensual agreement between adults. Power in prison is not consensual. Unless

committing crime is giving consent. Which maybe it is. Power seems a lot less like a game when there's no ping-pong ball to drop.

Chapter 3

You have a right to be informed of the rules, procedures, and schedules concerning the centre you are in.

You have an obligation to abide by these rules.

- 'Rights and Obligations', *Handbook for Women Inmates*, 2006

'Now I know you're all a bunch of putrid filthy cunts and I don't want any shit out here ... And I'm doing your Classos, so don't forget you gotta be fucking nice to me.'

- Mr America AKA Officer Bentley, Classification Unit, Mulawa, 17 February 2010

Friday, 12 February 2010

Induction: Mulawa Women's Correctional Centre

Silverwater, NSW

A woman from Probation and Parole comes to see me. She's been looking over my case and trying to chase up the paperwork. She's confused by the situation, by why I wasn't given the chance to apply for bail, thinks there might be grounds for me to get home detention instead of full time prison. On paper, she says, I look like a mistake, like I shouldn't be in prison. I agree. I talk to her about the camera cell order, ask if there's anything she can do, anyone she can talk to. She promises to have a word to the wing officer, maybe the governor.

I talk to Dex over the phone, tell him things are looking promising, that I'm missing him and can't wait to see him when he visits.

Sunday, 14 February 2010

Induction: Mulawa Women's Correctional Centre

Silverwater, NSW

Kathy and I get a Valentine's Day gift from Corrective Services, a transfer out of the safe cell and into one with 24-hour access to a shower and a TV. Finally something to do besides shoot the shit and smoke cigarettes. The TV's in a box bolted to the ceiling, with a Perspex screen across the front and steel plates drilled with holes on the sides and base. We also get bunk beds, shelves, a table, chair, and a window that opens. Sliding aside the glass changes nothing about the view, covered as it is by three layers of tight wire mesh and security bars, but it lets air in and if I push my face right up against it and squint a bit, I can see the blurred outlines of magpies and crows scavenging on the grass

in the yard. It's luxury, unadulterated luxury. The mint green walls in this cell are decorated with painted handprints, red, blue, white and yellow. It's some pretty snazzy graffiti for a cell and I figure there's a story behind these prints. I make up stories for a while and then decide to ask Cindy, the wing sweeper. She's had the job for nearly three months, gets let out early and locked in late. She might have to do all the grunt work of keeping the wing clean, but she also knows everything there is to know about Induction.

By the time we've settled in, unpacked our garbage bags and made our beds it's almost time for the afternoon unlock and Kathy flicks on the TV for some chilling. She channel surfs a bit and settles on the Winter Olympics, a nice contrast to the stinking heat outside. After a bit she gets bored and tries to change the channel but the remote seems to have kicked it.

'All good,' she says, 'I'll talk to Davo at lunch.'

Davo is the tattooed arm and coiffed hair, the wing officer ('dude in charge' in his lexicon) of the B watch in Induction. We've worked out that he's not too harsh and that as long as you talk nicely to him and say please and thank you, he'll help out with reasonable requests. Like letting me call Dex from the office phone because there's been delays in putting my phone numbers into the automated system and putting Kathy and me in this cell together. The whole leaving us with a floor covered in piss thing must have been an anomaly – he now seems like a nice guy trying to work in a hard system.

The end of the lunchtime lock-in is announced by the rattling of keys at the door and Davo's expansive cheerfulness floods us as he swings open the door.

'All settled in then?' he enquires, running an eye over our housekeeping.

'Chief,' Kathy says, 'I gotta ask you a favour.'

'Come see me after unlock,' he says, shooing us out so he can relock the door.

I see Cindy fussing near the mops and buckets, tidying things before she heads to the grass yard outside. Thinking that I'll wait till she's not busy, I wander over to the kitchenette and make myself a coffee from the urn. I tuck my plastic spoon back into my pocket, throw away the empty coffee sachet and sweetener packet then give the coffee spot a quick wipe. The instant coffee still tastes like crap but it takes the edge off the caffeine withdrawal headaches. I'd kill for five minutes alone with my espresso machine.

'Love it when someone else tidies,' a voice says at my elbow, and Cindy is smiling when I turn to her.

'Hey Cindy,' I say, 'want a coffee? I've got some spares in my pocket.'

‘Nah sweetie, but thanks. I’ve got some of those Nescafe latte things. You should get some on buy up, they’re great.’

We talk about the weather while she makes a coffee from the supplies in her pocket. Her wipe down of the bench is much more thorough than my perfunctory swipe, and I compliment her on how great the wing looks.

‘Yeah, hard work but it pays well.’

On the way out to the yard I wave her through the door first and then take a seat next to her at the picnic table to ask about the handprints.

The paint, Cindy tells me, came from buy ups, just like her coffee and moisturiser. General buy ups run once a week, and are the only chance for inmates to stock up on essentials. You put your form in on a Tuesday and then head up to stores to collect your stuff on a Thursday. You can only spend money in your account, so if you had no cash when you came in then any purchases will need to wait till money that your visitors brings clears into your account or you get a job. Buy ups are for luxuries, like the coffee sachets, but also things we might think as necessities on the outside – deodorant, razors, tobacco and toothpaste. There’s also special monthly buy ups: magazines, craft, yarn and knitting supplies. If you run out of something before buy ups, then it’s beg, borrow, steal to get through.

So anyway, Cindy tells me, the girl who was in cell 11 before Kathy and I had bought paint on special buy ups. She picked up her stuff and took it back to the cell and then the prison went into lock down. Lock downs can happen for lots of reasons; this one, apparently, was because the screws went on strike. She got bored sitting alone in the cell and started decorating. The handprints cover all of the walls, even the bits underneath the bed and I tell Cindy that I think they add atmosphere to the room.

‘The screws didn’t agree,’ she tells me quietly, with a quick look over her shoulder. ‘You know that yelling you can hear from over the other side? Well that’s her. Put up on destruction of prison property charges and has been in Segro ever since I started working here. Every time a screw gets near her she lashes out and so they just keep dragging her stay out longer and longer. Last time I was in there mopping she’d been tearing the cell up so they’d taken everything out. She was in a hospital gown with nothing but a cement slab. You’d think she’d just learn to settle down. I wouldn’t want to be stuck in there.’

I’m almost too horrified by this story to believe it; surely a bit of paint isn’t worth all this fuss. I take too long thinking about the implications of this and I think Cindy gets nervous at my silence.

‘Well,’ she mutters, picking up her mostly empty red plastic cup, ‘time to get back to it.’

I watch her walk and away and roll another cigarette while off behind me, in the back of the Induction unit I hear another set of screams start up.

Kathy comes to find me about an hour after unlock, I’m sitting under a spindly gum tree that offers much less shade than the fig in the Mum Shirl Unit, watching birds swoop and spiral above the green rolling barrels that top the external fence.

‘You wouldn’t fucking believe it,’ she declares, slumping down on the ground next to me.

‘Smoke?’ I say, taking out my pouch and starting to roll. ‘Wouldn’t believe what?’

‘Oh yeah, thanks. Wouldn’t believe what fucking Davo said. Such a fucking joke.’

She pauses to light a cigarette and since it’s close to buy up we have two girls approach to get a light off the match before she can continue.

‘We’re supposed to buy batteries for the remote on buy up. Apparently it’s our responsibility to maintain them and he won’t give us any.’

‘That’s fucking ridiculous, buy up was just two days ago and we had no way of knowing we’d need batteries. Surely they have to provide them.’

‘Nah, he said they don’t.’

I try to get my head around this. Back-to-back with the paint story and I’m starting to feel like I’m trapped in some kind of surrealist artwork; nothing is what it should be, the angles are all wrong. Surely it would be insanity to expect prisoners to buy batteries for an electrical device they may only use for a day or two and which they can’t take with them when they transfer? That just doesn’t sound logical. I can swallow the handprints as graffiti, but not this. Off to my right I see Davo wander out the door of the unit, stop to stretch in the sun, flexing the muscles in his arms to show the tattoos off to their best advantage.

‘This is ridiculous, I’m going to talk to him.’

Kathy looks at me with something like admiration, or maybe she thinks I’m crazy. I suck it up and stride across the yard to where Davo is talking to two other screws. I wait courteously till they’re finished their chat and then approach. Five minutes later I’m back under the tree with Kathy. It’s not some fucking joke. He told me with utter earnestness that we’d need to wait till buy up or get batteries from somewhere else. When I told him we couldn’t change the channel or turn it off he suggested that we

might like to go back to the safe cells where it wasn't an issue. I cut my losses at that stage and walked away. What a fucking shitter, I think, picking up a twig from the tree and snapping it between my fingers. Kathy and I sit in silence, me breaking sticks and her ripping up leaves. As the pile of snapped sticks grows between my legs an idea starts to ferment.

'I've got a plan,' I say, and feel a cartoon lightbulb appear above my head. 'You collect a bunch of sticks, try for no thicker than a pencil and I'll be back in a few minutes.'

I trot down to the door to the unit and tell the screw at the door that I need to go to the bathroom. He wanders down the hallway and lets me into the cell, reminding me to get him to lock the door when I was done. I pee quickly (just in case), and then rip a strip off the garbage bag we have sitting under the table. Using the strip of bag as an impromptu measuring tape, I work out the distance from the side panel to the power, channel and volume buttons and tie knots in the strip at these spots. I then fold a bit of paper so that it will slide through the holes in the side panels of the TV box. Sticking my measuring devices into my pocket I head back outside, remembering to get the screw to lock our door again.

Kathy has collected a pile of sticks, ten or fifteen of them, mounding them up on the ground under the tree. I pull out my paper and cull those too thick to fit through the holes on the side, then start measuring them for the length. After a few minutes we have a short list of sticks to smuggle back in at lock-in. If this doesn't work then I'll come back to the finding batteries plan. Kathy doesn't really get the idea, but is willing to go along with it for shits and giggles. At lock-in time we each slip two sticks into our pants legs and stifle chuckles as we stand outside the door of our cell for the muster, gripping at the sticks through our pants pockets to stop them falling out.

The first stick has bumps along it that stop it sliding into the holes. The second slides right in but we can't get any leverage to push the buttons. The third gets caught on a bend part of the way along but looks perfect length-wise so I give it a bit of a wiggle and get the bend through the holes. Once it's all the way in, the bend acts as leverage, and with a bit of jiggling we can use the bend to force the end of the stick against the buttons by levering it against the Perspex. We whoop like lunatics and Kathy stands on the chair to see if she can use the stick to bring up the menu, clock and program. Works like a dream, a mother-fucking dream. Fuck you, Davo, I think in my head, keep your fucking batteries. Turns out we can't actually get the stick back out; it either stays in there or we snap it to get it out, but by this stage I don't even care. I imagine they could

probably frame wedging a stick through a hole in the TV box as destruction of corrective services property but I'd really like to see them try. I realise that the capitals have gone from 'corrective services' when I write about this in my exercise book and decide to forgo an edit. This nonsense doesn't deserve proper noun status.

While Kathy jumps around on the chair and channel surfs just for the fun of it, I place my hand on a red handprint above the desk and send positive vibes to the screaming girl in Segro.

Wednesday, 17 February 2010

*Classification: Mulawa Women's Correctional Centre
Silverwater, NSW*

It's Wednesday, my ninth day in custody, and I'm slotted to get classified today. I will be sorted according to my security risk. There are security levels for inmates that determine how many layers of fence we need between us and the real world. We're ranked on a scale from 'A' (minimum security) to 'F' (the maxest of maximum, or a prisoner who's previously attempted escape). Back in '96 I was classified as 'C' (first level maximum) because I was on remand. Today I'm hoping for 'A'. But no matter what classo I get, it's my ticket out of Induction. And I can't wait to get out of Induction. Even though Kathy and I have been moved out of the safe cell and into a normal cell, I'm really looking forward to finding out what prison out of this sweltering brick box is like. The stories I've been hearing from other girls sound promising and this classification interview is all that stands between me and a four or even five pm lock-in, access to cooking facilities and maybe even a library. Prison outside of Induction sounds like a dream (comparatively) and I want to get there.

There are six or so inmates heading off to Classo today and we walk in a rough clot of green with two blue-clad officers herding us along. A girl at the back of the group makes 'baaing' noises as we walk. The trip from Induction to Classification is only twenty metres as the crow flies. Which several crows prove by flying above us as we take the walk, landing on the roof and lawns of the stately house we're headed for. It takes much longer for us to get there than the birds because of the unlocking and locking. There are two locked doors and then two gates to get out of the Induction Unit, a walk of fifteen metres, and then another locked gate to get into the area around Blaxland House. Even though these are internal fences they reach almost to the top of the steel external fences. Made from cyclone fencing rather than steel grating, these internal boundaries

are topped with a single loop of razor wire instead of steel barrels. Gates closing in these fences don't have the definitive life-altering bass thump of the big mechanical external doors closing behind you, rather a dull repetitiveness. The cyclone fencing rattles as each door is unlocked and relocked, a constant frustrating reminder that we're submitting to the hand that screws a key. Getting through the gates takes valuable time that I could be using to get classified. At each unlock stop I bounce on my toes and jiggle my hands in the empty pockets of my track pants.

When I was nineteen and last in Muluwa, the building next door to the Induction Unit, Blaxland House, was the Education Unit. It's an old homestead brick building with sandstone buntings at the corners of the foundations, shaded by the massive branches of old-growth trees. The sweeping views down the slopes to Parramatta River were interrupted, but not blocked, by the high steel fences with rolling green barrels along the top. Now demountable buildings stand between Blaxland and the river, cutting off the glistening hints of water. When Blaxland House was the Edu Unit back in 1996, the library was on the top floor. It had a great lounge under a window next to the Sci-Fi shelves where you could sit and watch light sparkle off the water. Where you could pretend you weren't surrounded by ten-metre high fences. Blaxland House was a space for prisoner programs and a social gathering place in the afternoons. Three nights a week I attended guided meditation classes there with a counsellor who smuggled in the kind of quality chocolate that buy up had never heard of. Since my last visit the funding models have shifted and the atmospheric and soothing building has been co-opted by the Classification Unit, the officers who decide the security levels of all arriving sentenced inmates. Blaxland House kept me sane in 1996; in 2010 it will be the place where I remember what being a prisoner really means.

Sitting on the steps of Blaxland House, I'm bitter that I followed the screws' orders to leave everything behind in my cell. The officers who walked us down left quickly, locking the gates behind them. Blaxland House is locked and seems empty. Right now it's just us crims, the crows and a view of the river. Hettie, an older Aboriginal lady with faded wrist tattoos, a wild cackling laugh and cocky walk, has done this before and has brought her pouch of tobacco. She pulls it out and begins to roll. I'd really like a cigarette but we've never talked before and I don't feel comfortable asking. Others aren't restrained and gather around her, whooping and cawing. They set off the crows which flutter about the yard and settle in a flock over near the fence. I watch the birds jumping back and forth as the girls behind me light up cigarettes and talk about the post-Classo options.

‘I’m going out to Emus,’ declares Hettie. ‘I got cousins out there and once you get out to the houses it’s pretty much like being at home.’

In the courtyard of Induction I’ve overheard her talking about bunking down with the boys in the Domain after nights spent hanging out at Woolloomooloo so I suspect that our definition of ‘like being at home’ might differ a bit.

A blond girl who sits next to Hettie in the shade of the veranda agrees, ‘I hear that work’s good out at Emu Plains, pays well.’

‘And they’ve got a great library, my friend is the librarian out there,’ says a mousy girl sitting along the step from me. She is busy folding and tearing the wrapping off the outside of a toilet roll into rectangles that she will use to roll cigarettes. Buy up collection is tomorrow afternoon but I assume she was running low on funds and will be smoking toilet roll wrapper cigarettes till she’s classified, transported to a new prison and can get work.

I’m just mustering the courage to ask about Berrima, the closest women’s prison to Wollongong, when a short officer wearing mirrored aviator sunglasses and a bandana printed with the American flag comes up to the gates and starts the key-finding process. The giant ring of keys looks even larger between his small plump fingers.

Behind me, Hettie goes, ‘Oh fuck,’ and sighs deeply.

The officer is smiling as he turns towards us after locking the gate, smiling as he adjusts his belt under the strained front of his shirt. He reaches up and steadies his sunglasses with a single fingertip to the bridge. Beads of sweat drip from under his bandanna and paint his forehead. He is smiling as he opens his mouth and starts screaming at us.

‘All right, for those that don’t know me, I’m Bentley. Now I know that you’re all a bunch of putrid filthy cunts and I don’t want any shit out here. You’ve gotta wait till we’re ready for you, and no, I don’t know how long. So you cunts start any fights out here, or any other shit, and I’ll hammer you all. Nail your fucking heads to the concrete. I will smash you all down and you’ll be in fucking Segro for six months – even if you’re supposed to get out tomorrow!’

I pull my feet up onto the step with me, making a ball with my body, becoming the smallest target I can be. Segro, or Segregation, is in the back half of Induction where the girl who left the handprints in my cell is locked. At night we hear them – wild animal howls, bare fists hammering on doors, abrasive yells from the screws to ‘shut the fuck up’. Segro is a solid threat to anyone coming from Induction.

Mr America – as I’m instantly calling him in my head – stomps up the stairs, his black boots just missing the scuffed white toes of my sneakers, and unlocks the door to the building. Shards of light reflected from the river bounce off the mirrored lens of his glasses as he turns to deliver his parting statement.

‘And I’m doing your Classos, so don’t forget you gotta be fucking nice to me,’ he snarls and slams the door shut.

There is a moment of silence, broken only by the caw-caw-cawing of a crow that flaps up and over the fence.

‘Hey Chief,’ Hettie calls out from up the veranda a bit, ‘Chief, reckon you could make us a coffee?’

‘Fuck off.’ Mr America’s voice is barely muffled by the closed door and I pinch off the anger bubbling on my tongue.

I clear my throat and spit phlegm laced with dark tobacco stains into the empty garden bed next to the stairs. It tastes like rage.

We sit on the veranda for another hour or so. No-one goes in for Classo. After a bit, two admin ladies turn up and they let us use their bathroom and make coffee in polystyrene cups. We have to drink it black and unsweetened because they say if we wanted milk or sweetener, we should have brought it with us. Guess they missed the memo that said we had to travel empty-handed. As we head back out to the veranda with our full cups, one of the admin women picks up a spray bottle of disinfectant and starts cleaning everything we touched.

Back on the front step I drink two mouthfuls of the swill mixed up from a powdered International Roast sachet and then tip it in the garden. It swirls across my angry spit, washing it to invisible among the chunks of brown bark.

I am seething but there’s no space to expel it, no amount of prison coffee that could wash away that stain. Mr America is still in hearing distance. The step below me is mounded with sections of pine needle that I snipped off with my fingernails and dropped between my feet. Every sliver of leaf is the same length. By the time the same two screws come to collect us from Induction I really, really want a cigarette. They tell us that there’ve been some issues, the rest of the Classo board is unavailable, and so we need to come back the next day. They are grinning as they unlock the gate.

There’s no sign of Mr America as we go back out through the gates but I smile sadly at the admin lady who looks out the office window as the gate is locked. She stares

at me for a moment and then looks down at her desk. It's hard to tell if this is shame, empathy or disinterest. I hope it's the second but know it's the third.

Mr America's abuse has hit me hard. Back in the real world – back in Wollongong with my books and brain and internet – I don't live in a world where people can talk to me like this. I'm used, now, to having options. I don't even have the choice to walk away from him. But I deal with shit; that's what I do. Somewhere in my repertoire, I have the skills to deal with this. I need time to process, find the mental pin I need to pop his bubble of power. I know Mr America and his short man syndrome. See his pre-emptive abuse for what it really is – a power pissing contest. I've met Mr America before, or people just like him and since then I've learned they can only take my power if I let them. Now I understand how silly this game can get, how the 'way things should be' so diverges from 'the way things are', I know I'll be able to work out how to handle Mr America. I just need to think, break some mental sticks in my mind.

I ring Dex before lock-in. We talk about his computer games and what's been going on at school. Before he gets off the phone he puts Liz on. She tells me she's spoken to my best friend Chris, whose dad is a judge. They're trying to hook me up with a solicitor who knows about parole violations, who can talk to me about home detention. It gives me space to think about something outside the walls of this unit. I'm starting to have hope and Mr America can't fuck with that.

Thursday, 18 February 2010

*Classification Unit: Mulawa Women's Correctional Centre
Silverwater, NSW*

Walking back into Classo the day after being abused by Mr America is hard work, but not as hard as it could be. Yesterday I met a woman, fresh in from the street, who'd taken the two sizes too small option in the shoes and was looking for a trade. We swapped and both got a perfect fit. Wearing shoes that fit might seem like a small thing but it's given me back some confidence and allowed my stride more definition and purpose.

I've thought things through, written out my rage at Mr America in the black and yellow exercise book. Feel like I'm ready to tackle this thing. Regardless of my mental preparation and well-fitting shoes, as the gates are unlocked and then locked behind me, the teeth in the back of my head start to grind and I seethe again at the short angry man and the way he spoke to me. My green tracksuit and lack of keys are the consequences of my actions. But wearing green and being locked in tiny cells is punishment enough. Being screamed at and degraded no longer fits my definition of

reasonable consequences. I know this and I'm pretty sure that Mr America knows it too. I figure it's just a long time since anyone pointed it out to him. Well, anyone wearing green.

I sit on the same step as the day before and smoke a cigarette from the small stash I smuggled out of Induction. My raging brain settles into the rhythm of drag, inhale, hold, exhale. Mr America might be an arsehole, a 'putrid cunt' in his vocabulary, but I know that we're equals despite the blue on his chest and the green on mine. I know how to handle meetings and how to address people that I despise with courtesy and respect. I figure that it'll be okay. I'll get the 'A' classo I'm aiming for. According to the description I've been given of the Classification process, there should be other people in the room to mediate – a psychologist, case manager and Mr America.

Four crows have gathered on the grass and they crime-scene-walk in a line towards me. Sleek dark heads bob up and down as they dig at the grass for evidence. Watching their attentiveness soothes me.

By the time I am finally called in for my Classo, I've got a game plan. I'll force them to see me as a human being on the other side of the table, will speak calmly and rationally, make a solid case for being sent to Berrima, the closest medium security prison to my home town. I'll ask questions about the process because I have a right to know, be accountable for my position as a prisoner and expect the classification committee to be equally accountable for theirs.

'Marino, 263504! Classo!'

Mr America's voice right behind me curls my gut into a panic. I take a few seconds to have one last drag on my almost dead cigarette and then grind it out on the step. Picking up my red plastic cup, I follow him into the office. We are alone.

'Well, that's an old MIN number,' he says as we walk into the office. 'Don't see many starting with two these days.'

'I got it a long time ago,' I say because it seems silly to thank him.

'The rest of the committee can't make it today, so I'll be doing your Classo alone,' Mr America doesn't seem to see any issue at all with this lack of due process. His face under the sunglasses is smug as he plops his body down onto the protesting chair on the other side of the desk.

Since the chair he waves me to is the only other seat in the small room I wonder how we'd fit the committee in. Either the A4 photocopied 'Introduction to Mulawa' factsheet is wrong or the committee-based assessment policy exists on paper only. I'd

like to confirm when I get back to the cell but there was only one copy for the entire wing and I'd had to return it after only a single read.

I'm not happy to be alone with Mr America but the game plan can still work. I pick up my mental dice and roll.

'Okay,' I take a very deep breath, 'I was advised that there would be a psychologist and a case manager present to help make this decision. Can you tell me how I appeal against your decision if I feel that it is unfair?'

His brow furrows as he looks across the desk at me, down at my file and then back up at me.

'I see this is your second visit to Mulawa,' he says, as if I've complimented him on the sunglasses. 'And I see that last time you were here you were classified 'C', maximum security. Can you tell me why you got that classo?'

'As you know,' I counter, 'Inmates on remand are automatically given a maximum Classo and all of my time here in 1996 was on remand.'

'Oh,' he says, 'So there weren't any incidents that led to that?'

I wave at the folder in front of him, 'Surely my file tells you there were no incidents.'

Mr America grunts and flicks pages in the file. This goes on for several minutes while I stare at his dusty desk and listen to the crows cawing outside.

'So, you've been to Uni... we don't see that much in here.'

I don't know what can be said to this. I stare at him mutely.

'It's gonna make you popular wherever we send you. It's hard to get people who know how to use computers to work in the offices.'

Seven years of tertiary study reduced to 'computers for dummies' by the green on my chest? I don't think so. There're no qualifications on the wall behind his desk and I think about asking after them but figure I don't want to know how much schooling it takes to get his job.

'I'm in the process of being assessed for home detention,' I say, 'So wherever you send me, I'm not going to be there for long.'

'Well, that's what you say. Chances are the courts will disagree. They usually do, particularly for repeat offenders.'

Again I say nothing. Opening my mouth right now could make me a repeat offender. I swallow the rage but I'm sure my body language gives it away.

He starts to ask me a long list of questions about my drug use, history of self-harm, education, living conditions. All of these questions have been asked in one or

another of the case review meetings I've attended over the last ten days and I've personally seen a bunch of the answers written down in the folder he has open. I've read *The Trial* by Kafka and so at least have a worse situation to compare this to.

After twenty or so minutes, he flips the file back to the front page and tells me that I will be classified as 'B', or medium security and will be sent to Berrima.

'Can you please explain why I've not been classified as minimum security?'

I know the answer doesn't really matter. The only truly minimum security incarceration for women in NSW is the mother and child unit at Emu Plains. Despite there only being two female maximum-security prisoners in the system, most of the beds are designated for security classifications higher than 'C'.

'I've got a lot of people to get through today,' he picks up my file and dumps it on the stack to the right of his desk. 'If you've got any more questions, you should talk to your wing officer.'

'No,' I reply, placing my hands palm down on the dusty desk. 'I've asked two questions that you've refused to answer. One, I want to know why I'm being given a medium classo after never having reoffended and being back in the system for the first time in thirteen years. And two, I need you to tell me who I speak to about an appeal against your decision since it has been made without due process and by a single person rather than by a committee.' My hands are steady on the desk and I concentrate on holding them still. The skin of my nail beds turns white with the effort but I'm pretty sure he can't see this from his angle. I hope.

'No' is obviously a word he doesn't usually hear from people wearing green. Mr America removes his sunglasses for the first time and his eyes are watery. For a second I see him seeing past the colour of my T-shirt and the file in front of him. For a fraction of time I'm a person to him, someone who can think and reason and ask difficult questions. His mouth opens, closes, opens again.

'You're a "B" because you need to be assessed over a period of three months to be given anything lower than that and you haven't even been here two weeks.' He slams the folder shut again and slips the glasses back over his eyes. 'Now, if there are any complaints that you would like to make, then you'll need to take them up with your wing officer. That's how you lodge an appeal.'

'Okay,' I say, getting to my feet and wiping the dust from his desk onto the front of my pants. 'So pretty much the same process you would use to complain about an officer who screamed abuse in your face for no reason, then? Now that I know why you are classifying me as you have, I'll hold off on an appeal. Have a nice day.'

I walk out the door without waiting for his reply or his permission and close the door behind me. The crows have come closer and are pecking in the garden bed where I spat out my rage the day before. Behind Mr America's sunglasses and conceit, I like to hope he'll pause for just a second the next time his mouth opens to call someone a 'putrid cunt'.

When I get back to cell 11 in Induction Kathy is gone, her bunk empty. A note on the table says 'Gone to Dylwinnia, you are great, look after yourself'. A ziplock bag that meds come in lies next to the note, stuffed with tobacco, and a box of matches sits atop this. There are two O's, two X's and a smiley face on the bottom of the note. I miss her already.

Saturday, 20 February 2010

*Induction: Mulawa Women's Correctional Centre
Silverwater, NSW*

After I get out of prison I do some Googling and find out that February 2010 was the hottest on record. This translates to an inferno in the Induction unit. The small brick building sucks in heat, radiating it out from the double layers of brown bricks. It's okay inside, during the day when the air conditioning is on, but out in the tiny courtyard where we breakfast the air is baking. There is no circulation, no vents in the walls or gaps to let a breeze in. The wire mesh roof lets filtered sun and heat in but no breeze. For a few days we still get our afternoon exercise out in the yard with the scant shade from the gum trees. As the days get hotter, however, the screws get worried about us getting sunstroke, so we start spending the afternoon unlocks in the courtyard as well as our mornings. The temperature has been steadily rising for days now; the prediction for today is mid to high thirties. At breakfast we were told all of our unlocks today would be in the courtyard. The wing officer for today, a tall blonde screw who I've nicknamed Chihuahua Face – for her tiny face and giant head – announces that they don't want to have to deal with the paperwork of heatstroke, so dress sensibly for the weather and if we get too hot out in the yard, request to be put back in our air conditioned cells.

Dressing 'sensibly for the heat' is made difficult by the prison-issue clothing. Bare shoulders are contraband at Mulawa so the briefest tops that we have to wear are T-shirts, and more than once over the last few days, as the heat has gradually risen, girls have been reprimanded by screws for rolling sleeves up to the shoulders, or tying the front of shirts up to expose bellies. The top half of our bodies have to be completely covered, elbows and waist to neck. Most of the T-shirts are made of a thick stretch

cotton drill that holds the heat close to your skin, though I have one raglan style shirt that I've already been wearing for days. Pants are also an issue. Very few pairs of prison issue shorts have pockets, and those that do tend to disappear when you put them in the communal wash. The tracksuit pants are thick, designed for winters out at Emu Plains and Windsor, but they do have pockets. Since we're locked out of our cells during the day, except for quick bathroom breaks, everything we need is carried with us. My usual pile includes tobacco, papers, matches, pen, exercise book, red plastic cup, plastic teaspoon, reading book, and, in the mornings, my bowl. Some people have managed to wrangle clear plastic bags to carry stuff in but most of this needs to go in your pockets or be carried, and pockets make it easier. The thick tracksuit pants will only roll as far as just below your knee, creating a tubular scarf around the leg that keeps the heat in and quickly becomes soggy with sweat. Bare feet are also a no-no, and since thongs are a luxury buy up item most of us are stuck with thick woolly socks and the Dunlop Volleys.

The door into the unit has a window next to it, and through this we can see the screws lounging in their glass box office, and air conditioner outlet directly above their heads. When the door is opened for Cindy to go in and fill the thermos jugs with our hourly ration of boiling water for coffees, people cluster around the door to catch the overflow of chilled air that floods out. We ask the screws for cold water and eventually they allow us one jug to share between the thirty-five prisoners in the tiny brick box. By the end of the breakfast unlock, we are a mass of groaning complaints, lining up against the door, eager to get back into the air-conditioned cells for lunch.

The shifts of screws rotate, and today we have a crew that are mostly female. Over my eleven days in Induction, I've noticed there's a pattern with the female guards – they're meaner than the males, nastier. The males in Induction, like Davo, try to charm us into compliance, the women attempt to beat us but without ever lifting a finger. They use the good old female tools of sarcasm and shrill yells to keep order. In my exercise book I write about them: 'It's the women who are the worst; they seem to feel a need to erase their femininity, scrubbing away any scent of weakness and replacing it with the big hard cock of nastiness and anti-solidarity.' Today's wing officer, Chihuahua Face, is one of the worst. She has a constant cat's bum mouth and actively ignores prisoners' attempts to communicate. Her towering height and broad shoulders add an extra physical threat to the meanness. Her second-in-charge I've nicknamed Irish; she's the yipping terrier that follows Chihuahua Face around, herding us into line with sharp yells and quick insults. I've seen the stupidest interpretations of the rules under these two and don't hold high hopes for the rest of the day.

At the pre-lunch muster we're reminded to look after ourselves, drink a lot of water over lunch and ask to go back into our cells if it is too hot in the afternoon. Most of us are leaning against the walls next our cell doors, already exhausted from our two and a half hours trapped in the stinking box. As the wing officer counts us, she reminds us to stand up straight on muster but as she passes we slump back against the walls. Over lunch I watch the Winter Olympics, fantasising about burying myself in snow and piling handfuls of it into my mouth. I'm now sharing my cell with an elderly Vietnamese woman who was here when I arrived, got bail, but then breached the bail conditions by seeing her son and co-defendant and was back forty-eight hours after she left. She has no English and I only know about the breach because a younger woman translated for us in the yard. Following protocol, I've given her the bottom bunk and she spends the air-conditioned hour tossing on the squeaking vinyl mattress and groaning at the heat. Every time I fill my cup with tepid water from the tap, I also fill hers and she gulps it down before dropping back to her pillow made of clothes. I'm not sure she'll survive an afternoon out in the yard. Even with the air con, we both still have sweat dripping down our faces when the screws come to unlock after lunch.

When the keys turn in the door at the end of lunch, my new cellmate turns her back to the room, groaning. I know what's she's saying, despite our lack of shared words, it's too freaking hot to go back out there. The screw at the door yells at us to get up and out, and past her I can hear other screws yelling similar things into other cells. The heat has sapped those in green of the will to follow orders and those in blue of the ability to give them gently. It takes twice as long as usual for unlock and the mood as we filter back out into the yard is angry, antagonistic. When the last crim comes through the door, Chihuahua Face stands in the door, rage evident in the set of her shoulders and tighter-than-usual cat's bum mouth and reminds us that rules are still rules, even when it's hot. She gestures to Cindy to hurry up with the jugs of hot water and then slams the door closed, leaving us out in the concrete box.

Cindy plops the jugs down on the table, says, 'I'll try to get some cold water in an hour or so.' She looks too tired to face the arguments with the screws which that will take.

We thank her in a chorus and settle in to handle the next two hours. No one seems game to hit the knock up button next to the door and request to be let back into their cell. The sun has moved overhead and drills through the wire mesh, leaving small patches of shade around the walls. So many bodies try to press into these spots that sweaty limbs inevitably touch and tempers fray. The seats attached to the metal picnic

tables in the centre of the yard burn when we sit on them and those who try to sit wearing shorts jump up, yelling. The tables are too hot to lean on. The vinyl lounge chairs that have mildewed through constant exposure to rain sit empty in the sun, a miasma of rot and steaming possum piss rising off them. The air in the box feels thick in your mouth, solid as it tries to get into your lungs. Smoking is a chore, but most of us do it anyway.

My new cellmate isn't handling the heat. She sits in a corner surrounded by the small group of Vietnamese women. Her face is pale, with sweat beading down it, and her lips are white slashes that she can barely part to sip at the warm water a younger woman has been pouring from cup to cup to cool. Another woman kneels next to her, bare knees on the gritty pebblecrete, using a red plate to wave air across the old woman's face. Her eyelids flutter and when they open I can see more white than pupil, even from across the courtyard. After a while I approach the two middle aged woman standing near her and talking in a rapid-fire panic.

'She needs to go back inside,' I say to them, 'needs to get out of the heat.'

One of the women looks at me, shakes her head like I'm crazy. 'They won't let her,' she says.

'They have to,' I reply.

Her response is mute. I look at the CCTV camera which stares down at the old woman and wonder why the screws haven't worked this out themselves.

The knock up button has been in full sun and is hot when I press my finger to it. There's a long pause and through the window I can see the screws lounging behind the desk, waving chilled air across their faces with stack of paper and sipping iced water from glasses. Eventually Irish stands up and goes to the intercom at their end.

'What?' The interrogative is harsh and demanding.

'There's an old lady out here who needs to go back into her cell; I think she has heatstroke.'

I stare at Irish through the window then turn to the CCTV and point at the woman. The screw stands with her hand above the button and looks over at Chihuahua Face, I see the giant blonde head shake a negation and am angry before Irish's finger gets back to the buzzer.

'It's not that hot, tell her to toughen up.'

The old woman is slumped against the wall, held upright by the young woman holding the cup. The whole group of them stare at me, waiting.

I take a deep calming breath, 'At muster we were told to ask if we wanted to go back into our cells. This is me asking for her to go back into her cell.'

Even at a distance I can see the air of aghast the surrounds Irish, see her anger at me talking back. I don't give her time to respond.

'If you won't let her in, then at least let us have some cold water. I can see the dew on your glass from here. This is unreasonable and unjust.'

Oh God, I think, now I've done it. These are two words that screws hate to hear. The un-words get their hackles up quicker than anything. If my brain had been cooler, then I might have thought a bit more carefully about word choice. Well, I postulate, in for a penny, in for a pound, might as well pull out the big guns. I press the button again: 'If she has a seizure out here,' my voice is less polite now, 'I'll be calling the Ombudsman myself.'

Holy fucking hell, I think, two un-words and the O word. This isn't going to be pretty.

Irish stares at me while behind her Chihuahua Face slams the gossip magazine she's reading down and swings her big black boots off the desk and onto the floor. She stamps across to the office fridge, yanks the door open and takes out a giant jug of icy cold water. My salivary glands kick in, flooding my mouth as she reaches up to the top of the fridge and pulls down a single plastic cup. She places the glass on the bench and with deliberate precision pours three fingers into the bottom of the glass. Leaving the jug mockingly atop the bench, she pivots and heads for the door, swilling the glass so that drops fly out across the floor. I step away from the door as she approaches and my peripheral vision shows me every girl in the yard standing back, staring at me. For a brief second I almost hope she'll fling the water in my face, which will make for some great scribbles in the book. She doesn't, however, instead wrenching the door open and shoving the cup into my hand. I turn and gesture to the woman who has been feeding warm water to the old lady, passing her the cup and then bracing myself for what's coming next. Chihuahua Face is a towering mountain of rage but I'm too hot to be scared of her. From behind her bulk, a wave of cold air washes out into the courtyard and highlights the trickles of perspiration running down my face and neck.

'I'm not putting up with this shit,' she yells at me, at the yard, punishing the whole for my use of the un-words, the O word. 'It's too fucking hot to be listening to all your bitching and moaning. You're out of the sun, got water to drink, none of you are going to die. If you wanted to be lounging at home, sucking on ice blocks, then you shouldn't have committed crimes. Next person to hit the knock up for no reason is up on

charges.’ She pauses, looks around, takes a deep disgusted lung full of our rancid stench, plants her hands on her hips. ‘Cindy, get the jugs and fill them with cold water. No coffee till dinner and just stop fucking complaining.’

Her eyes come back to me and dare me to respond. Okay, I think, I’ll take your dare. I breathe in, place my own hands on my hips to mirror her. Behind me I hear a collective gasp. Till now I’ve been the one defining words and encouraging people to find sensible ways around the crazy rules, I can feel the wall of overheated brains wondering what I’m about to do. Use your emotional vocabulary, Angela, I council myself, be the big man.

‘What ever happened to solidarity?’ I say, arching my eyebrow in that way I know kicked goals in tutorials.

Chihuahua Face huffs once, then again. Her cheeks redden and the skin around her eyes and mouth turns stark white. She opens her mouth, closes it, opens it again. I stand stock still, hands on hips but barely breathing, refuse to break eye contact. Chihuahua Face’s mouth catbums till almost invisible. She pivots on her heel, slamming the door shut and storming back to the office and around the corner out of sight. I stand, shaking a little, scared to turn and see the reactions of the rest of the prisoners, afraid I’ll vomit or cry if I make eye contact with anyone. Slowly my hands slide off my hips.

Irish walks almost tentatively to the door and opens it, calling Cindy in to get water. As she waits for the jugs to come back, the screw holds the door open wide, letting cold air flow out into the courtyard and just before she closes it, after Cindy returns, Irish reaches out and unlocks the window next to the door, sliding it open two inches so that a small breeze comes out into the courtyard.

We spend the rest of the afternoon taking it in turns to sit on the bench in front of that breeze, necks turned to chill some of the sweat. My cellmate is first in and after every three of four people have a sit she’s called back to have another go. The mood in the yard is subdued but relaxed. It might not have gotten any cooler but the tiny victory feels like a communal one. None of us have ever seen Chihuahua Face speechless.

By afternoon muster the wing officer has found her words again. As we line up outside our cells and she marches past us for the count, she derides us for our stench, the rancid smell of us *en masse*. Standing next to me, but deliberately not looking at me, she lectures us on hygiene, says that by now we should have learned to look after ourselves, keep our bodies smelling like women instead of barnyard animals.

I don't care. Not one single jot. The rancid sweat is cooling on my skin and after lock-in, when I've showered, I spread my towel out on the top bunk and celebrate the lack of cameras in my cell by lying dripping wet in my underwear directly underneath the aircon vent. The chills of water on my skin feel like winning.

Mr America and Chihuahua Face are pretty typical officers for Induction, I now realise – abrasive, unhappy, impatient, abrupt, controlling. The combination of screws like these, constantly shifting policies and regulations, and the tight confinement of Induction, foster a feeling of solidarity between the girls at Mulawa. Well, the tiny Induction corner of Mulawa. Induction has an 'I'll cover your back if you cover mine' vibe. A common thread for the prisoners in Induction is the inability to have a voice, the lack of confidence to speak up, but in the face of screws like Chihuahua Face, this doesn't surprise me at all. I'm astonished at my own courage to confront her.

The women I am most scared of at Induction this time around are the screws. It was different last time I was in Mulawa. I came out of the prison in 1996 with bruises on my face and a gross mistrust of the female inmates. I've been trying to remember why, having found no reason to be afraid of them now. The universe is about to remind me. I've never gotten women, never understood how they relate to control, and watching the female screws in Induction has kicked all the questions off again. Mr America makes sense; I get angry men, particularly angry short men. Angry women just scare me, and till now, all the really angry women I've seen in prison have been wearing blue. That's about to change.

Chapter 4

You have the right to be treated with respect, impartiality, and fairness by all staff. You have an obligation to treat others, both staff and inmates, in the same manner as you expect to be treated.

- 'Rights and Obligations', *Handbook for Women Inmates*, 2006

Note: governors are advised not to place young Aboriginal inmates in one-out cells. In such cases, an alternative disciplinary action should be considered. **These procedures accord with Recommendation 180 of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody.**

- 'Inmate Discipline', *Corrective Services Policy and Procedure Manual*, Reviewed July 2006: Author's emphasis

Monday, 1 March 2010
Berrima Correctional Centre
Berrima, NSW

Berrima Women's Correctional Centre is a lot like the girls at Mulawa described it – later lock-ins, more freedom to move around, a basketball hoop and library you can walk into anytime you like. It's also the worst place I could have ended up right now. Berrima reminds me why I distrust women, why I responded to Chihuahua Face like I did, and why I fight so hard to stay calm in these moments. Berrima is where I run into Delma again, a moment I've been dreading since I stepped off the bus in Mulawa.

The last time I saw Delma was my trip to Mulawa over a decade ago. She left an impression, though, and some of the bruises I just mentioned. I learned a lot from Delma back in my first stint, about how a person can respond to the lack of control that comes with prison, how we survive when the lack of power triggers our childhood fears. She taught me the tricks that got me through this trip to Induction – keep your head down, don't make eye contact, don't be a target. I've been carrying her in my head for thirteen years. Since prison was the only place I'd ever seen her, I'd been expecting to see Delma at Mulawa and was relieved when I didn't. But now I've been waiting in a kind of dull terror since I saw her name up on the cell list as I came in through reception at Berrima. So far it doesn't seem like she's recognised me, although I knew her immediately – not surprising considering our first run-in years ago. I'm hoping she'll continue not to recognise me, terrified what might happen if she does.

Berrima is an historic village in the Southern Highlands that was founded in the 1830s. It has eleven streets, a riverfront caravan and camping park, market gardens, a lolly shop and a jam factory. Berrima looks like a nice place to visit, somewhere to stop over on the way to somewhere more exciting. Berrima is the kind of homely crafty town my mother would love. Berrima also has a prison, right smack bang in the centre of the town, the pivot of the local economy.

Convicts in irons started building the prison in 1836 and it was opened in 1839. In the 171 years between the gaol opening and me walking in the doors, it's been a men's prison, a correctional training centre, an internment camp for German prisoners of war, a tourist attraction and museum and finally in 2001 it was remade again as a women's correctional centre.

The prison feels like it is 171 years old, despite the internal buildings having been rebuilt in the 1940s. High sandstone walls ring the compound that contains two large buildings wrapped around internal courtyards. The buildings are made from large sandstone blocks, with small windows for each cell looking into the yards. The front courtyard is filled with grass and flowerbeds and most of the cells in this section are sole occupancy. The girls in these cells have all been here for a while and many of them are looking at lengthy lags. Their cells are decorated with origami lampshades, art projects and knitted dolls. They have colourful crochet blankets over their beds. The rear courtyard at Berrima is much larger, concrete from wall to wall, surrounded by mostly dual-occupancy cells. A basketball court takes up the centre of the yard, but balls are hard to find. The ubiquitous crows perch on top of the basketball backboards while they surveil the yard. Along the rear of this courtyard there is a thick green line painted on the ground that we line up on three times a day for muster. Once you get in through the large locked gates, the buildings cut off all but the top of the large external wall. The picturesque village becomes just a cluster of noise outside the walls. Sometimes you can smell jam cooking. It smells like picturesque jam.

My cell is the last one in the far northeast corner of the rear yard and I share it with an older lady who copped eight years for fraud. This cell has double bunks, a ceramic toilet, sink, desk and TV. The showers here are in a separate room, along with the first bathtub I've seen in prison. Ruth, my new cellmate, is in her fifties and I take the top bunk here. Ruth doesn't smoke but says it's fine if I need to so I hang my head and arm out the window while I do. From our window, we can see all of the cells in the rear yard and across to the guard tower which lurks between the two yards. Lock-in is at 4pm and after the doors are all locked we can talk to the other inmates in the cells near us.

We can also feed the crows out the window but the screws don't take kindly to this. Not that they'll unlock the doors for us to come out and pick up the bags of rice bubbles that we scatter for the birds, they just stand outside and chastise you. We can also see the night sky. The days start at 6am at Berrima and those inmates with jobs line up at eight for the walk to either the print shop out the back of the prison or the gardens outside the walls. The rest of us fill our time in the library or gather in circles to knit, crochet or paint the time away. I'm still not working and have found a group of women to sit and knit with.

The screws and girls get on differently in Berrima. I figure this has something to do with the lower levels of conflict and disorder than the screws at Induction deal with; this is prison to live in rather than prison to break you. I've been here for seven days and I'm yet to have a single officer call me a putrid cunt. The women seem okay, as do the men – just people doing their jobs. When I do have to talk to the screws, which seems to happen much less frequently than in Induction, they don't even raise their voices; it is almost like we're on the same planet. Yesterday a screw called me 'Ms Marino' and the lady who gives me my mail actually called me 'Angela' when I got my letters from her today. Generally, Berrima seems to work much better than Mulawa, but it is still a prison filled with prisoners and the people wearing blue are still in charge. Mostly.

It's Monday, which means that visits have been and gone and any contraband that was going to get into the prison is already in. There was obviously a big drop of drugs done some time over the weekend. A bunch of girls, the cliquey in-crowd, spent Sunday afternoon lolling in giggling packs, with clouded eyes and fast fogged speech. After lock-in last night there were multiple calls out cell windows for officers to pass in cigarette lighters or matches that had been left lying on steps, to carry snacks and lollies between cells. The screws ignored them. One inmate even tried to convince the girl a few cells up from us to boil her jug and then somehow throw a cup of boiling water to the window two cells over for a recovery coffee. My experience with drugs is old, but not so old that I can't read the clues. Whatever got in was definitely more of an upper than a downer and had the crash of a tainted amphetamine. There were some sore heads on muster this morning and more than one person begged off work in the print shop, claiming an urgent need to stay back for the medical line up. Whoever split their drugs up will be looking at months of favours – she'll have people lined up to clean her cell, bring her dinner and lunch. The person who carried the drugs past the post-visit searches will have pressies heading her way from the next few buy ups.

Last night Ruth and I sat in our cell listening to the yells and chaos and speculated about the official response to the outbreak of chemical contagion. The knitting circle this morning has been filled with discussions of a possible widespread 'random' urinalysis or a search of every cell in the gaol. All the prisoners seem to know who brought the stuff in and it seems a little irrational to assume that the screws don't too. Despite my handful of days back in the joint, even I know the girl who brought the stuff in, better than I'd like to. I'm sincerely hoping that the screws take the easy path and just let the drugs go. Delma brought the drugs in. I'm scared of the shit that might go down if the screws challenge the issue.

1996

Willet Unit, Remand Compound

Mulawa Women's Correctional Centre, Silverwater, NSW

When we met at Mulawa in 1996, Delma and I were about the same age, late teens to early twenties. We wore the same size prison pants and the same size Dunlop sneakers. She had clear skin, bright green eyes, curling dark hair and a dazzling smile. Delma oozed charisma. If we met outside of prison I wouldn't have pegged her as a criminal. She carried her Koori culture like a proud flag and called me 'sis' when she guessed at the Aboriginal blood that gives my nose its shape.

The unit where we all lived was in the newly-built remand section of Mulawa, a fenced-off section of the prison in the opposite corner to Induction. Induction and Remand were built in 1990 and according to the Inspector General's 'Inspection report' from 2001 were 'based on inmates providing for their own living requirements'. The Remand section contained three units, which looked like very secure houses from outside, and the market gardens that grew fresh flowers for middle-aged housewives and guilty husbands to buy from Woolworths. Each unit was two square buildings, or wings, set on a diagonal and linked by an office in the centre for the screws. The wings had cells along two walls, a large lounge room in the centre and an open plan kitchen off the lounge where we took it in turns to cook dinner. There was a laundry up the back, a television in the lounge, and each cell had a tiny fenced-in balcony where we sat at night and gossiped with the women in the cells next door.

Delma and I had been on the dinner roster together a few times and we'd had a run-in over the correct way to skin an onion that almost escalated to blows. So I avoided her, tried to stay off her radar. A lot of my first trip to prison was spent learning small but vital lessons like this one.

It was early afternoon when a screw popped their head out of the office and called Delma to the phone. The screw passed the handset out the office window and Delma leant on the kitchen bench as she talked and listened. Shoulders hunched in, head dropped down. Something bad had gone down – there was shit piling up in Delma's world. Shit so much bigger than the unit could hold, bigger than the prison could hold.

I was coming back from a cigarette, in through the big front doors of the unit, when Delma's call ended. Our eyes met as I walked across the room. This was my mistake.

'What the fuck are you looking at?' She was screaming as she closed the gap between us with running steps.

Every head in the room swivelled in our direction.

'What is your fucking problem?' She was on me, a mesh of whirling fists, screaming mouth, blazing eyes.

Inside the office, a female screw fumbled with her keys, trying to open the door to the wing. Behind her, a male screw ran out the open external door and then into the wing through the front doors. He was not fast enough. Delma had me on the ground now, straddling me, pinning me flat with her knees pressed tight against my hips. I'd never been in a real fight as an adult. I tried to tell my arms to push her up, hit her, defend myself. But they were flailing lumps of dead meat.

Delma landed a dozen blows on my face and head before the officers dragged her off me. They pulled her to her cell, throwing her in and slamming the door. I started to breathe again, convulsively – like an almost drowned puppy – as I heard them screwing the key in the lock.

In the office, the female screw gave me a box of tissues and pointed me to a small mirror hanging on the wall.

'We can take you up to the clinic, if you think it needs it,' she said to me but her face told me this was a bad idea. Not that I needed her face to tell me this.

I dabbed at a small trickle of blood near my eyebrow and pulled at my lips to see if they were split or just swollen. Breathing was kicking my brain back in and I could feel the silent crims in the wing, watching me through the glass windows to see if I was about to dog, to tell, to beg for protection.

'What's going to happen to Delma?' I was terrified of going back into the wing.

The male officer leant back in his chair and looked me up and down. 'That call was about a death in the family,' he explained, 'so any charges we press will just be

dropped. She's going to be preparing for the funeral over the next few days so we can't really put her in Segro.'

I didn't know what to say. I got it, so got it. But I had blood on my face and a lump pushing up under the hair on the back of my head. I looked at the female officer but she had her eyes down on the big diary where the wing officers noted incidents. She held a pen between two fingers and tapped it on the wrinkled corners of the pages. I looked back to the male officer and while he met my eyes I could feel the wall of mocking behind them. You are too weak for prison his eyes said to me. I know, mine said back.

There was no help coming from that office. The other girls in the unit avoided my eyes as I walked back across the wing and into my cell. I wanted to scream at them as I walked back into the unit, tell them I didn't say nothing, that I wasn't no dog. But that's exactly what a dog would do, so I didn't. I walked back to my cell. It was four doors up from Delma and I could hear her sobbing as I closed the door behind me, climbed onto the top bunk and crawled under the scratchy grey blankets.

I felt like I deserved this. I was so afraid of angry women.

*Winter 1990
Family Home
Woy Woy, NSW*

The bed I slept in once belonged to my dead step-grandmother. I was lying in that bed, in my bedroom in my parents' house in Woy Woy when I started to bleed. I was fourteen, a virgin, terrified. Like all teenage girls, I'd been waiting for this. The dread that filled me when I saw the blood on my fingers felt irrational. I was afraid, but I didn't know why. I couldn't think about the blood, what it might mean.

The bed was a monolithic thing carved from a dark stained wood. This was the bed my stepfather's mother slept in before the dementia carried her off to the nursing home, before she died in a smaller, more sterile bed. It filled my lavender and lemon bedroom, this dark bed. It was the centre of a kingdom I built for myself. Above the bed, swathed lace shawls were tacked tri-corner across the ceiling, yellowed with age, dusty. Between them hung a collection of old pewter cups, dangling on strings threaded through the handles. There was a bookshelf with a collection of Trixie Belden books, a well-thumbed copy of *Playing Beatie Bow*, floral bound bibles, *The Cross and the Switchblade*, and a few contraband science fiction and fantasy novels. Everything in this room was old. I understood Abigail, from *Playing Beatie Bow*, who sought refuge from

her pain in antiquity. I fantasised that I'd find a scrap of magic crumbling lace that would take me away from my life. I'd lie on the bed, seeing faces in the shadows of the scarves and imagine a way out of my life. By fourteen I knew the ridiculousness of this fantasy, but it didn't stop me hoping.

I didn't think the night I started bleeding. I lay on the bed, with blood on my fingers and didn't think at all about why I was so scared. I knew my mother well enough by then, knew her predilections. The desire not to think should have been a warning sign; the fear should have stopped my tongue.

I didn't think about the fear then, and find it hard to think about it now. I lose myself in details instead. It wasn't a Saturday, Sunday or Wednesday because we weren't at church. It was winter; I could smell the open fire from the other end of the house.

My mother and I had 'the talk' about a year before this. She was in a loquacious mood and had taken me aside to explain the facts of life and pass on a packet of sanitary pads. It was a long and creepy conversation, with intonations about how this womanly moment would increase my danger from men. She'd dug her long fingernails into the soft skin above my pelvis as she explained the pains I would feel and what would happen next, kneading at my belly in a mildly sexual manner and pulling me close as I winced. At this stage of my life I assumed all mothers had these oddly erotic moments with their daughters. I convinced myself that this discomfort with her touch was teenage angst. Aside from this conversation, there were no references to menstruation in our daily lives. After giving birth to my brother, Trevor, my mother had a radical hysterectomy and so didn't bleed. It had to be pads I used, she had explained to me, or I would risk deflowering myself before my wedding night. The jocularity and intimacy of this conversation lulled me into a false sense of security.

When I felt the pains in my stomach there was a moment of excitement behind, under and around the unnameable fear, a feeling that maybe in becoming a woman I would finally earn her trust and respect. Maybe in this moment, becoming a woman like her, I could finally come to feel safe in this house, in her love for me. I just didn't think.

The rest of the family were gathered around the open fire in the formal lounge room at the front of the house. A brown velvet modular lounge separated the room in two and my mother, brother and stepfather were scattered along its length. Trevor, my brother – a year and two days younger than I – was reading a book and my mother and her husband leaned on each other, both staring into the flames.

I came to the door and announced with pride and fear, 'I think I'm getting my period.'

I knew it was a mistake before the words had finished. My mistake wasn't mentioning this women's business in front of the two males. No, my mistake was not stopping long enough to sense her mood before I opened my mouth – my mistake was not thinking more about that fear.

She was up from the seat and coming for me, even as I swivelled and tried to escape. Paula, my mother, was large, pendulous and powerful. Her taloned fingers clutched at me, cutting short my retreat. She flung me down on the rug in front of the fire and it began, as it had so many times before.

I don't want to tell you the details but I will. By midnight she had beaten me several times, with fists and feet and shoes. She'd clenched her fingers in my hair, dragged me on my knees across the floor to apologise to my stepfather and brother. I begged for her forgiveness, for theirs. I cried and denied that it was true, promised it was a lie I made up for attention. When things got dangerous I scuttled back from the heat of the screen around the fire, crabbing on my hands and feet like Linda Blair in *The Exorcist*, getting my face away from the hot metal, flames and embers. I screamed loudly as she scratched at my arms and legs. I tried to lead her away from the rack of metal tools that leaned by the hearth.

'You filthy slut,' she screamed at me, again and again. 'You're a dirty whore. Girls like you end up as prostitutes, selling their body on the streets.'

Holding me down with my legs spread apart, she thrust burning sticks near my genitals and threatened to sear my hole closed so that I could never use it to shame her. Shame the family.

'I know exactly what you are doing,' she said, twisting my budding breasts between her nails. 'You're using these to get men to look at you, talking about your body to get their attention.'

My stepfather tried to intervene but her rage turning on him was enough to send him back to the corner of the lounge. He sat and shook his head.

It just kept going.

Sometime in the darkest hours of the night a lull set in. My brother had been sent to bed, but he kept coming back to stand at the door and watch. She sent him away again and again, but as this calm settled in he came back and stood there watching.

There were always these lulls, moments where my tears (or her exhaustion) broke through. Sometimes this was the end of it. That night the calm was just the eye of the hurricane. I crouched on a footstool between her knees, bent over by sorrow and shame, wrenching out all the reasons why I was sorry, why she *needed* to do this. My mother cried with me, pouring fourth inverse explanations.

‘This is for your own good,’ she murmured close to my sweat-damp hair. ‘You make me do these things. I’m helping to save you from yourself. God told me this is my job, spare the rod and spoil the child.’

Her words were hypnotic. I’d heard them so many times, when I’d been in so much pain. It was hard for me to find meaning in them, hard to keep breathing through the mantra. She knew the meaning. God had given me to her, she meant, and it was her obligation to discipline me, to send me out into the world as a moral upright citizen. And the only way to do this was by beating me.

Snot and tears poured down my face, stringing from my nose and chin until my stepfather handed me a folded handkerchief with a look of disgust. Blowing my nose filled the fabric, saturated it, made it into a wet lump in my shaking hands. Still I cried, pouring out shame and pain, drops of wetness falling onto my legs and the polished boards of the floor. She held me to her chest and sobbed into my hair, fingertips pressing into the sore spots on my scalp and the bruises on my body. It could have ended there. If it had ended there, I could have gone to sleep and had some hope of dragging myself out of bed and to school the next morning.

Sometimes the calm would last hours, or even days, until a muttering under her breath, a reworking of the rants would signal the coming back of my mother’s anger. Anything or nothing could set this off. There was no way to know. That night it might have been a sidelong glance of shame at my brother. Or it might have been the softness of my hair, the tremble in my lip. This second coming of her anger was so much more brutal, refined by tears and sorrow. In the early hours of morning I believed she might kill me. It was not a new fear.

When she kicked me down onto the ground and started to tear off my clothes I screamed, full-throated shrieks ripping up out of my belly. Slapping at my head, she distracted my hands and tore the pink flannelette pyjamas away from my body. In underpants stained with blood I cowered away, hiding the softest parts of my body as she ranted at me, swinging her hands towards the two male witnesses.

‘This is what you want, isn’t it,’ she screamed down into my face, ‘Men looking at your naked body? Men wanting you?’

Mortified, crippled, I turned myself into a ball, a dropped and splintered marble rolling on the bare boards near her feet.

‘You want the whole world wanting you – wanting to fuck you! I’ll show you what it is like, what you want.’

Pinning my legs down was easy for her. With one leg pressed down on my chest she wrenched off my underpants, ignoring the small flowering of blood at the crotch. I screamed and thrashed as she tugged them away and threw them into the guttering fire. Shame burned through me as the small scrap of charred fabric fell to the side of the embers.

I thought this was as bad as it could get, this was the worst thing she could ever do to me. I felt I might die from the humiliation of my stepfather’s eyes, my brother’s relief that it wasn’t him.

I thought I might never stop screaming.

‘You want the whole world to see you naked? You want them to touch you and fuck you? You want them to want you?’

With one hand buried in my hair and the other wrapped around my upper arm she dragged me to my feet. Her lips were twisted and bubbled globs of spit flew off her mouth and hit my face like acid. I knew that I couldn’t survive whatever she meant to do. I finally fought back, lashing out at her with trembling fists that felt like wet sponges.

She screeched at me, ‘I’ll give you what you want, you dirty slut.’

The hand in my hair tightened and wrenched my naked body upright as she dragged me from the room.

It was ten steps to the front door, another six to the edge of the veranda. I fought her every single one of them, kicking and writhing and grabbing at doorframes and bare walls. My fingernails broke and tore but found no hold on the painted wood or fibro. At the front stoop she paused, forcing me into the gap between her and the outside world, and then flung me out into the middle of the front yard. I rolled across the frost-rimed grass and landed in a heap at the foot of a Geraldton Wax bush that grew on the lawn. My temple tapped a snapped-off steel star post next to the root of the shrub and hot blood joined the tears and snot on my face. Dawn was happening and grey misty light wrapped around my screams as neighbours came out and huddled in their yards, whispering at my shame.

Birds twitted somewhere in the gloom. Morning has broken, I thought, more than a little hysterical, my dead father's favourite song. I escaped for a second into an old fantasy where she died and he lived. Not for the first time, or the last, I distracted myself from her actions by regretting him dying too early to protect me from her, too early to be the knight in shining armour who'd step in and stop the beatings. Comparing my idealised birth father to the ineffectualness of my insipid stepfather, I saw him again face up in a pool of his own vomit on the kitchen floor – cursed the dodgy liver that gave out after one hundred too many liquor baths. Wished for the millionth time that she'd taken the rock star route out of things and that he was there to protect me, to tell me it would all be okay.

'You want to be a slut,' she came down the steps screaming. 'You want the whole world to see you, touch you? Well I'll send you back out into the world naked, just like you came into it. You can die out there with a needle hanging out of your arm, it's all you deserve.'

The elderly couple across the road tutted on their front porch while the four children next door gradually trickled out to join their mother and father in the front yard, rubbing sleep from their eyes to better see this show. The audience fed her frenzy as I crawled onto my hands and knees and then pulled myself to my feet using the flimsy sharp fronds of the rough bush. Hunched golem-like, I tried to hide my nudity, clutching futile hands over my nipples and vagina, turning this way and that to hide from the neighbours' eyes. No one called out; no one stepped in. They huddled in small groups wrapping their arms around each other and watched as my mother pushed me out through the front gate and towards the road. My bare feet scraped on the gravel as I stumbled across the grass verge and onto the unguttered road.

'Go,' she roared at me, 'just go.' She pushed me into the middle of the road and chased after me as I ran sobbing along the tarmac.

As I wavered along the empty road with her bulk screaming behind me, it all finally became too much for my stepfather.

'Paula,' he called from the front stoop, 'stop now. Let her come inside and get dressed.'

When she failed to hear, failed to heed, he followed us into the road, stopping her and wrapping his arms around her. She collapsed onto his chest, sobbing melodramatically. Under the sharp eyes of the neighbours I scuttled around my mother and stepfather, giving her heaving form as much space as I could, trying to sneak around the low wire fence and into the yard without coming close to anyone. Hitting the front

steps, my feet took a life of their own and I ran through the house, bare feet slapping bare wood. In my lavender room I slammed the door and pulled clothes over my nakedness. I climbed into the large dark bed and pulled the covers up over my head, sobs cutting out of me. The pain in the bowl of my pelvis was gone, the blood seeping from me forgotten.

Later in the day I would sneak into the bathroom and take pads back to my room. Struggle to wash bloodstains out of my pants without drawing her ire. I would press a pair of scissors into my wrist wishing I had the guts to break through but only leaving shallow scratch marks, tiny scars I'll rub at for the rest of my life when I'm scared, confused, uncertain. In twenty-one years I will tattoo a proofreading mark meaning 'delete and close up' over the tiny scars. But then, in that moment, warming and chilling in my second-hand bed all I could do is wrap my shame around myself and hope to die.

I became a woman, weeping in that dark old bed, distrusting the blood seeping from me, denying any pride I might have felt in being 'adult'. I didn't know how I would ever walk out of that house again, meet the eyes of the neighbours. I wondered how those women – next door, across the road – could see these things happen again and again and never do anything.

I was a woman. I hated everything I was. I hated the weakness in me which made me incapable of standing up to this womb-bearer who spat me from her loins. I hated the similarity to her that leaked from between my legs. I wished she'd killed me, vowed to myself that I would never let a woman hurt me again.

It was a vow I didn't know how to keep.

But as I get older and wiser I'm getting better at shielding myself, weighing the risk of my words and actions. I'm learning to think.

*Tuesday, 2 March 2010
Berrima Correctional Centre
Berrima, NSW.*

As the drugs run out Delma starts to get angry. It's Tuesday now and 'food poisoning' isn't cutting it with the screws. She spent all Monday lying in her cell and now she has been told that she needs to be up today or risk being sent back to Mulawa to see a doctor. From our cell at the end of the row I can hear her from across the courtyard, raging at one of her cronies who was supposed to get a script from the nurses but failed.

Delma's on a call on the inmate phone, which hangs on the wall behind the green muster line. She yells and rants down the phone and swears when her ten minutes expires, slamming the black plastic handset into its cradle. I'm in the knitting circle near my cell door, with my back to the wall. As she storms past us she screams at one of the older ladies in our group. 'What are you fucking looking at?'

My stomach fills with ice. I breathe hard breaths and I keep my eyes down on the tangle of yarn in my lap. My fingers pluck at the threads and there is a sharp clink as one of my knitting needles slips to the ground.

Later, in the knitting circle, we talk in hushed tones about the current threat level, running our own risk assessment. Hillary, the American whose entire vacation in Australia will be spent behind bars or on transport buses after she smuggled drugs into the country in a wig, is all for them taking the hard line with Delma.

'It's a joke,' she declares. 'Surely they can see how much of a threat she is. I can't believe she's even allowed to be out here with us, should be locked up with that husband killer at Mulawa.'

'No, come one,' says Janis, who's doing time for not paying taxes on her family farm, 'she's only in for drug charges. Shouldn't even be locked up. She's sick, not evil.' Janis's farm was confiscated, nearly a million dollars' worth of property to pay off a \$200,000 debt, but she's only as bitter as she needs to be. I imagine that on the outside she probably drives a Vee Dub with a 'Magic Happens' sticker in the back window. 'If they treated her addiction, gave her space to get better, then I think the rage would disappear.'

'It's cos she's Koori,' says Mel, an angry white woman from Nowra who spends her days begging for sweets and cigarettes around the compound. She's not knitting, just here eyeing off Janis and Hillary's stash of jam packets on the cell windowsill. 'They get all the special treatment, always wanting a handout, something for free. It's the way the system works.'

Everyone goes quiet, Janis grumbling, but under her breath, not wanting to start an argument. Needles click as fingers pulling wool make space for thinking.

'Maybe it's a combination of things,' I say, putting down the zebra leg I'm knitting and picking up my pouch of tobacco. 'Maybe there's so many layers that we couldn't hope to point at one thing and say "this is the problem". Yeah, we all live in the same system, but for some of us navigating that system is harder than for others. Some of us were lucky enough to have at least some coping mechanisms modelled for us,

some of us had to learn the theory and then work out how to put it into practice. The system might be to blame, but pointing the finger at others and saying “they have it easier than me because of the system” is taking the easy way out. We’re all women here, so we know one level of systemic inequality: we know we have to fight harder to get heard, get paid, be seen. We’re also prisoners, so we know we have less rights than “real people”, that we’ll always have to be better, more truthful, more honest to be trusted. Some of us are drug users, so we get an extra layer of stigma and discrimination, people look at our medical history, our track marks, and assume we’re looking for the next big hit and so don’t listen when we talk.’

I light up a smoke while I’m ranting and Janis moves over a bit and taps the doorstep next to her. We’re not allowed to smoke in chairs outside the cell doors, only inside the cells. I wave smoke away from Hillary, the non-smoker, as I move over to sit next to Janis, start talking again before Mel can ask for a smoke.

‘Delma has more problems in the system than any of us white women can imagine. She’s sitting on the intersection of sexism, racism, stigma and discrimination. She’s so buried under labels and assumptions that it doesn’t matter how loud her voice screams, those at the top of the pile will never see anything but her skin colour, her green shirt, her track marks and her vocabulary. If she could speak and be heard, past all of that shit, then maybe she’d be able to tell us why she’s so angry but I think she’s probably sick of trying to speak. She screams out her rage, tries to bury it under the drugs and bravado because it’s easier than feeling silenced. I don’t think any of us have the right to judge her when we know that if we walk up to the governor, speak quietly and politely, stand in the right light for him to see our skin colour, then we are already a hundred steps up the privilege ladder and much more likely to be heard than she possibly could be.’

I stop to breathe, to think. Janis is staring at me and running the tip of her tongue across her bottom lip. While my mouth follows this politically correct line I can’t stop my head running off on its own tangents. You changed, my brain yells defiantly, you found a way to get clean, to make a better world for yourself. And if you can do it, then she can do it, right? I feel bile rising in my throat, need to cut my stupid brain off. Yeah, I snap back, listen to yourself, will you? Check your own privilege, have some compassion. I got myself together and look where it got me, huh, huh? When the two sides of my brain shake hands and make up, I can take a step back and see that where I found ladders to climb, Delma saw nothing but snakes.

‘Yep,’ says Mel loudly, ‘it’s cos she’s black. Hey, Janis, Hillary, reckon I could get a couple of jams off you guys?’

I sigh and watch her stuffing jam packets in her pockets as she walks away.

Delma’s breakdown will take two more days.

*Wednesday, 3 March 2010
Berrima Correctional Centre
Berrima, NSW.*

Between meeting Delma in Mulawa in ‘96 and seeing her again, here at Berrima, I’ve done a lot, learned a lot. I’ve completed an apprenticeship at Salon Kittys and written critically about power and control, I’ve thought about women, feminism and the role we play when colluding with and conceding to power.

My spot on the muster line is directly opposite Delma’s cell and as she is pulled off the line on Wednesday morning, ranting and screaming at the screws, I come to an abrupt realisation – I owe this woman a debt, a debt I may never be able to pay. Standing shoulder-to-shoulder with the women in my knitting circle, women who are feeling like friends, I realise that Delma was the person who helped me discover that I was afraid of women and begin to understand how to form connections with them. The fear I’ve been living with since she beat my head into the floor in Willet has been a mere shadow of the fear that I felt when my mother dragged me out onto the front porch of our house in Woy Woy, and having this smaller, less confrontational fear to think about has given me the space to think about the bigger fear that has haunted me since childhood. This screaming sobbing woman, getting dragged and thrown into her cell, is a big part of the reason why I can sit, talk, connect with these women. Confronting the reflection of my mother in her was a safe(r) way to understand and absorb the fear I felt about my mother. Watching Delma give into her rage, lose herself in it, I understand my mother’s infantile rages, her need to beat me down, break me under her power. My mother, I realise, standing on that muster line, took her rage out on me because she was unable to imagine it any other way, could not give herself the space to be angry at anyone but this small girl who taunted her with the promise of all the things she had failed to become. I owe Delma a debt for giving me the space to find empathy for both my mother and myself and for giving me a window into being able to understand women, understand myself as a woman.

Thursday, 4 March 2010

*Berrima Correctional Centre
Berrima, NSW.*

At the evening muster on Thursday, Delma completely loses it. She's been locked in her cell since Wednesday morning. I'm standing on the line and can see her face pressed against the Perspex window as she screams rage out at the screw running the count. She rants against him and then starts trashing her cell. A precious china coffee cup is the first thing she flings out the window and it smashing on the ground finally gets the screw to turn towards her.

'Keep it in your cell, Delma,' he yells at her. 'You're already on the truck to Mulawa in the morning; don't make it any worse for yourself.'

A chair hits the window next, its plastic back bouncing again and again as she hammers out her rage. The screw's shoulders are firm and his chin set as he turns back to us and the count. There's a slight twitch at the corner of his mouth and it reminds me of a look I've felt on my own face while dealing with slaves in the dungeons of Salon Kittys. He's got the look of a person unavoidably in power who's confused – but not surprised – by the reaction he's seeing. Like he doesn't understand why Delma doesn't see how much of a game this all is.

I remember standing in a dungeon with a slave grovelling near my feet. His shoulders were hunched down and his face took on a look, half worship, half terror, that I remember seeing many times on my stepfather's face. As I wondered at the resemblance, the senior Mistress who was supervising the session leaned close and said (loud enough for both of us to hear): 'See that look Mistress, that look tells us that he's absolutely under our power. We've got full control of this dirty little slut now.' The light bulb that went off in my head burned and sparked in that dungeon. The look my stepfather gave my mother was exactly this. He was a submissive person, I realised in that moment, and my mother was dominant, a sadist. I didn't have the time to process this, focussed as I was on keeping slavey-poo tangled up in his fantasy. But later, in the girls' room, as I unlaced my corset and took off my high-heeled boots I shared my revelation with the other mistresses, debriefed the sudden understanding that my mother was a sadist, that her anger could have been safe if she'd known how to direct it.

'Maybe if my parents had lived at a different time,' I tell them, 'a different place, then they might have found a way to do this safely, sanely, consensually.'

Instead, my mother raged at my stepfather and me, took her sadism out on the weakest people she could reach because she was too afraid to look inside and see how much she enjoyed hurting. My mother and her rage made sense in this context and the mistresses at Salon Kittys took this reading as a given.

The look on the screw's face is my mistress face. He gets how much of a joke this is, can see the uselessness of Delma's rage and is trying not to crack a smile. Later, I imagine, when he is back in the office and takes his heavy belt and hat off, he'll debrief this moment – just like I did with the mistresses – and try to work out how Delma didn't see the way she'd been backed into throwing the cup.

When Delma is finally unlocked and walked to reception for the bus back to Mulawa I watch from my knitting circle with empathy, compassion and regret. She'll never know what she gave me – how my understanding of her anger finally cemented that understanding of my mother's anger, and my fear of that anger, that first began to gel when I learned to recognise the face of person helplessly railing against an unchallengeable power. I may have been living with fear of her for thirteen years, but I've now learned to shake off that fear and let myself feel for her, for my mother and for that terrified version of me looking at the blood on my fingertips. I'm grateful, right now for the privileges I do have, the ladders that have let me climb out of what I was given, shown me a way to move ahead in the game.

All of a sudden it feels like this whole experience is less me losing the game, and more a chance for me to read the rule book more closely, to think deeply about the strategies I employ, the places I inhabit.

Poor Delma.

Chapter 5

Prison should provide for the personal safety of staff and prisoners by ensuring a prison environment that protects the physical, psychological and emotional well-being [sic] of individuals ...

- Standard Guidelines for Corrections in Australia, Revised 2004

*Friday, 5 March 2010
Berrima Correctional Centre
Berrima, NSW.*

To get out of prison and into home detention, I have to appear before the Parole Board. The news on this front seems positive. Over my thirteen days at Berrima I've had a lot of phone conversations with the right kinds of people. As promised, my darling best friend, Chris, has wrangled contacts from his dad, the judge. I've been talking with Bill, the head of the public defence unit that handles parole matters. Bill's advocating on my behalf. He's got a stack of paper detailing my life changes over the last decade – references attesting to my good prospects from my shrink, lecturers, people I started the derby league with. He's got the markers' reports for my honours thesis, my outstanding academic transcript. Bill assures me there are very good prospects for home detention. It's hard for me to hand over control to someone else but I don't have any other choice. Bill seems like he can handle it. When we talk on the phone he tells me that I'll need to be moved, probably next Monday, as my hearing with the Parole Board is on the Wednesday. There will be this hearing, then a two-week recess for them to make a determination. And then I should be released.

I call Dex, tell him the good news, then go and check with the screws. They have no record of a transport. Their file says I'm staying till December 11. The wing officer makes a call or two, he goes 'oh, oops, we were wrong' for a bit and tells me to be packed Monday morning for the truck.

By this stage I'm so filled with hope that it makes me tolerant of their maladministration, accepting of foibles. I'm willing to wait patiently outside any number of offices, speak politely to every officer I need to – no matter how many pips they have on their shoulders – to get into the video link up and talk to that parole board. I'm starting to be able to see the ladders again, stop holding my breath every time the dice is rolled. The safe cells feel like ancient history.

Monday, 8 March 2010

Transport

Berrima, NSW to Silverwater, NSW.

To save on transport and security costs, Parole Board appearances are done by video link-up or 'VLU'. Since Berrima doesn't have VLU, I'll be put onto a transport bus and taken back to Mulawa.

Prison transports don't facilitate dignity, valuing security over everything else. The transport process begins with packing your belongings in black plastic garbage bags and hoping that the screws don't throw too much out between discharge and reception. This might sound paranoid but each prison has its own regulations about how much property an inmate can possess and so it's likely that moving from a long-term prison like Berrima to a short-term one like Mulawa will result in some 'executive decisions' being made. I met a girl in Induction a few weeks ago who had two boxes of paperwork (including the TAFE certificates she earned over her five-year stretch and personal letters and photographs) binned by the admission staff at Mulawa. The bins get emptied quick and there's no appealing this decision.

Once you've finished packing, your property needs to be signed over to reception. If you want to wear a jumper on the truck, it needs to be on before the handcuffs. Any additional items you carry, like spectacles in my case, are your responsibility and you sign to acknowledge this. No matter what their security rating, every prisoner is cuffed before travelling between prisons.

On Monday morning, I pack my property, stash some pre-rolled smokes into the little pocket created by the lining of my prison-issue underpants, put my jumper on and report to reception. My knitting circle comes with me to smoke a last few cigarettes. We're all assuming I'll be back after the hearing. After my friends have been shooed away I share a cramped wooden bench outside reception with a shortish older lady with cropped white blond hair and a sullen cockiness. We smoke and wait for the transport bus.

'Truck's here,' the screw is too cheery as he struts towards us with two sets of cuffs dangling from his finger, 'time to get your bracelets on.'

The truck is a large white van, like a refrigerated transport, but with small oval portholes along the sides to let light in. The back is split into compartments by steel walls, built to hold groups from two to six people, each section with its own doors to the outside. Like

all corrections doors, there's two sets – internal cage doors and then solid metal doors. The truck is too big to fit through the gates at Berrima so we are walked out to climb into one of the rear compartments. I thought this might be a chance to look at the roses and check the map of the village I have drafted in my head but the hoots and whoops of the male inmates watching us from other compartments make me scurry from prison to van. The two-person compartment we climb into is about three-feet-by-three-feet, has solid steel benches along two walls, no seatbelts or handholds and only about four inches of floor around the edge of the steps. My travelling companion takes the seat under the air conditioning vent in the ceiling of the compartment but it has mostly been clogged up with shreds of toilet paper and broken off matchsticks. She pokes at them for a minute before giving up in disgust.

'It's gonna be a long ride,' she settles back in her seat and sighs.

The drive from Berrima to Mulawa should take about an hour-and-a-half, through the picturesque Southern Highlands, but as we're locked into a tiny airless box and only able to see out the window by standing in the footwell, I suspect she's right.

The compartment reeks of piss and a puddle on the bottom step tells me that maybe a trip went a bit too long for someone. Since the same trucks do runs between every prison in NSW and the main holding cells at Silverwater it is easy to imagine pissing on the floor as an option on the six-hour run from Dubbo. My companion stashed cigarettes as well. We take it in turns sitting directly under the CCTV camera, out of its line of sight, while we smoke. A few times the screws tell the whole bus to stop smoking through the intercom but they don't stop the bus. My bus buddy tells me not to worry, they're full of it, she says.

If I perch right on the edge of the seat with one foot braced on the floor and the other in the stairwell, then I can see out the window. When I'm not smoking, I stay there, face pressed against the glass, peering out at the world. There's not much to see, just rolling paddocks and then traffic after we hit Sydney, but after weeks of views limited by stone walls and wire mesh I drink it all in. The horizon seems a long way away. I stare at the cars we pass and compulsively read signs. The 'Police in Campbelltown are now targeting: SEATBELTS' one makes me laugh out loud.

'We'd be fucked in a crash,' I say, half to myself and half to blondie. 'One roll and there'd be brains splattered all over the cabin.'

She looks down from the air vent and stares at me blankly. Her body is a study in disparagement, painted in tones of stillness and silence.

‘No really,’ I’m working into a rant now, ‘there should be seatbelts in these things.’

She keeps staring at me, shifts her gaze to my hands braced tight, my knuckles bleached white. ‘They could put six people in this cabin if there were seatbelts,’ she mutters. She reaches into her underpants for another smoke, whole body telling me to shut up, stop panicking.

I try to imagine six people in this tiny space and can see that with that load we’d be pushed so tight together that we wouldn’t even shift in an accident. My mouth opens to ask if she’s been in a box like this with six people but her studied nonchalance while striking her match on the ripped off edge of the matchbox makes me reconsider. I swallow the question and its follow-on statements about the law and duty of care.

It’s not really like the cops are going to pull us over, I ruminate; wouldn’t do to have the crims see the apparatus asserting power over itself. I imagine the whoops and obscenities from the boys in the other cabins if we were pulled over and grin a little, but only on the inside. Disregarding my travelling companion’s scorn, I keep one arm and one leg braced for the rest of the trip, trying not to think too hard about the anatomical details of the accidents in *Crash*, cursing JG Ballard for his exquisite imagery and myself for my florid imagination.

When we arrive at Silverwater there’s another wait before we actually get to the women’s prison. Mulawa is inside the Silverwater complex and it would take less than five minutes to walk from the Silverwater reception cells to the Mulawa gate but our truck stops at Silverwater and we’re transferred into the holding cells. The cells run in a row along the side of the courtyard where the trucks park, six large pens, about ten-feet-by-ten-feet, without any of the comforts of a residential cell. The screws direct us along a corridor between the high steel grill cutting us off from the courtyard and five cells full of men waiting for transport, locking us into the empty cell at the end of the row. You can imagine the catcalls.

There’s a toilet in this cell but no modesty wall, not even a waist-high one like the Mulawa reception cells. The truck we got off is parked next to several others in the middle of the yard and we can see male prisoners looking out through the still-locked internal grate doors. Diagonally from us, five or six male screws lounge around on old plastic chairs and upturned milk crates. Even though I’m busting to pee, there’s no way I’m using the dirty toilet with this audience. The screws bring us tepid black coffee in polystyrene cups but it makes me want to piss even more. I’m scared to tip it down the

toilet as the trickling sound could pop my imaginary bladder cork. I sit on the concrete bench that runs around the internal walls of the cell and stare at the word 'cunt' smeared on the wall above the toilet in six-inch-high letters of what could be either runny shit or Vegemite. I critically analyse this instead of thinking about my bladder for a while. Vegemite is a core ingredient for prison booze, an evil-smelling noxious concoction I tried on my first trip to Mulawa in '96. Across my twenty-seven days inside, I've seen tiny packets of Vegemite handed out once at Berrima. Oranges, another essential ingredient, are also few and far between. The smear is probably not Vegemite.

After what my spidey sense tells me is around an hour, we are taken out of the cell, placed back on the same truck we got out of. The doors are closed on the male inmates who are still on the bus and we are driven the two hundred or so metres to the Mulawa Reception Area. Once off the truck I do a little shuffle dance to keep the pee in until I get into the cells. The screw who I talked science fiction with on my last trip through reception watches me dance for a second, reaches into my travel bag, pulls out my pouch of tobacco and then lets me into the holding cell with both a toilet and an outside area for smoking.

'You're almost unrecognisable from your ID pic,' she says as she unlocks the glass door. 'Give us five mins, have a smoke, have a pee, and then we'll take another pic before we send you up to Induction.' I suppose I have lost a bit of weight not eating the prison food.

There are five girls already in the cell but none of them are on the toilet. Even with only a low wall separating me from them and the male screws out in the reception area, I have my pants down and am sitting to pee before the door is closed. With an empty bladder, cigarettes and space to stretch my legs it feels like the trip is almost over. All I need to get through now is the strip search before I can get up to Induction and meet another new cellmate. I move the last remaining cigarette from my underpants, standing under the cameras, and the girls in the cell give me knowing smiles. I'm back into the groove, is what I read behind the smiles, I've got my con back on.

While we're waiting in reception a truck pulls in and a single girl in street clothes is led to the segro cells across the way. Her hair is mussed and face streaked with tears, head down while she tries not to look over at us. I remember the intimidating wall of green on my first day, the girl who gave me the half smile. Riding high on my three weeks back in the game of power I stand and watch until she glances over and give her a soft smile to try and cut through some of the terror I know she's feeling. She needs this contact right now and I realise that moments like this are one of the purest things about

prison, the solidarity and support that can happen in these brief instants. I might not have the power to help this girl in any other way, the freedom to even talk to her, but for just one second I can reach out, help carry her first day inside burden just a little. So much suffering, I think can be lessened by understanding, sharing. Just knowing that someone sees you, accepts what you're feeling with no judgement. I wish there was some way I could get this message to that social worker before she talks to this girl, wish I could explain to her to aim for just a little more empathy. I wait to see if she wants another smile but the girl just stares down sadly at her feet. I hope she ends up in the Penthouse.

I only wait about an hour in the Mulawa Reception cells before I'm handed my property and shunted down to the Mum Shirl Unit. I'd been expecting to go back into Induction but the prison is full-to-bursting and I have been given a single room in the Penthouse as an overflow inmate. They tell me that when beds free up in Induction I'll be moved over there. I got through the move with all my photos and letters intact but did lose a packet of biscuits, two blocks of chocolate and a bottle of cordial. The screw who hands me my garbage bag of property tells me my chocolate was thrown out because it was opened and the other items are considered contraband at Mulawa. They left me the tins of tuna. I'm not sure why. A tin of tuna in a sock seems like a more effective weapon than a packet of Tim Tams. They also left me the yarn, knitting needles, crochet hooks and the crocheted bag that I made at Berrima but warned me that these may be considered contraband wherever I end up and could be confiscated. There's no sign of the girl from reception and I assume she's gone to Induction. I hope that other people smile at her there, that she ends up in a cell with someone like Kathy.

Tuesday, 9 March 2010

*Mum Shirl Psychiatric Unit, Mulawa Correctional Centre
Silverwater, NSW.*

So it's three weeks since my surprise re-entry to the system and I'm waking up in the penthouse again. Waking up in the Mum Shirl Unit isn't too bad. The unit is built on a similar pattern to all the new buildings in the prison – two wings separated by an office for the screws. Both sides are laid out with the cells running along one wall facing onto a loungeroomish area with a television and some chairs and a kitchenette area tacked onto the end wall. Both sides have doors that open onto external courtyards. The side Kathy and I stayed in last time is for critically ill and suicide-watch inmates. On the other side of the unit, the long-term wing, there's a large gardened courtyard with an old

Moreton Bay fig tree growing in the centre. Large plate windows in the wall of the courtyard allow a view across the parklands that butt up against the perimeter of the prison and a spiralling path shaped like the Rainbow Serpent trails across the yard. There is no such luxury in the critical wing – the external area is split into two small lockable courtyards with high brick walls and bare cement floors, and the living area is smaller and dingier than on the long-term side.

I've got a quiet single bed cell on the long-term side. I fell asleep last night, watching the LCD TV and planning what I would say at the VLU. Being here makes me miss Kathy, wonder how she's going, wish I'd had a chance to say goodbye.

I was warned the night before and the clock on the morning show on TV means I know the time so I'm dressed and ready for the 8am unlock. The officer who unlocks me tells me to grab my stuff and head into the critical wing for breakfast.

'Why?' I ask, 'I was in here three weeks ago and we were allowed to stay on this side during the day.'

'There's been a policy change,' he replies, 'and now anyone who is not on a psychologist-ordered program needs to stay in the no-sharps section. Don't worry, it's only till lunchtime and then we'll be locking you back in your cell to eat.'

I'm on my way out the door with my red plastic bowl and coffee cup when he stops me.

'You've got to leave them in your cell,' he says. 'The new policy bans any sharps at all over the other side.'

I turn the round bowl and equally round cup over in my hands and look at him like he is crazy.

'Snap either of them and you've got a weapon,' he says, waiting with no patience as I place them on the bed in the cell and walk out the door. 'Leave the book too...' he adds as I'm almost out the door again, 'it's a blunt object. Now get over there and get breakfast before it's all gone.'

I walk through the door in the unit and he slams it closed. There's a fire hose next to the door that opens onto the first yard. It has not been looped up properly and the hose nozzle drips water from its end where it hangs over the top of the reel. The idea of being trapped in that cement box with this high pressure stream of water being sprayed at me pricks out tiny aching spots up the back of my arms. I rub at them powerlessly.

I'm in till lunchtime so might as well get onto eating to pass the time.

A ration trolley is pulled up next to the kitchen area, with a cluster of girls around it. Most of them stand back, watching as two argue over its contents. One girl is clutching a pile of cellophane-bagged rations against her chest and as I approach I see that she has claimed all the bags containing Rice Bubbles for her own. This leaves a few bags with Corn Flakes and the strange mix of cardboard-like chunks that corrective services call muesli. The girl with the armload of Rice Bubbles is trying to rip open the remaining bags with one hand to claim the jam packets while the other sneakily tries to snatch a bag of Rice Bubbles. Realising the danger, girl one moves to the other side of the ration trolley, pushing her legs against it and ramming it towards the pilfering girl.

‘Fucking c’mon,’ the girl with no bags whines to the other. ‘I just want some fucking Rice Bubbles.’

Rice Bubble girl grunts and pushes the trolley harder, smashing it into the begging girl and pinning her against the kitchen bench.

I glance over at the office. The screw sitting at this end lifts his head for one second, clocks the action near the kitchen, then deliberately looks down at the desk.

A woman in her late thirties is standing next to me and notices my confusion.

‘This happens every morning,’ she says. ‘In a minute they’ll start screaming and then the screws’ll come in and break it up. They’ll lock one or both of them in their cells and the rest of us can get whatever’s left for breakfast.’

‘That’s shit,’ I mutter. ‘Can we get past them to make coffee?’

‘You can give it a try,’ she replies, ‘But only if you brought coffee over with you... They’re not going to let anyone near the rations for now.’

Behind the two fighting girls there’s a stack of polystyrene cups, underneath a wall-mounted urn. I feel the pockets of my green tracksuit pants, wanting to make sure that I’m not about to accidentally offer her the good stuff I got on buy ups at Berrima. There are two big squarish coffee packets in there and a bunch of smaller rectangular sweeteners but no long tubes, so I’m fine to pull them out. Prison has taught me, more than Girl Guides ever could, to always be prepared.

‘All right,’ I say, ‘I’ve got coffee and sweetener in my pocket. If we can just get behind them to the cups and water, and if there’s milk in the fridge, we’ll get coffee and wait till it settles down.’

The plan works perfectly. Since neither of us are making any moves towards the trolley, both girls ignore us. I get the cups and pour ugly International Roast powder into them and my partner in coffee crime sneaks a small carton of milk out of the fridge.

‘Spoons?’ I mutter to her under my breath.

‘We don’t get them,’ she says. ‘No cutlery at all.’

I’d seen her coming over from the long-term side and assumed she was also here as overflow, but her proprietary tone tells me she’s been in here for a few days at least. Either she’s hiding her symptomology better than the fighting girls or the prison is very, very overcrowded.

‘What do we eat with then?’

‘If you’re not on a sharps order then you’ll be allowed to have them in your cell for lunch and dinner but for breakfast it’s either toast with whatever you can smear on it or drinking cereal out of a cup.’

‘That’s crazy,’ I say to her but with an even lower tone. I get the feeling ‘crazy’ is a word I want to be careful with in this room.

The water coming out of the urn isn’t hot enough to steam and I figure the thermostat has been set to ‘incapable of burning anyone’s face off’. My new friend seems uncomfortable with taking the coffee and sweetener but I assure her that I’m fine, I’ve got heaps in my cell. We carry the coffees outside to the courtyard furthest from the screws’ office and the fire hose and sit down on the step. I roll a slim cigarette and pull my matches out of my pocket.

‘Don’t,’ she says, jumping up with her own cigarette and heading for the door. ‘You’ll be up on charges if the screws catch you with matches.’

I slip them back in my pocket and turn around to watch as she carries her smoke inside to the steel grate over the office window, leans across the bench and gets a light from the guy at the desk, the same screw who unlocked me.

He lets her get two steps away from the counter before leaning against the wire mesh covering the window and yelling at her ‘Now get it outside! You know there’s no smoking in here!’

She carefully holds the smoke out for me to get a donkey root light off; it takes a little longer for the lit end of hers to catch the not-yet-lit end of mine but saves me a walk to the screw and the consequent scolding.

It takes another ten or so minutes for the ration issue to escalate but when it does, it really does. The girl with the Rice Bubbles has started to stuff the ration packs into her underpants when the other girl finally snaps and tries to pick up the steel trolley and hit her with it. Rice Bubble girl drops to the ground and starts screaming a single high-pitched note while the other girl flings the trolley aside and pulls at the screaming girl’s hands, still trying for a bag of cereal.

The other inmates know what is coming next and flood out into the courtyard with us. The last one barely clears the door before the screws are in the wing, several of them pulling the other girl off Rice Bubble hoarder and one heading for the courtyard door.

‘All righty,’ the short female officer yells cheerfully at us. ‘You know the drill. Locking you out here, till we get this sorted and then you can come in and have breakfast.’ She slams the reinforced glass door, screws the key in the lock, gives us all a perky grin and wave and turns back to the tangle of blue and green people.

Two male screws pin down the legs of the hoarder while another kneels above her, forcing her wrists onto the ground. She is still screaming, face pressed into the grey lino and eyes scrunched shut. If the door was open we might be able to hear the day’s supply of Rice Bubbles popping to dust under her pelvis. Two other screws have thrown the other girl face-first against the door of a cell. She might have been in the right initially, but her aggression has painted a target on her back. One of her arms is pinned between her body and the open swing-down flap that the screws use to pass food into the cells during lockdowns.

‘You’re breaking my fucking arm,’ the girl who’s up against the door screams at the screws. ‘Get off me, fuckers, you’re breaking my fucking arm!’

The screws drag her off the door, unlock the cell and push her in, slamming the door and then the food hatch closed.

Rice Bubble girl’s a writhing mass of anger on the floor as the screws drag her to her cell, stopping to pry loose fingers that grasp at furniture and legs. It takes a few minutes for the screws to get her secured before they open the door to the courtyard. I stay on the step and roll another cigarette as the female officer comes out with a packet of Winnie Blues and a lighter.

‘Can I grab a light?’ I ask, figuring this is easier than breaking the rules.

‘Yeah, sure,’ she holds out a lighter and drops it into my hand. She’s short and stocky and with dark cropped hair. Looks like she’d know what to do with a football. She watches me without watching me while I light my cigarette and then pass the contraband lighter back to her.

‘Got pretty crazy in here since my last visit,’ I take a long drag on my smoke and drink the last half inch of my cooling coffee.

‘And when was that?’

‘About three weeks back. I was in here for a night before they moved me up to Induction.’

‘Yeah,’ she says, smiling more with her eyes than her mouth, ‘Seems every new bunch of inmates brings a new set of rules.’

Inside, the other girl is still screaming about her maybe-perhaps-broken arm and a screw walking past her cell door smashes on it with his palm, yelling at her to be quiet.

‘Do you think her arm is really broken?’ I ask. ‘She hit that door pretty hard.’

‘Hmmm, might be,’ she says, ‘But chances are it’s not. We’ll let her yell it out in there till she calms down and then get a nurse down to look at it.’

‘Hmmm,’ I say.

It’s almost lunchtime when a nurse comes down. For her protection the screws refuse to let the injured girl out of her cell so the examination is done through the food slot. The girl slips her arm out through the slot that is about five inches high and is left with enough room for her to nestle her face up against the gap as she leans her forearm on the ledge. The nurse asks her to wiggle her fingers, pokes at her wrist and a lumpy swelling above the joint. She asks the girl to rate her pain on a scale of one to ten and the girl screams ‘ten’ through the slot in the door. This is the end of the examination. The nurse says nothing to the patient, gesturing at the screws that she is done. They push the hand back in through the slot and lock it closed on the girl’s yells.

‘I don’t think it’s broken,’ the nurse is talking to the screws but I can clearly hear her across the twenty or so feet that separate us. ‘She’s too distressed to bring to the clinic right now but I’ll put some Panadol on the meds trolley for her tonight. Keep her in the cell if there’s any risk.’

The girl in the cell has heard this too and at the threat of being locked in all day she screams again. The screws and the nurse move into the office where it is quieter and stand around not-quite laughing in a slightly relieved fashion. They have the air of resigned tolerance, another hard job done well.

As hard as I think, I can’t imagine a way the screws could have handled this differently. I can’t put myself in their shoes and find a better outcome. I’m glad that I don’t have to do their job.

I wonder if there’s special training to work in the psych units of prisons, like to imagine that these screws are specially trained for dealing with these moments. Thinking over the details though, the placement of the controlling hands and careful steering of the threatening bodies, I sadly realise that if there is some extra training here

it would be on par with that short introduction course given to the orderlies who work in real world psychiatric wards. I've been in these wards, felt the blunt end of the public mental health system, I know there's very few options to get through this stay in the MSU intact.

By lunchtime lock-in I've made up my mind. The longer I spend in this small room with no book, no pen to write with, nothing to do but interact with these people, the higher my risk of being the focus of an inmate's rage or the target of a screw's fire hose. No way in hell they are getting me back into here after lunch.

*Summer, 1989
Emergency Department, Gosford Hospital
Gosford, NSW*

I was thirteen years old when I avoided my first psych admission. The acoustic ceiling tiles above my emergency bed were marked with rows of black holes and for almost a full day I'd been following their patterns, finding letters, words and stories in them. The doctor told me I could go home when I stopped reading them out loud. There were no words on the ceiling; I knew this on some level. But I'd taken everything in my mother's medicine cabinet. The contents of my mother's medicine cupboard were varied and plentiful and so it wasn't surprising that the psychoactivity continued even after they pumped my stomach and made me drink cup after cup of gritty grey charcoal. They were playing it safe, just not so safe as calling in Department of Community Services. Another time I slipped through the cracks, missed the first rung on the ladder.

This was my first suicide attempt. I'd just turned thirteen and was having a taste of mental health services. Well, kind of a taste. Apparently a thirteen-year-old girl overdosing wasn't considered a mental health risk in the eighties. Though it's more likely that my mother's stories of my deceptiveness, melodrama and need for attention made more sense to the doctors than my own jumbled tales of abuse and self-loathing. She sat next to me, clutching tightly at my hand with her taloned fingers whenever medical people approached. During my discussion with the psychiatric registrar, her grip became so tight that I kept looking down at her nails to see if blood was seeping out from under them. The doctor didn't seem to notice.

As my mother walked me out the front doors of the hospital I felt her hand brushing the back of my head and then settling on my back. I was in so much trouble.

Within a decade I was familiar with the process. I was a dual diagnosis inpatient at the psychiatric unit at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, presenting with both signs of active drug use and mental illness. I was just starting to recognise how differently the health system treats you when you've got track marks. By the time I go back to prison for my second visit, I will have worked out the two-tier functioning with health practitioners – how the old needle marks on my arms mean that any illness or injury is, by default, self-inflicted, how any story you tell is a lie to get drugs. In 1998 though, while I'd noticed that doctors and nurses treated me differently to other patients, I still thought this was the taint of my abusive childhood, or possibly my paranoia. I still thought that if I was cheerful, compliant and faked 'normality' then I'd get the same medical care as everyone else.

Winter 1998

*Missenden Psychiatric Unit: Royal Prince Alfred Hospital
Camperdown, NSW*

There was an emergency helicopter pad in the grassy grounds of St John's College, across the car park from the Missenden Unit courtyard. It was an open space, with a fringe of trees, and a good place to go for a smoke if you'd been cleared for out-of-unit exercise. As long as the nurses knew where you were, and could see you from the veranda of the Unit, you were cool to hang there for a while.

I'd been cleared to go out for about a week and had found that the peace of the empty field worked much better for me than the chaos of the Unit's living areas. Unlike a lot of the patients, I had no problem with my own company. It was mid-afternoon when I took my cigarettes and a book and headed off across the road to the shade of the trees.

I wandered around, scuffing my feet in the fallen leaves and trying to choose a tree to settle under. There was a fresh early winter wind and for a second I caught the smell of the ocean in it. Chasing the scent took me further along the line of trees and it wasn't long before bits of paper started to appear in the piles of leaves. I was too distracted by the hint of beach to look closely at the first few but could tell from the familiar colouring and layout that they were patient notes. After a few more steps I picked one up and started to read it.

The notes I was reading described an eating disorder inpatient in the Unit, a girl I'd been talking to earlier that morning. From the stories she'd been telling me, and the date on the page, I was pretty sure I was looking at notes from her last admission, about a year back. Knowing her, being able to put a face to the name printed on the sticker at

the top of the page, made it impossible to stop reading. The handwriting was terrible and some of the words unintelligible but I could catch that before her parents brought her in she hadn't been eating solids for a while, her mother had asked for her to be admitted and they were following through with that. I stuffed the paper into my pocket and wandered on to the next one.

A lot of bad handwriting and confidential facts later and I came to a garbage bin, one of the large plastic two-wheeled kinds that we called Otto bins where I came from, tipped over on its side. The papers were fluttering out of its open lid in a steady stream and from next to the bin I could see a giant circle of them. They fluttered along with the ocean smell, escaping into the grounds of Sydney Uni, up into the courtyards of St John's, and across over the park towards Parramatta Road. I sat on the bin in my fog of anti-depressants and tranquilisers and lit a cigarette. There was a lot of personal information swirling along in front of the gusts of wind and the most pertinent fact took a while to seep through – one, or more than one, of those bits of paper could have my name written across the top.

It was late afternoon by the time the nurses came to find me. I had collected as many pieces of paper as I could, stuffing them back into the bin that I wheeled along behind me. The tranquilisers weren't tranquilising anymore. I had tears running down my face and the first thing I did when I spotted the nurses coming towards me was to scream abuse at them. I hadn't found my name on a single piece of paper but there were still lots of sheets lying on the ground.

'Don't worry about it, we'll collect them all,' the nurse who had me by one shoulder and one wrist said to me as she led me across the car park. She didn't say it but I knew that she thought I took the bin out there and emptied it.

I was restricted to the Unit as punishment for yelling at the nurses, no more walks in the park for me. From the balcony where I smoked I could see the occasional scrap of paper fluttering around the edges of the field and resisted the urge to climb the fence to collect them.

The night shift nurses knew nothing about the bin full of papers and the next day the nurses who'd collected me from the field acted like it never existed. I was just another borderline personality case with track marks, delusions of self-importance, paranoid fantasies and a lock-in order. People stood too close to me. There was nowhere I could be alone in that place.

2001

*St George Hospital Psychiatric Unit: St George Hospital
Kogarah, NSW*

On my last admission three years later the ligature marks on my neck from my suicide attempt were still fresh when they transferred me from Emergency to the psych ward. There were weeping grazes under my chin from where the weight of my body swinging had scraped the rough rope against my skin. The doctors told me that my neck would be sore for a few days. The pain from this was nothing compared to the tenderness on the inside of my throat, the one cigarette I'd managed since making it to the ward burned so badly that I ground it out after three drags. My voice croaked when I said hello to the psychiatric registrar who came to assess me.

The bed in the single room was next to a double plate glass window. I sat leaning on the wall with knees drawn up to my chest and my arms wrapped tight across my legs. The window was directly behind me and as I spoke to the doctor – running through my history of abuse, addiction and self-harm – I rhythmically banged the back of my skull against the glass. It was not enough to injure myself, but the shrink told me later (much, much later) it was a sign to him of trauma and distress. I smashed my head into the window. He asked me carefully framed questions and raised a pale blond eyebrow when he wrote stuff down.

The shrink was typical to form, tall and skinny, pale from lack of sun, with tiny rimless spectacles. His unique non-judgmental approach contrasted with many of the psychiatrists I'd met. He talked with me, not to me. The man who would one day become my Shrinkola – my longest relationship – had a disconcerting habit of raising his right eyebrow whenever he wrote something down but somehow also managed to never look over his glasses while talking to me. Something about him convinced me I could trust him, something about the way he held his head when he listened and watched my eyes while I talked. In the storm of rage and self-loathing that tore at my brain, his calm rationality and confident curiosity soothed me. I now know he was practicing unconditional positive regard, and that for me, this worked. It chipped away at the layers of shame and self-judgement I'd spent years building up, gave me space to see some of the positives about myself and find ways to build on these layers instead.

We talked a lot then. And more over the next few days. I spewed out my history to him, told him I didn't trust my mother – that she was dangerous and I needed to stay away from her. He agreed with this proposition and never implied I was exaggerating. I told him I couldn't sleep and suffered insomnia since I was a child and he asked me what

I'd taken, both legal and illegal, to help me sleep. He adjusted my meds order so I wasn't on anything habit-forming. When I told him that sometimes I felt like I could hear the thoughts of people around me he said, 'You're obviously very empathic; it must be hard work.'

The biggest difference between Shrinkola and almost everyone I've seen before or since is that he never acted like my drug use devalued me as a person, never treated me like my mental illness was self-inflicted. The only other time I've encountered health care with this positive regard, this non-judgemental framing of the individual's choices, was at the Kirketon Road Centre, a free and anonymous clinic in King's Cross which works with anyone and bases every action and interaction on a genuine harm minimisation framework. For a country with bipartisan support for harm reduction, the rest of our medical system has a hell of a lot of catching up to do.

Leaving St George to go back into the real world was hard. The registrar gave me a list of local psychiatrists to call but I couldn't get past a phone conversation with any of them. I felt judged and inadequate. A week later Shrinkola called to see how I was going. His voice was gentle on the phone and I was honest, I wasn't going well. He offered to see me as a bulk-billed patient if I could get from my house in Kogarah to his office in Burwood. I didn't drive and got panic attacks on public transport. It was a reasonable 'if'. So I scheduled an extra hour for my travel to cover the time I'd spend sitting in public toilets, sobbing silently.

Shrinkola gave me faith that parts of the system do work and has been one of the strongest ladders in my game. I've been seeing him regularly since 2001, taking public transport to his offices in Burwood and St Leonards, even after moving to Wollongong, to talk it all out. He sits across from me in small, safe rooms, with shelves filled with books whose spines I scan during the hard bits. Sometimes he crosses his legs and leans back in the chair, sometimes he sits forward with elbows on knees to really hear what I'm saying. I know something big is happening when he tears the top sheet off his notepad to better align it to his scrawls. He wears suits and ties, the occasional tweed jacket with leather patches at the elbows. He is the president of my fan club and tells me I'm the strongest and most courageous person he's ever met. When people challenge my inability to form long-term relationships, I laugh and think about Shrinkola and his unconditional positive regard. I tell them of course I can have long-term relationships;

look at Shrinkola. He has never doubted my intellectual veracity, never questioned my ability to think myself out of the tightest spaces.

I imagine him leaning back in his chair and chuckling with delight as I formulate the next step in my plan, the way I'm going to get myself out of this tangle.

Tuesday, 9 March 2010

*Mum Shirl Psychiatric Unit: Mulawa Correctional Centre
Silverwater, NSW*

Lunch in prison is never good but it's the main meal of the day and after thirty days of the food I'm getting good at knowing which bits won't make me gag. The boiled chicken joint, with grey wrinkled skin and a skirt of congealed fat and jiggling juices, goes in the gag pile. Chewing the lettuce and cabbage coleslaw gives me time to mull things over. I've workshopped resistance at Uni, know my rights and power in this situation, know that crying or screaming will mean nothing to these screws. I hit on a plan to avoid the no-sharps side by the time they unlock me. I still have a half-finished Aztec-themed romance novel that I snuck out of Berrima and as I was walking back through the long-term wing before lunch I noticed a stack of books in an open cupboard near the TV. While the girl locked in her cell earlier might be traumatised by the idea of solitary confinement, I see it as super preferable to another stint in no-sharps/no-matches/critical care land. While I might have track marks – be sitting here wearing green and talking to those wearing blue – I know my power and my place in this game. I've worked out the rules and know that they can only hold as much power over my mind as I let them hold.

Passive resistance, I remind myself, passive, as I jiggle the dice in my mind.

When the same screw who unlocked me in the morning comes to unlock me after lunch I stand waiting inside the door of the cell holding my red plastic cup, a spare polystyrene cup, a sachet of the classy Nescafe Instant Latte that I got on buy up at Berrima, and a spoon.

'Okay,' he orders, 'off to the other side.'

'No thanks,' I counter genially, 'I'm not going back over there. I'll stay in my cell. If you just give me five minutes to make coffee and grab some books from the cupboard, you can lock me back in till dinner.'

He looks over his shoulder at the other screws who've finished unlock and are heading back to the office then back at me. His chest puffs up and his over-muscled shoulders hang a little further out from his chest.

‘You can’t do that...’ he says and I can almost see the end of the sentence floating out of his still open mouth... *because you haven’t done anything wrong.*

‘Yes, I can,’ I reply. ‘There is nothing you can say or do that will get me back over there.’

‘Hang on,’ he says, slamming the door in my face.

‘She wants to stay in her cell,’ he yells from right outside the door to the officers in the office. ‘She can’t do that, can she?’

Turns out I can. The screw, who I’m calling Butchy McButch in my head, lets me out for long enough to make my luxury powdered latte coffee, fill another cup with hot water for a prison-issue coffee to follow it, and grab the best-looking options from the stack of books. I pass the afternoon lying on my bed, lighting cigarettes with matches, finishing the Aztec romance and getting into my first ever Danielle Steel novel. It isn’t as bad as I thought it would be. I come out for afternoon muster and to collect my dinner. The friendly female officer from yesterday insists I go outside and smoke a cigarette in the fresh air and then half-an-hour later I get locked back in for the night.

Wednesday, 10 March 2010

*Mum Shirl Psychiatric Unit: Mulawa Correctional Centre
Silverwater, NSW*

In the morning Butchy McButch unlocks me again. He rolls right into his routine, like yesterday afternoon never happened.

‘Get your stuff and I’ll take you over the other side.’

‘No, thanks, I’ll just make coffee and maybe some toast and then you can lock me back in.’

‘You’ve got five minutes, make it fast.’

Not even a glance over his shoulder this time.

When lunch is delivered Butchy unlocks me again. He looks around the cell suspiciously, stares at my book lying open on the bed, my pouch of tobacco, box of matches and open exercise book lying on the neatly made bed. My red coffee cup and spare polystyrene one are lined up next to the door filled with coffee making supplies. I don’t even have my shoes on.

‘Okay, muster, then make your coffee and get your lunch,’ he grunts.

During muster he stands behind the wing officer, looking stern but not at me.

Butchy tries again after lunch but I just walk out past him and take a left hand turn towards the kitchenette rather than a right hand towards the no-sharps side.

‘I’ll be less than five minutes.’

He’s still standing next to the door looking into my cell when I finish making my coffee and return. I give him a cheery ‘Thanks Chief’ as I walk back into the cell and pull the door closed behind me. His keys sound uncertain and confused as he locks the door, like he doesn’t know how to turn a key in a door that a prisoner has closed themselves.

It’s still an hour before afternoon muster and dinner when the female officer with the lighter comes and unlocks the door. I stay on the bed, back against the wall and open book in my lap.

‘C’mon,’ she says, with a friendly grin that makes it to her mouth this time. ‘It’s time for you to come out now.’

‘I’m not going over the other side.’

‘I know you’re not. We’ve changed the rules, you can stay over here.’

I put the book down and walk to the door. Behind her I can see inmates out on the large shady veranda and two girls kicking a football with a screw under the sweeping branches of the tree.

‘Okay,’ I’m wary. ‘But if ...’ I almost say Butchy McButch but catch myself, ‘... if anyone tries to make me go back over there I’m just staying in here.’

As I walk out of the cell with my book, red plastic coffee cup and cigarettes, I see my coffee friend from yesterday morning standing just inside the doors to the no-sharps side. She stares as I walk out of the cell and I give her a small smile. She turns her back on me and disappears into a part of the wing that I can’t see from here. I wonder how she would react to twenty-four hours solitary. I can’t wait to get out of prison and tell Shrinkola how I handled this one.

Turns out the injured girl doesn’t have a broken arm. She was allowed out at lunchtime today and somehow got her hands on batteries. Which she ate. Later, after she gets back from the hospital she explains that the nurses at the hospital are nicer to her than those in the prison clinic and eating batteries is a guaranteed trip to casualty. While I’d been lying in my cell alone for twenty-six or so hours, reading, drinking coffee and smoking, she’d lain in her cell plotting how to get people to be nice to her, even if it involved surgery.

In conversations over the next four days I find out that we'd been in neighbouring cells back in 1996. She's been in prison since she was fifteen for stabbing a social worker and at Mulawa since she was sixteen when the state appealed that she was too much of a risk to stay in Juvie. She has another three years to go and then will be out of prison. The new wound that runs down her belly is wide and bright, bulging against the stitches and staples. She shows it to everyone. The other scars are whiter. This is her resistance, not passive but only dangerous to herself. I rub the small scars from the scissors on the inside of my wrist and thank the universe for Shrinkola.

Chapter 6

Any inmate held at a court/police cell complex, managed by departmental officers, who is identified or believed to be detoxing from drugs or alcohol, is to have all items that could potentially be used to self-harm removed (eg. Their shoe laces, belt, tie, drawstrings). CHS (Corrections Health Services) is to be notified immediately and consulted in relation to the inmate's care in placement.

- 'Reception of inmates', *NSW Corrective Services Operational Procedure Manual*, Revised 2008

Wednesday, 10 March 2010

*Mum Shirl Unit: Mulawa Correctional Centre
Silverwater, NSW*

I'm feeling something like indestructible coming out of my exercise in passive resistance against Butchy McButch but there's nothing a walk through a prison can't cure.

The Video Link Up is haunting me. It will be my first appearance in front of any sentencing body since being sent to prison in 1996 and is one step closer to this mythical home detention. My body is showing the nerves. I'm talking a lot, picking the dry skin around my lips, smoking way too many cigarettes. The nails on my index fingers are yellowing and it doesn't matter how much prison-issue toothpaste I rub into the nicotine stains, they don't fade. I don't feel like I know what I need to know to get through it. As a researcher, I'm used to Googling everything, arming myself with all the available facts before diving into anything. There's a very limited amount of research that can be done from inside a prison, with only ten-minute phone calls to connect you to the real world. I've spoken to Diana, the solicitor who'll be representing me. Bill has personally selected her and assures me over the phone that she'll be all over it. She's given me the facts that she has, walked me through the process, answered as many of my questions as she can.

So far what I know about the VLU is that it's done in a specially set up room, that the link up is supposed to be 'secure', 'unhackable'. I'll be in front of a camera and able to see the people I'm talking to, the Parole Board and my solicitor. I should also be able to see the audience in the chambers at Parramatta. My son won't be coming to the hearing but we had a big visit the weekend before I left Berrima. I know he's safe at home; sounds like he's doing well. And he's coming to Mulawa this weekend so if there's good news we'll be able to celebrate.

I'm the only person going from the Mum Shirl Unit to the Video Link Up so the screws get me ready to go and plant me near the front door of the unit to be collected. My actual appearance will only take a few minutes, but the trip to VLU is planned for a full day. It's only a three-minute walk from the MSU to the VLU, but the screws don't want to be doing it again and again so we all go at once. I've been told I can take my smokes, some paper to write on, my red plastic coffee cup and a book. It's like they've worked out how to stop me 'causing trouble'. I sit on the hard plastic seats in the small foyer section between the long-term and short-term sides of the MSU, balancing my stack of notepad, book, smokes and cup on my lap. I practice my lines for the VLU, even though I have no idea of the script.

When the short train of inmates trundles past from Induction a screw comes out and unlocks the front door, hands me over to the three officers on escort duty and I attach myself to the tail of the snake. The girls in the line in front of me all look tired and smell bad. They've got the taint of Induction all over them. The girl in front of me in line has bleached blond hair with ratty extensions that are trying to tangle themselves out of her hair. She's bent at the waist and has wrapped her arms across her belly. With her head down the hair extensions fall apart at the sides of her neck and I see a slick of greasy sweat beading the skin across the nape of her neck. She's hanging out for something, I surmise. As we reach the first set of gates past the MSU and huddle waiting for the unlock she starts sneezing, one sharp sneeze after another, the force of them bending her forwards so quickly that she needs to reach out and hang off the fence with one hand. I know these sneezes – she's hanging out for heroin, withdrawing so bad that her bones feel like fire and the drops of sweat on her neck burn like acid. Each sneeze will be followed by a shroud of goose bumps, every one a prick of agony and a reminder that all it would take to stop this is one less agonizing prick. Withdrawals suck. 'Hanging out like dog's balls' we used to say, back when I was a junkie. By the time we make it through three more locked gates and to the VLU, the girl is hurting bad. I guess her last shot was no later than lunchtime yesterday; this is probably a bail hearing. She wants to hope she's got a ride and cash if they let her walk or it's going to be a long hard train ride to wherever the 2010 incarnation of John St in Cabramatta is.

1991

*Good News Church Bookshop
Umina, NSW*

In 1991 I was still four years away from knowing the quickest route from anywhere in Sydney to John St in Cabramatta, the mecca of heroin for Sydney junkies in the '90s. I was fifteen years old, with blond curls and clear skin. I was teaching Sunday school and working in the church bookshop after sermons on Sundays. I had no idea that in twenty years I'd be in prison. But I was starting to get a fair idea that I'd be a junkie one day. Besides my mother's ongoing insistence that this was my future, I also had a clear how-to laid out on the shelves of the church bookshop.

The church we went to was Pentecostal in nature, all the laying on of hands, speaking in tongues and casting out of demons. Witnessing was a big part of this, and one great way to witness was to write a book. There was a 'bad girl, gone good' section of the bookshop, with shelves of books like *The Cross and the Switchblade* that told the stories of addicts and other disreputables finding God and getting clean. There was one book with a bright yellow cover and a close up image of (what I know now was) a very bungled intravenous injection – the vein had been missed and whatever was being injected had formed a large bloody bubble under the skin. These books set out to demonise drug use, but didn't always work that way. I read the books, one after another, while sitting alone at the bookshop table every Sunday. Most of the books left out the sneezing but they all covered the sweats and described them in emotive tones: 'thick yellow sweat oozed from her skin', 'a dirty sheen of greasy sweat coated her', etcetera, etcetera, *ad infinitum*. Sweat, according to the Good News Church bookshop, was the main drawback to being a junkie. Another downside seemed to be body hair with most of the book taking at least one chance to describe how much more attractive the female protagonist was after they stopped using and shaved their legs more regularly. My mother wouldn't let me shave my legs and I wondered occasionally if this was part of her plan to make me a junkie, to hurry me on to the end she kept predicting: 'Dead in the gutter with a needle hanging out my arm by 21.'

The clearest link I could see running through these stories was that when people became addicts their families dropped them. A lot of them held on for a while, played the loving compassionate game but things got bad and eventually, *bam*, the family was gone. No matter how much I read and reread, this never changed. Start using smack, get on the H-train, and your family will let you go. It took me a long time to put this together, to work out that I'd been planning it all along.

By the time I had my first taste of heroin just before I turned sixteen, I knew this was the path for me. I was going to be a junkie. My family was going to let me go.

Wednesday, 10 March 2010

*Video Link Up holding pen: Mulawa Correctional Centre
Silverwater, NSW*

The holding pen for the VLU is actually a storage room for the excess chairs from the visiting area. It's a long, dank L-shaped space, with a single window near the door, solid brick walls and stacks of green plastic chairs piled neatly along the walls of the long stroke of the L. The short leg of the L, at the end furthest from the screws, contains more chairs but these have been tumbled in, dumped in messy mounds rather than stacked. A small table has been placed inside the door at the top of the long stroke with an electric kettle, a one-litre carton of milk and polystyrene cups filled with coffee and sweetener sachets. Free access to coffee supplies? This is luxury unimagined. There's even a pile of plastic teaspoons that look and feel like they just came out of a fresh packet. I haven't used new cutlery since walking into Induction and so I slip a handful of spoons into my pocket. Just outside the door, past the screw on their chair, is a single bathroom with a sink. The tap is too low to fill the kettle so whoever gets the last cup needs to fill it with one of the spare polystyrene cups. It takes ages.

At the very end of the space, hidden behind the stack of chairs, lurks a tall wide gate, originally cyclone fencing but with plate steel welded over it. The only space to see through is the gap between the two gates. Men from the immigration detention centre are waiting on the other side for their turns in the VLU. Initially the girls in this holding cell are excited by the male company but once they work out these guys aren't criminals, not hip to the slang, not likely to have drugs, they get bored and sit in groups up near the window. The kettle gets filled, boiled, emptied, filled. Eventually the circle of men near the fence drift away and the girls in the holding pen settle in to wait.

The girl with the blonde hair extensions is getting sicker and sicker. She's on a chair near the door, where she can get to the toilet fast. One thing they didn't talk about much in the Christian bookshop was what heroin does to your bowels. It's not pretty or fun. When you're using, the crap in your intestines forms into rock solid lumps. Syringe exchange buses hand out tiny self-enema kits along with the fits, spoons and swabs to those junkies that are willing to admit they haven't pooped for months. When you stop using everything loosens up. About six hours after the sneezes start, when the cramps are ripping through the long muscles in your legs, and the sweats and shivers are shaking everything, that's when the diarrhoea kicks in. If you wait too long to get onto a toilet, the shit explodes out of you. I've seen junkies crap themselves on train stations and standing in line at chemists to get fits. I've sat on public toilets with a spoon

balanced on the toilet paper dispenser, liquid shit pouring out of my body while I curse the impurities in the gear that makes it take so long to break down in the water. I've cried with frustration because the convulsions forcing the crap out of me made my hands shake too much to get the needle into my vein, leaving pin prick dots around my track marks where the tip bounced in time to my shakes. Heroin is not nice to your bowels, but withdrawals are worse. By the time the screws call me for a phone call with my lawyer, the blond girl has been into the toilet three times already and it's not even 11am. As I walk past the open bathroom door the smell of her diarrhoea is solid; waves of it press against my face and fill my nose as I walk past the screw whose chair sits between the two doors. His face is impassive. All part of the job.

The phone call happens in a visiting booth, the kind used for non-contact visits with two small sides separated by a solid glass screen. An old-school Telstra home phone has been plugged into an outlet in the wall and sits on the bench. I consider trying to make a call – to anyone or everyone – while I wait for the lawyer to be patched through but the screw outside in the hallway is watching so I keep my hands in my lap and stare at my fingernails as they pick at each other. My lawyer is sounding positive when she finally does get through: my two-inch stack of supporting paperwork is with the parole board, they've considered my case and it looks likely I'll be okayed to begin the home detention assessment process. She's waiting outside the hearing room at Parramatta and I'll be able to see her on the video link. I'll be having another VLU in two weeks and if I'm approved for HD I'll be released from prison within a few hours of that hearing. As I walk out of the small glass box I see the blond girl hurrying into the bathroom again. According to my lawyer, hearings should start in about half an hour and I'm hoping for her sake that this girl is somewhere towards the top of the list. She's not.

Lunch comes at just past twelve, the usual heated aluminium boxes printed with the CS Industries logo across the cardboard top. The girl who's withdrawing is sitting up the back of the space now, near the gate that goes through to the immigration section. One of the older girls carries a box of food up to her and sits close, their heads tipped together. From where I'm sitting it looks like they're talking about anything but food; the lunch box is put on the ground as the older girl leans close and runs one hand in gentle circles on the other girl's back.

A girl sitting next to me snorts and calls out up the length of the holding cell. 'Better get eating,' she yells jovially. 'They won't let you take it back to Induction.' She has the lid off her box and is picking strips of wilted lettuce off the mound of pasta,

popping them into her mouth with perky little tosses. Her methadone-rotted teeth tell me she probably knows exactly what withdrawals feel like.

The blond girl's shoulders drop down and while we can't hear the tears from this end of the cell, I can see them wrenching out of her. The sobs get tighter and faster for a minute and then she swivels towards us. 'I won't be going back to Induction, okay! My boyfriend is out there – he's got the money for my bail. As soon as I get into my hearing, I'm going to be out of here.' The sobs are harder now, shaking both her and her chair as she slumps back down.

I can hear delusion behind the bravado. Her teeth didn't look that bad when I saw her up close this morning as she leaned on the fence and sneezed. Her cigarettes are tailor-made, a sign of wealth in prison, and the sneakers on her feet are branded non-prison-issue, shockingly clean and white against the grime of the holding pen. I know that an experienced user would ride the waves of the detox more stoically; they'd grit their rotting teeth and sit through the tremors, cramps and sneezes. The girl sitting next to me, snipping off shreds of lettuce with her stumpy brown teeth could be hanging out right now and if she's good at it, I'd never know.

The fear behind the blond girl's words is likely well founded. It's a fear that while her boyfriend might be out there, might have money, that money will probably have gone up his arm before she gets into her hearing. I remember my first few involuntary detoxes, sitting in a shitty flat in Newtown, waiting for my boyfriend-cum-using-buddy to get home from his early morning shifts at the Fish Markets so we could go and score. When the gear is flowing the life of a junkie is all sparkles and unicorns, but when it starts to run out things get very bleak, very quick. You'll tell yourself anything to fantasise away the threat of withdrawals. That's how the compulsion works.

*NYE 1996
Apartment
Newtown, NSW*

New Year's Eve was a big night for junkies. It wasn't so much the celebration of the end of another year that we had to deal with, more how everyone else's celebrations impacted on our ability to get drugs. NYE 1996 was a giant year for me as a junkie, my last as a heroin user, but I didn't know it at the time. I knew things were going to be tricky and had lined up gear, clean fits and junk food the day before but we went through it all in one night. So the morning of December 31 was flurry of chasing things up. Mark, my partner, co-defendant and using buddy had done a bunch of extra shifts at

the fish markets and I'd been whoring it up like crazy so we were cashed to the max. Weekend detention was over for the year and all I had to do was navigate the six blocks of Newtown/Enmore that housed my dealer, methadone clinic and the pharmacy that I got fits from, do all the stops and get back to the flat without being apprehended by the cops. Easy as.

Troy the dealer had been selling out of the same Housing Commission flat in Newtown for over twenty years and the one good thing about him was his reliable supply. He might have been a dirty old sleaze who encouraged you to whack up in the bathroom and then fondled your lady parts while you nodded off on his apricot vinyl lounge, next to the tropical fish tank, but he always had gear, good gear. And gave credit if you were wearing a low cut top. I didn't need tic that day so wore a tracksuit for my trip. Troy looked disappointed when he opened the door and even more so when I said I was going to wait for a taste till I got home. He was my second last stop, three ten packs of fits were wrapped up tight in brown paper bags and snuggled into the bottom of my backpack, the day's dose of 'done was warming my belly and all I had to do was stop off at the Seven Eleven on the way home for Ice Coffee Dares, Crunchie Bar ice creams and salt and vinegar chips. I'd even stopped at the video store, conveniently across the road from Troy's, and had a VHS of *Trainspotting*, the hot new movie everyone was raving about.

I still don't remember the end of *Trainspotting*, haven't bothered to see it again. I remember things in the movie triggering off my need for a shot – again and again – but I don't remember the details. I remember the Ambos giving me a hit of Narcan, a 'narcotic antagonist' that reverses opiate overdoses, while I lay on the floor in the shower with cold water running over my face. This was after the baby scene ... or maybe before it. I remember pulling the pillows off the lounge in a frenzy because I'd gone on the nod with a full fit in my hand and dropped it down behind the cushions. I remember different Ambos giving me another hit of Narcan in the bedroom of the apartment while dance music from the pub next door pumped through the open window. I remember being woken up the next morning by pins and needles in my left hand from where I'd fallen asleep with a blue rubber tourniquet wrapped tight around my elbow. The full syringe that I was holding when I crashed was uncapped on the bed next to me and another was loaded up next to the empty spoon on the bedside table. I remember sitting up, taking the needle in my hand and sliding it into my arm, not even bothering to loosen the tourniquet or switch to the other arm. I remember running out of gear by lunchtime on January 1 and putting on a low cut top to go and beg tic from Troy. This

was almost the end of it for me. In just a few months I was admitted to Royal Prince Alfred as a dual diagnosis patient and was on the list for the medical detox at Rozelle Hospital. I'd gotten step one as deeply as I needed to: I knew I had an addiction and my life had become unmanageable. I'd realised that I hated myself on heroin, hated being dependent.

It hadn't always been like this, for a long time – well a year or so, long for a junkie – I had loved the game. I learned quick and could get a needle into just about any vein. My friends brought first timers to me because I was gentle and reassuring. I had the good grace to only steal some of their shots, diluting it down with extra water so that when our fits were laid side-by-side on the table it looked like we were getting the same dose. I loved the intrigue of using, the secret that I shared with other users, the subterfuge we went through to conceal our deals and the loud yelling public conversations we had about these cover-ups that we'd have after the shot, when we thought we'd become invisible to the real world. I loved the lack of physical boundaries that came with using: the sex was dirtier, easier and less shameful than any I'd had before or since, the chronic discomfort of hanging out made my non-withdrawing body feel amazing. Even the vomiting that kicked in after almost every shot was enjoyable, an orgasmic expulsion of everything but the chemicals.

I remember being enamoured with heroin, entranced by it.

I remember trying to convince myself that Mark was on his way home with a bag full of cash and then finding out that he'd met up with a buddy, used all our gear and I was going to have to go to work before the sneezes would stop.

And now, I very deliberately remember the bad bits.

Wednesday, 10 March 2010

*Video Link Up holding pen: Mulawa Correctional Centre
Silverwater, NSW*

The girl in the holding pen at Mulawa has the same desperate glimmer in her eye that I imagine was in my own when I sat up and had that shot to welcome in 1997. She still sees the sparkles and unicorns – sitting here in prison is just the first hint that being a junkie isn't what she saw in the movies.

The compulsion plucks at my perception and I see her now as if in a movie frame, sitting towards the end of the holding cell with her comforter and colluder leaning close to her. The *mise en scene* is affective. The light that falls through the small barred window doesn't quite reach the two women and the dust that swirls up in the

beams blurs them, paints them into indistinct shapes in the darkened corner. I want to adjust the camera, pull the focus to get a closer look. But there is no camera. This is not *Trainspotting*. The blond girl's head gets closer to her knees as the cramps in her legs intensify and occasionally she reaches down, gripping the big muscles of her calves in tight fingers, trying to massage away the cramps. Her friend looks towards us, past us at the screw who slumps in the chair outside the door. Her face takes on a sacrificial resolve, the smack martyr glow, and she tips her face down to the suffering girl next to her. I can't hear what she's saying but the look of relief on the suffering girl says it all. The second girl has gear and a fit secreted somewhere around her person and has just offered to share it. I figure they'll go around the corner where the chairs are piled up, rather than try and explain to the screws why they both need to go to the toilet. I wonder if this'll be the first time that the blond girl will have shared a fit. I wonder if she'll even think about the consequences.

1996

Kitchen: Main Compound

Mulawa Women's Correctional Centre, Silverwater, NSW

My only hit with a shared needle was in Mulawa, in the toilet block next to the kitchen where I worked. I remember the exhilaration when my work mate Sarah pulled me into the walk-in fridge and showed the cut-off fit and tiny ball of foil that said she'd scored. We'd been trying for days and she kept getting hints that led nowhere but finally it'd come through. I never knew who she got the gear from or who the fit belonged to but she'd worked wonders and I was going to have my first taste in weeks. We found the screw in charge of the kitchen, told her we were heading to the bathroom, and skipped to the demountable toilet block. Nothing suss, nothing at all.

Getting syringes into prison takes smuggling and it's hard to smuggle a full-size one. The fit she'd sourced had been cut off half way down the length of the barrel and the edges melted to make small finger grips. The plunger had also been cut off and melted down. When we pulled the orange cap off the needle was slightly bent and when I moved my fingers to bend it back Sarah stopped me.

'Don't bend it back,' she said urgently. 'If the needle snaps we're fucked.'

I moved my hand back and let her hold the fit gently, like the precious commodity it was. She filled the barrel to its fullest from the water that sat around the drain hole in the sink and we hustled into a cubicle. There was a screws' office on the other side of the rear wall so we talked in whispers and tried to keep our giggles to a

minimum. We mixed up in the bottom of a coke can that had been left balanced on top of the divider between the cubicles, turning the can upside down and crumbling the gear into the hollow at the bottom before Sarah squirted the water from the fit in. The line of water matched a mark in the bottom of the can, sediment from the last time it was used to mix up. The lines met so neatly that I assumed the same fit filled it last time. The pop as she tugged the plunger out of the barrel was so familiar. Ah, my body said, that noise means heroin soon. I held the can balanced on the toilet seat as Sarah used the black rubber tip on the plunger to mash the chalky white lumps into the water until they dissolved. A tiny shred of tampon made a filter that I slipped into the mix as Sarah slid the plunger back into the barrel of the syringe. With the tip of the needle pressed into the filter she pulled up half of the just-a-little-bit-milky liquid into the syringe and then placed the coke can gently on the floor. In the rush we hadn't even thought to grab something to use as a tourniquet and so I gripped both my hands around her upper arm and squeezed tight.

The needle was very blunt, had been in many arms. What would normally be a simple slide into the vein took several seconds of pressure and there was an almost audible pop as she finally pushed it through. I saw her fingers going for the plunger and knew she was just about to pull it back, set off that flowering of blood up into the barrel that meant the vein was hit, that the rush was seconds away. I loosed my grip on her arm and looked up at the wall, knowing what the blood flower signified, how that would set off my impatience.

'Mulawa is full of fat junkies', someone had written across the wall about the toilet. Underneath a different hand had responded with 'Everyone gets fat in Mulawa'. This was Sarah's first shot in a while and she was gagging before the fit was out of her arm. She held it long enough to duck out of the cubicle, fill the fit from the sink and squirt the last of the gear and blood into her mouth. She handed it back into me and rushed into the other cubicle to spew. There'd be fewer fat junkies in Mulawa if gear was easier to get, I thought to myself. I considered waiting for her for approximately four seconds and then reached down for the can to fill the fit again.

There was a pause in the vomiting next door. 'Give it a sharpen,' she said, and a box of matches slid under the wall.

'What?' I said. 'Give what a sharpen?'

'The fit,' she was interrupted by another spew. 'Slide it along the edge of the box to sharpen it.'

I looked at the loaded fit in my hand, the matches on the floor. I supposed it makes sense, the harder the needle was to get into my arm, the worse the mark would be and the more likely it would get spotted by a screw. I pulled the plunger out a bit to make a bubble at the needle end so that I wouldn't accidentally lose any and then picked up the matches from the floor. There was dust along the striking edge and I wiped it on my pants before running the sharp cutting edge of the needle along it a few times. The torture of holding the full fit in my hand got too much after just four or so strokes and I licked the tip of the needle to get the dust off before dropping the matches and settling back for my shot. Sarah was still in the other cubicle but I was pretty certain I could manage alone. I twisted the sleeve of my green T-shirt until it cut in tight at the top of my arm and then tugged the end of it into my mouth, holding the twist between my teeth. It wasn't as tight as I'd have liked but I could see the vein at the crook of my elbow bulging and just slid the needle right on in. It felt like it went easier into me than it did into Sarah, I was glad I took her advice about the sharpening.

After weeks of not using, having to hold on just by methadone, even the tiny hit Sarah had managed to scrounge was big. I had my own spew, gripping the sides of the bowl while I let the heroin purge me, then nodded for a while on the bathroom floor. As Sarah and I sat on the steps of the toilet block, knowing screws could walk past at any minute but enjoying the risk, it took me longer to roll a cigarette than at any time since I'd learned in Induction. Fuck, I'd missed smack.

We were late back to the kitchen and by the time we arrived the other girls were into making sandwiches for the prison's lunch. There were loaves of bread stacked along the centre benches and six women standing around buttering them. We moved to the end of the table where our backs would be to the window to the office and the screw who sat at her desk overseeing the sandwich prep. It took us twice as long to butter our batches of six slices of bread as the rest of the table, mostly because we kept tipping our heads towards each other to giggle, as high on the rush of collusion as the H.

After lunch I accidentally scratched myself on the edge of a bench as we were clearing away and it was only then, as I watched tiny beads of blood pushing out of the skin on my hand that I finally thought about the risk I took using that needle. The AIDS ads from the '90s swam through my head and I felt the threat of the Grim Reaper's bowling ball as it whistled towards me. I thought about Kaposi's sarcoma and the movie *Philadelphia*, the HIV positive girl who lived in the same cell block as me and who threatened to spit blood at anyone who tried to stand up to her. And then I sucked the beads of blood off my hand and tried not to think about it.

Wednesday, 10 March 2010

*Video Link Up: Mulawa Correctional Centre
Silverwater, NSW*

I'm on my way out the door to my VLU when the more experienced girl comes back into the room with a cup of water from the bathroom. As she brushes past me I see the handle of a plastic spoon sticking out of the pocket of her tracksuit pants and I marvel at her audacity, forgetting for a moment the pile of spoons in my own pocket. I look back over my shoulder and see the hanging out girl scurrying around the corner, into the short arm of the L that is piled with chairs. I brace myself in the doorway of the VLU room, one hand on each side of the frame.

Breathing in, I shake off the urge to race back into the holding cell and force my way into the middle of the shot party. Like the flower of blood when Sarah was hitting up set off the instinctive gut longing, need to get the needle in my own arm; just knowing those two are shooting up down the back triggers off a similar 'need'. In a narcotics anonymous meeting years ago someone described it like a toxic love affair: 'We always love the ones who hurt us the most', and she was right. No matter how bad heroin was for me, no matter how many times I OD'ed, somewhere in the back of my mind it's always an option. The idea of a shot is like a security blanket I take out and sniff when things start to get hard. I don't know how long I will go without a shot, how far from smack I will get before I'll lose the urge to use. Part of me fears it's forever, that every time I see a fit in the gutter or a person on the nod I'll have just a little bit of longing for that long lost love. Ten years clean, I chant in my head – my age-old mantra – keep breathing, don't use, keep breathing, don't use. The mantra soothes me. Like it has every day of the last ten years. There is no way I'll be approved for home detention if I nod off in front of the cameras and I'm not risking being at home for a sudden urge to get munted. Don't use, keep breathing. The five steps from the door to the seat in front of the screens are long and my feet drag despite my firm intent. Keep breathing, don't use. My foot is on the ladder out of prison and there's no way in hell I'm buttering that rung with heroin.

The VLU room is darker than the holding cell, a windowless room, just the technology and me. The tech lives in a long low cabinet made of beech coloured chipboard. There are two screens in the angled top of the cabinet, side-by-side. On one screen I can see the empty bench in the courtroom, filmed from below to mimic the dynamics of the actual courtroom. Even sitting over the VLU looking down at the

screens, I'm still placed below the magistrates, looking up to them to acknowledge their power. There are five large swivel chairs and I can see the tops of them but not the seats or the surface of the bench. My chair sits three feet out from the screen and as I sit the camera mounted above it catches sight of me and I appear in the corner box at the top right of the second screen, above the seats for audience in the courtroom. I can see my partner and his best friend sitting there and just as I wonder whether they can see me Daniel pulls at his friend's arm and they both look at me. I've seen Daniel on visits, when he's brought Dex in to see me, and spoken over the phone, but he's never felt both as close and distant as he does now. They can see me and I give them a small sad wave. Their waves are just as sad. I can see the shock on Daniel's friend's face. I've lost a lot of weight and green is not my colour.

The seat is another plastic lump of uncomfortable, like most of the chairs in prison, and as I sit quietly waiting for the Gods of the bench my body screams out its panic. The sweat that has started up on my scalp inches paths to my face, dripping down my forehead and running behind my ears. The palms of my hands itch with panic ants but I don't want to rub and scratch at them in case this shows on the camera. A tickle starts up in the back of my throat and just as I'm trying not to cough a screw opens the door behind me and tells me to rise. I'm confused for a second, thinking that he's telling me to go back into the holding cell, but then I see Daniel stand up on the screen and remember that standing up as the Bench Gods enter is another way we reaffirm their right to punish us. I rise. The people that enter from the door behind the bench and sit in the swivel chairs look ordinary, unthreatening. Even from below they look more like a golf club committee than the Parole Board of NSW. I wait till they are all seated before I sit back down.

The hearing is brief. My solicitor confirms that the facts are as the paperwork says: I am here to face a warrant for incomplete periodic detention from 1996, I have been in custody since February 8, 2010, the Community Compliance Group who supervise home detention in NSW think I may be a suitable candidate for the program and are willing to assess me. The short grey-haired man in the centre seat on the bench asks me to agree with these facts and I do. He reminds me again of the process: I will be assessed for suitability for assessment and if I am found suitable I will be released for an actual assessment to occur in the real world. But, he tells me in an ominous tone, if I fail that real world assessment I will be returned to custody to serve out the rest of the sentence in prison.

‘We will see you again in two weeks,’ he says to me at the end of the hearing.
‘Keep up the good behaviour.’

‘Thank you, your Honour,’ I nod respectfully as I say this, acknowledging his place at the top of the pile. Out of all my rehearsed lines this is the only one I use.

Keep breathing, don’t use, my head screams at me. Find the fucking drugs and get them in your arm, my compulsion screams just as loud. I remind myself of that twelve step knowledge – it’s always when things are looking up, that you’re most likely to fall down.

Back in the holding cell I stop and breathe. I click the switch down on the kettle to start it heating for a victory cup, pulling one of my luxury coffee sachets from my pocket and trying very hard not to look up into the back corner, not wanting to think about it. This self-ruse works for a few moments as I focus on the sound of the water in the kettle agitating itself but then the screw pops in behind me and calls another name. No one at this end of the cell moves and I realise that he must be calling one of the two girls up the back. I finally let myself look in their direction and am not surprised to see both of them leaning against each other with lit tailor-made cigarettes in their hands. The one sitting closest to me is the blonde and she is no longer hanging out. The ash on her cigarette is a long grey tube, showing (not telling) that she hasn’t had a drag since lighting it. Hair hangs down over her face but I don’t need to see her eyes to know she’s on the nod. The screw calls her name twice more, getting louder, until her head pops up and she drops the cigarette on the ground. The long tube of ash explodes out a mushroom cloud of dust that she scuffs with her shiny white sneaker as she shambles towards us.

‘Yer’right,’ she is muttering, disgusted with the screw’s impatience. ‘I’m coming, fucking coming.’

I pour hot water onto the beige powder in my cup and stir intently as she passes me and heads for VLU. I’m jealous for a second that I can’t take the easy path out anymore, pump a dose of The Great Eraser into my arm and let it all slide away. Keep breathing, don’t use. The words have circled my head so many times in the decade since my last shot, danced me past, around and over so many temptations. They are shorthand for why I don’t use, why one needle in my arm is more than I can handle. These words will get me through the rest of the day in this holding cell.

1999
Anonymous Laneway,

Rockdale, NSW

My last shot of heroin came very close to killing me, in more than one way. It was a rainy night in a back lane in Rockdale. I'd finished rehab, moved on with my life, done twelve-step meetings, gotten a job, did all the things I thought I needed to do. Tried to forget. And then I busted. 'One is too many and a thousand is never enough' sounds like a platitude, but for anyone who has struggled with addiction it feels like the truth. I forgot that one wouldn't be enough. I tried just a little taste, just one – fifteen dollars' worth. I got stoned, enjoyed it. A couple of days later I had another slightly bigger one, and then just one more. And one more, and one more. Three weeks later I sat down on a gutter for just one more shot, mixed up \$100 worth of smack in a small plastic spoon and injected it into my arm.

I woke up some amount of time later dripping wet from rain that was pouring down. The skies had been clear when I met my dealer in the car park up the lane. Vomit had exploded out my body, was dripping from my chin and splattered on the legs of the ambulance officer who'd just injected me with Narcan to kick me out of the overdose. Two concerned looking men stood next to the ambulance, one of them holding a mobile phone in his hand and jiggling it as he watched me come round. My right foot hurt. The OD had tipped my body to the left, sliding it down into the gutter and this had pushed my right foot out flat onto the road. The pain was from it being run over by the car that I had sat down behind, which I'd seen as a good privacy screen. The two concerned looking men had been about to drive away in when they reversed over my foot. The man with the phone kept telling the ambos that he thought I was a dead cat and was going to throw me in the bin. He said it again and again like maybe this fact could erase me, erase what he'd just seen.

My wallet was lying open on the ground in front of me and I could see the other two fifties I'd gotten for another dose sticking out of a gap in the zip. Even as I had been telling myself just one more, I'd been prepping for the next one. My pink address book, with the numbers of all my dealers, was lying damp in the gutter, the edges of its pages turning red as the blood from my foot mingled with the rain.

The ambos wrapped me a white blanket, helped me to my feet. I asked if I could give them my gear and the ambo with my spew on his feet looked relieved as he held out a sharps disposal container for me to drop my used fit into. I followed it with the other two fresh ones that I'd been saving for later and the spoon.

'Get home safe,' he said to me.

'I'm taking a taxi,' I said. 'Thank you so much.'

As they climbed into the ambulance I remembered my manners and called out 'I'm sorry about your shoes.' He smiled sadly at me as they pulled off.

The concerned men looked uncomfortable, like they felt they should offer help and so I pulled the blanket around my shoulders and thanked them before I walked off up the alley to where I knew the closest taxi rank was. As I exited the lane way I threw the pink address book into a garbage bin and opened my wallet, knowing that I would need to prove to the driver I had the fare to Balmain before he would let me in the cab.

I never used heroin again.

Wednesday, 10 March 2010

Video Link Up: Mulawa Correctional Centre

Silverwater, NSW

Blondie doesn't make bail. She's sobbing when she comes out of the VLU but not as much as I expected. I calculate she's got till maybe tomorrow morning before the sneezes start up again. I don't envy her for even a second. I swear it, not even a second.

The me that walks back to the Mum Shirl Unit is different to the me that traced the opposing path earlier that day. When I left I was celebrating my win over Butchy McButch, expecting to do nothing harder than get to that 'Thank you, your honour' line in the VLU script. The MSU has been built over the foundations of what used to be the kitchen, back in '96. When the snake of inmates stops to drop me off we are walking the same ground my heroin-fuddled feet stumbled fourteen years ago. I'm filled with feelings, feelings I'm scared to try and nail down. I feel like shouting and cheering and vomiting all at once. I've fought the demons, battled off the ridiculous ever-reoccurring urge to use, but this time I did it locked into the room with the fits and the drugs. I don't think I'll ever be able to explain this to anyone who hasn't lived with a compulsion. For the first time in a very long time I feel the urge to hit a twelve-step meeting, sit in a room full of people who just know.

Chapter 7

Once an inmate's identity and warrant particulars have been confirmed, the inmate must be strip-searched for prohibited articles and contraband in accordance with security and search procedures. This search is to be undertaken with due regard to dignity and self-respect.

- 'Reception of inmates', *NSW Corrective Services Operational Procedure Manual*, Revised 2008

Thursday, 11 March 2010

*Mum Shirl Unit: Mulawa Correctional Centre
Silverwater, NSW*

This is it. I'm counting down to what should be my release in two weeks. All I need to do is get in front of those cameras one more time and I should be out and being assessed. There's not much I can do to change this now – except for using heroin; that might cause some issues. So I continue to keep breathing, to not use heroin.

As much as it seems ridiculous to get back on a bus to Berrima just to have to turn around and come back in ten days, I'm really looking forward to getting out of Mulawa. The loosening up of restrictions that means I'm allowed to stay on the more pleasant side of the MSU has helped but I'm seriously missing the knitting circle and the full days of not being the focus of the screws' attention that's the norm at Berrima. Mulawa feels more like 'prison' than Berrima. So starting Thursday morning I get into nagging for news of my next transport.

The person I target with my enquiries is the smiley female screw who works in the MSU. Turns out her name is Harrison and she's actually pretty good to chat to. I'd seen her in visits before I went out to Berrima and her persona in the visiting room was a radical contrast to the genuine and approachable face we saw in the MSU, the woman who talked to you like an equal and would hand over a lighter for your cigarette. In visits she was tough, just another blank-faced screw on the lookout for contraband or touches that last too long or get too intimate. My research brain is finding its feet again and so after she says she'll chase up my next transport, I size her up, take a deep breath and ask about the difference in her approaches.

I tell her about another screw I first met doing strip searches in visits who just grunted a 'thanks' when I complimented her on the dermal piercings on her chest but

then days later started a conversation about them with me in the MSU, following on as if my compliment had been seconds before. I suggest that visits take a harder face because it's the highest security risk in the prison, that they must need to keep up the stern to stop visitors thinking they can get one over.

'Must be hard,' I posit, 'to have to force yourself to be so hard in visits, take a lot of work to keep up the tough face.'

'No harder than it is for you guys in here,' she says, waving a hand past the MSU walls at the prison in general, 'but at least I get to drop it sometimes. Inmates have to keep up the front constantly, always look tough or risk being a target.'

'We all wear masks,' I respond, 'faces tailored to our situations to keep us safe. No one will ever really know the essential insides of another person, see past the situational masks they wear. But yeah, you're right, us crims have to wear a very particular kind of mask to survive.'

'I'm going to tell you the truth,' she says, and I perk my ears at her lowered tone. 'I suggested we keep you in here till you're moved; I'm not sure you're up to Induction right now...' She pauses and watches my face for a second, then continues: 'It's not that I don't think you're tough enough to handle it, but it just looked like you could do with a break.'

I'm filled with gratitude at this gesture – the closest thing to 'nice' I've seen from an officer – but I don't know how to handle that so I look up over the walls at the sky. We sit silently for a minute, both dragging on our cigarettes.

'I looked at your file during the whole sit-in thing,' she says.

I can't quite tell if it's admiration or confusion in her eyes so I laugh sardonically, 'Bet it was entertaining reading.'

'Sad,' she said, 'but you're handling it well.'

'I'm writing everything down,' I say, 'will be writing about it. I'm the wrong kind of brain to put back in the system.'

'No,' she counters immediately, 'you're the perfect kind of brain to put in the system. I hope you do write about it.'

I tell her my real name, say to keep an ear out. I might try to get back into the prison to do research, or at the very least write a book about it.

'I'll remember your name, when I do,' I say. She is a ladder that lets me imagine there might be people behind the blue as much as there are people behind the green.

Out of all the officers I encountered, Harrison's was the only real name I considered using when writing the story. But I didn't. I hope that one day she reads this and sees through the second mask I gave her.

Friday, 12 March, 2010

Transport: Mulawa to Emu Plains Prison

Emus Plains, NSW

Turns out Berrima is old hat; I'm out of the knitting circle for good. On Friday morning, just as I've finally managed to get access to the washing machine and pile my greens in, Harrison comes and tells me I'll be on a bus to Emu Plains that afternoon. She reckons my clothes should just have time to dry before I'll have to throw them in a garbage bag and hustle up to reception.

The screw who does my strip search on the way out of Mulawa keeps looking at me funny. It started when she walked to the door of the communal cell in reception, making brief half eye contact with me before directing me up the hallway to the search rooms with a gruff 'You're next'. I feel like I should know her, and my head starts running through the people I really don't want to see me naked and powerless. Is she from roller derby? A student from my undergrad days? As I kick off my shoes, peel off my socks, and pass them over to her I take the second she spends bending down to pick them up to check her out. I know her face but just can't place it. Maybe we've worked together, I wonder, maybe I've already seen her naked in a very different situation. I start trying to imagine her painted up, in a frock. She has long dark hair, high cheekbones, plump lips. She'd be popular with clients.

'Shirt first,' she says to me, making eye contact again.

Maybe my musings are showing on my face or perhaps the air in the room is thickening with the unavoidable 'I'm thinking about you naked' sleaziness.

'Did you come up from Wollongong a few weeks back?' she asks, and it all clicks into place, popping my sleaze bubble.

'Yeah, first thing in the morning.'

'I remember you,' she seems bashful. 'You were very upset. Okay, bra next. Just take it off and pass it to me.'

'It was all a bit of a shock,' I say, thinking this should have been obvious, that it must be the norm for people to be upset just after they have been arrested.

'You seem to have come to terms with it now though.'

The comfortable sports bra that Daniel brought in for me looks uncomfortable as she turns it over and feels along the seams before placing it on top of my shirt on the bench. I lift my breasts with my hands so that she can see the crease underneath them. I know I fail the pencil test, probably enough to carry at least a fit under each breast, maybe even a ten pack of fits.

‘Yes, didn’t have much choice.’

I’ve started on my pants before she tells me and she struggles to catch up as I hand them to her, pockets turned inside out, and reach for my underpants.

‘Does it look like things will be sorted soon?’ She runs perfunctory fingers along the seams of the pants. ‘Oh, just to the knees is fine,’ she adds as I tug my underpants down.

I turn on the spot, stopping while my back is to her to lift up my feet and wiggle my toes so she can see there is nothing between them.

‘Looks good for me getting home detention,’ I tell her, bending at the waist and tipping my head forward, fluffing my hair out to ensure any hidden contraband will fall out. ‘I’ve got another VLU in two weeks and should be out for assessment after that.’

‘Oh, that explains Emu Plains then; they have a VLU set up out there.’

This does explain Emu Plains. I wonder why Mr America didn’t think of sending me to Emus in our class meeting at Mulawa but am not surprised that this slipped past him – it’s probably too much consideration to give a putrid cunt. I send him some quiet bitter rage, packaged up psychically like the kisses I used to blow to my grandmother’s house when I was a small child.

‘You can get dressed now,’ she says. ‘I hope it all works out and that you’re home soon.’

She’s quiet while I dress but as I turn to the door she stops me.

‘It looks like you’ve had a hard time of it.’

The fingers on my right hand seek out the old suicide scars on my left wrist and rub at them as I watch her mouth forming the words.

‘Try and look after yourself for the next two weeks. Make sure you eat.’

Yes, mum, I am looking after myself, I think about saying but, ‘You’ve seen the food, right?’ is what comes out of my mouth as she opens the door.

She smiles sadly at me.

Any sign of softness is gone by the time we make it back to the holding cell.

‘You’re next,’ she says gruffly to another girl in the cell.

The transport to Emu Plains is like a party bus compared to the ones I've been on before now. There are eight of us going to Emus and another six headed for Dyllwinia at Windsor. We spend an hour in the holding cells before making it onto the bus, time filled with loud stories, passed on greetings and cigarettes that we shouldn't have on our persons but which the screws ignore. I ask a few of the girls heading out to Dylwinnia to look up Kathy and say hi from me. The size of the cohort means we get a bus to ourselves, no boys in other compartments yelling through the walls. As we finally file out of the cell to line up for the transport I realise that this is very similar to the truck I came from Wollongong on. Us Emus girls are directed to the big section nearest to the back, with two rows of seats facing each other. The girls headed to Dyllwinia climb into the smaller compartment and looking past them as we wait, I recognise the seat in the middle where I sat and cried as I watched my home disappear behind me. How fitting, I think, that my first prison transport in over a decade should also be my last, or my hopefully-last. I volunteer to sit in a backwards-facing seat because keeping a low profile is core to my survival strategy and risking nausea is easier than fighting to face forward. I end up opposite a sick-looking girl and next to two women who seem to have struck up a very intimate relationship in Induction. They're kissing and nuzzling each other, not open to conversation, so I talk to the sick girl.

'You been out to Emus before?'

She looks relieved at the distraction. 'Yeah, did a two-year lag out there a few years back. Not too bad. Once you get to the houses, it's bearable. Almost like being at home.'

'I used to do weekends out there years ago,' I say. This is the second time I've heard someone describe these 'houses' as 'just like at home' and I want to know more. 'Never saw the houses when I was there though, we just had the little compound down near the station end. What's the deal with them?'

She tells me that the prison used to be different, all rows of tiny cells, that they now call the 'huts', but when the prison was refurbished they built a whole bunch of houses, which most of the prisoners live in now. They kept a row of the huts which is now fenced in with cyclone fencing, and that is where they put receptions – or people who break the rules – the Emus version of Induction. What makes Emus unique in my experience though is the free-range approach to prisoners. 'Lock-in' at Emus means you are locked into your house but not your cell. Even in the huts they just lock the cyclone fencing, leaving the doors open. This cuts down on the exposed toilet in every cell issue

and means that you get a little bit of privacy back, but I still have trouble imagining how any prison could be 'just like home'.

As we meander up the long driveway into the prison I start to get a sense of what it could mean. The prison opens up along the right hand side of the road, rolling green fields bordered by the obligatory high fences, topped with the rolling green barrels. The cellblocks are orange brick with red tiles on the roofs, and they do look exactly like houses. As the truck pulls up to the prison another set of houses, white with steel roofs, appears on the left and I'm confused for a minute by the low white wooden fence.

'That's Jacaranda,' the girl sitting opposite me says, seeing my confusion. 'The unit for mothers and children.'

I see a snatch of an undercover barbeque area as the truck turns right into the main prison compound, there's a plastic kid's trike lying on its side on the grass. So that's what minimum security looks like: a picket fence dream. As we climb off the truck just one cyclone fence away from freedom, the girls who are familiar with Emus stretch and breathe deep as if they are home. Emus includes a working dairy that sends milk and dairy products to NSW prisons and the smell of cow shit mingles with the shitters' mournful lows as I pause to get my bearings.

My musing is interrupted by a tall red-haired screw who strides towards us, hand on hips and lips pursed but in a different way to Chihuahua Face's cats bum.

'Well, well, well, what have we got here? Another bunch of delinquents who need to be taught a lesson?'

She's walking like a stereotype of herself. Her right hand is twitching on her bulky leather belt because it would rather be swinging a truncheon in circles.

'Heya, Birchie,' the taller one of the couple who'd been sitting next to me says. 'Bet you've been hanging for me to come back!'

Birchie stops, lifts an eyebrow, tosses her fringe and duck-faces her lips even more.

'Can't stay away, huh? Well, you know I'll be searching you first!'

This is a woman who really likes her job. My head, sardonic as always, instantly labels her Bitchie as she joins the rank of worse-than-can-possibly-be-imagined screws, alongside Butchy McButch, Chihuahua Face and Mr America.

I sit quietly and wait for my turn in the room up the hallway where they do the searches. The sick girl from the bus, me and a very scared looking young girl who is yet to say a

word are all that's left in the queue when Bitchie decides it's my go. I've gotten used to strip searches by now but am in no way prepared for what a search with Bitchie means.

'You look new,' she says, as we're walking down the hallway. 'First time?'

'First time in a long time and I never made it to Emus.'

'Repeat offender,' she says and I'm not sure if this is a statement or a question, either way I'm tired of defending myself to people who don't listen and so choose not to respond.

'You'll find we do things by the book here, particularly with searches. There are always two of us present and you'll be expected to follow procedure. Do you know procedure?'

'I think so.'

'We'll find out.'

Procedure at Emus, it turns out, is similar to procedure everywhere else except for the sexy-times vibe that Bitchie brings to the table. Oh, and her assistant, a very young female screw who looks even more scared than the young girl waiting out in the hall. This is the first time I've been searched by two guards and I wonder why 'procedure' at Emus requires this extra set of eyes. The lights are bright and the room quiet but from the tone of Bitchie's voice and the way she instructs you to undress there might as well have been heavy slap bass, a spinning pole and disco ball.

'Okay, now start with your shoes, one at a time, shake them out for us and then slide them over here.'

I have to bite my lip because it actually sounds gaspy, like she's breathing heavy down a phone line that costs \$5.99 a minute. I will not laugh, I swear internally, I will not laugh.

'Now slide those socks off, turn them inside out, that's right, all the way.'

I drop the inside-out socks on top of the shoes and they make me think of nothing more than used condoms. This strip search is doing my head in, feels like I should be getting paid for it.

'Shirt's next, yeah, and then bra. Now make sure you lift those puppies up nice and high for us, show us there's nothing under there.' She is leaning forward a little from the hips and I have to stare at the floor because I'm sure that if I make eye contact then I'm going to lose it completely. Rolling on the floor laughing during strip search is very likely to get me on the 'probably smuggled drugs in' list.

My 'puppies' have been lifted and now it's time for the pants.

'Pants off and on the pile and then underpants and do a pretty spin for us.'

I feel like I should start grinding my hips but know from experience that it's hard to grind your hips and pull off pants. I just tug them down and toss them onto the stack. She didn't say underpants to the knees but this has been the go for all my other searches and so I stop when they get there.

'All the way off, please, onto the pile, and spin.'

All the way off it is. I concentrate very hard on not spinning them off my toes, my signature move as a stripper. Instead I bend down and pick them up with my fingers before dropping them onto the pile. Completely naked I turn, stop, lift my feet, separate my toes, keep turning. I've got my back to the unlocked door when I finish my turn and she gestures for me to tip my head forward and shake. As I bend at the hips I feel my vagina open up and every noise I hear sounds like the door behind me is about to open. I wrinkle up on the inside and realise that as much amused as I've been by this strip search it was just another, more brutal exercise in power. It's the most exposed I've felt since coming back to prison and I'm not sure if Bitchie enjoys my naked body more or the flush of humiliation I can feel on my cheeks and neck. I have a terrible feeling that the sleaze was going to keep escalating till she got that blush out of me. Bitch, I realise, can't blow her psychological load without seeing humiliation.

'You're done,' she says in a satisfied voice as I pull my clothes back on. 'Can't wait for next time.'

It crosses my mind as I walk back up the hallway that maybe Bitchie is the reason 'procedure' at Emus involves two officers, I wonder how *boom chicka wahwah* the search might have gotten if we'd been alone. I want a shower, a long hot shower. I never want to let another person see my naked body ever again.

Desirability, I know, is power. Being unashamed of sex is power. But, I wonder, as I walk away from Bitchie to finish my Induction into Emus, what happens when sexual power turns toxic?

1995
Kings Court Massage Parlour
Sydney, NSW

My first gig in the adult industry was as an erotic massage girl at Kings Court Massage on Broadway in Sydney. I took a lot of hot showers while working there. Nothing has ever felt quite as sleazy as this massage place, maybe because we all rocked up to work pretending that we didn't offer a sexual service.

Kings Court was upstairs above a row of shops on Parramatta Road and their ads in the *Daily Telegraph* were targeted at people new to the industry. 'No experience, no worries – we'll teach you everything you need to know.' It turned out teaching me everything I needed to know involved me giving three free massages and happy endings to the owner and his two sons and then sitting with them in a room while they sized me up and gave me feedback. They didn't quite call my breasts puppies, but they came close. Bob, the owner, started out by asking if I'd had a child and suggesting I start working out to lose the baby fat and get apricot oil onto the stretch marks on my breasts. I would need to make the best of my assets to compete here, he told me, lots of very low cut tops, short skirts to show off my 'stunning pins' and the highest heels I could walk in to draw eyes away from my 'problem calves'. He suggested two or three of the older girls who could help me work out what to do with my make-up and hair. By the time he finished with the physical appraisal I was feeling like asking the \$55 per hour they charged might be pricing me out of a job.

Bob's sons then moved on to critique my 'massage'. As I suspected, the massage they talked about was my hands on their cocks. I needed to be more responsive to the client, work on my timing, make sure I was giving them the right feedback to relax. Feedback, in this case, meaning appropriate groans, moans and gasps to convince the client that rubbing their meaty member was driving me to climax. As the younger-looking son started to describe how my dangly breasts would come in handy for arousing clients, telling me how to 'accidentally' rub them against the client's chest, groin and face, it suddenly dawned on me that I'd brought these three male relatives to orgasm within a very short time and that now they were openly discussing my value as a professional wanker. I didn't think I deserved better so when they finally offered to put me on a four-week trial with another 'test' massage for each of them at the end I jumped at the chance. They told me to see the receptionist for a key to a locker and I stood to leave. My hand was on the doorknob when Bob spoke one more time.

'Have a long hot shower before you meet any clients; we want you to smell like a lady.'

I didn't stay long enough to do my re-test massages but it turned out the best bit of working at Kings Court was the community, the way the girls looked after each other. We'd try to get the big group bookings and talk them into having a spa first. We only got paid \$20 to sit in the spa with them but with a group of six couples, the most we could fit in the party spa, the job felt more like a party. We'd crack a few bottles of the god-awful house branded bubbly (that they bought for \$2 per bottle and passed

onto clients for \$25), mix it with mango and banana juice to make it drinkable and drunken away the sleazy men and their wandering hands. This was my intro to the concept of sex worker solidarity but it couldn't quite shift the stain of my 'interview'. It was also a fallacy that I learned to let go of eventually.

Sex worker solidarity is a tenuous thing, and a thing that can only happen between workers. Trying to push this same camaraderie onto non-workers can backfire terribly. The detail-laden sex talk and over-the-top irreverence works well to build comfort between a group of women who are all using their money boxes. In a room full of 'straight' women it's alienating and can verge on the abusive.

Saturday, 13 March 2010

The Huts: Emu Plains Correctional Centre

Emu Plains, NSW

The kissing couple from the bus get split up when we're put into the huts and the shorter of the two, a perky girl in her late thirties, with curly hair that has all the reds, browns and blondes woven through it, ends up in the cell next door to me. She introduces herself as Tiffany with a well-practiced grin as we walk to our cells. I laugh a little like I do every time I meet someone whose name seems more like a hooker name than a real name.

The huts are a double row of cells, back-to-back in a line down the centre of the compound. At one end of the row is a kitchen with a microwave, fridge and toaster. Once we get to the houses fresh food will be delivered every day and we'll be able to cook meals in the kitchens, but for now we're still on corrective services boxed meals and the preheated metal containers are delivered to this kitchen in an insulated trolley. There's a bathroom on each side of the row, smack bang in the centre. There are gaps under the doors and no glass in the high windows and it's already cold enough in the mornings to make your breath steam. The change in the weather from the heat wave back in Induction is startling. Tiffany's next door and her Induction lover is in the cell almost directly behind mine. Walking down to our cells I ask if they are sad to be split up.

'It's an Induction romance,' she says glibly. 'We were cellmates in there and, well, you know how it is with slotties.'

I've shared cells with five different 'slotties' by now and haven't slept with any of them but I'm still flying low and so silently assent. We peel off from our conversation to get settled in. I go into my cell, meet my new cellmate. We manage to not have sex.

The new cell is a small cement room with bunk beds, shelves, a chair. There's a window with one set of bars and a door that we choose to have open or shut. Luxury compared to the safe cells. I pile my freshly washed greens onto the shelf, stack my books on the highest shelf where I can reach them from the top bunk, roll a cigarette and wander outside.

Tiffany was much quicker off the mark than me and has claimed a chair in the walkway that runs down either side of the huts. She has her shoes off, shorts on, a half smoked cigarette in her mouth and her naked toes hooked into the chain link fence opposite her. She is laughing loudly and has one hand on the bare arm of a butch and submissive-looking woman who squats down on the ground next to her. I'm just in time to catch the end of her funny story.

'—and then I said to him "We're real lesbians, and real lesbians don't like men joining in. Sit in the fucking corner and watch!"' Tiffany cackles and takes a long satisfied drag on her smoke. 'Bet it was a long time before he tried to book a gen-u-ine lesbian double again.'

The girl next to her is laughing but with an uncomfortable tinge behind it. She watches Tiffany's eyes closely, watches her lips as she pulls on the cigarette.

'I'm a hooker,' Tiffany says to me proudly as she looks up and sees me. 'Just regaling my new friend here with some stories.'

'Sounds like a funny one,' I say. 'You sure showed him.'

Tiffany cackles again and after a second her new friend joins in.

I've known more than one worker who talks openly about their work, myself included, but watching Tiffany feed on the adoration and discomfort of her audience suddenly makes me uncomfortable for every person I've ever told a designed-to-shock sex work story. I look up past Tiffany, towards the open gate at the end of the huts, and make eye contact with a weary-looking woman perched on the doorstep of a cell six up the row. Her eyebrows tilt the tiniest bit and a shadow of a mocking grin floats around the corner of her mouth. I can see the effort it takes her to keep her cynicism in and I stifle my own grin. It takes me several seconds to realise it is the same woman who sat on the step with me at Classo weeks ago tearing cigarette papers from the toilet roll wrapping. I smile at her and give a little wave.

'I'm going to make coffee,' I declare to Tiffany and pivot on my heel.

'I take mine two-S-M,' Tiffany declares but before I have to decide how to tell her to get her own coffee, her new paramour leaps up.

'I'll do it,' she declares. 'You got a cup or need to borrow mine?'

The prison succubus pats her hand, smiles with too many teeth. ‘Yours will be fine thanks, pet.’

After I make my coffee I walk the long way around the huts and spark up a conversation with my friend from Classo. She’s been here for a couple of weeks. Reads books and works in the library, is doing a three-day punishment stint in the huts for fighting with her cellmate and takes me on a tour of the prison before our Corrective Services Industries tins arrive. Dinner tonight is steak, the first non-boiled meat I’ve eaten inside. Cutting it with plastic knives is hard but chewing it is fun. I sit on my bed eating and listen to Tiffany outside in the walkway, telling stories about the girls’ rooms in the brothels she worked in. It all sounds so familiar, reminds me of when I started to see through the solidarity, when I first started to recognise how sexual power can be misused in the sex industry and how our hooker personas can poison us when we don’t recognise we’re wearing them.

2003

Golden Apple Brothel

Kings Cross, NSW

I’d been working under the name ‘Amanda’ since starting out at Kings Court Massage but when I moved to The Golden Apple in Darlinghurst I was ready for a new mask. I’d chosen Amanda for Amanda Dwyer, the head mistress at Salon Kittys, and since I was in the process of starting an apprenticeship there it seemed best to swap monikers. Sonja Blue was a character from a series of books by Nancy A. Collins, a vampire who never died, had unvampiric power and so had set herself up as a vampire killer. In one of the books she worked on a brothel ship that served oil rigs and tore apart a bunch of over aggressive clients who tried to change the deal from single jobs to gang bang, without negotiation. I couldn’t think of a better model for my new and improved approach to the job. Kittys and the Golden Apple were a new start for me. I’d decided to move away from straight work, where I was feeling ever more toxic, and into a branch of the industry that I saw a future in, a chance for personal growth.

Amanda had been a bit of a whiner; she shot up smack ‘cause she didn’t like who she was, let clients go too far because she didn’t know how to say no. Sonja knew how to say no, wasn’t going to let the clients get to her. Sonja wore a skin-tight scarlet jumpsuit with a plunging V-neck and radically flared legs. She stalked the red-carpeted halls of the Apple in eight-inch platform shoes, carried a bag full of extras – fetish toys that she’d add to a job for the appropriate tip. Sonja knew that if men were willing to

put money on the line, she must be worth more than that silly Amanda could ever imagine. Sonja saw \$220 per hour as a fair minimum and she looked back with sadness and a little bit of disgust at Amanda's belief that she was just about worth the \$50 for a fifteen minute booking that some of the cheaper places had offered her for. Sonja had just discovered that adding humiliation to a session at Kittys upped the price significantly. Sonja wasn't giving this shit away for free anymore. Sonja would have put Bob and his sons thoroughly in their place at Kings Court.

As Sonja, I learned how to work safely, separate the job from my self, get that mythical work/life balance. And as Sonja of the Golden Apple, I realised that the toxic can seep into your bones, eat you out from the inside, that the solidarity of workers can just be a front for nasty, bitchy, garden-variety mean. The Apple had a great reputation, built up over its first fifteen years being run by the same entrepreneurial worker who set up Kittys, but after two accountants from Melbourne bought it in the mid 1990s things started to go downhill. Drugs started appearing in the house, they offered live-in rooms for workers who needed them and at least one of the girls living in those rooms was under eighteen.

The Apple was a lounge set-up. Clients would get buzzed in by the receptionists after being vetted as sober enough to stand and likely to have at least the \$160 price of a half-hour booking either in their wallet or on a card. The girls would meet them in the lounge, an oddly shaped split-level room that took up most of the ground floor of the old terrace house. Like most brothel lounges, the lighting was dim, the couches low, and the walls draped in velvet curtains that shimmered in the artificial dusk but just looked tacky after all the clients left and the overhead lights were switched on. We could duck out to the girls' room to fix our faces or take a few minutes out after a job, but otherwise we were expected to be in the lounge, on display, waiting for the next potential client. The lounge was where most of the trouble started at the Apple.

Early one Sunday morning the usual miasma of clashing perfumes and instant coffee, tinted underneath with a hint of spoiled semen and bleach, was joined by the harsh nose-tingling burning-ants smell of ice. It was late in the shift, things had been slow for a few hours, and one of the girls had ducked out to score. On her return she headed for the back corner of the lounge, an alcove up a few stairs from the rest of the room, partially hidden around the corner. As she pulled out a small glass pipe and crumbled some crystals of methamphetamine into it the other workers started to gather around; soon there was a regular puff-puff-pass circle happening up the back. I got called over for a hit but politely declined, remembering my three years off the needle,

the risk that one is never enough. I'd heard the stories that were starting to do the rounds about this new-to-Sydney drug and wasn't taking the chance. I didn't want to walk away, however, knowing that whoever wasn't part of the circle would be called a nark if the manager walked in, and instead perched on an arm of the lounge. The girl with the pipe was loud and jarring, her stories getting more extreme as the pipe went around and around. The outside of the glass pipe was darkening from the flame, and left black soot smudges on the fingers and faces of the girls. Eventually, after they'd all gotten nice and giggly, the buzzer told us men were on their way through the door and the pipe disappeared into a bag.

The clients were a drunken bunch, tracksuit-clad men in their late twenties with baseball caps and loosely laced sneakers. They were handsy as all fuck, grabbing any girl who walked close enough, sneaking their fingers into places that they hadn't yet paid for. I figured the chance of them staying was slim and happily slapped away the hands with a dose of humiliation they hadn't paid for. It was a professional sacrifice I was willing to make. The girls from the pipe circle sucked up the attention and it wasn't long before the girl who owned the pipe was straddling a man on a couch while his very drunk friend leered at her almost exposed breasts. I stared at a smudge of black on her chin as she ground her hips against the prone man.

The recepo let it go on for about half an hour before she started pressuring the men to book or go. To my utmost astonishment three of the men decided to stay, and the grindee was one of them. Astonishing pipe girl just as much, he decided to see me. There was a brief period of negotiation where he tried to convince me that the sizeable discount she had offered him (coming out of her cut, the house never gives discounts) should still apply and I informed him the house price was my minimum and that extras could apply if he wanted anything other than massage, oral and sex. He agreed, submitted to a very thorough STI examination and even had a shower without too much coaxing. As his attitude changed on the way into the room I realised that this man was a sucker for a nasty woman; he liked the standoffishness and had been manhandling pipe girl downstairs to cover up his discomfort at wanting to be dominated. How fun, I thought to myself and played it for all it was worth. I was nasty and mean and hot and sexy all at the same time. He got his money's worth.

Being a hooker teaches you exactly how long an hour is and so five minutes before our booking was up I had him flat on his back, floppy filled condom creasing around his rapidly shrinking cock and happy sweat running down his face. The bravado

was gone and I was just picking up my clothes and reaching for a towel to wrap around myself when the screams from next door cut in.

Screams in a brothel were nothing new but these were not pleasure screams, not even playful 'oh no Big Boy, I'm so scared' screams. These were real, filled with panic and fear screams. The client sat up, pulling a towel over his cock, and looked confused. I pulled on underpants and ripped open the door, leaving him to deal with himself. The recepo was coming up the stairs, two at a time, and we met outside the door. It was locked from the inside but her keys opened anything and in seconds we were in. The client was standing in a corner of the room, naked and scared. The worker, a maybe eighteen-year-old girl who'd been part of the pipe circle, knelt in the middle of the bed, naked except for a bra and stay up stockings. Her hands clenched the sheets between her knees and as she screamed and screamed thick lines of make-up tears ran down her cheeks.

'What did you do to her?' The receptionist yelled at the client.

He shock stuttered, 'N-Nothing' and his pale face convinced me he wasn't lying.

The worker stopped screaming eventually, calmed down a bit, shook her way down the stairs in bare feet and got dressed in her street clothes in the girls' room. The pipe circle became the care circle as the workers gathered around her, soothing, calming. I suggested an ambulance, but following house policy the recepo gave her money for a taxi. More clients came in and we were ushered out to the lounge as she collected her things.

'I'll be checking my bag when I come back; those filthy junkies can't be trusted' Pipe Girl said quietly to another girl as they walked up the hallway in front of me.

Some solidarity, I thought to myself.

I booked in one more job to round out the weekend and thought about the essay I was writing on *Madam Bovary* for my literary theory class while the fat tired businessman pounded away on top of me and dripped sweat onto my face and neck. I reminded myself to grab the book out of my locker before I left, just another final job for another weekend.

The weekend was over, and back in the girls' room piles of make-up wipes, smeared with heavy black eyeliner and too bright lipstick, were forming on top of the already full bin. Bodies in various combinations of work clothes, lingerie, nudity and street clothes brushed against each other as we all shucked off our work names and got ready for the real world. This liminal moment, when we all take off our masks and see, for just a brief

few minutes, the real faces behind the personas, has always been one of my favourite parts of sex work – the bit where I feel we make the strongest community. But that night it felt tainted, broken by the lack of sympathy in the air for the girl whose mask had slipped. One by one we filed out of the room to sign off with the recepo and collect our night's takings. Handbags lay open, with sunglasses at the top to cover our brothel-smudged eyes when we exited the front door. Pipe girl reminded everyone to check their wallets, make sure nothing was missing, and was now ready to leave but paused to tell one more story about the screamer before she left.

'I knew she was too weak for this,' she said, with superiority. 'Knew she couldn't take the game. Weak, scared and stupid. I could just tell.'

I glanced around at the faces, different without their warpaint, and saw some discomfort but no defiance, no burning need to defend the girl.

'Knew it when she got the sponge stuck, the stupid cow.'

'She got a sponge stuck?' a newish girl to the house asks, incredulous and confused.

I understood her confusion; it's a confusing idea. Sponges are the working girl's tampons. You'd get sponges from the chemist, where they advertise them as make-up sponges, boil them in water and then insert them like a tampon. The sponge nestles up against the cervix and catches the blood before it can freak the client out. Most of them never even know it is there, just another bit of texture inside the mystery that is a woman's vagina. In all my years of working I'd only once had a client ask me what he could feel in there. I distracted him with my feminine wiles. Getting sponges out can be tricky, lacking the string of a tampon, but with a little bit of practice you learn how to get your fingers up there and tug them out without breaking the sponge up. If that fails, then you have a long soak in a hot bath till it swells and hope gravity does the rest. Last option is just to go to the hospital and ask for help. Everyone's first go is hard; it was unfortunate for the screamer that Pipe Girl had been there.

'Yeah, stuck for three days, stupid cunt. I found her in here, spread-eagled on that lounge, up to her elbow trying to fish the thing out. Smelt like a fucking graveyard. Lucky for her I got these babies—' she clicked her talon-like acrylic nails together '—they're like totally super tweezers! Got it out in seconds and then spent the next week scrubbing the stench of her off my hands.'

The room exploded with laughter and I thought about asking why she didn't wear gloves but was too disgusted by her callousness. I picked up my handbag, backpack and copy of *Madam Bovary* and walked out of the room.

Waiting on Kings Cross Station for the train to Hurstville I wondered about how some women can be so nasty, how they make it okay to see other women like this. How they can take other people's pain and use it to shock. The problem with not removing a sponge is that the captured blood can turn toxic, poison you slowly from the inside out. Pipe Girl, I could see with a bit of thought and perspective, had the emotional equivalent of a stuck sponge. She used the ice, the brutal, flamboyant seduction techniques and the lateral attacks on other workers to stop herself having to squat down deep, reach into her psyche and yank out the toxicity that poisoned her world. She didn't see that her work face was a mask – or the other girl's – wouldn't acknowledge the reality behind the illusion.

On the train I sat behind a pair of office workers, women with power suits, brittle makeup and too-tight hairdos. As the train pulled out of Kings Cross station, they started up a litany of gossip about another woman in their office, one they felt had been unfairly promoted based on looks, availability, etcetera. It's not just hookers, I thought, who could do with some toxicity removal. The pitch and intonation of their voices told me that they wanted the whole carriage in on this scandal, wanted us all to take their side against this competitor. As they got off at Town Hall I watched their heels tap-tap-tapping past the train window and wished I could have pinned them to their seats and told them the story of the sponge and what it meant.

*Tuesday, 16 March, 2010
House 8: Emu Plains Correctional Centre
Emus Plains, NSW*

I get Tiffany, get where she's coming from. But that doesn't mean I like it. I try to stay away from her, keep my own stories from the industry to myself.

After three days in the huts the screws inform me that I'm moving to house eight. They give us fifteen minutes to pack and then everyone who's moving meets at the end of the huts. My garbage bag full of clothes is next to my feet and I'm juggling a stack of toiletries, my plate, cup, cutlery and stack of books when Tiffany strides up next to me, hands empty and with her butch pet following along behind with her stuff. We're all going to house eight and I groan but keep it entirely on the inside. At the house we are each given a key to our rooms and left to work out the unfamiliarity of being able to lock a door.

The house has a central living-cum-dining room, with large lounges spread around a television, and several tables scattered in the outer corners of the room. The

cells, or 'rooms' as they call them here, are around the outside of the building. Most are single occupancy but there are two double rooms, one at each end of the rear wall. None of the singles are free and a gothy dark-haired girl already has a bed in the room I've been assigned. Tiffany and her new love get the empty double room and I wonder how hard Tiffany batted her lashes at Bitchie to make that happen.

This is it, I think, looking around; this is the last cell I'll sleep in. It's a giant room, almost the same size as my bedroom at home. There are two single beds on opposite walls, and two separate freestanding wardrobes. Above each bed is a window, with only a single layer of security mesh between us and the view. Said view looks out through the single high prison fence, across a rolling green paddock and onto the high spindly conveyor belts of what looks like a sand mine. When I get home and scope it on Google maps, I see that the giant structures are surrounded by a wasteland of dead sand and murky green ponds easily ten times the size of the prison. I can hear the belts running, a constant grinding roar that probably requires ear protection once you cross the green field. My cellmate tells me that the machinery runs from five am till midnight every day but Sunday. I don't suppose they even think of the prisoners trying to sleep across the way but figure we're probably low on the list of environmental considerations.

The porch out the front of the house looks directly across to the Video Link Up on the other side of the compound, a small building in its own chain-link yard. I take a stroll around the prison, walking the straight white paths through the two residential sections, read the signs on the outside of the library, gym and buy up room, say hi to some of the people left in the huts. Smoke a cigarette sitting on the soft green grass in the centre of the yard, as far from all the fences as I can possibly get. By four pm we're settled in and when the screws come to do muster and lock us into the house I'm feeling comfortable, relaxed. Emus, I've decided, won't be a bad place at all to kick through the time till my next VLU appearance.

Dinner is apricot chicken, magicked up by a long-termers who knows how to crack a jam packet and has been collecting individual apricot jam packets from the rations for weeks to make this dish. I sit at an actual dining table and eat. It's the first meal I've eaten off anything but my lap or a picnic table since getting locked up.

Tiffany's at another table and as I scrape the bottom of my plate I can hear her getting louder, telling stories of the brothel with the same 'listen to me or else' tones of the Pipe Girl at the Apple and the two businesswomen on the train. She's telling stories of her sex work, not to form bonds but to alienate. It's not long till she's up out of her chair and giving her new friend a lap dance, talking as she does of all the men who've

wanted her, all the cocks that have been inside her. I sneak looks at the faces of the other women at my table and see resignation, intolerance, disgust. One of the women at Tiffany's table is confined to a wheelchair and as she moves away from the table she clips Tiffany's foot with her wheel but doesn't seem to hear the yells of outrage and just keeps rolling.

'What's her fucking problem?' yells Tiffany, breaking off her dance and looking around the room for support. 'Watch where you're fucking going!' she screams at the retreating chair. No one responds and the woman in the chair just keeps on rolling.

That night we all hear her, hear them, loud brutal fucking. Tiffany's screams seem contrived, drawn out and emphasised.

*Wednesday, 17 March, 2010
House 8: Emu Plains Correctional Centre
Emus Plains, NSW*

At breakfast the next morning Tiffany is perky, bubbling over. She rubs the benches with a sexy wiggle and bends extra far down to put the milk in the fridge while her pet watches.

At dinner she starts again, talking loudly about how her chronic wanker's cramp makes holding a fork hard. She sends her love slave to make her coffee, hands her dirty dishes over with a nod to the sink. While she stands watching other people washing the dishes, Tiffany launches into a story about this 'stupid cunt' she worked with once who was too ignorant to know herpes when she saw it and ended up with a face full of sores as a result. She's laughing about how many clients the worker passed the infection along to, and in this story everyone's a stupid cunt. I'm sitting on the lounge, watching television and we keep turning the TV up to drown her out, but she just gets louder. At the fourteenth or so repetition of 'stupid cunt', Sandra, the woman in the chair, has had enough. She rolls over to the gap between the kitchen benches and plants herself, blocking the girl's exit and takes Tiffany to task.

'I'm so fucking sick of hearing your voice,' Sandra spits out, rage filling her face. 'We're all stuck in here together and if you keep going like this you won't fucking make it through next week. Learn some fucking respect for the rest of us, or we'll teach you some, quick and fucking proper. If you choose to whore, that's your choice. We don't need to hear about it. We don't need to hear you fucking, don't need you to show us

how you wank your johns. So mention the subject while we're locked in this house one more time and I'll make sure you can never talk about it again.'

Tiffany stands silent, mouth agape. Her pet hangs back, not drawing anyone's attention, hiding behind Tiffany's mass of hair, hands dripping soapy water onto the floor.

Sandra moves towards her room, and as she reaches the door pivots in her chair and declares 'And if I hear the words "fucking cunt" one more time tonight, I'll show you exactly what a fucking cunt looks like.'

Later, after we've turned in for the night, I ask my cellmate about Sandra, curious to know if she would follow through on the threats. She's in there for murder, I'm told, killed her husband for cheating. Would have killed the girl too, except that the chair wasn't fast enough to get her before she made her escape. Yep, I figure, she'll carry through on the threat. And has some understanding of what it is to be the target of a woman's breach of solidarity, need to use her genitals as power. I wonder if Tiffany is taking the threat seriously, how she'd move fast enough with us all locked in house eight together. I'm sad for Tiffany, seeing how much of her personality is carried in the labels 'whore' and 'hooker'.

As I lie in bed, listening to the whirring grind of the sand mine, I try to think it all out, work out why Sandra's reaction feels so right, so justified. It all comes back to masks, I realise, remembering my conversation with Harrison a few days before. How we all wear them to survive, and sometimes, I suspect the masks we see on other people are just the ones we refuse to acknowledge ourselves wearing. My good luck, I suppose, is having found a space where I can see my own masks for what they are, and by extension understand the masks that other people wear. Some masks, I realise, only work in their native environment – if we wear them to the wrong party the dissonance makes us stand out. Instead of camouflaging us they make us targets. And this is what happened with Tiffany, the peacock feathers of her hooker mask made her stand out more in the green and blue jungle of the prison.

The value of sex work for me was the explicitness of the masks we all wore, the clearly defined demarcation between Amanda, Sonja and Angela. The constant process of putting my whore face on, wearing it as a shield for a shift, then taking it off at the end of the night, has given me the space to understand how we construct our multiple personas. Every make-up wipe I've filled with smeared foundation and smudged eyeliner

has brought me one step closer to understanding the narratives we hang around ourselves with our masks.

Remembering the girls in the Golden Apple turn on the woman whose mask slipped under the weight of the ice shows me why Bitchie needs to keep up her façade of sleaziness to grasp the power she holds over us. Knowing that Bitchie is faking it to get through the strip searches lets me see Tiffany's outrageous stories as a way of pushing away the women around her, reducing us back to the sexual competitors she's used to from brothels. And seeing this all, the strand of narrative that links all of our masks into a theoretical explanation for how we interact, allows me to finally understand the rightness of Sandra's response – as a long timer, in prison for over a decade already, she sees past the need for competition, understands that with the blue clad boot on our communal neck the need for solidarity is more important than sexual competitiveness. She knows, like no one who's doing a short lag ever can, that if we don't stand together then we fall together.

Chapter 8

This centre is at the forefront of the management and successful re-integration of female offenders back into the community.

All staff are trained and motivated to assist you in finding solutions for yourselves to address the reasons that led you to come to gaol.

This centre requires you to abide by the routine as well as participate in programs that will empower you to re-enter the community as a law-abiding member.

At Emu Plains you are given the opportunity to improve your mind, physical well being and role as a mother, woman and member of society.

Take care and good luck for the future.

- 'Finally', *Welcome to Emu Plains Information Package*

Thursday, 18 March 2010

Education Unit: Emu Plains Correctional Centre

Emu Plains, NSW

The houses at Emu Plains really do feel like homes; they give the inmates room to pretend we're not locked up, to create a patina of normality that is almost enough to wipe out the high fences and the razor wire. It's like the feel at Kathleen York House, the all-female rehab I attended – a group of women sharing a space, building rapport. But there's no getting out of here if you relapse (or 'bust' as the twelve-steppers call it), no weekly shopping trips, no daily twelve step meetings. We're still behind the fences, still expected to line up for muster three times a day. But we can watch TV till the wee hours of the morning, drink hot coffee in the middle of the night and shit without our cellmates looking on. So, yeah, kind of like being at home.

The girls in house eight are an eclectic bunch. There's Tiffany, of course, and her bunkmate and lover. Sandra is the woman in the wheelchair, who killed her husband – she's overweight and with greying hair, but her stories let me see past the wrinkles to a woman who must have been a stunner back in the day. There's also Joanne, heavily pregnant, and in her early twenties. This is her third child, the second to be born in custody, and should be going to live with her cousin and oldest child when it's born. The other rooms are filled by mostly short termers, two girls who are both doing less than a hundred days each for driving offences and another who failed a urine test in the drug court system. The feel in the house is relaxed. We make jokes about the screws, cook

dinner as a group, share coffee supplies and fill the communal bathroom with steam when we all squeeze in early morning showers. Incursions into the house by the screws are few – they duck in for muster first thing in the morning and last thing at night, counting us as we all line up next to our rooms, but other than that they're absent. The house is ours, we set the rules, manage the conflict, clean the toilets. Just like a real house.

The houses make the prisoners' jobs easier but in some ways they make the screws' jobs harder. While Mulawa, and, to some extent, Berrima, seem to be run according to the ancient principle of 'divide and conquer', this has been removed from Emus. The girls get into houses, make faux families, build communities around mostly shared goals (getting out prison in one piece) and principles (don't fuck with other crims). It's like *Big Brother*, except that the housemates here seem to have found some ways to grasp at power, developed some techniques to argue back, tweak the system. And we don't get to nominate each other for eviction, except by using violence. As I settle into the house and watch screws ignore muttered insults and giggling groups of inmates I wonder where the line is, how the system manages to keep control in the face of this communal power and simmering not-quite-conflict.

Emu Plains has both a library and an education unit, open and available to all inmates, regardless of employment status. It doesn't matter if you work full time, the opening hours mean that you can still get in and read books, learn stuff. It's the first evidence I've seen during this visit of a prison valuing the rehabilitation of the crims as much as their labour, and I'm pumped to get in and find out how it all works. I can't get a job at Emus till I've done the Occupational Health and Safety course so my first week is spent hanging out in Edu and the library.

You can wander into the library, a light-filled space that looks out onto the afternoon muster line, grab a book, settle down into a beanbag and read. Or you can check the book out, take it back to your house and sit in the sun on the veranda and read. You can even hang out in the library with the two prisoner librarians and talk about books. The librarian in charge has a degree in English Lit and is in for drug offences. We share a common loathing of *Madam Bovary*, which we discuss at length.

The Edu Unit has a building all of its own, a warren of small rooms that make me think it might have previously been badged 'clinic' or maybe 'reception'. The main wall as you enter is painted with a bigger than life-sized mural of the Mad Hatter's tea party scene from *Alice in Wonderland*. Black and white checks undulate their way along the wall from the entrance, leading to the back wall where Alice, the Hatter and Ratty all

frolic at a loaded table. The Caterpillar and Cheshire Cat both float in the background looking smug.

‘Get that one,’ I say to Steve the Education Officer on my first visit, pointing to the mural. ‘Totally feel like I’m down the rabbit hole.’

‘Oh,’ he says, looking genuinely surprised, ‘hadn’t thought of it that way before.’

‘Seriously?’ I laugh at him. ‘How could you see it any other way?’

‘A few inmates wanted to do it a couple of years ago and there was money left over in the budget for paint, so we let them,’ he says.

I wonder how anyone couldn’t make that connection, could look at the mural every day and not grasp the intertextuality. I guess if you worked with the mural it would fade into the background pretty quickly, overshadowed by less fantastical madness.

On my second visit to Edu, Steve wonders if I’m the inmate with the university degrees.

‘Yep,’ I say to him, ‘that would be me.’

I’m not surprised that he knows I’m here; it seems my background is rare enough to get them talking. He tells me that the Edu admin girl is getting out in eight days and they’re going to be looking for someone to replace her. It’s the highest paid job in the prison, he tells me, coming in at almost \$70 a week, and all I need to do is a test to prove I can use Word and Excel. I think back to Classo and Mr America and am once again bitter that my degrees transmute in this system to make a full-time week of my work worth a few hours of equal effort on the outside. I tell him that I’m aiming to get home detention but that if that fails I’ll come back to him about the job.

Steve gets my back up with hints of sleazy but I try to ignore it and assume the best. I’m trying to look past the blue with the screws more often, look for hints of human, but something about him triggers my alarms. It might be the way he talks down to the inmates, or how he invites me into his office to talk but doesn’t offer me a seat. I’ve dealt with worse in prison, I think, and so I talk to him anyway.

To distract from the wait for Wednesday, 24 March, I chat to Steve about the lack of academic material in the library and ask if he could find me something a bit meatier, maybe download some Foucault or similar on power and smuggle it in.

Back in Berrima, I was sent a photocopy of the first chapter from *Discipline and Punish* but it was returned to sender as contraband. It may have been that the torture of Robert-Francois Damiens was too graphic for prison but as ‘The UN Convention on

Prisoner Rights' was also marked RTS, I have to assume there's a general policy against documents that might let us think too deeply about incarceration.

Steve promises to give research a go and on my third visit hands me a printout from Warren Farrell's *The Myth of Male Power*. It's chapter fifteen 'From Husband Sam to Uncle Sam: Government as Substitute Husband'. I'm sceptical but decide to give it a go. From this photocopy, I learn that it's my job to allow men to look after me and that I've been programmed into letting the government look after me instead because 'feminism and government [have become] taxpayer-supported women's unions'.

I've got one degree and honours up on Steve, education-wise, and now he's proselyting to me about how feminism has stripped away male power?

'Feminist ideology, initially opposed to male-only clubs in the areas of male dominance, soon supported female-only clubs in areas of female dominance,' I read, hearing it in Steve's slightly snide voice. 'Like communism, feminism went from being revolutionary to dictating politically correct ideology. And, like communism, this political correctness was supported most strongly in the universities.'

Ah, the good old pinkos-under-the-bed paranoia, I think to myself.

'It was an interesting read,' I say to him on my next visit, 'but pretty one-sided and mildly contentious to me, considering, well you know, I'm a feminist who went to university.'

'I figured you were,' he laughs as he says this. 'I hear there's been some conflict in your house, thought you might like to think about some alternatives to the feminist diatribe, other ways that power can be split up. I know most of you Arts graduates subscribe to the "all men are bastards" line, but maybe this taste of feminism in action might have you looking for options.'

You fucker, I say in my head, power tripping on my need for some actual reading, trying to push your own misogynistic agenda. I wonder what a guy who plays these kinds of games is doing working in a women's prison; shouldn't he be giving the news of the pinko commie lesbian uprising to male inmates? Spreading the good word of the men's movement? I conclude that he's probably here because it's close to home and pays well. Probably lost out on a few gigs to women and decided they are easier to handle when you're wearing keys and they're wearing green, I think, in my own moment of gender stereotyping.

'Tell me if you want anything else to read,' Steve says as I'm walking out the door.

I don't go into Edu much after this conversation and when I do I avoid Steve's office.

But maybe Steve and Warren Farrell are right about some things. Us nasty feminists really do support 'female-only clubs in areas of female dominance'. Like women's flat track roller derby. It's six weeks and three days since I've been on skates and the lack of exercise and contact with my derby community are really starting to grate. They don't know where I am, what's going on for me; I've been too ashamed to tell them. But now I'm really starting to wish I had. A group visit from the league I started in Wollongong would really help shake some of this crap off.

*26 January 2009
Oxford Hotel
Wollongong, NSW*

Australia Day may not have been the best day to schedule a roller derby planning meeting but I live in the kind of bubble where I forget about these nationalistic holidays so on Australia Day 2009 I rocked up early to the Oxford Hotel in Wollongong and freaked out for a while over the idea that no-one would show. The air was filled with the smell of barbequing sausages. People did come, four of them. Two never came back and one dropped out after breaking her tailbone skating in a car park. The fourth, Diane, came to the next meeting, and the one after that, and to everything from there on in. She became my vice president after we were incorporated and I was convinced to take the lead role.

That first meeting was still productive, despite the low turnout; it put a fire under me to promote, promote, promote. At our next meeting, almost a month later, we had just under thirty people turn up. After a lucky meeting with a journalist I knew in the mall we lined up a photo shoot with the local rag, *The Illawarra Mercury*, and in early March an article appeared on page three with twenty women, posed in roller skates and our best approximation of derby chic, on the grass in front of the region's iconic lighthouse. Wollongong Illawarra Roller Derby was off the ground and ready to roll.

I first met roller derby on the ABC in November 2008, in a doco called *Roller Derby Dolls*. The show covered a start-up league in Queensland. For someone who'd never played a team sport, this game looked like a dream. The women who played roller derby were tough and uncompromising; they wore short shorts and fishnets and hit

each other really hard. Roller derby is a full-contact sport, played mostly by women (well, back in those days; men started playing again around 2011). Players wear old-school quad-style roller skates and a crap tonne of safety gear. They skate around a flat oval track, using full body blocks to either help their team score points or stop the other team scoring. A game goes for sixty minutes and hundreds of hours of training, planning and organising go into making that sixty minutes happen. The sport is set up around do-it-yourself principles, with leagues establishing as not-for-profit organisations, raising their own funds and appointing committees to run things.

I'd never played a team sport, never worked on a committee, never been close friends with a large group of women, but I decided to start a league in Wollongong. I brainstormed with my housemates and reverse engineered the name Wollongong Illawarra Roller Derby to make the acronym WIRD (pronounced weird). Starting in December 2008, I printed off stickers and posters with the words 'Wollongong needs derby' and stuck them in every shop, pub and window I could find. I stuck stickers on garbage bins, bus stops and everything I owned. I set up a Facebook page, an email account and agitated. I talked to the people who had started other local leagues – Sydney, Newcastle, Canberra. I networked. And then we held the planning meeting.

Creating roller derby from scratch was a hard job and being the founder of a league may have been the hardest job there was. For the first year I was president, media coordinator and sponsorship wrangler. It was hard work – I very nearly broke myself (not to mention it was the same year I did honours at University). But none of these roles was the hardest part of the job. The hardest part of the job was learning how to wrangle the ever-increasing group of women who flocked to the league.

Women who play derby are a unique bunch. They come from diverse backgrounds, as journalists love to highlight. In WIRD there were mothers, small business owners, students, and public servants. There were women who had been champion speed skaters and those who'd never skated before. I fell into the middle ground, having done roller skating as a sport in high school, but then not skated for more than fifteen years. There were women who knew how to function collaboratively with other people and women who didn't. We all gave up our spare time to the derby gods, worked our butts off (literally and figuratively) to make derby happen in Wollongong. But we didn't do it easily. 'Derby drama' is what we call the many issues that arise – the personality clashes, the poor governance practices, the bullying, intimidation and outright bitchiness that goes along with getting a bunch of powerful women, asking them to obliterate each other on the track and then come together to

perform the voluntary duties that go into making a league run. But 'derby drama' can minimise the impact of behaviours that would be unacceptable in any other area.

Learning to navigate 'derby drama' was harder than turning up to meetings and photo shoots and fundraisers and thinking I would be the only one there. Learning to function with 'derby drama', to find ways to keep the league striving towards being an ethical example of the sport's core principle of 'by the skaters, for the skaters', taught me how to keep my own emotional responses mostly under control in the face of actions that seemed designed to undermine not only WIRD, but the sport as a whole. Sitting in meetings and listening to people who did nothing but disparage the efforts of those who did everything showed me how some women can respond to power, how they can challenge control without being willing to take responsibility for carrying it. At one particularly difficult meeting I tried to hand off the sponsorship role to someone, anyone, else in the league. I was informed, by a woman who did little besides foster drama, that since I was best at the job, I was obliged to just keep on doing it. She argued loudly and in her most unchallengeable voice that my education and confidence made me a natural in this role and that asking anyone else to take over would damage the league.

'You're always trying to hold the league back, Angela,' she spat with animosity, and heads around the table in the bistro of the RSL nodded along with her.

I walked out of that meeting broken, feeling like it was all my fault. What I didn't realise at the time was that this was scapegoating in action, that almost mystical set-up that seems to happen in some groups of women where there has to be a sliver of grit in the oyster for the rest of the group to feel they're doing okay. As long as the group has an individual to niggle at, to push out of the main body, then that prevents them having to take on too much responsibility for their own shit.

Since the game is new to many people, and I have the derby disease of needing to talk about it constantly, here's the stock standard basics of roller derby spiel: Derby is a full contact sport, played on quad roller skates. There is no ball. Players form into two teams, with five players from each team on the track at once. Four players from each team make up the pack. These skaters need to stay within ten feet of each other and play simultaneous offence and defence. One player from each team wears a star on her helmet and acts as the jammer, or point scorer. The sixty minutes of play is broken into two-minute shifts called jams. The jammers start play behind the other skaters and after breaking through once and lapping the pack, they the start to earn one point for each

player they pass. The pack can block their progress with shoulders, hips and butts and assist with whips, pushes and pulls. There are penalties for unsafe blocks, fighting and abusing officials and fans. The game can get crazy and needs officials to keep it rolling.

I'd always felt drawn to the striped side of the game but kept it a secret from most of the league. Referees weren't held in high esteem at WIRD, another unfortunate side effect of making a sport with so many people who'd never played team sports and didn't see the value of officials. Officials – according to WIRD – were the collective lump of grit in the oyster of derby that just stopped players having fun. More than once I'd heard that refs were there to stop skaters playing the game, that they were control freaks, only wanted to tell players what to do. This attitude made it hard to get refs to train with the league and by May 2009 we had exactly zero prospects for the job. Derby is a rough sport and it takes up to twenty on- and off-skates officials to put on a game, so having no-one willing to do this job after five months as a league was problematic. By March we'd found an indoor venue, a small community hall just big enough to fit a track on which meant we could stop training in car parks. We began having our first mock games, or scrimmages, on this track. There was a foot of space between the outside of the track and the brick walls, the apexes of the track were always coated with dust which blew in under the doors and since the hall was also used for after school care there was often crushed up food and spilled drink to contend with. My decision to jump to the inside of the track, officially become an official, was made at this venue.

I was skating in a referee-less scrimmage in this tiny hall when I found another mask and became Syntax, the official. I was at the back of the pack, with seven other skaters in front of me making up the pack. The jammers were off on the other side of the track, doing their initial pass before they could start scoring. Without refs, we had no way of knowing if their passes were legal or how many points they actually scored, but we were all high on the derby. There was a fire hydrant cupboard on a wall just at the start of one of the straights, coming out of a turn, and like all the best fire hydrant doors, this one had a handle to open the door. I was coming around the curve and into the straight, eyes pinned on a skater in front of me when I saw her arm stretching out towards the door. She's going to hook her finger into that handle, I thought to myself, someone should do something about that. Before the thought was even through my head, she hooked her pinkie finger into the handle. Her trajectory pulled her forward and I watched the finger bend backwards, twist her around. Watched her body crash into the floor and dropped into a single knee slide to stop myself running into her. All of this happened in slow motion, my breathing loud in my ears. I'd later come to know this

slowed vision intimately, recognise it as a referee really tapping into their flow, putting their all into the job. I'd see my knowing what was going to happen as 'perception triage', my brain reading all the possible signs and outcomes and directing my eyes to where they needed to be. At the time I just thought I was catastrophising. But catastrophising in a way that made me perfect for the stripes.

At the next training session I wrapped foam I brought from home around the handle, padding it and filling the space behind it. And Syntax the roller derby referee was born. Like Sonja, and Amanda before her, Syntax played a big part in shaping me, shaping how I interacted with the world and dealt with prison. Syntax was a ladder I climbed, with burning thighs and screaming calves, to learn about how to handle control, how to stay calm, how to talk to people with a beige and neutral face.

There's a saying among derby people, memorialised on booty shorts and in song – 'roller derby saved my soul'. Roller derby didn't save my soul, but roller derby refereeing well may have, despite the damage it did to my relationship with WIRD.

28 November 2009

Sports HUB

University of Wollongong, NSW

WIRD's first public game of roller derby took place less than a year after that planning meeting at the Oxford. I'd argued for a minimum of twelve months between our first training session in a car park in North Wollongong and putting on a game but got shouted down at meetings, told once again that I was trying to hold the league back. I wasn't coping very well with negotiating the contradictory obligations of leading a league that followed best derby practice and trying to keep the rest of the committee happy. And things got worse after I became a referee.

WIRD's first home game was a smashing success, selling out the University's multi-purpose sporting venue with over a thousand people. I was head referee, wrangling a crew of twenty-one officials. I'd begged the more experienced refs from Sydney to handle the head ref job but they insisted I take it.

'This is your league,' they said, 'you've earned the right to lead this crew.'

I did a terrible job, compared to what I would later learn about head refereeing, but for my first go as an on-skates official I was all over it. The skaters had split into green and purple teams; they played like champions, mostly sporting, with just an example or two of poor sportsmanship. I have no idea which team won, but was reasonably confident it was the team that scored the most points. Which meant I'd done

my job well. When an audience member dropped a lighter from the mezzanine level onto the track I saw it and removed it before the skaters arrived. When a skater chose to stop playing in the middle of a jam I remembered that tricky bit in the rules about whistling it dead, stopping the game and removing the skater. The work and research I'd shovelled into learning how to ref showed and I finished the game feeling like I'd done the best job I could do.

The skaters didn't seem to agree. Or if they did agree, the animosity I'd earned by arguing for doing things the 'right' way and becoming a ref made it impossible for them to say so. Packing up the venue after the game went in a blur, the tape and rope that made the track needed to be pulled up, the equipment all packed away, skates and gear needed to be stuffed into bags and then there was the after party.

Walking into the party wasn't nice. The skaters from both teams were clumped together in the beer garden of the local pub. They were still wearing their 'boutfits', ripped fishnets, shorts skirts, shorter shorts. Everywhere I looked there were faces flushed with adrenalin, surrounded by sweaty helmet hair. Smudged make up and face paint. Shoulders marked with the ghosts of numbers, either drawn on with texta before the game or printed in reverse from shoulder checks during the game. I'd twisted my ankle on the way into the game but carried on despite it, knowing that the head ref job didn't give the space to rest-ice-compress-elevate. As I stood in the doorway to the beer garden, it throbbed and tweaked with pain when I tried to put weight on it. I tried to focus on this instead of my anxiety but the anxiety won out. Taking another step into the beer garden would mean choosing one of the groups to approach, a table of revellers to attach myself to. The group closest to me was clustered around the woman who had tried to punch me the first time I called a penalty on her. No going over there. The one off in the corner, under a cloud of cigarette smoke, was mostly committee members who'd shouted down my arguments that we were pushing the league too hard too fast. One of them saw my looking, made eye contact for a second and then swivelled her body towards the group, laughing loudly. Not heading there either. Diane was sitting with a smaller group, off to my right, and as she saw me she smiled and waved me over. I started to breathe again and hobbled in her direction, only to have my path intersected by one of the original members from the car park days.

'Nice work today, Syntax,' she said, putting a hand out for me to shake. I shook it because there was no way I was getting one of the giant celebratory hugs that I could see skaters still sharing around me.

'I did the best I could,' I said to her. 'It was a great game to work on.'

No one else approached and so I chatted to Diane for about ten minutes before leaving. She pointed out that I made this happen, that my hard work and dedication had paid off and that Wollongong had derby now, thanks to me. I could hear her words but not understand them. Derby was here, it had happened because of my work, but I didn't feel part of it. We talked for a bit longer and then I left, dragging my housemates and son along with me.

As I stood next to the highway trying to hail a taxi, throbbing ankle held off the ground, tears poured down my face and I mourned for the beautiful derby dream I'd held for the last year. At the time I didn't understand what had gone so wrong; I didn't see how my vision of an ethically sound volunteer-run sporting club had turned into this bitchfest of nastiness. I didn't understand how calling these women out had led to them hating me so much. I didn't get the basic concepts of how a group of women can respond to conflict.

I wasn't particularly experienced as president of a not-for-profit group, but goddamn it, I knew the dynamics that could happen in groups of women.

November 1997

Kathleen York House: Rehabilitation Program

Glebe, NSW

In November 1997 it was a couple of weeks before my twenty-first birthday and I'd been a resident of the live-in drug and alcohol rehabilitation program, Kathleen York House, for nearly three months when the whole house got put on restrictions.

KY, as the residents called it, was a two-storey eight-bedroom mansion on a leafy street corner in Glebe. The house was ringed-in by rusting but ornate wrought-iron fences. It had jacarandas growing close on three sides of the house and they'd exploded bushels of lavender flowers across the yard and verandas of the stately home. I'd been clean off heroin since three weeks before walking in the doors at KY and it was this house and the required daily twelve-step meetings that had kept the needle out of my arm for that long. The jacarandas – always one of my favourite flowers – were like an extra gift from the universe for finding this place.

KY's twelve-month program was for women only. Mothers entering KY were encouraged to bring their children with them if there was room, so I had Dex with me. This was unique in the Sydney rehab scene and had attracted me to the house. The program was 'total abstinence', which meant if you were caught using or drinking just once, you were booted and had to start the admission process from scratch. Not to

mention that you'd probably need to do another detox first. To maintain our recovery, all residents attended daily Narcotics or Alcoholics Anonymous meetings in interchangeable rooms with stackable chairs spread out on scuffed lino floors. KY was mostly self-directed – staff hung out in the office during normal working hours but the residents were left to supervise themselves (and each other) during evenings and weekends.

Like a lot of people who hit the 'hab, I was rediscovering self-expression. I was enjoying wading out of the dull cloud of leftover-from-the-night-before makeup and hastily selected tracksuit pants or hooker clothes that were my habitual using wardrobe. My hair was long and I brushed it regularly. I wore giant safety pins through my ears and a necklace with a purple bell on it. I spent ages in the mornings choosing outfits of ripped jeans or denim overalls. I wore the overalls with one strap undone and hanging down the back. I was confident, feeling like the program might just be working. You know what they say – or maybe you don't: it works if you work it.

I worked it. The girls in KY house became a replacement family. On Saturday nights, we all watched *Xena: Warrior Princess* and on Sunday mornings we'd get warm hazelnut croissants from the bakery and dance with the kids to the videos on *Rage*. We watched each other openly for signs of emotional distress. We talked out the pain in small gatherings on the many staircases connecting the split-level rooms. We also watched each other furtively for signs of current or impending busting, which we then talked out in our tri-weekly three-hour group sessions with rehab workers. We were family in intent but gaolers in practice. But, just like roller derby, we needed to have the grit in the oyster.

The self- and other-surveillance worked well for me, but I was there voluntarily. I wanted to stop taking drugs and was young enough that the constant supervision of childhood wasn't too distant a memory. There were other women in the house who had real problems with the idea of being supervised and commented on by their peers. Kerrie, for instance, in her late-twenties, was there on a court order and knew that if she used drugs, busted out of the program, then the next stop was gaol. And for Mandy it was a deal with the Department of Community Service, or DoCS, to keep custody of her eleven-year-old daughter, which stopped her plunging a pick in her arm. Just like me, Kerrie and Mandy participated fully in the processes of spying and gossiping that went along with a house full of women in early recovery supervising each other.

The hub of the program was Kylie, the coordinator of the program and a recovering addict with legitimate clean time. In her mid-thirties, softly spoken and

seemingly unflappable, Kylie kept a calm unjudging face, no matter the topic. Without Kylie, KY House would have slipped into chaos. She ran our group sessions and intervened with the stuff that was too big to be worked out in stair circles. Kylie was the one at the house when police turned up to question residents or ambulances needed to be called. But Kylie wasn't the gaoler; most of the time it was the residents who alerted her to the need for intervention. Kylie was the lock but we turned the key. We voluntarily made ourselves the screws in this semi-consensual prison.

On a Friday afternoon about a week before my twenty-first birthday Kylie called an emergency house meeting for KY. We gathered in our usual group spot, a ring of lounge chairs around a large coffee table in the big front room of the house. The high ceilings, arched window frames and double doors that opened onto the garden remembered a more glamorous time: time when the furniture was not covered in scuffed apricot vinyl covering, when the people who lived here weren't battling addiction. This room was forgiving though, it welcomed us to spill our twitching insides into the therapy circle we created with our ring of squeaky but comfortable seats. It was a good room to hold emergency house meetings, laden as it was with the safety of therapy. It was also a good space to rub out the bits of grit. This day, one piece of grit was going to be pushed out, a misshapen, malformed pearl.

Once we are all settled in the seats Kylie started. 'I know what has been going on over the last couple of weeks.'

Pointed glances shot around the circle of eight or nine women.

'We all know what happened with Lydia. She'd been drinking on visits with her granddaughter for several weekends and I thank everyone who helped bring this to our attention.'

The glances turned smug now, with a peppering of self-righteous '*hmms*'. We all knew what had happened; we knew intimately. I'd smelt the stale wine in her warm morning hugs, seen her obsessively cleaning the kitchen, struggled to get eye contact in groups and just known. Someone had known and gone to Kylie. One of the women in this circle had screwed the key on Lydia. We all knew that this was how power functioned in the house: the collective whole controlling the individual's behaviour.

'As you also know, we had to ask her to leave us as a result of her choice to drink.'

Knowing nods bobbed around the circle. We all remembered the core tenet of living in KY house – if you want to live here, do not use. If you do use, expect to be found

out by your peers, and if you're found out, it's out the door. No second roll of the dice in this game.

'However, before she left Lydia brought some things to my attention. There has been some other acting out happening with some of our residents, particularly at some of the bigger NA meetings.' Kylie's face was grave as she logged our reactions and noted the non-verbal admissions of guilt.

There was rustling around the circle as guilty parties exchanged bitter snatches of stare. How dare she fucking betray us like that, the eyes shouted, how dare she breach our trust? The people behind those eyes had enjoyed the role of gaoler but found themselves uncomfortable inverted to prisoner.

'I'd like to take this opportunity to remind you all that the program at KY House is not only total abstinence but that you're also expected to remain celibate while on the program. Sexual acting out can be as damaging to your recovery as drinking or using. There's a strict curfew for the house and you are expected to obey this.'

Around the circle the people who knew all avoided looking at the people who'd been doing. The people who'd been doing glared defiantly at the people who knew. A ripple of deflated solidarity ran between the seats, slumped shoulders and weighted heads.

The people who had celebrated the uncovering of Lydia's drinking had become the focus of the inquiry. Power had shifted, tilted the circle.

Mandy, who argued with her addiction to retain custody of her daughter, leaned forward into the circle and glared at the dirty coffee cups stacked on the coffee table. 'How can you even trust what Lydia said?'

Kerrie, colluding with the grit approach, agreed from the seat next to her, 'She's probably just lashing out 'cause she was busted.' Her voice was strident and rung off the arches of the ceiling.

Kylie waited for the rest of the residents to respond to this but we were wary of Mandy. We were all in group the day that we tried to discuss Mandy's habit of leaving empty coffee cups on the coffee table. We'd flinched as she screamed at us all and tipped over the coffee table full of dirty cups, yelling that we had no right to make her do shit. Mandy was the house control freak and now that she'd declared her standpoint, the group knew better than to disagree.

'Okay Mandy,' Kylie said in her calmest voice, 'besides having drunk while on the program, is there any other evidence for Lydia's dishonesty? Any reason why we shouldn't believe her now?'

‘Well obviously she was just trying to get herself out of shit.’

Maria had been there the longest and was coming up to twelve months. She was almost ready to leave the house, finish the program. Maria mirrored Kylie’s tone and body language as she spoke, ‘We all know that once you bust, you’re out the door.’

Without the authority of Kylie, her reason meant little to Mandy.

‘What the fuck do you care, Maria? Lydia being gone is just one less person for you to snitch on. Anyway, I wouldn’t be surprised if you were the one who dogged to Kylie about us at the meetings.’

So it was on the table. Mandy admitted to Kylie, the group and herself that she’d been part of the rooting in toilets at meetings crew. I’d also been part of the crew – no rooting in toilets but I’d been having some pretty steamy pash sessions at said meetings, knowing I was breaking the rules but doing it anyway. I figured Mandy’s rage was coming from a similar shame to the one that made my face hot and stuck the back of my thighs to the vinyl of the sofa. My shame turned me into a quiet mouse while Mandy’s made her explode.

The collaborative voluntary prison we’d all checked ourselves into suddenly seemed more real as our fellow gaoler and inmate raged about the injustice of the program. Mandy ranted against enforced celibacy and the unfairness of the word of a busted alcoholic taking precedence over her actions as a still-clean-and-sober resident. It was so obviously the lashing out of a guilty party and I suddenly saw the stupidity of arguing against the accusations. Kylie knew. Everyone knew. Mandy’s lying and arguing was making us all look silly.

Kylie was talking about putting the whole house on restrictions, confining us to selected NA and AA meetings and cancelling all social outings. As she talked in her calm, relaxed voice, Mandy and Kerrie became even more infuriated, shaking their heads and gritting their teeth. We’d been planning a party for my twenty-first and the restrictions meant we were going to have to cancel this, but I could tell there was no arguing Kylie out of this. It was time for us to suck it up, drink a big fat cup of concrete and harden the fuck up.

‘We all know what happened and we can’t keep using Lydia as an excuse.’ My voice wavered and as I shifted uncomfortably the vinyl under my legs made a slight squeak.

I regretted speaking instantly.

Mandy and Kerrie swivelled their heads towards me and Kylie made a slight sucking noise as she pulled air in between her teeth. Outside a fire engine siren started

up in the street, echoing off the walls. I breathed through this reprieve and braced myself to keep going.

‘We did the stuff that Lydia talked about. Let’s just cop the restrictions and try to get on with it,’ my voice was shaking and I could feel redness flooding my cheeks. I kept talking anyway. ‘You guys know as well as I do that what is being said is true so why are you so angry?’

I stated my opinion and did not die. Owned my part in the matter and the shame didn’t dissolve me. Neither Mandy nor Kerrie could voice any coherent objections to the restrictions. They were too focussed on making sure that they came out of this with their pride intact. Their arguments against the restrictions became more strident and hysterical but Kylie refused to budge. The house was on restrictions for a month.

It wasn’t the last time I broke a rule in rehab but it did teach me that if you want to ask others to be accountable, want to police their accountability, then you need to be equally dedicated to owning your own shit. You can point your finger at the grit, scream blue murder about how it’s not your fault, but somewhere along the line you’ve got to own said shit. Whether you’re the grit or the oyster tongue, you’ve got to play it out.

Thursday, 18 March 2010

*Muster Line: Emu Plains Correctional Centre
Emu Plains, NSW*

Bitchie is everywhere at Emus so there is never a chance to forget her uniquely flamboyant style of being a screw. I’m coming to realise that if prison is an oyster, it works best when the prisoners are the tongue and screws like Bitchie are the grit. The constant low-level undulations of communal anger at the blue-clad grit lubricate the crims into solidarity.

Bitchie brings the same strange almost-erotic feel to muster as she does to strip searches, as though imagining the fully clothed inmates lined up by room and house order as single naked prisoners bending over for her pleasure. Bitchie runs most of the musters when she is on duty, supported by a crew of officers who stand around the periphery, the referees in the prison game, hands clasped impartially behind backs while they keep a tight eye out for penalties from the crims.

The lunchtime musters at Emus are one of the only times that all the prisoners are together, meeting up in the undercover area outside the library to muster up on the green painted lines and be counted off against the list in the large cardboard-paged

book held by the screws. The horn sounds once at exactly 2:55pm, and we all report for the 3pm count. Lining up can take anything from a minute or two to over a quarter of an hour, depending on the compliance of the inmates and the distractions on offer. The day that two guys drove a truck down near the back fence, between the prison and the sand mine – an ‘excluded zone’ cut off from public access – and were chased out by a bunch of screws on foot, muster took forever. Getting those lines organised took ages, with all the crims still craning their necks to see down to where the truck had been, watch for more Benny Hill action from the screws in blue. Girls were running out of their spot on the lines to pass on gossip about whether the guys had been there to make a drop, or set up an escape.

Muster is also a chance for the screws to pass on messages to all of the inmates, and March 18 is one of those days.

‘Okay,’ Bitchie declares from her spot at the front of the pack, ‘there’s a couple of things for us to talk about today before we do muster.’

A verbal ripple runs through the ranks of prisoners as the more experienced at this game bemoan the extra time this is going to add to the line up.

‘The first thing we need to talk about is your personal hygiene.’

A girl in the row behind me snickers and a screw at the end of our row shuts her down with a glare and a ‘psst’. An involuntary shudder rolls down my spine at the memory of Chihuahua Face’s rant.

‘The officers don’t want to be dealing with your poor hygiene when it comes to searches.’

The snicker is bigger this time, like a Mexican wave of mirth running up and down the lines.

‘You can laugh all you like, but we’re not going to keep handling your filth. It’s not our job to look at your filthy shit smeared underpants, or to smell your dirty unchanged menstrual pads.’

The screw at the end of our row is male and I glance at him, ashamed for him to be hearing this women’s business. His face is blank and I assume that this fits into his category of ‘another typical day at the office’.

‘So, from today there are new rules for visits. If you attend for your visit but your hygiene is not up to acceptable standards, your visit will be refused. Your visitors will be told why they cannot see you – complete with all the disgusting details – and will be sent away. Multiple infractions will lead to your visiting rights being suspended until you can prove that you are capable of looking after yourself.’

She pauses for sixty seconds or so, letting the mass of green respond to this. A few girls jostle and rib each other, calling out the names of people they think may have inspired the new rules. The screws watching the rows shake their heads and look disgusted at the rabble.

I'm genuinely not expecting what comes next, don't think there is any way I could.

'There's been a lot of books taken out of the library,' Bitchie starts up again, voice raised to cut through the joking, 'and not all of them have been returned by their due dates.'

I look up the line, past the other girls from my house and through the library windows. The lights in there are turned off but the windows let in enough light that I can see the rows of shelves covered in books, the stacks piled on top of shelves. The display of Harry Potter books along the top of the shelf closest to me only has one gap where the fourth or fifth in the series has been borrowed. I try to imagine how many books could actually be missing.

'There will be an amnesty period where books can be returned. You have until Saturday morning to get all books back to the library or we are closing it down. For now we are suspending all loans, so even if you borrowed books yesterday, they are due back immediately.'

There are people behind me actually laughing out loud and I remember the line in the *Welcome to Emus* package that talking on muster is a chargeable offence. I figure that laughing is just the same as talking and so stifle my own giggles.

'This is no joke,' Bitchie declares loudly, though the almost-smirks on the faces of several screws convince me that the crims aren't the only ones amused by this new turn of events.

'Saturday morning at nine am the library will be running an audit and if there are any books missing off those shelves, we are shutting it down for the foreseeable future. This is not open to discussion.'

As if to illustrate the importance of literature, she flips open the muster book and walks down to the back of the line up to start the count at house one. The girls respond to their names with 'yeps', 'heres' and 'okays' while I wonder about the logistics of actually shutting the library down, trying to work out how I'm going to function without reading material.

It seems so petty and ridiculous. This, I think as Bitchie counts us off, is exactly the kind of arbitrary power play that the women at WIRD were worried about. There's no way to navigate a game with such an inexplicable set of rules.

Saturday, 20 March 2010

Muster Line: Emu Plains Correctional Centre

Emu Plains, NSW

By Saturday, Joanne, the pregnant girl from house 8, is stretched so tight that it seems she must either deliver the baby or burst open along the sides. She is hungry all the time and rocks up to muster with a plastic box of sliced beetroot in one hand and single-serve tubs of the horrible Tasty Dessert sticking out of every pocket. She lines up for muster, a few people along the row from me, and as the count starts she peels the lid off one of the Tasty Desserts and gulps it down in three big slurps. As she swallows I watch her low hung belly pulsing and wonder if it will be today. Watching her eat on muster has been a distraction for our house and those lined up in front and behind us. Bitchie's reminder that today is the end of the library amnesty slides right under the mass concern that we might be delivering a baby on the scuffed green line and dirty concrete.

The house has been filled with speculation on the timing of the labour. Last thing at night we all gather at Joanne's door to confirm she's still intact and first after unlock each morning the screws ask how she's going, if there's any pain, contractions. The library will be closed later today and I've been co-opted by Steve to help sort the shelves. I've done my OH&S now and so am able to be paid \$10 for what he guesstimates will be four days' work. I'm glad to still have access to the books but worried that I might miss the contractions starting, the excitement of a break in routine. Bitchie, on the other hand, cares naught for the impending labour. When she reaches our row she looks Joanne up and down, stares at the empty dessert cup lying next to her feet and the open box of beetroot slices clutched in her hand.

'No eating on muster,' she says, and wanders on down the rows with the muster book balanced against her breasts.

'No fucking compassion,' one of the girls between Joanne and I mutters. 'Would probably eat her own babies as soon as they fell out.'

The rows in front and behind us giggle but Bitchie doesn't even break pace.

There's a rumour that Joanne's mum will be transferred over from Dylwinnia when the baby is born, that they'll be shuffling our house so she can share a room with Joanne. I wonder why they don't transfer her beforehand and why Bitchie wouldn't try

to show just a trace of humanity in the face of this miracle. I assume she'd see it as a sign of weakness, a chink in her armour that we'd dive on immediately. I appreciate how the house gathered around Joanne, showed her without needing to say it that they supported her in the face of this adversity. I get why this support matters. We are nothing without solidarity; we are the communal whole that holds the system together.

Joanne goes into labour while I'm the library that day. She eats all the beetroot in the house before she does, but nobody minds a bit.

Tuesday: 23 March 2010

House 8: Emu Plains Correctional Centre

Emu Plains, NSW

On Tuesday morning the screws are late coming to unlock us. As the time for people to start reporting for work comes and goes, speculation about what's causing the delay increases.

'It's gotta be a raid,' Tiffany is sitting on the kitchen sink where she can peer out the window and down into the compound where the officers' hut is. 'Nothing else would keep them back this late.'

Since her dressing down from Sandra she's dropped the divisive talk and is doing all she can to fit in, be part of the family. She's even done the dishes a few times. Playing cockatoo, or lookout, is another way she's helping out now.

'She might have a point,' says Sandra. 'Been a while since we've had a ramp. Hope everyone's wearing clean underpants; don't want poor Birchie's stomach to turn.'

We all laugh and my laugh has the added juvenile incredulity behind it of hearing the woman in the wheelchair use the prison slang for a raid – 'ramp'. That's wheely funny, I think, quoting a joke my son has been laughing at for years. He's not here, besides in my head, and I miss him laughing at my not-funny joke.

The TV is on and we're mostly lounging around watching the morning news programs when we hear the wheels of a trolley rolling up to the front door and the keys turn in the lock. The TV is off and we're pulling ourselves out of the lounge chairs when the screws come through the door. There are more of them than usual for morning muster, screws outnumbering crims. As we move to the doors of our rooms they spread out and watch us closely. This is no regular muster, I think, that's for sure. The screws are wearing their normal uniforms but with vests that look like they'd deflect a shiv. There's extra pouches hanging from their belts and I think I recognise the shape of a

capsicum spray can on the screw who stands near our door. Things are getting serious, I think; they look more like riot squad than screws.

Bitchie is in her element as she strides in the door and stands, legs akimbo and hands on hips, like the captain of some particularly unruly pirate ship.

'Alrighty,' she declares, 'You all knew this was coming. Time for a raid, ladies.' The large wheeled trolley sits at the open door of the house and I can see a jumble of pillows and blankets piled in it.

'You will all remain standing next to your doors. The officers will be searching your rooms for library books and any other contraband. We'll be strip-searching you one at a time and then you'll be allowed out on the veranda to wait. After we are done you'll be locked into the house until the search is complete. Don't try to hide anything and don't leave the paved area while you are waiting out the front. And no talking.'

As she swivels towards room one, turning away from me, I see her keys dangling off her right hip and catch sight of a tiny set of handcuffs hanging from her key chain. I've seen these mini cuffs before. They are just big enough to go around an adult thumb and are marketed as 'thumb cuffs' in sex shops. In the kink scene people wear them as key chains or hang them from their rear view mirrors to advertise their leanings. I wonder for a second if Bitchie is a top or a bottom, likes bossing or being bossed, but the image of her hog tied with a ball gag is too much for me and I nearly start giggling. I'm shutting the line of thinking down as the closest screw gives me a shut-the-fuck-up look and I swallow my mirth. Just like a ref, I say to myself, show no sign of amusement. I slide my beige referee mask over my amused crim face and clasp one wrist with one hand behind my back, just like I do when I'm wearing stripes, to watch the ramp without laughing.

The screws are into room one, the room that Joanne was in before she went off to hospital to have the baby. The room is diagonally opposite mine and I can see the screws from where I stand. The room is tidy, feathered like the only nest she can get. Her bed is hospital neat, every corner tucked in tight. Good luck cards and pictures of her other two children are tacked onto the small notice board and a blanket which has been carefully dyed off-pink with beetroot juice is folded across the back of the chair. A small stack of books sits on the corner of the desk. The blanket is the first to go, and then the stack of books. Despite the search brief specifying books, the screws ramp the room thoroughly, tossing the pillow and sheets off the bed, opening cupboards and riffling through them, shaking out clothes and towels. They might be looking for books but from the vigorousness of their search I assume they have heard of tiny books. Or are

just including tiny things as 'contraband'. As the screws come out of Jo's room they meet the other pair coming out room two and wander together to rooms three and four. Their not-quite-riot vests look out of place in the homely setting. When the screws have finished in a room, Bitchie and her buddy take the inmates into the bathroom for a strip search. Strip searches to find hidden books? This is one rigorous raid.

Sandra's wheelchair-accessible bedroom with its open to the room ensuite is number seven, three doors up from me and next door to the communal bathroom. But searching her takes longer due to the wheelchair. Sandra can't get into the normal bathroom so she is searched in her room. There isn't space in there for the chair and two screws, so to follow the no solo screw strip search rule the officers stand outside the open door while Sandra is searched. The screws are done with rooms eight to nine and so we stand in a line outside the bathroom door and wait for Sandra's search to finish. From my spot at the end of the line I can see right past Bitchie to watch Sandra struggling to undress, still seated in her chair. The male screws who've been searching the rooms stand off to one side where the door frame blocks their view of the undressing woman but they keep a close eye on us. I wonder for a second whether they are watching us, waiting for our reactions to Sandra's predicament. That's silly, I think, but then remember the many hours I have whittled away on YouTube watching reaction videos to 'two girls, one cup'. Yeah, they're watching our reactions. I make my face rock smooth and try to not see the search out of the corner of my eye but can't look away. With the top half of her body naked and her eyes pinned on Bitchie's shoes, Sandra lifts up each breast, humiliation staining her cheeks. She bends forwards at the waist and fluffs her wisp-like grey hair out and then reaches down to the floor for her nightgown-cum-T-shirt. As she pulls this on, Bitchie reaches out with a foot and kicks the shower chair towards her.

'Out of the chair now, and get those pants off.'

Sandra groans melodramatically as she heaves her weight into the white plastic chair and starts tugging down her underpants. Bitchie grabs the wheelchair and pulls it out into the lounge room, shoving it towards the male officers.

'Make it thorough,' she snaps. 'And watch out for the seat, she's pissed in the chair for more than one search.'

I glance at Sandra's face and see a tiny smirk at the corner of her mouth. You go girl, I cheer in my head, you show those dirty fuckers. The screws search every inch of the chair, even taking the plastic grips off the handles to peer up inside the chrome

pipes. She'd have to be dedicated to reading to get the books up in there but they look anyway.

With Sandra done, the last three strip searches take less than ten minutes. Bitchie doesn't quite have the same sleazy vim and vigour that she's brought to our previous searches and I assume that searching the whole prison first thing in the morning must paint the naked female form in a whole different light. While Bitchie has been finishing off our searches, the other screws have torn apart the lounge, kitchen and laundry. The Christmas decorations are gone from the cupboards, as is the industrial-sized tub of Napisan that one of the laundry workers had smuggled back to the house. The stack of old *Readers Digests* have been taken from under the television. The bent tin lids we use to cut fruit and vegetables have been found hidden up inside the paper towel holder in the kitchen but surprisingly have been left lined up on the sink. Counting the stack of books from Jo's room and the magazines from the TV stand, maybe fifteen books have been found in house eight.

When the ramp is done the screws lock us back into the house and trundle off up the path to house nine, dragging their trolley full of blankets, pillows, loose tinsel, and a small selection of books, along behind them. It's another forty minutes until they come back to unlock us. The first room to be cleaned in this time is Jo's, a group effort by everyone but Sandra. She closes herself into her room and stays there until the keys turn in the outside door. When she comes back out, there is no sign of the humiliation that had burned her cheeks during the search.

I had wondered how the screws kept the balance of control at Emus and watching Sandra and Bitchy during this strip search made it clear. The casual sleaziness and disregard for human dignity, the petty power games of the raid, all acted as an add-on to the rattling and turning of the keys. There is no chance, in the face of such silly power playing, to forget that you're at the bottom of the heap.

Wednesday, 24 March 2010
Video Link Up: Emu Plains Correctional Centre
Emu Plains, NSW

Twenty-four hours after the Great Book Raid of Emu Plains I report to the video link up unit. The VLU here is integrated into the prison grounds, a small custom-built hut right in the middle of the grounds, surrounded by a chain-link fence. There is a small waiting lounge, with tea and coffee making facilities, a veranda out the front, clean toilets and the video link up room. A single screw hangs out in a tiny glassed-in office. I sit out the

front in the sun, my crocheting draped across my lap like I might actually have the focus to work on it. All I can think is that I may well have just spent my last night in prison, eaten my last prison-issue cardboard muesli. As I sip a cup of the premium latte sachets, one of the last from the box I got at Berrima, I look forward to a double flat white made by someone else, a black Ice Coffee Dare, a single macchiato.

‘I think we’ve found a loophole,’ the solicitor says to me on the phone. ‘Because you were sentenced before 1999 there is a precedent that means we may be able to get you parole instead of home detention. We’re going to try for that, but if it doesn’t work, don’t worry. It’s just a matter of formality for you to be approved for home detention.’

The actual hearing is quick, quicker than a strip search with Bitchie. The parole board are in their up-high chairs, Daniel is in the public gallery. My solicitor leans forward, hands on the desk, a picture of organisation and confidence. She states the case for the precedent and the board leave the room to deliberate. I have nothing with me in the VLU room but waiting has become a habit of late and I sit quietly until the board returns.

‘We have considered your request to have Ms Marino placed on parole rather than home detention,’ the head of the Parole Board says into the microphone. ‘Ms Marino, you have worked hard to make something of your life and deserve all admiration and respect for what you have achieved on the last thirteen years. While there are, indeed, grounds for the sentence to be converted to parole, we feel that society needs to see justice being served. You are to be released for a period of assessment with the Community Compliance Group. During this assessment you will be expected to follow the conditions of your order and any breaches will result in re-incarceration. Do you understand?’

I am shaking in the plastic chair. ‘Yes, thank you,’ I say, then remember where I am, ‘sir.’

Outside the room the screw asks me how it went and I am still shaking when I tell him I’m going home.

‘Get on down to admin,’ he says, ‘Give them this paperwork and hopefully they can release you at four. But at the latest you’ll be out by tomorrow morning. We can’t keep you for more than twenty-four hours.’

I go to admin. Stop at the phones to call Daniel, my partner.

Tell him, ‘I’m coming home. Yes, four o’clock; can’t wait to see you’.

Every person I walk past I tell that I’m going home today. I pack my stuff and rock up to reception at 3:30. Bitchie is on the desk and I get the honour of one more

strip search with her before I go. There's a plastic bag full of paperwork that I've collected over my stay but that's ignored, left sitting on the ground while I take my clothes off one more time.

'I knew we'd get on,' Bitchie says while I'm standing there in my underpants. 'We've got the same haircut.'

I snort and mutter thanks. She misspells my name on my prison release certificate but I don't care.

I'm getting out of mother-fucking prison.

Screw you, screw. The words run like a mantra in my head as I walk out the door to freedom.

Daniel hands me a black Ice Coffee Dare when I get in the car and I drain half of it in two gulps.

Sitting in the car on the drive back to Wollongong all I can do is laugh and cry. My brain quakes at the space around me, the wind in my face from the open windows. I'm wearing the khaki derby girl T-shirt, jeans that smell musty, my leather sandals.

Later, when I can think again, I look back at Bitchie and those last days in prison; I realise that she was the grit in the oyster of Emus but that this was a vital function. The solidarity that prisoners live by, the 'us' that survives the 'them', can only stay strong if we've got something to rally at. Arbitrary actions like the Great Book Raid are essential to bind us all together. Just like the system can't function without Sandras to keep the Tiffanys in line, it also can't function without screws like Bitchie (and Butchy McButch, Chihuahua Face and Mr America) to give the crims a reason to keep going, a reason to fight on. Every protagonist, I realise, needs an antagonist. All of a sudden I am terrified at the idea of home detention – how will I survive without others around me to lean on?

Chapter 9

Offenders serving home detention are subject to extensive conditions. These conditions are intended to constrain an offender's ability to an extent that approximates confinement in a minimum security correctional setting with access to external leave programs.

- 'Introduction to Home Detention', *Home Detention Operational Policy Manual*

Confinement to an offender's residence can create or exacerbate depressive symptoms. While a thorough assessment of all home detainees' risk of self-harm is undertaken during the home detention assessment period, supervising officers must continue to remain alert for any indicators of self-harm and respond to and such indicators promptly.

- 'Mental Health', *Home Detention Operational Policy Manual*

Wednesday, 24 March 2010

Home Sweet Home

Wollongong, NSW

Getting out of prison is not the end of it, not at all. The time I've spent in prison has been removed from my sentence but I still owe society eight months and fourteen days that I'll be paying by way of home detention.

When Daniel pulls the car up out the front of the house, I've unbuckled my seatbelt and am out before the engine is even switched off.

'Hi honey, I'm home,' I yell as I run up the stairs, setting off the budgies who yell in their cage on the front porch. The space around me is startling and I pause with my hand on the handle of the screen door. Inside I can hear Dex running from his room to greet me, Liz opening her door to call out to me. No more prison, I tell myself, and open the front door to hug my son.

'No more prison coffee,' I say, as I switch on the espresso machine and take a china cup out of the cupboard.

The kitchen is clean and Dex proudly tells me that he did the dishes because he knew I was coming home. I hug him for so long that he becomes twitchy and tries to pull away. Despite the visits and the phone calls I feel like the breach to our mother-son connection may be irreparable. I'll think about that later, do what I can to fix it; for now I just smile, pull him in for another hug, kiss his almost-man face.

'No more prison greens,' I yell ecstatically, as I tear of the khaki shirt and throw it into the washing basket.

No more prison; I'm home.

My house is a brick triple front, built in the sixties. It's comfortable but not luxurious, though there is a view from the front porch of the ocean and the five islands that give so many Wollongong businesses their name. I'd been spring-cleaning the day the police came and there are still signs of the work I put in that day. The washing baskets are behind the lounge, the linen that I folded waiting to be put away but the clothes baskets are filled with different piles. I do a bit of tidying, exuberant at being able to move from room to room without asking permission. I drink too many coffees, whenever I want. I start to breathe again.

While the sun sets on my first day out of prison I go out to the terraced back yard, lie flat on the grass and smoke a cigarette while I watch the stars come out. I've missed them so much. My ferns have died while I've been inside but the doves that I feed know I'm back and gather in the shrubs cooing at me for seed. It's good to be home.

Friday, 2 April 2010
Home Sweet Home
Wollongong, NSW

The screws who come to my house dress just like real people – no uniforms, no black boots. There's a short, dumpy woman, of Pacific Islander heritage, named Hannah, a tall woman with streaks of dignified grey through her ash blond hair named Kate. Hannah wears exercise pants and a large floral smock; Kate is in business pants and a button-down shirt. They show me their ID at the front door and are polite and friendly during the interview.

It's a long one. The first thing they do is take a comprehensive detailed criminogenic history. We cover my early childhood abuse, addictions, mental health issues, sex work. I'm asked about my family and questioned as to why I have no contact with them. I answer a long list of questions while Hannah notes down my answers on a large spreadsheet. I'll later find out that we've been completing the 'Level of Service Inventory' or the LSI, a statistical risk and needs assessment tool used to determine the level of security required to ensure I don't engage in further acts of criminality. Hannah isn't very smart and when she notes down my answers, it's in careful rounded letters, with multiple corrections. I've already coined the term 'secret squirrels' for my visiting-at-home screws and as I watch Hannah puffing out her already round cheeks and

sticking the tip of her tongue out I imagine her mouth full of nuts, chittering in a satisfied manner as she carries my secrets up her paperwork tree to hide them away for winter. I'm trying not to giggle when I make eye contact with Kate. She smirks and I wonder how much of what I was thinking has been showing on my face, how much I've been giving away.

Kate and Hannah explain the rules of home detention, backing them up with reams of paper for me to study. My first obligation is to never do anything outside of the house without informing them. I will submit fortnightly plans, detailing all of my planned activities and excursions at least two weeks before the start of that fortnight. I have a 1300 number to call if plans change, I'm hospitalised or the house burns down. My allowed excursions will include regular appointments with my psychiatrist, work if I can get a job, one two-hour grocery shopping trip per fortnight, essential medical or dental appointments and maybe walking for exercise if I can prove that I need it. A letter from Shrinkola should be enough proof, they tell me. All excursions out of the house will need to be verified. I will collect receipts from shopping and for everything else I need to get a yellow form signed to prove my attendance. The yellow form has the words 'Home detention appointment verification' across the top in all caps 14-point font. I will wear my anklet, or electronic monitoring device at all times. We'll connect a second phone line to the property for the monitoring box to be hooked up to as the unit cannot be on the same line as an ADSL connection and I can't live without internet, have too much to research. I will not tamper with the box in any way and will contact the 1300 number if there's an interruption to electrical or phone service. I will not commit any new crimes, drink any alcohol or take any illegal drugs. I am given a list of medication that I can only take with a prescription, which includes numerous over-the-counter painkillers and cold and flu meds. They show me the white cardboard box that the random drug test kit lives in, walk me through the process of administering the test and explain how it is sent off to labs for testing. Explain that any positive results for meds not on my cleared list will mean a breach of my order, a trip back to prison. I'll be living under these conditions for the next six weeks but this time will not be coming off my sentence, this is six weeks I give Corrective services *gratis* to prove I'm capable of serving the rest.

And then it gets crazy.

I'm trying to let go of my bitterness over that line from the Parole Board about how 'society need to see justice being served' but it is made worse by what comes next.

'You will not talk to anyone outside of your house about home detention,' Kate has taken over talking while Hannah fixes her spelling mistakes on the LSI. 'You will not

show anyone your monitoring device; keep it covered at all times when you are out of the house, and you will not write about home detention on social media.'

The Parole Board's statement rings in my head and I wonder how society will see justice being served if my order is a secret and no-one is allowed to see the anklet, know I'm on home detention. This dissonance kicks off a moment of extreme sarcasm.

'So I don't suppose I can publish anything then?'

'Oh, are you a journalist?' Kate asks.

'No, not really, more of a writer.'

'Oh, well, then no – you cannot publish anything. Talking about this on Facebook or writing about it publicly will be a breach of your order and could result in you going back to prison.'

The interview is almost over now and Hannah starts packing up the paperwork, scooping the piles together and trying to sort them before they go into her briefcase. Kate leans back in her chair and smiles at me.

'I think you know my daughter,' she says, making eye contact but rubbing one thumbnail along the edge of the round dining table. 'She did Creative Arts at Wollongong Uni.'

'Oh,' I say, a little surprised by this line of conversation. 'Who is she?'

Turns out I don't just know her daughter, but have a history with her daughter. Kate's daughter was part of the queer scene at Uni and I'd met her through the Allsorts Queer Collective. I might have been sleeping with a man for the last three years but wore the label 'queer' when asked to define my sexuality. Kate's daughter had hit on me and been rebuffed and then later reappeared as Daniel's housemate. Like a lot of university share house housemates, she'd turned out to be a bit of a nutter, not quite up to independent living. She'd moved out of the share house owing hundreds of dollars on rent and bills and leaving a room saturated with the smell of cat piss. I'd spent hours at the end of Daniel's lease sprinkling bicarb soda into the carpets and vacuuming it out to try and soak up the smell. Kate's daughter had never paid her debts and there was some large level of animosity about this. Kate had been called in to pay off the rent and to collect her daughter's property from the house.

My simplistic understanding of 'conflict of interest' tells me that perhaps Kate isn't the best person to be taking my history, deciding on the conditions of my order, determining whether I go back to prison or not. I think about the phone call where I told her daughter that if she didn't come home from Sydney and look after the sick ferret she'd left locked in a cage in full sun with no food and only a tiny amount of water, that

I'd be calling the RSPCA. I remember her insistence that her mother would come and get the animal, take it to a vet, and her request to please not make the call. I wonder if I'd hung around long enough that day to meet Kate, whether that would make this conflict of interest enough to get her off the case.

'Isn't there a conflict of interest?' My lack of tact has only been improved marginally by my time inside.

'No, not at all,' she says and her tone defines this as a ridiculous question. 'I'm not going to be telling her anything about you.'

Maybe if I'd said yes to her daughter's advances that might be enough of a conflict.

In about three months, I'll get onto a train coming home from Shrinkola and I'll run into a mutual friend of Kate's daughter. He'll tell me in detail what has been going on in my life, ask to see my anklet, tell me that Kate is my supervising officer. He'll be all sad and sympathetic but he'll know way more than anyone else in my Uni world. He might be able to tell how angry I am by the time I get off the train. The next time I see Kate I'll be rude and abrupt and she'll tell me that the stress of the order is getting to me, that I ought to talk to my psychiatrist about my fragile mental state. I will tell her that I saw her daughter's friend and she'll ask how he is as if she hasn't recently seen him, had a barbeque dinner with him and his partner. She'll just assume I'm too much of an idiot to put it all together. Ten years before I might have agreed with her.

2002-2009

*University of Wollongong
Wollongong, NSW*

I met my Chris, my darling gay BFF whose dad had lined me up with the solicitor Bill, in 1999 when he was fifteen and I was twenty-three. We bonded over drug binges starting when he was sixteen but by 2002 we'd both straightened up. He'd finished high school and, like all good boys from Cronulla, was heading off to university in Wollongong to study biology. Chris was smart, the kind of 'real' smart you get from a moneyed family and a private school, but only marginally street smart. Though I like to think I'd helped with that. In 2002 I drove with him to Wollongong to put in his Uni application.

The campus was amazing, landscaped with duck ponds and trees, filled with native birds and bunnies. Cool-looking people wandered slowly around campus with stacks of books, backpacks and coffee cups. Chris pranced into the admin building and

back out again with a giant flamboyant grin. He was going to university and I was jealous already.

So many people had told me I should go to university and I just never thought I'd get the chance. I spent one semester watching Chris and decided that if he could do it, I could do it. I put in the forms for a mid-year intake for the University Access Program bridging course at Wollongong, paid the \$1200 tuition upfront with money I'd earned with my vagina, and applied to start Creative Writing in 2003. My initial interview was done by the poet and lecturer Alan Wearne and I was accepted into the course on the strength of my writing weeks before I finished the UAP. Years later I found out I could have gotten a scholarship for the course but decided that this was possibly the best thing I'd ever spent my money-box cash on. Chris transferred from Biology into Performance and we were the coolest kids on campus.

I'd always assumed I was stupid but a high distinction in my first writing subject shook this up a bit. University was of one of the biggest ladders in my game. At the end of my second year of Creative Arts I transferred into a double degree with Communications and Media, finished both degrees with a distinction average, made the Faculty of Arts Dean's Merit list for my last two years and was offered a place in the honours' program for Communications and Media. I thought I was finishing my tertiary education with that research and was chuffed to get first class honours and a mark of 96 on my thesis from a marker at Harvard.

Turns out I wasn't as stupid as I thought. I could think and I could write. I'd found another mask to wear and I knew how to wear it at a jaunty angle.

*Wednesday, 5 May 2010
Probation & Parole: Parramatta Court House
Parramatta, NSW*

My home detention order takes effect on 5 May 2010. I attend this hearing in person at Parramatta, sign off on the paperwork, go home. Call the Community Compliance Group on the 1300 number and get the anklet fitted by two officers who come to my house.

Home delivery prison, get it in thirty minutes or wait as long as they want you to.

The electronic monitoring device consists of a black plastic box, around two inches square and an inch thick, held on my ankle by a thick black rubber strip and sealed in place with a much smaller plastic box that clips closed over the strap. All of the

edges are hard, with a light curve on the edges of the actual box but straight sharp edges on the closing clip. It's fitted one notch tighter than I ask for and sits just above the anklebone with the edges pressed into the top of the joint. I'm advised to be careful with it, told that it has a tamper alert and that any attempt to remove it or alter it will be a breach of my conditions. They'll know, they tell me; the box will tell them. I've got my own little Panopticon strapped to my ankle, my own little prison to carry around with me.

I've jumped through all the hoops to get my walking organised and so two one-hour walks per week have been added to my list of allowed activities. I've gotten a job in a local call centre and turn up for training that night without letting anyone know I'm now wearing an electronic monitoring device.

My new manager knows, because that's a condition of the order. He asks how I am when I arrive for training, says, 'It's good to see you back today.'

I settle in to get on with my life and wait for the sentence to end. It might have been a screw-up but I was willing to cop it sweet, ride it out, and make sure I did every bit of paperwork.

*Sunday, 6 June 2010
Home Sweet Prison
Wollongong, NSW*

On June 6, one calendar month into the order, I invite one of my lecturers, Alan, over for dinner. Since doing my initial interview for Creative Arts we've become friends and he's been the leader of my cheer squad the whole time I've been at Uni. He sent me colourful postcards to brighten my cells while I was in prison. It was good to catch up with him, swap stories and jokes. He quotes William Howitt at me, describing the secret squirrels and their dance as 'a burlesque of authority.' I laugh so hard at this. And then the phone rings. I'm still laughing a bit when I answer it.

Hannah has been replaced as my supervisor by a sleazy man named Alistair who looks at me like I'm spinning on a pole, even when I'm wearing pyjamas. I stop laughing as soon as I hear him. His voice on the phone is light – too jocular – my skin is crawling before he's three words in.

'Our supervisor has looked over your schedules,' he tells me, after some rough and sleazy greetings. 'He's decided that you're doing too much and so we're cancelling your walks.'

The air is sucked out of my lungs as I'm sucker punched by another stupid rule change.

'I'm sorry,' I say, 'could you please repeat that?'

He does, and what I heard was correct. I stay silent, use my toes to push at the hard lump of plastic on my ankle. It has rubbed on my walks but the trips out into the fresh air, the sweat and stimulation has been healing me, sloughing away the fear of open spaces that I carried out of the safe cells. I don't know how I'll survive without them. He breathes heavy down the phone for a few seconds.

'So, pack those running shoes away and we'll be seeing you soon.'

I'm filled with rage, flooded with it. My pulse screams in my temples and my hands shake as I press the button on the phone to end the call. The walk from the hallway to the dinner table takes an eternity, each step torture as I drag myself away from Alistair and back to people who make sense.

'The fuckers have cancelled my fucking walks.'

*Thursday, 10 June 2010
Home Sweet Prison
Wollongong, NSW*

I'd already had a friend apply through freedom of information for a copy of the Community Compliance Group 'Policy and Procedure Manual' and have been reading up on the conditions of home detention. I know that for them to change the conditions of my order I have to commit a breach, that they have to issue me with a written warning of said breach. I let my rage settle for a few days and then email Alistair asking for him to please explain how I breached the order, why my conditions were being changed without a written first warning as specified in the manual. He calls me moments later and seems confused and shocked by my anger. After listening to me explain how they had breached their own procedures he assures me this would be sorted out quickly, promises to call back in five minutes. I won't hear from him for over six months. My phone rings a few minutes later but it's not Alistair.

'Is this Angela?' an angry male voice screams down the phone at me.

'Yes,' I reply. 'Who is this?'

'I'm Brendan, the boss of home detention in Wollongong,' the voice yells.

'You're lucky that you're allowed to walk to the bus stop, get on the bus, go to work and then walk around at work. I don't care what crap you downloaded off the internet – I

know the rules of home detention and I'm the boss of home detention. I don't want to hear any more about these walks. I don't want you ringing up crying and saying that we've made illegal sanctions on you. You should be in gaol, where you would spend significant periods locked in your cell and not be allowed to walk around at all. And I'll tell you that if I do hear anything else about these walks then when you ring up with last minute changes to your schedule which relate to your work you will be getting told, "No, those changes are not approved", and then you will be breached as you need to give forty-eight hours' notice of changes. And if you want to take this to court, then you take it to court. I am on holidays and you are interrupting my time with my family to deal with your bullshit. If I hear your name one more time, you are back in prison before you can think.'

He hangs up on me without giving me a chance to respond.

I sit down at my computer and write down what he had said to me and then send it off in an email to Alistair starting with the words 'Well, thanks for getting on that – this is the response I got from "the Boss of Home Detention in Wollongong".'

The phone rings again minutes after I hit send. Brendan is screaming louder, if such a thing is even possible. The phone speaker distorts his words, crackles in its attempt to transmit his incoherent rage. He yells at me that it's illegal for me to record his calls and that I will be being charged as soon as they can prove that I did it. 'You're going back to gaol for this,' he says before hanging up on me again.

In prison there were posters next to every phone telling us the steps for how to deal with complaints, starting with a quick chat with your wing officer and escalating to calling the Prisons' Ombudsman. At no stage during the assessment process for home detention was I given a similar process for complaints. I call the Ombudsman and they tell me that my initial complaint needs to go to corrective services. There is no email for complaints, no link on their website but I'm smart and I know how to handle men like Brendan. I also know how to complain.

I write a letter. A meticulously researched 2024 word letter addressed to Commissioner Ron Woodham at Corrective services. I detail the background of the situation, Brendan's abuse of me. I quote, with section numbers, the parts of the Policy and Procedure Manual that apply and the letters from my GP stating that I'm fit to walk and my psychiatrist saying that walking will help alleviate the symptoms of my anxiety. I use all of my academic and writing skills to construct an unassailable argument. The only address I can find for Woodham is a PO Box and I'm not very confident that corrective services will even listen to my complaint so while Dex is walking up to the post box to

mail the hard copy of my letter I start emailing it to people. In my overly thorough fashion I send it to everyone I think can help (except the media – as much as I would like to, the threat of going back to prison is too real). I start with the Premier of NSW and the leader of the Opposition and then work my way down. There is no shadow Minister for corrective services so emails go to the Ministers and Shadow Ministers for Health, Women, Justice. I also send a copy to Noreen Hay, the local member for Wollongong. Within a few hours I'm receiving emails and calls from staffers telling me that the complaint is being passed onto the appropriate people. I get a call from Noreen to tell me the situation is terrible and she's on it. I sit back and wait.

The next morning I get a call from Rochelle, the NSW manager of home detention, who asks me all sorts of detailed questions. She apologises for Brendan's rudeness and assures me that things will be sorted soon. And then I wait some more.

*Saturday, 12 June 2010
Home Sweet Prison
Wollongong, NSW*

On Saturday morning there's a knock on the door and when I open it Kate is standing on my balcony with a man who I've never met. He doesn't introduce himself and Kate won't make eye contact with me. She's holding a white cardboard box in her hand that I recognise from our initial interview. The box is a drug testing kit and I'm about to get my first random urinalysis. Ever since I sent the letter and emails I'd been expecting some kind of punishment.

'I've been expecting this,' I say bitterly, opening the screen door for them to enter. God I hate being right.

'Do you think you can pee now?' Kate asks.

'Sure, why not?'

The bathroom is off the hallway and as I enter the room Kate stands in the door, puts on latex gloves and hands over the small specimen jar for me to pee into. The man walks right up next to her, where I can see his arm and shoulder past the door, but does not come far enough that he can see me taking my pants down and sitting on the toilet. The slant of his upper arm tells me that he is leaning his head towards the bathroom and I wonder if he can tell the difference between a genuine sample and a borrowed one from how the pee tinkles into the jar. I assume Kate is supposed to be watching me but she looks anywhere else. I still haven't had a second of eye contact from her.

It takes a minute or so to get the flow going. It took longer during my first urinalysis in prison but my body has remembered how to piss with a person in the room and it doesn't take too long to get going. I make jokes about turning the pee tap off too tight and Kate looks even more uncomfortable. Later, after the conversation on the train, I'll wonder if she joked at the barbeque with my friend about how hard it was for me to piss, but at this stage I'm still assuming she'll maintain the confidentiality she promised. I fill the cup three quarters, screw the lid on, wipe, flush, wash my hands, stick the numbered tape over the lid to seal it – just like they showed me in the interview – and hand the jar to Kate. She turns the glove on that hand inside out to encase the jar, ties a knot in the wrist and places it into the box. A matching numbered tape seals the box shut and we leave the bathroom.

As-yet-unintroduced man stands in the hallway and blocks my path to the lounge room.

'I'm Brendan,' he says. 'Time we had a chat.'

I lean against the wall and sigh. Of course he's Brendan, AKA The Boss of Home Detention in Wollongong. And of course he didn't bother to introduce himself until after the drug test. No better way than to drive home how much power you've got over another person than to enter their house with no introductions, stand outside an open door while they pee and then use your body and your position to prevent them moving around their own house. A burlesque of authority, indeed, I think.

'I've read the letter you sent to the commissioner,' the Boss of Home Detention in Wollongong says to me. 'I know you think you are very smart, and maybe you are in your world, but I'm smarter in this world. Your whingey complaints aren't going to change anything. No one in corrective services cares about your hurt feelings and we all know that you only made this complaint because of your emotional instability.'

I've written more than one letter of complaint in my time and I know that those complained about like to minimise the position of the complainer. I remember a letter I got published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* where I detailed a request from my son's primary school that all children bring a bottle of insect repellent to class as the public system could not afford to fix the faulty drains or put flyscreens on the classroom windows. The next day a response was published from a parent who quoted the cost of a bottle of Aeroguard and then compared this to the cost of the private school that he sent his children to. He also called me a whinger. But he didn't have the right to walk into my house and demand that I pee for him. This is different.

Brendan is a large man and I can see hours of weightlifting bulging out his shirt arms and pant legs. He could put me on the ground in a second and I'm sure this intimidating physique is useful in his intimidatory career. I'm doing my best to stay rational, wear my beige referee face, not let him see me upset, but the aftereffects of those safe cells are still with me and I'm never more than a few minutes away from a panic attack. As he towers over me in the cramped hallway I feel my cheeks flush and the first tingles of tears at the corners of my eyes. He is on this immediately, using it to push his case.

'It's obvious to anyone that you have serious psychological issues and this is what has led to you reoffending. You really should be grateful to us for doing this; at least we're forcing you to finally get the help you need.'

For the Boss of Home Detention in Wollongong who has read all my files he is remarkably unaware of the facts of my case. Kate is looking out over the balcony at the trees across the road waving in the breeze. I open my mouth to correct Brendan but he just talks on over the top of me.

'So you won't be ringing up with any more complaints, you won't be questioning any more of my decisions. My officers have been instructed to contact me immediately if you complain about one more thing and, as you know, I can send you back to prison in a second and there won't be anything you can do about it. They might think you're great at uni but we know you're just another crim and we aren't giving you any special treatment. Now snap out of it; stop crying. If you're going to get this upset over every little thing then maybe the psych unit in Mulawa really is the best place for you.'

I'm sitting on the floor and sobbing by the time he leaves, dragging Kate out the door in his wake. She is picking at the corners of the drug test box and still won't look at me. She mutters a goodbye as she closes the screen door behind her.

I can feel the tears on my face and turn to the mirror behind which I have been leaning to wipe them away. The mirror is large, with a wooden frame, which I made years ago. As my vision clears and I start to think again my eye falls onto a Wilcox comic from the letters page of the newspaper stuck to the frame. I start to giggle as I realise that Brendan was able to see this the whole time he was berating me. In the comic a tattooed angry man with Brendan's physique and the word 'Security' on his shirt points his finger out of the frame right at my face. 'If you don't behave,' his speech bubble says, 'You'll never write another letter again.'

I'm laughing so hard that I need to brace my hands on the wall before sliding down to sit on the floor under the mirror. Outside I can hear the car doors slamming where Brendan and Kate are getting into their car.

Send me back to prison, I think, and watch the letters I write then. They can't re-incarcerate me if I'm already back inside. I give myself time to calm down and then write down what he said to me.

Just for the record.

Monday, 14 June 2010

Home Sweet Prison

Wollongong, NSW

When the phone rings on Monday morning I'm half expecting it to be Brendan telling me that I've failed my drug test and they'll be around to arrest me soon. I haven't taken any drugs or drunk any alcohol but I have absolute zero belief that the Boss of Home Detention in Wollongong wouldn't tamper with my sample just to prove his point and stop me writing any more letters. Logically I know the test probably isn't even back from the labs yet, but I'm living in worst-case-scenario land and have been since 6pm, February 8.

It isn't Brendan on the phone. It's Rochelle, the actual boss of home detention in NSW.

'How are you going?' she asks and actually sounds genuine.

'Not too bad,' I say, 'Though I did get quite a nasty visit over the weekend from the Boss of Home Detention in Wollongong.'

She must be able to hear the quotation marks and laughs a little before she says 'Oh, Brendan came to visit?'

'Yes,' my tone is scathing. 'He oversaw my first drug test.'

'What do you mean, he oversaw it? Wasn't there a female officer to conduct the test.'

'Yes, Kate did the test. He just stood outside the door where he could listen in. And didn't introduce himself till it was done.'

'Oh,' she sounds uncertain. 'He should have introduced himself and shown you his ID before he even came in.'

'I know.'

She is silent for a minute.

‘I think we have gotten your situation sorted,’ she continued. ‘I understand where you’re coming from; I would go mad if I couldn’t exercise. You will be getting your walks back immediately. Now, is there anything else you need? Would you like to go to yoga classes, or to the gym?’

I think for a second, rubbing at the anklet and feeling the sore spot where the bulk of it sits against the bone in my ankle. Less than twenty-four hours after putting it on there’d been a bruise from it. I’d cut a long sock into pieces to slide underneath it but the bulk means that it rubs no matter what I do. I imagine trying to bend into downwards facing dog without letting anyone in the class see the black plastic box strapped to my ankle.

‘No,’ I mutter, ‘I don’t think I can do yoga with this thing on my ankle.’

She understands, understands completely. My walks are back on and won’t be taken away again. I ask her about a complaints management process for home detention, telling her about the posters in prison. She is amazed to hear about the posters and tells me that the process I should follow is calling the 1300 CCG number and asking to make a complaint. I suggest that detainees be given this information in writing in the future and she agrees this is a good idea. Before the call finishes I ask her what, if any, action will be taken regarding Brendan’s treatment of me.

‘This isn’t the first negative feedback we’ve received,’ she says. ‘It’s not okay that he treats people like this and action will be taken.’

‘Can I request that he not attend my house in the future?’

‘You don’t have to worry about that,’ her voice sounds tired now. ‘He’s already out of that position and if I have anything to do with it he won’t be having contact with detainees from here on in.’

I should feel like this is a victory, getting the Boss of Home Detention in Wollongong fired, but I’m scared and wary and nervous. Eventually I realise there’s nothing to be done, no recourse but the ongoing passive resistance. I tuck the piece of paper with her full name and direct number into the frame of the mirror where the secret squirrels will be sure to see it and start getting excited about my next walk.

*June 2010 – January 2011
Home Sweet Prison
Wollongong, NSW*

For the next seven months, I live under the conditions of my order. I never get a written reply to my complaint from corrective services but a few months later I receive a copy of

the letter Woodham sent to Noreen Hay that confirms that my order is legitimate and that the conditions of home detention are strict. It states that, 'the CCG have increased the period during which the detainee may take walks.'

I get used to the regular unannounced visits, quickly work out which days they are rostered on and can almost predict to the minute when they will arrive. I pee in a cup at least once a month and if there's a male officer there they stand up the hall, right away from the bathroom door. I wear long pants all summer, get used to shaving around the box on my ankle. I experiment with foam and tape and fabric and never find a way to stop the box hurting.

I start a secret blog called 'diy Panopticon' where I detail the processes, feeling like a revolutionary every time I upload an entry. I talk secretly to a journalist named Inga Ting who gives me another mask and quotes me as 'Jennifer' in her exposé of mental health care in NSW prisons. Her gentle questions and evident empathy help me start to find my voice again. I read everything I can find about prison and home detention. I decide that I need to write this book over coffee and cake with my future PhD supervisor.

Chris is living in America but he rings me every couple of weeks to check in and make sure I'm not back in prison. My dear science friend Ingrid comes to my house with ten litres of milk and we teach ourselves how to make Haloumi, covering the kitchen and ourselves in sticky curds. The ten litres of milk makes two small slabs of cheese, which we fry and eat with lemon juice. On Christmas day my brother visits with his wife and children. We eat delicious food, play with toys and all laugh when the baby pulls the tiny Christmas tree over on herself. Just after lunch the secret squirrels arrive with the white box and my brother and his wife wrangle the children outside so that I can pee with the door open without them asking why that lady is watching Auntie Ange peeing. We tell the kids they are just friends who have come to visit.

During the first week of January I buy a bottle of vodka, two packets of jelly and a packet of plastic shot glasses.

*Tuesday, January 18 2011
Home Sweet Prison/Home Sweet Home
Wollongong, NSW*

At lunchtime of January 18, 2011, the squirrels come to my house. Alistair and Kate seem as relieved to be finishing this as I am. Kate asks me if I'm going to write about the process and I say 'how could I not?' She tells me I have her permission to write about

anything she's said to me. I think back to our many conversations about the ethics of imprisonment, the psychology of inmate versus screw, her breaching my confidentiality to tell her daughter's friends about me. I decide I will definitely write about her.

When Alistair kneels down next to my feet to remove the anklet I expect him to pull out a specialised tool but instead he yanks a large flat head screwdriver out of his pocket.

'Now be careful,' he says, only half joking. 'I don't want to take your ankle off this close to the end.'

He wedges the screwdriver into the tiny slot of the connector holding the anklet on, applies a tiny bit of pressure and pops it open. There are no wires inside the connector and I have to assume that what they told me about the tamper alert is a lie as I can see no way that opening this clasp would be electronically noticeable. The space inside the clasp is caked with eight months and fourteen days worth of skin, dust and hair. I consider trying to find my camera and take a picture but just want it off and them out of my house as soon as possible. As soon as it's off I lift my foot into my lap and scratch the spots that have been itching for eight months and fourteen days. Where the plastic has pushed against skin-covered bone there are deep divots in my flesh. It will take weeks for the bruises to fade out through red, purple, green and yellow.

Before the secret squirrels leave they remind me that my order doesn't end till midnight and I'm still subject to the conditions of the order till then. So no drinking alcohol, committing new crimes, shooting up smack. As soon as they leave I run down the front stairs and spend endless minutes walking into and out of the front gate. A police car drives past and I stand on the median strip and watch till it turns the corner. Residual paranoia leaks through the back of my brain but I work hard to shake it off, remind myself I'm free now. This is going to happen every time I see a police insignia for a long time, maybe for the rest of my life. Then I go inside, pack my bag for derby training that night, and get on with my life.

I think back to the girls in prison who will never be able to tell their stories and promise myself and them that I will never again take my privileges for granted, that I will use my speaking position to its fullest extent.

I will never again forget, I swear to myself, what it means to lose your freedom.

Postscript

The seeds of the end are always to be found in the beginning. The 'once upon a time' leads inevitably to the 'ever after'.

- My prison diary, 10 March 2010

The Stanford Prison Experiment is not a story about the lone individual who defies the majority. Rather, it is a story about the majority – about how everyone who had some contact with the prison study (participants, researchers, observers, consultants, family, and friends) got so completely sucked into it. The power of the situation to overwhelm personality and the best of intentions is the key story line here.

- Phillip Zimbardo, 'Reflections on the Stanford Prison Experiment', 1996

The largest impacts of prison are carried in your mind when you leave the walls, when the last gate closes behind you. The fallout from my incarceration is still falling around me, years later. Writing this book was as much about shaking off the self-inflicted shackles – the internalised labels 'criminal', 'junkie' and, most pervasively, 'victim' – as telling the tale. So many times in the story time I've shared with you I thought, 'This will be the hardest thing I will ever live through'. Every time I was wrong. My mother wasn't the hardest thing – neither was quitting drugs, surviving prison, rehab or home detention. The hardest thing I've ever lived through was the realisation that I'm still a legitimate and valuable person, behind, under and around all this. My track marks, forehead crease and bitter wall of defences are all part of who I am and none of them devalue me. My history doesn't define the reality of me – the trauma isn't core to my existence. I am now, and will continue to be, more than any of those labels may suggest. The Angela I am now is the same Angela I have always been. Learning this lesson has been the hardest thing.

In 2013 I entered a draft of this book in the Varuna Publishers' Introduction Program, a national competition aimed at manuscript development. In the synopsis that I submitted I wrote that it was 'a story of almost making it from the gutter to the stars and then losing it over one small missed step'. I was wrong; I didn't lose it, couldn't lose it all. Writing at Varuna, I felt like an imposter again, like at any second they may realise that I didn't deserve to be there and boot me out. Sitting at a giant scarred wooden

desk, looking out over the gardens turned brown by the Blue Mountains winter, I still had most of what mattered before I put my foot off that gutter 1,625 days before. Visiting Varuna for my residential retreat was an exercise in controlled terror, forcing myself to act like I had a right to be there, like I'm equal to the other women I shared the house with, even though every fibre in my being screamed that I wasn't. On the last night in the house I joked at the similarities between Varuna, prison and rehab, how all my hardest work was done in houses full of women.

"The stars" I thought I'd lost were some mythical pressure that I created for myself, some imaginary position of legitimacy that I felt I needed to strive for, a traditional "normalcy" that I thought mattered. In the last five years I've gained some things, shed some other things. What I don't have now, I didn't really need and what I do have has made my skin easier to live in.

I started letting people read the first nine chapters of this manuscript about a year ago, trying to brace myself for the exposure shock of sharing a story like mine with the world. Lots of people gave me the same feedback – it's not quite finished, this isn't where the story ends; it needs another chapter. And they're all right, this story didn't end with me finishing home detention, promising to never forget what it means to lose your freedom. This story will not be complete until you know how I brought myself back to life, how I moved past thinking that a single misstep meant I lost it all, how I chipped away at the walls I had built around myself to find the realest freedom I've ever known.

If this book was a white paper, then this chapter might come first and be titled 'Executive Summary'. This chapter, I hope, is where the magic happens for you, my readers. It's to thank you for holding my hand through all the hard dark bits, for staying here to the end.

Writing this story was always going to be hard work. I've had memoir described to me as "therapeutic" countless times while writing this, but in an essential way writing trauma is different to therapy. When I come face-to-face with pain in Shrinkola's chair, I feel it – I look at the sensation, maybe turn it over in my hands a few times to see the different angles, shake it to find out if it hurts as much as I first thought. Writing trauma is different. You, my reader, don't live in my head – you don't know my emotional shorthand, the convoluted paths my pain follows, the angles that make it understandable, bearable. To share my story with you, I can't just see the pain, feel it, and then let it go. For you to understand, I need to take every traumatic moment, unpick it at the seams, work out what makes it so hard and nasty and dark and then

work out a way to translate that into a viable narrative form. To make the story make sense for you, it first has to make sense for me. And “understanding pain” in a therapeutic context doesn’t equal “making sense” in a narrative form. Yes, there are parts that still don’t make sense. There are parts that will never make sense. But let’s try to untangle what we can.

The one thing I haven’t described about prison is the visits, but they are core to why I wrote this book. The biggest difference between medium and maximum security happens in front of your loved ones. Like I wrote in chapter seven, visits are where the biggest risks are and so visits are when the most graphic displays of the security apparatus happen. You’re never more aware of the gaps between the green and the blue than in visits.

At Mulawa, the maximum security prison, visits happen in a locked and barred room. Unless you’ve committed an infraction, visits include ‘contact’, which means you’re in the same room as your visitors, not separated by glass. After you’re strip-searched, you climb into long-sleeved white coveralls that zip up at the back and the top of the zip is fastened with a numbered cable tie. You sit at small plastic tables, in a room with no clock, and screws patrol constantly, leaning close to listen to conversations and intervening if touches last for too long. Drinks and snacks can be purchased from vending machines, but inmates are not allowed to touch the money. Visiting time is up for everyone at the same time. The most frequent sound in the visits at Mulawa is tears, from visitors and inmates alike. At the end of visits, all the inmates line up and are strip-searched again before being returned to the wings. Talking or attempting any contact with inmates who have already been searched is an infraction if you’re still in the coveralls. The screws doing the searches move you through as quick as possible, so no conversations, no jokes, no human faces.

Both Berrima and Emus take a more relaxed approach to visits. At Berrima, visits take place in a small covered patio that opens onto a grass yard and in Emus there is a large room, also with a grassed yard. You’re strip-searched both before and after visits, but are allowed to wear your prison greens to meet your visitors. The relief saturated Dex’s face when he first saw me in greens at Berrima, instead of the thick starchy white coverall. Both of the medium security prisons give you space to get up and move around with your children, but not for any other reason. The searches at the end are more relaxed, unless, of course, Birchie happens to be working on visits. In medium security visits, people laugh, smile, and introduce prison buddies to mothers, fathers, partners

and children.

But the one thing all visits have in common is the constant surveillance, and that's why visits are here in the last chapter. There are always the eyes of screws on you, and unlike the Panopticon I described to Kathy, you absolutely know these eyes are watching you. I spent a lot of time thinking about surveillance in prison and in my DIY incarceration at home and it was thinking about the impact of these eyes that made me need to tell you this story.

Surveillance is a tricky thing. It works partially because it disciplines us into being "better people", and throughout writing this book I've imagined it as a form of self-surveillance, turning my written words into an unofficial record to challenge the short answers to awful questions jotted down by the social worker, Mr America and Hannah the secret squirrel. The French thinker Michel Foucault wrote about the power of challenging the official records, and for me this has been the biggest positive of writing this book. While my paperwork trail may have been marginally balanced by the academic transcript, building this narrative to show how I moved from two dimensional child abuse victim, drug user and criminal to rounded out character has given me back belief in myself. The diary I kept in prison and blog on HD allowed me to discipline myself into something akin to "normal". I've turned the camera of my writing on myself as thoroughly as the screws turned their eyes to me in visits, and in doing so found a way to understand my unease with their suspicious gazes.

I've also turned this surveillant gaze on the rest of my world.

While my mother only occupies a small section of this book, she occupies (and always will occupy) a large space in my head. Chapter four, where I told you how I started out, wasn't a nice one to write. But the dedication at the start of this book is true; my mother made me the strongest woman I could be. That description of the night she beat me were some of the first words that I penned for this book and they needed more editing and reworking than the rest put together. When I wrote the first draft of that section it was twelve years since I'd spoken to her, and I believed that was it, I would never speak to her again. Shrinkola thought it was probably a good idea that I avoid contact with her and anyone who had ever heard any stories from my childhood agreed. I couldn't take the risk, you see.

I struggled with not having a mother, peeled away the onion layers of mourning for a parent who is still alive but torn away from me by abuse and fear. On anniversaries and birthdays and holidays I got morose and considered looking her up, but felt the risk

was too great. My biggest fear around my mother was that I was going to turn into her, repeat the cycles of abuse, lash out at those close to me with the same unthinking disregard. I wanted a mother but couldn't bear the risk. Then my grandfather died.

My mother had given the eulogy at my grandmother's funeral in December 2009 and offered her revised version of the family history. My dead father was written out of existence and my stepfather became him. My uncle, whose suicide had preceded the psychotic break that landed Grandma in a dementia ward, ceased to exist. The madness that stole the last years of my grandmother's life became an unnameable illness. Our familial history of mental illness, addiction and intergenerational abuse was whitewashed, not even hinted at. Some might call it "not speaking ill of the dead", following dear dead Grandma's favourite dictum: 'If you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all.' I called it lying.

When my grandfather died in July 2011 I swore it wasn't going to happen again and formulated a plan. I workshopped it with Shrinkola and he told me he couldn't believe I was willing to go through with this risk. I couldn't believe I was willing to go through with it but I don't step back from a challenge easily.

This was what I was going to do: When I arrived at the church I was going to find my mother and say to her 'Do you want to talk to me after the service?' If she said yes (I didn't have a contingency plan for if she said no), then I would say, 'Then every word you say today needs to be the truth'. If she questioned this I had examples from Grandma's funeral to explain. If she managed to follow through on this contract then I would talk to her.

The service was in an old sandstone church in Raymond Terrace, built to the same basic design that dots the east coast of New South Wales. Groups of my grandfather's navy and golf buddies clustered outside in the chill or sat in pews back from the front, steadily not looking at the casket covered by a mound of white roses at the front of the room. The funeral had been organised by the aunty who had tried to kidnap me when I was eleven and while she had given my mother a chance to speak she had also asked me to give a eulogy, tell the story of this man as seen from the tiny eyes of his grandchild. My notes were typed up and folded in the pocket of my velvet coat. My mother sat alone in the front row, looking over her handwritten notes.

'Yes, my darling, of course I want to talk to you,' she cried, flinging her arms wide for a hug.

I did not hug her. I followed through with the plan. I banished the memory of her as the monster of my childhood from my mind and stood strong.

And she did it, even though at times I saw the lies almost tumbling from her lips, watched her having to grab the imminent words and stuff them back into her mouth, she told the truth about my grandfather that day. So I talked to her and then gave her my phone number when we gathered for drinks at the golf club where Grandad got his last ever hole in one.

We stayed in touch after the funeral, with the occasional call and text. It was hard work. I needed to set boundaries with her and strengthen those boundaries again and again.

‘Why do you need to have a relationship with her?’ Shrinkola questioned every time I told him how hard it was. ‘She’s a dangerous woman and can hurt you so easily’.

‘I need to prove to myself that I’m stronger than her, need to prove that I’m not going to turn into her. I have all the power now, can stop talking to her at any time, but I need to prove to myself that she can’t hurt me anymore. I need to know that I’m more powerful than her.’

He raised that pale blond eyebrow and made notes, told me that I’m brave and that I know what I’m doing. Tore the top page off his pad.

My mother didn’t make it easy. There were late nights calls when she was off her face on morphine and yelling at my brother’s children at family picnics. I hung up when I realised she was intoxicated, called back the next day and said she could never do that again – stood up for the kids and said no-one gets to talk to anyone like that, that it’s not okay to yell at small people.

We started to get there, building something like an adult relationship. She conceded, after years of denial, that what happened when I was a child was real and that she actually did remember doing it. She admitted publicly, in comments on my blog that she abused me. She seemed to have grown up, found an adult self under the angry ranting child who’d raised me.

But even with all the accountability and adulthood, there were still flaws and gaps I couldn’t get past. We were friends on Facebook and there was no space; she was that creepy social media stalker who inserts themselves into everything. My posts got liked and commented on, as did my friends’ and random derby people’s. I used my calm voice when I said, ‘Please pull up; please don’t comment so much’. But she just didn’t seem to get it. As the end of this book got closer, I became more critical. After she posted one of those inspirational memes on my wall about how much she loved her children and how important it was to tell them that you love them every day, I lost my compassion. I told her I was editing the book and that it was hard to be reminded of

these ideals when we both knew that I didn't get them as a child. After this I tried not to look too much at what she posted, keeping a wall of ignore between her and me. We went on a jet boat ride in Sydney Harbour and laughed about how much we had in common and I still got occasionally scared that I might have a version of her hiding inside me. Then she posted a stupid Facebook meme. You know that one, the picture of a wooden spoon or some such, which says, 'My parents spanked me as a child: as a result I now suffer from a psychological condition known as "respect for others".' This was a woman who blamed her abuse of me on her own parents' abuse of her, who told me stories of being beaten with hoses to make up for beating me with electrical cables, and here she was posting memes minimising the impact of physical child abuse. I calmly and politely messaged and said I needed a break while I finished the book. She agreed and defriended me on Facebook.

I don't know if we can ever talk again. I ignore her occasional texts and calls, leave her voicemails unheard on my message bank, because it's easier than taking the risk right now.

The new-again, then gone-again relationship with my mother wasn't the only one to crumble in the post prison haze. Daniel, my boyfriend throughout the whole thing, who gave me care packages of underwear, put money into my account, and brought Dex to visit me every single weekend, broke up with me less than a year after home detention finished.

'It's not you,' he said, 'it's me,' but I knew it really was me.

I knew the paranoid and jumpy monster I'd become after the whole experience was too much for him to handle, too much for anyone to handle. Similarly, Liz, my housemate who I'd shared houses with for years, moved out after my anxiety and depression dribbled into her head and set off layers of madness there that she wasn't equipped to handle.

Friends who I'd seen regularly before going to prison, I just couldn't quite relate to anymore. I got too angry too quickly, too bitter at small indiscretions. I found it safest to just keep myself apart from people. After Liz left and Daniel moved out, Dex and I moved from the lovely brick home that held so many bad memories into a too-cramped flat in Wollongong where we grated on each other.

After a few months I met a woman, much younger than me, and fell into a dangerous relationship where I tried to make up for all my wrongs by making everything perfect for her. I failed, and in knowing I failed, tried to erase it all with guilt. I slipped

into something like an emotional affair with another woman who lived in a different state because I thought she could see through the pain of my history. We whittled away something that could have been beautiful with a few months of guilty words and a couple of shame-filled nights, a traumatic emotional accident that made me wish you could get insurance for this kind of thing. After apologising, owning my shit, I tried again. I bought a ring for the younger woman, towards the end, to try and prove that I wasn't the failure we both knew I was, and failed some more. Then I finished things with her and met another woman, a woman my own age. We connected over shared trauma and an understanding of the need for safety and distance and honesty. We are trying to do things differently, to make a safe space for us both to heal. She can't read the book past the chapter about my mother and I understand.

Dex moved out of home and is living independently. When he turned 18 he asked to read the book and I gave him the first few chapters. We've worked to try and rebuild the relationship we used to have and mostly it works. I've somehow mothered a child through all of this, let him see my flaws and fragilities but still kept his respect. I tried to maintain his privacy in writing, but give enough of him to show that I never stopped thinking of him. He has a healthy lack of regard for authority that I encourage. I'm proud of both of us, and can't wait to see what he becomes.

I quit the job at the call centre right after I finished home detention and started my PhD at the University of Wollongong. After six months of thinking and writing I also started teaching in the compulsory first year critical theory subjects. I used the research skills I'd been honing to help rowdy Creative Arts students understand Foucault, Lacan, Derrida. I used *The Simpsons*, YouTube and the Kardashians to unpack how to think. My lectures on surveillance and Banksy got laughs, nods and difficult questions. I realised, standing in front of noisy classrooms and answering difficult questions, that my ongoing impression of myself as 'illegitimate' was wrong, that I'd been undervaluing the experiences I'd navigated. I'd fooled myself with the masks I wore. My students and teaching colleagues saw value in my ability to spot incorrect Harvard referencing at ten paces, didn't even notice my track marks or take offence at my occasional passion on topics of power and disadvantage. My brain really began to matter. I gave a conference paper about home detention and showed pictures of my electronic monitoring device on the big screen. Afterwards the conference convenor hugged me.

'You're a good egg,' he said with a smile.

In 2013 I started to apply for jobs in social services and got a gig doing community health outreach to sex workers and homeless youth. I found the real value of my experiences and saw my genuine capacity for compassion, empathy and self-awareness in action. I'm now thinking about moving into policy and advocacy work, taking my voice and ability to untangle systems of power to the big tables where it can help to enact structural change. I'd like to help other people find their ladders.

Part of my job involves handing out clean injecting equipment and when I came face-to-face with Delma in the back streets of Woolloomooloo, I only froze with fear for a second before handing her two ten packs and telling her there was clean water and spoons in with the fits. She didn't recognise me.

I talk to cops as our mutual lines of duty intersected, realising that they're mostly just people doing a job that no one else will step up for. I found a sense of equality with them as professionals, managed to almost overcome the residual fear that I'm about to be arrested at any second.

The new woman in my world has close friends who are cops and I've even learned how to socialise with them. A woman I knew from derby started training as a screw and we talked about the intricacies of power that happen in prison while she debriefed visiting Induction as a trainee. I now call a cop friend, and a screw, and it hasn't imploded who I am. Knowing them has given me more fodder for my masks theory. One day I might even ask them what it feels like to be on the other end of a strip search.

In 2013, corrective services announced that smoking was to be banned in all NSW prisons, effective from 2015. According to the research 80% of prisoners smoke, and a similar percentage of officers. I'm still smoking now, hand rolled cigarettes, and I'm stopping as I write to roll another. After days of editing and writing, the fingers on my left hand are stained yellow and my eyes smart from the smoke. I'm quitting again when the book is done. Quitting smoking has been harder than either heroin or methadone but I know I can do it, have survived much worse. I needed the crutch to get through telling you this story, but I'm done now.

I have a shiny new coffee machine but still go out and buy creamy flat whites whenever the urge takes me. I eat out frequently, live on the sensations of taste and texture. I've quit smoking pot and gotten through this whole book without using heroin once. After I wrote those words at the end of chapter 6 about the urge to go to a twelve - step meeting, I hit 'ctrl/s', closed my computer, went to a meeting and worked it.

The missed step did not land me on as big a snake as I first imagined, but it was a scary slide down at the time. I don't know if I will ever fully recover from prison, the betrayal of thinking it was all over, that I'd made a different world, then going back there because I forgot to chase up on paperwork from when I was young and stupid. I have residual symptoms of being broken, leftover impacts from the safe cells – a fear of the dark, anxieties about being judged, a crippling inability to spend much time with people – and I don't know if they'll ever go away. I can't stop myself from questioning power imbalances, am filled with rage at small inequalities and awed into silence by big ones. I make sarcastic jokes to hide my fears, pretend I'm okay even when I'm not. It's hard to admit any weaknesses, to myself or anyone else and I don't trust authority. I sometimes struggle to make my words public – on my blog or in letters to the newspaper – without falling into pits of anxiety. But I keep trying, trusting, writing, thinking.

So now, at the end of this story, I can see more of the 'junkie-criminal-victim' falling away every day. I'm becoming a little closer to a 'real person' every day, taking the rungs on the ladder and the small snakes as they come.

And I always look left, then right, and then left again when I cross roads.