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history/prisoner

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# **Appropriating Culture to Recuperate History/Prisoner**

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

**Master of Creative Arts – Research**

**From**

**UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG**

**By**

**Terence Joseph Keeley Dip.Ed., BCA(Hons)**

**FACULTY OF CREATIVE ARTS**

**2007**

## CERTIFICATION

I, Terence J. Keeley, declare that this thesis, submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Master of Creative Arts – Research, in the Faculty of Creative Arts, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. This document has not been submitted for qualification at any other academic institution.

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## ABSTRACT

The following thesis consists of three parts: a research paper comparing two other texts, *In Country* by Bobbie Ann Mason and *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* by Milan Kundera, that incorporate the same or similar strategies as those adopted in the creative component of the thesis, a synopsis of two related texts preceding the creative component, and finally, the creative component itself, *Prisoner*.

The essay, requiring research into critiques of the Mason and Kundera texts, found a number of parallels between them and my own creative practices relating to *Prisoner*. All three texts can be seen to appropriate icons of popular culture, and high culture on the part of Kundera, as part of their strategy to tell a story. Additionally, all three can be seen to develop similar, and occasionally oppositional, philosophical discourse on the recuperation of history, at both a personal and political level.

The inclusion of a synopsis of two creative texts written prior to *Prisoner*, was deemed necessary as they set the stage for the third and final text in completing an extended narrative.

The creative text itself completes the story begun in the previous texts, *The Visitation* and *The Interview*, and resolves the ambiguities inherent in the previous texts. Additionally, it incorporates a strategy, much like Mason and Kundera, of appropriating a popular cultural icon in *Prisoner* – the television series of the early eighties, as part of its discourse into the recycling and re-interpretation of history conducted by the story's characters.

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## **Section 1: Essay (5000wds)**

### **Appropriating Culture to Recuperate History**

#### **A Discourse Between Three Novels**

*In Country* by Bobbie Ann Mason

*The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* by Milan Kundera

*Prisoner* by Terry Keeley

## Appropriating Culture to Recuperate History – A Discourse Between Three Novels

In creating a fictional world populated with fictional characters, the writer relies on real facts and the cultural paraphernalia of a given period to allow a reader to make connections and, in that connecting, create a sense of verisimilitude. In this way, a work of fiction set in a particular era will use facts, dates, historical figures and cultural icons from that era, to establish a sense of the real for the reader. Even works of fantasy and science fiction, in creating future or imagined worlds, still use recognizable symbols and knowledge to establish the possibility of these fictional settings. However, it is my intention to examine two fictional texts that go further than simply flagging various cultural paraphernalia of a given era to create plausibility and, in so doing, illustrate how these texts can be seen to reflect the technical organization of my own text *Prisoner. In Country* by Bobbie Ann Mason uses a variety of known popular cultural icons, that is, persons or objects symbolic of popular culture, to not only create a fictional setting but to add further meaning and nuance to events and character within the fictional story. *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* by Milan Kundera, on the other hand, uses so-called high culture in the form of classical compositions, such as Beethoven's *Quartet Opus 131*, as a mathematical formula to structure his novel. Kundera's criticism of popular culture within his novel makes an interesting contrast and opposition to Mason's minimalist approach to language and her embrace of the pop culture of the 1960's and 80's within her novel. On the one hand, *Prisoner*, like Mason, uses popular culture to add further meaning and nuance but on the other hand, like Kundera, it uses a cultural icon as a central motif in the novel's structure.

Set in 1984 in a small town, Hopewell, Kentucky, Bobbie Ann Mason's *In Country* could be described as a "heavily symbolic" coming of age story or "the Bildungsroman, also variously referred to as the novel of development, education, or initiation" (Graybill, 243). The main character, Sam Hughes, a 17 year old girl whose father was killed in the Vietnam War before she was born, is on a journey, both figurative and actual. From the very first chapter she is on the interstate highway to Washington with her grandmother, Mamaw, and her Uncle Emmet, a Vietnam Veteran, to see the Vietnam War Memorial and ultimately, by the end of the novel, to come to terms with the war and her father's absence. Divided into three parts, the description of the physical journey in Part 1 and 3 act as book ends to the bulk of the story in Part 2 as Mason explores a figurative or inner journey. The main character, Sam, seeks to experience the Vietnam War through the medium of popular culture and come to terms with the absence of a father she never knew.

As Holstein states in her article, *In the swamp at oblique angles: Mason's In Country* "All survivors of the war, .... must continually grapple with its meaning and impact, and for Mason the survivors here include combatants, non-combatants, and subsequent generations" (331). Much of the story concerns Sam's attempts to understand the war which took her father's life and traumatized the veterans known to her, particularly her Uncle Emmett. In effect, she attempts to directly experience it or, as the novel's title suggests, attempts to go 'in country', a term used by Vietnam veterans when they faced enemy forces. Here, Mason's text uses a number of techniques typical of narrative minimalism, "disrupting the traditional separation between high and popular culture," distrusting "master narratives" and above all, subverting "the humanist belief in the sublimity of man's existence" with a "description of pointless lives being lived by utterly un-heroic characters who spend their time mostly watching TV,

shopping at the mall, eating junk food, and consuming large quantities of beer” (Collado-Rodriguez, 98). Mason’s characters in *In Country* do all of the above. Through the appropriation of popular culture, particularly Sam’s attempts to “recuperate history”, Mason’s use of present tense to create a sense of immediacy and “simple, declarative sentences devoid of sophisticated metaphor” (Graybill, 234) all suggest a minimalist approach. However, a sense of closure which Sam ultimately achieves at the end of the novel, and according to Joanna Price the author’s “moral concerns” (qtd. in Collado-Rodriguez, 99), are inimical to a minimalist text and tend to fly in the face of a purely minimalist interpretation.

Just as the *Prisoner* manuscript uses a regular Australian TV program of the same name, often rerun throughout the 80’s and 90’s, Mason’s *In Country* also co-opts a popular program, in this case *MASH*, as a “virtual ur-text in the novel” (Graybill 247). Although it doesn’t go so far as to use *MASH* as a setting like the *Prisoner* text does with the television serial, *MASH* is an important indicator throughout the novel as Sam explores her father’s death and Emmett’s trauma.

Years ago, when Colonel Blake [a central character in *MASH*] was killed, Sam was so shocked, she went around stunned for days. She was only a child then, and his death on the program was more real to her than the death of her own father (Mason, 25).

As Sam grows older, the consequent repeats of this particular event acts as a catalyst in her understanding of her father’s death.

...each time she saw that episode, it grew clearer that her father had been killed in a war. She had always taken his death for granted, but the reality took hold gradually (25).

This is one of the many instances in which Mason, according to White, uses cultural icons in the form of known television programs to educate “Sam,

broadening her horizons” in contrast to the leftist view that criticizes television for “lull[ing] the mass audience into passive inaction... instill[ing] bourgeois aspirations and values” even while passing for “harmless entertainment” (qtd. in N doCarmo, 591). Through *MASH* and other various entertainment programs signposted throughout the novel, Mason acknowledges the role media plays in shaping our “historical and political consciousness” (N doCarmo, 589). *MASH* the sitcom, was born out of the film of the same name. First aired in 1969, it was Robert Altman’s take on the current news emanating at the time from the Vietnam War, and consequently, reflected much of the anti-war sentiment of the time. However, the war depicted in *MASH* was the Korean War, ten years earlier. This “blurring of fiction and fact foregrounds the impossibility of truly unmediated experience and the increasing overlap between individual memory and mass-media expression” (Holstein, 331). The understanding that Sam acquires, like any of us for that matter, is forever mediated by the various media outlets she has been exposed to. Hence, the loss of grand narrative and the end of history, both central philosophical contentions of Postmodernism, are flagged within the novel. If all we ever do, as individuals, is pastiche a historical, political and social self together through the endless reruns of sitcoms, National Geographic, fragments of pop songs, reality TV, then nothing is genuine or authentic anymore. This loss of authenticity is acknowledged in the novel itself when Sam, Emmett and Mamaw are on the road. In a motel room in Maryland they are watching *The Tonight Show* usually hosted by Johnny Carson when Emmett complains: “Johnny Carson has Joan Rivers substituting,..... And it’s a rerun. Nothing’s authentic anymore” (Mason, 19).

Kundera, on the other hand, takes an entirely different approach in his novel, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*. According to Kundera, due to his classical musical background, all

of his novels, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* in particular, loosely follow, if unconsciously, a classical formula, such as Beethoven's Quartet Opus 131. "My point, once again, is that the form of a novel, its 'mathematical structure,' is not a calculated thing; it is an unconscious drive, an obsession" (Kundera, *The Art of the Novel*, 93). *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* has no lineal plot or continuous protagonist. Its seven part structure, switching between first and third person is "a novel in the form of variations" exploring the main themes of the novel. The fourth and sixth parts are linked by the same character: Tamina.

...[T]he seven part structure doesn't represent some superstitious flirtation with magical numbers, or any rational calculation, but a deep, unconscious, incomprehensible drive, an archetype of form that I cannot escape. My novels are variants of an architecture based on the number seven" (Kundera, *The Art of the Novel*, 87).

Part 1: *Lost Letters* explores the rewriting of history in both a political and personal sense. The novel opens with Clementis' (an historical figure) who, apart from his hat, is airbrushed out of an official photograph after his fall from grace. The third person omniscient narrator, often switching between perspectives, then proceeds to tell the story of a male character attempting to retrieve his love letters from his ugly mistress, Zdena. The central motif, as stated by the narrator:

We want to be masters of the future only for the power to change the past.  
We fight for access to the labs where we can retouch photos and rewrite biographies and history (Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, 31).

Part 2: *Mama*, again controlled by a third person omniscient narrator, explores forgotten histories. Mama, a once powerful and despised or feared mother-figure is now frail, childlike, with poor eyesight. The Russian tanks seem small and inconsequential in comparison to "pears wasting on the tree". The

central motif resolves itself around a ménage à trois between Karel, his wife, Marketa, and mistress, Eva. “All our experiences”, in this case, the act of love, are “merely recurrences, imitations, repetitions, or evocations” (71).

Part 3: *The Angels*, tells the story of two students, Michelle and Gabrielle, as they attempt to interpret and give a presentation of *Rhinoceros*, a play by Eugene Ionesco, for their teacher, Madame Raphael, and her class. A mixture of third and first person, a discursive narrator interjects with his own stories as he recalls an episode in his past, where he nearly succumbed to raping the editor of his astrological secret writings. The central motif explores the duality of laughter, describing it as an invention of mockery by the devil, aped unsuccessfully by angels in opposition. The section ends in a fabulist image, in mockery of magic realism, in which the girls, like their angelic namesakes, fly through the roof and into the sky after they have been kicked in the backside by a Jewish girl, Sarah. This Judeo-Christian theme will be revisited in Part 7.

By Part 4, *Lost Letters*, we are finally introduced to the main protagonist, Tamina. The narrator states:

It is a novel about Tamina, and whenever Tamina is absent, it is a novel for Tamina. She is its main character and main audience, and all the other stories are variations on her story and come together in her life as in a mirror” (165).

Like Mirek, in Part 1, Tamina too is attempting to retrieve her lost love letters and diary entries of her relationship with her husband, now dead. The central motif, similarly, explores the act of forgetting. Tamina fears losing her memory of her husband and believes only by retrieving the letters from across the border (another repeated image) can she continue to live. The narration switches between third and first person, but in a much more personal way as the author, presumably Kundera himself or his alter

ego, attempts to deconstruct the art of the novel. With a heavy tone of irony from the narrator, the novel then describes a minor character who is attempting to write a novel and is advised; “All anyone can do,’ said Banaka, ‘is give a report on oneself. Anything else is an abuse of power. Anything else is a lie’” (124). In this way, the novel identifies the Postmodernist quandary on the identity and purpose of a novel when history and the grand narrative are both dead. The narrator then tells us he “will spare” us “the lecture on the art of writing the two Socrateses gave the young woman” (125) to give his own lecture on Graphomania: a mania for writing books. The powerful image of the Ostriches that confronted Tamina, he reassures us, were not to “warn or to scold her’ (145) but to tell her about themselves.

Part 5: *Litost*– a Czech word, the Narrator assures us, with no equivalent English translation, means “A state of torment created by the sudden sight of one’s own misery” (167). The narration switches between third person omniscient narrator and a first person persona, an émigré watching from across the border. Following the story of a poetry student’s unrequited love for a butcher’s wife, Kristyna, this section deconstructs the art of poetry, often ridiculing the poets – all male with scenes verging on slapstick such as the scene which depicts poets, all named after iconic poets such as Voltaire, Boccaccio and Petrarch, lifting a drunken, invalided poet, Goethe, into a taxi (192-97).

Part 6: *The Angels* is a repetition of the hat image in the first part, representing the rewriting of history with observations on the writing of Kafka, representing a world without memory. A third person narration dominates with first person anecdotes about a banned Czech historian and the death of the narrator’s father. The story then returns to the main protagonist, Tamina and the process she undergoes in forgetting about forgetting. Tamina ends up on an island of children, a metaphor for Czech communism and popular



culture. Children run the world on this island, a world without history. Reminiscent of *The Lord of the Flies* by William Golding, the world of the island is dictated by the whims of children and in attempting to escape back to her life, Tamina drowns.

The final part, Part 7: *The Border* is in complete contrast to the previous part with its tragic demise of the main protagonist. Introducing characters never seen before, Part 7 “heralds the ultimate forgetting” (Kundera, *Art of the Novel*, 92). Alternating between third and first person narration, a complete new cast of characters is introduced. The last of the novel’s male characters is about to cross the border of countries (and laughter). Comical and often ludicrous images, an irrelevant social issue of whether women should wear tops on the beach, pencils inserted in the rumps of opera singers, the hat in the coffin, and a final nude beach image, all explore the central motif of laughter as a border.

Like *Prisoner*, a cultural icon, in this case an icon of high culture as opposed to popular culture, acts as a central plank in the construction of the novel. Where *Prisoner* used the television series of the same name as a setting with its own fictional character interacting with the cast from the series, Kundera uses the mathematical structure of Beethoven’s *Quartet Opus 131* to construct the seven movements of *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*. Just as Mason incorporated various examples of popular culture to develop both character and theme, Kundera too uses cultural icons to expand upon the themes of the ambiguity or duality of laughter, the process of forgetting whether it is personal, political or cultural memory, and a deconstruction of the art of writing, whether the novel, poetry or play.

The *Prisoner* text, in its own right, adopts many of the same practices and themes raised in both Mason’s and Kundera’s texts. *Prisoner* is the final part of a cycle of three interrelated novellas or a novel in three parts, and as such, a reader will have privileged

information on how Claire Bailey came to be in prison for the murder of her husband. The story of Claire Bailey in prison develops her story after the guilty verdict. As she launches an appeal, as has been done before by Karen Travis, a major character in the television series, there is a re-examination of her past through her claims of her husband's actions, her father, an ex-lover and Detective Fieldon. Between her and her solicitor, Mr. Wilson - a character taken from the television series, they develop or negotiate the various scenarios that might lead to her eventual acquittal or at least extenuating circumstances leading to a reduced sentence. At the same time, these scenarios examine many of the mysteries signified but never developed in the previous two texts, *The Visitation* and *The Interview*.

From the very first page the reader, perhaps without yet realizing it, is plunged into the *Prisoner* television series. Like Kundera, a cultural icon is appropriated as a central structure to the story and like Mason, an immediately recognisable product of popular culture is 'excorporated' and subverted as part of the central play of the novel. Any reader familiar with the series, the correlation between the title of the text and the series is a further clue, may recognize the opening images of every episode repeated in the opening sentence of the text.

The double shift of a shutter is like an exclamation mark: these uncomplicated shots in black and white, a succession of the same face at different angles... (Keeley, 1).

They might also recognize both a central character in Mrs Jackson and her dialogue, directly lifted from the television series. "When the bell goes at 6am", she says, "it means rise, dress, make your bed and tidy your room" (1). After Claire Bailey is inducted into the jail, she meets other characters from the television series in Bea Smith, Lizzie Birdsworth and Doreen Anderson. It is only once the first person narrator interjects that we realize that Claire Bailey is in a

real jail somewhere, and the narrator chooses something he knows, the *Prisoner* series, to interpret both character and plot.

Now she has gone into the labyrinth of the women's penal system to where I cannot follow.... I can only imagine her through the prism of the fictional (10).

With the story being told through the imagination of a narrator who is implicated in the story, it then becomes possible to see that the character is not really in the television series. Rather it is how the narrator, who seemingly has experienced a real prison himself given the various facts, descriptions of inmates known to him and privileged language he uses, chooses to tell the story. The reader can envisage the potentially 'real' experiences of a woman imprisoned for a crime she may not have committed, and the machinations of plot exploring various legal means and retellings of history, to put things right. "There are other avenues of escape. She must think about them. No one chooses to be here" (12).

It is not coincidental that the text works against the expectation and sense of closure we have become accustomed to through the medium of popular culture, in this case, in the guise of crime television. Like Mason's text, there is a question of authenticity. How can we truly mediate between 'individual memory and mass-media expression' when there is such a 'blurring of fiction and fact[?]' (Holstein, 331). The system of narration, for its part, is yet another expression of this lack of authenticity and the suspicion it generates that nothing can be taken at face value. The exposition of the various scenarios that attempt to find another 'fall-guy' or lessen the culpability of the main character, or in the very least attempt to explain, can be seen for what they are, a fabrication from various angles and characters, both minor and major, including the narrator himself.

As I began to laugh, to join in their song, no one but myself could appreciate the irony... If Karen Travis could get away with murder than

why couldn't she? Appeal. Tell them they got it wrong. Tell them anything (Keeley, 16).

Both the Mason and the Kundera texts, just as *Prisoner* does, not only use a main cultural icon to formulate a major component of the story's structure but also use a number of references from other icons to add nuance to both character and theme. For Mason, there was much to plunder given that her novel was set in the 1980's but also dealt with events that occurred in the 1960's, namely the Vietnam War and the adolescent years of Sam's mother. By using pop songs, originating from both eras, Mason is able to add further complexity and endorse the philosophical preferences that she is writing about; the impossibility of truly unmediated experience. The appropriation of such references begins immediately with the epigraph of a popular song.

*I'm ten years burning down the road*

*Nowhere to run ain't got nowhere to go*

*-Bruce Springsteen,*

*Born in the USA*

Springsteen, Sam's favourite rock star, is critical of the treatment of Vietnam Veterans and the epigraph sets the scene for the consequent plot of the novel. Notably, it also enhances Sam's understanding of her Uncle Emmett, a Vietnam Veteran. Mason comes back to the song in Part 2.

... In the song, his brother gets killed over there, and then the guy gets in a lot of trouble when he gets back home. He can't get a job, and he ends up in jail. It's a great song (Mason, 42).

Another pop song, *The End* by the Doors released in 1967, is a more direct indictment of the Vietnam War. To complicate matters even further and to add to the mix of how we re-contextualise cultural icons, *The End* was appropriated by another media form, that of film, when it was used in the sound track of *Apocalypse Now*, a film

produced in 1979. “Sam was looking through the records, wishing she could find a Doors Album – the one that had ‘The End’,” from *Apocalypse Now* (145).

Perhaps a further illustration of how cultural icons are constantly re-contextualised and subverted in *In Country* occurs when Sam remakes a red ceramic cat by utilizing beads her mother wore in the sixties. According to N doCarma,

Sam’s use of all these mass-culture texts demonstrates the type of ‘excorporation’ Fiske describes, as ‘resources and commodities provided by the dominant system’ are pilfered and re-interpreted by a subordinate individual, a status inherent in Sam’s economic, gender and geographical positionings (593).

The ceramic cat Sam purchased from K-Mart is a coin bank reminiscent of piggy banks given to children by major banks during the sixties and seventies to start their savings. A typical icon of capitalism, the ceramic cat is subverted from its original purpose as Sam remodels it for an entirely different one. “She fastened a sequin on the cat’s cheek. A cat like this could be used for smuggling dope. Or for a terrorist bomb” (Mason, 140). From an object representative of capitalism, it is suddenly transferred into representations that are anathema to capitalism, in dope smuggling and terrorism. A few passages on a further opposition is added in the form of a hippie representation. “She picked a marigold from the yard and stuck it in the cat’s slit. ....He was psychedelic” (141). It is worth noting that the cat in its original form “grinned at her” but once transformed “[t]he red cat seemed to take on a new personality, more contented with his new appearance than smirky” (143). Even the Vietnamese get into the act as they too appropriate icons of popular culture. “The Vietnamese used anything the Americans threw away – bomb casings and cigarette butts and helicopter parts and coke cans..... The Vietnamese could make a bomb out of a coke can” (209). Such demonstrations of

the subversion of popular cultural icons, the products of capitalism, question the assertion of “absolute opposition between producers and consumers”. If such objects can be re-contextualised and subverted then “[i]nstead of being dichotomous by nature.... mass culture can emerge as ... having no intrinsic political allegiances” (N doCarma, 594).

If Mason is willing to highlight and subvert popular culture in her own work, Kundera, on the other hand, takes an entirely different view. In opposition to the minimalist approach where the traditional separation between high and popular culture is disrupted, Kundera values high culture and ridicules popular culture. From the very first pages of the novel, he illustrates the case where political forces rewrite history in an act of collective forgetting by subverting an iconic representation of popular culture, the press photograph. Gottwald, the leader of a fictional communist State, Bohemia, steps out onto the balcony to address thousands of citizens in the town square. Gottwald is bare-headed and ‘bursting with solicitude, Clementis took off his hat and set it on Gottwald’s head.’ Thousands of photographs of the event are distributed on posters. “Every child knew that photograph” (Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, 3). When Clementis is charged with treason and hanged four years later, the propaganda section immediately airbrushed him out of the photograph. The only thing left of Clementis in history is his fur hat still on Gottwald’s head. To develop this theme of forgetting history further, Kundera refers more directly to popular culture as a major factor for erasing the past and blinding the masses. In this case, he focuses on the guitar, representative of popular music as a means of emotive manipulation. “The history of music is perishable, but the idiocy of guitars is eternal. Music nowadays has returned to its primeval state” (248).

In this particular scene, popular music is a means by which Kundera explores one of his major themes, the loss of history and the loss of memory. He goes on to describe what he sees as the effects that the instant gratification of popular culture is having on humanity.

Children are the future not because they will one day be adults but because humanity is becoming more and more a child, because childhood is the image of the future. ....He shouted "Children, never look back!" (257).

Accordingly, when Karel Klos, a Czech Pop singer that the Narrator labels as 'The Idiot of Music' (257), left the country, Husak, the communist leader, wrote him a letter begging for his return. It is here that the Narrator comments that the emigration of professionals from high culture, including historians, writers and painters, never elicited the same response 'because Karel Klos represented music without memory, the music under which the bones of Beethoven and Ellington, the ashes of Palestrina and Schoenberg, are forever buried (249). Kundera's exposition of the loss of history and memory, brought about by the immediacy of popular culture culminates in Part Six, *The Angels*, where Tamina, a major protagonist, is left on the Children's island. Here, according to the Narrator, is the future of humanity. "The island resounds with the shouting of a song and the din of electric guitars. A tape recorder has been set down in front of the dormitory" (258). On this island, the absurdity of childish cruelty is the rule. Tamina, the only adult on the island and consequently an object of fascination, is expected to join in all the childish games. "The idiocy of the guitars keeps resounding, and the children keeping dancing and she feels the nausea that emanates from weightless things" (259).

Even as she drowns when trying to escape the island, the children watch from their boat, making no move to rescue her but waiting in anticipation of her death, reminiscent of an audience watching a popular movie or documentary

without involvement. The world of popular culture that Kundera describes, in contrast to Mason, is one of loss. Without history and memory, the archetypes of high culture such as Beethoven, we lose our humanity. Combined with the simple unadorned language and what Kundera calls his ‘meditative interrogation’, the novel paints a bleak picture as it explores the variations of themes of forgetting and the consequent absurdity, much as Beethoven explored the possible variations of a note and a chord. “Each of the parts in my novel could carry a classical indication: moderato, presto, adagio and so on” (Kundera, *Art of the Novel*, 90). A novel with no lineal plot or central character, unlike Mason, the main point of interest is the mathematical structure, in this case the movements of Beethoven’s *Quartet Opus 131*, as Kundera explores the variations of his themes.

Just like Mason’s *In Country* and to a lesser degree Kundera’s *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, *Prisoner* also appropriates or signifies a number of other cultural icons. The mimicry of newspaper reports and psychological profiles add to the authenticity by including what one might expect in a high profile crime case. “A report was provided at the request of the Court in order to provide a psychological profile and risk assessment of Mrs C Bailey” (Keeley, 50). A duet between Claire Bailey and her solicitor, Mr Wilson, taken directly from the *Sound of Music* works further against authenticity and adds an element of the absurd. “Mr Wilson bursts into song:- You were sixteen, going on seventeen, innocent as a rose, bachelors, dandies, drinkers of brandies, what did you know of those” (76). Like Mason, by borrowing from a known text, one taken from a film of innocence, a further nuance is added, the naivety and vulnerability of the main character at an earlier age.

The three texts are part of the same discourse, the loss of authenticity and the loss, recuperation or reinvention of history through the medium of popular



culture. How Mason and Kundera might be seen at odds is in how Mason, on the one hand, empowers her characters through appropriation, or in what N doCarmo points out as ‘a practice John Fiske, in *Understanding Popular Culture*, calls “excorporation”, which is the “tearing or disfigurement of a commodity in order to assert one’s right and ability to remake it into one’s own culture” (qtd. in doCarmo, 589). On the other hand, Kundera’s characters are disempowered, more or less paralysed, through the loss of history brought on by popular culture. The main character in *Prisoner* can be seen to be a mix between the two, in some ways paralysed and disempowered in a television series, in other ways empowered in that she can be seen to take action on her own behalf. Mason’s text is peppered with references to popular cultural icons with *MASH* an overarching one as part of the novel’s discourse. Kundera uses Beethoven’s *Quartet Opus 131* as a mathematical structure for his variations on a theme with instances of iconic popular culture iconography in the form of a guitar. Where Mason is positive in her declaration, Kundera is pessimistic. The *Prisoner* text, by embedding popular culture within the story, cannot help but be part of the same discourse. Like Kundera, an icon is part of the structure of the novel but like Mason, it uses a product of popular culture in the form of a television series, in contrast to Kundera’s high cultural artefact in the form of Beethoven. Just as *MASH* plays a central role in Mason’s story, the television series *Prisoner*, first televised in the late seventies and early eighties with repeats in the nineties, plays a similar role in the *Prisoner* text.

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## **Section 2: Synopsis**

### **Related Texts**

*The Visitation*

*The Interview*

### SYNOPSIS: RELATED TEXTS

The creative project of my MCA –R was to develop a novella, *Prisoner*. However, due to the fact that it is not a stand alone text but the final part of a cycle of three interrelated novellas or a novel in three parts, a complication exists that may make it difficult to judge without some background on how it is positioned. With this in mind, I have added a brief synopsis of the previous two texts and how all three relate to one another both in regard to plot and narrative perspective.

It should be clarified at the outset that the three texts are not part of a trilogy in the traditional sense; hence there is no over-riding title or lineal narrative. Each text has its own story to tell, with a narrative perspective to suit its needs. Some characters appear in only one text while others appear in two or all texts. The *Prisoner* text, by necessity, bears a much closer relationship with the first text, *The Visitation*, with its main character again central to the story. The various twists and turns of narrative as each text is completed, works eventually by the end of the final text to establish a fourth meta-story, that of a narrator out of control on a separate plain. By the end of *Prisoner* the discourse between text and reader is finally realized, and an outcome achieved that gives closure without disrupting the discursive nature of the texts. Following is an analysis including a brief synopsis of them all to give some idea of my intentions.

## THE VISITATION

1. Philosophical underpinning: Provisionality of truth
2. Narrative Perspective: Third person omniscient, retrospective:
3. Setting: Inner suburb (Melbourne-Richmond). Time unspecified – late 1980's to early 90's
4. Plot: A young woman, Claire Bailey, recently married to an older man, becomes the victim of a stalker, an unknown Caucasian male. She suspects he is squatting in an empty apartment opposite (Flat 5). This figure takes on god-like aspects in that he is seemingly able to appear at will, pass through locked doors and windows, even seemingly floating amid the rafters of the Cathedral when she accompanies her husband to church. She seeks help from a Detective-Inspector Des Fieldon, a friend of her father from whom she is estranged. After she has been pursued down the street by the stalker, she begins to unravel. Her husband is murdered, presumably by the stalker, and torched in the family car. At the end, she is constrained in a hospital room, psychotic and rambling incoherently about her own culpability.

From the very start, the story is framed by the surreal, in which Claire Bailey is depicted in bed early one morning, apparently dreaming. This dreamlike quality will continue throughout the text with the Stalker taking on nightmare proportions and will be resolved later on in the hospital scenes. The end of *The Visitation* remains ambiguous. As readers we cannot be sure whether the Stalker, or alternatively, whether a psychotic Claire Bailey rendered her husband unconscious, placed him in the family car and set him alight. The final scene shows the detective snooping around her apartment, trying to clarify the ambiguity of two possible scenarios.

## THE INTERVIEW

1. Philosophical underpinning: The process by which the past is recreated according to need and perspective.
2. Narrative perspective: Shifting First Person – discourse between various characters, both minor and major: predominately Mr. Jones. Past tense, very much a story told retrospectively, that is, after the event. An over-arching second voice in which ‘you’ (Detective Inspector Fieldon, unspecified until the end) is conducting the investigation into what actually occurred.
3. Setting: Country Victoria, Echuca. Time unspecified and variable. Descriptions of place are accurate, however, these descriptions vary historically so that even the physical environment keeps shifting, reflecting shifts in the reported events as they are investigated.
4. Plot: Concerns a young man, Paul Baker, who leaves the city of Melbourne and travels by unknown means to a regional city, Echuca, and is either murdered or commits suicide. He is later found beside a track in the bush with a 12 gauge shotgun by his side. What follows is the Detective’s attempts, referred to as ‘you’, to find the truth of what happened and achieve an accurate assessment of a main character who is dead. A number of characters, including those that saw him in passing, i.e. shop assistants, casual acquaintances, town cop investigating the suicide and those more closely involved, a young woman with whom he had an affair, the man he shared a house with who happened to be her ex-boyfriend and would later be her husband and the enigmatic Mr. Jones who was in the right place at the right time, are interviewed. Even the investigating voice, the detective, has a story to champion, a past incident, a night assault on a female nurse in the car park of a city hospital where Paul was working at the time and

reveals a transcript of a police interview where Paul was a possible witness. As the various claims of the characters, with varying degrees of plausibility, are collated the story unfolds.

The story is framed by the investigation itself. The Detective, in his secondary role on the Crimes Review Board, is called upon to investigate the suicide after a letter written by Mr. Jones claimed that the original investigation carried out by a local police officer was flawed in its finding when, in his view, Paul Baker's death was a well planned and malicious execution. By the end of *The Interview*, the Detective confirms the original finding, however, by then as a reader, we know that the Detective's motives are suspect, that his intentions were not so much to find the truth of the matter but to champion his own hidden agenda, his investigations into the murder of Claire Bailey's husband.

## PRISONER

1. Philosophical underpinning: redefining history
2. Narrative perspective: First person narrator, 'I' am the viewer, shifting to third person, She' the main character, the object being viewed.
3. Setting: television series, *Prisoner* - set in a fictional women's prison televised during the late 70's and early 80's. As one of the central themes of the text is the relativity of perspective we bring to refining and redefining history on both a personal and political level, the text appropriates an artifact of popular culture, a successful and well known television series, as a fictional setting.
4. Plot: Resolves the ambiguities of the previous two texts, *The Visitation* and *The Interview*. **Manuscript attached.**

Please note: The synopsis above is meant as a guide to resolve the difficulty that *Prisoner* is a concluding text to a longer story. However, the other manuscripts are available upon request, should they be required, under the proviso that they require a further draft following the completion of *Prisoner*, the third and final book of the series. Contact Alan Wearne (Supervisor) at the University of Wollongong, by phone (02) 4221 4098 or email: [awearne@uow.edu.au](mailto:awearne@uow.edu.au)



## **Section 3: Creative Component**

**Manuscript: *Prisoner* by Terry Keeley**

# **PRISONER**

TERRY KEELEY

[ 1]

The double shift of a shutter is like an exclamation mark; these uncomplicated shots in black and white, a succession of the same face at different angles, its shared expression, indifference, perhaps defiance.

A voice behind the camera tells her to lift her chin. Turn left. Now right.

Her many aspects are represented in the various images they take of her, how she can now be described, the different angles, distortions, how she might be seen when she was not looking at herself. Brunette and slim, vivacious and worldly, alternatively childlike, she will wear the same clothes as everyone else so there will be no discrepancies.

-Claire Bailey, you were found guilty of murder in the first degree, and sentenced to life imprisonment. Is that correct?

Mrs Jackson, the only officer to introduce herself, didn't expect or need confirmation. The documents were before her.

-When the first bell goes at 6.00a.m., she says, it means rise, dress, make your bed and tidy up your room. The 7.00a.m. bell means muster and report for assigned work. The breakfast bell rings at 8.00a.m. Daily showers are to be taken at times designated by the house officer. You are allowed one phone call at admission but you should already know that. You will be examined by the sister. You will then meet the reception committee who will explain the options open to you within the system.

Her life will be different now. Simpler. Everyone looked the same. That is the way it is here.

What was unimaginable once must now be imagined. It is how everyone must see her now. She murdered her husband. Perhaps he deserved it. There were the things people said of her, the portents dragged from her past during her trial, until she hardly knew herself. She was a blank slate upon which anything could be written.

Now the whole world can see her in her nightgown. They point at her as she dragged an unconscious man through the hallway after striking him down. Did madness give her strength? They see her struggle with his improbable weight, his heels thrumming against the treads of the back steps. Perhaps she falls, stumbles beneath her load. The bruises can be accounted for in this other way. She propped him against the car and opened the driver's side door. Or was it already open? These were the steps that must have been taken, the precise stages of an execution. Somehow, for whatever reason, the power to move him was given to her by whatever had possessed her. She bundled him into the car, put his seat belt on, locked the doors, stripped off, fed her night gown into the petrol tank, lit the wick.

And aren't we all guilty, at one time or another, of hating those we are supposed to love?

As the van that transports her makes its way towards the prison gates, I catch a glimpse of the sign: 'Wentworth - Correctional Centre', I see the rose garden in contrast to the prison walls, hear the lyrics of a plaintiff refrain, roses again. A series of large bolts slide into place, metal against metal, the final thump of an iron door. I know she is in a place where they turn the lights out exactly at ten. On again at six with the birds. Climbing the fence is not allowed. Climbing the walls is optional.

In the days to come, believe me, she will long for other places, other times. Such flash backs will be accompanied with the strains of a violin in the background, a change in the lighting, soft, sepia-like,

faint echoes in the voices from the past that speak to her. These technical changes occur without notice.

She will remember a shadow, the change in air as it manifests itself, the concussion of steps, felt rather than heard. These are the physical signs she will cling to as she seeks to explain.

Yet she must learn quickly to limit or control her expectations, become more or less human, less or more animal, she cannot know which it is, only that she must appear sedated, watchful, always ready. She must learn to run like clock work like everyone else, to rise, shower, fulfil her tasks, sustain herself by sustaining herself. She will be identified and counted three times a day to ensure she remains where she is. There will be no make-up, the real without facade, recognisable. She is given a number to memorise, digits that record her circumstance, transcripts of commentary on her behaviour and the like. Number 47874, a palindrome, ending as it begins or beginning as it ends. No one remarks on it. In time, she will feel drained, dried and frozen by the facts. She will respect authority, await instruction for the most menial of acts.

-One word of warning, Mrs Jackson tells her as she leads her down the hall. Keep your eye on your things. In this place, they tend to disappear.

There are voices she has never heard before calling through the hall in the dark, a flurry of words. Impossible to work them out. The cacophony and its echoes begin when the lights go out, the roar and heehaw you'd expect on the plains, not dusk sounds but night sounds, the brass arguments over meat in the pitch and she cannot bear the din. She covers her ears and the images in her mug shots all do the same.

-Hey, ya slag.

Frustrated voices ringing down the halls.

-Liar, liar, ya pants are on fire.

Cruel matriarchs barking at her heels, their intention; to pull her down.

-Tell us the truth then.

-Yeah. We want to hear you cry.

-Even howl.

-Like a dog.

Until she cries. Yes. To get it over with. She turns and she squats, she bursts into tears. That or remain defiant. Bite back. It is all perfectly natural after all, it is what they do, and she isn't sure which was best, defiance or submission, doesn't know what she's in for.

She has no memory, or recollection of her crime.

Yet she takes the latter course because it seems the easiest at the time, or rather, it is expected of her. So she cries. She sobs loudly so that everyone can hear her.

-That's not me, she says. I don't tell lies.

[2]

Winners and losers. Inevitably that is how it should be seen after all the fanfare of her trial. R. B.'s family and friends, having sat for so long through the process of the trial, were asked on the steps of the courthouse by the media how they felt about the decision once the jury's verdict was handed down.

Why do I insist in identifying the victim as R.B. and not Ralph Bailey?

Ralph Bailey, by the very circumstances of his death, is more a concept now. He was in the way or in the wrong place at the right time. He was not a martyr but an object, representative of all such victims of crime. What now can be said of him? What is left, besides his gravestone, to show that he ever existed? Simply this. Incinerated almost beyond recognition, he became a series of photographs, horrifying to some, taken by forensics and presented by the prosecution, later leaked to the press by persons unknown. A black petrified mummy framed by the burnt-out shell of his car, his head tilted back, mouth open impossibly wide, silent, a sculpture of stone. These contortions of head and mouth are meaningless, caused more by the process of combustion. According to the Coroner, the blow that had caused Ralph Bailey's skull to fracture would have insured that he was never conscious, never cognisant to the facts.

Yet how we eulogise the dead. Father Frank, Parish priest and spokesman for the victim's family and friends, long winded as always, had prepared a few words. Not all of them would

make it to the daily news. Not all of them were true. This is what he said.

*On behalf of the family who have asked me to speak to you today, and on behalf of the Parish that I represent, I can tell you that no sentence, however long, can make up for the loss of one loved by so many. The fact of his death, the brutal manner of it, has left an indelible mark not just on his immediate family, but also his greater family, his colleagues, his pupils, the Parish which he served voluntarily, humanity as a whole. The world is poorer, a sadder and more meaningless place for his passing.*

He paused momentarily for greater affect and this would be the image that would make the papers, and the television evening news: a cleric, suitably stern, saddened by events.

*From all we have heard during the long ordeal of this trial, Claire Bailey, the woman with whom he chose to share his life, would appear to be a very troubled young woman. Perhaps this tragedy is as much hers as ours. We do not see her as evil, as many of you have portrayed her, ultimately only God can be her judge. Yet to have tortured a man, to set him on fire as has been described during the trial, is in itself an evil act. No one deserves to die in such a horrible way, especially a good and loving man such as Ralph Bailey.*

*But now that the ordeal is over, we beseech all of you to allow us to move on. Ralph Bailey will be greatly missed. We will never forget him. Yet Life will go on. Justice, as far as it is in our earthly powers, has been done. Now it is time to pick up all the pieces, to get on with our lives. I thank you for this opportunity to speak to you today. May God bless and guide us all.*



\*

When the bell rings and the lights come on, I see her sitting on the edge of her bed, in pyjamas, standard issue. Her cell has all that she will require; a single iron bunk bolted to the floor, mattress and blanket, a small bedside table with basin, iron locker, toilet - a metal bowl discretely out of sight. For her initiation, she will be locked up on her own but it is only temporary until she settles in and learns the rules. They won't tell her how long this will be, she was here to serve time after all, it was not her concern, but eventually she will share a cell with other prisoners, two out or three out as they say. She will learn to live without privacy, to turn away, see without seeing, listen without hearing.

They all shower together. Three cubicles and you can see their wet legs, their heads and shoulders neutralized in the stream. The cubicle door covered what must be covered, according to public taste. Three basins for them to clean their teeth, a metal mirror, unbreakable; another distorted image, the overpowering reek of disinfectant.

Frankie Doyle, another inmate, famous or rather infamous when she was there, wore a lesbian's scowl. Another tough, perhaps she was where she liked to be in the midst of all that flesh, copping an eyeful, still within a stones throw of the censor rules but enough to titillate. The women covered themselves in the shower room except those that didn't care and Frankie had limited opportunities anyway. The screws were always watching.

Yet you will understand. Claire must become Bea's friend and fairly soon. Anything but that. With the years that were to

follow, surrounded by dreary walls, concrete and metal, without a man, you might wonder how she could be so naive, so stuck up. She would want to be kissed, won't she? She would want to touch someone and be touched so we have begun imagining what we previously thought unimaginable. But the likes of Frankie Doyle will want to dominate her.

The breakfast room was made up of small tables, in rows, sitting no more than four. Pastel green walls, a trolley at the side where they helped themselves. Claire is given a plate. Eggs and toast and she didn't like eggs. Bea Smith, the boss in a hierarchy of bosses, is a large woman, strong, you can tell, tough as old boots. She smiles as she passes the plate to Claire, even winks at her.

-I've got you a plate, Bea says. But don't expect that every day. Eh girls?

They all laugh. They all know who she is. There is no anonymity here. A high-profile like Claire's, she didn't need to tell them anything. They'd read the papers. They'd all seen the photograph, an image of herself that began to dominate her.

-There are a few of us in here, Bea says, that've done the same thing, luv. You're nothin' special.

Should this console her? Does it put her in her place?

Queen Bea is the one she will have to get to know. Ask anyone. Bea is the one she will have to watch out for. Become her friend.

If she stands very still, fixes her eyes on the distance, lets her mind wander, she might cease to hear the shallow breath of her panic, the crescendo of her own silence.

Midway up the steps to the courthouse on the first day into the inquest of her husband's death, Claire Bailey, not yet in disguise, looked down at the camera without comprehension. The photograph will be published in the newspapers for all to see and conclusions would be drawn that in time will become definitive and decisive in the public eye.

She had never experienced anything like fame before.

Things were beginning to look worse for her. They were already bad enough. She had lost her husband in a most terrible way and it must be remembered, the car, an orange Datsun, was uninsured.

Staring at the lens, or at the man behind the camera, perhaps she was checking the crowd for a face she might see there. Or distracted by what she had already seen, not so much by the photographer, she was looking for a sign, however small that sign might have been. A wisp of hair had fallen over her right cheek. She wore a black dress and black shoes; she was in mourning after all. The photographer had called out her name. With one foot raised to the next step, she had stopped walking and looked around. A natural reaction. A moment poised. The photographer took the shot. A few steps ahead of her, Detective Fieldon, a personal friend and one of the two men closes to her, had also turned. He was not looking at the cameraman but at Claire. Frozen in time, his face in profile, his uncertainty was captured in that moment. His weight was shifting back on his heels, his head tilting away. He was in the same frame but he was no longer with her. Later on, in his professional capacity, he had told her to get a lawyer. She would need one. She was going to be charged and there was nothing he could do about that. Father

Frank, a Catholic priest, both counsellor and temporary friend, had not wanted to be seen in this light and failed to turn his head at all. The photographer took the photograph. The moment was recorded, frozen, the angle of shot bearing skywards towards the building she was heading for.

She would be advised later on by her defence counsel to stop wearing make-up, dress more conservatively. Don't stare at the witnesses or jury, this will be seen as defiance. On the other hand, don't avoid eye contact altogether, for this will be seen as guilt. But this early on in proceedings, the black dress ended above the knees. A close fit, accentuating her figure, it was more suited to a night on the town, not that she had ever been. She wore lipstick and eye-shadow. The effect was stunning but hardly wise. The make-up could not conceal her despair, an empty expression, difficult to describe and often misinterpreted but you know as she stares out at you, that she is not seeing anyone. Dark, shoulder-length hair. In her later appearances her hair became strikingly blond and styled close to the nape, taking everyone by surprise. So you can see as both. She hardly spoke, barely cried. Later, she would sit through the public and extended proceedings, hidden behind sunglasses.

In the photograph, an image that would be used repeatedly throughout the trial, she had not yet learnt to disguise herself. Her mouth was open, if only slightly, in surprise, perhaps even in guilt. Perpetrator or victim? Sometimes she was both at the same time. Her guilt, as seen when the photographer caught her off guard, may have been a general one. It may have simply been a trick of light, a quality of film or placement of object: a young woman midway up the concreted steps leading to the stone

courthouse, phallic in its conception, surrounded by men with their faces turned away.

Like everywhere else, the laundry where she is expected to work is pastel green and grey, a pale cream band to break the monotony. Industrial, purposeful, it smells of steam and linen. A hard floor, green mat, table and shelves with folded clothes. Simple and unencumbered. A nice franchise. A nice little earner.

Everyone wears the same overalls, their shirts yellow although some are green, others grey, so there are discrepancies after all. On special days they even wear dresses, their length properly beneath the knee, stiff denim of Wentworth blue. Bea is in the laundry. And Doreen Anderson, Lizzie Birdsworth too. And others. I cannot yet put names to all the faces. Fragments of their developing plots, lifers and blow-ins, small snippets of intelligences that were serialised, are irrelevant in any case. Bit players, nameless ones who appear and disappear, some going free, some going away. They do have names, I just forget them. They make their own plans, incidental to anything Claire might think or say, so she is folding clothes all morning. She pulls them from the dryer and places them neatly onto the bench. Something she is good at.

After work, the dining room is compacted with their din. They toss food into their mouths, laugh and talk around mouthfuls, the curse without the substance. They all complain about the food. In the recreation room, they sit before an old black and white television. They watch the screen. They play cards or they just talk. Claire would play and talk too if she was invited.

She must dread the coming night.

[3]

Do I observe selfishly? Seek the detail in everything, crave to know what I cannot necessarily understand? Is this my necessity, my pleasure?

As I wander through the shadow lands I hear the crescendo of the night's television, and later on, the shallow breath of the sleepers, the disturbance of their dreams. Listen. Twelve o'clock to twelve o'clock and another circuit begins.

Now she has gone into the labyrinth of the women's penal system to where I cannot follow. She endures her despair? Prison, if you've ever been there is full of pitfalls for the unwary, the naive. There is a new way of being, a way of slumping through time while you learn the ropes, the who's who of the yards. There will be those already there waiting to take advantage, those you should never cross. She has so much to learn. I can only imagine her through this prism of the fictional.

Yet nothing in the shadow lands is impossible. Fiction and fact become intertwined, where even the past is not static, neither dead nor alive. As I think of the many antecedents of people in prison, film, television, novels, both of and on the past, I wondered what would be the antecedent to her condition?

It was while I pondered on how to follow her that I turned on the television after a long night of wandering, flicked idly through the channels, and there it was: *Prisoner*. A rerun of a long running serial on commercial television, set in a women's prison, with an emphasis on realism.

Serendipity, according to The New Oxford Dictionary of English, is the occurrence and development of events by chance in a happy or beneficial way, first coined by Horace Walpole in 1754 in *The three Princes of Serendip*, the title of a fairy tale in which the heroes ‘were always making discoveries, by accidents and sagacity, of things they were not in quest of.’

I had seen *Prisoner* before when it had first aired in 1979 but back then I was barely interested. In my own arrogant way, I dismissed it, wondered at the stupidity of anyone who could be bothered to watch such melodrama, interspersed of course, with advertisements interrupting my fine thoughts.

How I regret that now.

So what do I remember of *Prisoner* back then? The original cast and their crimes, of course. Burly Bea Smith, murderer. Frankie Doyle, lesbian, in for armed robbery and murder. Karen Travis, school teacher, murdered her husband in the bathroom with a carving knife. Such coincidence but of course, I never knew that back then. Doreen Anderson, simpleton, was in for a lesser crime, forgery and theft. Lizzie Birdsworth, old and grizzled. As I recall it, she added something extra to the meal of the shearers she cooked for because they complained about the food. And then there were the officers, guardians of the mad and the bad: the Governor –Erica Davidson, Vera Bennett her deputy, and to counter balance her nastiness, Meg Jackson, the nice officer. Finally Dr. Greg Miller would have his part to play too.

And where was I in all this? I was unknown at this time, unappreciated. I spent the intervening years in a daze, dreaming before my time. I never intended this for her. Yet such is the

prism through which I must view her. That and the occasional snippets of intelligence let slip through the wire. Her story was still newsworthy, still seen to be of interest to the public, and there are always leaks. A small, unconfirmed report that she still maintained her innocence, even sought an appeal can generate excitement, a double page spread in the Herald, a rehash of her story with accompanying images of her on the court steps, a sketch of her in the dock, things she said and never said.

Once the shock of her circumstance has passed, her denial of what could be done to her and was done, does she think about getting out, about seeking revenge? I imagine her with wings, sweeping with her talons braced to strike. There was no shortage of those upon whom she might seek her revenge. The list was long and growing ever longer. R.B. was dead so he would not be one of them.

Time inside these walls fashions faces into appropriate shapes and lines, like Lizzie Birdsworth, or alternatively, old Lizzie had always looked the part. It is what I fear most on Claire's behalf, that she would become like that, all those lines, shrunken and defeated.

Yet they have all had a fair hearing, a chance to tell their side, the circumstances in which they found themselves, argument and counter-argument, mitigation, final judgement. Some, more than others, like Claire, have gained fame, or rather infamy, and now here, serving, enduring, escaping time, they have carved a niche, an existence of some kind, a steady and enduring role, sometimes even death.



There are other avenues of escape. She must think about them. No one chooses to be here. She must dream of other places, a park swing, the kept lawn by a lake, anywhere but here.

But there is certainty in the turning of the locks. All those metal doors are irrefutable. These facts. There is something demeaning, dispiriting, in being numbered, if you've ever experienced it.

In one episode, Frankie, Doreen and Lizzie climbed the fence but Claire couldn't know how they achieved it. She was not privy to the details. No one would tell her. No one would admit to seeing anything. They fall silent whenever she approaches; hide their hands behind their backs. They didn't know her. No one trusted her. Life stories came much later. Bea said it best. Life stories came after you had been here for some time, once they knew who you were, what you were likely to say, even do.

A strange combination, I think. Doreen Anderson left with her teddy bear tucked under her arm. Lizzie Birdsworth, an old woman with a bad heart, wouldn't get very far. Only Frankie refused to come back. She won't miss the place. The place won't miss her. But outside, on the lam, things were just as tough, just as frightening.

Claire, like all the other prisoners, will be rounded up and informed that all privileges had been withdrawn. She was locked in her cell, regardless of her innocence.

-We're not here to be fair, the screws tell her.

When Lizzie was brought back after her heart attack, having been left outside the gate gasping for air, Claire too heard the whispers down the hall. Everyone had been locked up for hours and she might wonder how they knew, how word got

around. But these strands going on are not important. Botched jobs in any case, they are incidental. She did not need to know about them. Nothing was happening to her. Endless nights. Repetition. She drifted without purpose through the days.

Lyn Warner, another prisoner more her age, pushed beyond endurance, sawed through her veins with fragments of a broken mirror. She claimed that she was innocent too but no one believed her. Blood, metallic in this place of metal, drifted down the halls. Something serious. Something terrible. And that was another means of escape.

Or madness. Mindless rage. Transference to a psychiatric hospital, somewhere easier to break out from.

None of these options would suit her. Too physical. Too obvious.

As I observe, I can see there is nowhere to sit in the recreation room. The chairs had all been taken. Lizzie, her old self again, her heart still beating, was cheating at cards. Monnie Ferguson, a new inmate, doesn't need intelligence. Too big to argue with. And Bea, still living in the past, doesn't like Claire although she hasn't done anything.

-Everyone who kills someone, Bea says, unnecessarily aloud, claims to be crazy these days. As if you can be foaming at the mouth one moment and sane the next.

I haven't forgotten Karen's party. Time is not sequential. This is the non-sequential past. It was an episode that occurred before or after it was being told. The beginning can be after the end and what is between them may be outside of them. A re-arrangement. Or re-occurrence.

It was after Karen's re-trial, when mitigating circumstances were allowed. Bea's idea. A party approved by the Governor, streamers, balloons and party cakes, and there was nothing 'old Vinegar tits' could do. Not a single thing.

This is not my favourite scene but a crucial one. It changes everything.

-And me and Lizzie, Doreen says, did our old song and dance routine.

The truth, or near truth, or the appearance of truth, or not the truth at all, was finally coming out. Karen Travis had her sentence remitted to just two years, her appeal successful in that regard. Two years instead of fourteen. Her smile was sweet and relieved.

*Don't you come home, Bill darling*

As Doreen and Lizzie, arm in arm, sing their version of an old song, my mind goes blank. A too bright light flaring in my head, synchronicity, or just repetition, and all that it brought back to me. Yet Bailey was such a slim connection.

*Don't you come home*

*Cause I'll get back at you.*

Doreen and Lizzie kicked their legs high into the air. Ridiculous.

*I'll do the cooking honey*

Should Claire laugh? Should she cry?

*I'll turn you in*

*Ya know ya let me stew*

So damn strange. So damn right and fitting and the tears were running down Claire's cheeks too. And why not. No one saw her. She is learning the art of visibility. There in the

background, she has her faced turned away. She moves to the fringes, yet I see her.

*Remember that rainy morning*

*The cops called around*

*And never gave me a chance at bail*

And it may have occurred to her how appropriate this new version, theirs, not hers, really was, how apt.

*Well ain't it a shame*

*You know you're to blame*

So why the tears, why now? And what sort of tears should they be?

*You're nothin' but a bloomin' male*

-Come on girls, one more time now.

*Won't you come home Bill Bailey*

*Won't you come home*

As I began to laugh, to join in their song, no one but myself could appreciate the irony. The lights came on. I was standing in the lounge room, watching a re-run of Prisoner and suddenly I understood. I could follow her anywhere, even into prison. Opportunity. Escape, partial or otherwise, possibility. If Karen Travis could get away with murder than why couldn't she? Appeal. Tell them they got it wrong. Tell them anything. It wasn't Claire running from the room, screaming, but that Rice woman, another character in the series with her own problems, nothing to do with Claire. Claire had begun to enjoy herself. So had I. She could sing their song too.

[4]

There was a man I once knew in a prison far away. It would not be appropriate to name him. One out in his cell, in his case to protect him given the nature of his crime which I won't divulge, only to say his was a crime despised even here, his only companionship apart from the prison officers and the few with whom it was deemed safe for him to associate, were the sparrows that visited. They came through the bars to the water bowl and plate of bread crumbs he set out for them.

Picture this: A middle aged, overweight sociopath with long greasy hair, gone to water over a few birds.

In all the years he had been inside before I knew of him, with little hope of ever being released, he filled in the time by creating a record book embossed with images and encyclopaedic descriptions of the birds he'd seen from his cell window, the sparrowhawk, which he loathed, lark, magpie, crow, even a blue crane sighted once long ago when he spent time in a rural jail. Beside each entry, he recorded the date, time, number of sightings and on the other side, his observations – their habits, diet, descriptions of calls.

His favourites, the sparrows, were so tame that they lined up on his window sill as he made his notes. They sat with him on the bunk as he read to them various points of interest – the life cycle of the praying mantis kept in a vegemite jar, the hunting habits of the sparrow hawk and the like.

But even in this place so structured, so obsessed with timetables, nothing is ever certain or remains the same. Without warning, the whole wing was told to pack their things, they were moving to the other side. A double shift designed to forestall trouble and disrupt the inevitable passing of illicit goods. The man inheriting his cell had no sympathy for birds, particularly the scavenging type. The sparrows, of course, were not to know that things had changed and so began their slaughter.

To give some idea of what Claire Bailey must endure during her incarceration, one only has to look at the various studies conducted into the causes of violence in prisons. In 1976, after the Bathurst riots, the Nagle Royal Commission was formed to investigate conditions in gaols throughout New South Wales. It found that conditions in the Bathurst gaol were appalling. Cells were crowded, only three showers a week were allowed, the food was often rotten and, with no glass in the windows, prisoners were often rained on, enduring freezing conditions in winter and throughout summer insects attracted by the overflowing sewerage systems. In Grafton gaol, housing the most intractable prisoners, he found a brutal regime with systematic beating of prisoners, often administered randomly without violence or provocation on the part of prisoners. Although many of these practises were since outlawed, others were not. It only meant that such practices became isolated, less condoned and it did little to protect prisoners from themselves.

There are many ways behind the walls in which revenge can be taken. If nothing else, man is inventive, even in the most restricted of places. The screws cannot control everything; neither is their hierarchy of punishment and reward the only one.

The prisoners have their own procedure of what might be allowable.

It is generally accepted that the first principle in which order can be attained by the prisoners themselves, is by those who are respected for their violent crime and have the authority to control others willing to enforce discipline as required. For most the threat is enough. Standover tactics, practised by all and sundry, from the top dog down, is the principle by which one inmate of a greater physical presence stands over another of lesser brawn to demand favours and other currency such as tobacco and bread in exchange for protection. Then there is organised punishment for those that do not toe the line.

The set up can be organised or spontaneous, a practice that utilizes another set of laws, those administered by custodial in the general operations of the centre. It may simply involve a campaign of whispers or could involve the placing of illicit goods, such as drugs or weapons, upon the person or property of the inmate targeted. A beating, inflicted as required, may be spontaneous in which case it is generally isolated to two inmates in disagreement or alternatively, it may be organised by the top dog as a means to put an inmate in his proper place. More drastic punishments can take the form of rape, which is self explanatory, whether in lust or again, as a means to teach an inmate (usually a younger one) their proper place. It can also be administered as punishment to those inmates sentenced for certain crimes. Pipe rape, a rarely used form of punishment, is reserved for those sentenced for despised crimes such as violent rape and paedophilia. It requires a length of pipe or timber and barbed or razor wire. The wire is looped and fixed around the pipe and four

or more inmates are then required to administer the punishment. When the pipe is withdrawn the barbed or razor wire remains internally fixed, requiring extensive surgery to have it removed. It should be noted that those found guilty of these despised crimes are no longer incarcerated in the main yards but isolated for their own safety.

A shiv might be used to inflict puncture wounds, a punishment not designed to kill, unless by accident. Administered by three or more selected inmates, often by ballot, each is armed with a short blade. Multiple puncture wounds are then inflicted upon the victim. Should the warning be ignored then death is the inevitable consequence. Knifing or any other means to inflict death is usually a last resort. This form of punishment is usually well planned although isolated incidences do occur. It requires the isolation of the intended victim, such as a cell or corridor where there is no means of escape. A blade to the jugular or beneath the ribs, alternatively, a heavy blow to the skull by whatever is at hand is the general practice.

The man killing the sparrows kept calling down the hall with each success.

-I got another one.

A call designed to infuriate the inmate a few cells down, who had spent so many years training his birds and recording their habits.

In this place, no slight, however small, is ever forgotten. The time would come when the principles of law as practised here would take their course. In the thirty seconds it took for the riot squad to arrive on the scene, the bird killer was already



bleeding profusely from the many puncture wounds inflicted on his flesh. A prison pullover that nobody would claim was found draped across the lens of the camera in the hall. Needless to say that the warning was heeded and no more sparrows were killed. Vengeance is a point of honour even practised by the lowly. None can afford to ignore a slight given, to do so would incur loss of honour, or loss of face, which brings me to my favourite scene in *Prisoner* where vengeance was enacted, not upon another inmate which is par for the course, but one inflicted with great subtlety upon an officer.

Nobody liked Mrs. Bennet. She was just a screw, they all said. She saw nothing good in anyone. She was there to punish and contain, not to rehabilitate. She wore her hair in a tight bun and snarled orders that were at times desperately made but ever reluctantly obeyed. Her rancour sat on everyone.

Monnie Ferguson woke up with a belly ache but it was not her appendix.

-If it was, Mrs. Bennet screeched, the pain would be on the other side, it always starts on the left side. Now get up Ferguson. You're not fooling anyone.

But she wasn't watching her back and the door closed. Vera, alone with the two of them, Monnie and Bea Smith, her back against the wall

What was going on?

-It's time she had a taste of her own medicine, Bea said.

The threat was palpable, strings whining in the background. Bea was in here for life. She had nothing to lose. I found myself smiling, on the edge of my seat. These amazons were about to do old Vinegar Tits, rough her up a little, enact

their own rough justice but it was more subtle than that. They held themselves back. They were not touching her and Mrs Bennet was standing by the wall, her breath in short gasps, panting with expectation, and excitement, but they didn't even slap her. When Mrs Jackson arrived on the scene, Monnie Ferguson was slumped on the bed, holding her jaw. Bea was backed against the wall feigning terror while Vera, as surprised as anyone, and disappointed perhaps, stood there with her mouth open.

-She hit her Mrs. Jackson, Bea said. I tried to stop her but she went crazy and laid her out.

Close your mouth, Vera.

-She's gone mad I tell you.

Mrs. Davidson, the Governor, didn't like violence under any circumstances. The women inside had rights too, the right to do what they liked and get away with it.

-Have you ever seen Vera strike a prisoner? She asks.

No, they all say.

-Do you think she's harsh with them?

At times. But we all know her views on discipline.

But there were other ways. Solitary. Loss of privileges for women with few privileges. Not violence. Outside the office, Bea held her hand. She wanted to know if there was anything about sprained wrists in Lizzie's medical journal. A little scheme of theirs that they had used before in another prison. Bea clobbers Monnie once they have isolated the officer targeted, then the officer gets the blame. A simple phone call would find them out. When Mrs. Bennet was reinstated, Bea and Monnie were in a lot

of trouble but for now, everyone was ecstatic that they got a screw.

[5]

Karen Travis, slim and sexy in her overalls, with dark hair and pixie face, said she used to feel so guilty. She wouldn't even help herself.

I see her in the prison dining room for the first time; teacher turned murderer, killed her husband with a carving knife while he was taking a shower, and she was Catholic, unbelievable coincidences. She and Claire have so much in common. Naturally they will be attracted to one another.

If Claire ever wanted to ask Karen why they did the things they did, commit those appalling acts, hate those they were supposed to love, Karen Travis would never answer. It would affront her, even being asked. But so what? They kept on asking. Some of them. Information was a type of currency. But for Karen Travis to answer either way would be out of character, like the murder she committed. When she spoke at all, about her circumstance, she told anyone who would listen that her mother never came to the trial.

-There was nothing she could've done any way. Not once I had pleaded guilty.

It was something that Claire felt strongly about. A mother in relation to a daughter. Her mum was never like that.

In the scene I am describing, Karen's mother was moving to Queensland. A new life. A new lover. She came to visit just the once. Karen was her daughter, she said, and God knows, she did love her but even her daughter must pay for her actions.

If Claire's mother had been alive, she would have come to her trial. It was something she was certain of but not something she wanted to talk about. Her mother was dead, obviously.

Karen's mother, not Claire's, wanted to know what they were trying to do, putting her through all that again, all those slurs and whispers, stories in the media. To complicate her character even further, there was the inevitable guilt she must feel that all bystanders do, what she might have said or done before the event, that could have stopped it, what she should have known but never consciously confronted.

But a re-trial? Was that possible? Karen's solicitor, Mr. Wilson, who would also be Claire's, thought so. In the sessions he had with her, he was looking for a way out, flaws in the arguments during her trial. He told her to keep the faith a little longer.

After her mother died, Claire made up her mind to never speak again. I mean forever. What's the use anyway? No one listens. But it drives you crazier than you already are.

Both of them fit in so well here. They know how to speak, simply and directly, how to suggest things in an expression of hand or eye, in a few words. Time was precious. Each moment must carry meaning.

The prison doctor was a real spunk. Ask Doreen. Young, with an English way and accent, compassionate and gullible. A soft touch, as they say. They all loved him. Even Frankie had tolerated him when she was alive, so it wasn't just that he was a man.

Dr. Greg Miller will want to listen to her chest so she must take off her shirt.

-I'm a fully qualified doctor, you know. I've seen it all before.

When she suggests that he just shove his stethoscope he becomes offended. She meant under her shirt but he is more determined than ever that a full examination is required. So she moves behind the screen. She removes everything. She might as well.

-What are these scars on your arm, he asks. They look suspiciously like cigarette burns to me.

And he ought to know. He has seen that sort of thing before.

She will want to tell him but he no longer wants to hear. He has treated Karen Travis for the same complaint, played that role once before and when Mrs Travis told him her husband did that, he had gathered her husband was something of a sadist.

But what he had done for Karen once, he would not necessarily do again, or he would not do it for anyone else.

Why didn't she just run away? Why did she take so long after the trial to bring up her husband's bestiality? Didn't she want to defend herself? Were there such guilt feelings that she wanted to punish herself more than justice may have required? Masochism? And on the other hand, prisoners might just make up stories like this in order to get a reduced sentence. Wouldn't you?

So he tells Claire to put her shirt back on.

-Look, he says. Maybe you should see someone else about this. Try Mrs Vernon.

But don't involve him. At least not so personally.

All these obstacles. Shunted from one to the other. She goes back to her cell and slumps on the bed. Everything appeared so difficult. Time. The screws, although they didn't like you calling them that. All those women getting in the way, all that talking.

Other changes were being made. They were moved around, reshuffled. Something that was done from time to time. Strangers entered that most treasured of places, where you slept, where you stored your things, the cells where you made your home. Karen was moved in with Bea and Monnie. Doreen was put in with Lizzie. Claire was to stay where she was, one of the lucky ones, at least for the time being and when she overheard Bea telling Karen not to count the days, she knew exactly what she meant. Let them come and go, dissolve into the one melange.

The problem with the doctor is that she both attracts and repels him. This is the anomaly or paradox that all of us face, those that knew her. She attracts him, after all, she is a good looking woman, young, everything in the right place, as it should be. There is something about her, the way she looks at you, an angled, oblique examination of everything she sees, that both thrills and frightens the one being viewed. Ralph Bailey would have known how the doctor felt.

Under normal circumstances, the doctor doesn't want to know why these women are here. He doesn't want to know the particulars of their crimes, anything that might interfere in how he sees them. They are all human, after all, he assumes, being of fragile biology subject to illness and disease that must be treated. To know too much would contaminate, in some way, his professional capacity to cure or offer relief. Why else was he

here if not to rehabilitate the poor prisoners, to lift them from the mire of crime.

Yet she frightens him. He cannot help but be aware of why she was in here. Death infuses her; first her mother, her lover, and then her husband. That and the haunting of her expression, the way she looked at him.

When the Governor called her to the office, she knew that they had been talking about her. The doctor wasn't there but he had acted in his own small way, perhaps to stop the haunting. Mrs Vernon, from Welfare, was already there. They had been discussing her case. No decisions had been made. Mrs. Davidson knew the rules as well as anyone. She, herself, didn't hold out much hope. The rules of appeal, she says, demand that it should be lodged no later than one month after sentencing. There must be fresh evidence, or proof that the evidence was mishandled, perverted in some way.

They could not see any grounds for a re-trial, so Claire tells them how guilty she felt at her trial but not necessarily responsible. She wasn't thinking properly. She believed she deserved to be punished and that was a mistake. There were things she never said that she should have.

But there are other concerns that the Governor has, parallels she is not happy about.

-I am concerned about the similarities, she says in her sharp voice, between your case and that of Karen Travis. There are too many coincidences, don't you think?

So everything was at a standstill. Karen thought of them first.



-Do you have any family, Mrs. Vernon asks, who might be able to corroborate what you say?

Not any more.

Mrs. Vernon, so earnest, blond and slim, effervescent, brought a certain ebullience to the show. A crusader for the cause of compassion, like Dr. Miller, she provided additional romantic interest as well as general prison theology. She fixed things.

-But you do have a father, Mrs. Davidson said. We have your records.

So they knew about him. Of course they did.

-My father and I are not the best of friends. He thinks I'm getting everything that I deserve.

And he would.

-Perhaps you and your father could make up, Mrs Vernon suggests. Surely he would know things that would help your cause.

-My father was never invited to the wedding. He never met my husband.

It was an obstacle she would have to get over, this lack of substantiation. Mrs. Davidson, under the circumstances, could not promise anything. If something could be found to convince them, she assures Claire, she might yet put it to the board but as things now stand, it would just be a waste of everyone's time.

So it begins. Regardless of Mrs Davidson's reservations, there will be others willing to see it through

I give her a dream to dream. She is alone in her cell, before dawn and she dreams she is climbing rungs, a ladder to the stars. On those occasions that she pauses, she looks down at

the rungs she has already climbed. We both feel that she is getting somewhere.

Then the dream shifts, as they always do. They are no longer rungs that she climbs but heads, a shifting gradient of fleshy boulders that she must scale, faces mortared together, wide-eyed and open-mouthed, gabbling, ripe for the picking.

-Pick me, they cry as she passes over them.

-No, pick me.

What they say in voices soft with regret.

-Why not tell everyone.

-Tell them the truth.

She hears their voices, their echoes down the halls. Other prisoners.

Other stories.

-Tell them about him.

They mean me of course.

As she climbs over them, their teeth are sharp, her pain is virtual, not actual. I see her climbing on hands and knees, their cavities her footholds, their nostrils flaring convenient to her hand and she thrusts her fingers in tight.

-Let us tell you what he did to us?

All the dead days and the dead nights, behind them, irretrievable thank god, forgotten already, forgetting.

Bones with flesh, plump with longing. Heartbroken.

-Only on pointless days.

They were the mulch upon which I grew, long and stalk-footed, my roots in their bellies.

-Rooting me.

Her eyes become an amalgamation of the women I have known. Her long, tapering hands like theirs.

Smeared in their mucus, she slips and she slides, kicks free of mouths before they clamp themselves shut, regains lost ground. To remain still is to be eaten alive. She will have to stand up for herself. They will bleed her dry if she lets them.

-In Koondrook, the days all seemed the same and I longed to get out.

Fresh as a pea, this prisoner was ready; she was waiting for just the right man to put his hands in her overalls, to take her away. So I did.

-Remember me. From Manangatang. The long hours on the train to get nowhere, his stinging lips.

Yes. And she was Catholic.

-From Tatura I cried but dumb as dead wood he never listened. I told him everything but he wouldn't stop.

How I regret that.

In the fields of Yarroweah, the girl from the dairy still hears the wild geese calling in the paddocks. Can you hear them too?

-There ought to be a law.

And there is.

-Your pants are on fire.

As always.

There are other details that I dare not let them speak. They will pull me down if I let them.

She owes her existence to them all, haven't they shown me the way, opened the window of opportunity, understanding, the mathematics of this equation possibly resolved. All these lost loves.

As the clouds part she will see what she has been striving for. I smile down upon her, beckon her onward.

\*

Steve Wilson, Claire's barrister, when he finally called to see her, was businesslike. Handsome, yes, but gruff, direct.

-I have been looking into your case, he tells her, and the more I look the stranger it gets.

She could only agree with him.

And he will look into it. Of this you can be assured. A case like hers, already high profile, was just right for a blossoming career.

-Now tell me. How did your husband abuse you?

Her mouth fell open. Like Vera's. A question she hadn't expected, a question she cannot answer. Not now, not like this.

-Come on, he says. This isn't the time or place to be coy. You clearly show all the symptoms. Your circumstances are just right. A man ten years your senior. You lived alone with your husband in an apartment. No immediate family around you. A husband accustomed to authority, he will want to dominate and possess you.

She was wringing her hands, shaking her head vigorously. Not ready to concede anything. Not yet. He must note that.

-Did he punish you if you didn't do exactly what he wanted?

Mr Wilson rifles through his papers, transcripts of her trial, selecting sheets that may or may not have had any

relevance, telling this filthy story and she might realize how clever he is being, how right and fitting he might prove to be.

-Was it every night? Or just some. Were there signs, did you know when to expect it?

She wants to say it wasn't true, or that it was true, one way or the other. But which should it be?

-Give it some thought, he says. Let me know what you decide.

There is a new prisoner, thin and wiry. She said she was in for receiving but no one believed her. An ex-screw, she once guarded them but that was before Claire's time. Now she was in here too. These constant reversals.

There is going to be trouble. Sometimes, Bea said, you need to take the law into your own hands to see that justice has been done. But in the ensuing melee in the dining room where Bea takes the law into her hands, it is her blood that is spilt on the floor. No point crying over it. Days of tension, manoeuvring. Beforehand, Bea tipped hot soup into the new girl's lap, threatened violence, palpitating strings again. But like Christ, Bea bled from a wound in her side. The new girl had a knife, she had to protect herself and Bea was punctured. Her blood is dark and viscous as blood should be. The new girl, her name was Anne, is found the next day in the dryer, dead of course.

But these are things Claire only hears about, small froth in her flat glass. She is not involved. She has no interest in these machinations that have no bearing upon her own case, or do not appear to affect her. But I wonder about the dryer, the way things occur here, events so arbitrary, even impractical, just to advance

a story. If inadvertently, Mrs. Bennet, who was on the new girl's side, closed the dryer door, locking her in, then why didn't she sing out, bang against the sides, do something? A dryer? How could anyone die in there anyway? The dryer cannot be opened from the inside, apparently. It must be well sealed to disallow fresh air.

When the door was opened the next morning the new girl flopped out like an old sheet.

These various improbabilities of plot make me nervous. Who knew what would happen next, or who might be accused of doing what?

In other strands, Frankie died in a botched attempt at robbing a bank, while still on the lam. It happens from time to time. Someone dies. The role is left vacant until someone can be found as a replacement. And Frankie had other roles to play. It was time to move on, advance her career. When Doreen returned after Frankie's death, she gave Karen Travis a black eye.

-She's gone mad, Karen told anyone who would listen. She's more Frankie than herself now.

[6]

I see her lying on the bed. From this perspective of mine, I see her from a fair height, not a great height; say from the altitude of the light bulb. I hover above and beyond her. Prone on the bed with her eyes closed, unmoving, she waits for the lights to come on, for the calls to ring down the halls, for the bolts to slide and she needs a shower. All night she has perspired. She has her period.

She is awake, or not awake, it is difficult to decide. I am imperilled by the very scene I attempt to describe, by the chimerical nature of the view I have of her from above, she upon the grey narrow bed, unmoving. Yet she does awake, or not, transports herself to another place. No longer in this prison, she becomes trapped within her past.

The sounds here are muted, cautious. Cars opening their doors. Voices down the hall outside her door, the deep tones of a son greeting his mother. She doesn't see herself move yet she moves. The bed was large. She had to move further than she expected. It had an orange bedspread, pink sheets, large pillows. And the room was warm.

She got out and she made the bed. She wondered about breakfast and there was a tap on the door, a clattering of plates and a call from her landlady; 'Breakfast'. She was astounded by this. In the bathroom there were white tiles, bright taps, the basin sparkled. She pulled the curtain across the window and held her hand beneath the water until it became too hot.

In her next encounter there was a man. Freshly shaven, apart from a dark moustache, one hundred and ninety centimetres tall, eighty-five kilograms in weight, he was standing before the bench in the kitchen making a sandwich for his lunch. But really, he was watching her. He was searching through the cupboards with a knife in his hand. He pretended to read the labelling on the jars but the labelling wasn't clear or he couldn't concentrate because she was across the room behind the ironing board.

She remembers that she wore a drab dressing gown, slippers and she ought to have done her hair but all, apparently, was not enough to detract attention. In point of fact, all his pretence, forgetting what he wanted, walking to the refrigerator on her side, was designed, in his own clumsy way which was typical, to get close to her, maybe even touch her.

R.B., when he finally introduced himself, told her it was his responsibility to ensure that her stay here was a satisfactory one for all concerned. His mother needed company, some purpose in her life after his father passed away while he, himself, found it necessary to move closer to work.

What more can she remember?

R.B., indeed, took those opportunities that arose to touch her. His hand had lightly pressed on the small of her back as he guided her down the hall to show her the room, not yet slipping lower but likely to. There were times when she could hardly move. Disappearing. Indoors as it were. Finding the lights out, silence but never perfect silence, closed doors, falling between things. A man who was the son of the old woman with whom she lodged befriended her. Befriended is not the word. He was full of lust. Now she is lying on the bed except this isn't now. She was



conscious or unconscious. She'd slept with a man and she can't remember feeling anything. His lovemaking was energetic, not yet demanding or depraved. His mother slept down the hall. When he got up and left in the middle of the night, she hadn't cared. Conversely, she can remember now that an unexpected weight had been lifted from her, that once he'd gone she could think for herself, become appalled at the trap she had fallen into. Yet this would not save her. In his presence, she lost her will.

There were things that her husband did to her. Things that he made her do. He could do what he liked.

Mr Wilson is in the right place. It is the right time for both of them.

-The first time my husband invited some friends home, a few months after our marriage, he wanted me to wear something slinky. Something daring. Otherwise he wouldn't love me. Otherwise he would find something worse to do.

Mr Wilson understands that a case like this comes up once in a life time, that it launches careers.

-A short skirt. No underwear. It turned him on.

He jots everything down. Other avenues he might pursue. Other questions. The answers are not important. It is why he looked at everyone in the way he did, with such assurance, as if he could see beneath their skin. You were one of the dreamers, so what's the dream.

-I had to cook for them. What could be more titillating than a woman in the kitchen without underwear.

-Why did you do it?

-I was his wife. It excited him. Our sex life to that point had been normal, you know, the missionary position, the same thing every night. I guess it excited me too.

Steve Wilson was human too. He shifted uncomfortably in his seat. The pen in his hands, he illustrates the story as she tells it, fills in the details himself, fleshes it out.

-Mrs Bailey, he says, I can't see, I mean, I don't know how a court of law, in spite of its innate conservatism, could see such behaviour as anything but within the realms of normal behaviour, a marital aid, as it were, a mere peccadillo on your husband's part, hardly a mitigating factor for an act of murder.

-But then he told them. He shared our secret.

-Believe me, Mrs Bailey, I've known of judges caught in more compromising situations than that which you are describing.

-And I had to do things with them. At first, one at a time but after that with them all at once. I know that it is a terrible thing to say but my husband made me do it. You wouldn't believe some of the things he had me do.

-Did you ever resist?

-Oh yes. He would come into the bedroom while I was getting ready, when his guests were about to arrive. He would put his hands up my skirt to remove my underwear. If I refused there were the punishments. Like tying me up. Cigarette burns.

-Of which we have scars.

-One night he beat me with the hearth poker.

-Doctor's records?

-I never went.

-So you never told anyone.

-I once told Eleanor, my mother-in-law, his dumb mum but she'd had a stroke and couldn't understand anything. She's dead now.

-What about the men he brought home? Who were they?

-They would never own up. It would mean their reputations. Their careers. The others? He brought them in off the streets. I never knew their names.

-So you were made to do this on more than one occasion?

-Oh yes.

-Did you enjoy it?

\*

Noelene Bourke, another inmate, is impossible. A new tough to replace Frankie, she works her way up the rungs. Prison politics. In the hall she touches Claire's face and laughs when Claire slaps her hand away. Her hand was hard, you could see, her arm impossibly strong.

-After sixteen years, she says through her teeth, your face is gunna look like shit, miss high and mighty.

The doors to the cells were open all day. They didn't lock them in. There was nowhere to hide. Even Bea if she was around, might not have helped.

Noelene is in the corridor. She has no business being there. She should be working in the laundry but when no one is watching she often disappears. She glides, unseen, through the labyrinth. She backs Claire up against the wall.

-I've just been to the doctor, Claire tells her, to get something for a headache.

But Noelene leant against her and drove her knee into her thigh.

-That's called a corkie, she said. Maybe that'll help.

Claire had not done anything to deserve it. Inoffensive, she was minding her own business, keeping her head down, voicing no opinions but still Noelene didn't like her. This often happens. Someone in the yard will take a set against you, for no obvious reason that you can see. At the lunch break, outside, she grabs Claire's shirt and drags her around the corner, out of sight. Claire hadn't even known she was there, just this sudden wrenching from one state into another. Noelene breathes into her face. They all had fish for lunch. Fish and cigarettes.

-Got a fag, she asks.

Of course Claire did.

-Got a light, f-f-firebug?

Claire pulls matches from her pocket and Noelene doesn't give them back.

-Did ya know I've gotta a sweet tooth?

She didn't know.

And as Noelene hocked up mucus from her sinus, Claire knows what's coming next and turns her face away.

R. B. deserved everything he received. A man out of time, he believed in miracles, life after death, the dichotomy of evil and goodness, grace, the ritual of sacrifice, never realising that he would be the sacrifice. The successor of a family that continued

after the death of his father, his father was the patriarch upon which he modelled himself.

-But nothing in his background, neither rumour nor innuendo, gives any indication that he might be the sort of man to indulge in the activities described by Mrs Bailey.

Mr Wilson dealt in facts. He was a study in the logic of law, veracity and the like.

-It is not just the lack of substantiation in everything she has told me, but the lack of detail. Her descriptions are too vague. If she can't convince me then she will never convince the court that there is any shred of truth in anything she says.

[7]

Not until one is in a position like hers, believe me, does it become clear how things work, how wrong they can get it, how what she did or said offhandedly, years ago, irrelevant to the circumstances of her crime, can become so twisted, corrupted by public opinion.

No one believed in her innocence.

Oh, the slanders she was made to endure, so-called acquaintances that never knew her, except in hindsight, whose five seconds of fame (never five minutes) damned her as a misfit, or in the very least, as someone who appeared strange, off-centre, beyond the norm, even cunning and manipulative. In such circumstance, no one, it seems, could keep their mouths shut.

It is then that public opinion begins to drive the investigation. A chance of fame, promotion, ego, will drive detectives to look for what was never there and in looking, they will find it. They too collect all articles and reports relevant to her case. Like me, they will read them, file them and speculate upon the nuances between fact and fiction. Some sources, they will deem more reliable than others.

### **An Evil Angel:**

**Claire Bailey's Troubled Childhood a Lesson to us  
all**

[A special report by Brad Gower]

The moment everyone has been waiting for finally arrives. Claire Bailey is called to stand. The jury, after two days of deliberation, has finally arrived at its verdict.

For three weeks, those of us present have heard the prosecution put its case, that all along Mrs Bailey had plotted to murder her husband, that she had invented a mysterious assailant, went through 'extraordinary performances to convince the police that such a figure existed to hide her own culpability', that she herself 'bludgeoned her husband with an iron poker, placed him in the family car and set him alight'.

Pale and withdrawn as she had been throughout the trial, Mrs Bailey stood patiently. During her testimony, a final desperate act by the defence given that there was no requirement for Mrs Bailey to face cross-examination by the prosecution, Mrs Bailey spoke quietly with lengthy pauses. Supreme Court Judge, Lionel Humphreys, had to frequently ask her to speak up so that everyone could hear. Often, the question had to be repeated.

Since the very day Mrs Bailey was charged, it has been left to all of us, the family of the victim in particular, to ask: how did it come to this? How could a young woman from a

respected and, to some degree, privileged background exhibit such hatred toward another human being, not less than her husband, that she would strike out and with premeditation dispose of him in such a vindictive and cruel manner.

After the furore resulting from the picture of her, published in this very newspaper, in which she dressed so flamboyantly and was accused of callous disregard for the circumstances of her husband's death, Mrs Bailey has come a long way. Gone are the stylish pant suits and stunning make-up. For her day in the witness box, as now while she waits for the verdict to be given, Mrs Bailey wore a plain white blouse, a blue skirt and dark flat shoes. She keeps her eyes lowered, although she does finally look up to the jury when Judge Humphreys asked the inevitable question.

But the question still remains: who is this young woman, what made her, what in her background made it possible for her to commit that appalling act as claimed by the prosecution?

Until her mother's death, Claire Bailey had a normal childhood. Born in 1971 she was the only child of C.J.Nolan, an up and coming member of the Victorian Police force, until recently, Deputy Superintendent, and Ann-Maree Cunningham, daughter to Robert Cunningham, a



well known local Councillor. [See Insert on opposite page]

Ironically, it was the birth of their first child that would ultimately lead to so many problems; to Ann Maree's health and to C.J. Nolan, (CJ to his friends) in both peace of mind and his political career.

[See insert, page five top]

To have a daughter serving life for murder is hardly a career advancing circumstance in the police force. However, in those early days, with a new family, and I have it on good authority, the occasional boisterous get-together with colleagues and their families, this was not something that anyone could have imagined.

There were the usual milestones in Claire Bailey's early childhood in a peaceful suburban street, Kindergarten, the early school years, and then things went horribly wrong.

At the age of twelve, Claire Bailey's mother was diagnosed with lymphoma, an insidious cancer with no known cure at that time. She died twelve months later. It is from this point that we begin to see the early pattern of a disturbed young mind. From a bright child with an early academic record in the talented range, Claire Bailey became

withdrawn and in the words of one of her school reports "a little surly, given to tantrums if she didn't get her own way." The report goes on further to say that "she is still unsettled and given to distraction and her academic scores have suffered accordingly."

She received counselling and psychiatric treatment intermittently for the next seven to eight years but due to confidentiality restraints, only those assessments submitted during her trial have made the public record.

(See insert, page 5)

Some mystery surrounds her teenage years. Those who know will not speak of it and those who do speak either do not really know or cannot always be relied upon. However, a number of observations can be made.

At some stage during her St. Bartholomew's High School years, age 14, Claire Bailey began absenting herself from school. A day here and there in the initial stages, to anything from two to three days, and on one occasion a whole week. Signed notes from her father explaining these absences were later found to be forged.

These absentees suddenly ceased just before she turned 16, when she was moved from the Catholic secondary school just up the road to a more exclusive private one, St. Andrews,

notably one with some success for creating discipline in troubled young ladies.

Prior to her enrolment in this college for girls, there is a period of 6-8 weeks where no record of her exists. As stated by one witness, a girlfriend who declined to be named, this followed a major family argument where Claire Bailey virtually became a prisoner in her own home and was later whisked away to a place unknown, allegedly for her own good.

It is here that Claire Bailey's girlfriend becomes much more circumspect and less willing to divulge what she knows. However, by what she does say and doesn't deny we can deduce as follows:

Discovery:- A single father with an important and busy job leaves a teenage daughter to her own devices, often to all hours of the night. When the school authorities bring his attention to her absenteeism, the inevitable discovery of her double life is made. One can only imagine the scene when a father discovers his teenage daughter, notably beneath the age of consent, has dropped out of school to form a relationship, most likely a sexual one, with a man some five to eight years her elder.

Tragedy:- The boyfriend, allegedly, commits suicide.

Consequence:- Claire Bailey is withdrawn from school and after six to eight weeks is

enrolled in an exclusive Anglican College for girls. Her life long girlfriend hardly sees her now. Even during school holidays Claire Bailey is shipped out to country Victoria, to some unidentified relation on her mother's side. After graduating from High school, Claire Bailey disappears off the radar. [Her father refused to take part in an interview for this article]. Twelve months later, she reappeared as a lodger in the household of Eleanor Bailey, mother to the murder victim.

It should be noted here, as a type of postscript, an incident that occurred some days before the verdict was brought down. By this stage of proceedings, all evidence had been put before the court and, as one can imagine, the defence and their client were in disarray, some more resigned to a guilty verdict than others. The authorities, on their part, now that proceedings had almost reached an end, were less regimented, the rules of engagement more lax, humanized. There was someone outside, a friend of Mrs Bailey, they said. Did she want to see her?

Rosa Bellarossie wanted to explain how they (the prosecution and the press) had twisted everything she said, even invented things she didn't say.

But Claire never wanted to see her again.

Ralph Bailey, according to friends and colleagues, was a fairly reclusive man. A teacher for the Catholic Education system, once a seminarian, he was fully committed to his faith and heavily involved in various church bodies. How he came to marry Claire Bailey (nee Nolan) is one of the great mysteries of the case for it came as complete surprise. Few, if any of Ralph Bailey's associates, had ever heard of or met Claire Bailey. Even family had been kept in the dark, apart from, perhaps, Eleanor Bailey, Ralph Bailey's mother and widow to Phillip Bailey senior. What Eleanor Bailey knew could never be established, even while she was alive, due to a series of strokes that had affected her speech centre and left her virtually incoherent.

The married couple lived with Ralph Bailey's mother for the first six months of their marriage before moving to a set of flats in Elm Grove, Richmond closer to St. Ignatius where he taught year three. It was here, according to Claire Bailey's testimony, that the stalking incidents began that led to the eventual murder of her husband.

In the light of the charges against Claire Bailey, the psychological report based on interviews and testing make interesting reading.[see insert Psychological Profile page 6] According to Dr. Openheimer the results of

the tests indicated that Claire Bailey "is a person who is indifferent and remote, detached from personal relationships, with no desire for intimacies, choosing solitary activities." She also suffered from "anxiety and post traumatic stress with a high degree of avoidance" that is, "a fear and distrust of others." She is "vigilant and always on guard... severely depressed and may constitute a high risk of self harm." He also noted that Claire Bailey maintained throughout her interview, that "she did not murder her victim, that it was done by a person unknown with superhuman qualities, the ability to appear and disappear at will." It is worth noting that in the MCMI test, she measured as a borderline paranoid with a low score on schizophrenia. She maintained that she was being watched but didn't hear voices.

We will never know the real causes behind Mrs Bailey's sudden and inexplicable crime. Many have lost a mother at an early age and have gone off the rails during their adolescent years, yet have gone to live normal lives. The lesson here would seem to be that evil can cross all boundaries, that the man or woman living next door might be the next psychopath to commit a heinous crime.

**[Brad Gower has been a court reporter five years]**

[Insert:- opposite page]

**Cunningham and Nolan - two well established  
Irish families.**

The Nolans - failed settlers in country Victoria, moving to Melbourne in 1896 to become part of the establishment. Claire's great, great grandfather, Francis, opened a linen enterprise in Swanson Street in 1903. The family business was run by Francis and his son, Frank, until the 1930's Depression. The Cunninghams - more successful in the small settlement stakes, went on to own properties throughout rural Victoria.

[Insert:- page five top].

**CJ Nolan - An illustrious Career**

Born 1951

1970 - Joins the Victorian Police Academy

1971 - Graduates

1973 - Married Ann Maree Cunningham

1975 - Detective, Special Crimes Unit

1978 - Inspector-in-Charge, SPCU

1981 - Joins Commission of Corporate

Crime

- 1984 - Detective, Violent and Organised  
Crimes Unit
- 1986 - Assistant Deputy/Advisor, Special  
Crimes Board
- 1988 - Returns as Superintendent, SPCU
- 1990 - Deputy Superintendent, Victorian  
Police Force
- 1992 - Steps down as D.S temporarily, due  
to scandal caused by trial of Claire  
Bailey

### **Psychological Profile**

A report was provided at the request of the Court in order to provide a psychological profile and risk assessment of Mrs C Bailey. Conducted by Dr. W. Openhiemer, information contained in the report was based on the following:

- An interview with Claire Bailey
- Various police statements
- State Forensic Sciences, Report on the examination of items in the case involving



the murder of Ralph Gerard Bailey

- Interview with Mrs Erica Davidson, Governor Wentworth Correctional Centre
- Psychological tests, including the Millon Clinical Multiaxial Inventory III (MCMI - III), Static 99, State Anger Inventory II (Staxi - II), Criminal Sentiments Scale.

Dr. W. Openheimer has a PHD in Psychology from Melbourne University. Currently a fully registered Psychologist with the Psychology Registration Board, he has approximately 15 years experience as a Psychologist, 5 years as a private practitioner, 10 years employed with the Department of Corrective Services.

As part of her assessment, Claire Bailey was administered the Millon Clinical Multiaxial Inventory II (MCMI-III). The test comprises a standardised questionnaire assessing a

range of information related to a client's personality, emotional adjustment, and attitude toward taking tests. It comprises 28 scales divided into three categories: Modifying Indexes, Personality Patterns and Pathology and Clinical Syndromes. The scales are closely aligned with the diagnostic categories in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders IV (DSM-IV).

She has asked to work in the laundry but they don't want her there. She was trying to make arrangements on her own behalf but they want her in the garden and she knows what will happen there. Noelene would be waiting.

But it was not all bad.

Outside, where she cannot see, beyond the wall, progress was being made. New discoveries, certain re-wirings, re-evaluations were being made on her behalf and Steve Wilson was rather pleased with the way things were going. It would take time. She must be patient.

Noelene's time would come too. In the shower block. Claire is in there now, while no one is about. She has planned it that way. Get there early. Get out quickly before trouble arose. Impossible of course.

She turns on the water. She undresses quickly near the shower head and holds the door closed with one hand. You can't snib it. Everyone can see over the top in any case but she hopes to be dry, dressed and out of there before trouble occurs.

Then she hears them outside as they make their way down the hall and she had hardly gotten herself wet yet. Monnie, Lizzie and Doreen, and some other girl whose name she didn't necessarily know, one of those nameless ones. Noelene follows them in and moves to the other end.

There is going to be trouble. She could sense it. Pointless otherwise, everyone being here, unless something was to happen. Noelene is about to get hers but there is a screw wanting to send some away, too many in a confined space, not enough cubicles.

-Anderson, she says, Birdsworth, you can come back later.

But it is not according to plan. No one is going anywhere, except Lizzie and the screw. Lizzie feigns a heart attack. The screw takes her out. If Mrs Bennet had been in charge, then everything would have been different but she is not in the script, just some too soft screw, a lame duck, an easy beat who caves in when Doreen whines that they gotta have a shower before breakfast, miss.

So the stage is set.

Claire, who wants no part of this, has turned off the water and stands there, naked, dripping and unwilling to make any sound. It is too late to get out so she has to stay there. No one can see her, not even I.

Doreen, suddenly so friendly has chosen sides and Noelene, friendless, falls for it. Lizzie has her heart attack. She needs air, she says. She needs to be taken outside, to the doctor and the screw must

take her there. Noelene wonders out loud why they don't just let her drop dead, who'd miss her?

-I'll get your shower ready, Doreen offers, and she does.

She turns on the hot water. No cold. She removes the handles to the faucets and then they shove her in. All three of them. It is what everyone has been waiting for. They hold the door closed with their combined weight and keep pushing Noelene under the water. Noelene, while she is being scalded, screams. Claire covers your ears but she can't block out the screams, nor Monnie's laughter.

-This oughta teach you a lesson, Bourke.

-Bloody bitches, Noelene screams, I'll kill ya's.

But they hold her in there anyway. She is jumping up and down like a live prawn, trying to get away. Such commotion, someone must hear her. Mrs Jackson finally arrives.

They were only trying to get the door unstuck, they said.

-Yeah, poor thing. It was getting pretty hot in there.

The screws are here at last and it is almost safe for Claire to come out. Lizzie, miraculously, has recovered from her heart attack. Noelene, wrapped in a towel, whimpering, is taken away to have her burns treated. Now she needs to see the doctor.

-You lot can forget privileges for the next week, Mrs Jackson tells them.

Miraculously, Claire is not included. No one knew she was there.

When she had a visitor she had to be fetched from the garden where she was listlessly pushing at clods with a hoe. Mrs Jackson was sent to get her.

-Inside Bailey. You have a visitor.

She did not believe her.

Every prisoner may receive a visitor once a week, or more at the Governor's discretion. No one as yet had visited Claire. She didn't expect them to. All her friends and family had simply dissolved into the background, become silent, distanced themselves, even those still living, disowned her once she was found guilty of that terrible act.

Mrs Jackson was always fair. She had her own story to tell but that was before Claire's time. A husband killed during a prison riot, dead and buried too. The prisoners all liked her. Not one of them would like to see her hurt but she was hurting. Such loneliness.

-It's your father.

But Claire did not want to see him.

-Suit yourself, Mrs Jackson said.

Bea was also there, sitting on the grass with her skirt hitched up, sunning her legs, being obscene, and she told Claire not to be so stupid. It was the only time she has spoken directly to Claire since that first time. She just happened to be outside. Something to do with the sun, its warmth, words she had said before to someone else. She will say them again.

-You must know what it's like in here by now, you damn fool. Anything to relieve the monotony.

And Claire, who would not wish to offend her, changed her mind. Bea, not only boss of them all, can sometimes be seen to aid and abet in an offhanded way.

Her father hadn't changed. Less hair at the top but more than you'd expect knowing the rate of loss when she last saw him. He'd been getting those hair transplants. She would bet on it. Strand by

strand replacements so that those he saw every day would not be able to tell. She got to see all the advertisements on the television.

He wore that silly moustache, still spoke as if he had all the answers. Cold. Angry.

-I hear that you have been thinking about lodging an appeal.

She shouldn't blame him for her mother's death. He'd told her before.

Daddy in his dark suit and tie, elegant as ever, was still a handsome man. So he will be vain. He will aim high. There was no screw in here with them and there should be, a sure sign that he was held in high esteem. Mrs Jackson, usually a third party to whatever goes on in the visiting room, her back against the wall, her hands clasped behind her, a blank state, under ordinary circumstances she would be in here too but she was outside. She shouldn't be.

- Think what the media will make of it. I will never make it to the top now, he said, after what you have done. You must have known that would happen.

Such melodrama.

-You really did it this time, he said.

But Claire was not listening to him. She was gazing off into space, looking at the walls, looking at her feet, picking at her nails. He wiped his forehead with his white handkerchief and when he looked at her his eyes had become soulful, frustrated.

-God it stinks in here, he said. How can you stand it?

There was no necessity to answer yet she would. She smiled. A sweet girlish smile, like she used to.

-You become accustomed to it.

He wanted to take her hand but she wouldn't let him.

-We can't touch in here, she reminded him. There is to be no physical contact. It is one of the rules.

-Why do you hate me, he asked anyway. I came here hoping that we could talk, I mean, I wanted to...say that I understand that since your mother died... I know it hurt you very much. That maybe I wasn't there when you needed me. But there was always work to be done.

He wanted her forgiveness. He wanted her to say that she forgave him even though he hadn't done anything.

-Claire, what I'm trying to say, is that I'm still your father.

She looked down at the table between them. In this dark little room. She looked down at the table, stupidly at where someone had scratched their initials, S.M. What did that stand for?

And he slapped his hand hard on the table top.

-Look, you little shit, I gave you everything. I let you get away with murder but when you brought that boy home that was going too far.

Outside the closed door, Mrs. Jackson scuffed her feet. She cleared her throat, rather awkwardly. She would not like this bending of the rules.

But Daddy was afraid.

-I'm sorry, he said in his reasonable voice. I didn't mean to shout. I didn't come to fight with you. You are my daughter and I don't like to see you suffering like this.

So she smiled that smile again and he leaned closer, not touching her, but near enough.

-What did he do to you, he asked. That boy of yours? What did he do to you to make you like this?

And she wanted to tell him anything. Just like that. Things he might have made her do. How he fucked her because it was such a filthy word, it will disturb him.

-Then he deserved everything he got, didn't he, daddy said, missing the point entirely.

\*

Did she enjoy it?

She wanted to answer, both yes and no, but she was not sure which was best. Perhaps she only wished to shock him, give the answer that turned him on because she didn't know otherwise.

Steve Wilson, when he was embarrassed, tended to blush. He could not meet her eyes.

-It was an inappropriate question, he said. It was just something that you may have been asked by the opposition when the time came.

She cannot believe everything she hears. She cannot believe anything.

It was the beginning of a new session; facts and figures, court transcripts, old and new histories, whatever came to mind. He had taken his note books from his brown leather brief-case, placed them on the table before them.

-Your father came to see you, he said. I want to know what he had to say. After all, he could be a hostile witness when proceedings get under way. I don't want him putting the pressure on you to change the story. I don't want him getting too friendly.

-That was never a problem, she said.

-Then what's the matter?

-It's the waiting. It's being in here.



He told her that she had to keep the faith a little longer, something that he has said before to Karen Travis. It would be some months yet before anything happened.

-What has my relationship with my father got to do with my appeal?

She wanted to know.

-Diminished responsibility, he said. Temporary insanity. Manslaughter instead of murder, a lesser term like Karen, who knows.

He was such a clever man, educated, well placed, handsome and ambitious. And why wouldn't he be. He lived in a world we all try to get into.

-So how does the story go, she asked.

His hand rested briefly on his dimpled chin and he got out of his seat to think, started pacing. Three steps before he turned to look speculatively at the woman across the table.

-Something like this, he said.

He spoke in a hushed voice. There was a story to tell.

-Your fourteenth birthday. Your mother had died some years ago. When your father burst through your bedroom door he did the unmentionable. We are talking abuse here. We are talking about things that may not be described. Then he hushed it up. Gagged you. He got away with it. When you married, your husband, also a figure of authority, came to represent a father who had abused you. One night, you go crazy. Like you did in the hospital. You do things that are irrational. As if you are punishing yourself. Or punishing him. You didn't mean to do it. Your mind went blank for that split second. It just happened. How am I going so far?

Go on, we say. Tell us more.

-When you opened your eyes, the poker was in your hand, your husband was on the floor and he wasn't moving. You thought you'd killed him, Claire, you didn't know that he was still alive at that point, that he may have been saved. There he was, the man you loved, the man you married seemingly dead on the floor. Was that how it was?

She didn't say. She didn't know if this was what she meant at all. It was not her explanation.

-And while you were standing over him, like that, it all began coming back. What your father did to you. What he and his friends made you say when you spoke out. The extreme lengths they went to, to cover it up. Perhaps some of them, like Detective Fieldon, thought they were doing the right thing. None of them would believe you. So you are standing there over your husband's body and you begin thinking. If they can cover up what your father did to you, than why can't you cover up what you did to your husband? If they can get away with it then why can't you? So you attempt to destroy the evidence. Don't you Claire? And you invent this wild story about a man stalking you and tell everyone he must have done it.

She didn't know what to say. Didn't like ending like this, the implications. Too callous. So terrifyingly empty of anything to say.

-I don't remember, she said. I don't remember thinking like that. I didn't do it.

-That's the entire point, love, he said. You were asleep. Drugged. Your nightmares took you over. And you are quite correct. It is much better if you don't remember anything, that you were not conscious, not yourself.

But there were flaws in his argument, in the timing. The stalker had already been invented. It would suggest premeditation. Couldn't he see that?

[8]

When Mrs Jackson told her to pack her bags it was not that she was going anywhere. They were only moving her to another cell. She was leaving her home. It had to come. She will be sharing with two women she hardly knew. Monnie's friends.

-You can't do that.

Mrs Bennet just laughed.

-You're not here for a holiday, she said.

So they put her in there and the two women prisoners smile as she enters, not like Frankie did, more like her dream. She will have to pay them for the privilege of staying here. A packet of fags, say. Maybe make their beds for them.

-You'll be alright here, Mrs Jackson told her.

\*

When Steve Wilson and Detective Inspector Fieldon finally meet, it will be done quietly, circumspectly. Steve Wilson has an insatiable appetite for information. In cases like this, one can be assured, it is necessary to gather as much background as possible, to revisit and revise the past as necessity dictates. The smallest detail, he likes to explain, a seemingly insignificant facet can become vital. On the downside, it can open a Pandora's Box but he is prepared to take the risk given the hopelessness of the situation.

I say they met in the car park, only for convenience. They could have met anywhere. Mr. Wilson's office perhaps, or the Detective's, even a café in Lygon Street. Yet knowing that they met and that they would meet again, I place them in the car park of the prison where she is kept, in the Detective's car, a white Ford, where there are no security cameras or records kept. The Detective is a busy man, with places to go, people to see. When Mr. Wilson phoned requiring information about the past, they arranged to meet here, 9 a.m., and as such Mr. Wilson was waiting alone until the Detective drove up. Mr. Wilson opened the passenger door with an inquiring gaze and the Detective told him to get in. They parked in a bay to one side, out of sight.

A family friend and fellow officer, Detective Des was around when Claire was born. He knows her past, sees her through his own eyes. He was in the academy at the same time as her father, they shared cigars at her birth. Mr. Wilson is after anything he might hang his hat on and Detective Fieldon was the logical choice, perhaps the only one willing to speak on her behalf but a certain caution had to be exercised. The Detective didn't want to be seen as too closely involved. He had been burnt before during the trial, his competence, professionalism brought into question.

-What can you tell me about her childhood, Mr. Wilson asks. I am getting conflicting information from my client and what we read in the media can hardly be believed.

And this is the crux of his dilemma, obviously, too few facts or too many. To find some sort of defense for the indefensible, Mr. Wilson must delve into the past but as I have already mentioned, delving too deeply might be counter productive.

-We were all at her mother's funeral, Detective Fieldon told him. The graduation class of '71.

They lined the driveway as the coffin was carried from the church. He can still remember a slip of a girl beside her father as they followed behind the pall bearers.

-It was the usual story.

Neglected too often after her mother's death, her ambitious father hardly ever at home she became a little wild, the detective said. She had a boyfriend at an early age; they made up this bullshit story about a cousin on her mother's side and brought him home. When her father, in spite of the distractions found out the truth, the boyfriend jumped out the window.

-Next thing we hear, the boyfriend was killed, train accident or possible suicide, and then she started making these shocking accusations about her father. She really hated us all back then.

So you see where all this is leading, what I have in mind. In contrast to their supposed role as guardians between good and evil, more often than not the police are more the problem than the cure. They exclude all outsiders, tamper with the evidence, cover each other's back and any other cliché I can think of. If justice were truly served, the jails would be full of them instead of the people they put away, for the crimes committed by criminals are honest ones.

-Detective. Let me ask you just the one question. I want you to think carefully about your answer. Much depends on it.

Mr. Wilson, it must be remembered, although he acts on her behalf, at least for the moment, is still part of the establishment. He may know or may choose not to know, how power is wielded.

-Was there any truth to her accusations? Did her father act less than a father should? Did he touch her? Did he do the unspeakable and then,

when she threatened to let it out, did he use his position and all the power at his command to shut her up?

The detective, of course, would not answer either way. He could only restate what he thought back then, she was an angry and spiteful teenager and what she'd said was just too incredible to be believed.

As he weighed up the alternatives, a positive affirmation places a heavy burden upon his shoulders, that he could have got it so wrong. He must feel guilt for there was no formal investigation, just damage control. None of them would listen to her. They swept it under the carpet. As he imagines it thus, he might feel awe of her, that she remained alive in spite of everything, nursed her anger, waited to act. Magnificent in her fury, he remembered how her eyes flashed with brilliance as she stood in that other place. Yet such a frightening thought; she got the wrong man and Detective Fieldon couldn't accept a story so horrifying. He must begin to believe in her innocence. His professionalism having already been called into question during her trial, he couldn't bear to have got it so wrong, even in those early days? And her father? With so many friends in both high and low places, he was not someone to be trifled with. When the detective speaks at last, he neither confirms nor denies either possibility.

-Have you spoken to her about this, he asks, about the 'so-called cousin' she brought home? Who was he? Where did he come from? If you can find the key to that, then maybe it will all start to make sense. No one really knows what happened to him. There was a body beneath the train, yes, but we only have perhaps a too brief, even wishful, confirmation from her father.

So the Detective has made this incredible leap of faith. He believes in her innocence again; even castigates himself for ever

having lost faith. Let the Court find her guilty, let everyone believe, he cannot stop them. He will champion her cause once more, husband his strength and credibility, reinterpret until he finds a better outcome.

-For my part, he said, there are a few loose ends that have been bothering me. I should have done something about them long ago.

When the Crown cross-examined Detective-Inspector Fieldon during her trial, there was a certain irony in the fact that under normal circumstances he could be expected to have been acting for the prosecution, detailing his investigations, explaining the evidence that led him to charge the accused but in this case, unusually, he was called by the defense.

*-Detective-Inspector Fieldon, given that you were a good friend to the family of Mrs. Bailey, might I suggest that your best efforts to arrive at the truth of the matter could have been influenced, if not perverted on their behalf.*

In denying the charge, he told the court that when he was first approached by Claire Bailey at the police station in Richmond, he had not seen her or any member of her family for several years, although he did know of her father through association.

*-She came to my office and told me that her apartment had been broken into. The following day I was called out to pick her up from a Delicatessen in Charles Street, Richmond, where she had taken refuge. She was quite obviously distraught. She claimed to have been pursued down the street by an unknown assailant and I had no reason to disbelieve her.*

When asked if he had found any evidence of such an assailant, the Detective-Inspector replied that there were items of clothing in an apartment in the same block belonging to Claire Bailey. There was also evidence of occupation when it was supposedly untenanted.

*-Might the accused have put the documented items there herself?*

*-The doors were locked. It was unreasonable to assume that she had access.*

Here the Crown prosecutor told the court that there was no proof the items belonged to the accused, other than the word of the accused, herself.

*-Is it not the fact that you have been unable to find any other evidence or links to suggest such an assailant existed in the first place?*

*-Her mother-in-law did say an intruder had been in her house.*

Again the Crown prosecutor, Jeffrey Phillips, QC, addressed the court.

*-It should be recorded here, Your Honour, that Mrs. Eleanor Bailey, now deceased, suffered numerous strokes before her eventual death, incurring such brain damage as to make it impossible for her to speak clearly. In consequence, whatever she may have said, with such difficulty, in relation to the phantom assailant cannot be deemed admissible evidence in a court of law. As Detective Fieldon might remember, if his objectivity could be relied upon, she also stated that the death of her son was Claire Bailey's fault. However, given the state of her health, it is not the prosecution's intention to place any great significance on either of the claims made by Mrs. Eleanor Bailey.*

Turning back to the Detective-Inspector, the prosecutor allowed a few moments pause so that none would miss the final questions.

*-I ask you again, Detective Fieldon, and I want you to think carefully before answering. In your professional capacity, and I stress*



*that, other than Claire Bailey's claims, there is not a shred of evidence to show that an assailant existed. Is that not true?*

*-I am a Detective-Inspector.*

*-Alright, Detective-Inspector, there was no intention to offend, it was a matter of expediency, after all, Detective-Inspector is quite a mouthful. Now answer the question.*

*-You realize that I was taken off the case. The Homicide Squad took over the investigation. It was their jurisdiction.*

*-But you did all the leg work, if I may use the vernacular, and yet you could find nothing. True?*

*-Yes, it's true.*

*-Thank you Detective-Inspector, I have no further questions.*

Mr. Wilson knows all that transpired during the Detective-Inspector's testimony. He has the transcript in his brief case. It was what he has relied on, that and his suspicions of what the Detective must feel, the obvious affront to his professional pride. Perhaps the Detective even felt remorse, a sense that for a second time he had failed Claire Bailey.

*-Good. You will keep me posted.*

*-Yes, of course, the Detective-Inspector said.*

\*

When did she begin to suspect that even now, although her trial was over, her guilt established and punishment duly enacted, that she was to be watched, spied upon, and obsessed over. I suspect it was

near the beginning of her sentence term, when she still had a cell to herself, an observation deck, a place in between until she became accustomed to what was required. I describe it only now because at the time I didn't understand the significance of her actions. I assumed, naturally, that in a place of incarceration one should expect an element of paranoia. The screws kept an eye on her, it was their job after all, to become obsessed with where she was, where she should be, how she addressed them, her hygiene. Without warning the observation hatch could be opened and the face of her guardian would be framed there, peering in at her. So it was quite reasonable that she demonstrate a certain amount of distrust, that she display clinical patterns of paranoia that in more normal circumstances, would require treatment. Her 'fear and distrust of others', to use the words of Dr. Openheimer, that she was 'vigilant and always on guard' and continued to believe that she was a victim of a miscarriage of justice perpetrated by 'a person unknown with superhuman qualities' could still be seen to reflect behaviour within acceptable boundaries of someone in the circumstance she now finds herself. Her husband's death was neither a beginning nor an end to it?

That morning when she woke there was a blowfly in her cell. Overnight they had locked a fly in. Black and cumbersome, it ricocheted from wall to wall, its figure eights measuring the dimensions. There was no escape for either of them. It became tired, or bored and settled on the wall, without moving unless it moved when she was not looking. When the fly was still there that evening, she wondered if the fly was dead, or if it was a fly at all. She raised her hand to brush it away and the fly flew. It circled her head, in slow motion, only inches away. Her time was not the fly's time. A bug on her wall, listening to anything she had to say, that she might think out

loud, reporting back to whoever such things might report back to. Nothing she saw was incidental. When it landed in exactly the same place, her suspicions were only deepened. Its legs were probably mechanical, faint wires soldered to a black shell, an engineered replica of what was real, a simple prop, a false fly that even flew. She got up and swatted it. She had to know. She expected to feel a brittle resistance, pieces you might see flying from a watch, but the fly was real, after all. It was soft and gushing, part of her world.

Although that didn't prove anything.

-There are flaws in our argument, Mr Wilson tells her, discrepancies in the timing, in the logic, not the least of which is the fact that the stalker had already been invented. Then there was the presence of inflammable residue, petrol no less, in the car's interior. That would suggest premeditation and careful planning, hardly the sentiment we would wish the court to see.

So many things she had forgotten about. So many things she'd rather not remember, all bearing down.

-What about that cousin of yours? Jack Cunningham. Was that his name? Was he really your cousin?

Mr Wilson had been talking to someone, probably her father or Detective Des.

-No, he said. Because when your father finally rang your aunt, the real Jack was still on the farm.

But that was all ancient history. She expressed that view.

-It has no bearing anymore. It cannot change anything.

-Don't be so naive, he said.

-He was just a friend.

-He was more than that.

-My lover?

-Wasn't he?

So the pieces were finally coming together. Mr Wilson must have been pleased.

-Tell me about Vincent. How did you meet him? Detective Des has already told me that you became sick after he died. Deep bouts of depression. And when you told those terrible stories about your father, your father panicked. He hushed it up. Even if it could be clearly demonstrated that there wasn't a shred of truth in what you said, it would still have damaged his promising career. So he took you away, he and his friends. Somewhere quiet. Someone's house, perhaps. And they brow-beat you until you didn't know what story you were trying to tell. Isn't that how it was Mrs Bailey?

So it was to be a combination, boy trouble and father trouble.

She told him, what? It was her idea to bring him home. She was old enough, she said. She was old enough to make up her own mind and when her father came back unexpectedly, knowing what he knew, Jack jumped over the window sill.

-You mean Vincent.

-There wasn't even time for goodbyes.

-And then what?

-He killed himself.

-Did he?

She didn't know what he meant.

-Claire. How do we know it was Vincent under that train? We don't even have a second name.

She had no answer to give him. The question was rhetorical in any case.

-What if Jack, I mean Vincent, just disappeared. Something that he seems to do from time to time. What if it was someone else beneath the train?

At this perfect hiatus, no one speaks. Even Mr Wilson must know how overwrought his imagination has become, that having looked everywhere for an explanation, he may have looked too hard and begun to see that which wasn't there. He will want to step back from the abyss, return to some semblance of normality.

-Just tell me about Vincent. How you met him. The type of man he was.

He came to the city. Yes. He was sitting on a street bench, watching all the passers-by, so many unsmiling faces, the traffic lights, the cars, the bodies inside them, pigeons scavenging for crumbs, their heads tick tocking as they scrambled from beneath the myriad feet. She was passing him by, only that. He turned to watch her. He could not help it. He'd had no intentions, or expectations, just his idleness at the time. He didn't mean her any harm.

She was a girl in her school uniform walking in the street with a friend. School was out. They stopped on the corner and waited for the lights to change. Or they were waiting for him. She reached around the back to adjust the panty line at her crutch but realising what she was about to do in public and brushed her skirt instead. Yet he was sure she hadn't seen him.

He crossed the road behind them. He followed them to the train station. He didn't mean to get on but he did. He hid his face behind a newspaper, pretended to read it. He watched them from across the aisle, a few seats behind them, how they folded and unfolded themselves, how they laughed, perhaps they were laughing at him, and as the carriages filled with home-coming began to move, he rode that

train. When she and her girl friend both got off, he didn't ride it anymore.

She didn't know who he was. The two of them had never met.

-So what happened after he followed you along the footpath?

He had to see her up close. Maybe even talk to her. He had to stop her in the street as if his life depended on it and when her school friend left her alone for a moment on the street, he tapped Claire on the shoulder.

-Rosa was always hungry, she told him. She had gone into the corner shop to buy a bar of chocolate, probably a Cherry Ripe which was one of her favourites.

He gave her a rose. Just like that. He walked up behind her, tapped her on the shoulder and when she turned around he handed her a single red rose on a long stem, taken from someone's front garden. Ridiculously easy.

She cannot remember whether he wanted to kiss her then and there but all he did was hand her a single rose, its stem with thorns threatening but not really hurting him. When she took it from him he smiled, and then she smiled. He gave a slight nod and turned back the way he had come. He faded away.

\*

There is always a line one is not meant to cross. Whether it is drawn in sand or set in concrete, the collectivization of manners that we are expected to abide by gives us comfort does it not, at least for those of us who are without imagination. Such as these I see all around

me, the timid ones like Ralph Bailey who become indignant should the rules they deem irrefutable be flaunted no matter how petty they might be. They will give way when you cross their path, step back from the doorway to allow you to pass, give way. These are the ones that fate or circumstance will never favour, that maintain the fantasy that through cooperation and love, we might all live together in harmony. Best not to tell them that within every alleyway and shadow there is a predator, that behind every empire there is a psychopath.

I make no admissions of culpability, no confession of guilt. Like a scientist, it is imperative that I be accurate in every detail, to make no technical mistakes, to ensure that what is intended is not thwarted by an error in the mathematics of the equation.

Take R.B.'s car as an example. At what capacity must the petrol tank be filled to ensure that there is enough heat and flame to be certain of immolation? Too full and perhaps the flames will fail from a lack of oxygen. Too empty and the flames might die from lack of fuel. Should the conflagration, through a lack of research, have fizzled out before the wick was truly lit, then R.B. might have survived his martyrdom. His mundane existence would continue, his moment of fame extinguished. His name would not have reached the papers except as a postscript, 'Man escapes burning car', or the like. Claire Bailey would still be trapped in a marriage made dull by a man who meandered through a boring life, a man without ambition or verve.

There was an element of risk in what I propose to tell for the sake of the story. To purchase or steal a car, a four cylinder alike but not an exact replica of the vehicle in which R.B. was fated to die. To find an isolated location where I could conduct my experiment. How to describe the thrill of driving a stolen vehicle openly on the roads, the jolt I might feel at the sight of a police car travelling in the opposite direction. It would take some

explanation on my part should the car I proposed to torch, partially or otherwise, be traced back to me.

I feel I need to speak of it, to demonstrate the extremes to which it is necessary to go to get the facts right. Without risk I would endure what cannot be endured, a life like Ralph Bailey, without audacity, without triumph. To drop the screen so, to allow this small glimpse, makes vulnerable a self that has always felt invulnerable but what good is conquest if it is never shared. How I long to come out, to shine beyond the ordinary. So I drove out from the city on a moonless night, alone as always. I had chosen a secluded place out in the bush, not far from the freeway. A place I knew well with various exit tracks. The petrol tank was half full or half empty, depending on your point of view. I unscrewed the petrol cap of the tank. I stuffed an old rag into the petrol spout. I hadn't soaked it in petrol although I had considered it but in the interests of my own safety I decided it was better to have a slow wick that would allow me to attain some distance.

But who would have thought it would be so difficult. Whether from a lack of oxygen or the rag itself blocking the fumes from the tank reaching the flame, the wick fizzled out. What seemed a simple operation, to light such a volatile fuel and engulf the car in an inferno, proved technically more difficult than I had ever imagined. It was necessary after all to take the rag out, dose it with petrol from the four litre can I failed to mention bringing with me and with some trepidation, stuff it back into the tank spout, and light it. I barely had time to scramble behind a tree before the tank exploded, a satisfying whomp that I felt more than heard.

Yet again, things didn't go as I had hoped they would. The tank exploded, yes, the tank blew out, and the flames even spread some



way into the interior of the car. Perhaps I could have placed a dummy in the driving seat but didn't bother, I could extrapolate from how the flames spread, took hold. If the front seat burns then everything burns but you might imagine my consternation, my disappointment as I watched the flames fizzle out, not at all what I had envisaged. What a fake I'd become. Such a vital moment as R.B. torched in the family car, now seen to be technically unlikely, if not impossible. You may have seen the same on the roadside in your travels, an abandoned vehicle, the back end scorched but the front end untouched, a botched job in any case. All the planning and plotting I had conceived would have come to nothing with this monumental failure, leaving R.B. walking free.

Isn't this the whole point in conducting an experiment, to test a hypothesis, a presumption that A leads to B. Once it can be established that the formula doesn't bring about the expected results, then it has to be changed. Now I knew that it was necessary to add further elements, to expand upon what I had planned. It was not enough to simply light the wick and walk away. To ensure R.B. kept his mouth shut, it was necessary to add more fuel to the flame, douse the interior of the car with more petrol, a few litres, say, splashed on the front seat, maybe over R.B. himself. Then walk away. Once the tank exploded the flames would create enough heat to consume everything. A plume of oily smoke would then rise, to be seen for miles if anyone cared to look. Let what I had hypothesized then become inevitable, a true summary of the facts.

[9]

To think of her so confined behind prison bars, enduring the suffocating miasma of human misery sweated upon the walls, a model prisoner perhaps, going about the business of paying her dues to society, whatever that might entail, following instructions given by those set to guard, no matter how petty or menial, diligently obeying all the rules. Could she be trusted with extra duties, become a calming influence upon other inmates? Or is she one of those who whine about her innocence every chance she gets; does she rail against the system, the corruption of the coppers investigating her case, the incompetence of those representing her, appointed by the State?

There is the criminal mind that sees himself, or herself in this case, as a professional whose incarceration is one of the hazards, a product of industry. To them, there is no dilemma over the morality of their actions. Some would even express the view that without thieves society could not function, that they are necessary to the market, a profitable arm of the insurance industry. The properties they target all have insurance so that break and enter, far from being evil, is simply the movement of out-dated goods. It is a thin line, indeed, that separates so-called legal enterprises from their own. Look at the millions of tax payer dollars poured into jails throughout the State; they will point out to you, the wages of staff, court functionaries and police who in turn keep the economy buoyant. Having bestowed upon themselves the legitimacy of free enterprise, criminals such as these become the elite of prison society. It is the others; rapists, a certain

type of murderer (murder for profit, revenge, passion are a different category), child molesters who give criminals a bad name.

Amidst such as these, Claire will find herself. Her husband's murder places her neither at the top nor bottom rungs. The elite will see her as nearly one of their own, purely by accident. All things being equal, she would get on, even make friends. Others will approve of her, even admire her strength of character for having acted so decisively against a man who had obviously done her wrong. It is those on the outside, naïve in the ways the secret economy works, misinformed by the real criminals, the administrators of the State who never face a day behind bars, (truly there is more honour amidst the convicted thieves), who want the perception that justice has been served. They want to feel safe. They want to believe that certain standards are maintained, that they pertain to everyone. And the prison guards? They too have their say. The very procedures they endorse are designed to alienate and destabilize, and ultimately divide. Some will separate friends before they become partnerships while others will support them as a means of maintaining order. Even the officers' inconsistencies can be seen to be part of a system designed to control.

Take the consequent episodes of *Prisoner* after Bea has been stabbed in the dining room. The new girl died in the dryer but Bea was recovering in the hospital with a screw keeping guard in a chair beside her bed. In her absence, the feudalism of the prison environment has been disrupted. There is now a vacuum in the absence of the queen, with many willing to fill it but lacking the authority and the breeding. Unease and distrust throughout the Kingdom has everyone on edge. Even the prison guards themselves are divided. Some see their jobs made easier while the prisoners are fighting among themselves. Others want Bea's return as soon as possible so that things might return back

to normal. Yet Bea escapes, doesn't she. She slips the sedatives she should have swallowed herself, into the screw's drink so that instead of guarding her the screw falls asleep. Then she gets away. Not good news. They were all missing her hard authority. Monnie Ferguson's cigarette collection continued to grow, and her ambition.

-Where're those fags you owe me. Here, wash my socks and sew up my ol' blue jeans. Maybe you could go outside and change the tyre, hah, hah.

When some of the women have just about had enough and begin discussing how they all should stick together, maybe stand up to her, Claire wants no part of it. To her it would seem just another stupid idea. Her anxiety will be reflected in her discussions with Mr Wilson as they develop her story.

-What's the matter with you, he will ask?

-It's this place, she tells him. It's getting to me.

And he will say what he has said before.

-Be patient. You must keep the faith a little longer.

After she has absorbed that little gem, maybe filed it away for future reference when she needs some self-motivation, he says:

-Now, tell me more about this boyfriend of yours. You told me before how you met him. So what happened next?

They were sitting together on a bench inside the police headquarters where her father was stationed and she asked Vincent why he was here. He told her there had been a misunderstanding. Everyone has their ups and downs. An outstanding loan that will always be outstanding. Something like that. Something untrue. She was here. He had followed her in. He said: what's a nice girl like you doing in a place like this?

She was waiting for her father.

Daddy was a detective. He'd told her to meet him here but then he never showed up. Running late again.

But Daddy was not the problem, not right now. Her mother had died when she was young. She was babbling and she apologised for it, and yes, she'd seen the advertisement too where a beautiful man gives a beautiful woman a beautiful rose and she thought it was funny too.

And so it begins.

He was more than happy to meet her after school. He waited at the corner for her to jump into his car. He would take her for a ride. He would take her anywhere she wished to go. He would take her down to the park and sit her on a swing. She had such smooth skin, he told her, and lovely eyes. They would not be touching each other yet but soon they would be. The birds were singing. The bees were buzzing. The slow rub of willow leaves in a gentle wind, the bubbling of the creek over rocks, soft grass; she must have felt it, something live, glad to see her.

-So how did it all end, Steve asked her. Whose idea was it to bring him home? That he play that role? Pretend to be your cousin from out in the country?

But such questions were of little consequence. Old history.

Against her better judgement Claire too had become involved in prison politics. Or in spite of her best intentions, she was forced to make a stand. She was in here. She would have to defend herself. Something she had already proven she could do. But this physicality, narrowing her vision to its narrowest arc, her own body, the pain it was designed to feel, the sickening aura of impending violence, all made her nauseous. It was not a situation she relished, being pregnant with them all, all manoeuvring from the fringes.

She stood in the background out of sight with her back to the wall, one of many. Someone had to lead and Doreen had been elected, or she elected herself. Monnie, cat mad, slunk along the corridors, her hands in her pockets, her huge frame hunched over, ready to be amused, so it was all going to happen now.

-What are you lot doin'?

-Nothin', Doreen said. Minding our own business. Out here where the stink ain't so bad.

And Monnie looked at them contemptuously, smiling, leaning forward on her toes, pushing her ugly mug in amongst them.

-Gotta fag, Beryl?

Doreen said that they were not giving her fags anymore. She could get her own. They were all tired of being pushed around.

-Yeah, Monnie asked?

Doreen said, she's gunna have to leave them alone. They're not afraid of her.

-Is that so, Monnie asked?

At any moment, Claire too might have said something, but what to say. When to say it?

-Come on then, said Monnie.

When Monnie twisted Doreen's arm up her back, no one was doing anything. Doreen didn't stand a chance. The rest of them, champing at the bit like thoroughbreds, wanted to jump in but hesitated, wanted to step forward but not one of them was doing so. They had forgotten the plan.

Silently gritty, Doreen was no longer on the attack, just trying to defend herself, covering herself up, fending off what blows may come, dropping her eyes. And that was a mistake. Daddy's friends, when they were teaching Claire to box, said never do that. How can

you dodge the fists when you don't see them coming? Keep your head and your hands up.

But she was only a girl.

Claire should jump in, maybe from behind, grab Monnie's arms, do something but she couldn't move, couldn't lift her feet, rooted in some way to the ground, watching Doreen cop a hiding until someone yelled - screw, and then it all stopped.

The air felt bruised.

-What's going on here, Mrs. Bennet asked.

-Nothing, they all said.

-Fat lot of good you lot were, Doreen told them.

-I take it, Mr Wilson comments, that this went on for quite some time before your father put a stop to it.

Rosa had been her best friend. She would admit to that much. She had always lived next door. They walked to school together. Went into the city when they were allowed to.

-When he met me after school, naturally Rosa was with me and came along for the ride.

She recalls the time in the back yard when he gave her what was to become his parting gift, an image of a swan with a woman enfolded within its wings. Steve Wilson is enthralled with what he knew, a classical education, all the myths at his fingertips.

-This could work in our favour, he tells her. How old were you, fifteen, going on sixteen?

As I transcribe their duet, I will borrow or steal a few lines here and there, images and other myths. Mr Wilson bursts into song.

-You were sixteen, going on seventeen, innocent as a rose, bachelors, dandies, drinkers of brandies, what did you know of those?

She remembers a man obsessed with her although at the time she thought it was love.

-I was sixteen going on seventeen, I know that I was naïve, fellows I meet tell me I'm sweet and willingly I believe.

-When he presented himself to your father as Cousin Jack, Steve continued, your father accepted him as such. It had been many years since he'd seen the real Jack, a cousin from your mother's side, and that meeting had been fleeting at best. He knew that the real Jack was actually looking to come to the city for work, which had given you the idea in the first place. Your father was always distracted with work. He didn't pay enough attention.

-And I'm not sure, if beneath it all, I wasn't trying to punish my father. I was always alone in the house. Daddy had his other women when he wasn't working. And Vincent was homeless. He'd been sleeping in his car.

-So Vincent moves in as Jack. The risks you had taken. You hadn't known him that long. You lied to your father. There was every chance that the real Jack could turn up on your father's doorstep. And yet for weeks, you both maintained this fiction.

But in time, Daddy became suspicious, less distracted, something they said or didn't say, a question asked that neither had an answer for, a small detail they'd gotten wrong. When he came home unexpectedly, neither of them was prepared for it. A car door slamming and the scuffing of his boots on the front door step. He was there now and pounding on her bedroom door. There was no time to do anything.

-If I have to break down this door young lady, you're in big trouble.



Perhaps a brief moment to grab some clothes, a partial dressing, Daddy crying on the other side. When he burst through the door, Jack jumped over the window sill.

-You mean Vincent, Mr Wilson corrected her.

-Then he disappeared. You know the rest. We were going to meet at the train station. Run away. When I couldn't get there he killed himself.

-Did he?

She didn't know what he meant.

-Can we be sure it was him?

-Daddy said he saw him.

-He would, wouldn't he!

-He said he went to the morgue to make sure he never bothered us again.

-What if he only said that to stop you believing in this myth, for your own sake?

-I don't understand.

-What if Jack, I mean Vincent didn't jump beneath a train? That it was someone else and Vincent just disappeared, became someone else. Something that he seems to do from time to time.

She had no answer to give him. The question was rhetorical in any case

-What if Vincent came back on the scene many years later? Could he have been the stalker?

Distracted, Claire has a vision of Doreen, bruised and battered, telling them all that they were spineless. She'd rather stick with Monnie, like Lizzie. They could all get stuffed. Her anger was such a relief.

-I've asked Detective Fieldon to go back, look into the past, Steve said.

The way Claire froze while Doreen received her punishment must prey on her mind.

-Claire, you are not listening to me.

He was standing before her, holding her arms, trying to catch her eye.

-He will need a description. You will know what he looks like, how he acted, those identifying mannerisms that identify us all. So describe him.

But it was so long ago.

-Claire, you must try. It's very important that you give Detective Fieldon something to go.

-Alright. Alright. Stop pressuring me. I'll do it. Dark hair then. Brown eyes? Or were they blue. I can't remember. Large build. Soft voice. Mannerisms? Nothing distinctive. That's all I can remember. I was only fifteen.

They will have to be content with that. Not much but it will have to do. A description that might describe anyone.

Yet who can believe in anything anymore? What faith in a world, a universe, that is always shifting, like her concentration, in time that is non-sequential? When Bea came back, everyone was put back in their place.

-Never mind, Steve said. If nothing comes of it we can still get a retrial but you must keep in mind, some lawyers get the idea that a retrial is a criticism of their methods, so be prepared for an air of heavy scepticism. It would be much better, more certain, if Detective Fieldon could come up with the goods.

In this role of story teller, it is not Mr Wilson's purpose, or his job, to lay the facts bare, to sift through the dross in his search for these nuggets of truth. Truth is irrelevant, simplicity anathema. Like any good lawyer, he seeks to add colour, digression, to clothe a skeleton with flesh, a heart, even a soul. His arguments are a metaphor, his profession a way of art. A beautiful piece of logic will define and convince, the credible rather than a distinctive truth, which is after all, in the eye of the beholder. He wants us all to believe that the canvas he creates, through both subtle and, where necessary, blatant brushstrokes, is the figurative truth. He raises the dead so that all may see. He peels the corpse from the train tracks so that it might serve a higher purpose. He seeks to create a new order from chaos, to give purpose to meaningless tragedy.

In the scene he now places before us, there remains a certain fracture as if everything is yet out of alignment. There is a crowd at the edge of a platform, looking down, and electric lights that fail to penetrate the shadows, that hide more than they reveal through the harsh contrast of light and dark.

Some time before we, as witnesses, arrived, a train had burst through the tunnel, heads turned, someone might have screamed but we weren't there to hear them. We were on the verge, as they say. The train was no longer moving. Running late, perhaps there was a fault in the line, we can't be sure. The electric lights drain the scene of reality, so that the images flicker like an old film, with curious leaps of narrative, the images dealt face up, emphatically, without connection. A hot Sunday evening and we arrived late. One of those difficult nights.

Mr Wilson moves us through the crowd to the edge because he wants us to know what the fuss is all about. He wants us to see what it is

that everyone is looking at and once we make our way discreetly to the front, he shows us the body of a man beneath the motionless train, a large iron wheel rooted in his abdomen.

So that he is two halves. His head and shoulders are in the shadows beneath the train. We cannot see his face but only his latter half; trousers pulled down to his ankles; legs glowing like pale sticks, the lump of shrivelled penis and testes in black briefs forlorn in the spotlight. The dark cords of flesh and gut have caught on the wheels that had previously passed over him, tight blue strips churned in the gears. A single brown shoe, like shoes any of us might wear, laced but empty, lay on its side a few yards up the track.

There is no need to describe the condition of the corpse any further. The man's face was obscured and further description, in any case, is impossible. That his trousers were down is not something we can presume he will have done for himself, so the authorities had already arrived. They knew enough to confirm that time was of no consequence so they were waiting for the coroner and this was the very moment, this perfect hiatus, in which we have arrived.

Mr Wilson does not describe the facial expression the man might have worn but we can imagine it; terror writ large, sweat upon his brow after a long chase, dumb disbelief. Did he even know what hit him? More than this, not even Mr Wilson can say. He doesn't mean us to know how the man came to be described in this way, how he had arrived at this point. Was he pushed, did he fall, did he simply decide he'd had enough? Perhaps he was thinking about someone he loved, or tonight's big draw on the lottery, or just getting home when somebody pushed him.

Don't we all have our enemies?

Someone had it in for him, maybe God, or he did something stupid like getting too close to the edge. Or running late he crossed the line, and there you are, it could happen to anyone.

A man fell beneath an oncoming train. He became enmeshed in the mechanisms of cogs but no one saw it happen, no one could explain.

Should we begin to feel it necessary to make a gesture, to feel loss for what we might regret losing, Mr Wilson will assure us that we should keep in mind that the events he is describing occurred many years ago and who the man was, what he might have done, and who would answer the door to receive the bad news that one of their loved ones was deceased, were irrelevant.

Life without death would be meaningless.

-A man fell beneath a train. The authorities never really knew whose name was on the ticket. A mistake was made.

Some other poor sap got erased instead of Vincent and now Vincent had another part to play. We see him disentangle himself from the tracks. He pulls his shirt from beneath the wheel, dusts himself off, retrieves his shoe, puts it on, and climbs back to the platform. We know at last that he is alive, with a second chance and he intends to grab hold of it, ride on that train, not under it. He makes his way back through the crowd, steps on board another train, one facing in the opposite direction. This train will be movement, progress. It will get him places. It will get him out of here so he sits calmly on the vinyl seat by a window.

All those on board we can call 'they'. Like us, they will never get to know them. 'They' don't want to know his name. Like us, 'they' are simply witnesses on the scene and 'he' could have been any one of them.

-I put it to you, ladies and gentlemen of the jury, that Vincent, alias Jack Cunningham, was not the man who died at the scene that late Sunday night, that a simple case of mistaken identity allowed a man of indeterminate age, a predator of adolescent girls, to slip from the radar, as it were, to continue his devious and malicious seductions. If we accept that he was still on the loose at the time of Ralph Bailey's murder, than indeed, we can accept the possibility that the phantom stalker, as the prosecution so eloquently named him in their final address, may have not been so immaterial after all. If Vincent could go to such great lengths to disappear as he did on that night, than what else might he be capable of?

As the train leaves the platform, we might finally realize that it is never too late to turn back, re-examine the facts, re-interpret, maybe even change them. The light could have been better, we decide, the description more detailed. This is progress. We could have climbed down for a closer look, who knows, maybe we did. We all feel as if we might have. We become more confident in our explanations. Vincent, by the window of train, in between destinations, has no other place to go but forward. He has a heart. We can feel it beating. The next station cannot be far away.

[10]

There has to be a stage of transition. That's what transitions are for, a progression from one state to another or a progression from one facet to another of a state she had always been in. Detective Fieldon has left the city. He has taken some time off to follow his own interests. He has driven out into the country side, going fishing as he liked to say if anyone should ask. What he is doing there is not yet apparent. It will become significant later on but just now Claire Bailey's circumstances have reached that perfect hiatus, a period of time where everything is in balance. She is waiting for something to happen.

The cell she shared served its purpose. She would stay there for as long as she was made to. Her main meal was taken at night with everyone else. Once a fortnight, she bought her groceries at the buy-up, like chocolate, cigarettes, magazines, enough to keep her going during the long days and nights. She will have to go out in daylight to feel the sunshine. Every Sunday afternoon she listened to the radio, to hear what was said on the outside. As she stood in the queue, waiting to be served, she heard them all, what they were saying and what they were not saying. Some laughed. They didn't understand. Some were solicitous as if they were hearing voices too.

The cell window above her bed now had curtains, she had put them there herself. She added a crocheted rug to her bed, given to her by one of the prison officers after a prisoner who had served her time left it behind. She will have the light on for as long as allowed, the dull white presence of the utilised bulb at the end of its flex, forlorn,

almost useless. She did not want to be isolated. Didn't want to be alone. On the contrary, she wanted to make friends with the women sharing her cell, to hear the sound of feet, occasional acts of clumsiness, a glass being shattered, say, or a chair falling backwards onto the floor, the dull thud of a door being slammed. Occasional evidence that she was not here all alone.

So when a door slams shut she rushes to the window to peer between the bars. She will see the women come and go. She will feel time passing. She will see other faces from across the corridor, peering out too.

One afternoon when she was out in the exercise yard, exercising, she saw a truck outside the fence, men up poles on their ladders doing things. She could hear them. She could even see them through the mesh: their generator, hammers, the slamming of the truck doors, an occasional call, indecipherable, a car horn. Signs of a functional world beyond the walls, inhabited by the everyday.

At the end of the day when they had accomplished what they set out to do, turn somebody off, turn someone on, whether they accomplish anything or not, the men in overalls demonstrated satisfaction in the way they brought the ladders down, the decisive manner in which they packed up the road signs, threw their tool boxes into the back of the truck, took their gloves off, slapped the dust from their thighs, told a joke, laughed, climbed into their trucks, drove away. These were the signals that the job was done. They had such confidence. When they left, they might have glanced back through the truck window to see a woman in grey on the other side of the mesh, forlorn inside. They won't care if she's watching them.

Why can't she be like that?



The transition would be complete on a day like any other but for now she must endure the journey in getting there. The morning bell rang at 6.00am. Muster at 7. Mr Fletcher, the lecher, was the new man about the house and he was not a man to be toyed with. Ask Monnie. They met him for the first time while they were all having breakfast. Their arguments were over food, large helpings, or helpings too small, but to keep their strength up Doreen and Lizzie went for seconds.

Claire sat in a corner, out of shot, not really there. She heard what they were saying but she had stopped listening long ago.

For breakfast, they had sausages and tomatoes with toast, at least there weren't any eggs congealing on her plate. She hardly ate. She has grown thin and tired, her head down, battered by their cacophony, their boisterous arguments, and their open mouths. They spoke with their mouths full. They stole food from each other's plates.

Mr Fletcher was the new deputy Governor. He wore a moustache like her father, his bearing also military, his expectations also nil. Something different at least. Someone who could leave his shoes beneath their bunks any time, if he'd like to. But their lewdness did not impress him. None of them were his type. He said it was easy enough to see why they were all in here.

-I'm Queen Bea around here, Bea said. What you might call the union boss.

He watched over their shoulders while they played cards. After her parole failed to go through, he flattened Monnie in the laundry. She went crazy so he flipped her onto her back, took the fight right out of her.

-Nothing wrong with that, Monnie told them after she had calmed down. Nothing wrong with a man who will give you a backhander when you step out of line.

Claire's silence was complete and unequivocal. She was only waiting for things to change. She has wallowed in here long enough now that her life, deemed so abnormal when she first came here, has become routine. Even meeting with Mr Wilson as they re-ordered her life's story has begun to seem futile, although Mr Wilson's brilliance in interpretation, a retelling of the ordinary, can never be questioned. From an everyday story of romance, or young love if you like, he has fixed in our minds something far more dire and compelling – the corruption of a minor, carnal knowledge, every parent's worst nightmare. But this is only the foundation, the sediment as it were, to excavate layer upon layer of evidence.

Raising the dead is always problematic. Mr Wilson will come to realize it in time. When raised, they cannot be expected to continue from where they left off. Time has moved on without them. Loved ones or despised ones have grown older, power has changed hands. It is time they will never be able to make up. The actions they have been raised to carry out will always carry the ordure of corruption. There were always problems in any case, when Vincent arrived on the scene.

-What did he want?

A question but Mr Wilson did not expect an answer he couldn't give himself. It was better that way.

-He wanted you back, obviously. He'd come all this way and he wouldn't take no for an answer.

But in his absence, things had changed. She had been too young when she first met him, naïve. She was older and wiser. He had been dead for years anyway. She hardly recognised him and she was married. With

her husband was at work when Vincent came to the door, it was the last thing she would have expected.

-Why did you never tell anyone?

She might have said that although things had changed, that she now loathed her husband, it was too hard to begin again.

-When you went to see Detective Fieldon about the stalker, why didn't you tell him that it was Vincent? Why all the secrecy?

He was presumed dead of course, difficult to raise him, hardly within her power.

-A false sense of loyalty perhaps. Or was it more complicated than that? Collusion between the two of you.

Even Mr Wilson must know that this line of inquiry would do his case no good. She would be stuck here for years

-I can see the prosecution making a meal of this, he said. Perhaps we should forget about Vincent.

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Even as children we are taught to hold dear the dichotomy of good and evil. As we practice these roles at school, we already know that to be a cop is to be on the side of angels, to be a robber, which in this game is representative of all criminals, is to be rounded up and penned in the corner of the playground. All our lives we are taught these roles. The politicians prey on our fears of being one or the other. More police on the beat, they say, if you vote for me. More criminals off the street and behind bars. So one cannot exist without the support of the other. The lines become blurred, with corruption on either side.

When Detective Fieldon first joined the force, he was both righteous and ambitious. He was there to serve society, to protect the innocent, to find

the truth. As he grew older, more jaded with what he saw, the mangled bodies amid the car wrecks, the battered wives, senseless vandalism, theft and murder, he lost his youthful exuberance. At the time Claire Bailey made those accusations about her father many years ago, he was no longer a raw recruit. He had moved through the ranks. He had children of his own near the same age and he knew she really hated her father back then, as children often do at that age. Having acquiesced to the good sense of his fellows, additionally her father, in deciding that no investigation into this particular facet of her mad background was easy at the time but it marked a point in his career when righteousness was finally lost and only ambition remained. In the intervening years, his success and reputation were made not through any particular sharpness of mind or brilliance of deduction but through doggedness, his refusal to give in. To see that justice was done, it was sometimes necessary to shift to the other side, condone the occasional verbal, add or delete minor details so that the evidence might suit the facts.

Mr. Wilson was the one to tell her. He told her there was really good news.

-I'm not really sure how it works just yet but Detective Fieldon has found your man. It wasn't Vincent. It wasn't your father or your husband but someone you never knew, a phantom in fact, as you'd said all along. Unfortunately he shot himself before they could arrest him.

It was not entirely unexpected.

-Detective Fieldon gave me a photograph. I am to pass it on to you.

A man sitting in a chair at the end of a table. Dark. No voice to speak of. Brown eyes. The table had been pushed against the wall. At

the end where he was sitting there was a glass of beer near his elbow. He held a cat on his lap. The cat had ducked its head as if it hadn't wanted to be in the photograph. Its dark eyes stared contemptuously at the lens. The man smiled self-consciously.

-Now I have to ask you, Steve Wilson said, and I want you to think carefully before you answer. Do you recognise the man in the photograph? Is he the one?

How the detective found what he had always been looking for came about not through the tenacity of his investigation but purely through chance, a serendipitous event that saw a letter of complaint fall on his desk. Due to his reputation, Detective Fieldon in a secondary role, was often called upon to work for the Crimes Review Board, a section responsible for the review of serious crimes where no resolution had been reached, or where new evidence came to light that might suggest a miscarriage of justice. The letter, from a somewhat pompous Mr Jones, at least in Detective Fieldon's opinion, claimed exactly that, that through collusion and corruption on the part of an investigating officer in a country town, a finding of suicide was determined where suspicious circumstances would suggest to "anyone with an ounce of intelligence" that a violent crime had been committed. The letter, in part, began as follows:

I call your attention to what one could only deem as gross misconduct on the part of SGT A. Jeffreys, the Echuca Police officer carrying out the investigation into the death of Paul Alexander Baker, Ref.No.4873..... It is my belief, knowing what I know, that although his death was

made to look like suicide as so dutifully recorded By SGT. Jeffreys, it was in fact a well planned and malicious execution.

The ramifications of the letter would not become immediately apparent to Detective Fieldon. It would sit in the in-tray for a number of days, a mundane matter which he was obliged to follow up but one he hadn't intended to dedicate too many resources until he became too frustrated with the lack of progress in the Bailey case.

He told Steve Wilson that it was as if it was meant to be, that some higher authority had taken the matter in hand.

When he picked up the letter again, made some phone calls, carried out a few uniform checks, he came across some surprising results. The suicide victim was not local to the town. He'd lived in the same area if not the actual neighbourhood where Ralph Bailey had died. He had been interviewed previously over an incident at the Box Hill Hospital, twenty minutes down the road, involving an assault upon a young woman. And there was an outstanding traffic infringement that had occurred in the same street if not on the same day, a street where Claire Bailey had run for her life. Detective Fieldon, in his exuberance, phoned Steve Wilson. He was driving down to Echuca to investigate.

-The problem has always been, Mr Wilson tells her, that cases like yours always follow a predictable path. In such cases, it is always the woman that gets it in the neck, if I could be so crude. A domestic argument culminates in a vicious attack ending in the woman's death. Or she simply disappears. Sometimes the body is never found. It is not just the fact that the male aggressor, in your case, is never seen by anyone else that makes this such a difficult case to defend, Mrs Bailey, but also the fact that it was

your husband who suffered the ultimate fate. No one can believe it and so you are cast into the role of liar.

He must be disappointed. All those plans they had made, incidental plot lines, terrible visions they had created together, all come to nothing.

-And yet, Mr Wilson says, nothing should surprise us. You only have to sit in the courthouse to know anything is possible. Who can argue if a culprit is found? The authorities would have to be satisfied that you are innocent. The rest will be a matter of form, paperwork, going through the motions.

Detective Fieldon assured Mr Wilson that the original investigation into the death of Paul Alexander Baker was completed to his satisfaction, that it was indeed a suicide and not murder as a somewhat fanciful and untrustworthy Mr Jones might suggest. Not that it has any bearing on Claire Bailey's case. In fact, he added, it would have been somewhat ironic and satisfying if he had indeed been a victim of an execution. He would have received some of his own medicine.

-So no more prison for you, Steve Wilson told her. No more bashings or otherwise. No more sitting at the dining table, watching them masticate their food. The authorities will have to be satisfied that you are innocent. In the very least, there is enough doubt to set you free. This is him, Steve said. They will have to listen to us now.

She cried in her cell. What else could she do? Not only was she exonerated but Detective Fieldon had now confirmed everything she had ever claimed. He had embarrassed them all, judges and barristers, screws and inmates. They were shown at last how wrong they had been. She was innocent. So she collected the meagre belongings she had accumulated and gave most of them away. She changed back into

her own clothes, an old outfit that had been placed on the bunk for her by one of the officers. Everyone was being so kind. She wanted to look casual so not too much make-up. She was going out wearing her own face, whatever that might be and for however long.

She found herself thinking stupidly, of all the goodbyes to make; Karen, Doreen and Lizzie too, even Beryl, Bea now that she was back, others whose names she couldn't remember, some she might have confided in, some to whom she might have spilt the beans but we were more interested in their stories. She could forget about the rest.

-You have spent two years, four months and twenty-five days in here, Mr Wilson said, not counting the time you were on remand. For a crime that as far as the Law is concerned, you never committed. The justice system grinds ever slowly but occasionally, it can be seen to get it right. Your photograph has been splashed around all the newspapers and they have told stories that have blackened your name. If ever there were a case for reparation than this is one

When Mr Wilson took her elbow to lead her out, he leant down to whisper in her ear, something between just the two of them.

-You've been very lucky, haven't you?

She refused to understand what he meant.

-I mean, everything has fallen into place.

Lucky was a word that echoed in her mind.

- Paul Alexander Baker lived in your area, he had the means. He left the city not long after your husband was murdered and from what Detective told me, he was about to do it all again. A dead cat in his back yard. A petrol can in the boot of his car. In his bedroom, women's undergarments, that sort of thing.



-She'll be back, Vera said as they passed her in the corridor. They always come back. You wait and see.

They waited for the guard at the gate to find the right key for the padlock. He pretended to have difficulty, his little joke, until finally he unbolted the gate. She slipped outside. The guard closed the gate behind her and waved hesitantly through the mesh.

-Good luck, he said.

When she stepped outside she would be transformed. Not all at once. But part of the grid again, all juiced up. In the not too distant future she might skip town, leave the country but that was still in the future.

I assure you that releasing a prisoner is never as quick or as efficient as I describe for Claire Bailey. There is the bureaucracy to be gotten through, release forms, signing for property and the like, and like all Government Departments, there is duplication and inefficiencies. Under normal circumstances the inmate in question must wait on the availability and good will or otherwise of the officer on duty. The transition from prison to the outside, is of necessity, a long and often frustrating process.

When Noelene Bourke was released from Prisoner, she was told days if not weeks before that a certain Monday was the day of her release. None of the drama revolving around her, however, gave any weight to her anticipation of freedom. The preceding episodes, in fact, were taken up with far more dramatic themes, the ongoing struggle for domination in the absence of top dog, Bea Smith.

If you remember, Bea Smith had escaped from the hospital after the knife fight in the dining room. A change of clothes, a wig and she was hamming it up on the outside. In the prison itself, Monnie Ferguson, hardly

foreman material, was involved in a power struggle with Noelene Bourke. The currency, as always, was cigarettes and sly grog. In these episodes, much of the action was taking place on the outside, with Bea hiding out with old friends, the continuation of various romances between the prison staff and of course, the siege where Noelene's Brother, Col, was shot by police. Just like Claire's story at this stage, much of the developing plot was unfolding out of sight.

Noelene Bourke's failure to impress, her lost battles and the disintegration of her family, Bea's eventual return to the prison and her consequent restoration as top dog, all gradually built the tension towards Noelene's ultimate revenge.

-I'll get youse lot one day, she told them, just you wait.

I describe this final scene because it is not enough to simply release Claire Bailey. In some way, my memory of Noelene's final act can be seen ultimately to shatter the trap in which Claire had been imprisoned for so long. I imagine her, like a ghost, finally rising free in that last sequence of exploding glass.

As Bea said of Noelene, she was always sneaking around behind people's backs, like a rat in a sewer and true to form; Noelene has constantly been shown in the background with her lips curled in hatred for them all. There was a celebration taking place, one of those occasions in which the prison authorities hoped to gain some positive media. A benefactor, Marianne Deveres, had collected funds, and even donated some herself, to create a half-way house for women after their release from jail. There was to be an official announcement in the prison with the media invited and all the inmates had pitched in to do the catering and set the tables outside in the garden. In addition to the halfway house, there was also to be the presentation of a coloured

television to replace the old black and white that the inmates had been viewing all these years. It was within these circumstances that Noelene finally got her revenge before she was released from the series.

The television was placed in the recreation room, still covered with a blanket for the final presentation. We see Noelene sneaking off with a hammer stuffed down her overalls, one that Monnie couldn't find in a previous scene. We understand her intent but it was not until Marianne Deveres made her second speech in the recreation room and lifted the veil on the television that we finally see how Noelene had taken her revenge. The television screen was shattered and the last shot we had of Noelene was her leaning against the wall at the back, a less than sweet smile on her face as the benefactor stormed out telling them all they were animals and she didn't know why she had bothered.

So I release her. The shattered screen she was squeezed through has not left her unscathed but there will be no blood on the floor. Detective Des waited by his car. He leaned against the passenger side door, casual, contemplating the ground, his arms folded. He will take her wherever she wants to go, he said.

And where was that?

A room somewhere. It was not something she had thought about.

The two men shake hands, excluding her. They have done what they have set out to do, or been paid to do. Mr Wilson drove away in his own car, appropriately, a Rolls Royce, but second hand. She sat with Des in his white Ford. He will take her for a ride. Perhaps he imagines, just the two of them on a cruise or walking on the beach of a tropical island, holding hands and she would either drown him or

make love to him. He drove slowly and as he did she looked back through the rear window to see the walls before they disappeared, the solemn, inverted towers, the outer mesh and the garden bed with white roses, and the sign.

-Never look back, he told her. You start a new life now.

Yes, she agreed.

-Margaret, my wife, you may not remember her, has fixed up the spare bedroom for you. You can stay there until you get back on your feet.

-That is very kind of you, she said.

And she meant it. She would like to become like him. Balanced. Wise. To know when to ask questions, to remain silent when there was no need for further answers, no point in asking any further.

-What was he like?

To know when to keep her mouth shut.

Detective Des, as he drove, shrugged his shoulders.

-Vincent, call him Jack, or call him Paul, all of them had a lot to answer for.

He had no wish to resolve the flaws and ambiguities of a story in which he, himself, had played no small part.

-I never liked your father.

A non sequitur she intended to ignore.

-He must have had a reason.

She was conscious of the Detective's competence as he drove, the nonchalant manner in which he looked left and then right, the steering wheel turning as he directed, seemingly a physical extension of his shoulders and hands.

-We will never know, the Detective told her. And I don't just say that because he is now dead. Even alive he would never have told us.

He gave way to a pedestrian crossing against the lights, not because he had to but simply because he chose to ignore a simple traffic infringement.

-I don't know what it is, he said. Pride. A criminal code. Denial of guilt or simply pig headedness but even once the dust has settled and they are committed to serve their time, they rarely tell us where the bodies are hidden.

There was a man on the corner watching them pass but neither of them saw him.

-As for Paul Baker, regardless of what anyone else might say, his family, friends, acquaintances, he was the one that had time on his hands. He was the one who was in the right place at the right time. Too many coincidences, his name popping up in all the right places. So let it rest.

The truth is she was out of jail. She was on the outside. A special sitting had exonerated her of all charges and just then, she had no wish to know more. The Detective drove. She was the passenger. To the man on the corner they were not just two people in their car, like all the rest, intent on arriving at their destination wherever that might be. He raised his hand once in farewell as they passed from his sight. Then he flagged a taxi and when there was a break in the traffic, the taxi executed a u-turn and proceeded up the road in the opposite direction.

Having arrived at this point, the end game if you like, I feel neither exhilaration nor triumph. I have achieved a certain omniscience, taken on a aloofness, yet another aspect of godhood.

Strangely I feel nothing, neither jealousy nor love. I have become free like Claire although she will never be as free as me. She will look over her shoulder, an occasional lapse in her confidence. She will lock the doors, even knowing that such barriers are useless.

I pay the taxi driver at the airport and collect my bag. In time I may forget her. I pass blithely through security and in due course, I am guided to my seat. I state here, neither blindly nor boldly, that I am not surprised she got out of jail. In Detective Fieldon, she had a powerful ally and I always knew that beneath her seeming naivety she would find the resources she needed. You see, I always had faith in her.

I secure my seat belt, make myself comfortable, and open the newspaper that will not yet report her change of circumstance. Perhaps this was the reason for her quick exit, the hasty shepherding out the gate of her person and property. As always, those in authority don't like being seen to get it wrong. It undermines confidence, they will tell you. I tell you that it destabilizes the foundation on which they have built their empire, the edifice upon which their privilege depends. How they must tremble at their shaming. You can see it in the headlines. 'Commissioner of Police denies that corruption is rife in the ranks.' 'Chief Minister of Justice to face child sex charges.' On page three something else catches my eye. 'Body found at Garbage dump.' Did I do that?

Across the aisle, a young woman I had noticed earlier as she made her way up the aisle, now slumps in her seat with a book in hands, her knees propped on the back of the seat ahead of her. Her careless pose is revealing, not just of her fine ankle with its quaint bracelet but in the very least, of her apparent innocence of malevolence. At eighteen or nineteen, certainly no older, she is oblivious to my furtive glances and I find that

endearing. I wonder if this should be my next project now that the other is done. Someone else's daughter! Hasn't she been told before never to talk to strangers?