

Social Crimes

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Doctor of Creative Arts, 2006

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Abstract

"Social Crimes" is a thesis comprised of a novel entitled "Crooked" and a critical exegesis on the subject of the social novel entitled "Social Crimes: The Social Novel as Crime Fiction". In the exegesis I argue that the dream of the social novel is primarily a political rather than an aesthetic one, and that, in this sense, social novels must not only address the social in their content and form, but must in some sense be enfranchised as social objects, and circulate as such. I also argue that as avant garde literature has progressively abandoned plot and other forms and conventions commonly associated with popular fiction, mass market, genre, and especially crime fiction, have increasingly come to fill the space once occupied by the social novel, as a genuinely popular form of fiction able to explicate the social transformations and upheavals of contemporary life.

In so arguing, the exegesis draws together a range of critical debates taking place inside and outside the academy, including debates over experimental versus conventional narrative, high versus low art, theory versus practice, and most significantly, perhaps, the political relevance of an increasingly marginalised and marginalising literature in consumer capitalist society.

The novel itself is about organised crime and political corruption in Sydney during the Askin era. It is a hybrid of crime novel, social novel and historical novel — high and low art. In style, content and form it reflects the theoretical concerns mapped out in the exegesis.

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisor John Dale, without whose critical insight, intelligence, dedication and uncanny editorial ability this project would never have seen the light of day. I would also like to thank my associate supervisor Catherine Cole for the valuable contribution she made to the development of both the critical exegesis and the creative work. Last but not least, thanks go to Meg Simons, Peter Bishop and the Varuna Writer's Centre where the novel went through its gestation.

The help of others during my research for the project has been invaluable. I would like to thank everybody at the Mitchell Library, the State Archives, the Australian Archives, the State Coroner's Office, and those people who dealt with my persistent (though not always successful) requests for documents from the State Attorney General's Office and N.S.W. Police Department. I would like to thank my uncle, former Royal Commissioner Frank Costigan, for giving me the benefit of his insight and experience, as well as a number of people from 'shadier walks of life' who agreed to be interviewed for the project, but have asked to remain anonymous. That said, all errors of fact are intentional and entirely the fault of the author.

Contents

Introduction	6
You Can't Write a Social Novel After September 11	14
The Crime Novel is Where the Social Novel Went	49
Some Examples of Crime Fiction	
Thomas Harris's <i>Red Dragon</i>	83
James Ellroy's <i>LA Confidential</i>	103
Chris Nyst's <i>Crook as Rookwood</i>	118
Reflections on Writing <i>Crooked</i>	130
Conclusion	136
Manuscript of <i>Crooked</i>	139
Bibliography	429

Introduction

Speaking at the opening of the UTS Centre for New Writing, British novelist Caryl Phillips referred to what he sees as a fundamental tension in the position of writing within the university, suggesting that where “writers put things together, universities are places where you take things apart”.¹ This uneasy relationship between theory and practice becomes uncomfortably apparent in considering the fortunes of the so-called ‘leviathan’ or ‘great white whale’ of literature, the panoramic social novel, to which much recent theory has attributed a variety of insidious ideological effects ranging from complicity with consumerism to complicity with ideologies of western ascendancy and dogmas of empire.

French critic Roland Barthes has argued that while such novels may portray the oppressive machinery of capitalist society (replete with dramatic demonstrations of great suffering and social injustice), they manifest a comfortable conservatism at the level of plot and syntax that reinforces rather than challenges the status quo. He writes:

For all the great storytellers of the nineteenth century the world may be full of pathos but it is not derelict, since it is a grouping of coherent relations ... since he

¹ Caryl Phillips, Speech at the Opening of the UTS Centre for New Writing, UTS Gallery Function Centre, 24 May, 2005, author’s notes.

who tells the story has the power to do away with opacity and the solitude of the existences which made it up, since he can in all sentences bear witness to a communication and a hierarchy of actions and since, to tell the truth, these very actions can be reduced to mere signs.²

For Barthes, the social novel, and the realist attitude more generally, conspires to present the reader with a vision of the world that is already coherent, well ordered, and meaningful, so that what is in fact mere literary convention passes itself off as a reflection of the natural order of things. Barthes labels novels that provide such cosy reassurance “readerly”,³ and argues that the reading of such novels helps to prevent change. They “plunge [the reader] into a kind of idleness [in which] he is left with no more than the poor freedom to accept or reject the text”.⁴ According to Barthes, in accepting the text and negotiating the dominant codes, the reader experiences pleasure in conforming to the dominant ideology and the subjectivity it proposes. In other words, not only do such texts function to mask the anarchic nature of reality and reaffirm the socio-economic order, but also, as the theorist of

² Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero: and Elements of Semiology*, trans Annette Lavers and Colin Smith, Jonathon Cape, London, 1967, p.37.

³ Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans Richard Miller, Blackwell, Oxford, 1990, p.4 and *passim*.

⁴ *Ibid.*

postmodernism Jean-Francois Lyotard once put it, "to preserve a certain consciousness from doubt".⁵

Worse still, Barthes argues that the universalising tendencies inherent in such works fostered the confidence with which the "triumphant bourgeoisie of the last century"⁶ imposed their values on the colonised world, claiming they were upholding the abiding truths of so-called civilisation. According to Barthes, the universalising tendencies inherent in such works allowed European nations to "look upon [their] values as universal and to carry over to sections of society which were absolutely heterogenous to it all the Names which were part of its ethos".⁷ Postcolonial critics such as Edward Said have expanded this critique of the Eurocentric values of the social realist novel into a formidable body of theoretical work, citing the traditional social novel as one of the ways in which culture and politics cooperated to produce a system of domination that extended not only over colonised people and places, but over imagery and imagination, creating a false vision of the world which justified not so much Europe's right as its 'burden' of rule.⁸

Perhaps the most influential of recent theories to tackle the social novel are those of the New Historicist critic D.A. Miller who argues that the nineteenth century social novel performed a kind of Foucauldian surveillance, and that the reading of such works constituted a kind of disciplinary regime which

⁵ Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1984, p.74.

⁶ Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, *op.cit.*, p.39.

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, Chatto and Windus, London, 1993, *passim*. See also, *Orientalism*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1978, *passim*.

was functionally no different from the mechanisms of social control represented by the prison house, the barracks or the police force. As Miller writes, "Yet perhaps no openly fictional form has ever sought to 'make a difference' in the world more than the Victorian novel, whose cultural hegemony and diffusion well qualified it to become the primary spiritual exercise of an entire age."⁹ But for Miller, the whole "point of the exercise" is to "confirm the novel reader in his [illusory] identity as 'liberal subject'" as well as the "political regime that sets store by that subject".¹⁰ In other words, the social novel is complicit with the expanding mechanisms of moral conformity of the modern bureaucratic State, and participates in an economy of police power that supports and upholds the very regime that it seeks to undermine.

For the many writers who continue to practise within the realist tradition there is perhaps some embarrassment in theory's dismissal of the cultural legacy constituted by the works of writers such as Dickens and Balzac. Moreover, apart from Said, much theory still fails to account for the ways in which writers such as Zadie Smith have adapted the compositional style of the social novel to 'write back to empire', as the title of a famous anthology of postcolonial criticism once put it,¹¹ or for writers such as Jonathan Franzen who have exploited its readability in order to seduce the reader into a bottomless pit of global disquiet. More usually, contemporary theorists tend

⁹ D.A. Miller, *The Novel and the Police*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1988, p.xi.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *The Empire Writes Back: Race and Racism in 70s Britain*, Hutchinson in association with the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, London and Birmingham, 1982.

to bring out the modernist or postmodernist experimental text as a kind of theoretical panacea, as the only sort of text that avoids complicity with capitalism and the ideology that perpetuates it. But in so doing, criticism also creates a theoretical binary of its own, placing the experimental text at the apex of what is essentially a grand narrative of cultural progress. In this sense it might even be argued that theories that once promised to enhance our understanding of the relationship between cultural representation and power, are in danger, via a largely uncritical cult that has grown up across the academy, of having an opposite effect. Our understanding of the cultural function of the social novel, and of narrative writing more generally, is too often held hostage to a dominant critical idiom that constitutes experimental fiction as progressive and good, and realist or conventional narrative as regressive and bad.

Moreover, it might even be argued that in a society in which we see ourselves as the subjects (or rather objects) of abstract if not downright mysterious social, political and economic forces, the plotting of the individual, social and institutional life story takes on a new urgency. If reality is fragmented, arbitrary and contingent, as theorists such as Frederic Jameson tell us, then social novels are books that attempt to create a shared social meaning out of the messy randomness of life. In place of what I would argue is an increasingly solipsistic understanding of the world (the alienated consciousness of modernism, the epistemological flux of postmodernism), social novels are texts that attempt to understand the ways in which power transforms discontinuous experiences into shared and social ones.

1.

Following Bakhtin's dictum with respect to the constant interaction and mutual influence of genres (the novel, Bakhtin argued, "is plasticity itself. It is a genre that is ever questing, ever examining itself and subjecting its established forms to review ..."),¹² this thesis looks beyond formal literary categories based on arbitrary notions of cultural 'value', to locate examples of social narratives in popular fiction. I am especially interested in those works that use the techniques of crime fiction to question structures of power and the effects of power on social experience. In place of an overly influential understanding of crime fiction as an existential conflict between alienated individuals and the State, I attempt to understand such fiction as a means of locating the subject within a given social field, in a way that is often, though not always, informed by a fundamentally political apprehension of reality.

In taking up examples of popular fiction, it is not my intention to read mass culture as the unfiltered product of dominant ideologies, but as a crucial site where such ideologies can be subverted, resisted, or conversely, incorporated into the mainstream. The separation of so-called 'high' and 'low' culture is not seen as a symptom of literary health, as American novelist Jonathan Franzen once argued,¹³ but of cultural and intellectual failure. I also argue that in preserving the elements of plot, or what T.S. Eliot once called the

¹² Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. Carl Emerson, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1992, p.39.

¹³ Jonathan Franzen, "Why Bother?" in *How to be Alone*, Fourth Estate, London, pp.55-97.

“melodrama” of the old social novel,¹⁴ crime writing, as a genuinely popular form of fiction, is uniquely placed to challenge the literary novel’s capacity to narrate contemporary society. I argue that the language of conventional narrative is not as transparent, misleading, or indeed, comforting, as much contemporary theory tends to suggest. Indeed, such arguments often underestimate the productive potential of fiction. In a society increasingly dominated by the mass cultural narratives of advertising, soap opera and the nightly TV news, narrative does not reflect so much as it actually produces reality — and makes and remakes it in a different way. In this sense it may even be that the theory and practice of narrative offers us a way of understanding and perhaps even changing the social world.

2.

My own fictional project started life as a piece of history rather than a social novel or crime novel; a mingling of fiction with facts gleaned from court archives, newspaper archives and personal interviews. Like the social novels of Dickens and Thackeray, the novel is set thirty or forty years before the time of writing, attempting to find the roots of the brash global Sydney of today in a time when the rambunctious city-port was being made-over. Like the traditional social novel, it draws its characters from a cross-section of city postcodes and social milieux, including the political arena, the police force, the world of big time crooks and small time scoundrels. Collectively, these characters traverse the landscape of the novel, stitching together a series of dodgy deals of the sort that were to make Sydney a byword for

¹⁴ T.S. Eliot, “Wilkie Collins and Charles Dickens,” in *Selected Essays*, Harcourt, Brace & World, New York, 1950, p.409.

institutionalised corruption by the mid-70s. In this way, the novel attempts to create a picture of a social system in which all characters are equally ensnared and compromised, and in which crime becomes a kind of stand-in for capital. It also attempts to show that it may be the system of corruption that entraps the characters, but it is also the characters that hold the system together.

As such, the novel is a generic hybrid, combining elements of the crime, social and historical novels, of so-called 'high' and 'low' culture. But as T.S. Eliot once wrote of the novels of Wilkie Collins and Charles Dickens:

Those who have lived before such terms as 'highbrow fiction', 'thrillers', and 'detective fiction' were invented realize that ... if we cannot get ... satisfaction out of what the publishers present as 'literature', then we will read — with less and less pretence of concealment — what we call 'thrillers'. But in the golden age of melodramatic fiction there was no such distinction. The best novels *were* thrilling ...¹⁵

¹⁵ T.S. Eliot, *ibid.*

You Can't Write a Social Novel After September 11

*Fiction may well be, as
Stendhal wrote, a
mirror carried down
the middle of the road:
but the Stendhalian
mirror would explode
with reflections were it
now being walked
around Manhattan.*

— James Wood, *Guardian*, October 6, 2001

Following the collapse of the twin towers, James Wood, writing in the *Guardian*, announced the demise of the social novel, arguing that any attempt to chart the new cultural terrain was doomed from its moment of publication to become “laughably archival”. Wood opened his salvo with the “trivia-stamped” New York novels of Bret Easton Ellis, moved onto the “Frankfurt School entertainers” of Don DeLillo and the “softened DeLilloism” of Johnathan Franzen, before wiping the floor with the “Hysterical Realism” of Salman Rushdie, David Foster Wallace and Zadie Smith among others. The targets of Wood’s ire were those novels of “many-tentacled ambition” that “strive to capture the times”, to “document social history”, to “work on the biggest level possible”. It isn’t the novelist’s task to go on to the street and

figure out social reality, Wood argued, because “whatever the novel gets up to, the ‘culture’ can always get up to something bigger”. “For who would dare to be knowledgeable about politics and society now?” he asked.¹⁶

Wood is not the first critic or writer to make such an argument. Much quoted in the rage and confusion that dominated the literary pages in the wake of the attack, was Phillip Roth’s famous warning that we live in an age in which the imagination of the novelist lies helpless before what they will see on the nightly TV news. “The American writer in the middle of the 20th century has his hands full in trying to understand, describe and then make credible much of American reality,” wrote Roth. “It stupefies, it sickens, it infuriates, and finally it is even a kind of embarrassment to one’s own meagre imagination. The actuality is continually outdoing our talents, and culture tosses up figures almost daily that are the envy of any novelist.”¹⁷

Roth wrote this in 1961, long before smart bombs and reality television (not to mention the very recent spectacle of the impeachment of a United States President for lying about a blowjob), at a time when America was emerging from the mind-numbing constraints of McCarthyism and embarking on the long period of social upheaval that was marked by the war with Vietnam. But among novelists of Roth’s generation there was a general feeling that Roth was right. On both sides of the Atlantic it seemed writers were abandoning any attempt to engage the particulars of their times or write about public life.

¹⁶ James Wood, ‘Tell me how does it feel?’ *Guardian*, 6 October, 2001, www.guardian.co.uk.

¹⁷ Phillip Roth, from an essay published in *Commentary Magazine*, 1961, and quoted in Jonathan Franzen, “Why Bother?” in *How to Be Alone*, Fourth Estate, London, 2002, p.59.

In America, the critic Michiko Kakutani argues, writers turned inwards, “concentrating on the convolutions of the individual psyche. While others like John Barth or Donald Barthelme “contented themselves with performing postmodern experiments with fable, farce and recycled fairytales.”¹⁸ In Britain, according to the critic Jason Cowley, writers like Pat Barker, A.S. Byatt and Sebastian Faulks have been fleeing the public terrain for the safe harbours of “costume drama and the ready-made stories of history”. Wrote Cowley, “‘If an English novelist writes realistically about the present’, Sebastian Faulks once told me, ‘the result is usually banal, uninteresting or reads like a style piece.’”¹⁹

This was the perceived status quo at which Tom Wolfe took aim in his famous 1989 essay, “Stalking the Billion-Footed Beast: A Manifesto for the New Social Novel”, urging American novelists to “head out into this wild, bizarre, unpredictable, hog-stomping Baroque country of ours and reclaim it as literary property”.²⁰ Wolfe said that he deliberately conceived *Bonfire of the Vanities* as “a novel of the city in the same way that Balzac and Zola had written of Paris, and Dickens and Thackeray had written novels of London”.²¹ Writers ought to return to the old-fashioned school of plot and character, and produce big, sprawling, novels based on the grinding of shoe leather and lots of reporting, Wolfe argued:

¹⁸ Michiko Kakutani, ‘Struggling to Find Words for a Horror Beyond Words,’ *New York Times*, September 13, 2001, www.nybooks.com.

¹⁹ Jason Cowley, *New Statesman*, 17 December, 2001, www.newstatesman.com.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.xiv–xv.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p.viii.

Phillip Roth was absolutely right. The imagination of the novelist is powerless before what he knows he's going to read in tomorrow's newspaper. But a generation of American writers has drawn precisely the wrong conclusion from that perfectly valid observation. The answer is not to leave the rude beast, the material, also known as the life around us, to the journalists but to do what journalists do, or are supposed to do, which is to wrestle the beast and bring it to terms.²²

Writers have taken issue with Wolfe's analysis, both on the basis of his "uncanny ignorance of the many excellent socially engaged novels published between 1960 and 1989",²³ as American novelist Jonathon Franzen puts it, and his historically conditioned idea of what a social novel should look like. British novelist, Martin Amis, in particular, takes issue with Wolfe's idea that the future of the social novel lay with a highly detailed realism based on journalism — that the "great stories were out *there*, not in *here*"²⁴. Amis writes:

²² *Ibid.*, p. xxviii.

²³ Jonathan Franzen, "Why Bother?" in *How to Be Alone*, Fourth Estate, London, 2002, p.67.

²⁴ Martin Amis, "Half Wolfe," in *The War Against Cliché*, Jonathan Cape, London, 2001, p.231.

Tom Wolfe, with his bright architectural eye, writes so well about institutions that he forces you to compare him to his beloved Dickens. Dickens was a great visitor of institutions and no doubt he 'researched' his Marshalsea Prison, his Chancery, and so on. But he also dreamt them up and reshaped them in the image of his own comic logic. That is perhaps why they have lasted and why Wolfe's edifices look more time trapped.²⁵

Amis and literary critic James Wood both share a belief that literature needs to eschew the transient and latch onto the enduring, "to be of its time and properly resistant to its time", as Wood puts it.²⁶ But where Wood's solution is to reject the life of the street and return to the novel of stylised inwardness, Amis remains resolutely public. He argues that the function of literature is not to record the literal — not to mirror life, as Stendhal would have it — but to transform it into something else. Amis's own novels are crammed with what he calls the ephemeral "dreck" of modern life, partly derived from popular culture and the mass media but partly from Amis's own phantasmagoric imagination.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.232.

²⁶ James Wood, "Abhorring a Vacuum," *New Republic*, 15 October, 2001, www.tnr.com.

Of the many socially engaged novelists overlooked in Wolfe's essay, Don DeLillo is among the most significant, both as a pioneer of a new sort of social novel intended to keep pace with the rapid transformations of contemporary life, and as a Godfather figure to a whole generation of novelists anxious to revivify the tradition, including Zadie Smith, David Foster Wallace, and Jonathan Franzen among others. Indeed, if "the Stendhalian mirror would explode with reflections were it now being walked around Manhattan", as Wood argued, then DeLillo's fragmented narratives, with their dazzling variations of scale and perspective, have eloquently charted this explosion. His fascination with conspiratorial themes, from attacks on the money markets to toxic shock in the suburbs, has long anticipated a world in which acts of terror and spectacle would achieve central significance. But transforming the narrative traditions of the social novel has also transformed the audience for the social novel. DeLillo's novels, such as *White Noise* and *Underworld*, are fabricated from the stuff of popular culture — baseball, brand names and media headlines — but do not reach out and attempt to engage with a popular audience. Writes DeLillo:

The writer leads, he doesn't follow. The dynamic lives in the writers mind, not in the size of the audience. And if the social novel lives, but only barely, surviving in the cracks and ruts of the culture, maybe it will be taken more seriously, as an

endangered spectacle. A reduced context
but a more intense one.²⁷

In this sense, DeLillo positions his work as the last gasp of the high modernist avant gardism, rather than as the popular progeny of Dickens or Balzac. In so doing his work also confirms literature as an essentially elitist pursuit. The essential conundrum being, as George Orwell, writing about the political poets of the 1930s, put it, "by being Marxised literature has moved no nearer to the masses".²⁸

The idea that the function of a social novel is not just to engage with a culture but to engage with an audience is explored in Jonathon Franzen's so-called *Harper's* essay, recently republished as "Why Bother?"²⁹ "When I got out of college in 1981, I hadn't heard the news about the death of the social novel", wrote Franzen. "I didn't know that Phillip Roth, twenty years earlier, had already performed the autopsy."³⁰ In the essay, Franzen constructs the social novel as an ominous-sounding novel of "social instruction" that should "Address the Culture and Bring News to the Mainstream". It has a "responsibility to dramatise important issues of the day", he wrote. But, according to Franzen his first social novel, *The Twenty-Seventh City*, came and went without ruffling so much as a feather outside the closed circles of the literary world, leaving him wondering about "the failure of my culturally engaged novel to engage with the culture. I'd intended to provoke; what I got

²⁷ Don DeLillo quoted in Franzen, *op.cit.*, p.95.

²⁸ George Orwell, "Inside the Whale," *The Complete Works of George Orwell*, www.george-orwell.org.

²⁹ Jonathan Franzen, *op.cit.*, p.59.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 61.

instead was sixty reviews in a vacuum."³¹ There was a book tour, a photo-spread in *Vogue* and a hefty advance, but, according to Franzen, this was the "consolation of no longer mattering to the culture".³² His second social novel *Strong Motion* renewed the onslaught. "Instead of sending my bombs in a Jiffy-Pak mailer of irony and understatement ... I'd come out throwing rhetorical Molotov cocktails." But the result, as Franzen describes it, was "the deafening silence of irrelevance".³³

As the essay progresses, Franzen extends his sense of disillusion at the mainstream reception of his earlier works into a general discussion about whether literature has a function beyond entertainment as a form of social opposition at all.³⁴ "I can't pretend the mainstream will listen to the news I have to bring", wrote Franzen. "I can't pretend I'm subverting anything, because any reader capable of decoding my subversive messages does not need to hear them." By the end of the essay he concludes that there is "something wrong with the whole model of the novel of social engagement".

Expecting a novel to bear the weight of
our whole disturbed society — to help
solve our contemporary problems —
seems to me a peculiarly American
delusion. To write sentences of such

³¹ Franzen, *op.cit.*, p.89.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*, p.62-3

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.89.

authenticity that refuge can be taken in
them: isn't this enough? Isn't it a lot?³⁵

On arrival in the bookstores, Franzen's long-awaited third novel *The Corrections* proved to be a very different beast. It jumped straight onto the best-seller lists and television chat shows, showing itself to be a novel capable of crossing the yawning gulf between high art and the popular. But it was character, not language, which was the primary reason Franzen gave for the novel's capacity to cross the cultural divide. According to Franzen, this was what the chilly pyrotechnics of the contemporary social novel lacked. "I used to believe characters exist to serve the big picture. Now I think the big picture is there to serve the characters," says Franzen.³⁶ In *The Corrections* contemporary icons and obsessions such as Hollywood, gated communities, the stock market, do-it-yourself mental health care and the Internet put in an appearance, but they reflect and extend the character's own emotional dramas, rather than serve as primary targets of critical attack. Hence Enid's Christmas ambitions, Chip's Lithuanian escapade, Gary's attempted stock market killing in biotechs and Denise's affair with her financial backer, and his wife, all work to anchor the age of greed and globalism in the microcosm of a family, which is delightfully drawn and dramatically realised.

The Corrections was instantly acclaimed by the western literary establishment as the social novel to sum up the Zeitgeist, but Franzen is more ambivalent: "No actually, the *Harper's* essay was about abandoning my sense of social

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.84.

³⁶ Jonathan Franzen quoted in Malcolm Knox, "The Pursuit of Loneliness", *Sydney Morning Herald*, May 10-11, 2003, p.4.

responsibility as a writer and learning to write fiction for the fun and entertainment of it," he told *Sydney Morning Herald* literary editor, Malcolm Knox.³⁷ Later describing it at the Sydney Writer's Festival as a "Cop-out".³⁸ "I don't write those sorts of novels any more," he amplified elsewhere.³⁹ Writing in the *Guardian*, Wood calls it, "a big social novel trying hard not to be one".⁴⁰ A disagreement that merely serves to underscore the fact that, in the post September 11 debate over whether the social novel could or could not provide a cure for literature's woes, there was very little consensus about what a social novel actually is.

What is a Social Novel?

In the literary commentary after September 11, claims about the death and life of the social novel masked some widely differing conceptions about what a social novel should look like. Lumped together in an undifferentiated mass were the Realist Novel, the Naturalist Novel, the Historical Novel, the Anti-Realist novel, the Regional Novel, the Social Problem Novel and the novel of Social Reportage to name just a few. Unspecified arguments over definitions and genres also resulted in wilful misrepresentations of aims and intentions. For example, Wood's tendency to subsume all social novels under the realist or documentary banner resulting in the tag 'Hysterical Realism' to denote social novels, such as Salman Rushdie's, written in an anti-realist mode. Likewise, academic studies of the nineteenth century social novel following on from classic studies such as Auerbach's *Mimesis* and Lukacs' *Studies in*

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.4.

³⁸ Author's notes, Sydney Writer's Festival, 2003.

³⁹ Franzen quoted in Malcolm Knox, *op.cit.*

⁴⁰ James Wood, *op.cit.*

European Realism tend to gather them unproblematically under the realist label, although realism as a term didn't come into circulation until Dickens, its so-called high priest, was long dead. Realism as a literary slogan was coined in France, and went into circulation in the final quarter of the century. Many of the writers retrospectively labelled realist were anything but. Victor Hugo was a Romantic, his works are moral fables more concerned with ideals than actualities, intended, for example, to show the superiority of justice over injustice, or virtue over vice. Dickens's work also contains a wide streak of Romanticism, a fact that led the novelist George Meredith to predict Dickens's work would die out precisely because it didn't bear enough co-relation to reality. In France, Zola used the word 'Naturalism' as a slogan, a kind of realism pushed to extremes. Flaubert was dubbed a realist, but hated the term ("I hate what is conventionally called realism," he famously wrote in a letter to George Sands⁴¹). And though Balzac in his 'Preface to the Human Comedy' aligns his role with that of the scientific observer ("I saw that in this sense society resembled Nature. For does not society make man, according to the milieux in which he acts, into as many different men as there are varieties in Zoology?"⁴²), his characters, with their larger than life obsessions, are more the stuff of nightmares. The thing that unites such disparate works lies not in their 'realist' or 'documentary' character but in that they are dramas of milieux rather than dramas of individual consciousness — novels that are concerned to show a social order, with all its faults and inconsistencies, rather than an individual human being.

⁴¹ Flaubert quoted in *The Literary Encyclopedia*, www.litencyc.com.

⁴² Honore de Balzac, "Preface to the Human Comedy", English translation from the Project Gutenberg online edition, www.gutenberg.org.

In the nineteenth century, the social novel aligned itself with the democratic impulses of modernity, populating its pages with a wider social cast in terms of its characters and wider social range in terms of its readers. The novels of Dickens were bustling not just with the worthy old squires of the English gentry, but shopkeepers, merchants, street scamps and criminals. Even the novels of Anthony Trollope, though significantly more conservative in range and outlook, caused a stir in their day for making even aristocratic characters appear ordinary.⁴³ Meanwhile, in the novels of writers such as Thomas Hardy, fictional representation moved away from the world of the gentry altogether, to the working class reality of characters like Tess of the D'Uberilles and Jude the Obscure.

In the nineteenth century, the social novel was a multi-protagonist novel, concerned with showing as broad a cross-section of society as possible. But in the twentieth century there has been a tendency to narrow down the unruly scope of the novel in line with the aesthetic traditions and individualist ethos of the present, so that a critic such as James Wood appears quite comfortable referring to the single-protagonist and socially elitist New York novels of Jay McInerney or Bret Easton Ellis as social novels, not on the basis of any breadth of social vision but purely on the basis of their so-called 'social' or documentary character.⁴⁴

⁴³ In 1876 the *Spectator* famously lamented the way in which the author stooped to "vulgarity", saving his most severe censure for the way in which the Duchess of Omnium "descends ... to an impossible degree, and perspires with effort in the vulgar crowd" in a novel in which "vulgarity of thought" is attributed to the "majority of mankind." Quoted in Courtney C. Berger, "Partying with the Opposition: Social Politics in the Prime Minister," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 45, 3, 2003, p.315.

⁴⁴ James Wood, "Tell Me How Does it Feel?" *op.cit.*

In choosing to write about the social rather than the individual the contemporary novelist moves against the tide of twentieth century tradition which, since the time of Henry James, has been experimenting with shifting the focus of the novel further inward, so that language and psychology become the real basis of interest for the work. In so doing they encounter certain aesthetic prejudices that have long made them targets for critical attack. Such criticisms generally revolve around issues of artifice in character and story design, ungainliness of form, and a desire to deal with the world's vulgarities rather than more conventionally aesthetic concerns. Although Franzen's *The Corrections* and Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* were warmly received by audiences, not all attempts at the genre have met with similar adulation. As the critic Jason Cowley writes, "No book was more traduced ... than Rushdie's *Fury*, his portrayal of New York during the money-madness of the recent new technology boom; and yet no book was more alert to the crisis of modern urban experience."⁴⁵ In his now infamous review of *Fury*, Wood argued that the whole book is "corrupted by the very corruption that it decries" — a charge that extends from "vulgarity" of subject matter (E! Planet Hollywood and Tony Soprano), to "vulgarity" of character ("All these vulgarities ... are characters," Wood marvels), and the various "vulgarities" of language or "argot" uttered by the novel's protagonist Professor Solander.⁴⁶ Wood similarly castigates Franzen for "cartoonish characters" and "a broad Dickensianism that descends into crudeness",⁴⁷ and criticises Zadie Smith not

⁴⁵ Jason Cowley, *op.cit.*

⁴⁶ James Wood, "The Nobu Novel," *New Republic*, 24 September, 2001, www.tnr.com.

⁴⁷ James Wood, "Abhorring a Vacuum," *op.cit.*

only for characters that are “not fully alive, not fully human”, but also for the “stories and sub stories” that “sprout on every page.” “Storytelling has become a kind of grammar in these novels,” Wood marvels, “it is how they structure and drive themselves on.”⁴⁸

This last remark can only be understood when seen in context, deriving from a literary sensibility typified by the novelist John Hawkes, who once commented, “I began to write fiction on the assumption that the true enemies of the novel were plot, character, setting and theme.”⁴⁹ But in approaching the social novel in this way critics such as Hawkes and Wood entirely miss the point. In so far as the social novel excites contemporary audiences, it is precisely because of the attributes of plot, character and artistic “vulgarity” that they seek to avoid.

The social novel derives from the popular tradition of the serial novel (the “loose baggy monsters” of Victorian prose, as Henry James dubbed them) and much of its characteristic style is found in its genesis. For instance, dealing with the social invariably requires a large cast of characters. Many such novels contain upwards of thirty characters (some Russian novels contain upwards of eighty) and given such a cast not all of the characters are — or ought to be, as E.M. Forster once argued — fully drawn. Forster argues that novels should be composed of both round and flat characters, characters that are finely drawn, and characters that intentionally hit only one or two notes and can often be summed up in a single sentence. “In Russian novels where

⁴⁸ James Wood, “Human, all too Human,” *New Republic*, 24 July 2000, www.tnr.com.

⁴⁹ John Hawkes quoted in Tom Wolf, *op.cit.*, p.xv.

[flat characters] so seldom occur they would be a decided help," writes Forster. Moreover, according to Forster, Dickens never wrote anything but a flat character and yet in his novels "there is this wonderful feeling of human depth".⁵⁰ "One great advantage of flat characters is that they are easily recognised whenever they come in," writes Forster. "Another great advantage is that they are easily remembered by the reader afterwards."⁵¹ He continues:

It is a convenience for an author when he can strike at full force at once, and flat characters are very useful to him, since they never need reintroducing, never run away, have not to be watched for development, and provide their own atmosphere — little luminous discs of a prearranged size, pushed hither and thither like counters across a void or between stars...⁵²

The idea of flat characters (or humours as they were called in the eighteenth century) runs contrary to the general thrust of contemporary literary taste which often uses the technique of point-of-view narration so completely that the minds of the characters, not the social canvas or the story, become the real basis of interest of the novel.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.68.

⁵¹ E.M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, Edward Arnold and Co., London, 1949, p.66.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p.66.

Lastly, the contemporary literary novel is forged from the tradition of the French novella, containing only a few story events, often revolving around events of a single day, in which no truths are necessarily uncovered, or mysteries resolved. The contemporary literary novel favours the 'lifelike' plot whereas the paradoxically named 'realist' or social novel favours the intricately crafted story. Trollope's marriages, Dicken's lost wills and orphans are deliberately artificial devices, structured in a way which brings characters from different social strata into collision, offering both tragic and comic possibilities, in which the social conditions and cultural mores of the day play a significant part.

But criticisms such as these are the price the contemporary social novelist is generally willing to pay for accomplishing something else. Franzen puts it like this:

It's possible that the American experience has become so sprawling and diffracted that no single "social novel" a la Dickens or Stendhal can ever hope to mirror it; perhaps ten novels from ten different perspectives are required now.

Unfortunately there's also evidence that young writers today feel imprisoned by their ethnic or gender identities — discouraged from speaking across boundaries by a culture in which

television has conditioned us to accept only the literal testimony of the Self ... I mourn the retreat into the Self and the decline of the broad canvas novel for the same reason I mourn the rise of the suburbs ... I still like a novel that's alive and multivalent like a city.⁵³

For the philosopher Martha Nussbaum, novels such as those by Dickens express a “projected morality”, and reading such novels constitutes a form of political conduct involving the civic use of the imagination. For Nussbaum, the importance of such novels is cognitive, in that they shape in their reader certain evaluative judgements that lie at the heart of important emotions, with ethical and political consequences. She writes apropos Dickens:

We see person-like shapes all around us: but how do we relate to them? All too often we see them as just shapes, or physical objects in motion. What storytelling teaches us to do is to ask questions about the life behind the mask, the inner world concealed by the shape. It gets us into the habit of conjecturing that this shape, so similar to our own, is a house for emotions and wishes and

⁵³ Franzen, *op.cit.*, p.80.

projects that are also in some ways similar to our own: but it also gets us into the habit of understanding that that inner world is differently shaped by different social circumstances.⁵⁴

In this sense, the dream of the “Ambitious Novel”, as Wood tags it,⁵⁵ is primarily a social rather than an aesthetic one. As popular literature, social novels such as those by Dickens offered a shared imaginative experience, allowing the reader to transcend the limitations of their individual point of view and comprehend their world as an inclusive system of social relationships. At a time when the industrial revolution was breaking up traditional communities, separating the worker from the product of his labour and the individual subject from the wider social life, narrative became a means to knit significance together. Unlike Stendhal’s analogy of the mirror, such novels offered not a static vision of the world, but a dramatisation of social process and the problem of making sense — a temporal map or diagram through which the reader could orient themselves to the rest of humanity.

In many ways the social novel is still the realist novel as writers and critics of the nineteenth century such as George Eliot defined it. It is a novel concerned with the influence of social institutions and economic and social conditions on characters and events, which shares a fascination with the diverse multiplicity

⁵⁴ Martha Nussbaum, “Exactly and Responsibly: A Defence of Ethical Criticism,” *Philosophy and Literature*, 22.2, 1998, p.350.

⁵⁵ James Wood, “Tell me how does it Feel?” *op.cit.*

of the material world and the process of history. It is a novel whose defining achievements are the serious treatment of a wide range of 'ordinary' people and their experience, the perception that individual lives are the location of social forces and contradictions, and the political idea (one that often drops out of sight in twentieth century literary debates), that the deepest purpose of reading and writing fiction is to sustain a sense of social connection. In other words, where the naturalist, the so-called 'slice-of-life' realist, or indeed, the postmodernist, looks at the world and sees a universe ruled by randomness and chance, the social novelist sees a world shaped by patterns of historical intention and political power.

Literature Post September 11

In his post September 11 essay, "The Voice of the Lonely Crowd", Martin Amis suggested that, in the wake of the attack, "all the writers on Earth were reluctantly considering a change of occupation". He likened his own sense of impotence to that of "Josephine, the opera-singing mouse in the Kafka story: Sing? 'She can't even squeak.'" (In the essay, Amis suggested the problem was that writers write best about "what is not going on" whereas on September 11, "politics — once defined as 'what is going on' — suddenly filled the sky."⁵⁶) Of course, Amis wasn't the only writer to imagine the world revolved on its axis on that bright September morning. Just about everyone who is anyone in the world of western letters scrambled to offer their interpretation of an event, which was — if writers such as Paul Auster, Ian McEwan, and Andrew O'Hagan are to be believed — more significant and alarming than

⁵⁶ Martin Amis, "The Voice of the Lonely Crowd," *The Guardian*, June 1, 2002, www.guardian.co.uk.

any previous crisis. For Ian McEwan the attack on the World Trade Centre was “beyond belief”. “We knew we were living through a time that we would never be able to forget,” he wrote. “We also knew, though it was too soon to wonder how or why, that the world would never be the same.”⁵⁷ For Andrew O’Hagen the event was of such consequence as to change language itself. “Language is something else now,” he wrote, “and so is imagery, and so is originality.”⁵⁸ But for critic Jason Cowley, such reactions merely typified the sort of “hysteria” in which the West has come to “specialise.” Cowley argued:

“The imagination,” Wallace Stevens said, “is always at the end of an era”, and the predominant tone of much literary reflection on 11 September, and its dislocating aftermath, was catastrophist — eschatological anxiety and an unconvincing sudden seriousness, as if human nature itself changed the day the towers collapsed. Or perhaps it was merely that we in the relatively benign, affluent west had forgotten that the world has always been a spectacular carnival of suffering.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Ian McEwan, “Beyond Belief,” *The Guardian*, September 12, 2001, www.guardian.co.uk.

⁵⁸ Andrew O’Hagen, *op.cit.*

⁵⁹ Jason Cowley, *op.cit.*

Indeed, as Tariq Ali points out, on September 11 the earth didn't move for three-quarters of the world's population, and many saw the collapse of the twin towers as cause for celebration. Ali writes, "There were celebrations in Bolivia ... In Greece the government suppressed the publication of opinion polls that showed a large majority actually in favour of the hits ... In Beijing the news came too late in the night for anything more than a few celebratory fireworks."⁶⁰ But when the western cultural establishment woke up from their collective daydream to the sound of the World Trade Centre tumbling down, they found themselves bewildered by the rage, shocked that the rage could actually reach them, and guilty of assuming that the rest of the world shared their outrage.

For journalist and political activist, John Pilger, the reactions of western writers generally, and Martin Amis in particular, were symptomatic of an insular and "self obsessed" literary culture which serves to dull (rather than inspire) the reader's social imagination. Pilger writes:

Amis represents a much wider problem:
that some of the most acclaimed and
privileged writers writing in the English
language fail to engage with the most
urgent issues of our time. Who among
the collectors of Booker and Whitbread
Prizes speaks against the crimes

⁶⁰ Tariq Ali, *The Clash of Fundamentalisms: Crusades, Jihads and Modernity*, Verso, London, 2002, p.2.

described by [the Palestinian poet] Darwish — the product of the longest military occupation in the modern era? Who, since 11 September, has defended our language, illuminating its abuse in the service of great power's goals and hypocrisy? Who has shown that our humane responses to 11 September have been appropriated by the masters of terror themselves? — by Ariel Sharon and his "good friend" George W. Bush, who bombed to death at least 5,000 civilians in Afghanistan.⁶¹

Four years, two wars, and a series of world-changing events later, a growing number of literary works addressing the global fallout post September 11 are entering the public domain. These include: David Foster Wallace's novella, *The Suffering Channel*, about a cable news network devoted to 24-hour coverage of humans in distress; Joyce Carol Oates's short story "The Mutants", about a woman who shuts herself in her flat following the explosion and perversely takes comfort from the presence of the locks; Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, a whimsical tale about a nine-year-old boy who loses his father in the attack; indirectly perhaps, Phillip Roth's *The Plot Against America*, a counter-factual history in which a defenceless

⁶¹ John Pilger, "The Silence of Writers", *New Statesman*, 13 June, 2002, www.newstatesman.com.

Jewish minority is persecuted by a Fascist government led by the all-American hero Charles Linberg; and chiefly perhaps, Ian McEwan's *Saturday*.

Saturday examines the global order post September 11 and the war in Iraq, as it is reflected in the insular life of a London neurosurgeon named Henry Perowne. As Perowne goes about his business as usual, hundreds of thousands of marchers are gathering in London to protest against Tony Blair's support for the American attack on Iraq. *Saturday* is a socially engaged novel, but not a social novel in any traditional sense. The movement of the novel is inward, not outward. *Saturday* is not a story about a human mind in communion with others, but a mind in communion with itself. How it can accommodate, as Malcolm Knox puts it, "the end of the world, the slaughter of innocents, the preparation of fish stew, the competitiveness of a squash game and much else, trivial and earth-shattering, all at once".⁶² Perowne is a profoundly anti-social creature, shut off from feeling and life. He often worries about his inability to find out whether or not Saddam Hussein actually possesses any weapons of mass destruction, but this concern masks a more worrying inability to find out what it is to be anybody other than himself. In this sense, *Saturday* is not a social novel, but its deliberate inversion. Instead of thrusting the reader out into the world, Perowne shuts the world out. For critic James Wood, it is the revolutionary work of a socially engaged novelist in the guise of an "historian facing inward". Wood argues:

⁶² Malcolm Knox, "The Voice of Shared Trauma," *Sydney Morning Herald*, Feb 5-6, 2005, p.9.

This inward historian, or historian of inwardness, holds up no clear mirror but rather the mind's mirror — cloudy perhaps, stained, and losing some of its backing — to the world; that is to say, this historian watches how his or her fallible characters interpret reality, how they inhabit it, how they distort it and force it to accommodate their mental cosmos.⁶³

Saturday is, in many ways, a finely wrought novel, at the level of language particularly, but it is doubtful that its “inward history” of what writer Pankaj Mishra has dubbed “bourgeois narcissism” will help solve what Turkish novelist Orhan Pamuk once called “the problem facing the West”.⁶⁴ Writing shortly after September 11, Pamuk eloquently argued that this problem is to “understand the poor and scorned and ‘wrongful’ majority that does not belong to the western world”.⁶⁵ Pamuk writes:

What prompts an impoverished old man in Istanbul to condone the terror in New York in a moment of anger, or a Palestinian youth fed up with Israeli oppression to admire the Taliban, who

⁶³ James Wood, “On a Darkling Plain,” *New Republic*, 14 April, 2005, www.tnr.com.

⁶⁴ Pankaj Mishra, “The Wilderness of Solitude,” *New York Review of Books*, June 23, 2005, p.31.

⁶⁵ Orhan Pamuk, “The Anger of the Damned,” *New York Review of Books*, 48, 18, November 15, 2001, p.12.

throw nitric acid at women because they reveal their faces? It is not Islam or what is idiotically described as the clash between East and West or poverty itself. It is the feeling of impotence deriving from degradation, the failure to be understood, and the inability of such people to make their voices heard.⁶⁶

In this sense, the whole idea of a socially engaged novelist as an “historian facing inwards” becomes highly problematic. Not just because the profound insularity of *Saturday*’s protagonist seems merely to harden when it comes into contact with others, or because ultimately Perowne appears to support the war in Iraq, or even because, in this respect, it might also be argued that the politics of the novel as a whole are deliberately ambiguous, but because the novel adopts in its structure the very ethics one would expect it to reject. Put simply, the form of the work suggests that the western middle classes whose history is being told (or whose “mind’s mirror” is being reflected, as Wood puts it) are the only ones who have stories that matter.

Contrary to Wood’s argument, the social novelist must be an historian facing outward. For if the social novel stands for anything in the contemporary world, it must be a desire to engage, to make connections, to speak out across boundaries, to escape what Franzen has labelled the “literal testimony of the

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

Self",⁶⁷ to make a gesture, however small or inadequate, towards a concept of literature that is genuinely dialogical.

Soap Operas, Blockbusters, Mega-Bestsellers

*And what kind of serious
writer considers Michael
Crichton any kind of
competition?*

— James Wood, *New Republic*, October 15, 2001

Don DeLillo once suggested that the novelist used to “alter the inner life of the culture”,⁶⁸ but that this enviable power now belongs to terrorists (“they make raids on human consciousness”⁶⁹), and the TV news (“The darker the news, the grander the narrative”).⁷⁰ On September 11, as literary editors across the globe conducted yet another autopsy on the death of the novel (attempting to decide whether literature was incapable of addressing the social issues of the day or simply irrelevant), out on the street people were turning to film and popular fiction to get their minds around the attack. On television screens across the world, real-time images of buildings exploding, of crowds running beneath billowing clouds of smoke, were repeatedly compared to *Independence Day* or ‘something out of Tom Clancy’. Film, it is true, functions in a mode that is qualitatively different to fiction, being able to

⁶⁷ Jonathan Franzen, *How to be Alone*, *op.cit.*, p. 80.

⁶⁸ Don DeLillo, *Mao II*, Vintage, Random House, London, 1991, p.41.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p.42.

offer the convenience of a grand narrative of hope and destruction in a ninety-minute grab. But perhaps the widespread recourse to popular narrative serves to highlight the primary reason why the literary novel has lost so much ground in the public imagination, which is the literary novel's abandonment of story. As children's author, Phillip Pullman, on winning the Carnegie Medal for *Northern Lights*, memorably said: "In literary fiction, stories are there on sufferance. Other things are felt to be more important: technique, style, literary knowingness. The present day would-be George Eliot takes up their stories as if with a pair of tongs. They're embarrassed by them."⁷¹

Though the issue of story didn't get a look-in in the critical debates surrounding September 11, it was a significant factor in a minor dust up that occurred in the literary pages in the weeks leading up to the attack. The row started with the publication in the *Atlantic Monthly* of "A Reader's Manifesto", by B.R. Myers, a self-described literary outsider, subtitled, "An Attack on the Growing Pretentiousness of American Literary Prose". In the essay, Myers decried the oppressive influence of a literary culture dominated by the "sentence cult", which makes a fetish of language at the expense of communication and story. Myers argued:

More than half a century ago popular storytellers like Christopher Isherwood and Somerset Maugham were ranked among the finest novelists of their time,

⁷¹ Phillip Pullman, quoted in *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Quotations*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003.

and were considered no less literary, in their own way, than Virginia Woolf and James Joyce. Today any accessible, fast-moving story written in unaffected prose is deemed to be 'genre fiction' — at best an excellent 'read' or a 'page turner', but never literature with a capital L.⁷²

Myers's reading is admittedly narrow and his analysis of some contemporary literature is questionable, but the predominant tone of critical reaction to his expression of reader disenchantment was outrage. Judith Shulevitz, of the *Sunday Times Book Review*, savaged Myers on the basis that he was a literary "unknown" who doesn't have "a stake in the literary establishment" let alone "a sure grasp of the world he's attacking", suggesting (for reasons best known to herself) that Myers's real problem might derive from the fact that he "lives in New Mexico".⁷³ Lee Siegel, of the *Los Angeles Times*, slammed Myers for his "phony populism", and "arrogance" in declaring that because "ordinary people" are "too stupid to read complicated prose" that "great literature" should not be "difficult".⁷⁴ Meanwhile, across the Atlantic, the *Observer's* Robert McCrum suggested that the reason for the critical over-kill was the same reason the issue of reader disenchantment raised by Myers has long gone unheard in the literary world, namely because "Literary fiction has been

⁷² B.R. Myers, "A Reader's Manifesto," *Atlantic Monthly*, July/August 2001, www.theatlantic.com.

⁷³ Judith Shulevitz, "The Close Reader: Fiction and 'Literary' Fiction," *New York Times Book Review*, September 9, 2001, www.nytimes.com.

⁷⁴ Lee Siegel quoted in Laura Miller, "Sentenced to Death," *Salon*, August 16, 2001, www.salon.com.

supported by an awesome establishment of writers, editors, critics, agents, publishers and booksellers, all of whom have, in different ways, been unwilling to question the dominant orthodoxy."⁷⁵

Salon's Laura Miller posed the problem like this:

... what literary authors are after is the esteem of their colleagues. Just as nuclear physicists strive to impress other nuclear physicists and dog breeders value the admiration of fellow dog breeders over that of the uninitiated masses, so people who write serious fiction seek the high opinion of other literary novelists, of creative writing teachers and of reviewers and critics. They want very badly to be 'literary', and for many of them this means avoiding techniques associated with commercial and genre fiction — specifically too much emphasis on plot.⁷⁶

In other words, there is a danger that literary writers, however socially engaged, are losing sight of the whole idea of inter-connectedness (between writer and reader, as well as between members of a given society) that once

⁷⁵ Robert McCrum, *op.cit.*

⁷⁶ Laura Miller, *op.cit.*

helped define the social novel as a genre. As Jonathan Yardley of the *Washington Post* put it: “narcissism is the order of the day everywhere in American culture, but Myers is right to find it especially unwelcome in literature, which should be a window through which the writer regards the world rather than a mirror in which he merely gazes adoringly at himself”.⁷⁷

Novelist Jonathan Franzen weighed into the critical fray twelve months after the publication of the “Myer Manifesto” with an essay entitled “Mr Difficult”, in which he attacks the high modernist (and indeed postmodernist) notion of “difficulty” as a benchmark for literary achievement, arguing that difficulty in literature is a species of elitism and a source of reader disenchantment.⁷⁸ “[It] sends this message to the common reader: Literature is horribly hard to read. And this message to the aspiring young writer: Extreme difficulty is the way to earn respect. This is fucked up,” Franzen added in an online interview following the essay’s publication. “If somebody is thinking of investing fifteen or twenty hours in reading a book of mine — fifteen or twenty hours that could be spent at the movies, or online, or in an extreme-sports environment — the last thing I want to do is punish them with needless difficulty.”⁷⁹

In “Mr Difficult” Franzen draws a distinction between so-called ‘Status’ writers, who believe that the difficulty of their work is proof of artistic achievement and ‘Contract’ writers who believe that connecting with a

⁷⁷ Jonathan Yardley, “The Naked and the Bad,” *Washington Post*, 2 July, 2001, www.washingtonpost.com.

⁷⁸ Jonathan Franzen, “Mr Difficult,” *New Yorker*, September 30, 2002, www.newyorker.com.

⁷⁹ Ben Greenman, “Having Difficulty With Difficulty,” *New Yorker Online Only*, September 23, 2002, www.newyorker.com.

readership is the primary focus of their work. According to Franzen, the Status model invites a discourse of genius and art-historical importance. It suggests that “the best novels are great works of art, the people who manage to write them deserve extraordinary credit, and if the average reader rejects the work it's because the average reader is a philistine”.⁸⁰ In so doing, the Status model opposes itself to the Contract model where the discourse is one of communication. Franzen argues, “Every writer of fiction is first a member of a community of readers, and the deepest purpose of reading and writing fiction is to sustain a sense of connectedness, to resist existential loneliness; and so a novel deserves a reader's attention only as long as the author sustains the reader's trust.” He adds, “Writing thus entails a balancing of self-expression and communication within a group, whether the group consists of *Finnegan's Wake* enthusiasts or fans of Barbara Cartland.”⁸¹

Many critics questioned Franzen's model of reading as accessible and enjoyable, most notoriously among them the academic and writer Ben Marcus, who, in an essay published in *Harper's* magazine, entitled “Why Experimental Fiction Threatens to Destroy Publishing, Jonathan Franzen, and Life as We Know It”, pointedly subtitled, “A Correction”, interpreted Franzen's argument as meaning that nobody need ever challenge themselves as writers or readers. In the essay Marcus condemned Franzen's *The Corrections* as a “capitulation” to the “mainstream” and the rule of the “market”,⁸² suggesting Franzen's various arguments on behalf of narrative

⁸⁰ Jonathan Franzen, “Mr Difficult,” *op.cit.*

⁸¹ Jonathan Franzen, “Mr Difficult,” *op.cit.*

⁸² Ben Marcus, “Why Experimental Fiction Threatens to Destroy Publishing, Jonathan Franzen, and Life as We Know It,” *Harper's Magazine*, October 2005, p.40.

realism after the novel's publication represented the author's need to "medicate his regret" over the "road not taken" to "artistic ambition".⁸³ According to Marcus, where the "reader" of experimental fiction possesses a "barn-sized" brain "staffed by an army of jump-suited code-breakers",⁸⁴ the "consumer" of conventional or realist narratives such as Franzen's indulge in the fictional equivalent of "sucking down large tubs of soda while we watch movies".⁸⁵

Marcus's arguments are not new, but form part of a long-running critical debate another example of which notoriously erupted on the publication of Tom Wolfe's second social novel, *A Man in Full*. In this instance the writer John Updike argued that Wolfe's novel was not to be understood as literature but as "entertainment" (adding, to amplify his point, "not even literature in a modest aspirant form").⁸⁶ Norman Mailer concurred with Updike's analysis, fulminating that *A Man in Full* wasn't literature, but a "mega-bestseller". Wolfe "no longer belongs to us" wrote Mailer, meaning the rarefied circles of the American literary world, but has moved away to the "King Kong Kingdom of the Mega-bestseller".⁸⁷

Marcus's rehearsal of the argument is far more sophisticated than Updike's or Mailer's, in that it sets out to re-establish a theoretical model for literary criticism that runs the full range of twentieth century critics from high

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p.43.

⁸⁴ Marcus, *op.cit.* p.40.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p.45.

⁸⁶ John Updike quoted in Tom Wolfe, "My Three Stooges," in *Hooking Up*, Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 2000, p.151.

⁸⁷ Norman Mailer quoted in Tom Wolfe, *ibid.*

modernists such as George Steiner to postmodernists such as Roland Barthes. This model seeks to locate literature within what is essentially a grand narrative of Progress with experimental fiction at the top of the hierarchical progression, and realist or conventional narrative at the bottom of the cultural heap. The popular success enjoyed by social novelists such as Franzen, Smith and Wolfe also allows Marcus to style experimental fiction as the literary underdog:

... now, in the literary world, writers are being warned off [the] ambitious approach, and everywhere are signs that if you happen to be interested in the possibilities of language, if you appreciate the artistic achievements of others but still dream for yourself, however foolishly, that new arrangements are possible, new styles, new concoctions of language that might set off a series of delicious mental explosions — if you believe any of this, and worse, if you try to practice it, you are an elitist. You hate your audience, you hate the literary industry, you probably even hate yourself. You stand not with the

people but in a quiet dark hole, shouting
to no one.⁸⁸

All writer-critics are proselytisers in their own cause, as Martin Amis once said. This is especially true of recent debates about the social relevance of literature, which have tended to reflect the inability of individual critics and writers to believe in varieties of artistic belief and achievement. The writer of experimental fiction is not necessarily an elitist, as Franzen argues. Nor is the writer of conventional narrative necessarily a whore to the market, as Marcus asserts. However, in so far as the social novel itself is concerned, the issue of audience must be seen to play a part, because it is partly the longing for “social connectedness” that defines the social novel as a genre.

One significant way in which the social novel has traditionally connected with the reader, which was not canvassed in the debate, is through that much stigmatised form of social cognition called story. Literary sociologist Franco Moretti poses the problem like this:

Once avant-garde literature abandoned plot, the void was inevitably filled by a parallel system — mass literature — which, just as inevitably has acquired an ever increasing relevance. The appeal of mass literature is that it tells stories, and we all need stories: if instead of

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p.40.

Buddenbrooks we get *The Carpetbaggers*, then Harold Robbins it is. It's certainly no progress in our perception of history, but it is a fact that, in this century, narrative forms capable of dealing with the great structures and transformations of social life have more often than not belonged to the various genres of mass literature, and more broadly, mass culture.⁸⁹

On September 11, as literary critics proclaimed the death of the social novel, it may well be that the corpse was alive and flourishing across a much wider cultural terrain. The kinds of social explorations once popularised by the novels of Dickens and Balzac have not vanished into the rarefied realms of high art, so much as they have scattered themselves across a much wider range of cultural experience. They are to be discovered in the narratives of soap operas, blockbusters, and especially, in the realm of crime fiction.

Postscript

It is clearly impossible to include an analysis of all writers producing socially engaged or so-called 'realist' work in the past two centuries. Therefore, I have chosen to concentrate on writers like Dickens who have helped shaped my

⁸⁹ Franco Moretti, *Signs Taken for Wonders: Essays in the Sociology of Literary Forms*, Verso, London, 1988, p.247-8.

own ideas, and in whose work the social or political dimension of the text is inextricable from the novel's popular appeal.

The Crime Novel is Where the Social Novel Went

The crime novel is where the social novel went. If you want to write about the underbelly of American life, if you want to write about the second America that nobody wants to look at, you turn to the crime novel ...

— *Dennis Lehane*

According to the well-known critic of nineteenth century European realism, Georg Lukacs, a social novel is a book with the capacity to combine the general and particular in characters and events, creating situations that force characters to reveal their relationship to the rest of society.⁹⁰ Crime, it might be argued, is such an event. In crime fiction, it is the writer's task to trace the hidden social relationships, which crime reveals (and more often conceals), to expose them, bring them to the surface, and show the social apparatus in motion.

Crime novels make use of their times in ways that the traditional social novel did, and many other forms of fiction do not. They share the social novel's

⁹⁰ Georg Lukacs, *Studies in European Realism*, Merlin Press, London, 1972, *passim*.

fascination with the diverse multiplicity of the material world, of places and things. They are concerned with the structures of power, with the influence of social institutions and socio-economic conditions on characters and events. They often show a willingness to enter into important social debates about agency and oppression, centrality and marginality, the social system and the individual criminal act. They have brought public attention to focus on social issues around poverty, urban disintegration and the social causes of crime, as well as on social problems such as racism and sexism, to name just a few. Like the traditional social novel, the crime novel is less concerned with interiority than with external patterns of social behaviour. Popular arguments about the crime novel as a form of social criticism tend to concentrate on the ways in which crime novels 'point the finger' at injustices of the world, or, for reasons of commerce or politics, fail to do so. But this debate merely masks the deeper ideological impact of such works, which has to do with the mapping of the social process itself. As popular fiction, crime novels re-enter and unfold within the ideological space of the cultures from which they derive. They can shape our reality because they share with reality a kind of fiction.

The confluence between crime fiction and the socially-focussed novel more generally has been remarked on by a number of writers. In his "Manifesto for the New Social Novel", Tom Wolfe argued that recent literary attempts to "wrestle the beast [of social reality]" have long been over-shadowed by writers "whom literary people customarily dismiss as 'writers of popular fiction' (a curious epithet) or as genre novelists", placing crime writers such as

John Le Carre at the top of his list of possible suspects.⁹¹ American crime writer Dennis Lehane takes Wolfe's point even further, arguing that the contemporary crime novel has challenged, if not replaced, the literary novel as the pre-eminent narrator of American life below the headline. "The crime novel is where the social novel went," said Lehane. "If you want to write about the underbelly of America, if you want to write about the second America that nobody wants to look at, you turn to the crime novel."⁹²

Lehane's claim is by no means a new one. Raymond Chandler made a similar point back in 1944, when he famously argued that Hammett had created a body of work that was both finer and different in kind to the clue-puzzle mysteries of British Golden Age fiction, typically set in upper middle class drawing rooms on sprawling country estates. Wrote Chandler:

Hammett gave murder back to the kind of people that commit it for reasons, not just to provide a corpse; and with the means at hand, not hand-wrought dueling pistols, curare and tropical fish. He put these people down on paper as they were, and he made them talk and think in the

⁹¹ Tom Wolfe, "Stalking the Billion-Footed Beast," in *Bonfire of the Vanities*, Picador, London, 1988, p.xxviii.

⁹² Interview with Dennis Lehane, <http://www.powells.com>.

language they customarily used for these purposes.⁹³

More recently, writers such as Luc Sante and Margaret Atwood have commented on the convergence of crime fiction with what they call the mainstream of social realism from the standpoint of an age in which concern about, and obsession with, crime is so increasingly built into the fabric of everyday life that it might be said to constitute “an underlying reality, not an exceptional circumstance”, as Sante argues.⁹⁴ Atwood similarly speculates whether a “novel without some sort of crime or scam in it can ... claim to be an accurate representation of today’s reality,” suggesting that this is especially true of the United States, “the home of Enron and of the world’s largest privately held arsenal, where casual murders are so common that most aren’t reported, and where the CIA encourages the growing and trading of narcotics to finance its foreign adventures.”⁹⁵

Just as Atwood and Sante point to the increasing relevance of crime fiction in examining the criminality that lies at the heart of contemporary life, crime writers such as Ian Rankin have identified a resurgence of what Rankin calls “realism” in crime writing, meaning a critical engagement with a diverse range of contemporary social groups and concerns. For Rankin, the new commitment to realism is evident in plot, character, setting and theme, as well

⁹³ Raymond Chandler, “The Simple Art of Murder,” *Atlantic Monthly*, December 1944, pp. 53-59.

⁹⁴ Luc Sante, “Low Lives,” *New York Review of Books*, Vol .42, No.8, May 11, 1995, www.nybooks.com.

⁹⁵ Margaret Atwood, “Cops and Robbers,” *New York Review of Books*, Vol.4, No. 9, May 23, 2002, www.nybooks.com.

as in the move away from the idea of the amateur sleuth that was the hallmark of Golden Age fiction. Rankin argues:

The problem — if it is a problem — with English/British crime fiction is that it comes from a certain tradition, in which well-meaning amateur or semi-professional detectives solved crimes which tended to take place on country estates or in genteel drawing-rooms. Some readers may still get a lot out of these types of novel, but I don't think they can be said to reflect contemporary concerns (with the breakdown of society, the drug problem, terrorism, conspiracies and corporate cover-ups). All that's happened in Britain is that crime writers have started, in the main, to write about the world around them. This produces a more troubling body of work, in that evil is not always punished (or even defined!), good guys and bad guys have been replaced by 'grey guys', the crimes themselves are no longer bloodless (no more rare poisons or blunt instruments), and so, these newer books tend to produce fewer happy

endings, and make the reader think harder about the big moral questions, because few spinsters or titled gentlemen are on hand these days to solve the mysteries for us.⁹⁶

Rankin argues that a new type of socially-focussed crime novel can be seen not just in British crime fiction, but in Canadian, Australian, French, German and Spanish fiction as well. He sees it largely as the product of an encounter with the work of American crime writers such as James Ellroy, Elmore Leonard and Ed McBain. British crime writer Val McDermid agrees, but suggests the social turn came earlier with the impact of traditional hardboiled novels such as those of Raymond Chandler. Writes McDermid:

Until [Chandler] created his vivid acerbic pen portraits of Los Angeles, classic mystery fiction had strenuously avoided anything as vulgar as a sense of place. For years, the only real place in British mystery fiction was London. Apart from the capital city, murders took place in imaginary Home Counties villages, improbable country houses set in vast unpopulated estates and, occasionally, in exotic settings like Scottish castles or

⁹⁶ Interview with Ian Rankin, <http://www.mysteryreaders.org>.

Oxford colleges that bore little resemblance to their real counterparts.

After Chandler, American crime writers realised that rooting novels in real places had definite advantages, so they followed suit. As usual, it took a bit longer to catch on across the Atlantic.⁹⁷

Rankin and McDermid's arguments are compelling, but they also reflect the tendency among crime critics of privileging the so-called open-community, urban-based novel as a vehicle for social criticism, over and above the closed-community, clue-based tradition represented by writers such as Ruth Rendell and P.D. James. In "Some Clues About Story in Crime Fiction", Australian writer Tess Brady disputes this claim, arguing that the former is erroneously seen as a "more contemporary tradition mirroring a more contemporary world" and therefore "more worthy of our attention".⁹⁸ P.D. James has also suggested there is a need for a critical reappraisal of the clue-puzzle tradition, arguing that the contemporary clue-puzzle has moved away from the "crudities and simplicities" of earlier crime fiction, and is as concerned as any other novel with the "moral ambiguities of human action".⁹⁹ James defends the work of clue-puzzle writers such as Ngaio Marsh and Margery

⁹⁷ Val McDermid, "The Manchester Beat," *British Regional Mysteries*, Vol.17, No.2, Summer, 2001, <http://www.mysteryreaders.org>.

⁹⁸ Tess Brady, "Some Clues About Story in Crime Fiction," paper delivered at the Centre for Professional and Public Communication, University of South Australia, Crime Colloquium, April 20, 2001.

⁹⁹ P.D. James quoted in Patricia A Ward, "Moral Ambiguities and the Crime Novels of P.D. James," *Christian Century*, May 1984, <http://www.religion-online.org>.

Allingham. For James, these writers “are novelists, not merely fabricators of ingenious puzzles. Both seek, not always successfully, to reconcile the conventions of the classical detective story with the novel of social realism.”¹⁰⁰

P.D. James’s own claim for recognition as a writer of ‘mainstream’ or ‘serious’ fiction was given a considerable boost when her 1987 novel *A Taste for Death* was nominated for the Booker Prize. Combining social themes such as abortion with high politics, child neglect and the activities of the radical left, the novel draws a diverse social cast around two typical locales of the clue-based tradition, viz. church and mansion. In this sense it might be argued that the quintessential closed-community sites of the clue-based tradition are made to function as a “space of universal representation”, as Walter Benjamin once put it, or “box in the theatre of the world” — a confined space in which remote things, ideas and people are drawn together to make a single representation of what is known and understood about the rest of the society.¹⁰¹ However, it might also be argued that *A Taste for Death’s* claim to be regarded as a novel of social realism is significantly undermined by the way in which the clue puzzle dictates the shape and outcome of the actual narrative (ultimately, a typical Christie-like struggle over inheritance is what the novel is really about). There is a strong sense in which the characters are caught up in their own private dramas, which are shorn of political or social implications, to which the rest of the social world is ultimately of no consequence.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ Walter Benjamin quoted in Catherine Cole, *Private Dicks and Feisty Chicks: An Interrogation of Crime Fiction*, Curtain University Books, 2004., p.197.

In considering James's claims to breadth of canvas, it perhaps needs to be pointed out that her social vision is a profoundly static and conservative one, in which class, education and 'cultivated taste', as represented in the figure of her detective Adam Dalgliesh, stand as the final defence against an impending sense of social disintegration. James shares this conservative perspective with an overwhelming number of clue-puzzle writers, including Christie, Sayers, Allingham and Doyle, but this does not mean that conservative politics are necessarily intrinsic to the form. For instance, Ruth Rendell deploys clue-based conventions in her Inspector Wexford series to examine a wide range of social issues from a far more progressive, or, at least, liberal humanist, standpoint, including racism and unemployment in novels such as *Simisola*, and environmental activism and over-development in novels such as *Road Rage*. Rendell also incorporates realistic regional characteristics into the books, mapping the stresses in the changing social landscape outside the major capitals where most crime fiction is set. Moreover, the deadly dramas acted out in the novels never turn away from the concerns of the wider social world. Rather, the solutions to the mysteries often provide telling social commentaries in themselves. For instance, in *Road Rage*, the so-called 'environmental terrorists' turn out to be an affluent upper middle class family concerned to preserve the market value of their home.

Setting, it might be argued, is a central component of the crime novel's commitment to social, structural and thematic realism, as seen in the Los Angeles of James Ellroy, the Edinburgh of Ian Rankin, and the assorted backwaters from Atlantic City to Florida of Elmore Leonard. In the hands of

such writers, place is not merely a backdrop to enhance mood, or provide an edgy or exotic setting to act out a plot. Place becomes a critical force in the narrative, powerfully drawing together important political themes such as poverty, privilege, and social injustice. Rankin argues that though the wealthy and underprivileged areas of Edinburgh are geographically separate from one another, the conventions of fiction allow him to bring them together, dramatically highlighting the tensions between them. Rankin argues:

The Old Town section of Edinburgh used to be a nicely democratic place, where rich and poor would mingle, either on the street or else in the drinking dens and oyster bars. They even shared the same tenement space, with the rich living close to the ground floor, the poor living closest to the sky. Things changed towards the end of the eighteenth century. The New Town was built, and 'polite society' decamped from the Old Town. This, historians have said, was Edinburgh's turning point. Things could not be the same again. Well, in fiction, anything is possible, and my John Rebus novels show

the Establishment and the 1990s
underclass in close association ...¹⁰²

In *Mortal Causes* Rankin contrasts Pilmuir's infamous Garibaldi Estate (an impoverished working class housing scheme) with the officially sanctioned image of the city as represented by the Edinburgh Festival. In *Hide and Seek* he contrasts the junkies and rent boys of Calton Hill with a silver-service gaming establishment catering to the city's business and bureaucratic elites. In *Black and Blue* he juxtaposes Craigmillar's Nidrie Estate with the "new greed" and "oil money" flooding the North East of Scotland, "which has changed its character completely".¹⁰³

Moreover, in Rankin's fiction, the landscape isn't static, but woven in through the strands of the plot. Place is narrated via the character's actions, rather than described. The interaction of character and landscape gives rise to the social tensions that are acted out in the story. In other words, Rankin's work emphasises the human dimensions of place, which is not just a location but a mode of existence, and a whole way of life. It might even be argued that the emphasis on the human dimensions of place is one of the many things that differentiate Rankin's work from that of his hardboiled predecessors. In traditional hardboiled novels such as those by Hammett or Chandler, the city emerges as an autonomous, malevolent force, with the interaction between character and landscape taking on the form of an existential combat. But in

¹⁰² Ian Rankin, "The Silence of the Lums," *British Regional Mysteries I*, Vol. 17, No. 2, Summer 2001, <http://www.mysteryreaders.org>.

¹⁰³ Ian Rankin quoted in "Black and Blue ... and Read all Over," *Crime Factory*, 3, 2001, p. 8.

Rankin's work the interaction between plot, character and landscape emphasises the ways in which the social forces that make up the city are neither abstract nor autonomous, but man-made and concrete.

The confluence of crime fiction with the mainstream of social realism is arguably most apparent in the general shift towards the police procedural, in which the romantic fantasy of the amateur sleuth is abandoned for the gritty reality of detectives working collectively through the bureaucratic matrix of the police force, in a way that brings the political dimension of police power squarely into view. British academic John Scaggs has argued that what is particular about the police procedural is that it portrays a 'social world' in the true sense of the term, not only because it concerns itself more obviously with the interests and obsessions of contemporary life, but in terms of its use of a multi-protagonist cast.¹⁰⁴ Unlike the classic detective novel, the police procedural often deploys the form and paraphernalia of the traditional social novel, including multiple plot lines, third-person narration, revolving points of view, increasingly large casts of characters and cross cutting between action. For Scaggs, the social world of the police procedural represents a "celebration of teamwork", in which a "team of individuals, separated by age, experience, gender, race, and ethnicity, works collectively to maintain and restore order".¹⁰⁵ But in the hands of writers such as Ellroy and Rankin the police procedural does far more than this. By cross cutting between the world of the police force, and the world of the criminal, the worlds of the witnesses, suspects, perpetrators and victims, the procedural can bring emphasis to bear

¹⁰⁴ John Scaggs, *Crime Fiction*, Routledge, London, 2005, p.103.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

on the ways in which the whole concept of criminal behaviour is socially constructed.

For instance, in Rankin's most recent work, *Fleshmarket Close*, the labyrinthine plot of the novel weaves the many-sided debate on immigration together into a wider political commentary on the state of Scottish society. *Fleshmarket Close* commences with the murder of an illegal refugee on a working class housing estate where racist attacks have become a daily occurrence. The novel portrays not only the bigoted attitudes of the estate's underprivileged inhabitants, but also the racism that pervades the police force, despite official policy to the contrary. It examines the politics of Whitemire, an asylum seeker's detention centre run for private profit, where suicide and self-harm have become daily occurrences, and also presents the views of the second generation unemployed families of Bane who have found employment at the centre. The narrative encompasses the perspective of a Muslim lawyer who represents many of the centre's detainees, a middleclass activist who holds daily protests outside the walls, and a council worker who attempts to wrestle with the chronic shortage of housing. It presents the views of foreign students, of immigration officials, of various refugee and immigrant communities, and more darkly, the assortment of criminals and corrupt corporate officials who exploit the refugees' illegal status, using threats and violence to organise them into forced labour gangs.

The confluence between *Fleshmarket Close* and the traditional social novel wasn't lost on some critics. The publishers dubbed it a 'State of the Nation' novel in the tradition of Gaskell's *North and South*. Critic Rebecca Gowers also

argued that the work brings detective fiction back to its origin in the social novels of Dickens, comparing Rebus's wanderings with the perambulations of Dickens's Inspector Bucket, which organise the social canvas of *Bleak House*, as Bucket shuffles between instances of individual shootings and the concept of a broader social crime. For Gowers, *Fleshmarket Close* is shot through with a "Dickensian anger". "The nation under Rankin's microscope is one in which the string-pullers have the little people at their mercy," she writes. "If you trace the strings up high enough, they are knotted at the top."¹⁰⁶

But it is James Ellroy, perhaps more than any other crime writer, who is famous for taking advantage of the social dimensions of the police procedural to construct novels that are designed to reflect the sheer scale of contemporary experience — "the reality," as academic Lee Horsley puts it, "of America's brutal, expansion-minded twentieth century".¹⁰⁷ In the four novels that comprise the *LA Quartet* Ellroy combines crime themes and techniques with a detailed historical recreation of Los Angeles in the post war decades, incorporating real life events into the narratives, such as the Watts riots, the HUAC inquisitions, the construction of the Dodgers Stadium, Hollywood and Disneyland. This technique allows Ellroy to map his nightmare scenarios firmly onto the social terrain, in a way that disrupts received notions of history, and foregrounds the socio-political aspects of the genre. Ellroy argues, "I think I've shaped noir far into social history. Nobody's written noir

¹⁰⁶ Rebecca Gowers, "Murky Depths," *New Statesman*, 4 October, 2004, www.newstatesman.com.

¹⁰⁷ Lee Horsley, "Founding Fathers: Genealogies of Violence in James Ellroy's *LA Quartet*," *Clues*, Vol.19.2, Fall/Winter, 1998, www.crimeculture.com.

books as big as mine, with their scope and with their heavily detailed societal backgrounds."¹⁰⁸

Significantly, Ellroy argues that it is the plot-centred nature of crime fiction that enables crime writers to inquire into the complex nature of contemporary social reality. According to Ellroy, it is only when a writer is not "afraid of plot" that it becomes possible to tackle "the big canvas" in its infinite complexity.¹⁰⁹ He argues that, in this respect, the serial nature of crime fiction enhances the genre's capacity to mount successful social critiques, allowing the writer to deal with complex social processes over a series of works.¹¹⁰ Arguably, the privileging of plot over and above other aspects of narrative has alienated some readers, transforming his novels into a kind of action-delirium that teeters on chaos. However, foregrounding plot is also a way of bringing emphasis to bear on the action of various characters in the process of creating the urban milieu — demonstrating that 'social forces' are neither abstract nor autonomous (as, for example, the discourse of globalisation, or economics more generally, would suggest), but the product of human action, specifically the cumulative decisions and omissions of hundreds of bureaucrats, politicians and businessmen.¹¹¹ In contrast to the literary novel where "story is there on sufferance", as Phillip Pullman once suggested,¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ Ellroy quoted in Lee Horsley, *ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² Phillip Pullman, quoted in the *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Quotations*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003.

Ellroy uses plot to transform the crime novel into what he has called the “perfect vehicle for social commentary”.¹¹³

Crime Theory

The idea of crime fiction as a vehicle for serious social commentary goes against the grain of much recent academic analysis, which, as Caroline Reitz points out, tends to follow theorists Franco Moretti’s or D.A. Miller’s analysis of the genre as essentially conservative, serving a purely repressive function in the culture, eschewing any idea of the characteristic rebelliousness, which, for many crime writers at least, forms the heart of the genre.¹¹⁴ However, much of this analysis relies on a generalised and ahistorical application of theory, tending to view the genre as a form of ‘mythological thinking’, the product of a seemingly autonomous culture industry, with little or no correlation to reality, or conversely, as a simple and straightforward reflection of power. It suffers from a general abhorrence of plot, an abhorrence of traditional narrative, and an array of other prejudicial judgements based on the arbitrary cultural values ascribed to ‘high’ and ‘low’ art.

The influential literary theorist Franco Moretti labels the detective genre “radically anti-novelistic”, characterising it as a kind of textual illusion that “owes its success to the fact that it teaches nothing”. He condemns it as “literature that desires to exorcise literature”. Moretti argues:

¹¹³ James Ellroy quoted in Horsley, *op.cit.*

¹¹⁴ Caroline Reitz, “Thomas, R, Detective Fiction and the Rise of Forensic Science” (book review), *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 45, No.1, 2002.

In detective fiction ... the weight gravitates towards the ending. Detective fiction's ending is its end indeed: its solution in the true sense. The *fabula* narrated by the detective in his reconstruction of the facts brings us back to the beginning; that is, it abolishes narration. Between the beginning and the end of the narration — between the absence and the presence of the *fabula* — there is no 'voyage', only a long *wait*. In this sense, detective fiction is anti-literary. It declares narration a mere deviation, a masking of that univocal meaning which is its *raison d'être*.¹¹⁵

In this way it might be argued that the reader of crime fiction, detecting along with the detective, weaves the divergent plot strands together into a logically ordered world that is rationally explained. The world may be unjust, as the worlds depicted by writers such as Rankin and Ellroy are unjust, but the only thing that matters from the point of view of the reader is that a complex puzzle has been solved. The reader experiences a feeling of pleasure at the solving of the puzzle, regardless of any moral outrage directed against the social world as a whole. In this way, it may be argued that even the most

¹¹⁵ Franco Moretti, *Signs Taken for Wonders: Essays in the Sociology of Literary Forms*, Verso, London, 1988, p.148.

complex social interrogation built up in such novels is thoroughly evacuated. As Moretti argues, the detective story “desires” literary deviation only to “mock” and “destroy” it, so that literature becomes “only distance and delay with regard to the revealed solution”.¹¹⁶

Following Moretti, academics such as Peter Messent have argued that the social criticism generated by the contemporary detective is intrinsically constrained by the nature of the genre and the so-called return to the status quo. In his introduction to the influential anthology *Criminal Proceedings* Messent asserts that even when a politically active detective such as Sara Paretsky’s V.I. Warshawski reveals corruption at all levels of the social system, she ultimately helps to prop up the prevailing social order. Messent argues:

Warshawski, like the majority of hardboiled private eye protagonists, is caught finally in a kind of in-between world: seeing corruption in, and disliking many aspects of, the environment through which she moves, but serving the interests of the law and the status quo in solving the individual crime and repairing the

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.149.

rent in the social fabric that has occurred.¹¹⁷

According to Messent, Warshawski might interrogate the existing social order but the result of her investigations is, as the detective herself puts it, “one giant motherfucking cover-up”.¹¹⁸ A crime may be solved but nothing changes in the political scheme of things. Messent argues that if anything Warshawski’s actions assist the forces of political oppression by helping to, in Moretti’s words, “reinstate a previous situation” before the “disturbing forces broke loose”.¹¹⁹

In “Murder as Social Criticism” Catherine Nickerson makes a similar point with respect to the conventions of the genre as a whole. She argues:

While detective fiction deals with explosive cultural material, that sense of mastery reinforced by the assurance of solution, calms the recreational reader of the genre ... the conventions and formulas for which detective fiction is so famous ... [allow] us to draw close to the flame of our culture’s evils without actually getting

¹¹⁷ Peter Messent, “From Private Eye to Police Procedural,” in Peter Messent, ed., *Criminal Proceedings: the Contemporary American Crime Novel*, Pluto Press, London, p.9.

¹¹⁸ Sara Paretsky quoted in Messent, *ibid.*, p.9.

¹¹⁹ Moretti quoted in Messent, *ibid.*, p.10.

burned.¹²⁰

Nickerson's argument, like the arguments of Moretti and Messent, seeks to emphasise the ways in which the orderly conventions of crime fiction provide the reader with a sense of reassurance that works to reinforce, rather than challenge, the status quo. In particular, the ways in which the plot 'solution' or 'end' of the narrative allegedly diminishes, if not obliterates, social meaning and content. However, as Walter Benjamin once argued, all narrative must tend towards its end, seeking illumination in its own death — meaning that we read all stories (not just detective stories) in anticipation of retrospection. Or, as the literary theorist Peter Brooks puts it, meaning in narrative is generated by the sacrifice of the text.¹²¹ In this sense, the narrative logic of the nineteenth century social novel can be readily compared with that of the crime novel. For however unjust the moral universe depicted in the novels of writers such as Dickens or Eliot, narrative order is always restored in the end. The hero will always marry the heroine (or die in the attempt), and, in the case of Charles Dickens, at least, the figure of the kindly benefactor, in the guise of Scrooge, John Jarndyce or the Cheerybles, will always be there to pull out the plums and dish out the happiness at the end of the story.

In this sense, one might also ask of the nineteenth century novel: Does the marriage of Little Dorritt and Arthur Clennam reconcile us to the oppressive

¹²⁰ Catherine Nickerson, "Murder as Social Criticism," *American Literary History*, Vol.9, No.4, Winter, 1997, p.756.

¹²¹ Benjamin and Brookes quoted in Martin Kayman, *From Bow Street to Baker Street: Mystery, Detection and Narrative*, St Martin's Press, New York, 1992, p.12.

influences of speculative capital? Does the marriage of Dorethea and Will Ladislaw reconcile us to the situation of Victorian women? Is the social portrait of Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* evacuated by the *frisson* of pleasure we experience at the marriage of Margaret and Mr Thornton? Is the reading of Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* one long "wait" (in Moretti's words) for the marriage of Eliza and Mr Darcy? If not, is this because romantic plots are to be treated differently as a matter of course? Why then, is conducting sublime romance to be considered more 'meaningful' than fighting crime and corruption?

Ultimately, such questions bring us back to the role commonly attributed to plot in the discrimination between 'high' and 'low' culture. For Aristotle, plot was the "first principle and soul of a tragedy"; the 'highest' of cultural forms,¹²² but in contemporary critical practice plot is more often seen as the element that separates 'high' from 'low' art. As academic Martin Kayman points out, the modern novel of "language" or "character" is seen to embody the ideals of "Literature" while popular fiction merely exploits the "superficial" "mechanics" of plot.¹²³ Or, as academic Ben Marcus puts it in my previous chapter, where the "reader" of literature possesses a "barn-sized" brain "staffed by an army of jump-suited code-breakers",¹²⁴ the "consumer" of conventional narrative indulges in the fictional equivalent of "sucking down large tubs of soda while we watch movies".¹²⁵

¹²² Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. W.H. Fyfe, W. Heinemann, London, 1965, p.53.

¹²³ Kayman, *op.cit.*, p.6.

¹²⁴ Ben Marcus, "Why Experimental Fiction Threatens to Destroy Publishing, Jonathan Franzen, and Life as We Know It," *Harper's Magazine*, October 2005, p.40.

¹²⁵ Kayman, *op.cit.*, p.45.

Martin Kayman takes up this argument in his study of early detective fiction *From Bow Street to Baker Street*. He also historicises the argument, situating the debate within the wider struggle of the nineteenth century social novel to rise above its low origins (as a form of “frivolous, unimproving, and eventually, pernicious entertainment”¹²⁶) and assert its claim to be considered as art. Kayman argues that, as part of this struggle, accusations of “lowness” were redirected towards the social novel’s contemporary rivals, including the sensation, gothic and detective genres.¹²⁷ In this sense it might be argued that the ascendancy of the realist novel, and its transformation into the naturalist novel in the hands of Zola, and the novel of language in the hands of Flaubert, has made us blind to the kind of work the traditional social novel actually was, built out of social observation, but also out of convention and whim, and what Dickens called “fancy”.

For T.S. Eliot, the social novel belongs to what he calls “the Golden Age of Melodrama”, an epoch that disappeared as a result of the “dissociation of the elements of the old three-volume melodramatic novel into the various types of the modern 300-page novel”. Eliot makes clear that this separation of high and low culture, “the distinction of genre between such-and-such a profound ‘psychological’ novel of today and such-and-such a masterly detective novel of today”, is not a sign of the high moral purpose of the literary novelist, but evidence of a kind of cultural demise, in which the concept of a rich and varied public culture has been replaced by a view of culture that increasingly

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.6.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

excludes any transaction between the “literature” of the elites and the “entertainments” of the mass.¹²⁸

It is only when overly schematic and trans-historical approaches to crime fiction such as Messent’s are pushed aside, that other, more interesting, and often contradictory, interpretations are allowed to emerge. For example, it perhaps needs to be pointed out that Moretti’s original argument concerned itself solely with British Golden Age fiction, and the detective novel has changed since the heyday of clue-puzzle writers such as Conan Doyle and Christie, as have the material conditions out of which the novel emerges. In the hands of more recent writers such as Rankin and Ellroy, the plot of the crime novel is generally defined less by the mystery or puzzle solution and more by the sense of injustice that unfolds in the course of the investigation. Moreover, there is generally never one criminal to be gaoled or eliminated but a small multitude of wrongdoers, as well as those who are seen to be morally culpable by being blind or indifferent to their surroundings. There is never one victim, but an idea of the wider social causes and consequences of crime. Most importantly, there is also a strong sense in which, once a series of systemic inequities and injustices have been discovered, the old order is imbued with the kind of disturbance that makes Moretti’s complete and uncritical “return to the beginning” impossible.

In contrast to Moretti’s idea of detective fiction as “anti-literature”, the influential theorist D.A. Miller ties the detective novel to the nineteenth

¹²⁸ T.S. Eliot, “Wilkie Collins and Dickens,” *Selected Essays*, Harcourt, Brace & World, New York, 1950, p.409 and *passim*.

century social novel through the trope of the police. For Miller, the social novels of writers such as Dickens represent a massive thematisation of social discipline (not just the police, but the law courts, the schoolhouse, the poor house and the debtor's gaol), which was subsequently developed in the realist tradition by Anthony Trollope, and in the sensationalist tradition by the detective novels of Wilkie Collins.¹²⁹ But for Miller, social discipline supplies not just the theme of such novels but also their affects. Following his own particularly monolithic interpretation of the theory of normative social discipline outlined by Foucault, he weaves his argument through novels in which deviant activities are regulated and punished by the police force (Dickens and Collins), to novels in which deviant activities are regulated and punished by society at large (Anthony Trollope), and finally to the ways in which the reader regulates him/herself through acts of self-policing. Miller acknowledges that the nineteenth century social novel may contain "subversive" moments, but argues such subversion is just an illusion (one which, he claims, accounts for the seduction of such texts), functioning solely within the "overbearing cultural mythologies" that will already have appropriated it.¹³⁰ In other words, for Miller the social novel is complicit with the expanding mechanisms of moral conformity of the modern bureaucratic State. Moreover, it is one that participates in an economy of police power that upholds the very political regime that it pretends to undermine.

Following Miller, an increasing number of academics have situated the crime novel as part of what academic Peter Messent has described as a wider social

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.ix.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.xi.

process of “increasingly invasive monitoring on behalf of the state of anything threatening to upset the established social order”.¹³¹ Messent argues that this discourse of affirmation and control through surveillance is embodied in the earliest forms of the crime novel, including hardboiled and Golden Age fiction, but places the police procedural as the logical end point of the disciplinary process. He argues that technology and administrative bureaucracy have played an increasingly important part in the genre, citing Dennis Porter’s characterisation of the contemporary detective as the “unseen seer who stands at the centre of the social Panopticon and employs his ‘science’ to make all things visible” to the benefit of the status quo.¹³²

Messent and Porter are far from alone in their Panoptical approach to the genre. For example, in his recent review of theoretical approaches to crime fiction, academic John Scaggs endorsed what he believes is a general consensus of academic opinion along these lines. He concurs with Messent’s analysis, citing earlier works such as Winston and Mellerski’s argument that the serial form of the police procedural “constitutes the literary equivalent of Foucault’s ‘indefinite discipline’: a precise and repeated reproduction of the stages of interrogation, investigation and judgement which maintain such discipline over time”,¹³³ and maintains that the increased frequency of internal affairs investigations in recent examples of the genre further “emphasises the perceived need for Panoptical discipline at every level of society”.¹³⁴ In other words, for critics such as Messent, Porter, Winston, Mellerski and Scaggs, the

¹³¹ Messent, *op.cit.*, p.11.

¹³² Dennis Porter quoted in Messent, *ibid.*

¹³³ Robert Winston and Nancy Mellerski, *The Public Eye: Ideology and the Police Procedural*, St Martins Press, New York, 1992, p.8.

¹³⁴ Scaggs, *op.cit.*, p.89.

crime novel merely makes explicit what Miller argues was always implicit in the traditional social novel. In contrast to the diffuse economies of police power in the works of writers such as Balzac or Trollope, the crime novel produces a cruder, more simplistic version of power and a more easily comprehensible version of order.

Recently, however, a handful of critics have begun to question the schematic approach of Miller's analysis. For example, in *From Bow Street to Baker Street* Kayman argues that the social novel differs from the detective novel in its distinctive strategy for rendering its own discipline invisible. He argues, "In the realist novel 'omniscient narration assumes a fully panoptic view of the world it places under surveillance', the author, like the detective spy, seeks, invisibly, to penetrate social and personal surfaces and to register, examine, know, re-form, and narrate his or her characters."¹³⁵ In other words, the realist novel proposes itself as transparent, and it is precisely this strategy, the attempt "to destroy the veil of its own artifice and to appear as natural common sense", which makes it complicit with other modes of discipline as a form of social control.¹³⁶ In contrast, Kayman argues that through its very visibility, if not outright intrusiveness, the figure of the detective might be said to represent the recognition that the global project of policing has become the modern condition informing all human relations. The modern "obsession with crime" is, as Kayman argues:

¹³⁵ Kayman, *op.cit.*, p.102.

¹³⁶ Leonard Davis quoted in Kayman, *op.cit.*, p.102.

... expressive of a concern with the Law as the modern social code that masters and harmonises — or expresses conflict between — contesting cultures, in which the concept of crime itself operates as a means of representing not only the mysteries of the poor, but those of the new regime itself, and the new highly mobile class thrown up by the commercial capitalist relations of production and exchange.¹³⁷

In this sense what Foucault has described as the discourse of the Law¹³⁸ might be said to contribute what Kayman describes as a new “life plot” to the novel,¹³⁹ one in which the meaning of police power and its relationship to the larger social order can be contested and debated.

In *Cop Knowledge: Police Power and Cultural Narrative*, academic Christopher Wilson takes this point even further, directly challenging what he calls the “panoptical blueprint” of recent academic analysis, especially the tendency to subsume the material and cultural tactics of police power under a single

¹³⁷ Kayman, *ibid.*, p.59.

¹³⁸ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, trans. Colin Gordon and Leo Marshall, Harvester Press, Brighton, 1980, p.41.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.60.

monolithic paradigm of surveillance and detection.¹⁴⁰ Wilson argues that such interpretations rely on a particularly monolithic interpretation of Foucault, and a schematic and reductive application of theory that flattens rather than enhances our readings of the genre. He argues that a more particularised analysis would move critical debate beyond a model that thinks through the contradictory impulses of crime fiction purely in terms of a theoretical model of transgression/reification of power, and begin to recognise the complexity of cultural negotiation within any given field of social struggle.¹⁴¹ Obviously, power must always play a part in any analysis, but, as Wilson argues, a more flexible approach would allow us to understand crime novels as a popular, street-level venue in and through which notions of civility, decency, duty, the nature of society, and the concept of the nation, have been enacted and debated.¹⁴²

Crime as Social Criticism

In the fragmented urban spaces of late capitalism, a world of disconnected signs and identities, the detective roams the city, weaving the myriad fragments together into a comprehensible system of social relationships, which locate the subject, and show the social apparatus in motion. It could almost be argued that the detective novel is tied to the emergence of this new social space. At best, it is a story that makes connections, that interrogates existing ones, that carries out the socially important function of constructing

¹⁴⁰ Christopher Wilson, *Cop Knowledge: Police Power and Cultural Narrative in Twentieth Century America*, Chicago University Press, Chicago and London, 2000, p.208.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.13.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p.6.

meaningful political horizons in a world reduced, as T.S. Eliot once put it, to a “heap of broken images”.

But clearly, it would be wrong to paint too rosy a picture of the social function of crime fiction. Crime fiction, as a genre, is highly diverse in style, content and effect, especially social effect. For instance, academic critics such as Liam Kennedy have pointed out the ways in which hardboiled fiction is traditionally structured around a white subject, though he also points to the ways in which African American writers such as Chester Himes and Walter Mosley have subverted such codes.¹⁴³ Crime fiction is similarly noted for its conservative, if not entirely sexist, approach to gender roles, which has similarly been challenged by the rise of feminist crime fiction, with writers such as Sue Grafton and Sara Paretsky stretching the limits of the genre with interesting, though sometimes ambivalent, effects.

Equally disturbing is the rise of the serial killer narrative in which killers are dehumanised monsters that strike randomly, victims are brutalised objects, products of an insidious sort of voyeurism that pervades every text, and the society that makes such things possible never even enters the narrative equation. Significant here is the rise of the genre of forensic detection, where the God-like science of the pathologist replaces the human dimensions of the narrative, and the network of social relations that has traditionally linked the detective to victim, suspects, witnesses and killer, is reduced to series of

¹⁴³ Liam Kennedy, “Black Noir: Race and Urban Space in Walter Mosley’s Detective Fiction,” in Peter Messent ed., *Criminal Proceedings, op.cit.*, pp.42-61.

instrumental discoveries or the process of social stereotyping well known to fans of the sub-genre as psychological 'profiling'.

Most novels in the serial killer sub-genre such as those by Patricia Cornwall, Val McDermid, and especially Thomas Harris's infamous Hannibal Trilogy, are anxiety-inducing narratives that rely for their effect on the successful deployment of the politics of fear. Moretti has argued that such monstrous fantasies mislead, less by making us think that the world is a more dangerous place than by directing our thoughts away from the forces of social oppression that constitute the real horror of the world. (In theoretical terms, such stories engender a kind of 'false consciousness' by arbitrarily assigning causality to reality while adhering to their own fictional logic.)¹⁴⁴ However, it might also be argued that this analysis almost entirely disregards the productive aspects of narrative. As popular fiction, such stories have the capacity, if not to remake the world in their own image, then to bleed into a broader cultural reshaping of popular thought about western democratic society, and ultimately, a reordering of political legitimacy.

Australian writer Tess Brady sees variety as crime fiction's strength. In "Some Clues about Story in Crime Fiction" she argues that crime writers aren't moral guardians, they do not define what is right and wrong in any given society, but "play in the tension" and "stretch it into weird shapes".¹⁴⁵ Writes Brady:

¹⁴⁴ Franco Moretti, "Dialectic of Fear," in *Signs Taken for Wonders*, *op.cit.* p.105.

¹⁴⁵ Tess Brady, *op.cit.*, p.9.

This wrestle, this tension, or conversation, is the same kind of tension we have in our daily lives when we are mistakenly given too much change, or when we are asked to accept, silently, some human ugliness. Do we hand the change back or keep it? Do we remain silent over human ugliness? We engage with this internal conversation when we read certain reports in the newspaper or see the television news, hear a political commentary, or even when we go to vote. And we engage with it, in a private and entertaining way, when we escape into crime fiction.¹⁴⁶

Umberto Eco makes a different but related point when he argues that the appeal of detective fiction resides not in any triumph of reason over disorder or good over bad, but in the detective novel as a form of conjecture, which he likens to a form of metaphysical inquiry. For Eco, the labyrinth is an abstract model of conjecture and the most interesting form of the labyrinth is the “net”, or what Deleuze and Guattari call the “rhizome”.¹⁴⁷ Eco argues:

The rhizome is so constructed that every path can be connected with every other

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ Umberto Eco, *Reflections on the Name of the Rose*, trans. William Weaver, Secker and Warburg, London, 1985, p.15.

one. It has no centre, no periphery, no exit, because it is potentially infinite. The space of conjecture is a rhizome space ... it can be structured but it is never structured definitively.¹⁴⁸

Eco and Brady differ from other writers and critics in that they think of the detective story not as an epistemological genre, concerned with the revelation of a hidden truth, so much as a form of ontological speculation. As Oedipa Mass says in Thomas Pynchon's postmodern detective story, *The Crying of Lot 49*, "Shall I project a world?"¹⁴⁹ But what makes crime fiction less innocent and more interesting than Brady or Eco tend to suggest, is the way in which these "weird shapes" or "conjectures", which are the social narratives of crime fiction, play back into culture. As popular fiction, crime novels unfold within and re-enter the ideological space of the culture from which they derive. They can shape our reality because they share with reality a kind of fiction.

1.

In the following pages this thesis interrogates the work of three contemporary crime writers. Firstly, it examines the politics of serial murder as they are played out in Thomas Harris's *Red Dragon*, especially the way in which the mythologising impulses expressed in his work have played into the dominant

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49*, Picador, London, 1975, p.143.

political culture fostered by conservative world leaders from Reagan on. Secondly, it examines the demythologising impulse expressed in James Ellroy's *LA Confidential*, interrogating the novel's role in destabilising comfortable myths about the nature of American society, and the ideals of 'democracy' and 'civilisation' that Harris's work so effectively upholds. Lastly, it examines the politics of liberal humanism as they are played out in Australian crime writer Chris Nyst's *Crook as Rookwood*, whose work, of the three writers chosen, arguably brings the crime novel closest to the tradition of the nineteenth century social novel both in formal and structural terms, and more significantly, perhaps, as an expression of its political optimism and faith, or reformist impulse. Nyst's work might also be viewed as reasonably representative of the politics of what commonly passes for 'progressive' or 'socially conscious' crime fiction (Rendell and Rankin being other examples), which, for many academic critics of the genre, represents, as James Ellroy so eloquently put it, the "soft politics" of the "kind of liberalism I despise".¹⁵⁰

For an increasing number of literary critics from the 1960s on, the liberal or reformist impulse expressed in the traditional social novel is regarded as essentially conservative because it constitutes a plea for the preservation rather than the overthrow of the system. In other words, while writers such as Dickens were scathingly critical of social injustice where they found it, their work ultimately expressed, via its plethora of happy endings, an optimism and faith in the system that served to maintain rather than subvert the status quo. As George Orwell points out, one can "infer the evil of *laissez faire*

¹⁵⁰ James Ellroy quoted in Horsley, *op.cit.*

capitalism" from the whole of Dickens work, but "Dickens makes no such inference himself".¹⁵¹ In fact, as Orwell suggests, insofar as the "whole moral" of Dicken's work might be construed as "capitalists ought to be kind" not "workers ought to be rebellious" Dickens should perhaps be considered pro-capitalist.¹⁵²

Interestingly enough, this standoff between progressive liberalism and radical politics is taken up in much of what passes for socially conscious crime fiction itself. As Jenny Burden, a minor character in Ruth Rendell's *An Unkindness of Ravens* puts it, "If [you] compromise with liberalism, all [your] principles fizzle out and you're back with the status quo."¹⁵³ Burden's words are also echoed in the thoughts of Peter Robinson's Chief Inspector Alan Banks, who often struggles with "the whole sixties view" that "you can't change the system from within".¹⁵⁴ Banks muses, "if you're in it, you become part of it; you become absorbed and corrupted by it, you end up with a *stake* in it. Perhaps this is what had happened to [him]."¹⁵⁵

Banks may be describing the perennial standoff between liberalism and radical politics, but his words can also be interpreted as a kind of metaphor for the contradictory impulses of crime fiction itself, caught in the mire between consumer capitalism on the one hand and State ideology on the other

¹⁵¹ George Orwell, "Charles Dickens," in *Decline of the English Murder and Other Essays*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1965, p.84.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ Ruth Rendell, *An Unkindness of Ravens*, Hutchison & Company, London, 1985, p.144.

¹⁵⁴ Peter Robinson, *In a Dry Season*, Macmillan, London, 1999, p.139.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

(and contaminated by both). However, as we journey through what Australian writer Andrew McGahan has called “ugly times”,¹⁵⁶ the liberal humanist position may prove to be a more interesting, and indeed useful, ally than it appears at first glance, not least because, as George Orwell ultimately came to view the quintessential liberalism of Charles Dickens, it is a position which is both “*generously angry*” and “hated with equal hatred by all the smelly little orthodoxies which are now contending for our souls”.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁶ Andrew McGahan quoted in Nick Grimm, “McGahan Wins Miles Franklin Award,” *AM*, ABC Radio National, www.abc.net.au. McGahan is also the author of a crime novel about political corruption in Queensland. See *Last Drinks*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 2000.

¹⁵⁷ George Orwell, *op.cit.*, p.141.

Red Dragon

Fear in Thomas Harris's *Red Dragon*, the first book in the Hannibal Lecter Trilogy

In an age in which conventional politics seem unable to symbolise social experience, sociologists have argued that a kind of 'emotional democracy' is emerging, in which, as academic Kevin McDonald puts it, "people identify with others through a sharing of what they feel, as opposed to what they believe".¹⁵⁸ McDonald argues that the new role of emotion as a central organising principle of public life can be seen in the growing cult of celebrity and the strange rituals of collective mourning that followed the death of Diana, Princess of Wales. In the political arena, it is apparent in the rise of political campaigns that rely on their "feel" for transmission of their message, as well as in the ubiquitous "presidential-style" campaign in which constituents are called upon to "identify with" the leader, as opposed to merely seeing themselves as "represented by" them. McDonald argues that in such an environment fear has become an increasingly important tool in the creation and manipulation of public consensus, and that through the 1980s and 1990s the criminal as super-predator has increasingly become the cultural figure against which social unities and identities have been constructed.¹⁵⁹

It is perhaps unsurprising that the rise of what has been dubbed 'the politics of fear' has been accompanied by a global shift to the right more generally, as

¹⁵⁸ Kevin McDonald, "Watch Him Burn", *Meanjin*, 4, 1999, p 116-7. See also, L. Boltanski, *Distant Suffering: Morality, Media and Politics*, Cambridge University Press, 1999, *passim*.

¹⁵⁹ Kevin McDonald, *ibid*.

neo-liberal ideas, once thought consigned to the dustbin with the rise of Keynesian economics, staged a comeback. As criminologist David Garland argues, just as the ideal of security in common citizenship that underpinned the welfare state permitted criminals to be seen as members of a socially disadvantaged group, so too the current emphasis on offenders as 'evil' and 'independent' actors is a product of the move towards models of radical individualism in social and economic policy more generally, and the desire of populist New Right governments from Reagan onwards to manipulate and rearticulate forms of popular discontent.¹⁶⁰

On a textual level, these cultural shifts have registered in the outpouring of tales of serial killers, paedophiles, super predators and millennial aliens that have flowed from the laser printers of screenwriters and novelists. With their emphasis on criminals as morally monstrous individuals, bent on carrying out random reprisals against society, these anxiety-inducing narratives fed into wider moral panics over crime, becoming not *reflective of* so much as the *actual texture of* the Reagan-Bush years.

Harris's *Red Dragon*, it could be argued, is typical of the genre. Published in 1981, *Red Dragon* was, according to crime writer, James Ellroy, "the greatest suspense novel ever written".¹⁶¹ *Red Dragon* traces the story of Will Graham, a criminal profiler drafted out of retirement to aid the FBI in tracking a rampaging psychopath committing multiple crimes across the USA. Graham

¹⁶⁰ David Garland, *The Culture of Control: Crime and Social Order in Contemporary Society*, OUP, 2001, *passim*.

¹⁶¹ James Ellroy, "Introduction," *LA Noir: The Lloyd Hopkins Trilogy*, Arrow Books, Random House, London, 1997.

performs this task with the infamous assistance of Hannibal ‘The Cannibal’ Lecter, an incarcerated serial killer, and fictional incarnation of real-life FBI profiler John Douglas’s then fashionable (but now widely discredited) belief that killers should be used to assist the FBI in constructing their profiles. According to the publicity surrounding the novel’s release, Harris completed an FBI training course as part of his research for the novel and modelled the protagonist Will Graham on Douglas himself.¹⁶²

Red Dragon broke new ground in mass-market crime fiction. Not only did it take procedural fidelity to unprecedented lengths but it also was explicit in a way crime novels had not been before (especially in the grisly detail of the crime scenes and the sexual pathology of the killer). For example, on entering the first crime scene on the quiet suburban street that is home to the Leeds family, Graham conducts a six-page analysis of the bloodstains:

He plotted each splash on a measured field sketch of the master bedroom, using the standard comparison plates to estimate the direction and velocity of the bloodfall ... Here was a row of three bloodstains slanting up and around a corner of the bedroom wall. Here were three faint stains on the carpet beneath them. The wall above the headboard on

¹⁶² Woody Haut, *Neon Noir: Contemporary American Crime Fiction*, Serpent’s Tale, London, 1999, p.215.

Charles Leeds's side of the bed was bloodstained, and there were wipes along the baseboards. Graham's field sketch began to look like a join-the-dots puzzle with no numbers. He stared at it, looked up at the room and back to the sketch until his head ached.¹⁶³

Eventually Graham's forensic study tells him that:

Leeds rose with his throat cut and tried to protect the children, losing great gouts of blood in an unmistakable arterial spray as he tried to fight. He was shoved away, fell and died with his daughter in her room.

One of the two boys was shot in bed. The other boy was also found in bed, but he had dust balls in his hair. Police believe he was dragged out from under his bed to be shot.¹⁶⁴

But the ultimate horror of the event isn't revealed until Graham uses his so-called psychological profiling skills to reconstruct the scene:

¹⁶³ Thomas Harris, *Red Dragon*, Corgi Books, 1991, p.14.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p.12.

[The children] had been in a row, seated along the wall facing the bed. An audience. A dead audience. And Leeds. Tied around the chest to the headboard ...What were they watching? Nothing; they were all dead. But their eyes were open. They were watching a performance starring the madman and the body of Mrs Leeds ...¹⁶⁵

It was with this graphic portrayal of violence shot through with sexual anxiety that Harris launched the first in what arguably became one of the most anxiety-inducing trilogies of the late twentieth century. In doing so, he also spawned a whole sub-genre of crime writing, his work serving as a template for subsequent crime narratives such as Patricia Cornwall's Temple Gault series, Val McDermid's Tony Hill series, and an assortment of individual works by writers such as James Patterson, James Ellroy and Lynda La Plante. By the end of the 1980s, as James Ellroy puts it, "mano-a-mano duels of cops and serial killers" became a crime writing "cliché" and the term "serial killer" entered the lexicon of community fear.¹⁶⁶

Peter Messent argues that *Red Dragon* was also revolutionary in that it represented a new kind of "anti-mystery" — where the detective seeks a

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p.18.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

criminal but the reader knows the identity of the criminal well in advance.¹⁶⁷

The detective no longer roams the city, tracing his web of social connections from witness to witness, suspect to suspect, up to the highest reaches of power. Instead the whole network of social relationships that has traditionally aided the detective in the construction of a social narrative is all but extinguished. And the criminal, isolated from all social causes, is sought via the technological apparatus of the State — criminal profiling in the case of *Red Dragon*, but more commonly, as the genre evolved, forensic detection.

In this sense, *Red Dragon* is not a 'whodunnit' or even a 'whydunnit' (though this label is commonly applied to the psychological form of the genre), so much as it is a 'howdunnit', a narrative that relies almost purely on the mechanics of the crime (as evidenced through crime scene reconstruction and other evidential traces) for its internal coherence.

Barry Taylor argues that in narratives of this sort the causal logic and coherence of the traditional mystery is significantly disrupted.

The serial murder is a crime about which
no recognizable story can be told (and
which therefore generates an apparently
uncontainable desire for narration) ...
[Serial murder stands as] the sign of a
threatening randomness, of a

¹⁶⁷ Peter Messent, "American Gothic: Liminality in Thomas Harris's Hannibal Lecter novels," *Journal of American & Comparative Cultures*, Winter 2000, Vol. 23, p. 23.

disappearance of meaningful inter-subjective structures, of demotivated action, of the collapse of authoritative models of explanation and interpretation ... and of the disappearance of the subject.¹⁶⁸

According to Taylor, the serial killer is not a (located) subject, but a (fatal) object, something that happens and keeps happening. The reader's anxiety is located early in the text. The reader fears and anticipates in a way that is fundamentally different to more traditional forms of crime fiction, in which the reader is left to puzzle over events that unravel within a given social framework. In this sense the character of the so-called super predator might be said to have its antecedents not in the Dr Moriarty's of crime writing but in the monsters of Gothic and Horror. It is this potent mix of realist and gothic strategies that allows Harris to take up contemporary material fears, about the changing structure of society and the family, and refocus them against something else.

The Monster

Throughout the Hannibal trilogy Harris deploys Gothic devices to great effect, taking ordinary urban landscapes and rendering them strange through fictional techniques such as defamiliarisation and the uncanny. Mundane suburban streets become home to ritual murder and general visceral excess.

¹⁶⁸ Barry Taylor quoted in Peter Messent, *ibid.*

Otherwise pedestrian characters are given sightless eyes, harelips and speech impediments. Harris's Gothic antecedents are also made clear in the self-conscious inter-textual references scattered through the three books that make up the series. In *Silence of the Lambs*, for example, the *National Tattler* features FBI agent Clarice Starling as the "Bride of Dracula" while Gumb the killer is associated with Frankenstein through the "womanly self" he attempts to create from the skin of his victims. Arguably, Harris's fictional strategy reaches its apogee in *Hannibal*, the final book of the trilogy, which depicts a full-blown Gothic landscape, in which Hannibal Lecter, a new age cannibal, takes centre stage — drifting through Europe's museums and academies, contemplating historic instruments of torture, and, when necessary, evading capture with exotic weaponry dating from the middle ages.

In *Red Dragon*, the killer, Francis Dollarhyde, is, like his Gothic namesake, a Jekyll and Hyde character: his daytime persona of film lab technician "becoming" the Dragon by night, courtesy of his grandmother's dentures and a famous etching by William Blake. Like Hyde and Frankenstein before him, the monster Dollarhyde is created, but in a social laboratory rather than a science laboratory. In this sense he serves as a kind of metaphor for the process of capitalist production itself, which, as Karl Marx once put it, "forms by deforming".¹⁶⁹ Harris takes great pains to detail the alarming abuses of the monster's upbringing, which make him what he is (dumped by his mother, tortured by his grandmother, shunned by the rest of society). But once the

¹⁶⁹ Karl Marx quoted in Franco Moretti, "Dialectic of Fear," *Signs Taken for Wonders: Essays in the Sociology of Literary Forms*, Verso, London, 1983, p.87.

monster is created, he becomes the object of a primal kind of hatred. Like Frankenstein's monster, he is not a human being, but a member of what Mary Shelley called "a race of devils", a race apart.

The Blakean motif that runs through the text also underscores the notion of the murderer as a member of a deformed or alien species. Harris's use of the famous etching *Red Dragon, and Woman Clothed with the Sun* deliberately invokes Blake's idea of the "touched" individual, except that in the killer's mind the romantic urge to create and transform is no longer associated with artistic achievement, but with acts of sexual degradation and human butchery. In other words, not only is the monster a stand-in for the outcast and disenfranchised of the capitalist system, but he takes what is notionally the highest achievement of civilisation and culture and turns it against itself.

The Family

It may be the possibility of random attack that makes the serial killer narrative so alarming (as real life FBI profiler John Douglas once concluded, "anyone can be a victim"¹⁷⁰), but even a cursory examination of the fictional sub-genre shows that the institution most threatened by serial killers is the family — and, in the case of *Red Dragon*, the victims are, quite literally, mom, dad, three kids and a pet. In this sense, *Red Dragon*, and the serial killer narrative more generally, plays directly into the fears and anxieties of its time: viz. the shrinking of the American middle class, the swelling ranks of the working poor, the plethora of moral panics such as those against single mothers, dead

¹⁷⁰ John Douglas quoted in Woody Haut, *op.cit.*, p.215.

beat dads, crack babies, latchkey kids, and the various panaceas put forward by a range of neo-conservative governments including Zero Tolerance, Just Say No, Three Strikes and Megan's Law.

In the novel's opening pages, Jack Crawford, the FBI chief, flicks a series of photographs onto the picnic table, near where criminal profiler Will Graham's own family are playing.

"All dead," he said.

Graham stared at him a moment before picking up the pictures.

They were only snapshots: A woman followed by three children and a duck, carried picnic items up the bank of a pond.

A family stood behind a cake.

Graham looks at the pictures then, "ignoring his guest, watched [his wife] Molly and the boy for as long as he had looked at the pictures".¹⁷¹ In this way, the monster's victims aren't particularised so much as they are generalised. The Leeds and the Jacobi families are just like the Graham family — a stand-in for middle class American families in general. This sense of family normality is embellished as Graham enters the first crime scene at the Leeds home. He smells furniture polish and apples and notes the framed samplers with "homey sayings" on the wall beside the stove. We hear Mrs Leeds's voice through her diary, as she writes fondly of generic family things, such as that

¹⁷¹ Thomas Harris, *Red Dragon*, Corgi Books, London, 1991, p.3.

pivotal all-American institution known as Christmas. We see a home movie of dogs yapping, dad snoring, and the kids in the bath.¹⁷² This is an affluent house, but it is also a house built on the quintessential American middle class values of thrift and hard work. Graham notes:

Mrs Leeds's pantyhose hung on the towel racks where she had left them to dry. He saw she cut the leg off a pair when it had a runner so she could match two one legged pairs, wear them at the same time, and save money. Mrs Leeds's small homey economy pierced him: [his wife] Molly did the same thing.¹⁷³

Again, the strategy is to generalise, not particularise. Mrs Leeds is like Graham's own wife, Molly, becoming a stand-in for women in general. As in the literature of the so-called 'Civilising Mission' of the British Empire, the violation of Mrs Leeds becomes emblematic of the violation of the community as a whole. Similarly, as the narrative progresses, Will Graham, the man who battles the monster, becomes the representative of the community in general. Significantly, he is not an FBI agent but an 'ordinary' citizen, summoned reluctantly from his home in the novel's opening pages to protect society from the predatory acts of a criminal outsider. In fact, Graham is not just an 'ordinary' man, but a kind of 'everyman', possessing the uncanny knack of

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 9-14.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.14.

taking on the attributes of the people around him, including, as Jack Crawford notes, “the rhythm and syntax of [Jack’s] own speech”.¹⁷⁴

In taking on the Dragon, Graham risks losing his own family, both to the evil antics of the monster, and through emotional estrangement from Molly, who takes the children and leaves in the midst of the investigation. Graham risks everything in pursuit of the monster, eventually tracking him down to the photo laboratory where, rather sinisterly, we find the Leeds and the Jacobi families were targeted anonymously through the home movies they sent in for development. But at the end of the narrative it is not Graham but Molly who slays the monster, thought by the FBI to have perished in a house fire, but come back from the dead to wreak his revenge. “Muhner!” the monster literally calls to Molly the moment she shoots him (meaning “Mother!” — he has a speech impediment, a character attribute designed to further reinforce his alien status).¹⁷⁵ Molly, as *Every Mother*, then makes America safe for capitalism by slaying its bastard offspring — and it is through this act of exorcism that the rift in the Graham family, and the larger community, is healed. Hence, the narrative gives grist to one of the great lies of American capitalism, which exalts the family even as it tears it apart.

Politics

In *Red Dragon*, the status quo, in so far as the political system is concerned, is subject to a certain superficial criticism. But like many such narratives, *Red*

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.3

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p.346.

Dragon ultimately criticises the system only to defend it more fully. There is buck-passing among the various branches of law enforcement, in-fighting among Chicago ward bosses over manpower and a fear of stacking patrols in upper middle class neighbourhoods (where the monster has been striking) for political reasons.¹⁷⁶ Later on, when the Dragon is thought to have perished in a house fire, the coroner gives out his card at the crime scene, "Vote for Robert L. Dulaney" — the implication being that the situation will be used for political gain.¹⁷⁷ In this respect, *Red Dragon* is typical of its genre. The State must be shown to be inept so that the 'ordinary citizen' or 'knowing individual' can step forward to sort things out and protect the people. Tellingly, towards the end of the narrative, Reba McClane, a do-gooder liberal who is both literally and metaphorically blind to the monster's true nature, attempts to befriend him, and has to be saved in the nick of time from the monster, and by extension, from her own liberalism as well. "Do you know him?" Reba asks the policewoman stationed at her bedside, when Graham enters her hospital room. "I know he's a Federal Officer, Miss McClane," comes the unproblematic reply.¹⁷⁸ Clearly, the monsters aren't in the system. They are what threatens the status quo.

Civilisation

In "Dialectic of Fear", a study of Victorian Gothic literature, Franco Moretti argues that "the literature of terror is studded with passages where the protagonists brush up against the awareness ... that the perturbing element is

¹⁷⁶ Harris, *op.cit.*, p.250.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.337.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p.333.

*within them: it is they themselves that produce the monsters they fear.*¹⁷⁹ Harris commences *Red Dragon* with a similar observation, quoting Alphonse Bertillon, "One can only see what one observes, and one observes only things which are already in the mind."¹⁸⁰ As the narrative unfolds, Harris takes the reader into a seemingly complicated world where the line between the monster and the detective who seeks him is not as firm as one might initially suppose, reflecting the generally unarticulated anxiety that the brutality ascribed to monstrous Others is in fact mere self-reflection. Early on we are told that Graham fears the contagion of the monster inside him. "There were no effective partitions in his mind," he muses to himself as he wanders over the crime scene.

What he saw and learned touched everything he knew. Some of the combinations were hard to live with. But he could not anticipate them, could not block and repress. His learned values of decency and propriety tagged along, shocked at his associations, appalled at his dreams ...¹⁸¹

Not only must Graham battle the monsters inside him; he must battle Hannibal Lecter's insistence that he and the monster are alike. "Do you know how you caught me, Will?" Lecter taunts at the end of their consultation. "The

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p.102.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, frontispiece.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p.15.

reason you caught me is that we're just alike."¹⁸² Indeed, at one stage, Graham's brush with monsters internal and external brings him to the brink of madness — following his visit with Lecter he is exposed in the *National Tatler* as having spent time in a mental hospital. But, of course, the lesson the whole thrust of the narrative imparts is that Graham should not be afraid of going mad, he should be afraid of the monster: that we're not "just alike", that the monster isn't human.

With the monster's death in *Red Dragon*, the threat to Graham's psychological security is withdrawn and we return to the status quo, both in terms of Graham's identity as husband/father/citizen and the established social order. This restoration of order is aided by a strong thematic strand that runs through the book, whereby the borders between 'civilisation' and 'savagery' are redrawn. This theme is reinforced throughout the series with a variety of intertextual references to the frontier literature of the Wild West. For instance, the serial killer in *The Silence of the Lambs* is nicknamed 'Buffalo Bill' for his predilection for skinning his victims. In *Hannibal*, Starling is dubbed 'Annie Oakley' for her ability to shoot. While in *Red Dragon*, Graham's wife, Molly, refers to Graham's showdown with the serial killer as "High Noon and all that".¹⁸³ At the end of *Red Dragon*, this old frontier discourse more commonly used to demonise indigenous 'Others' while placing 'us' among the righteous is carefully restored. In a blistering image of social contagion, Graham argues that knowing we were once savage is what gives us the chance not to be so again.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, p.67.

¹⁸³ Harris, *op.cit.* p.7.

He understood murder uncomfortably well, though.

He wondered if, in the great body of humankind, in the minds of men set on civilisation, the vicious urges we control in ourselves and the dark instinctive knowledge of those urges function like the crippled virus the body arms against.

He wondered if old, awful urges are the virus that makes vaccine.¹⁸⁴

For Harris, it must be something ancient and savage that makes the monster. The idea that the monster might be a product of the present, of the very 'civilisation' the book upholds is, oddly enough, far too frightening.

Franco Moretti has argued that the entire strategy of the literature of terror is to take up social and material fears and transform them into "something else" (ie. monsters), so that the reader does not have to face up to what really frightens them. He argues that such literature does this in order to obtain consent to ideological values that the narrative places beyond dispute. He writes:

The more these great symbols of mass culture depart from reality, the more, of

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p.354.

necessity, they must expand and enrich the structures of false consciousness: which is nothing other than the dominant culture. They are not confined to distortion and falsification: they form, affirm, convince. And this process is automatic and self-propelling.¹⁸⁵

Despite the ultra-realist tag that accompanied the novel's release, *Red Dragon* is a book that blends mythology and fear to great effect. But it is perhaps too simple to argue that it creates a false or misleading picture of contemporary America, harnessing free-floating social anxiety over the various depredations on the family occasioned by the restructuring of the American economy under Reagan and turning them into "something else". Aside from the obvious theoretical shortcomings of the false consciousness argument (that the reader is essentially a dupe), Moretti underestimates the productive potential of narrative — the way in which popular narratives such as *Red Dragon* never stay in the realm of the purely imaginative, but become part of material American culture, feeding into a broader cultural reshaping of popular political thought about the nature of American society, and a material reshaping of political practices, as manifested in the various bureaucratic responses to moral panics over crime in the period, including Zero Tolerance, Three Strikes and Megan's Law. In other words, such narratives do not mask the nature of social reality, as Moretti asserts, but help to produce it.

¹⁸⁵ Moretti, *op.cit.*, p.105.

Traditional critics such as Martin Amis have argued that it is “corrupt” to enlist Harris’s work as an example of “literature”, let alone a genre of high moral seriousness such as the social novel — or, at best, an instance of what he calls “Philistine hip”.¹⁸⁶ But judged by any process through which social narratives become enfranchised as social objects (that is, embraced as a genuinely popular form of narrative capable of dealing with “the great structures and transformations of social life”¹⁸⁷), it might well be argued that *Red Dragon*, and the serial killer genre it engendered, is one of the greatest and most insidious social narratives of our time.

¹⁸⁶ Martin Amis, “Bob Sneed Broke the Silence,” *The War Against Cliché*, Jonathan Cape, London, 2001, p.234.

¹⁸⁷ Moretti, op.cit., p.248.

LA Confidential

Mythology in James Ellroy's *LA Confidential*, the third book in the *LA Quartet*

One of the most significant mutations in the crime genre in the 20th century is the shift away from the private eye of traditional hardboiled to the waged cop of the police procedural, in which, as Peter Messent argues, the romantic fantasy of extra-systemic freedom is abandoned for the gritty reality of detectives operating collectively through the bureaucratic matrix of the police force, in a way that brings the social meaning of detection squarely into view.¹⁸⁸ But in leaving the fantasy of the private eye behind, the police procedural also abandoned its oppositional politics. Where Hammett and Chandler journeyed to Bay City and Poisonville and found corruption at all levels of the city administration, in the police procedurals of writers such as Val McDermid, Barry Maitland or P.D. James, the state is generally portrayed as unquestioningly benign in its quest to bring order. Individuals within the system may be guilty of avarice or ambition, but the system itself is seldom shown to be corrupt. Even where corruption is exposed and the system is shown to be faulty, some fundamentally decent cop — Ian Rankin's John Rebus, for example — always steps forward to sort things out and protect the people. Or else, as in the serial killer narrative, the minor corruptions for which the State is responsible are overshadowed in the face of some 'Other' morally monstrous being.

¹⁸⁸ Peter Messent, "From Private Eye to Police Procedural," *op.cit.*, pp. 1-21.

James Ellroy's *LA Quartet*, published through the 1980s and 1990s, was revolutionary in its departure from the moral absolutes that have traditionally defined the genre, mapping a dark urban landscape in which the fine line between state agents and criminals is all but eroded and corruption exceeds every effort to contain it. Collectively, the four novels of the *Quartet* span twenty-three years in the history of post-war Los Angeles. Their dramas unfold in the context of a transforming urban landscape, in which real estate development goes hand in hand with the rise of cultural spectacle (Hollywood and Disneyland), which the many-tentacled plots of the novels show to be inextricably linked with powerful combinations of corporate and political interests. The narratives connect police and criminals to black bag operations of mammoth proportions, featuring corporate cover-ups, political trade-offs, double and triple crosses, vast webs of official lies and distortion, and endlessly shifting alliances between interests.

Ellroy has long characterised himself as a buster of cosy American myths. According to Ellroy, America did not "fall from grace" because "you can't lose what you lacked at conception". "America was never innocent," he says. "We popped our cherry on the boat over and looked back with no regrets."¹⁸⁹ This demythologising impulse colours every aspect of Ellroy's work, but is especially evident in the *Quartet*, which provides not just an alternative history of one of America's greatest cities, but a critique of the mythologising impulse itself. One of the most startling features of the urban history recorded in the *Quartet* is the way in which the sunshine images of LA projected by the

¹⁸⁹ James Ellroy quoted in Lee Horsley, "Founding Fathers: Genealogies of Violence in James Ellroy's *LA Quartet*," *Clues*, Vol. 19.2, Fall/Winter 1998, p. 139.

city's power elites are shadowed by their perverse inversions. The novels describe a vast urban landscape that is littered with double signs. In *LA Confidential*, hookers cut to look like movie stars darkly mirror the goddesses of Hollywood's silver screen, a television cop show named *Badge of Honor* mirrors the LAPD as a stomping ground for sex fiends and criminals, and the pornographic animations which are eventually linked to the grisly series of murders that dominate the story, provide a nightmare version of Walt Disney's famous cartoon aesthetic — which, in the context of the novel, comes to represent everything that is fraudulent in American life.

In fact nothing in Ellroy's *Quartet* is quite what it seems. The trajectory of each story maps a descent into an urban netherworld in which, as Luc Sante puts it, "every horror merely serves to conceal greater horrors" and "questions apparently resolved get opened again and again".¹⁹⁰ The novels operate via the inversion of a dream-like logic where the characters wake not to reality so much as to the presence of a nightmare crammed with an entire catalogue of human horrors (disarticulated corpses, bodies chewed up by simulated wolf teeth, bird feathers sewn onto the mutilated corpses of children, a deadly psychopath who ejaculates into the empty eye-sockets of his victims). As rape victim Inez de Soto says to Ed Exley at the opening of *Dream-a-Dreamland*: "You know what's scary? What's scary is that I feel good today because this place is like a wonderful dream, but I know it's got to get really bad again because what happened was a hundred times more real than this."¹⁹¹ The American dream as nightmare is the real subject of Ellroy's fiction, and as

¹⁹⁰ Luc Sante, "Low Lifes," *New York Review of Books*, Vol. 42, No. 8, May 11, 1995.

¹⁹¹ James Ellroy, *LA Confidential*, Random House, Sydney, 1990., p.184

academic Lee Horsley argues, Ellroy uses the extreme possibilities of the crime genre to restore to this familiar theme its full component of terror.¹⁹²

The narrative of *L.A. Confidential* — the third novel in the *Quartet* — unravels through the points of view of three characters in the 1950s LAPD: Clean-cut cop, Edmund Exley, a detective driven on by an overweening ambition, who lives in the shadow of his cop-turned-construction-king father; celebrity cop, Jack Vincennes, aka the 'Big V', technical adviser to television cop show *Badge of Honor*, who busts movie stars for pay-offs from the editor of sleazy *Hush-Hush* magazine, whose editor, Sid Hudgens, has a dirt file on him; and Bud White, whose memory of his mother's murder at the hands of his father fuels a terrifying violence, which is mostly, but not always, directed against those who commit their acts of brutality against women. In typical Ellroy fashion each character is also given a dispensation. Exley desires "absolute justice" (so long as it doesn't interfere with his career). Jack seeks redemption (but there is much from which he must be redeemed). And Bud believes in loyalty (though as things turn out his loyalties are both misplaced and misguided).

The lives of the three characters collide during an incident the media subsequently dubs "Bloody Christmas", when six prisoners are beaten senseless by their drunken gaolers. Exley turns crown witness, telling not the truth, but a politically sanitised version designed to protect the reputation of the LAPD and propel his career. In doing so, he curries animosity from the rest of his colleagues, especially Bud White for "snitching" his partner, Dick Stens. Jack also turns witness under pressure from his bureau-mentor,

¹⁹² Lee Horsley, *op.cit.*, p.140.

Captain Dudley Smith, and District Attorney Ellis Loew, for whom Jack “runs bag”, but takes the blame for Bud’s shipment of alcohol as a sop to his cop loyalties. Meanwhile Bud White risks certain indictment by refusing to play the political game and sticking by his partner, who instigated the bashings — a move that so impresses the corrupt cop and villain of the piece, Captain Dudley Smith, that he ensures Bud’s exoneration and recruits him to his ultra-violent “Mobster Squad”.

The construction of the officially sanctioned narrative that is “Bloody Christmas” is followed by the officially sanctioned version of the “Nite Owl Massacre”, an incident in which six patrons of the Nite Owl greasy spoon are murdered, and the characters’ paths cross again. Once again, for reasons of political expediency, blame for the murders is shifted onto the black population of southside LA. Three black youths are apprehended, but escape custody. In the manhunt that follows, Exley shoots the three suspects, unarmed and in the back, an act of fear and cowardice that perversely turns into a public relations coup for the LAPD, ensuring that Exley is “made” as a cop. Chief Parker awards him the Police Medal of Valour for “spectacular bravery”, the newspapers dub him “LA’s Greatest Hero”, and the power elites that govern the city combine to sustain the officially-sanctioned narrative so that “nobody mentions the niggers were unarmed”.¹⁹³

Exley is not the hero of the hour, as Ellroy makes abundantly clear, but a kind of impostor. The fraudulence of his position is underscored during the award ceremony when Chief Parker mentions Exley’s “war hero” status,

¹⁹³ James Ellroy, *LA Confidential*, op.cit., p.247.

particularly the Distinguished Service Medal “for gallantry” that the reader already knows was won by igniting a pile of “hari kiri” corpses with a flamethrower, and claiming he had taken out a Japanese outpost. Despite this, Exley has “tears in his eyes” as his medal is conferred — showing that cowardice and fear, not to mention cold-blooded murder, are not incommensurable with politics.¹⁹⁴

Social resonance in *Ellroy* is largely a product of plot. Hence, no sooner is the officially-sanctioned narrative of the “Nite Owl Massacre” put together, than it begins to unravel in a complicated story scenario which acts as a counter-narrative to the lies propagated by LA’s power elites. Forced by a campaign of rumours to investigate the flaws in his so-called “glory case”, Exley uncovers a giant conspiracy with tentacles extending into the upper reaches of the political and business worlds, involving heroin from a hijacked Cohen-Dragna drug deal, pornography from a racket belonging to shady LA businessman, Pierce Moorhouse Patchett, who runs a “stable” of “whores cut to look like movie stars”, and the crashing of imprisoned crime boss Mickey Cohen’s rackets by LAPD Captain Dudley Smith. The conspiracy reaches back in time to his ex-cop father Preston Exley’s own “glory case”, the so-called Atherton Case, involving the serial murder and dismemberment of children. As things turn out, his father has also solved his case wrongly, so that, in the context of the unfolding narrative, the Atherton Case no longer represents a single isolated crime but becomes yet another element in a vast criminal conspiracy with tentacles reaching into the present and future.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.248

The lines of the conspiracy, laid out in graphs and charts on the wall of Exley's office, are also tied to the material infrastructure of Los Angeles through the city-building activities of the "father figures" at the centre of the case. These include Exley's own father, construction king Preston Exley, who has been contracted to build the freeway system connecting Hollywood to downtown LA, and, metaphorically speaking, the urban reality that is downtown LA to Hollywood's dream factory. Raymond Dieterling, a thinly disguised version of Walt Disney, and founder of Dream-a-Dreamland, also built by Exley Constructions, who, despite his claim of "kind and good" intentions, perhaps bears greatest responsibility for the horrific events of the novel. Shady LA businessman and "sugar daddy-o" Pierce Moorhouse Patchett, whose selfish desires for a quick buck draws people around him deeply into wrongdoing. And lastly, Captain Dudley Smith, the Godfather of the LAPD who calls each of its officers "lad". Each of these men is seen to represent different forms, and perversions, of the American Dream. As Raymond Dieterling says to Ed Exley, "Your father, Pierce and I were dreamers. Pierce's dreams were twisted, mine were kind and good. Your father's dreams were ruthless — as I suspect yours are".¹⁹⁵ These dreams produce both the grisly catalogue of crimes that dominate the story and Dream-a-Dreamland itself, whose rockets, castles, and cartoon figures come to serve as a grimly ironic comment on the myth of American innocence.

Justice, Civilisation and the Hero

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.465.

In *Private Dicks and Feisty Chicks* Australian writer and academic Catherine Cole discusses the ways in which readers of crime fiction engage in all sorts of moral evasions — that reading about the ‘guilty’ perversely reassures the reader of their ‘innocence’, that indulging in the complete pleasure of a text may even require readers to check their own politics at the door. In crime fiction, such pleasures are arguably made possible through the ways in which the reader’s sympathies are engaged by the hero-protagonist in the guise of detective, and the way in which the reader identifies, and detects along with them.¹⁹⁶ But in Ellroy, the reader’s desire to make a hero of the protagonist is deliberately thwarted at every turn.

In place of what Ellroy once derided as the “soft politics” and “prettified brutality”¹⁹⁷ of traditional hardboiled, Ellroy confronts his readers with protagonists who run the full gamut of social prejudices: racism, fascism, misogyny, and, in the case of Detective Edmund J. Exley, hypocrisy as well. As the case spins out of control, Exley approaches his cop-turned-construction-king father for answers about the Atherton case, a case that, from the outset of the novel, Preston Exley constantly tells his son to remember as an example of “crimes that require absolute justice”.¹⁹⁸ When pressed about the case, Preston Exley replies in the language of pragmatism:

I want you to consider this. The Nite Owl
case got you where you are today and a

¹⁹⁶ Catherine Cole, *Private Dicks and Feisty Chicks: An Interrogation of Crime Fiction*, Curtain University Press, 2004, pp. 85-120.

¹⁹⁷ James Ellroy quoted in *ibid.*, p. 91.

¹⁹⁸ James Ellroy, *LA Confidential*, *op.cit.*, p.19.

quick resolution on the reopening will keep you there. Collateral homicide investigations, however compelling, might seriously distract you from your main objective and thus destroy your career. Please remember that.¹⁹⁹

Exley Jnr replies in the language of seeming idealism:

Absolute justice. Remember that?²⁰⁰

“Absolute justice” is a recurring theme in the novel, and a cornerstone of the myth of American civilisation and democracy that the novel sets out to debunk. Ostensibly forced to make a choice between his career and his father’s wealth and reputation, and his albeit fuzzy notion of what’s right, Exley decides to pursue the case to its limit. In doing so, he uncovers yet another crime concealed in the closed file of the Atherton Case, in the form of a pact made between Dieterling and his father, in which Preston Exley secretly carried out the execution of Dieterling’s second son, who he wrongly suspected to be guilty of the grisly child murders carried out by his brother, and whom Dieterling himself knew to be innocent. A pact made in the name of “Absolute justice”, on which the alliance between the Exley and Dieterling Empires were founded, and which, as Lee Horsley argues, represents a chilling image of the history of America as a “genealogy of violence” in

¹⁹⁹ James Ellroy, *LA Confidential*, op.cit., p.347.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

which the literal and metaphorical “founding fathers” visit their crimes upon their sons.²⁰¹

Unfortunately, Preston’s own son, the hero-impersonator Ed Exley, is every inch his father’s damaged son. He allegedly pursues the case in the name of “Absolute justice”, but is ultimately shown to do so for some exceedingly dubious reasons — rank careerism, deep-seated Oedipal animosity, and an arrogant sense that he is smart enough to play against the system and win. When Preston Exley takes his own life as a result of his son’s revelations — as do Raymond Dieterling, and Exley’s ex-girl-friend, the rape victim, Inez de Soto — we think not of the detective-hero who has risked everything for some fuzzy notion of “Justice”, however misguided, but of the boy who “danced” a “jig” when told that his older cop brother had died at the hands of a “bag snatch”.²⁰² In this way, “absolute justice” is shown to be just another lie propagated by bad white men who do bad things in the name of authority. Like ‘civilisation’ and ‘democracy’, ‘justice’ is revealed as a fabrication designed to serve the power elites, and the prevailing political regime.

The debunking of moral absolutes and large-scale myths means that Ellroy’s readers, detecting along with the detectives, are forced to navigate a landscape devoid of clear moral signposts. On a textual level, these troubled negotiations are reflected in the disorientating nature of the narrative itself. The mind-boggling welter of events, with multiple plot twists and shifting locations, the sheer quantity of characters, with revolving character points of

²⁰¹ Lee Horsley, *op.cit.*, *passim*.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, p.402.

view and swift staccato prose, work to suggest the problematic nature of any authoritative negotiation of the novel's terrain. This sense of narrative excess is also highlighted in the character's attempts to contain it. In *La Confidential*, paperwork is both an expositional strategy and a recurring motif. The pages of the novel are crammed with graphs, maps and wall charts (filled with countless "horizontal" and "vertical lines" linked to "information sections"), memorandums, case files, crime sheets, canvassing and shakedown reports (and their nightmare doubles in the form of *Hush Hush* editor Sid Hudgen's "dirt files"), signifying the protagonist's will to contain and master the city's narrative, while simultaneously pointing to that impossibility.

In this confused and confusing landscape, both the protagonists and readers of the novel are forced to make moral decisions where all of the available choices are unclear or unpalatable. This lack of obvious moral inflection contributes to what critics such as Mike Davies have called the "unmitigated blackness" of the *Quartet*. As Davies observes:

Quartet attempts to map the history of modern Los Angeles as a secret continuum of sex crimes, satanic conspiracies and political corruption. ... Yet in building such an all-encompassing noir mythology ... Ellroy risks extinguishing the genre's tensions, and inevitably, its power. In his pitch blackness there is no light left to cast

shadows and evil becomes a forensic
banality.²⁰³

In “James Ellroy, Los Angeles and the Spectacular Crisis of Masculinity” Josh Cohen extends Davies’s point, arguing that while Ellroy’s novels successfully demystify the spectacular forces of politics and economics that constitute the urban landscape, they do not make that world any more available to collective or individual agency — and hence, political action. Cohen argues:

Embodied agency is reduced by the unremitting processes of urban change to an inarticulably enraged masculine subjectivity, more often directed toward the brutalisation of female objects, who function as repositories of male hysteria, than towards identifiable forces of political and economic power.²⁰⁴

Cohen is typical of those critics who place gender at the centre of their analysis of Ellroy, concerned that the protagonists of his novels articulate a kind of violent misogyny or “displaced rage against an apparently feminised ‘object-world’”. As Cohen points out, this projection of the feminine takes on a variety of forms. The dismembered corpse of Elizabeth Short that lies at the heart of *The Black Dahlia*, the manipulative promiscuity of communist

²⁰³ Mike Davies, quoted in Woody Haut, *op.cit.*, p.151.

²⁰⁴ Josh Cohen, “James Ellroy: LA and the Crisis of Masculinity” in Peter Messent ed., *Criminal Proceedings, op.cit.*, p. 185.

organiser Claire de Haven in *The Big Nowhere*, the prostitutes “cut to look like movie stars” that wander through the pages of *LA Confidential*.²⁰⁵ However, what critics such as Cohen fail to consider is the extent of the demythologising impulse that informs Ellroy’s work, especially the way in which it encompasses the masculine ideal of the hero/anti-hero as well. Understood as the testosterone-fuelled fantasies of a male defective, Ellroy’s feminine projections are not patriarchal images (ie. women as passive objects/empty repositories for masculine desire) so much as they are images of what Ellroy’s own wife, the feminist author and critic, Helen Knode, calls “patriarchy on the skids”.²⁰⁶

This is not to say that gender is not an important consideration in any analysis of Ellroy, but that the issues he raises are not entirely reducible to issues of gender. In place of the masculine ideal of the hero/anti-hero as purposeful, and if not successful, at least effective, Ellroy presents the reader with an array of imposters and male defectives. His hero-protagonists do not drive the action so much as they appear to be driven by it, becoming agents and victims, subjects and objects of the vast web of material forces the novel describes. In Ellroy, characters negotiate with the power structures as they see them, not in light of the absolute values (good versus evil, progressive versus regressive) the reader has come to expect of crime fiction, but in the light of their own (often unenlightened) interests and (often misguided) loyalties. In this sense, the agency afforded the characters is indeed, in

²⁰⁵ Josh Cohen, *ibid.*, p.169.

²⁰⁶ Helen Knode quoted in Evan Roth, “Murder Close to the Heart,” *Ellroy Confidential*, May 23, 1995, www.edark.org.

Cohen's words, "divested of any utopian charge".²⁰⁷ But it also signals a more complex enunciation of the subject and its relationship to the social world.

In other words, nobody, not even the hero, enjoys immunity from the system in Ellroy. But contrary to Cohen and Davies's analyses I would suggest that Ellroy does in fact allow his protagonists a limited mobility through the labyrinth. At the end of the novel, the villain of the piece, Captain Dudley Smith, still holds sway over the LAPD, and the ramifications of Preston Exley's and Raymond Dieterling's bad acts continue. But within the constraints provided by the narrative, the protagonists do make small gestures of defiance. Bud White recognises the criminality of his mentor and defies him, throwing his Medal of Valour back at Chief Parker before exiting the stage for Frisbe, Arizona. Exley damns his father for "all the bad things you made me" and, for reasons that are morally dubious at best, stays within the system to fight another day.²⁰⁸ This is not the textbook heroism that readers have come to expect from crime fiction, but the actions of limited men who are compromised at every turn. Ultimately, in Ellroy, it isn't the hero or villain but the 'system' itself that stands indicted.

Ellroy puts it like this:

[The] hero bucks the system and wins — I think if you were to calculate the themes in eighteen out of twenty of the top

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p.480.

grossing movies of all time, that's what you'd get — but you know that doesn't happen ... The system grinds you to dust. And my hero has to be aware of this, and that whatever victories he gets will be compromised, brutally finite, and fraught with ambiguities.²⁰⁹

Ellroy's desire to portray this 'system' in all its complexity is what links his work most strongly with the encyclopedic ambitions of the old social novel. It is also what takes the crime novel away from what I would argue is its largely inaccurate figuration as an existential conflict between alienated individuals and the modern urban landscape, weaving its narratives back through the material terrors of history. But the densely layered spectacle that is part of the material texture of contemporary urban life also poses representational problems that both require and exceed the traditional novel form. In other words, Ellroy's task is not just one of articulating and describing the social world, but demythologising it as well. Engaging not just material 'reality' as such, but the dazzling signs that conceal it. In so far as the accumulated horrors of Ellroy's oeuvre serve as a rebuttal to the mythologising impulse that constructs present day American "reality" it might even be argued that the narratives of September 11 are foreshadowed in them.

²⁰⁹ James Ellroy quoted in Catherine Cole, *Private Dicks and Feisty Chicks: An Interrogation of Crime Fiction*, *op.cit.*, p.128.

Crook as Rookwood

The 'System' in Chris Nyst's *Crook as Rookwood*, the second novel featuring criminal lawyer Eddie Moran

Australia's convict heritage has often been invoked to explain Australian society's complex attitude to law and order. One need only turn to the legend of Ned Kelly or the public love affair with the quasi-fictional recollections of Mark 'Chopper' Reed to see the ways in which romanticised images of the bushranger or dinky-di crook play into our national self-concepts and self-delusions. Given Australia's flawed history of law-enforcement (which throws up such startling figures as Premiers Robin Askin and Joh Bjelke Petersen, not to mention detectives Ray 'Gunner' Kelly, Fred 'Froggy' Krahe and Roger 'The Dodger' Rogerson to name just a few), it is perhaps not surprising that in Australian crime fiction the detective is more likely to be modelled on the oppositional figure of the private eye rather than the police officer, with Peter Corris's Cliff Hardy and Marele Day's Claudia Valentine being obvious examples. However, as the technological apparatus of law enforcement has arguably rendered the private eye genre less credible, a number of writers have turned to detective figures with one foot inside, and the other outside, the system, such as Shane Maloney's Labor Party apparatchik, Murray Wheelan, who, from his privileged position as electorate secretary, and subsequently advisor, to a minister in Victoria's Cain Labor Government, rattles the proverbial skeletons and shows the party faithful where the corpses are buried. The detective in Chris Nyst's *Crook as Rookwood*, the obnoxious but ethical lawyer, Eddie Moran, falls firmly inside this

tradition. His position as a police insider/outsider permits a more complex articulation of the politics of law and order, as he picks his way through a system in which the criminals appear to be the victims, and the law enforcers are the crooks.

Moran enters the narrative as a man ground down by the system; besieged on a morning flight from the Gold Coast to Sydney by careless flight attendants, obstreperous fellow-passengers, crowded airline terminals, a dire lack of taxis, and an angry encounter with a “meticulously dressed gentleman” in a “navy pinstriped suit” who attempts to jump the taxi queue because he simply “failed to understand the barriers that led the rest of the cattle to their trucks.”²¹⁰ With such an introduction the reader has no choice but to engage with the “battler” who sides with the “cattle” against those who seek to jump ahead of the rest, especially when that interloper turns out to be the running dog for the corporate interests of an insurance agency attempting to prevent Moran’s client, a tough working class “chick” named Kirsteen (aka Slick), from collecting the insurance payable on the death of her husband, the small-time criminal and ex-junkie, Trevor Ellowe.

As the story unfolds, the increasingly flamboyant Moran, in his “crumpled black stovepipe trousers, open-neck mauve shirt, crimson jacket and high-heeled black suede boots”,²¹¹ combines the outsider status of a rock star such as Tex Perkins with the dissenting position of the traditional PI-protagonist. He is an “arrogant, uncompromising court brawler, who did no deals and

²¹⁰ Chris Nyst, *Crook as Rookwood*, HarperCollins, 2005, p.68.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.324.

never took a backward step”,²¹² a “straight-shooter” who sets himself up against the “deal-swingers” of the system.²¹³ As the principal detective figure, Moran is the primary bearer of suspense in the narrative, but interestingly enough, in this crime-cum-social novel, with a large cast of characters drawn from a diverse range of social groups, he isn’t the hero. This is a role reserved for the sometimes naive, if not altogether sappy, property developer, Michael Wiltshire.

The action of *Crook as Rookwood* is set in the inner circles of the NSW Labour Right, against the property boom of Sydney’s inner west. The narrative commences when Wiltshire returns to Sydney, having made his considerable fortune from Sunshine Coast property deals, with his eyes on an inner-western suburbs seat. To some of the local Labor Party old-timers, Wiltshire looks like what they are more accustomed to call a “poodle”, but he is also the son of a trade union heavyweight, which, in true Labor tradition, makes him something of a prodigal. “Charlie Wiltshire’s brilliant boy, returned to take his rightful place at the party table.”²¹⁴ More importantly, at least, in so far as Wiltshire’s political ambitions are concerned, he has the support of his old schoolmate, Gary Sharpe, who has scrambled his way up the greasy pole to become Labor’s number one dealmaker and powerbroker. According to Wiltshire, “Gary Sharpe had it all planned. He had all the answers.”²¹⁵ And according to Sharpey, the well-heeled Michael Wiltshire is just what the Labor Party needs — that is, until Wiltshire naively announces that he “wants to

²¹² *Ibid.*, p.326.

²¹³ *Ibid.*

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.425.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.425.

make a difference".²¹⁶ Nevertheless, things seem to be going smoothly enough, until the ex-junkie and general thug for hire, Trevor Ellowe, is found wrapped around a telephone pole in Sydney's Kings Cross.

Wiltshire, dismayed by the murky revelations at the inconclusive and obviously "fixed" inquest into the death of Ellowe, abandons his political ambitions and departs for the Gold Coast. He arrives back in Sydney several years later only to find himself charged with Ellowe's murder and approached for a cool million to have the charges dropped. The scam goes wrong when the incarcerated and humiliated Wiltshire calls in lawyer Eddie Moran, who immediately follows a series of paper trails through Wiltshire's business dealings, local transport tycoon Fred Hardings' political activities, a series of euphemistically named "consultancy fees" paid to a disgraced police officer named Roger Baston, all of which leads Moran back to Wiltshire's old schoolmate and Labor Party comrade, Gary Sharpe.

When Moran looks like winning the case, Sharpey, the ultimate "deal-swing", who is now ensconced in Canberra as Minister for Foreign Affairs, attempts to have the matter fixed, just as he has fixed everything else in his meteoric rise to power. He gets the State Attorney General Don Bollard to intervene with the magistrate. But for once somebody in the system isn't playing the game. Caught out in the witness box, Sharpey is merely baffled when he finally comes face to face with a Labor-nominated magistrate who refuses to be fixed.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.33.

Sue Withnall was supposed to be a friend of the party. She had no known allegiances to the Labor left. So why wasn't she backing him up? These questions had no relevance to the Wiltshire case. Couldn't she see this kind of muck-raking was just giving the press a free run at the party, playing right into the Tories' hands?²¹⁷

The irony of Sharpey's situation is underscored by the fact that Withnall does not act out of outraged morality or a concept of the public good, but from motives less pure. While Sharpey and Bollard believe she owes the party for her appointment to the bench, Withnall herself feels that she ought to have been appointed as a judge of the District Court or higher.

Eventually, Sharpey is condemned out of his own mouth, revealing, through his own testimony, the existence of a many-tentacled conspiracy connecting him to the Ellowe murder, via an assortment of murky police and underworld dealings. The resulting political scandal draws even the Prime Minister into the mire. He rings the Attorney General to ask whether the government could set aside the magistrate's verdict, and indict Wiltshire ex-officio, as a species of damage control to tide them over the forthcoming election. The Attorney General Don Bollard, an old school chum of Sharpey's, delivers the final coup de grace.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.442.

“Too dangerous, mate. This one’s got an awful smell under it.”

“You don’t think Sharpey could be involved in it, do you?”

The long pause answered his question.

“Could be.”

There was another hollow silence before the Prime Minister eventually whispered his reaction.

“Shit.”²¹⁸

Like the magistrate Sue Withnall, Bollard does not act out of anything approaching moral rectitude, but to safeguard his own interests, principally because the real (if somewhat flawed) hero of the story, namely the criminal justice system itself, has stepped into the breach, with the Independent Commission Against Corruption launching its own investigation. All through the novel Sharpey has played the system against itself, but it is fundamental to the book’s sense of narrative justice that the system under which he benefited should also prove to be his undoing. “So how do we ditch him without hurting the party?”²¹⁹ the Prime Minister asks.

In “Law Crimes: the Legal Fictions of John Grisham and Scott Turrow”, Nick Heffernan argues that the lawyer procedural is distinguished by the way in

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.452.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.453.

which lawyers, rather than their clients, are the heroes of the action, with the concentration of plot falling on the lawyer's activities outside (not inside) the courtroom, in a way that is intended to draw the reader into the professional and occupational culture of lawyers. According to Heffernan, in these sorts of novels the law is meant to resonate with some sort of procedural fairness that does not necessarily match the reality of the corporate law firm as depicted in the story. The yuppie heroes of such books embody and act out these contradictions, typically by being required to make a personal choice between making more money and "doing the right thing".²²⁰ In *Crook as Rookwood*, Nyst does something significantly different.

Like his generic counterparts in the lawyer procedural, Eddie Moran's role is primarily one of unravelling the details of the crime, but unlike such lawyers his crime-solving activities are generally confined to the courtroom, specifically to cross-examinations in the witness box. Outside the court, Moran is just another bit-player in an ensemble cast, with the role of the detective being split between characters. Kirsteen, the murder victim's ex-wife and nanny to Michael Wiltshire's boy, wants to find out what happened to her deceased ex-husband. Wiltshire does too, even before he is arrested and gaoled for Ellowe's murder. Wiltshire hires ex-Queensland cop turned private detective Frank Vagianni to help him find out. Vagianni locates retired Marrickville Branch Secretary, Barry Dougherty, who thinks he knows what happened to Ellowe and to old Tommy Attwell, a long-time Marrickville resident evicted from his worker's cottage to make way for

²²⁰ Nick Heffernan, "Law Crimes: The Legal Fictions of John Grisham and Scott Turow," in Peter Messent ed., *Criminal Proceedings*, op.cit., p.187-213.

Wiltshire's inner city residential complex, in a violent incident organised by Sharpey to safeguard his financial investment in Wiltshire's business concerns. When Dougherty winds up dead, Vagianni is also pressed into service by Detective Sasha Kelly of the Queensland Police, who wants to find out what her corrupt colleagues are up to south of the state border.

If the focus of the action does not rest entirely on Eddie Moran, nor does it rest on Eddie Moran's client, Michael Wiltshire, who is both the hero (and victim) of the story. Wiltshire is a hero of a peculiarly Dickensian sort, a kind of blank surface or foil against which the more interesting grotesques and gargoyles that make up the rest of the cast can play out their action. And while Sharpey is perhaps the most dynamic of all the characters in the book, he is not present for enough of the action to upstage the story. In this way, the moral focus of the action is brought to rest not on the personal dramas of the detective, hero or villain, but, as in the novels of Dickens, on the inequities and injustices of the system itself. Unlike the crime novels of writers such as John Grisham or Scott Turow, Nyst is not concerned to draw the reader into the "professional and occupational culture of lawyers", as Heffernan describes it, so much as he is concerned to draw the reader into the idea of the law as it functions within wider community, social, cultural, and political structures. Enmeshed in the quagmire of Labor Party politics, the legal system is shown as inextricably connected to the wider political and institutional health of Australian society.

In "Hard Nuts and Soft Underbellies" Australian critic Ed Wright also notes that Nyst's fiction has been compared to the work of John Grisham, but

argues that *Crook as Rookwood* is “more memorable than any Grisham I’ve encountered and the style is more in the vein of Elmore Leonard”.²²¹ Like Leonard, the language of Nyst’s fiction is at once heavily stylised and bristling with palpable authenticity — a bashing is a “touch up”, a mate is an “old china”, the big shots are always strutting around “playing the poodle”, while things are going “crook”. In this sense Nyst feels like Leonard, but the ideology embedded in the text is different. The incongruous plot twists and characters of Leonard’s fiction are underpinned by a strong, albeit somewhat unconventional, moral code, which sides with the small crook in his battle to gain a toehold in the economic system. If those who govern society commit criminal acts, Leonard seems to ask, how much worse can a petty criminal be? (Or, as Margaret Atwood puts it, there are many things in Leonard’s fiction that can make a “good guy” or a “bad guy”, but being on the right side of the law isn’t among them.²²²) In Nyst, the administration of the law is far more central to his conception of a just and equitable society. In *Crook as Rookwood*, as in Nyst’s earlier novel *Cop This!*, the law is seen to be open to far-reaching political manipulation and systemic abuse, but the “good guys” always wind up on the right side of the law — eventually.

Wright also argues that *Crook as Rookwood* displays all the advantages of “home-grown” Australian crime fiction. “It creates an image of a world that exists on our doorsteps, which, for reasons of power, secrecy and the political self-servicing of our defamation system, is only ever glimpsed in the

²²¹ Ed Wright, “Hard Nuts and Soft Underbellies,” *Spectrum, Sydney Morning Herald*, April 23-4, 2005, p.31.

²²² Margaret Atwood, “Cops and Robbers,” *New York Review*, Vol.24, No.9, May 23 2002.

media."²²³ *Crook as Rookwood* is absolutely convincing in its portrayal of political influence peddling, but for a novel dealing with corruption in the upper reaches of government it appears, at first glance, to be curiously apolitical. The bland and sappy Michael Wiltshire hero opines, "The old ways weren't always right",²²⁴ but the language, characters, settings and events of the novel create an overwhelming nostalgia for them. Bathed in the light of this nostalgia, and its evocations of class rights, the political characters come out looking, not like the pariahs that emerge from the pages of our much-censured media, but a bunch of lovable old rogues. Gary Sharpe, in particular, emerges from the murder trial looking more like a slightly flawed villain, rather than a rich and successful man who orders the murder of a small-time junkie in order to get ahead.

It is a paradox of the novel that it presents a social body riven with corruption from its proverbial head to toe, but, given the happy ending, is also one that defines itself as in no need of improvement. Perhaps this contradiction is best understood as the product of a distinctive moment in Australia's history, and needs to be contextualised against the breaking apart of the old welfare state (together with the notions of civility and security in common citizenship that once underpinned it), replaced by a rapacious form of *laissez faire* capitalism and neo-liberal political ideals. In this sense, it might be argued that Nyst's novel reveals a residual faith in notions of collective governance and the struggle to maintain the cultural and political institutions that uphold such ideals, however flawed. In other words, a philosophical perspective on the

²²³ Ed Wright, "Hard Nuts and Soft Underbellies," *Spectrum, Sydney Morning Herald*, April 23-4, 2005, p.31.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.33.

meaning and function of the law is allowed to coexist with an equally strong grasp of its social, political and economic corruptibility.

In this sense it might be also argued that *Crook as Rookwood* is less like a crime novel than an old fashioned social novel, harking back to a more organic version of society that is capable of both generating and curing its own diseases, in which trouble arises from, and is dealt with, by the legal system, so to speak. In a literary sense, the philosophical contradictions embedded in the text are resolved through the carnival element involved in 'putting the politicians in the dock', ie. debunking a corrupt system of authority by unmasking the criminals as the victims and the lawmakers as the crooks. Dickens was another great carnivaliser of systems of authority, a literary strategy that is particularly apparent in his own detective-cum-social novel, *Bleak House*. Relating the end of the infamous Jarndyce and Jarndyce suit that dominates the action (corrupting, if not actually killing, everything it touches), Esther, the heroine of the story, captures its carnivalesque nature.

Still they were all exceedingly amused,
and were more like people coming out
from a Farce or a Juggler than from a court
of Justice. We stood aside, watching for
any countenance we knew; and presently
great bundles of paper began to be carried
out —bundles in bags, bundles too large
to be got into any bags, immense masses
of papers of all shapes and no shapes,

which the bearers staggered under, and threw down for the time being, anyhow, on the Hall pavement, while they went back to bring out more. Even these clerks were laughing. We glanced at the papers, and seeing Jarndyce and Jarndyce everywhere, we asked an official-looking person who was standing in the midst of them, whether the cause was over. "Yes," he said; "it was all up with it at last!" and burst out laughing too.²²⁵

In Dickens, the laughter of both spectators and participants in the "cause" of Jarndyce and Jarndyce defies its malignant influence. And in Nyst, the laughter that arises from the procession of grotesques and gargoyles that make up the lurid carnival of Australian life carries a similar cathartic power. As the literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin argues, "All the images of the carnival are dualistic; they unite within themselves both poles of change and crisis; birth and death, blessing and curse."²²⁶ The carnivalisation of systems of authority destabilises them by opening up the possibility of a new beginning, encompassing the optimism and pessimism that lies at the heart of the Australian self-concept and self-delusion.

²²⁵ Charles Dickens, *Bleak House*, Wordsworth Classics, Ware, Hertfordshire, 1993, pp.711-12.

²²⁶ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoyevsy's Poetics*, trans. Caryl Emerson, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and London, 1984, p.126.

Reflections on Writing *Crooked*

Mikhail Bakhtin has argued that the nature of a given genre is less important than the things that it has to say about society,²²⁷ but for the practising writer struggling to combine disparate forms, the differences can be troubling. Like *Crook as Rookwood*, my own fictional project combines aspects of the social novel and the crime novel, eschewing the linear form of the thriller for a wide-screen approach that attempts to bring emphasis to bear on the political structure of the society under analysis. In so doing, the work risks a certain fragmentation of the traditional thriller form, which, as one critic puts it, “normally goes about its business in the lithe and lethal manner of a cat on the prowl”.²²⁸ This fragmentation has a potentially deadening effect on the ease and pace of the narrative.

Arguably, in the heyday of the social novel audiences were more tolerant of the multiple digressions that were the nineteenth century novel’s stock-in-trade. Moreover, the effects of digression were offset by the serial publication of the works (like the contemporary soap opera, the nineteenth century social novel was never intended to be consumed in one sitting). But in an age in which most writers have streamlined their work, or “cleaned up” their acts, as Martin Amis once put it, readers can be less forgiving.

²²⁷ Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. Carl Emerson, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1992, p.39.

²²⁸ Marilyn Stasio, “Crime: Dead and Bloated,” *New York Times Books Review*, 6 Feb, 2005.

For this reason, even a superior example of the crime-cum-social novel genre such as Ian Rankin's *Fleshmarket Close* divided the critics. In a practical sense, Rankin considerably ameliorated the effects of digression by limiting himself to two character points of view (and allowing one to predominate), but retained the texture and feel of the wide-screen social novel through strong contrasts of place, a large and socially diverse range of characters, and the lavish use of class and status details to locate them. Still, for some critics, the bifurcating narratives of *Fleshmarket Close* were "just too much", causing the novel to become "flabby" and "bloated".²²⁹ Others labelled it Rankin's "best novel yet",²³⁰ with one critic comparing it favourably to Dickens's *Bleak House*.²³¹

In her review of Rankin's book, critic Rebecca Gowers argued that the crime novel can be traced back to two basic models: Wilkie Collins' sleekly shaped *The Moonstone* in which a unitary or linear narrative is told by different characters in turn (each carrying on the role of detective), and Dicken's rambling and rambunctious *Bleak House*, in which various characters shuffle about between a handful of individual slayings and the concept of a wider social crime.²³² Gowers argued that in the past century and more crime writers have overwhelmingly favoured the model offered by *The Moonstone*,²³³ which T.S. Eliot once dubbed "the first and finest of English detective novels" and

²²⁹ *Ibid.*

²³⁰ Peter Guttridge, "Age Shall Not Wither Him. Or Improve His Temper", *The Observer*, 14 November, 2004.

²³¹ Rebecca Gowers, "Murky Depths," *New Statesman*, 4 October, 2004.

²³² *Ibid.*

²³³ *Ibid.*

“the most perfect piece of construction”,²³⁴ adding, “there is no contemporary novelist who could not learn something from Collins in the art of interesting and exciting the reader”.²³⁵ In comparison, Eliot was less than impressed with the dramatic structure of Dickens’s *Bleak House*, which the writer E.M. Forster once described as being “all to pieces”,²³⁶ circling its characters for half a dozen chapters before there is any strong sense that the lines of the narrative are actually coming together.

Dickens, however, famously argued that he had reason to approach his work in the way that he did. For Dickens, the dialogic form of the social novel redressed what he saw as an important narrative imbalance whereby the wanton criminal has “a certain sort of poetry” but the criminalised poor are merely “tedious”.²³⁷ In other words, Dickens was acutely aware of the ways in which the meaning of a novel rises not only out of its content, but also out of the form of the book, which represents not just a set of structural shapes or narrative conventions, but a way of seeing the world. This is what theorists such as Hayden White were subsequently to understand as the “content” of “form”, the way in which different narrative forms imagine the relationship of social context, historical and individual agency, differently.²³⁸

²³⁴ T.S. Eliot, “Wilkie Collins and Charles Dickens,” in T.S. Eliot, *Selected Essays*, Harcourt, Brace & World, New York, 1950, p.413.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.417.

²³⁶ E.M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, Edward Arnold & Co, London, 1949, p.76.

²³⁷ Rebecca Gowers, *op.cit.*

²³⁸ Hayden White, “Storytelling: Historical and Ideological,” in Newman, Robert, ed., *Centuries End, Narrative Means*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 1996, pp.58-78.

Despite the dangers and difficulties, I also adopted the widescreen approach for *Crooked* because it ideally allows the writer to show characters actively making themselves, and the social context as actively affecting that process. However, this does not mean I believe linear narratives are inherently anti-social or conservative, as Dickens's argument implies (take, for example, the well-aimed political polemic with its wide ranging social effects). Similarly, I would argue that the widescreen approach does not necessarily guarantee the salutary effects Dickens intended. Indeed, as the previous chapters attempt to suggest, the wide-screen approach seems as capable of accommodating carefully nuanced works as crude ideological maps, which, like Thomas Harris's *Red Dragon*, are not about cutting through social hierarchies or engaging in dialogue with others, so much as they are about propagating their own morally blinkered positions.

However, it is also possible to argue that while social narratives of this later sort may appear 'multi-voiced', making use of multiple character points of view, often with stream of consciousness narration, they are not genuinely "novelistic" in the Bakhtinian sense.²³⁹ According to Bakhtin, the truly "novelistic" text is "polyphonic" rather than "monologic". He argues that where the monologic text adheres to a narrative system in which alternative voices and views are presented and judged as good or bad, true or untrue, in the polyphonic or novelistic model the author creates a kind of dialogue in which each voice plays an unchallenged role. In other words, monologic texts employ a single style and express single ideological world-view, whereas

²³⁹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *op.cit.*, *passim*, and *Problems of Dostoyevsy's Poetics*, trans. Caryl Emerson, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and London, 1984, *passim*.

polyphonic texts employ a medley of voices and ideological positions that circulate in the text without ever being subjected to interpretative closure.

In this sense, it might be argued that novels such as *Red Dragon* may present the voices of the outcast and criminal as well as the voice of State power in the guise of the police force, and a variety of voices in between, but that this enactment of other voices is merely a performance to an authoritative or monologic end — in other words, mere pastiche or technique rather than the true dialogic relationship to the social, the most important implications of which are ethical and political.

However, as David Lodge argues, in taking up Bakhtin's argument with respect to the desirability of the polyphonic over the monologic form of the novel, critics run the risk of attempting to separate writers into "sheep and goats".²⁴⁰ As Lodge points out, there is a marked tendency in Bakhtin "to assimilate everything that is progressive, life-enhancing and liberating in writing to the concept of the [polyphonic] novel", positioning the novelist as an almost messianic hero, with other forms of writing then being associated with "whatever is fixed, rigid, authoritarian".²⁴¹

In this sense, I think it needs to be recognised that all texts are in some ways monologic (just as Lodge argues that all texts are in some ways polyphonic). The novel is not a literal, unmediated transcription of social experience, but an artificial construct, in which the author distributes voices, ideas and ethical

²⁴⁰ Lodge, David, "After Bakhtin," in *After Bakhtin: Essays on Fiction and Criticism*, Routledge, London, 1990, p.95

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*

perspectives among the characters, and orchestrates them within the restraining logic of the narrative. In short, all novels necessarily arrive at some sort of closure, and hence, ideological position, no matter how open, deferred or convoluted that position might be. Moreover, as Lodge also points out, monologism need not be “naïve or repressive”.²⁴² Writing, after all, is but one side or part of a wider social conversation (the half, not the whole, of a ‘speech act’), and books are intended to be read and re-read and transformed in the reading.

Ultimately, the ideological position charted in *Crooked* is blacker than Nyst’s, and the coincidences of the plot are less happy. Then again, like most Labor Party narratives, Nyst’s work charts a ‘fall from grace’ (or, at least, from the ideals of the Australian Labor Party) whereas my project concerns itself with the conservative side of Australian politics, with many of the characters having few ideals to start with. In other words, *Crooked* takes on the form of the old panoramic social novel, but without its ideological underpinning of optimism and faith. It shares something of James Ellroy’s darker, more jaundiced view of the workings of politics and history, and the fate of the intrinsically flawed individual in a corrupt and rapacious society.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, p.98.

Conclusion

Decades of what is loosely called 'post-modernism', 'post-structuralism' or simply 'theory' have shaken the halls of the academy and reshaped the views of many writers living and practising their work outside its walls, disabusing us of those grand Enlightenment concepts, such as the idea of Progress or our ability to unmask Ideology in order to reveal some sort of transcendental Truth. The lesson of postmodernism is that the local, the particular and the different are what is important, not the general or 'universal'. Moreover, an increased awareness of the workings of discourse has taught us that things once thought to be universal or abiding human truths have more often turned out to be specific to the interests of a particular class, race or sex.

However, it might also be argued that the fall of grand narratives and rise of the politics of identity has tended to produce an intellectual climate that valorises singularity at the expense of commonality, in a way that often colludes with, rather than combats the neo-liberal status quo and the individualist ethos that supports it. In this context it might well be argued that social narratives are important, in that they are books that attempt to create a shared social meaning out of the atomising experience of contemporary life. At best, they are books that attempt to understand the ways in which power transforms singular experiences into shared and social ones.

Fiction, it may be argued, never affected anything. But such a view underestimates the hermeneutic power of such works, the way in which stories explain events in the world by endowing them with a special kind of coherence (working via a cognitive mode, as Hayden White argued, rather than merely a form of discourse²⁴³). In a world dominated by the mass cultural narratives of film, advertising and the nightly TV news, narrative does not reflect so much as it produces reality, moving beyond the realm of the purely imaginary to become part of material culture, with material effects (which can be large or small, progressive or regressive, good or bad). Of course, the special danger with the social novel is that the universalising tendencies inherent in the form often imply knowledge claims that are far wider than the novel and its characters. This raises the important questions about whose story is being told, and whose world is being re-made in what image.

Narrative, in other words, can be dangerous. But the goal of the progressive critic or writer should not be, as Barthes once argued, to destroy its authority (which, I would suggest, is an impossible task), but to recognise its power. Insofar as the social novel is capable of projecting an image of the individual within imperial/capitalist society, it might also offer us a glimpse of what a humane society should look like.

In this sense the writer's answer to the formidable charge sheet presented by theory against the social novel should not be to retreat into a literature of the obscure, the personal and self-referential — to withdraw, in George Orwell's

²⁴³ Hayden White, "Storytelling: Historical and Ideological," in Newman, Robert, ed., *Century's End, Narrative Means*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 1996, p.68.

famous description of the writer's place, "Inside the Whale",²⁴⁴ but to face up to the world, as Salman Rushdie more recently argued, "Outside the Whale".

As Rushdie puts it:

The world is the unceasing storm,
the quarrel, the dialectic of
the whale there is a
need for political fiction, for
drawing new and better maps of
the world outside the whale the writer is
aware except that he (or she) is part of
the world part of the ocean, part of the
storm ...²⁴⁵

²⁴⁴ George Orwell, "Inside the Whale," *The Complete Works of George Orwell*,
www.george-orwell.org.

²⁴⁵ Salman Rushdie, "Outside the Whale," in *Imaginary Homelands*, Granta Books,
London, 1991, p.100.

Crooked

Frankly, I do not think the
right people were arrested.

— Hansard, 1968



Prologue

HATLESS AND COATLESS, the men left the rendezvous at Darlinghurst Police Station well before midnight. In ones and twos they slipped through the side streets, slouching on corners, loitering in doorways, pausing to glance at a newspaper, unravel a hamburger, strike a match and puff a cigarette against the moon-soaked sky, or mingle with the crowds billowing up Bayswater Road from the Sydney Stadium. Others wandered up through the graving docks. They scurried over fence palings and rusty iron lean-tos, through industrial courtyards ringed with damp washing, and sudden wastes, where the rear-ends of otherwise respectable terrace houses disintegrated into used tires, trays of bent cutlery, odd socks and rat sacks. Still more climbed the escarpment from Woolloomooloo, picking their way up the shiny half-mile strung with neon alphabets, seemingly oblivious to the passage of time. They joked with spruikers outside clip joints and night traps, sang with gaggles of seamen apprentices, soft-packs tucked up under their T-shirts and bulging mermaids tattooed up each arm, melded with chance crowds of sightseers, old geezers, tosspots and greasy potato fumes, before converging on the darkened doorway of the Kellett Club, Kings Cross.

Detective Senior Sergeant Frank Tanner stepped out of the shadow and into the light. His face tinted green between the curled-up ends of his shirt collar and his snap-down brim hat. He drew hard on his cigarette and ground it into the gutter, as his men sprang into position.

Four thickset young constables crashed down the front door, grabbed the cockatoo, Tommy Bogle, by the scruff of his shirt collar and the seat of his trousers, sending him — stool, hat and racing form — into the street. Tommy

flipped through the air with a yelp, and landed on all fours between three crates of garbage. He stayed there and muttered for a minute, got up slowly, and shook himself off. He adjusted his hat, tweaked the pink frangipani in his buttonhole, and with a quick darting glance in either direction, walked away, toes kicking out, off along the pavement.

Tanner swore, as somewhere above him he heard a second and a third door swing shut. The lights went out. "Steady on," he yelled, as the constables reared back and the second door flew off its hinges. Inside the place stank of smoke and faintly of mildew. A pale beam of moonlight trickled in through the side window, glancing off the rickety wooden staircase at the end of the hall. The thickset constables led the charge up to the top-storey landing. They reared back again, but the door wouldn't budge. Flashlights twirled. Men muttered and swore. From the far side of the door came the sound of shifting furniture. The constables set to work, with hammer and crowbar. But it was a further two minutes before the third door lurched sideways, and crashed to the ground.

Ernie Chubb, a squinty-eyed gnome, was standing on the far side ready to greet them.

"Evening detectives."

Tanner brushed the midget roughly to one side. "There are reasons to believe unlawful baccarat is taking place on the premises here, Ernie. I have a warrant to search."

Chubb stepped backwards, as if showing them through. "Would you like to start in the lounge or the club room? I'm afraid the joint's pretty full on account of we're screening the boxing tonight."

"Piss off, Ernie. Where's Reilly?"

"Out back," he said, cocking his head carefully to one side and jerking a thumb over his shoulder. "But he's not going to like this."

Tanner hauled Chubb up by his shirtfront until his toes wiggled free over six inches of air. "God almighty," he roared. "I am the law and I don't care what he likes."

Chubb gasped for oxygen. "Suit yourself," he choked between grabs.

"Pigeye!" yelled Tanner.

Sergeant Donaldson, with large orange freckles and gingery lashes, stepped through the shattered door frame behind him. "Yeah?"

"I want you to arrest Ernie here as the keeper of this common gaming house."

"Sure."

"Then get me some evidence. Cards, dice, flash paper, whatever."

Pigeye dragged the still sputtering Chubb out across the landing and cuffed him to the handrail at the head of the stair, before continuing down the hall into the gaming room, where he dismantled the cinema screen with the butt of his shotgun. Chins dropped. Jaws slackened. The celluloid reel clattered to an end, leaving a bright-white square on the wall around him.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, grinning and easy, rolling up and down on the balls of his feet. "You lot are all being charged with illegal gambling. In a couple of minutes you will be asked to file downstairs, where a patrol wagon will take you to Darlinghurst Police Station. In the meantime, I'm asking you to remain seated. No funny stuff, okay?"

But the funny stuff had already started. "Oh, my God!" shrieked a long-toothed blonde in a spangled salmon pantsuit. A pink-cheeked man blinked foolishly at his wife. "I told you it was silly idea to come here, I told you!"

Another couple seized upon the pandemonium, slipping down the back stairs, and clambering down the garden trellis below the first storey window. They picked their way through the garbage patch into the alley adjacent, where a young constable fixed them like rabbits in the beam of his torch. Finding their path blocked, the couple ran swiftly back through the building only to fall into the arms of the constables guarding the front door.

Upstairs, Pigeye was sorting through the piles of blanched and startled patrons, making his way towards the windows, when a brace of sailors on shore leave from Saigon caught his attention. "Oi! Haven't you got a war to fight?" The sailors glanced at each other, and stared back. Then hoofed down the stairs into the swallowing night. Pigeye cracked open a shutter and peered into the street. The windows that ran along the alleyway were all covered up, but here and there a chink of yellow light showed a cross-weave of electrical wires, looping from the pigeon-whorled rooftops to the regularly spaced telephone poles that stretched down the block. From this, the gloomier end of the street, a paddy wagon made its approach, easing in through the small crowd of onlookers gathered in the light of the doorway.

The crowd wasn't many, at first. Then, within minutes, the empty street was full. People were spilling out of the dark buildings adjacent, bunching on doorsteps, in dressing gowns, some of them, also molls in their night attire, sticking heads out of windows, switching on lights. They were stomping and hollering, and the stomping and hollering grew louder as the coppers began fast-walking the punters to the waiting blue wagon. Some of them fumbling in handcuffs, bumping heads on cage doors. One veering away in a soft pirouette, before turning back slyly and showing the coppers the one finger salute.

"Cut it, you smart bastard!"

Pigeye stuck his head out the window and yelled. Then, from somewhere out the back of the crowd, a bottle of 'Tooth's - Best Brewed' lobbed through the air and smashed square at the brickwork to the side of his head. "Bloody hell," he muttered, and whipped his head back inside.

Tanner shambled his way to the back of the club, the sweat-stains of a long afternoon showing dark at the armpits. He was barely through the door when Dick Reilly started yelling.

"Oi Tanner! What are you doing busting in like this? Bugger off."

Reilly followed his voice out across the carpet, his face gleaming like masticated pink bubblegum under the greenish hued light. He had a big bulldog jaw, and he jutted it out a little further, wrenching at his collar and tie, where his throat muscles were knotted and twitching under loose folds of skin. Sunshine, his pet chihuahua, yapped and tore round his blue-trousered ankles.

"Sorry Dick," said Tanner. "Allan says so. You'll have to take the matter up with him."

"With Allan?" Reilly jabbed an angry finger at the air. "I'm paying you lot through the nose and this is what I get? The country's getting like a citizen can't run his own business anymore."

"There's nothing I can do for you, Dick."

"Piss off."

Tanner spun Reilly around and slapped on the cuffs. "It's election time."



Part One

LBJ Day

1

DETEKTIVE CONSTABLE GUS FINLAY clambered out of the unmarked police car thrown across the curb at Palmer Street, and made his way up Oxford Street, towards Taylor Square, at the south end of which the motorcade carrying Lyndon Baines Johnson, President of the United States of America, and his wife, Lady Bird Johnson, was caught up in a tangle of tickertape and confetti made out of old telephone books cut into squares. On Palmer Street, an old man urinated on the rear tyre of an illegally parked EJ Holden, a young moll squinted and stretched against the morning sunlight and a street musician with a guitar swigged hair-of-the-dog and strummed odes to a moon that was conspicuously absent.

Gus rounded the corner and the crowd sprang upon him. After six weeks of desk duty, trundling through piles of paperwork, he was happy to be out on the street. He couldn't help moving along with a proprietorial swagger. Here were old Mother Hubbards in sunray-pleat crimplene and marcasite glasses, stenographers in beehives with frosted-blue eyes and tarantula lashes, office clerks in suede-patched corduroy, marauding gangs of school children, soldiers and oldsters sporting war medals, a United States sailor minus his hat, and above this teeming mass of brightly painted humanity, a banner stretched from end to end of the square, 'Hip, hip, hooray for LBJ' (the rear of the sign viz. 'Hello, hello, Lady Bird' was designed to become visible once the cavalcade had passed).

The Citizen's Special Welcoming Committee (comprising the New South Wales Premier Bob Askin, and Police Commissioner Norman Allen, CMG) had left nothing to chance. Earlier that morning President Johnson had

been greeted in the car park of the Sydney Kingsford Smith Airport with a 50ft sign hoisted 60ft in the air and suspended between two mobile cranes, 'Welcome to Sydney — First City of Australia'. Under the sign the cheering crowds included 1,000 schoolchildren in ten-gallon white plastic Stetsons with bannerettes bobbing, 'Sydney's Day for LBJ', 'Cheer today for LBJ' and 'Enjoy your Stay, LBJ'.

Flags wagged merrily along the route followed by the motorcade, down Oxford and College Streets, from Anzac Parade, with a further 2,000 banners being draped along the street signs, redesignating them 'President Johnson's Way'. Office buildings and shopfronts had been draped in 9,000ft of tricolour bunting, 5,000 posters and 3,000 awning signs, distributed by the government, and hung courtesy of the city's civic-minded proprietors. (And at Premier Askin's own suggestion, individual welcoming signs made out of brightly coloured beach towels had also been used to spruce up the street front where government bunting was not available.)

In special honour of the President's wife, Lady Bird Johnson, the Royal Horticultural Society of New South Wales had decorated Queens Square with a blanket featuring one million flowers and stretching the 150 yards from the corner of King Street to the Registrar General's Office. The Pigeon Fancier's Protection Union would also be releasing 200 homing pigeons from the roof of the Queens Square Courthouse, as the motorcade drew near. Outside Circular Quay a banner was flapping across the overhead railway, 'Sydney Welcomes the President of the U.S.A. to Circular Quay' and as the President boarded the official launch at the Maritime Services Board Jetty he would be greeted by a jaunty-looking sign hanging down from the Overseas Terminal, 'Anchors Away for LBJ!'

Gus shoved his way through with shoulders and elbows. Men lugging cameras were hurrying about the crowd, setting their tripods on the backs of utility trucks or clambering up the iron under-rails of shop awnings to grab a better shot. Up ahead he could make out the twinkle of a yellow badge on the dark serge of a copper's uniform, and in the open spaces of asphalt beyond the barricades, more cops, legs splayed, holsters dangling, and a handful of mounted cops, chestnut pelts glossy and sweating in the sunshine, horsetails twitching at blowflies.

A black car bearing the State Government insignia trundled up Oxford Street and slowed down. Gus stood in the open door as it pulled up alongside a patch of dry grass across from Kinsella's Funerals. He stared out through the dazzle of sunlight on chromium and safety glass, at the eighteen black Lincolns circled about him, his green aviator glasses whitened with road glare. Pigeye Donaldson was blinking at him through orange-fringed lashes.

"Oi," said Gus. "What's up?"

"Looks like his air-conditioning's bugged," said Pigeye. "This cowboy bloke, it seems he's unhappy with the sunshine."

Gus laughed, and the two coppers exchanged gags. Then feeling the eyes of the top brass on him Gus swung his gaze around the square. A sprinkling of US agents with dark glasses and razor-scraped faces were milling about on the far side of the grass patch. Some were glued to walkie-talkies, others sharked around the cars, one slinging an automatic rifle, with eyes trained on a posse of housewives, as if searching for the first sign of trouble. Set back in the middle of this, the President's vehicle gleamed black and bug-like, and smack in the door of this arsenal-on-wheels sat Lyndon

Baines Johnson — with a slab-like face, a bulbous nose and a voice like catfish gumbo.

"This here is real colourful," said Johnson, pushing a felt hat to the back of his pate. The crowd cheered, and Johnson, feeling encouraged, stepped a few feet from the car. "You don't know how much this means," he said, flashing a grin, "to Lady Bird and me."

"On yer mate," somebody yelled from back in the crowd.

"Thank you," said Johnson, waving his hat in acknowledgment. "I guess all of you know who I am, but at least I didn't come here to ask for anything, not even your vote."

"Why not?" somebody yelled. "You're a politician, aren't you?"

"I've got the week off."

The crowd started laughing and Johnson grinned back at them, staring out over the dense mass of faces. Here, people in sunhats were draped over barriers, standing on wooden fruit crates, bobbing up and down at the edge of the crowd. He seemed to look right into each pair of eyes and linger, before moving onto the next, and the next. Johnson stepped close to the barrier, reaching his arms into the thick press of bodies. "This is a big beautiful country! I love this country!"

Johnson threw his hat off into the crowd. There was scuffling and screaming as a battalion of cub scouts began a fight to grab hold of it. Pressmen moved forward, flashing Nikons and Leicas. Pigeye swung his boot an inch from the nose of a photographer crawling, flat on his belly, over the asphalt.

"Hey, you lot. Bugger off."

A buttery-cheeked woman in a pink pillbox hat broke through the barricade, carrying a red beagle hound under each arm. The US agents closed in as the beagles burst out of her arms, and ran yapping and yelping over the square. "But that one's called Lady Bird," the woman whimpered. "That one's called Lady Bird."

Johnson turned. He picked up the dogs and carried them back to where the woman was standing. He put the dogs into her arms and gave them a presidential pat. "Well, isn't that lovely," he said, and grinned at the woman until she was twitching all over with the pleasure of it. He glanced around, still patting the dogs. He looked at the people in the crowd to make sure they could see him. He turned towards the blokes with the Nikons and Leicas to make sure they could too. "Have you got it?" he yelled.

They got off their photographs. Then the moment was gone.

Pigeye stared on in disbelief. "Well, pick her up before she faints," he said, and Gus escorted the woman back to an empty space behind the barrier.

"How's the war business, Butcher Bird?"

The shout came from somewhere towards the back of the crowd. Gus spun around, scanning the massed bodies for a full fifteen seconds before he spotted the girl, sixteen, maybe seventeen, standing in front of a banner cut from a striped-flannelette bedsheet, strung across the awning of the Courthouse Hotel.

"Oi!" the girl called again. "Captain Slaughter!"

The mood was changing out in the crowd. There was something angry, a sort of passion running through them. Several groups of young people in black turtlenecks were wedging their way to the front and milling about with the legitimate spectators. Pigeye walked off a few paces into the shade-

dappled sunshine. His hat was damp about the outer-band where the sweat had soaked through, and his face was sun-stroked and worried. "Oh God," he muttered, shaking his head. "Norman the Foreman is not going to like this."

"I reckon," said Gus.

Inside the circled black Lincolns a handful of local dignitaries were primping themselves, edging their way about the ends of the action. Hanging not at all modestly to the back of this gang was a powdery-faced man, short as a cockatoo, with eyebags, up-springing hair, and light-soaped black spectacles, who Gus immediately recognised as the Police Commissioner, Norman Allan, CMG. Gus drew in his breath and leapt to attention. He needn't have worried. Allan wasn't looking at him. His eyes were fixed firmly on Premier Bob Askin, who was leading the dignitaries forward, with shuffling steps and arms extended, until they were standing shoulder to shoulder with the U-nited States President.

Askin was dapperly dressed in a blue pinstripe suit, striped shirt and tie, with cannon-shaped cigar clenched between yellow-stained teeth. He had a grey homberg hat clasped in his hand. His eyes were flickering and anxious as they watched his ousted rival, the Labor Leader, Jack Renshaw, disgorge from a Holden, ten cars behind, with photographer in tow, to converge on the President.

Renshaw worked his way about the gathering. Askin moved sideways, trying to isolate his rival. It was a tight two-step of shins and knees, as each worked for advantage. Then an awful screw-up, as Renshaw staggered backwards, landing asprawl in the gutter. Gus leapt forward, raising him up and dusting him off. Askin, meanwhile, was doubled over laughing like a large pinstriped walrus.

Johnson broke loose from the hugger-mugger. He stared at Gus unblinkingly for a moment. His eyes twitched. He turned back to Askin and asked, "Who's that?"

Askin swung around, eyes wide and innocent. "Why that's a copper. New South Wales finest."

"Hmm ... " said Johnson, staring off into the distance. He hoisted his balls, giving them a firm tug from the belt of his trousers, then turned back to Askin and slapped him on the back. Askin, feeling emboldened, clapped his hands to his knees, and the two men began squeezing and pummelling each other, worrying themselves in the direction of the car.

Within minutes, the motorcade pulled back into formation. Mounted cops, cycle outriders, agents panting and jogging alongside the President's vehicle and Gus riding in the police car that was snaking its way behind the horses.

It started with a single black balloon floating down from the sky. Then another, and another.

Gus looked up.

They were dropping off the fingers of a girl in an orange headscarf standing on the rusty iron awning above the Liverpool Street corner. She was surrounded by a group of young men in black mourning bands, some of them scurrying rat-fashion along a length of steel cable, attempting to haul up a sign over the Oxford Street intersection. The sign said, 'Stop the War in Vietnam'.

On the footpath below, the bodgie-types were milling about in greater numbers, chanting and waving placards, 'Don't be Gay for LBJ,' 'We are not Gay' and 'Is it Gay in Vietnam?' The chanting rose to an eerie pitch, breaking into booing and stomping as the motorcade made its approach. Minor scuffles broke out in the crowd. Gus watched as Pigeeye grabbed hold of a gingery-haired youth, dragging him kicking along the asphalt. The boy was still clutching his placard as Pigeeye walloped him, and shoved him headlong into the cage of a waiting wagon. 'Conscripts No,' it said. 'Your Silence is taken as Consent'.

Everywhere Gus looked, people were staring and wailing, and waving angry placards, some with flags of the Vietnamese National Liberation Front. A single-forlorn sign to the left of the barricades said, 'We Want the Beatles'. Three women scurried out from underneath it and began pelting the horses with pebbles, shouting, "What about the niggers? What about justice for the niggers?"

The horses grew frisky. The crowd broke through the barrier at two points. Soon hundreds of people were milling about on the asphalt, booing and chanting, pounding clenched fists on the roof of the car. They were only six inches away, eyes and noses pressed to the windows, when a girl in a red twin-set burst through the storm wall of bodies. She tumbled over the bonnet and bumper, landing on the asphalt with a sickening thud. The car swerved slightly and creaked to a halt.

Gus got out.

There was shouting all around him, "Quit Vietnam, quit Vietnam, quit Vietnam." Before he could yell out or do anything, another two women rushed out. They were joined by three men with beards and a fresh-faced boy

in striped shirt and spectacles, all of them lying on the asphalt beneath the wheels of the car.

"Officer?"

Gus swung around.

"Officer?" Askin stuck his head out of the car window. "What seems to be the trouble?"

"Sir," said Gus. "There's a bunch of young people lying on the road. In front of the car."

"What? Bunch of Commies?"

"I dunno," said Gus. "Could be."

"Well, don't just stand there. Run over the bastards!"

"Sir?" Gus blinked.

The mounted cops were turning their horses, pushing them further and further into the mass of packed bodies. Then the uniformed cops closed in, dropping identity badges into breast pockets, truncheons outstretched. They hauled off the girl in the twin-set. They hauled off the bodgie-types and the man in wire spectacles. Gus had to throw a few elbows to heave through the crowd. He got slammed in the eye, kicked in the mouth, struck in the teeth. He dived with his eyes squeezed tight into the thicket of fists and flailing limbs. The crowds surged, the horses plunged, their fetlocks shimmying in the sunshine.

... and all around was the roar which was long and rhythmic with an undertow like the whirring and grinding of January blowflies. He felt the blood in his head, the air in his lungs and everything about him reeling in the sunshine. He heard a long drawn out shriek of rubber on asphalt as the

cavalcade turned tail and ducked down a side street. And the rest (so he read in the newspaper next morning) was History.

2

ON THE SAME MORNING Gus Finlay saw History, Charlie Gillespie blinked down at the grubby paper packet on his desk. His office was located on the third floor of a dilapidated five-storey walk-up and looked more like a garbage room than a legal practice. The room was narrow and awkward (a result of the labyrinthine lettings and sub-lettings that divided the premises), and lit indirectly from a slat glass window that glanced down through the light well of the building. The meagre furnishings comprised a desk of wood-grained plastic laminate on a pink-metal base, a slightly dinged standard lamp of red-anodised aluminium, a Dunlopillo convertible day-and-night couch in dead-lettuce green and a large chromium ashtray on a pedestal that was blossoming with fag ends. The floor was covered in grey-speckled vinyl, the walls tinted spearmint, and through the glass louvres of the window, three of which were cracked and in need of replacement, wafted the smell of detritus and the city.

Gillespie touched the package gingerly with the tip of one finger, as one might approach the set mechanism of a mousetrap.

He had heard rumours that it was possible to square things, to win cases that might not otherwise seem winnable. He himself had been at the Sydney Quarter Sessions when the performance of well-known prosecutors turned suddenly lacklustre, when witnesses turned tail in a manner that was faintly ridiculous, and defence lawyers seemed, as if by a strange magic, to anticipate and waylay the prosecution case. He prodded the packet again with his finger, and traced its circumference on the blotter of his desk. Suddenly, he felt threatened. He would return the thing immediately. He would meet

Frank Tanner at the Latin Quarter and tell him flat out there was nothing to be done. He would not be abrasive. He would apologise profusely. He would say he was wrong, that he had mistaken the matter entirely.

Gillespie paused on the threshold, then stepped out into a billowing October afternoon. He gazed mournfully and not a little thirstily at the shut doors of the Hotel Australia, turned his face against the a-rhythmical westerly wind, as it swept the dust and street litter up into spirals, threatening to turn the pedestrians of King Street into a tailspin of distemper. He had to think. Think! He mounted the rise as the last shaft of sunlight tickled the verdigris spire of St James, the old almond-coloured church floating over the rise where King Street met the upper portion of Phillip at the Queens Square Courts. Two barristers and a moon-faced legal clerk trotted up the hill in front of him, their wigs set rakishly askew, their robes like giant magpie wings flapping in the slipstream. They slapped and tickled each other, as they tripped past the blanket of wilting flowers that had covered Queens Square since early that morning, and disappeared into one of the more sought after rooms in the crisp-modern-and-air-conditioned Wentworth & Selbourne Chambers.

Gillespie struck the bottom end of Phillip Street then set out through the soot-riddled arcades under Cahill's Expressway at Circular Quay. He walked through the shudder of traffic and the roar of an electrical train overhead, breathing in the dank fishy smell squalling in off the Harbour. He was sweating profusely and his forehead was puckered where his hat was too tight. Puffing a little, he leaned with his back against the spiked-iron railings edging the Quay, staring up through a tangle of electrical wires at the girl in

the white swimsuit smiling down from a billboard, 'Yes ... You Can Take Vincent's Headache Powders with Confidence'. Under the billboard a bunch of toothless old geezers were loafing about the entrance of a nicotine-tiled workingman's pub. Now and again, the swing doors burst open and a seaman stumbled out. The hobos gathered round in a tangle of blue shadows, stuck out their grimy hands and asked for ten bob to keep going.

Gillespie gave five cents to a cloth-capped street seller and purchased a paper.

UGLY SCENES IN CITY

Demonstrators halt LBJ

ROAD BARRED

Demonstrators did their best to interrupt Sydney's mighty welcome to President Johnson today.

They flung themselves to the road in front of the President's car forcing the motorcade to a halt.

Police dragged students bodily across the asphalt.

American agents told NSW Police they believed the demonstrations were organised by Communists.

Next Page: Crackdown on Protests

Mr Askin Blasts 'Spoilers'

Gillespie strode in through the pub doors. He downed three schooners and a plate of steak, eggs and chips, telephoned his wife Sylvia to say he'd be late,

and at nine o'clock precisely, threw back his shoulders, clenched his fists, turning his feet in the direction of the polite orange glow on Pitt Street that was Sammy Lee's Latin Quarter.

The Latin Quarter was a shimmering grotto of pastel blue lights, tropical blossoms, floor-to-ceiling mirrors and quilted satin doors. Housed in a yellow sandstone building with a candy-striped awning running to the edge of the footpath, and doormen in uniforms of emu-egg blue bowing to the endless procession of customers. The whole place was gas blue with pink-scalloped banquettes around the walls and a scattering of tables beside a pocket-handkerchief dance floor. On a dais at one end, a yellow-sashed orchestra played a prettied up rumba, while dancers in brassieres and feathers plucked at the air with their jewel-spattered fingers and whirled and fandangoed under pink and orange lights.

"Charlie, my mate. How are you?"

Gillespie brushed aside a palm frond in three blushing shades of tropical lime, and sat facing Frank Tanner at the damask draped table.

"Charlie, you remember my mate, Pigeye?"

Gillespie grinned, and stretched out a hand. Pigeye grinned back at him, then reached forward and shook without rising.

Tanner snapped his fingers in the air and within minutes the table was groaning under an assortment of beer jugs and glasses, capon-stuffed olives, devils-on-horseback and dishes of nuts. As always, Gillespie was in the mood he was required to be in. He laughed his big courtroom laugh, which was charming and infectious, and delivered himself of several long windy

anecdotes, with the intended effect of drawing the company closer. There were plenty of laughs around the table before Pigeye leaned over and gave Gillespie a nudge.

"Here's to Ducky O'Connor," he said, and drank off his beer.

"One hell of a bloody client," added Tanner, and winked.

"Yeah," said Pigeye, and filled up his glass. "We've heard how he don't like it down at D Block in Pentridge and reckoned we ought to do something about that."

Gillespie wasn't really sure that he'd made up his mind to the matter, but considered the moment propitious enough to make further inquiry. "So you would be willing to, you know ... " He took plunge, "Put in a good word?"

Tanner busted out laughing. "Bloody hell. It'll take more than a good word to get a bludger like that out of gaol."

Gillespie swore. "They haven't got any evidence worth a damn." But this only caused Tanner to break into fresh gales of laughter. Gillespie said, "It's not like I haven't done something for you lot, when you were in a scrape."

"Come on Charlie," interjected Pigeye, looking hurt. "We know you've always been a good mate to us in the Force and that's why we've decided to throw you a bit of business, so as to show that we're not unappreciative. For the amount that you're getting, I reckon you ought to be a little bit grateful." Pigeye glanced away, his orange-freckled skin drawing back tighter over his flesh. He drank off the rest of his beer and sank into himself.

Eventually, Tanner shifted his weight sideways. He said, "I've been speaking to some coppers down in Melbourne. I can tell you they're slack-arse bastards down there, and generally don't do too much business but this

bloke," he scrawled something down on a napkin and pushed it across the table. "He's a pretty good bloke and we've done a bit of business with no questions asked. I've spoken to him about them running crooked at the hearing, and he tells me they'll cop it. But I have to make it good for them. Sweeten them up."

"You want me — ?" Gillespie stopped. He was still having qualms. He took a deep swallow of his beer and blundered straight on. "It sounds a bit dangerous."

"Trust me, Charlie," said Tanner, shaking his head. "This thing, it's all taken care of. Twiggy has brought over the money, hasn't she? Just take the cash and give it to the bloke. I can guarantee that there aren't going to be any problems. I'd do it myself but it would look a bit odd." He paused, then added, "This matter sorts itself out right I reckon there'll be more I can give you in a similar line."

Gillespie knew that if he was going to say 'no' that he had to say it now, and say it very firmly. But found the matter had already progressed so far he was uncertain how to take it back altogether. Just as he made his mind up to say it anyway, and was working himself up to say it, the air swelled with wild phrases of music from the bandstand. The horn player was on his feet, blatting and wailing. Then the alto was up, and the singer was kissing him and climbing down off the stage. A baby pink spotlight trailing the clatter of her heels, as she swayed through the tables dressed like a giant sea creature in a swathe of green spangles.

"Dolly Brennan," said Tanner, getting up. He held her at arm's length. "Well, look at you."

Dolly lifted her face, tilting it somewhat to the side.

"Just like Venus on her cockleshell," said Tanner, planting a thick kiss on her cheek.

"Why, Mr Tanner! How you do carry on!" said Dolly, and flicked him on the shoulder, before hitching her train and sitting herself down, with an easy sort of preening motion. "Oh dear, am I butting in on something?"

"Never," said Tanner. "I reckon these blokes are just stunned like a row of mullets on account of what a great little gargler you are."

Dolly laughed a shrill, artificial laugh. "Who's this?"

Tanner turned towards Gillespie and stared, as if questioning his very presence. Gillespie wasn't entirely sure if his mind was playing tricks, but fancied he'd seen Dolly somewhere before, most likely in the courthouse on the wrong side of the dock. Still, he was charming enough to do his social duty. He clipped his character down to size and flashed it in Dolly's direction.

"What? A lawyer?" Dolly shrieked. Fresh gusts of laughter blew about the table. "Oh, my God! But he hasn't got his wig on."

"Not all lawyers have to wear wigs," said Tanner, patting Dolly's hand.

Dolly slapped him on the wrist. "Go on, Mr Tanner! I was just having a lend of the bloke."

For some reason this was thought to be unbearably funny. Tanner and Dolly fell over each other laughing.

"Oh, my God!" Dolly jerked herself upright. "Here I am and clean forgot the reason I came butting my fat head in." Hand cupped to Tanner's ear, she whispered a few words. Tanner, growing suddenly serious, got up and excused himself. The others followed suit, drifting into the eddy and swirl of the crowd with the frayed ends of Dolly's laughter wafting behind them.

Gillespie stayed at the table after the others departed and consulted his conscience. Though it had been goading him all afternoon it was utterly silent. There weren't any butterflies, or feelings that his insides were dropping out. He was feeling weirdly euphoric, as if he was pumped up with gas and might float into space.

"Looks like you badly need a drink."

Gillespie glanced foggily about and found Sammy Lee, the manager and proprietor of the surrounding extravagance, standing bottle in hand at his elbow. Sammy was a thick-bodied olive-skinned man in his mid-forties, with a shock of dark hair comically kinked off to the side. He had once been bright-faced and baby-cheeked with enthusiasm, before success took its toll and a series of shady-looking characters (split ears, mutilated thumbs) decided to join him as a 50/50 partner. In the tawdry club-light, his face looked yellow and pendulous, his soft dog-like eyes leaky with liquid, and a cloud of deep gloom gathered over his head, which gave him a constant air of lamenting. (Sammy said he suffered night sweats and palpitations brought about by a seeming inability to think of anything but graft.)

Gillespie eyed him warily. But Sammy grinned sheepishly back.

"No worries, Charlie. I didn't hear anything. But with those particular coppers at the centre of it —"

Gillespie said, "Well, you don't have to worry. There's nothing between that lot and me. Nothing but a legal matter in need of attention."

"Well, I guess that's all right then," said Sammy, sounding doubtful. He cast his eyes around the room then leaned into the table. "Just look who he's with."

Gillespie followed the line of Sammy's gaze to the far end of the room, where Tanner was grinning and drinking. Seated beside him was a lanky-looking bloke of some forty-odd, flamboyant in a pink-tinted shirt and wine-coloured blazer. He had an elongated brown face, with a tuft of dark hair hanging down the centre of a high, squarish forehead, and eyes that stared out obliquely through half-veiled lids, like they were staring through a peephole. Gillespie didn't know him, but the bloke was returning his look with several long horse-like nods of acknowledgment. "Who's that?"

Sammy lifted an empty glass and peered into it, as if he might find an answer. "Lennie McPherson. Next to Dick Reilly, he's maybe the greatest crook that ever lived. He does stuff for Dick, running bits of his business. Lennie, he started out thieving, pilfering cargoes, organising bits on the side with the waterfront unions. It was Dick gave him his first break, put him in touch with the sorts of blokes who could really get things kicking along for him. By the way," he added. "Dick's asked to see you."

"Dick Reilly?"

"Has been asking around."

Gillespie sat a little straighter. Ignoring this, Sammy shuffled through the glasses once more. "Dick Reilly's a goodish sort of bloke for a criminal, but that lot ... I'm telling you, first one small thing will be asked, then other small and large things, and before you even know where you are, you're a thumb-knuckle away from disaster. Believe me," he added, as if thinking of something that pained him.

"There's nothing between that lot and me," Gillespie found himself saying again. But Sammy appeared to have lost interest.

"Just so long as it's legal," he said, and walked off between the tables.

Gillespie stayed at the table and stared into the mid-distance, thinking that Sammy had read many hard things into his character that he might well have been spared. Gillespie had worked hard all his life, and didn't like to see himself the subject of so much criticism and fault. He drank off the rest of his drink, traversed the full length of the room, without incident, and with Sammy's words ringing loud and unheeded in his ears, stumbled through the rotating-glass doors into the street.

"The Kellett Club!" he shouted, tottering out onto the blue asphalt and hailing a taxi. "On to the Kellett!"

Gillespie alighted his taxi at Kings Cross and stumbled his way in the darkness, out of the whimper and blare of music on Darlington Road. Up ahead, a sailor swung round a purple gatepost and chucked in the garden, and two refugees from the affluent suburbs sprawled in the gutter in their evening attire, singing 'vive la revolution' in the flutiest of ABC voices. One fell back in a glorious coma, feet splayed against the stars.

Gillespie was six steps ahead of himself, banging on a door. "Open up! Let me in!"

The square hatch slid open and Ernie Chubb stuck his wart spotted nose out through the grating. "Jees, Charlie," he said, his scowl dropping off. "Stop surprising me like this. One day I'll sock you one in the clackers by mistake."

Gillespie stuck out his chin and bunched up his fingers, bobbing about like Cassius Clay. "Come on then, Ernie. Just try me." He swung a left hook, pivoted, wobbled and feigned pitching forward.

Chubb raised his eyes prayerfully to the ceiling.

Chubb threw open the door and Gillespie trailed him up the rickety wooden stair. He tripped on the top step, catching himself on the banister with the palms of both hands, before meandering through the yammer and hum of the crowd around the tables. He drank in the green glazed room with shiny-blue tracery about the ceiling and thick-purple drapes. Mouths roared. Dice rolled. Laughter boiled up around him. Everything grew fuzzy about the edges. Everything glowed.

"Bet?"

"One hundred."

"Feeling ill, Freddie?"

"Who me? I can't lose."

"Cripes," muttered Gillespie, but the sound of his voice was swept away in the roar of a winning streak rising up off the table.

Just then, as if by some strange cosmic compulsion, the thickly clustered crowd seemed to ripple and burst open, clearing a path to the end of the room. Twinkling under a glass chandelier that drifted like a pink icicle down from the ceiling, stood the most beautiful creature Gillespie had ever laid eyes on. Her face was clear as white alabaster with a coil of dark hair rolled up in a beehive, struck through with a diamante brooch. She shimmered all over, surrounded by afterglow. "Oh, happiness!" thought Gillespie. "Oh, affluence!" He looked again. The expression on her face was bored, a trifle insolent, or maybe just sleepy. He traded another glance and this time she smiled back at him, with two rows of pearly-whites bared for his inspection. "Oh, love!" thought Gillespie. "Oh ... " He began desperately to wonder how much he had drunk.

"Oi, Charlie. How are you, mate? I've been meaning to give you a ding-dong." Dick Reilly stepped out from behind him. He turned towards the apparition under the lantern. "Leave us alone half a tick, will you, Aileen? Charlie and me are gonna confabulate."

3

DICK REILLY EASED HIMSELF IN behind his kidney-shaped walnut-veneer desk and planted his sock-feet on the straight chair in front. He pulled down the knot of his tie, pushed it askew, and scratched his left foot where a sparse clump of black hair was sprouting off his ankle. "Know what that copper Frank Tanner says to me the night he comes busting in? 'Election time!' he says. I can tell you I've been in the courtroom more times than I can count since the bloody election, the beaks and mouthpieces are bleeding me dry. Nobody's doing any business. The place is a mess."

Gillespie said, "I heard you were in a spot of trouble. I thought you sorted it out."

"How am I meant to sort it when there's nobody to sort with? There's nobody knows which way this Premier-bloke Askin is going to jump." Reilly scratched at his ankle some more, and started again. "Just today I find out the coppers are appealing the court case all over again, try and get a judge to declare us and shut the place down. I suppose it might be kind of amusing, chuck a bit of the coin at some fellows like you, except every day I'm in court, we lose bets, we lose banks. The coppers do a raid here, do a raid there, making out like they haven't been copping the sling all along. 'Crime wave,' it says in the afternoon papers. I'm telling you there isn't any crime because nobody knows whether to stay open or shut. The uncertainty is taking the bottom out of the market. Next thing, some bludger from way out west reckons he can waltz on in anytime and get himself a piece of my racket. So now I've got this upstart to deal with —"

"What upstart?"

"Name of Johnny Warren. He's started up a joint."

"He'll never get it off the ground."

"I'm never going to let him try. I sent somebody around to have a talk to the bloke, but the bloke doesn't want to talk. And the reason that he doesn't want to talk is he's a thief, and the only way he ever earned a quid was from theiving it. He doesn't understand the workings of this town, that's the problem."

Gillespie ventured another grin, "No offence, Dick. But I reckon I don't need to know any more about that."

Reilly glanced at him with a mild sort of surprise. "No worries, Charlie. Just got to put the frighteners on more than what's usual. Drink?"

"Thought you didn't drink."

"Never touch the stuff," said Reilly, slopping a bit from a bottle of Bell's into a glass. "Just being hospitable-like. Say when?"

Gillespie said when.

Reilly said, "I'm fit as a fiddle. Work out every day. Reckon sometimes I ought to have stayed in the ring."

Gillespie loosened his tie, stuck out his feet on the carpet in front of him. "I reckon you made your packet and got out while you were good for it. Set yourself up in a normal sort of vocation. So you can fly like a butterfly, and sting like a bee."

"Yeah, that's right. I'm a regular Cassius Clay. I am the greatest!" Reilly laughed, making Gillespie laugh too. Then just as abruptly, all the laughter fell out of Reilly's eyes. "I've been figuring you might like to do some work on the court case, thought you'd be glad of the extra coin. See, I heard you was

running around with some blokes in the new government, and thought you might bring them to feel it was in everybody's interest to help out."

It wasn't that Gillespie doubted the value of a client such as Dick Reilly (the butcher and taxman were far from the only credible clients to his way of thinking), but he coloured slightly, and shifted in his seat, a gesture that Reilly mistook for lack of enthusiasm.

Reilly tried to talk him round. "I guess you've got to understand that me and the last government weren't really that organised. Just a few friendly people doing business on the side. But because there were politicians involved everybody was willing to turn a blind eye so long as nobody was being inconvenienced. Anyway, recently I got round to thinking of you, and I reckon you could put it to these blokes that if they were lenient in the matter of declaring the club, that me, and the businesses I represent, would be willing to reciprocate in a more organised fashion than was done in the past." Reilly squirted some soda into a tumbler and drank it off slowly, staring at Gillespie over the rim of the glass. "What's the matter?"

"I reckon you know," said Gillespie, feebly.

Reilly put down his glass. "Yeah," he said, and nodded gravely. "Maybe I do. But I dunno a single lawyer that has got himself arrested, at least not for asking." He went on, with a hint of defensiveness in his tone. "Don't sit there and tell me this bloke Askin doesn't have a deal with the bookies, he was SP himself. Still bets SP, and I can tell you he doesn't pay out his bookie on any regular basis. I mean, that doesn't sound like the sort that's falling over googly-eyed on account of you coming at him with a sound proposition." He glanced at his knuckles and added, "Obviously, I don't need to say I'd be

looking at a generous retainer for anybody who's able to make such an arrangement."

Gillespie knew Reilly had a way of inducing a bloke to call square things circles, but right now he was happy to think it was so. "Fine, Dick. Okay," he said, throwing up his hands in mock resignation. "But I'm not promising anything."

Reilly stepped out from his desk. He grinned, stretched, and scratched at his armpits. "That's all I'm asking, Charlie. Just have a chatter to the bloke."

Gillespie walked off into the star-freckled night with a sense there were more parts to his character than anyone expected. He glanced idly at a high-powered electric sign that showed above the dingy darkness of a black crenulated-brick building as he rounded the corner. The sign said, 'Johnny's Famous Baccarat'. Had Gillespie stayed for another ten minutes he would have seen Reilly's boys with their cricket bats spilling onto the footpath, and the sign sputter out. But he didn't. He fixed his eyes on the moon as it floated down the night sky, put a hand to his head to check it was joined to the rest of him, and ended the night on a cliff-hanger with the best yet to come.

4

IN JOHNNY'S FAMOUS BACCARAT CLUB around the corner, Glory McGlynn forced her eyes open and attempted to stand. Johnny was sitting, back to the wall, at the end of the room. There were bruised cuts over his face where Reilly's boys had laid in with their cricket bats.

"Johnny," said Glory. "Oh God, Johnny. What's happened to us?"

Johnny gagged on something wet in his throat. He tried and failed to get up off the ground. "Reilly reckons he owns this town. He's trying to make things so nobody can make a living. I'm going there right now to tell him that he can't get away with it."

"No, you won't, Johnny Warren." Glory's eyes filled with horror.

"Somebody's got to fight him. Somebody's got to stand in his road. He's trampled on everything I ever dreamed. I've got nothing left."

"You've got me," said Glory, emphatically. "And Kim."

Johnny's eyes blazed across the room, taking in the upturned chairs and plastic water jugs, the card tables with their green-baize cloths blackened at the edges, and the dust, rising from a white vinyl armchair sliced open. Then his eyes alighted on Glory and his face seemed to soften.

Glory knew she'd follow Johnny to the moon so long as he asked.

5

DETEKTIVE CONSTABLE GUS FINLAY wandered in through the familiar precincts of the Criminal Investigation Branch, oblivious to the urine-secreting wall paint that lined the corridors, the dust, ash and paper clips swirling along the grey-speckled PVC tiles. He passed the Breaking Squad, the Consorting Squad and the 21 Division, the Safe, Arson, Pillage and Pawnbroking Squads ... and paused. Up and down the hallway, the doors stood ajar. Everywhere men sat behind desks strewn with gummed-up collages of chip packets and mildew-infested teacups, their shirt-collars buttoned tight over ready-knotted ties on hoops or clips, and suit jackets, worn to a shine, draped in skewed folds over the backs of their chairs. Gus stared at the sign saying CIB, then down at the crumpled note in the sweaty palm of his hand. The note said, 'Finlay, F.C. Detective Constable. Report to Detective Senior Sergeant Tanner. Immediate.' His mind began calculating all the things that the note might imply, and all of these thoughts, in rapid succession, caused his cheeks to start burning.

Moments after the demonstrators chucked themselves under the wheels of the car Gus had been staring at the crowd milling round, feeling vaguely alarmed, if not a little appalled at the injuries inflicted by some of his colleagues, when a glimpse of a three-times convicted bag-snatch with six outstanding arrest-warrants against him, gave him an easy way out of his quandary.

"Oi," he shouted. "You there!"

The bag-snatch backed up, but only for as long as it took him to poke him in the ribs, before bolting off through the crowd and down a blind alley.

Gus crash-tackled, grabbed him at the waist. He fell spectacularly, skidding along on his front.

"Gotcha," he said, slapping a cuff to the bloke's ankle.

Behind him, somebody was laughing.

Gus rolled onto his back and saw Tanner walking towards him. He flushed. Stammered. Got himself up.

Other coppers did what they had to to get the job done, but Tanner was different. He was out raiding flats and flushing out criminals and bringing them in. He was prepared to jeopardise himself and his own life in the doing of his duty. He was prepared to be criticised by the judiciary as to the manner in which his arrests had been made, and the evidence taken. People talked, and he was prepared to accept that also. Gus admired him, but wasn't sure that he liked him. He shifted from foot to foot, the sun glancing uncomfortably off the rims of his spectacles, as Tanner reached out and gave him an easy shake.

"I've been meaning to have a chat about the Harry Guthrie Inquiry."

Gus stared back at the door marked CIB. He squared his shoulders, pushed his glasses a little further up his nose, and edged his way through. His eyes wandered down the serried rows of wooden desks burdened with telephones, typewriters and paper trays, taking in the dilapidated blue-mesh barring the windows and other odd gloomy features. He'd heard rumours that the inquiry into events at Darlinghurst Station, known as the Harry Guthrie Inquiry, was being wound up, with the whole of his squad being seconded or

transferred. "So this is it," he muttered. "They've made their decision." He dredged up a laugh to show he didn't care. But he did.

Gus had joined the Police Force at the age of twenty-one, starting out as a beat cop in the city walking the nightshift from Hyde Park to the Haymarket. He roused winos, cuffed molls, put deros in the drunk-tank. He chased down ghost armies of the homeless, the desperate, the drunk and deranged. He got himself from Beat One to Beat Two, and telephoned on time. He got promotion, was transferred to Darlinghurst Branch and put into plainclothes. It was 1964, the year he met Harry. He was an L-plate detective and Harry taught him everything there was to know. Partners, they became friends. They made cases together. Then the chief of the vice squad retired and Harry took command, changed things overnight. Harry said they'd had enough. He gave out new orders, 'Clean up the Doors'. A few weeks later the rumours started doing the rounds, allegations that Harry was taking a sling from the brothels, maybe a bit more than a pay-off. Soon enough, the rumours broke loose in the papers. Allan ordered a comb put through Darlinghurst Station and Frank Tanner was assigned to carry out the inquiry.

"Whatever Harry had done ... " said Gus, shaking his head. He didn't believe any of it. Harry was a mate. He ought to have known.

Three doors faced in along a short grimy corridor at the end of the room. One was marked with a sign that read, 'Senior Sergeant Frank Tanner' in white Bakelite letters. Gus bunched up his fingers. Knocked, and waited.

A voice yelled, "That you, Finlay? Come in, you bastard."

Gus entered a cramped space strewn with untidy boxes of paperwork, with the remains of last night's tea on the edge of the table. Tanner was standing to the left of a large picture window that occupied the length of one

wall, the light imparting a greenish sort of hue to a density of stubble on his close-shaven cheeks. He had a thick crop of grey hair flying back from his forehead, eyelids that hung downwards in thick overlapping folds, and a grin that never left his face, though he looked ready to break the room apart. "Welcome," he said, and saluted Gus comically, with a finger to his temple.

"Sir," said Gus, and stood to attention.

"Just call me Tanner."

"Tanner," said Gus, and tried to relax, then fearing there might be something awkward or unmanly in his manner, stood to attention again.

"Sit down," said Tanner. "I reckon you know why you're here."

Not trusting himself to say anything, Gus shook his head.

"The Darlington Inquiry was all bulls," said Tanner, striding back to his desk. "Harry was a good man, a conscientious officer, and he certainly thought the world about you. He ought to have stuck it through the bloody inquiry, but he didn't. Allan, he ought to have handled it better. He had a copper on the line and he should've stood by him."

Tanner's suit was dark blue and worn to a shine. There were three spots of gravy adorning the ends of his ochre swirled tie. But Gus thought him endowed with the sort of appearance that made clothes seem irrelevant.

Tanner went on, "I guess you've got to understand that moving paper is what Allan does. Every single task he's ever been assigned throughout his career is moving paper from the side of his desk where he finds it in the morning, to the side of the desk where he leaves it when he goes. Don't get me wrong. He's probably the very best paper shuffler on earth. But he doesn't know a thing about being a copper, doesn't know a single criminal, probably never met one, except maybe he's got a file number on those bits of paper he's

shuffling about. I guess that's the crux of the problem. Why Harry gets it in the neck."

"I guess so," said Gus.

Tanner moved on. "He's a Macquarie Street bloke, is Allan. The rest of us coppers are out there, bullets flying round our ears, and Allan, he's sitting in some lah-de-dah anteroom up at Parliament House, thinking what he's got to say to some politician about the files and the paper clips, or the taxpayer dollar. I've looked into this matter like Allan asked me and yeah, I reckon Harry cut a corner or two. Of course, that doesn't mean the bloke's running crooked. But Allan, being a paper shuffler, and essentially a civilian, doesn't understand that.

"Allan, he's never seen any actual cases being made, only knows what they look like when they're tied up in pink ribbons, going into the courthouse, and that copper's got plenty of time to wash off the dirt, the way he really got that conviction. So Harry's case comes up in the middle of the election, and well, hell. He never stands a chance. Anyway," he paused, as if marvelling at the length of his own outburst. "Now that the muck has all settled, Allan's decided to take no further action."

Gus couldn't help himself. "You mean —?" His eyes filled with hope.

"He means you're well out of it, detective. But Harry's all through."

Gus spun around. Pigeeye was sprawled across the sofa behind him, clipboard in hand. Gus glanced at the clipboard, his eyes travelling down to the foot of the page. He read, "Finlay, F.C., Constable. Darlinghurst Branch to CIB. Effective Immediate."

Tanner came round the desk and put a hand on Gus's shoulder. "I thought you'd fit in, be one of the boys. I've got great hopes for you, Gus. I reckon we'll have some high times together."

Gus stammered something, uncertain what to say, or how to react. He was still stammering out in the corridor ten minutes later.

"I just wanted to tell you I'm grateful," he said, and stuck out his hand. But Tanner made no move to take hold of it.

"Well, I reckon you ought to be."

Gus let the empty hand fall back to his side. He wiped off the sweat on the backs of his trousers. "Well, I am," he said, the words sounding vaguely weak and inadequate even in his own ears. "I owe you. Like I said, I reckon I'm grateful."

"I can count on you, can I?"

Gus felt the heat rise in his neck and across the backs of his ears. "Sure," he said, and turned his face slightly to hide his confusion.

5

GILLESPIE WALKED THE LENGTH OF HYDE PARK, with the Archibald Fountain set squarely at his back, peering up at the sky through a long curling arch made of sun-blackened branches. He stopped at the mouth of Macquarie Street and breathed in the scent of the Pacific as it blew in off the Harbour, tousled the brim of his Panama hat, and swept the grit on the footpath back and forth in a lullaby swoosh. He had recently secured the temporary release of his client Raymond O'Connor and spent the rail journey back to Sydney from Melbourne attempting to ignore the glaring reality that the foul-smelling dwarf was quite criminally psychotic. For his part, Ducky went back to his old haunts with a vengeance, cock-waltzing bars, standing-over bludgers and hoons, rolling punters, drunkards and toothless old geezers, and kicking molls, like footballs, along the lower lengths of Palmer Street known as the Doors. Between such activities (intended, for the most part, Gillespie supposed, to offset the bulk of his upcoming legal costs) he also found time to ring Gillespie upwards of nine times each day and was forming an unnerving habit of turning up on his doorstep, wielding, variously, a cutthroat razor and a sawn-off shotgun, and without an appointment.

But, considered in plain daylight, the considerable gratuity he had derived from the successful resolution of the Melbourne matter had put his practice on an even keel. One or two new clients had trickled in through his door and some of his more regular offenders had (thankfully!) returned to nefarious pursuits. He had met the unspeakable arrears he owed to his landlord, Crick, Humbert & Co, and the rent on the premises for more than one month. The sudden lack of indebtedness made him feel buoyant.

Gillespie swung left into Martin Place as a silver Karmann Ghia streaked past him, then turned left once again into Castlereagh Street, for a meeting with his good friend George Cubitt at the Hotel Australia. He had devoted much thought to the affairs of his new client Dick Reilly, and though his thoughts on this matter had been hazy at first, he had worked hard to make them clearer to himself, eventually concluding that he couldn't do better than seek out his friend Cubitt, with the object of asking for some particular advice (knowing such advice would be administered in accordance with his own views, giving him comfortable encouragement, if not outright assistance). Cubitt was one of a new breed of PR consultant, a well-known dabbler in politics, who made his money somewhere in the shadow-lands between business and government. He spoke out the side of his mouth, and drank regularly at the Long Bar of the Hotel Australia, where a few of his political cronies would stop by. Through him, Gillespie was becoming well known in such circles as a man with a hankering after some political manoeuvring.

Gillespie wasn't so naïve as to announce his desire to stand as a candidate (let alone anything higher!), but nursed a faint secret hope that on the strength of the talents he so obviously had, and the friends he was making, that he might find his way into Parliament. As to political views, his own were mild if not altogether malleable. He had once professed some interest in Labor, seeking the liberation of the toiling masses when he himself was oppressed, but now he was bent on raising himself above the general ruck he was divesting himself of unsuitable views. Lately, he had announced himself an Askin supporter, if only because people in the society in which he sought his daily bread were, by and large, in the same line, and with the

prospect of affluence set firmly in sight, was grown as conservative as you please.

Cubitt, by contrast, wasn't particularly interested in views, nor was he unduly concerned with the winning and losing, but in the game for its own sake. And so it was Gillespie thought Reilly's case might appeal to him — the prospect of parading him around to show that he could.

Cubitt was dressed in a grey chalk-stripe suit, striped shirt and tie. His ears were puffed up like cauliflowers, his cheeks slightly flushed above the stubble, and his eyes squinted intermittently beneath round horn-rimmed goggles. He also whistled slightly when he breathed, from the burden of weight and the wastes of his cigar.

"He's willing to rat out his Labor mates?" said Cubitt, once Gillespie unburdened himself.

"Oh, it's more a matter of business, I think, than any road to Damascus."

"Well then, I guess you've come to the right bloke." Cubitt grinned, sending his voice in a downward trajectory so that it travelled no further than the bar. "First up, I think you've got to understand that business kept its hands in its pockets for the most part, the day Askin went out to campaign. He wanted to do something for the rabble, the workingman (the salt of the earth, the backbone of the country), drag his Party somewhere the votes are, but the Party doesn't want to go. So money was tight throughout the election, with only the stalwarts like old Packer putting in. But Askin, he gets himself elected against the wildest expectations of many and now he's governing on a knife edge, diverting the best part of his attention to the next round of votes. Sure, he's got his hands in the treasury tart shop and things are looking up,

but sometimes the taxpayer dollar isn't enough. Or it's just not the sort of money that's wanted."

"And what sort is that?"

Cubitt took a deep swallow of his beer. "Chap in that kind of position ... what he's doing is collecting cash for the slush funds, the unofficial funds that help keep control of the Party."

A woman in fox furs sailed by.

Cubitt's attention seemed to drift along with her. Gillespie tried to bring him back. "Of course there'll be something in it for you," he said, with a prim tug to his tie.

Cubitt laughed, "I dare say there will. And from Reilly, I'm expecting double or nothing. But it's not as grubby as you think," he added, striking a more serious pose. "Thing is, I never make any quid pro quo on the donations I get. I just say that, for a fee, I can get business in to see whoever they've got their problem with. Take Reilly, for instance. I think you've got to let him know that it's mostly a matter of money. He's got to keep putting it in, until they come round to seeing things in a much brighter light."

Gillespie stared about the shiny-marble interior of the Long Bar, trying very hard to contain his excitement. Underneath him, down the generous sweep of an exterior staircase, was Princes, over the road, the faded glory of Romanos, and to the rear of the lobby was the Wintergarden, with its solid blue walls and Art Deco stars on the ceiling. Together these institutions marked out the world in which the rarefied thing known as Sydney Society gathered, and carried on its rituals, in all but complete ignorance of the sufferings and wailings of the burgeoning metropolis rushing around them. "What exactly can you do for me, George?" he said, taking the plunge.

"I can get you a powwow with the money boys, maybe the big man himself, turns out your donation is solid."

Gillespie grinned wider than is really normal, causing Cubitt to break into a stream of raucous laughter. He waved a brown banknote at the bartender. "Pour my friend another." He pushed out his glass. "I think he needs it pretty badly."

Three hours later, Cubitt lurched sideways off his barstool. He stared down at Gillespie with unsteady concentration, swaying slightly on his shoes. "Come, sir! Before the pot-wallopers throw us onto the footpath."

Gillespie followed his friend as he crashed out onto the street, proceeding in a southerly direction to the rear of the Latin Quarter.

The night was hot, the air as thick as formaldehyde and filled with the mysterious though unmistakable scent of fried onions. On the corner to their right a ghostly billboard loomed up, 'Lafitte French Brandy ... C'est Si Bon', beneath which the footpath was adorned with three piles of newspapers and a scattering of willful or nostalgic vagrants. Off in the distance, Australia Square Tower thrust itself skyward like a white marble finger stretched out to the moon.

Gillespie peered tentatively down the black alley — past a howling cat, a stack of wooden crates labelled 'Penfolds' and other sorts of wreckage. He was surprised to see the rear door of the Latin Quarter flung open, and Sammy Lee, the mournful and lugubrious nightclub proprietor, ejected summarily through it. From his sprawling position on the asphalt, Sammy adroitly grabbed hold of a large hobnailed boot that Sergeant Pigeye Donaldson was sending his way, causing Pigeye to tumble and crash through the complete row of garbage cans. They tussled about among the slops and

dead lettuce for a minute, until Pigeye, blowing out a steady stream of epithets such as 'wog', 'bog' and 'Yid', punched the nightclub proprietor half-conscious, walloped him, kicked him repeatedly, and banged shut the door.

6

DUCKY O'CONNOR SLIPPED up the front stairs of the Latin Quarter just as the doorman turned down the last orange light. He almost wept with relief at the sight of the crowd billowing endlessly out. Exhausted, they stepped through the night in bewildered streams, clambered into Holdens and resprayed Falcons, and began the long journey home to the suburbs — the men anxious and nerve-ticked, the women shivering in pink sateen and slithers of acetate, with make-up falling in hideous drifts from their faces.

In his crumpled shirt and petrol smudged trousers it was obvious Ducky didn't belong. He was better than them, he told himself. He could do anything better than them. He thought of the white powder that he'd left at the flop, and snivelled, his brain running in long unwiped streams from his nose. He didn't need that. He'd been close to death — violent death — many times. "But never this close," he muttered. "Never your own."

Ducky had sent messages from Pentridge but each time McPherson had failed to respond. He sent threats, said he would rip out McPherson's guts and blow his brains through his eyeballs — but still no one came. The coppers, the jacks, the toffee-faced lawyer who bailed him out, they all thought he killed for no reason. He pictured the woman standing on the fringe of the crowd with her dumb frightened eyes. Her friends had treated him like dirt, called him less than a maggot that had crawled off the slagheaps of Sydney. Each time he thought of those round frightened eyes he was seized with a wicked kind of amusement. He had killed for the sake of this ... scum town. Its harbour slithering with inlets and rivulets, crammed with rust-bucket hulks, boats spewing out garbage. Beggars ran free on its streets.

Freaks wielding sawn-offs crawled out of its jerry built hovels. Mould grew over its buildings in defiance of the sunshine. Sometimes he imagined the pollution moving up through his toes, filling his throat, squirting out of his eyeballs. Then terrible things happened. Not the taking of a life, not the murder of another human being. He hardly gave that a thought. The idea that his victims might have thoughts or feelings was inconceivable to him. They simply presented themselves as obstacles in his path until, in his own mind, he was satisfied he could do nothing but remove them. The busts, the standovers were no matter. Violence inflicted in the carrying on of business was wholly deserved. Persons that crossed him had only themselves to blame.

No, the thing he feared most was the cold and the emptiness, the bad dreams that were his constant company. He wanted to stop the nightmare. He wanted to turn off the dark. But then the pollutants descended as thick as a woollen blanket and smothered his face, so he could see, and breathe, only with difficulty. Those times, not even the sunlight could warm his poor shivering being.

Ducky was scared sick, in truth. It made his manner strange. He crawled furtively along the wall of the foyer and stopped in the shadow of a potted palm. Reilly had told him to make it up with McPherson. He thought Reilly was wrong, that he didn't understand what was going on around him. But it wasn't in his nature to go against Reilly, and so he was frightened.

"Stow it," said Ducky, when he came banging through Reilly's door earlier that evening. "Just hand over the ready, I'm broke."

Reilly was cocked back in his swivel chair nursing his chihuahua on his knee. He glanced at him strangely through half-lowered eyelids. "I hope

you've not here intending to cause a blue, like you've been blueing with all the people in this town, regardless of the money they're paying me. I dunno what's got into you, Ducky. But if you keep on like this, you'll end up the same as some others I could name."

"You threatening me, Dick?"

"Whatever."

Reilly's eyes drifted to the Smith & Wesson on the edge of his desk. But Ducky beat him to it. He snatched it up, waved it around. Reilly's chihuahua tore at his sleeve.

"Shut up the rodent. Or I'll mangle him, Dick."

Reilly scooped up the dog, muffled it with his fingers. "Look mate, I reckon we've been friends for a very long time. I know you're in a spot of trouble over this Melbourne matter, and it's got you shook up. That's why I'm going to give you a monkey," he stuck a hand in his pocket and pulled out a wad, "but I want you to see Lennie and set things to rights."

Ducky sneered, waving the gun. "So this is how the great Dick Reilly handles his business? Go and see Lennie, go and see Lennie. Let Lennie sort it out. I reckon you don't see what's coming, do you, Dick?"

But Reilly wasn't listening. He threw a short jab from the right, a hook from the left, and grabbed hold of the gun. Then he dropped the gun into his desk and clunked the drawer shut. "Sorry, mate," he said, and glanced at his knuckles. "But I can't help it when you do things like this. It gets me upset."

Ducky threw himself into the nearest chair. "There's no way I'll stand trial in Melbourne, not in a Hanging State. I won't."

Reilly sighed, "Well, it's a bit late for that. Should've thought about it when you shot up that sheila you never met and dunno from nothing."

"Don't leave me to Lennie. Don't do this to me. Hell, I killed for you, Dick. I killed Pretty Boy Walker and Charlie Bourke. Me, Ducky. I shot sixty slugs into Jackie Steele on account of the fact he was bothering you — "

"Yeah, and a fat lot of good it did me. Jackie, he gets up off the footpath and trots off to the hospital."

"Have you paid somebody to knock me?"

"I dunno," said Reilly, scratching his head. "But the way you go on I wouldn't have to pay anything. They'd knock you for free."

"McPherson doesn't like me. He thinks nothing of me."

"No worries, I've had a talk to the bloke. I've told him to make all the necessary arrangements. Wasn't it McPherson got you out last time you was banged up in the slammer?"

"He doesn't want to talk."

"Maybe he's busy," Reilly shrugged. "God knows he's got better things to do. Anyway, I've told him you're coming."

"Okay." Ducky edged his way to the door.

Reilly called after him. "Yeah, but don't go in there blowing like a maniac." But it was already too late. Ducky was gone, leaving Reilly gobbling air.

Things took a turn for the worse. He'd parked his blue Holden round the corner from Kellett Street but for some reason the engine failed to start. He opened the boot, extracted a tire iron, and banged it about. But it wasn't any good. He flung the tire iron into the gutter, and made his way into town. He didn't wait for the lights. But plunged into the stream of slow prowling traffic,

causing a red Mini Minor to crank to a halt in a jangle of burnt rubber and lengthy obscenities.

He jogged down Orwell and Victoria Streets, down the crumbling Butler Stairs into Woolloomooloo. He stood there, transfixed by a halo of frosted pink lamplight, before stepping deftly out of the puddle of light that had trapped him and darted off down the road. He seemed to hear footsteps behind him. Cries of, 'He's here ... he's here.' He turned an alley with a brick wall at one end. He grappled, swung himself up. He could see the city in front of him, the way the light picked out the ledges and lintels of the shiny glass structures. He heaved a bit, gave a short sigh, jumped down off the wall, and scurried up the rise. Past the soft orange light burning in the crypt of St Mary's Cathedral. Up through Hyde Park. He stank of sweat by the time he found the doors of the Latin Quarter and pressed his way through the crowd, their faces suffused in a gaseous green glow and endlessly multiplied in repeating club mirrors.

Cheap music wailed across the dance floor and shivered inside him. Laughter trilled on all sides, blending with the clink, clink, clink of used glassware collected. Shadows thinned before his determined gaze until he could pick out the shape of the bar, and beyond it, a row of banquettes extending the length of the wall. McPherson was sitting at a table on the edge of the dance floor. The blue glow of the orchestra directly behind him casting a deep violet shadow over the table in front of him, with its scattering of broiled lobsters, beer jugs and ashtrays overflowing. Ducky parted a cloud of blue smoke, and wandered up to the table.

"How are you, cunt?"

McPherson looked up. "I'm all right, cunt. How are you?"

"I'm fine, cunt."

Duck grinned, baring his teeth. Then his eyes widened slightly through anxiety into fear.

Somebody yelled, "This is for you, cunt ... " and blasted away.



Part Two

The Kellett Club

1

DETEKTIVE CONSTABLE GUS FINLAY was sitting alone in the squad room, chair cocked back, feet on the desk, and the radio down low, when the call came blaring over the squawk box. He almost tripped over himself getting up. He threw on his coat, grabbed a hat off the coat hook, and walked out of the room. He ran down the exterior iron stairs that led to the courtyard, clambered into an unmarked, and swung a left from the drive. He could see the dome lights churning from three blocks away, soaking the street with pink glare, before their brightness faded, and flashed against the sky. Several groups of uniforms were gathered outside the club entrance, throwing up barricades, running backwards and forwards under the light, or standing on the doorstep, fags cupped in hands, brown holsters dangling.

Gus pulled in to the side of the road and badged his way through.

"Who was here first?" he yelled, as he swaggered down the room.

Tanner was standing with one foot propped up on a quilted-satin seat.

"Me," he said, and brought Gus up short.

Gus stammered, looked at the floor. Ducky O'Connor, crumpled like a broken puppet, lay a half-yard beyond the tip of his shoe — right arm extended, chin flung back, eyes round and blue, and fixed with a look of surprise. The entry wound, behind the right ear, was surrounded by a mass of black stippling. Judging by the mess, which was extensive, the underside of the face was blown totally away. Despite this, he was breathing.

"Bugger," said Gus, and fell to his knees. "What happened?"

Tanner grinned, "Well, we were sitting right here, having a few, when in hops O'Connor and gets himself shot."

"You saw the whole thing?"

"Not a bloody bit of it, but sure as hell we'll be asking some questions."

Tanner shifted sideways as he spoke so that Gus caught sight of Lennie McPherson who was sitting at a table behind him, flamboyant in an open-necked pink shirt. Next to McPherson sat Ernie Chubb, appearing downcast and discouraged, and on the table between them, two guns, a Colt and a Dreyse, were carefully laid out on a pink damask napkin.

"Come on, Ernie," said Tanner, and gave Chubb a wink. "Why don't you tell the bloke here what happened?"

Chubb started up in a panic. "Who, me?"

"Yeah, you." Tanner grabbed Chubb by his shirtfront and hauled him across the dance floor. He sat him down on a piano stool and spun it around, so they were facing in the opposite direction to the rest of the crowd. "Okay, Ernie. Just tell us what happened."

"Jees, I dunno, Mr Tanner. It happened that quick."

"Who shot him?"

"Come on, Mr Tanner. I'm not a bloody top-off."

Tanner sighed, cheeks growing heavy, then he thrust his face right up to Chubb's. "I said tell the bloke here what happened, you bandy-legged bastard, before I tear you apart."

Chubb faltered, "Well, he sort of shot himself, I reckon."

"What do you mean 'Sort of shot himself'?"

"He was holding this gun, see. Then there was this huge bloody bang and he kind of ... fell over."

"Turn it up, Ernie. There're two guns here. Who had the other one?"

"Not me," said Chubb, and gave a long slow squint.

A voice came from behind. "Oi Tanner! How's graft?"

Tanner turned around, real slow. "Stuff you," he said, and stared at McPherson.

"Just making conversation."

"Well, stick to me and you might learn some."

"I reckon I might."

Tanner laughed, then turned to face Pigeye. "I reckon that bloke needs to go take a leak."

"That's right," said McPherson. "I've been sitting here drinking for the best part of four hours and the bladder's not like it used to be."

"I can take him," Gus offered.

"Pigeye can handle it," said Tanner. He strode back to the table, with Gus following on at his heels. "I want you to take charge of the scene, take down witness statements, details and so on, until Driscoll and his mob from Scientific Investigations get themselves here. I'm taking this lot to CIB and getting them dusted," he added, bundling the guns under his arm, and making his way to the bar. He pulled out a bottle of whisky, slopped a bit into a glass, and tossed it straight back, before offering some to Gus.

Gus shook his head.

But Tanner didn't care. He poured out another. Then three white-suited amblos came clattering through the door. Tanner stared at them over the rim of his glass. "Hell. You blokes really know how to arrive in a hurry. Cheers."

Wally Driscoll, from the Scientific Investigation Bureau, arrived at the Latin Quarter before Gus departed. He scoured the joint with tape measures, peered under tables, bagged the evidence, dusted for prints, and took lots of photographs. The amblos carted Ducky up to Sydney Hospital, where he didn't linger long. They wrapped him in hospital bandages, plied him with needles, and pronounced him dead within the hour. There was plenty of time to get up to the hospital, and ID the corpse, before they shifted it out to the morgue in the morning, except that it was already morning. There was just a glittering patch of purple on the dance floor where Ducky once was, and more mess than you would generally expect a human being to carry.

Gus burst through the mint-green swing doors of the CIB and collided with Salvatore Agnelli in the squad room.

"Oi, Gus." Agnelli poked him in the ribs. "Jees, you're a mess. What's up?"

Gus stopped, panting and breathless. "Ducky O'Connor," he spluttered, and grabbed up some air.

"Yeah, I heard. Pity nobody's going down for it."

Gus looked incredulous. "But Tanner was there. He got hold of the gun."

"Yeah well," said Agnelli, glancing around. "I reckon you'll find something is up."

Agnelli looked worn down and out of sorts. Gus had no idea what had put the smudges under his eyes or the patina of sweat on his forehead. He bit back what he was going to say, and reached out and gave Agnelli's shoulder an easy shake. Then he pushed through the swing door, turned right into a stubby corridor inset with cubicles, opened the door on the left, and peered

through the one-way. Static crackled through the intercom. There were smears on the glass.

Pigeye was sitting at a blue metal table, shoving three bits of carbon into a red Remington typewriter. Behind him, Tanner was pacing the small space between the desk and the glass.

"Address?" said Pigeye, as Chubb drew level.

Chubb lowered himself onto a spare metal stool. "Fitzroy Street, Surry Hills."

"Occupation?"

"I dunno ... Labourer, I guess."

Tanner laughed. "Very good, Ernie. Very good!"

Chubb was flustered. "I already told you what happened an hour ago."

"Sure you did. But now I want you to make me a statement so Pigeye can type it up for our records."

Chubb digested this, then tried to get cocky. "So are you going to ask us some questions or what?"

"Maybe," said Tanner.

"Come on, Mr Tanner, ask us a question. Isn't that's how it works?"

Tanner let a few seconds tick past, before easing himself in behind the table. He played with the ashtray, the notebook and pencil, then said, "Okay, Ernie. Just tell us what happened."

Chubb rallied, puffed out his chest. "Well, I don't rightly know what time it was, Mr Tanner. But we'd been there a goodish while, drinking and so on, and was all pretty full. I hear somebody yell, 'Look out, he's got a gun,' and Ducky is standing there, and I hear a shot, and that's it."

"Come on, Ernie. You can give me better than that."

"I dunno if I can. I don't rightly remember."

"So maybe it was you that shot O'Connor?"

Chubb started up angrily from his stool. "Stop messing with my words. You're confusing me."

"Well then," said Tanner. "Was it somebody else?"

"I already told you. All I heard was the yell. Then I look up, and I seen Ducky."

"Did he say anything?"

"I dunno." Chubb let out an unexpected chuckle. "I was pretty full."

"Yeah, so you said. Was it the Colt or the Dreyse that O'Connor was packing?"

"I seen him hold something ... "Chubb's face blurred with concentration. "But as soon as it goes off, I know it was a gun."

Tanner looked prayfully up at the ceiling. "How well did you know O'Connor?"

"Not that well. I seen him around with some friends of mine."

"Do you know why Ducky would want to shoot either of you?"

"Nope."

"Did he want to shoot you?"

"Hell no, why would he want to do something like that?"

"He wanted to shoot McPherson then?"

"I wouldn't know about that."

"Goddamn it, Ernie. Was he gunning for the bloke or not?"

Chubb pursed his lips. "Well, I did hear he was hostile with Len on account of the Melbourne matter. For not bailing him out." Then, ingrained

suspicion got the better of him, "But I wouldn't know much about that. I never had any blues with Ducky myself."

On the far side of the one-way, Gus was frowning. He wasn't sure he was following Tanner's angle correctly, but the interview was proving to be a disappointment and he was feeling let down. He shook out a packet of fags. Puffed one, blew smoke, then stubbed out the butt in an aluminium ashtray. When he looked up again, Lennie McPherson was standing in front of the table.

Pigeye bashed away at the Remington. "Address?"

"You bloody well know where I live," said McPherson. "You've been round there often enough."

Tanner laughed. But Pigeye persisted, "Occupation?"

Tanner spread out his hands in an expansive gesture. "Everybody knows Lennie has been the manager of a certain suburban motel since, well, about 1956."

"Ten years I put into that place. Almost as long as we've been acquainted."

Tanner indicated a chair and McPherson sat down. "So?"

McPherson leaned forward, elbows on his knees, hands hanging free. "Well, I reckon it must have gone something like this. I had just lifted up the beer jug and was pouring myself a glass, when I hear a voice, 'How are you, cunt?' So I look up and I seen O'Connor, and I say, 'I'm fine, cunt. How are you?' Then O'Connor pulls out his hand out of his pocket and he says, 'Here's yours'."

"And?"

"I hear somebody say, 'Look out, he's got a gun.' Then I hear a shot and O'Connor flops to the floor."

"You're telling me it wasn't you who shot him?"

"It couldn't have been me, could it? See, I still had the beer bottle in one hand and the glass in the other."

Tanner gave a too-wide boyish grin. "Course you did," he said, enjoying himself. "So help me out a bit here. Give me probable cause. Why would O'Connor want to knock you?"

"I heard he was going to try."

"Why?"

"He reckoned I should've put up the bail over that blue down in Melbourne, but I told him I wouldn't because I considered him a maniac."

"A maniac?"

"Yeah, he was always threatening to murder people. Witnesses in cases he was in. Then he goes off to Melbourne, and shoots up some sheila he never met and dunno from nothing."

"You were taking precautions?"

"Like what?"

"Like carrying a gun."

"I only heard he was in Sydney last night. Anyway, I thought it was all talk. I reckon he was mad, but not enough to try."

"What did you do after you heard the shot?"

"I stood up, and then you lot came over and said, 'Sit down'. So I sat down. And I still had the glass in one hand and the jug in the other."

Tanner laughed.

But out in the corridor Gus didn't think it was funny. Glass in the one hand and bottle in the other? He asked Tanner as much as he stepped out the door. "Jesus. What happened?"

Tanner started comically, staring at Gus as if recognition failed him. "This case is open and shut is what happened."

Gus stammered, "But the glass in one hand and the bottle in the other? Hell ..."

Tanner was already three yards down the corridor. "Hell what?" he said, swinging round.

"Hell, sir," said Gus, grinning weakly.

Tanner hesitated before he cracked open a smile. "I tell you whatever bloke shot that smart bastard O'Connor, they ought to pin a medal on him. He's done us a favour. Jeess, you had me going there," he added, and shambled off through a rectangle of grey gloom at the end of the hall.

Gus stood alone with a lump in his throat, uncertain what to think, or how to react. Tanner's words by no means sat comfortably with him, and there came on him the gradual feeling that something was 'up', as Agnelli had said. But no sooner had the thought occurred to him, than he began to bury the whole thing beneath several layers of complacency, deep at the bottom of which was a substratum of melancholy at what had transpired. He was not about to doubt Tanner or what was going on, but he was suddenly unhappy.

He turned on his heel and walked down the hall, reaching the doors to the squad room, as Wally Driscoll, of the Scientific Investigation Bureau, came hurrying through. Wally was dressed in a grubby white lab coat, with horn

rimmed bifocals of a supernatural size, bloating the pink-rimmed green eyes underneath.

"Wally?" Gus stopped him with both hands. "You lifted the prints off them guns from the Latin Quarter?"

"Haven't you heard?"

"Heard what?"

Wally took Gus by the arm and dragged him a few paces. "There aren't any."

"What do you mean?"

"There aren't any prints."

"You're kidding me, right?"

"Nope," said Wally. "I'm right on the level."

"Does Tanner know this?"

Wally moved a little further into the corner. Perhaps fearing they could be overheard, even there, he said in a voice barely audible, "I'm saying those guns have been wiped."

2

GLORY MCGLYNN WAS SITTING IN JOHNNY WARREN'S freshly opened betting club on the main street of Liverpool, together with Johnny, and their new-found friend, Michael 'Mick' Moylan, who was thumbing through the ledgers as they counted the night's takings. Outside a flatland of junkyards and factories stretched to the horizon, dotted over with occasional weatherboards and purple-brick semis, their unruly crops of television aerials sprouting off the red roof tiles. Under a cheap yellow light that shone down from the window, a green FJ was parked on a strip of cracked asphalt, beside a chain-link fence with a green metal gate, and beyond this, the apprentice mechanics at Perkal & Sons Smash Repair sparked up their blowtorches, sending slithers of orange up into the morning.

The shop itself comprised four whitewashed walls and a floor of yellow speckled linoleum, with a long makeshift counter at the furthest end. Above this, the starting prices were chalked up on a blackboard under a sign with a painted kangaroo and the words, 'Hop in — You're Welcome' and in smaller letters underneath 'Gentlemen Please Oblige by Not Carrying Form Guides and Papers when Leaving the Premises'. The operation was small but thriving, with four telephone lines and a steady stream of punters trickling across from the pub. They took bets on the dogs, the trots and the ponies, spread a bit of green baize after the last race on Fridays, and played three shoes of baccarat until 'when' in the morning. The money wasn't brilliant, but turnover was regular and the proceeds split 50/50 after the cops were paid off — and all of it thanks to their friend Mick.

Glory stared at Moylan across the cash on the table. He was a large, almost elephantine man in his mid-50s, with a blanket of dyed hair rising in unequal mounds on either side of a straight part. He had an enormous cyst to the side of his mouth, and eyes that were dazed and perennially bloodshot. His shirtsleeves were rolled purposely above his elbows. He was wearing a spiky pink rubber on his thumb.

"The thing is," he said. "Once we get this joint off the ground we'll move onto another one, big but not flashy, with glass chandeliers, and a few dancing girls in black egret feathers and a giant roulette wheel ..." he held out his arms " ... maybe fifteen foot across."

Johnny interrupted. "Just where are you going to lay hold of a fifteen-foot roulette wheel?"

"Monte Carlo," said Moylan, though last week he'd told Glory he had a timber trader lined up in the back streets of Bangkok.

"I dunno," said Johnny. "I reckon you'd be better off with craps."

"Craps?"

"Yeah. Once was, I ran a craps game with the prettiest pair of dices you ever seen, fetched in a packet," Johnny laughed.

There was a creak in the stairwell. Johnny's old mate, Chooks Brouggy, stuck his head through the door.

Chooks was a short bloke of unfortunate physique, with a miserably skinny neck, and hair the colour and straightness of straw sticking out around the edges of an old porkpie hat that was jammed tight to his head. He wore his shirt half-tucked into a pair of blue dungarees, but with the buttons undone, so his chicken-ribs were showing.

Johnny looked up from the notes he was bundling. "Jees, Chooks. Didn't I tell you not to take your eyes off the door?"

Chooks shuffled his toes. "Yeah. But it's Tommy."

Johnny started up from the table. "Well, I hope you got rid of him. Quick smart."

"I thought you ought to see him."

"Well, do me a favour and quit thinking. I need one of Reilly's boys poking around here like a hole in the head."

"He's one of Dick Reilly's boys?" said Moylan, looking up from his ledger.

"Shit yeah," said Johnny, growing angry at the memory. "That bloke Reilly reckons he owns this town, but I've got news for him. Out here in Liverpool he doesn't own a thing." He turned back to Chooks. "Go down there and tell Tommy from me to get stuffed."

"Hang on a tick. Maybe the bloke's got a reason." Moylan turned towards Chooks. "What did he say?"

Chooks glanced at Johnny, as if waiting for Johnny's permission to answer. Glory watched on, conscious they owed Moylan a whole lot, but also knowing Moylan had a habit of spiking Johnny into a prickly belligerence. (The way Johnny saw things he was the boss, with Moylan providing the finance.)

"Well, first up," said Chooks, once Johnny had nodded his head. "I reckon he isn't working for Reilly any more."

"Why?"

"I dunno. Just do. I reckon you seen him and you'll catch what I'm saying."

"Well, I guess you better send the bugger up then," said Johnny.

Chooks went out, and Johnny not so casually pulled a gun out of his trousers and put it down on the table. He waited a minute, then picked up the gun and stood at the top of the staircase, arm dangling loose, pointing the gun down into the dark. "Hurry up, Tommy. I don't have all day. I'm a busy man."

There was a subdued commotion on the staircase, and then Tommy Bogle blundered out of the gloom. His face was battered and bruised from a recent beating, and the light from the naked bulb brought out his injuries in a startling way. His cheeks quivered. He gnawed on his thumb.

"Aw hell ... " Johnny was disconcerted. "Reilly do that?"

Tommy was too distressed to say anything. But Glory saw it coming. Gradually it dawned on everybody present that he was talking about Ducky O'Connor.

"Mate. Reilly's gone and knocked him."

"He hasn't," said Johnny, incredulous.

"I tell you he's done it, and I reckon I'm next. Mate —" he said, and held out a crumpled bit of paper. "I tell you the bloke's got no loyalty. He hasn't got the right."

THE BIG WIPEOUT

City's fastest hankie covers up killing

The best brains of the Sydney C.I.B. have been baffled by 'The Fastest Handkerchief' in the West.

The Handkerchief removed the evidence which might have shown who killed gunman Raymond 'Ducky' O'Connor last night.

When O'Connor - known as Ducky because he waddled when he walked - was shot dead in the Latin Quarter The Fastest Handkerchief whipped out his hankie and wiped all fingerprints off the murder weapon - plus another pistol that appeared miraculously on the floor.

By the time two watching detectives pushed their way through the crowd, both guns were shining as smoothly as a sergeant major's boots.

There was a beautiful irony about it. Ducky O'Connor had died the way he had lived - with violence, without witnesses.

3

NORMAN ALLAN SLAMMED DOWN THE NEWSPAPER, and yelled at Frank Tanner as he came down the room. "This is not the sort of thing I want to read over the marmalade pot. This is the sort of thing I ought to be told."

Allan's striped-flannel pyjamas peeked at odd points from the collar and cuffs of his uniform, and his protruding potbelly blossomed like cauliflower through his half-buttoned coat. Tanner took this in as he came to a halt in front of the desk, and put on a wonderfully contrived look of angelic contrition. "I was going to mention it to you, Norman. Honest. Only with you being sick and all —"

"There's nothing to stop you from picking up the telephone. You dial it and it rings. Ever heard of that?"

Tanner slackly raised his arms from his sides, palms uppermost, in a gesture of hapless apology. "This O'Connor character. See, he was a bit of a loser. I reckon most likely he upped and shot himself."

"Shot himself?" said Allan, dubiously.

"I dunno how it happened —"

"You're telling me you stuffed it?"

"Yeah."

"Give me one good reason why I shouldn't yank you off this?" Allan started, and went on for several seconds. He sank back down against the edge of his desk, and his eyes began to wander, anxious and allergic. "Hell. Just tell me what happened."

Tanner threw himself down in the nearest chair like he'd just been invited. "I guess it must've been a little after two. I'm down at the Latin Quarter with my eyes on McPherson and that lot, when the club starts to close and people are blowing out the door and blocking my sight. Then I hear a shout, 'Look out, he's got a gun,' so I jump to my feet and draw my revolver, quick smart. I'm pushing my way across the room, hurling furniture, and so forth, and I see this bloke under the table. McPherson says, 'Ducky O'Connor, Mr Tanner. The cunt tried to knock me.' So I say, 'Sit down you lot and put your hands on the table'. Then I turn to Pigeye and say, 'Lock the doors, Pigeye' and I bend down and see as O'Connor is still breathing, so I say, 'Ring for an ambulance and get the others here.'"

Allan was pacing the room between the desk and the window, swinging round now and then to stare at a blank space on the wall between the Premier's photograph and a portrait of the Queen.

Tanner went on. "Anyway, about twelve inches to the right I see a small automatic pistol, a Colt .25. I pick up the gun and put it down on a napkin. Then I see a much larger weapon, a Dreyse .32, and I put it alongside the Colt. Then the others arrive, so I bag up the guns, and give them to Pigeye, who signs them over to Scientific Investigations for dusting."

Allan came to a halt at the edge of his desk. For a moment he didn't speak. Then he said, "I don't like this, Tanner. I reckon it smells."

Tanner eyed him soberly. "The last thing any of us needs is accusations flying around, what with them Labor blokes clamouring up and down Macquarie Street and the press banging on."

Allan walked round the side of his desk and sat down in his chair. He took off his glasses, cleaned off the lenses, and put them back on. "Can't you get me a witness?"

"We spoke to them already."

"Well, speak to them again," said Allan, impatient. "Then report back to me personally, understand?"

"Sure," said Tanner, and when it seemed Allan wasn't going to say anything more, picked up his hat and made ready to leave.

Allan glanced after him. "How's that young Finlay coming along?"

"Fine," said Tanner, turning around. "Why?"

Allan mused, "Knew his father once. Nice bloke, but soft for a copper. Got into a muddle. Sent out the back of Burke. Three weeks later and he topped himself. Know that?"

"No," said Tanner, with his hand on the doorknob. "I reckon I didn't."

Allan stared anxiously at the shut door for quite a long time after Tanner departed. He sank a little deeper into his chair, and reflected. His crook leg hurt him. He'd done the thing in falling down the station steps one morning, landing splat on his back and mangling the cartilage. The damn thing had folded underneath him again shortly thereafter, boarding a plane out at Kingsford Smith Airport. That put him hip-down in plaster. Then there was the bit of asparagus on the floor at that politician's bar mitzvah that cost him seven months and a kneecap ...

Scrambling to his feet, Allan strode angrily to a window that gave out on a glum courtyard filled with bits of broken brick and uncollected garbage.

Outside, a thick fug of pollution drifted about the lintels of the building, encrusting a small clutch of black wires looping down to a nearby electricity pole, and further along, a corrugated iron fence covered in billpostings that ringed the site of a future office block. He was head of the Police Force and in charge of everything. But down at the Criminal Investigation Branch he was in charge of nothing — there, only Tanner was in charge. Allan sent out orders. They were constantly countermanded. He requested information. Got nothing back. The battle was denting his ego and sapping his strength. Pitiful as it was, he was compelled to go on, to the last stagger of exhaustion, or watch everything he cherished go up in the stench of black smoke. He knew there were plenty of coppers who had unusual arrangements with the criminal class and that money was involved all along the lines of such transactions. Previously, he'd always been willing to turn an honest blind eye so long as nobody got hurt ... and because politicians were involved. But now it came over him like the recollection of something vague and unpleasant. He couldn't quite grasp it, but the feeling worked inexorably on him, grinding away at the mellow of his mood, until there was nothing inside but storm and gloom.

Tanner exited the door of Allan's Phillip Street office and drove back to CIB. Up ahead, the corridor was blocked off with pressmen. Surging out the swing doors into the stairwell, clambering over each other to get close. On the first storey landing an enterprising photographer in a red-and-white checked necktie stood on a three-stack of soapboxes emblazoned 'LustreGlo', another dangled down from the top storey landing, with his left foot hitched round

the banister like a brown-suited orangutang in bottle-glass spectacles. Tanner eyed them narrowly, stuck on a grin, threw a few elbows, and barged his way through. The reporters knotted round him, pencils flying over notepads, a couple of radiophones shooting out of the crowd. Then, gradually, the whole gang of them creamed back from his passage, falling away. And the doors of the squad room banged shut behind him.

There was a lectern on the platform, but Tanner didn't use it. He hoisted his foot onto a straight-back wooden chair — tie yanked down, shirt-collar unbuttoned, twin patches of sweat darkening his armpits — and leaned into the room. Pigeye was balled up over his desk, Agnelli was sprawled out in his chair, scrawling out notes, or maybe just doodling, Gus was perched on a desktop towards the back, shiny brown brogues resting on the desk-chair in front. Tanner didn't need to grab anybody's attention. "Lads," he said, and they jerked themselves upright, craning towards him.

"I guess you already know what that ruck in the corridor is all about. Raymond 'Ducky' O'Connor. In light of recent adverse publicity the big boss has asked us to put the lid on this quick, and gather up enough evidence to substantiate a charge. Now we know O'Connor arrived at the Latin Quarter just before closing, we've got witnesses putting him through the door a little after three. More than likely, he went there looking for Lennie McPherson with the intention of shooting him. However, two guns — a Colt and a Dreyse — were found at the scene of the shooting, and neither of these guns have owners. We were hoping for fingerprints. Unfortunately, we didn't get any."

"What's new?" yelled Pigeye.

"Nothing at all, detective," said Tanner, and grinned. "The coroner has confirmed the Dreyse as the probable weapon, and because the Colt wasn't

fired, I reckon we can safely work along with that assumption. Wally Driscoll, from Scientific Investigations, has retrieved bullets and cartridges from the scene of the shooting, but says the complete ballistics might take a couple of days. But we do have leads. Officers spoke to eighty eyewitnesses at the Latin Quarter and the big boss wants all of them re-interviewed —"

There were groans, a collective stirring.

"Don't give me that," said Tanner, straightening up. "It's not me that's saying, 'I don't trust you'. Just for this once it's got to be everything by the book. In any case, it's more than possible that there's somebody out there who saw something, but is holding it back, through shock, nerves or fright, or maybe just something they don't consider important. So are there questions?"

There weren't any.

Gus sprang off his perch and wedged himself into the back of the queue. Tanner put a hand on his shoulder.

"Sir," said Gus, wheeling round.

Tanner pulled a set of vinyl-covered car keys out of his pocket. "These were found on the body at the Latin Quarter. I want you to find the car they belong to. Take Agnelli with you. Grid search everything between Hyde Park and the Harbour."

"Right," said Gus. He signed off on the keys, and left, banging through the swing doors with the rest of the squad.

Tanner waited for the ring of the last footfall then switched off the tubular lights. He cocked himself back in his brown-vinyl swivel chair, ankle on knee, and stared at the wide strip of blue sky, and etched against it, the rectangular black edge of the city.

4

GUS AND AGNELLI STEPPED OUT of the Royal Arcade into a butterball of sunshine, looking for an unclaimed 1958 FB Holden to match to the set of car keys found at the Latin Quarter under Ducky Fawkin's right hand. So far three hours of grid searching had yielded nothing but parking tickets. They headed down George Street, swung a right into Liverpool Street, wandering off through the slow sprawl of the docklands between the Trocadero and the Harbour. They passed a gold Sprite, a pink Mustang, three Falcons and a Bluebird. Then, with the plate-glass windows of the commercial district firmly behind them, a two-tone pink-and-plum Holden sprouting tail-fins and minus four hub caps.

"Okay," said Agnelli. "What do you reckon?"

"I reckon that car didn't go anywhere for a very long time," said Gus.

"You reckon?"

Gus kicked the side of the Holden and a piece of rusted metal dropped out from under the chassis and clattered hard in the gutter. "Yeah, I reckon."

Gus and Agnelli walked on, across the ridges of old cobblestones forcing their way up through the asphalt. They passed the barred wooden-gates of warehouses lining Kent and Sussex Streets, wandering alongside the chain-link fence that divided a bricolage of coastguard huts, nightwatchmen's cottages, union ticket offices, and rail sidings with abandoned carriages, nudging up to Cockle Bay. The silos of Glebe Island stood shimmery in the distance and a thick line of smoke lay like a wet rag along the horizon with the sun soaking through.

Agnelli stopped, hands slung low to his hips in the middle of the footpath. "Do you reckon it's true then? What they're saying about the prints?"

"Yeah," said Gus, and scuffed up some gravel. "I got it off Wally Driscoll. Both those guns had been wiped."

Agnelli whistled, "So you think it was Pigeye then?"

"Maybe," said Gus, and shuffled his feet.

"Tanner?"

Gus felt the slow prickle of gathering heat through his shirt. "I dunno ... " he said, and shook his head slowly. "He's a good copper. They're both good coppers."

"Bulls," said Agnelli, red-faced and glaring.

Gus turned away and hid his face in the dazzle. "I owe Tanner," he said softly. "He helped pull me out of a whole pile of shit."

"Yeah, and I guess I must've been wrong, then. About how much you owed your old mate Harry Guthrie as well."

Gus opened his mouth to say something, then closed it and turned his eyes away. The Darling Harbour goods yard draggle-tailed along the foreshore in front of him. Cats preened themselves in the dark-gaping hatches of shipping crates, or under mounds of stacked tires. Dust and wheat chaff fell through the sunlight.

From somewhere deep inside this maritime waste a toothless old geezer in a muddy-brown raincoat staggered out of the shadow, hauling a red string-bag packed with loose cans of Reschs. He jumped down off a crate, reared back and swung.

"Oi!" shouted Agnelli. The old man cringed as Agnelli lunged forward.

"Just leave him," moaned Gus. But it was already too late. The tosspot ran and Agnelli was off running after.

The man clambered over a corrugated-iron fence, making for the water, when Agnelli grabbed hold of his coat tails and spun him around. "I'm arresting you for drunk and disorderly and assault on an officer," he yelled, and snatched off the man's hat. He kicked him methodically. The old man staggered and mumbled, and kept falling over.

Gus caught hold of them. "Jees, Agnelli," he yelled, swinging him around. The old man lurched and barfed, and Gus caught the load straight down his shirtfront. "Jee-suss," he swore, holding his arms out and stomping his feet.

"Oh shit," Agnelli started laughing. "Oh mate, I'm sorry. God you smell bad."

Gus left Agnelli with the tosspot and strode angrily over to the pub on the corner. Weather and age having erased the first and last letters, the sign running across the awning flashed 'OTE' in rotating red neon. Agnelli had never perfected the outward appearance of deep inner cynicism regarded by other coppers as something so desirable as to be considered a prerequisite for getting on in the Force. Though Gus tried not to let other coppers' judgements weigh with him as he walked into the Gents, it struck him that Agnelli was lacking in certain qualities. He didn't want to be like that.

Gus took off his glasses, laying them carefully to the side of the washstand. He peered at the pink pressure streaks along the sides of his nose, the white half-moons of sweat under his eyes. The conversation with Agnelli hadn't been pleasant. But it had set him off thinking, particularly after what Wally had said about the prints on the guns. But the more he thought about it,

the more certain he grew that Agnelli was wrong-headed, and quite possibly bitter, and that there was also a distinct possibility that Wally Driscoll was wrong. Quite simply, he believed in Tanner. "Whatever they said ... " He owed Tanner. He had done him a turn and nothing they could say could touch the core of this loyalty.

Gus took off his Reillyet and yanked down his tie. He stuck his head under the cold tap and turned it full blast. He smeared soap over his face and shirt and looked back into the mirror, blinking. He flashed on a memory of his old partner Harry, with his long blue nose and slouchy potbelly, and the way he had of blinking rapidly as if the whole world around him was just a little too bright.

Gus remembered the time Harry got command of the Darlinghurst Squad. The night they began raiding the terraces up and down Palmer Street, closing down brothels, pushing out street molls, forcing the spivs and the hoons out of business. Treatment was rough, money was confiscated as evidence. Hundreds of arrests were racked up in a handful of weeks. It wasn't until maybe six weeks along that the problem got noticed, that the brothels were being bought up almost as soon as they closed them. It wasn't just bungling. Somebody was taking advantage of the crackdown — and Dolly Brennan was the name that got mentioned.

Gus had seen Harry and Dolly together often enough. Dolly parked in her pink Valiant at the bottom of Palmer Street. Harry, leaning into the window, mumbling something. Dolly, nodding and smiling back through her butterfly sunglasses and platinum curls. It never crossed his mind there was anything in it. He'd always pictured Harry as a family sort of man, doing his fair share of the washing and cooking and laundry. His wife dressed in a red

gingham apron, serving up steaming dishes of kedgeree on the steel-and-pink-plastic-laminate table in the kitchen. Then he didn't know a thing. Not for sure.

Dolly had a problem. She gambled. All the money she made went straight back through the tables, so nobody was particularly surprised when she stepped off the deep end, drastically in debt, and running wild with it. Telling off street cops. Tearing up traffic tickets. Telling her creditors that it was Harry who owned all the brothels on Palmer Street. That she was a small cog in Harry's wheel that he kept on a retainer of ten quid a week. Of course, the creditors didn't believe it. In any case, they had Dolly declared bankrupt and dragged before the courts. Next morning, the whole sorry episode was splashed over the papers. Gus remembered Dolly caught in the glare of a photograph. Tearful, turning away from the cameras, a hat made of split ribbons pulled over her curls, clutching a copy of the newspaper to her face that said, 'Askin Ahead' (it was the middle of the election).

That night Harry turned up on his doorstep, looking like he hadn't slept in a week or changed any of his clothes. His voice was thick. His speech was shambling. He said Dolly was gone missing and asked Gus to help him.

It took them just a little over three hours to find her, though she hadn't gone far. As things turned out, she'd driven out to a flyblown motel in the backstreets of Enmore, the kind with a pink cupid shooting neon arrows through a sign, put a shilling in the slot for the radio, washed down a bottle of sleeping pills with a half-pint of gin. Dolly survived, she was packed off to hospital and had her stomach pumped out. Harry resigned from the Force and disappeared. Allan ordered a high profile comb put through Darlinghurst Station, and Tanner was assigned to carry out the inquiry.

Gus wiped his face on a grubby-yellow handtowel, throwing it savagely down on the floor. Five minutes later found him still hunched over the basin, seeing and hearing the bright eddy of his memory.

Gus walked back to CIB, checked his messages, shoved his notebook and holster into the bottom drawer of his desk. He changed into a fresh blue-cotton shirt he kept in his locker, then worked his way down the linoleum-covered corridor, and barged in through the swing doors marked Scientific Investigations. Inside, the walls were lined with pea-green glazed tiles, with six stainless steel benches marching in a row down the room. A three-stack of repackaged cartons labelled 'Arnotts' sat by the door, bulging with sinister exhibits on their way to the courtroom. On top of this, a battered tin wireless was tuned to the ABC World Service.

"Wally," said Gus, as the doors swung shut behind him. Then, shouting a little louder, "Oi, Wally!"

Wally Driscoll was standing with his back to the pea-green tiled wall, gun cocked in hand. Unruly tufts of grey hair stuck out at odd angles from the straps of his pink tinted goggles, and his grubby-white lab coat hung loose at his sides. "Oh, it's you," he said, and the gun-arm flopped, and the enormous body went suddenly slack. "I've been taking another look at this O'Connor thing."

"Tanner says most likely Ducky shot himself by accident," suggested Gus, a little too brightly.

"Said that, did he?"

"Yeah, on account of it being close range."

Driscoll gestured towards the paper target strung on a wire in front of him. Black powder burns fanned in every direction. "That close?"

"Just about," said Gus, fidgeting nervously. "Tanner says could've been somebody upped and grabbed and Ducky got himself shot in the struggle."

Driscoll took off his goggles, and replaced his bifocals, making his way to the end of the lab. Here, three strip lights shone down on a stainless steel bench covered in shrapnel and shell casings, all of it tagged and bagged and laid out on trays. "Let me show you something," he said, picking up a small automatic weapon from the edge of the bench. "This is the Colt that was found at the scene of the shooting, cocked but not fired." He put the Colt back and picked up a much larger pistol. "This is the Dreyse that was also found at the crime scene. It was a shot from this weapon that actually did the killing. Now the Dreyse is a German gun," he added, "maybe souvenired from the war. Old, but in pretty good nick and the mechanism is, well ... beautiful. Only, when this gun was found under the table, the slide was jammed open with two bullets stuck in the chamber and ejector way. So I'm asking myself, how do I account for these facts?"

Gus offered, "It jammed when it hit the floor, right?"

"Yeah, that's the first thing I say to myself. I say that the Dreyse must have jammed when it dropped to the floor. Only I've dropped this gun a hundred times on hardboard and concrete and it hasn't malfunctioned, not even once."

"So you checked the ammunition, right?"

Driscoll scowled, "Why are you asking me if you know all the answers?"

"Sorry," said Gus, and grinned.

"So the next thing I do is I check the ammunition. And I can tell you I've shot all kinds of ammunition out of this gun, old and new, in good nick and bad, including ammunition that went through the washing machine and is greening from soapsuds. But not once was I able to replicate the jam in the gun as it was found at the scene of the shooting."

Driscoll opened a drawer and took a swig from a bottle of Vicker's. He offered it to Gus.

Gus shook his head.

Driscoll went on, "Fact is there's only one way I can account for this particular malfunction. First up, I guess you've got to understand that the Dreyse is a semi-automatic weapon and the semi-automatic weapon is loaded and cocked manually for the first shot only. Once the first shot gets off, the mechanism automatically loads the next cartridge from the magazine into the firing chamber, and cocks itself for the second shot, and the third shot, and so on and so on ... until the magazine is exhausted. Now it's my experience that crooks, being generally untrained and incompetent in the maintenance and discharge of firearms, don't understand this. Such persons will, after the first shot is discharged, treat such a gun as a bolt-action repeating weapon. Hence the magazine is loaded — " Driscoll picked up the magazine and clipped it to the Dreyse. "The gun is cocked — " He cocked the gun. "The first shot is got off — " He pivoted suddenly, firing the gun into the trap behind him. "Then instead of the second shot letting off automatically, the incompetent crook manually pulls back the slide, causing the cartridge on top of the magazine to move up with the cartridge being extracted from the chamber." Driscoll pulled back the slide and gave Gus the gun. "You have a go."

Gus took the weapon. He pointed and squeezed. Nothing happened. He tried again.

"What did I tell you?" Driscoll let out an actual whoop. "See, the only way this bludger could've shot himself is if he was able to grab hold of the gun and manually pull back the slide, using, might I add, both of his hands, and all of this after his head was blown off with his brains on his face."

"Jesus," Gus swore.

5

GLORY MCGLYNN STUBBED OUT A FAG in a blue dolphin-shaped ashtray (with the words 'Greetings from Ulladulla' printed along the base), and blew a long cloud of smoke up to the ceiling. "I don't trust him, Johnny," she said.

Johnny was curled under the small dormer window, all knees and elbows, reading a comic book. "What was that?"

"Tommy Bogle. I don't trust him."

"Well, I reckon that you're being a bit harsh." Johnny lowered his comic, glancing at Glory over the top of the page. "I've known Tommy since, well, as long as I can remember."

"Well, I reckon he's a crook."

"There are some that would say we're all of us crooks," Johnny laughed, and getting no response, went back to his comic.

Glory tightened her viyella dressing gown and sat down at the dressing table before three arching mirrors. Johnny had been working himself into a regular state ever since Tommy walked into their lives. They'd spent half the morning yammering on about the old days and the club at Kings Cross, until Johnny had clean forgot what the Cross was really like. The way Glory remembered it wasn't only Reilly's blokes that fancied the place, but every two-bit bludger that turned up on the doorstep and asked for ten bob to keep going. Out in Liverpool there was nobody to grudge you the business you did, and many that were actually grateful for the service. Of course, it was true she hadn't liked it at first. It was a long way from Enmore and that meant long hours of travel. But with her mother helping out on Tuesdays and

Thursdays, and Kim starting school, they'd fallen into a rhythm that was as easy as breathing.

Johnny and Moylan had expanded the club, and were running a small game on Wednesdays, in addition to their regular Fridays, and Moylan was talking about putting in a new bank of telephones, maybe renting a much larger place on top of the pub. The money wasn't brilliant, but turnover was regular, and so long as they slung their fair share to the coppers there wasn't nobody bothered what sort of business they did. Glory was happy and thought Johnny was happy too — then all of a sudden this Tommy Bogle walks in and Johnny is sweeping it all aside, saying he wasn't spending the rest of his life fighting shindies in a backwater, that the Cross was the place where the real money was, and he'd be damned if any bloke could make him lay off.

'Forget about it,' she told him. But no matter how much money they made from SP it was like Johnny had got this idea in his mind, and that's it. They'd argued about it for days and days until she was puffed up and blue. But she just couldn't stop — fearful, the way Johnny was talking, that he'd get himself knocked, and she'd come home to find a copper on the doorstep, with his shiny copper's buttons winking through the fisheye. Johnny told her that she was being a 'fraidy cat when she ought to have been thinking about the future, about giving Kim all the advantages that they never had — that she was asking him to be a bum when he was going to be the best that there was ... Johnny, he'd always had his tin can wired up to the moon.

Glory pulled the cottonwool off the roll and took off her cold cream with three savage wipes. Johnny put his face beside hers in the mirror, their cheeks pressed together.

"Bugger off," said Glory, and gave him a shove.

Johnny stumbled until the backs of his knees struck the edge of the bed. He sat down, running his fingers back through his hair. "I reckon its Reilly you ought to be getting worked up about. He oughtn't get away with the beating he gave Tommy. Not after he's ransacked our club and shot Ducky as well."

"How do you know Reilly killed Ducky?"

"It stands to reason. Ducky was doing a bit of his own thing round the Cross, like we were. Maybe he was starting to get a hold on things, and Reilly wouldn't cop something like that."

"Yeah, and maybe Ducky went crazy with a gun. Just like the coppers said."

Johnny looked hurt. "Ducky was an old mate of mine. We grew up together."

"Then he went and worked for Dick Reilly."

"He was aiming for a break."

"Yeah, but it still could've been like it says in the papers."

"What about the coppers wiping the prints off the guns?" Johnny insisted. "Reilly's the only bloke could arrange something like that."

But Glory wasn't about to be put off. "Moylan thinks I'm right. He says it could've been exactly like it says in the papers."

"Mick's an idiot. He dunno a thing," said Johnny, looking suddenly sulkier than before.

"Well, I reckon you're being a bit harsh after what Moylan's done," said Glory, reproachfully. She touched Johnny on the arm. "What's wrong with Moylan?"

"I seen the way he looks at you."

"What?"

"I seen it, the way he goes on."

Glory got up off the bed and walked across the room, standing as far away from Johnny as possible. "I reckon you must be imagining something."

"No, I'm not," said Johnny. "I reckon I've hit it right on the head."

"Are you saying you don't trust me, Johnny Warren?"

Johnny sat there, irresolute on the bed. "Hell no," he said, and stared down at his toes. "I do trust you, Glory. Moylan's the one I don't trust."

It was only half an apology, but Glory accepted it, and sat down beside Johnny again. After a while, she put her head on his shoulder. Johnny stroked her hair, and Glory burrowed a little deeper into his chest.

Johnny said, "I've been doing some thinking. I reckon I've got to knock off Dick Reilly. I reckon there'd be somebody willing to give good money to a bloke who'd do something like that."

At first, Glory was too startled to say anything at all. Then she said, "But think, Johnny. Think. Something like that — Reilly's mob, they wouldn't let it go. They'd come at you for something like that." She looked at him strangely, "I hope this isn't Tommy putting ideas into your head?"

"Nah," said Johnny. "Nobody," he added, a few seconds later. "Just something I thought of."

"Johnny," said Glory, doubtful.

"Just forget I even said it," said Johnny, and Glory, thinking how happy they were, and how miserable she'd be without him, found she was more than willing to forget. The sun dropped a little lower in the sky and the days heated words became a distant aberration. But something in the silence made

her feel doomed. She knew Johnny must have been thinking exactly the same thing because he said, "I do love you, Glory. I do. It's just that I reckon you deserve better than — " with a hapless gesture he took in the piles of unwashed clothes and the crumbling stains on the ceiling. "I want to grow old with you, Glory. Washing our false teeth. Clipping the coupons out of the paper. Driving around in our own car that wasn't stolen or nothing."

Glory could feel Johnny's breath on the skin of her cheek, and sensed a tenderness in his eyes like the possibility of tears. Johnny went on, "One day I'm buying a house on a big block for you and Kim to live in. Made of sparkling blonde brick with a white railing fence and everything slap up and modern, built so you can step out the back door, and see the sun like a giant red ball rising out of the ocean. Then there'll be nothing to worry about — " Glory raised a hand to his mouth to silence him, and Johnny glanced down. The tears that had been prickling his eyes came trickling freely down his coarse-grained pink cheeks. Seeing this, Glory edged closer, knowing she'd follow Johnny to the moon so long as he asked.

6

DETEKTIVE GUS FINLAY took the stairs two at a time, each of them spit marked and ground down like a soap dish. Several doors faced in on the third storey landing, the fourth was inset with a pebbled-glass window and sign that said 'Sprogg, Gudgeon, Hunger & Gillespie — Solicitors' in a semi-circle of black letters. Gus knocked, heard a muffled answer, and stepped inside.

The desk was set back in the dimness. Behind it a man sat over a large mound of paperwork, dressed in a jaunty-brown pinstripe, mauve shirt and tie, a forgotten cigarette adding spirals of blue smoke to the cloud on the ceiling. His features were careless and thickened with alcohol.

"Mr Gillespie?"

Gillespie stubbed out his cigarette in a blue enamel ashtray and stuck out his hand. "Charlie Gillespie," he said, warmly. "How can I help you?"

"I'd like to ask you a couple of questions with respect to your client, Ducky O'Connor."

Gillespie waved at a chair. "I take it this is official?"

Gus pulled his badge-wallet out of his jacket.

"That looks real enough, detective," said Gillespie. He turned towards a clutter of green-glass decanters bunched on a wood-and-glass tray at his elbow. "Did you say you were joining me?"

"No," said Gus. "O'Connor was your client — ?"

"Yes, that's right." Gillespie took a pull from his tumbler. "Then again, I've got a lot of clients, nearly all of them criminal."

"I'm assuming you know something of the circumstances surrounding the death?"

"I know what I've read in the newspapers. Mr O'Connor failed to turn up for his appointment on Monday. He was meant to hand over some cash to front, er, pay the QC who was representing him in a matter down in Melbourne."

"That doesn't come cheap."

Gillespie drew his eyebrows sharply together. "They hang them in Melbourne. It's not the kind of thing a bloke's liable to chance. Anyway, late that afternoon I read how the poor bugger had been shot dead in a nightclub."

"Was he angry at McPherson?"

"I really wouldn't know."

"Was he anxious about money?"

"I'm not sure where you're taking this, detective. He was a trifle hard up. He was only out of gaol for a brief period before the unfortunate, er, incident occurred."

"The Melbourne matter?"

"Quite," said Gillespie. Then added, "Of course my client said he didn't do it."

Ignoring this, Gus pressed on. "Tell me, if the bloke was hard up how was he funding this fancy defence?"

"I haven't any idea. I think there was a girl, Twiggy — "

"Twiggy Lonragen?" said Gus, a little too fast.

Gillespie gave a tight, artificial smile. He glanced at his watch. "Like I said, I really wouldn't know. Now if you'll excuse me?"

Gus rose to his feet and walked towards the door. Just for the hell of it he flung over his shoulder. "So where were you, Saturday last?"

Gillespie stared after him, genuinely shocked, then, if a little belatedly, he laughed, as if he was taking it all as a jest in good humour. Gus pictured him listening to the sound of his receding footfall as he walked down the hall. Not moving or saying anything. Just standing there, silently and uneasily, until, after the brief suggestion of a tropical twilight, the night closed around him.

Gus wandered into the evening filled with a sense of disappointment. He had gone to see the lawyer expecting something, though he didn't know what, not exactly. Sure enough, the bloke had looked a bit cagey, then so many of them did, but whatever he was looking for he was nothing the wiser. He climbed into the unmarked and his mind turned to Twiggy. He could go and see Twiggy, have a talk to the girl. It wouldn't take long. He turned the ignition, gave a left-hand signal, swung through a side street, and threaded his way through the slow calcification of alleyways, known as the Doors.

There weren't any streetlights in the lower sections of Palmer Street. Just a long line of tumbledown terrace houses that the plumbers had long since abandoned, plastered with scabrous paintwork, leaky down-pipes, and long glittering expanses of damp. The door of each terrace was painted in bright pinks, mauves or reds, and under each fanlight stood somebody's Jane or Mary, slouched against the doorframe, sprawled in an armchair flung haphazard across the stoop, or squatting on the doorstep, with long bare legs stuck out in front of them, knees pointing to the stars. They flicked through

comic books as they waited for passing trade, which was brisk. Soft music rasped out of a wireless and drifted about them on swirls of pink light.

Gus parked round the corner and walked back along the block. The air was sticky and warm, filled with the unmistakable aroma of industrial carbolic. He knocked on the door of the bald-faced stucco terrace where Lyla and another girl shared shifts round the clock, but the place was shut up and he came away empty-handed.

Gus climbed back into the unmarked, and scoured the waterside district for almost an hour. He toiled along tiny shadowed side streets, watching bright shifting shapes, until brightness faded altogether, and he breathed in the dank-fishy smell of the Harbour. He had almost given up hope, and was telling himself that his mission was useless, when in a stark patch of waste under Cahill's Expressway he saw two shadows turning under a broken street lamp.

Gus pulled into the side of the road and clambered out of the car. "Oi," he yelled. "Police."

A sailor whirled round and stared, panicky eyes catching the light.

Gus sauntered forward. "Didn't nobody tell you not to pick molls off the street?"

The sailor blinked twice and kept stumbling backwards.

Gus poked him in the ribs. "Well go on ... " he said, then watched and grinned, as the sailor spluttered something and turned round and ran.

Twiggy was standing alone under a blue cone of light. Her dress was rucked over her thighs, her face turned away, staring into shadow. "What is it, copper, want your half of the take?"

"Come off it, Twiggy. You know who I am. You know I'm not on any weekly payroll." Gus hoisted a powder-blue rabbit-fur coat off a stack of used tires and held it towards her.

But Twiggy ignored him. She pulled out a powder-compact and began dusting her nose. "Oh, what a laugh. Ha. Ha. I'm splitting my sides."

Gus put a hand on Twiggy's shoulder. He spun her around. "Twiggy ... " he started, then stopped — the light spilling suddenly over her face showing him the cut running down to the edge of her mouth, covered in pink fibrous matter where she was daubing on make-up. "How did you get that?"

"I dunno," said Twiggy. "I really couldn't say."

"Did Ducky do that?" demanded Gus, angrily almost.

Gus tried to be patient. "I dunno, and I reckon that I don't have to answer."

"Just think for a minute. Maybe you should."

"Yeah, so I can wind up in some forty-four gallon drum bobbing in the Harbour."

Gus tried, "Give me something. Maybe I can help."

But Twiggy only laughed. "Just how are you going to do that?"

"Well, I won't arrest you, for starters," said Gus, pretending to play tough. "Then I won't put it out on the street that it was down to you I found out whatever I do."

"Okay then," Twiggy flared. "I'll tell you something. Ducky was mad, but he wasn't that mad. He knew how to handle himself."

"So?"

"I seen him and I talked with him. On the night of the shooting. He was off to see Reilly."

"Dick Reilly?" said Gus, his eyes rounding out in astonishment.

"Yeah, it was Reilly that was helping him out."

"You're sure about that?"

"Course I'm sure. He was always doing stuff for Reilly. And Reilly looked after him. He knew Ducky was loyal."

"What else?" Gus tried to probe further. But it wasn't any use.

Twiggy backed away. "I reckon that's too much already."

After a minute, Gus turned to go. "Make me a promise. Get off the gear and do something useful."

"And what would that be?"

"I dunno," Gus shrugged. He got into the unmarked and wound down the window. "Need a lift somewhere?" He nudged the car forward.

"In that old rattletrap?"

Gus laughed, then put his foot flat to the floor and flew up the rise. He reached Kings Cross during the worst hours of traffic congestion. Sailors waving beer bottles caroused in the gutter. A man in a striped butcher's apron, with a large orange fish on his head, wandered aimlessly through the cars. Further along, under the glittering puffball of the El Alamein Fountain, a young couple were spooning, while a toothless old geezer sang out encouragement, and beat out the rhythm on a bottle of metho in a brown-paper bag.

Gus parked the unmarked and pounded the pavement. He went over the matter in his mind and gradually the case took on a whole new complexion. If the Kellett Club was where O'Connor was coming from on the night he got shot ... well, there was something odd about it, something that could stand further scrutiny. He past a well-kept terrace with a fragrant

frangipani in the front garden then a less well-kept flat building with red-stuccoed window boxes a-riot with angry geraniums. He past a tumbledown mansion cut into squats, with wet laundry looped about its spiked-iron railings, and a flower garden blossoming with urine-stained mattresses and unloved appliances.

Then he saw it. The missing blue Holden sprouting four tail fins and a week's worth of parking tickets. "Jee-suss," he muttered, and fell to his knees.

Gus stared at the battered blue vehicle for a very long time. The bonnet was up and the carburettor was gone. The rear tires and four hub caps were missing. Breathless, he scrambled to his feet and strode up the block, not pausing for breath until he was standing on the footpath outside the Kellett Club.

Ernie Chubb, Reilly's squinty-eyed gnome, was dropped down on his haunches in front of the door. He was dressed in a pair of pink-checked trousers, with shirt sleeves rolled meaningfully above the elbows, showing the matching chrysanthemums tattooed on each arm. He blew out a large fan of smoke. "Hang about, mate. This is a private establishment."

"No worries," said Gus, spreading his fingers. "I just want a word with Dick Reilly."

"Yeah," said Chubb, dropping his fag into the gutter. "But it could be this Dick bloke doesn't want a word with you."

"How about you ask him?"

Chubb put a hand on Gus's chest, and gave him a shove. But Gus didn't move. He hesitated then said, "Tell him I'm an old mate of Harry's."

Chubb fell back almost immediately. "Mate of Harry's? Why didn't you say so?"

Chubb banged on the peephole and ducked through the door, returning a few minutes later to show Gus down a doubtful-looking hallway to the back of the club. There was a door at the far end with a light underneath. Chubb pushed the door open, and Gus stepped inside.

Reilly was cocked back on a mauve rondo couch in the corner, shirt-collar unbuttoned, tie yanked down, blue sock-feet propped on a straight chair in front. He looked up as Gus entered.

"So you must be Harry's little mate?"

"Yeah, that's right," said Gus, slowly.

Reilly mused, "Quiet sort of bloke Harry was. I disremembered him for a minute there, you know. But Harry's done me a couple of turns, before it all came unstuck. Poor bastard." He let his sock-feet plop gently to the floor and drew his thick eyebrows together. "Do you want a drink then?"

"Sure, why not?" said Gus, deciding to play amiable.

Reilly heaved himself up off the sofa, and walked round a stubby pink-glass bar piled up with decanters. He slopped out some whisky, put a green-plastic coaster down on the table, and put the glass on it. He picked up a soda siphon and squirted some fizzy water into another glass. He was talking all the while, "My mother, God rest her soul, she never approved of drinking or cursing and wasn't afraid of dressing the knots off us kids neither, and do you know what? I reckon she was right. I can tell you I've tried to knock off from swearing hundreds of times and I may as well sprout wings. But drink ... " Reilly took a steady gulp. "I reckon that was your mate Harry's problem. Cigarette?" he added, pushing a green agate box across the table.

Gus shook his head, Reilly's affability making him uncomfortable.

"You a cigar bloke then?" said Reilly, extracting a cigar from his outer-breast pocket.

Gus shook his head again.

"Well, good for you, copper." Reilly reached out and slapped Gus on the knee. "I never had a smoke in the whole of me life neither." He laughed and grinned, then after a minute, put down his glass. He said, "I reckon this is about Ducky O'Connor."

Surprised, Gus said, "I was hoping you might be able to help us out with a couple of questions."

"I'm always happy to help out the coppers," said Reilly, causing Chubb, who was standing behind him, to splutter and cough. "Jees, Ernie." Reilly whipped his head round. "You swallow a blowfly or something? Here, get some of this into you — " He shoved the half-empty tumbler of soda into Chubb's hands, then turned back to Gus. "I heard Ducky shot himself through accident or something."

"There are some unexplained features."

"You reckon it was deliberate then?"

"We're not sure. I'm trying to find out."

Reilly scratched at his ankle and frowned. "Ducky, see, he was a highly complex and tragical sort of character. He came to see me a couple of years back, I reckon that must've been when it started. He'd been beating the crap out of them bennies and purple whatnots and the white stuff he gets from the chow-slushies that he snorts up his nose. He wasn't real pleasant to be around and everybody was complaining. I asked the bloke, 'Have you got a problem?' He tells me, 'Nah, I'm not addicted.' Of course, I don't believe him, but I let the matter drop. And that was my mistake. Because it's not long after that that

he gets himself arrested for shoving his good time up some sheila and it turns out she was a kid. He says to me, "The coppers set me up.' Me?" Reilly stretched a hand out in front of his face. "I reckoned his brains were running that far out his nose that he dunno the difference."

Gus offered, "I reckon he did time for that. At the Bay."

"Yeah, that's right. Ducky, he does his prison quiet like he's done it every other time and then he comes back to see me and I give him a monkey so the bloke can keep going. Only this time he's twitching all over and acting peculiar. So I say to him, 'Look mate, you've got to take some time out and readjust to society.'"

"So what happened?"

"Well, I reckon I wouldn't be telling you anything you dunno already. He hops down to Melbourne and knocks off some sheila he never met and dunno from nothing." Reilly shook his head. "Like I told you already, it was the whatnot he gets from the chow-slushies that he snorts up his nose."

"You never laid eyes on him since he got back?"

"No."

"He wasn't up here on the night he got shot?"

"No."

"You sure?"

"Excuse me, copper. But that's not polite. You want some civil answers then you've got to be polite. Show some respect."

"I got information says Ducky came to see you on the night he got shot."

"Who gave you the drum?"

"His car is parked less than five minutes away."

Reilly got up. "Bulls," he said. "Bulls, that is. Ernie," he added, swinging round. "I dunno why I'm listening to this."

"Was it you got McPherson to knock Ducky?" said Gus, but he'd already lost. Chubb had a hand on his shoulder and was steering him forcefully down the stairs, out the rear exit and into the night.

Gus stood alone in the alley for a minute, rallying his thoughts, listening to himself breathe. He tightened his shoelace on a crate labelled 'Sunlight', adjusted his hat, then walked back via Roslyn Gardens in search of the Holden.

He had just reached the top of the rise when the Holden started up. For moments, the glaring headlights picked him out — his shadow, long and distorted, lying over the road. He threw himself over the bonnet as the car came towards him. He grabbed hold of the wipers. Heard them ping, as they tore away in his hands. He strove to force air into his lungs as the car swerved and turned. He found himself falling through a soundless up-rush of black air and breathed the smell of wet leaves.

7

IT'S A YEAH OR NO ANSWER. YEAH OR NO, THAT'S WHAT YOUR CHOICE IS. Either he's come into the Latin Quarter to whack you, and you whacked him first. Or you flat out and whacked him." Reilly was pacing in his sock-feet across the carpet, eyes watery and distended with anger, swinging around every now and then to glare at McPherson, who was standing in the wide-open space in front of the couch. "Sure, the bloke had a few problems. But so what? He was a mate. And sometimes I reckon you've forgot what that means. Just like them hairies and concies out on the street who don't got no values. Thing is, a bloke is a mate then you've got to back him up, no matter what happens. I mean, what the hell kind of organisation is this I'm running, the kind that lets one bloke knock another bloke without asking me first?"

"Okay," said McPherson. "So I made a mistake."

"Bloody oath you made a mistake."

"It won't happen again."

"Start talking like that and you're making me nervous." Reilly glanced at McPherson suspiciously, but he tried to simmer down. "I reckon we must've known each other since you was nothing but a two-bit chiseler and I got you that job at the Cockleshell Club out at Tom Ugly's Bridge."

"I've done a lot since then." McPherson's face flushed with unexpected anger. But Reilly barely noticed.

"Remember that big awful nightclub with the orchestra pit in the shape of a clamshell and the ballet girls in white swimsuits and everything squared off with the coppers? Those days, a bloke runs into trouble, he knows that his mates are standing behind him. Anybody tries to take him they'd have to take

the crowd at the back of him too. Seems to me, there's no other way that a crook can do business."

McPherson said, "Those were the old days. Right now we can't afford to have mad buggers like Ducky running around, upsetting everybody, and attracting attention."

Reilly swung round, and this time he couldn't avoid the flash of anger he saw on McPherson's face. He stood there, transfixed. Then a hard stroke of rage drove all sense from his head. He grabbed McPherson by the lapels of his coat and thrust his own flushed face right up to his. "So you knock off his block in a room pack-full of people and that makes it better?"

McPherson didn't twitch. He stood under Reilly's sweaty-flushed face and waited, until there wasn't a sound but his breathing. Then Reilly let him go. He spread his fingers, and stepped back.

Reilly went on, in an altogether different tone, "Me and you, we've always got along. In fact, it seems to me the only times we haven't got along is when we sit down for a chinwag and you go off and do the exact thing that wasn't discussed."

"I already said that I ought to have handled it better. What else do you want?"

Reilly crumpled unexpectedly onto the sofa as if all of the fight had suddenly gone out of him. "I dunno," he said, gazing into vacant space.

Reilly sat alone in the gloom for maybe an hour after McPherson departed, the light of a green-aluminium lamp spilling over his face and the furniture around him, though the walls and corners of the room were in darkness. He

was motionless and absorbed, but not altogether calm. Reilly had known things were going badly for him since one by one the weekly disbursements of banknotes began to return with their envelopes unopened. He wasn't the sort that was easily frightened, but it was a terrifying thing when your money wouldn't flow. Just a few days ago, in a last desperate attempt to stave off the court order that would shut down the club, he had arranged to see his old mate Jack Mannix, ex-Minister for Justice in the Renshaw Labor Government. Reilly pictured himself standing on the corner outside the Rex Hotel, watching a tawny-coloured moth trapped in the frosted-pink light of a street lamp. He remembered how the strain of the wait made him tremble.

"Jack?" he said, walking down the mouth of the alley, knocking on the car window.

Jack opened the door and Reilly clambered in. "Dick, mate. What can I do?"

"They're closing me down."

Jack was red-faced above his tight-fitting blue pinstripe, with thick ears, black brows and bright eyes, dazed and shiny. "I'm sorry to hear that," he said. "But there's nothing I can do."

Reilly tried, "Is this how you're treating me after all thee years? I thought you had judges sewn up in your pocket."

Mannix looked genuinely hurt. "I had it and I lost it, Dick. Not just me, but the whole bloody lot of us. I dunno how it happened. One day you're up there, on top of this town. Some bloke is driving you around in this great shiny car and other blokes are chasing you down the street, wringing your hand. Next day nobody's taking your calls anymore and there's just no accounting how it all comes about."

Reilly wasn't prepared to let things go lightly. "There's still that small matter about those Fortuna Club shares. If the press got hold of that — "

"Are you going to go the mongrel at me now?" Jack pulled out a yellow-silk handkerchief and mopped the sweat off his pink-shiny forehead. "I wish I could help you, Dick. Honest, I do. But I've got no more power to fix this than you do." Outside the car small drops of rain started falling. Jack leaned forward and turned on the wipers. Reilly stared out through the opening they carved in the breath-misted window. He saw a used tire, several stray lengths of piping, and the two mismatched halves of a pink porcelain lavatory. Jack took in the space beyond the headlights with a sweep of his hand. "Look at this city. You wouldn't bed a dog in it. This shyster-bloke Askin wins himself another election, and there's not a workingman a hundred miles round that will get a fair shake after he's through. We're all of us up against it, together." He sighed, then said, "But I reckon you've got more juice left in you than what you let on."

"You and me both," said Reilly, quietly. Jack brightened almost immediately. Reilly felt suddenly sheepish. "Sorry, Jack, I didn't mean to go crook on you."

"It's all right, mate. I can understand the sort of pressure you're under. I mean, remember that hokey old wall chart we used to keep nailed to the wall of the Chief Secretary's office, and rented out the pink bits for ten quid a week?"

"Nothing but daylight robbery that was."

"It was a licence to print money and all in a good cause. I swear there's not a Labor man comes into parliament with the seat hanging out of his trousers that doesn't leave with the air conditioning still there."

Reilly laughed, "I reckon you're too much of an idealist for a politician, mate." He dug up more courage. "There's maybe one thing you can do for me, Jack. There's a bloke name of Johnny Hagen who has started up a joint on the main street of Liverpool — "

"It's in my electorate, there's something I can do." Jack nudged him, and winked. "I can get the local coppers to shut it down lawful-like."

Reilly stood on the front steps of the Kellett Club and pulled a wedge of fresh air into his lungs. Outside the night was dark and lurid, an unseasonable chill hung in the air, diffuse with the faint milkiness of moonlight. He peered down a side alley where a toothless old geezer in a slouch hat and pink slippers was stirring a trashcan with a bit of broken stick. Further along, a bordello madam was trailing a rabbit-fur stole into Darlington Road with a string of ten molls fish-tailing behind her. Reilly blundered away in the opposite direction, their laughter seeming to follow him along as his thoughts turned full circles, without ever arriving at anything new.

He had been stunned by the look of contempt he had read on McPherson's face, and on the faces of others around him since his troubles began. He avoided their eyes, fearing pity and scorn. He was disgracefully unhappy and the feeling was intensified by the knowledge he was utterly alone in his misery. He also knew that if his present state of unhappiness continued there were some that could use it to tear him apart. It made him embarrassed just to think about it, a bloke such as he was — a criminal for decades! crabbing his heart out with pathetic complaints.

He walked blindly on. He had come up in a very hard school and nobody had ever done him any favours. He had got nothing but grief from the coppers and others he could name, when all he had done was try to better himself and his family. For the first time in a long time he thought of Lyla, his wife and the kids. The wild times they'd had, the way she'd always put it over the coppers, the way she'd always stood by him the years he was banged up and how she'd always been there waiting at the prison gate, the minute he was out. Even when things started kicking along for them, money was tighter than most people supposed. He'd sold the flat four times (when they'd only ever had a lease and owed sixty quid on the furniture). Looking back, he nearly died laughing, with Lyla sick to her knees that one of his customers would bang into the other on the doorstep, though she always swore that she couldn't imagine a situation Reilly couldn't wangle out of.

Reilly knew he'd be flat out to find a woman with as much go in her as his Lyla. He stopped on the footpath and listened to the wail of cheap music coming out of the dance clubs, hearing the synthetic strains of the pop charts with their ob-la-dees obla-das and their zip-a-de-do-fucks. He thought of the clubs of his youth, their ceiling fans churning heat and music out onto the footpath and the old blokes who could contain a whole life in a single blue note puffed out of a trumpet. He thought how Jimmy Carruthers had once landed 147 punches in two-minutes-and-nineteen-seconds of the first round to win the World Championships by a knockout. Then thought how the Sydney Stadium 'Where They Fight!' was as often as not crowded with pop stars weeping and writhing in the place where the great men of his generation once clobbered each other.

Reilly walked the bright and beaten streets, watching the kids they used to call bodgies. There were blokes dressed in striped-purplish trousers with hair down below their collars, girls dressed in black plastic thigh-highs and skirts made of the stuff that they used to roll out on the floor of the lavatory. They were laughing and crowding together as if they had no need to bother with him or any of his kind. They thought they were rebels and outlaws ... but they were tame. They knew nothing of Life. Couldn't they see he was a bloke they ought to be frightened of? They ought to run shouting from? Was he just an old man to them?

Reilly raised his hand absently to his cheek and was surprised to find it damp. He wasn't a broken down old man. He was a survivor. His kind would outlive them. What, with the sailors arriving on shore leave from Vietnam, things were sure to pick up. It would be just like the last war with them military blokes throwing thousands of pounds round the ring like they were desperate to get rid of the stuff.

Reilly pulled out his handkerchief and blew his nose hard. It seemed to make him brighten. Gradually a sense of order entered his mind, a feeling that things weren't nearly so unmanageable as they previously seemed. He also began to sense his own physicality, the thick sturdiness of his calves as he walked, the muscular sensation of his chest as he breathed, a notion of soundness in lung and liver that combined to create an impression of gathering strength.

8

ON THE FAR SIDE OF THE CITY, a green plastic telephone started to ring. Glory gave Johnny's huddled form an anxious shove with her toe. "Johnny, wake up. It's Chooks."

Johnny rubbed the sleep from his eyes with forefinger and thumb. He threw off the blanket, picked up the telephone, and his face filled with an expression that made Glory's heart skip three beats. Johnny had taken the knockbacks before and proved he could get up and go, but it was suddenly as if he was unable buoy himself up with any real hope.

He said, "There's been a raid at the club."

Quickly, they snatched up their clothes made their way down the stairs. Johnny with his beige trench coat belted tight over his pyjamas, Glory stooping to pull up the zipper on a camel-straw skirt. She paused outside the small bedroom next to the landing, eyes sweeping over the slightly skewed mattress, and litter of toys on the floor.

"No worries," said Glory, waking her mother in the room to the rear of the kitchen. "I promise I'll be back before she even knows that I'm gone."

Johnny and Glory parked the Valiant two blocks from the club and walked back. Johnny pushed open the wire-mesh gate, and Glory followed closely on his heels as he ran up the stairs. At first, she saw nothing at all. Then, her pupils dilated in the darkness, and shadows resolved themselves into broken chair legs, upturned tables, plum-coloured telephones pulled out at the root and a flutter of betting slips spiralling up in the draft. Chooks was curled up

on the floor at the furthest end, the moonlight seeping through a hole in the shuttered window casting a ghastly blue pallor over his face.

"Aw mate," Johnny gasped, and fell to his knees. He lifted Chooks's head, and stared into his face with a gentle concern. "You all right, mate?"

"What do you reckon?" moaned Chooks, trying and failing to get up off the ground.

Johnny righted an upturned chair, and settled him on it.

Glory said, "Maybe we ought to get him to a doctor?"

"Nah," said Chooks, arms circling his ribcage. "I reckon its bruises."

Johnny checked his coat pocket then glanced at Glory. She pulled out a half-pint of Vickers, and untwisted the cap. Chooks took a swig. Then started to cough. "Easy," said Johnny, yanking the bottle out of his grasp. "What happened to Moylan?"

"Coppers got him."

"And Tommy?"

"Out through the storage chute."

"These coppers, did you see who it was?"

"Yeah," said Chooks. "Maybe —" Johnny looked hopeful. But Chooks wound up, lamely. "Hell, I dunno. It was such a schmozzle." Chooks wiped the alcohol off his face with the back of his hand, frowning all the while with the effort of memory. "But I reckon it wasn't a friendly sort of raid. They can't make any deals on account of the orders coming from somebody important."

"You know who's done this?" said Johnny. "Dick Reilly's done this. He's trying to take me down."

"I dunno about that," said Chooks, cautious.

But Johnny wasn't listening to Chooks. "It's him or me."

Glory barely nodded, and didn't dare speak. The next thing she knew they were following the trail of mercury lights down the highway. Johnny hoisted Chooks into standing position and carried him up the cracked concrete drive to his door. Chooks lowered himself onto a brown slub weave sofa, and Marge brought him in tea things and medicinal brandy, and a bottle of Dettol, which Chooks waved away. They didn't stay long. Within minutes they were sitting together in the barely moving air of the car.

"How do you know Reilly was behind it? It could have been anybody, some copper high up who's giving the orders."

"I tell you the bloke's coming at me. He's coming at all of us."

"He wouldn't dare."

"Yes he would," said Johnny, his voice taking on an edge. "He gets people killed and houses bombed, and cars blown up, and the coppers do anything he tells them. First up, he takes out Pretty Boy Walker. He gets him with an Owen submachine gun, maybe four years ago. Then there was Jackie Hodder, knifed at a dancehall in Paddo. There was Jackie Steele, sixty slugs they tossed into him. Barney Ryan, Charlie Bourke and Mad Dog Sheridan. Big Barry Flock, they found him on a park bench with half his brain hanging out. Then there was Graham Moffitt. He turned on the headlights of his Holden Utility ... and va-boom! There weren't nothing left."

Glory watched the glitter of Johnny's eyes in the darkness.

"Oh Glory, I reckon I must've been a wrong one since ever I grew up. Maybe I ought to have been a plumber or something. But the way things used to be in this town was that any bloke could have a go, so long as he showed respect. There was always some big crooks, some of them bigger than Reilly ever was. But they always left space for the little bloke to have a go, and never

put you out of business unless you made an error of judgement or something. I've got to go through with this, I've got to. Oh Glory," said Johnny, and his big shoulders heaved. "I dunno no other way."

Johnny didn't sleep a wink the whole night through and next morning his face was pale, with blue onion rings under his eyes, and clothes bagging loose, like they'd suddenly outgrown him. But standing in the sunny air in Chooks's backyard he was looking more like himself again. Glory smiled slightly as she sat watching the pair of them, thinking what a strange picture they made. Chooks, who was small and wiry, was pacing and doing stuff, and Johnny, who was big, was stock-still and grinning, his foot hoisted up on a broken bit of stump, hands on knees, elbows cocked out.

Chooks was grumbling all the while as he trundled to and fro, carting buckets of mixed grain into the fowl house. "Twenty-five quid is all Moylan gave me. I reckon you've been doing business with a shyster, Johnny. That's what I reckon."

Glory was dimly aware that Mick Moylan had offered Chooks 'good money' if he ever got arrested on account of his work at the club. But though Chooks took a regular wallop last night, he hadn't spent any time in the actual slammer, and Moylan was arguing that all bets were off. Adding insult to injury, he was demanding settlement on a debt of some 400 quid that Chooks had run up on the ponies.

Johnny chuckled slightly. "Well, it so happens I've still got that other job open for you, the one I was talking about last night. I figure it's worth maybe

500 quid. Enough to straighten out the betting books, with a hundred left over for Marge and the kids."

Chooks stepped thoughtfully out of the fowl house, and closed the gate, twisting the wire loop over the tin latch behind him. He picked up the bucket and took it back to the house. He hosed it out carefully, leaving it out on the dust patch to dry. He sat down on the bottom rung of the steps, beside Glory. "I dunno," he said, still struggling to make up his mind.

Johnny flicked Chooks a sly glance. "I reckon if you've got the guts for it, you could drive the Valiant up alongside Reilly's Maserati and I'll throw a bucketful of petrol and a match over him. Can you imagine?"

"Cripes," said Chooks, impressed, but not really paying attention.

"Sensational," said Johnny, poking Chooks in the ribs.

"No, it's not." Glory got up abruptly, and stared down at the pair of them. "My God, Johnny Hagen. I've never heard a worse idea. The sound of screaming will bring folks running for miles."

Johnny tried, "I couldn't imagine a bloke such as Dick Reilly screaming."

"Yeah, well you might not even kill him, and then what?"

"Well, I guess I could get in an extra shot with a rifle just to make sure."

"Smash in his head with a meat cleaver or something," Chooks chortled, then stopped as abruptly.

Johnny turned his attention back to Chooks. "I've made a great study of the plans and petrol is only one of the options. But I'll be needing some back up, a good driver to make a getaway from the scene, for instance."

Chooks sat there, cheeks drawn in, eyes blurry with concentration. "It's not often I agree with Glory, but this incineration business, I reckon I'm fully

against it. Thieving and gambling is where my skills are. This thing ... " he shrugged. "I reckon I don't have the relevant experience."

Glory turned on him. "Don't you reckon you owe Johnny something on account of his being banged up an extra three years for you?" referring to a garage full of stolen washing machines eight years before.

Chooks hung his head. "I was in gaol, too."

"Sure. You got banged up two years and it's a mystery to everybody as to how Johnny got five."

Chooks scrambled to his feet. "You calling me a phizgig?"

Johnny put a calming hand on his shoulder. "Look mate, I can't give you the money Paddles wants, I'm broke myself. But if you have any further thoughts about the Reilly job, then I'm prepared to double my offer to one thousand quid."

"Gosh," said Chooks, and took a deep swallow. He glanced down at Johnny's hand. "Only I dunno I ought to be doing a thing like that. Killing a bloke, I mean. Not even for money or nothing."

"Chooks," said Johnny. "This is not even killing. It's self-defence."

GUS FINLAY SAT IN A RED LEATHERETTE BOOTH at the Corinthian Milk Bar talking to Agnelli over breakfast. "Maybe it's just like Tanner says. Maybe O'Connor arrives at the Latin Quarter and shoots himself by mistake."

Agnelli gaped at his friend in astonishment. "How can you even suggest it after what you've found out? I've been five years at CIB longer than you, and I'm saying there are coppers who are earning a hell of a lot more than an extra dollar here and there." He heaped three spoonfuls of sugar into his cup. "I reckon your loyalty is making you misguided. I also reckon you've got to make a choice where you stand."

Gus flared at him. "I've got no love for crooked coppers, but this is Tanner you're talking about. Frank Tanner," he repeated, taking in an unsteady lung-full of smoke. He stubbed out his cigarette in his saucer and knocked over his cup, splattering the black sugary liquid over his trousers.

Agnelli pushed a handful of paper napkins across the table.

"No worries." Gus dabbed at his trousers then paused, sensing a long and wide shadow fall over the table.

"Pigeye," said Agnelli, looking up.

Pigeye Donaldson, with a loud batik shirt hanging out around his trousers and a straw porkpie hat, walked up to the table. "I've been looking for you all over the place, Gus. Tanner wants us to get onto the last of the witnesses, wind up the paperwork. He's got to see Norman the Foreman later tonight."

Gus left Agnelli at the Corinthian Milk Bar and set off along the pavement. He had extracted no comfort from the morning's conversation, and felt sore and unhappy. He attempted to convince himself that his friend was wrong-headed, and quite probably bitter, and that there was also a distinct possibility Wally Driscoll was wrong. But no matter how he arranged his thoughts — in squares or in circles — he couldn't abandon some feelings of doubt.

"What was Agnelli rabbiting on about in there?" said Pigeye, eyeing Gus across the roof of the car.

"Nothing," said Gus. "The usual," he added, getting into the car.

"Let me give you a piece of advice," said Pigeye. "Don't hang around with Agnelli as much as you do. The other coppers at CIB don't think very much of him. Now Tanner's got a high opinion of you, and that's enough to keep you on side with the whole of the squad. But you don't want to waste it, hanging around with the wrong sort of element." Pigeye glanced sideways to make sure Gus caught his meaning.

"Sure," said Gus, eventually, with heightened colour.

"Good for you," said Pigeye, seeming satisfied.

But the words only caused Gus's face to redden. For the first time in his life he was thoroughly ashamed of himself.

Gus eased the unmarked out into the traffic, onto the expressway and over the Bridge. He drove on, past rows of used car yards, mechanics garages, and dilapidated shopfronts before veering off the highway into green-leafy suburbs. The day wore itself away in the grinding of shoe leather as witnesses were tracked down, re-interviewed, and crossed off the list. The heat gathered and melted and floated away and a soft-yellow dusk was falling as they came

back into town. He threaded the unmarked through the William Street traffic, swinging right into a shabby cul-de-sac of pink stucco and purple-brick apartments. An early moon rode low in the sky above the ridge of the buildings, and the soft tang of moist leaves hung in the air. Gus drew the unmarked up alongside a clump of green garbage cans, peered through the windscreen. The street was eerily familiar. "Who's next?"

"Thought you might recognise the place. We're going to see Dolly Brennan, Harry Guthrie's little mate."

"Dolly Brennan is a witness?" Gus gave a start of surprise.

Pigeye didn't seem to notice. He swallowed the warm remains of his hamburger, sucked off of his fingers, and disgorged from the car.

Gus trailed him up the footpath. The flat building was grown over with bougainvillea and fronted by a rusty-iron gate that had dropped off its hinges. The place was dark, but here and there above a tangle of night-blackened branches a window shone brightly, illuminating the short red-washed cement path that led to the door. A series of bells nestled in a crazy splatter of wires by the entrance. Gus read, 'Bobby two rings', 'Zelda three rings', and 'Horn for Sale, \$25. Flat six'. The bottom bell said, 'Brennan'. Gus pushed it.

Dolly was standing in the doorway a few seconds later. "Well, if it isn't Harry's little mate."

Dolly was dressed in a pair of pea-green silk pyjamas and green-feathered mules. Her face was pale and brittle with make up. Her hair was piled up and stuck through with pins.

Gus cleared his throat. "Detective Donaldson and I would like to ask you a couple of questions about the shooting at the Latin Quarter the other week. May we come in?"

Dolly's face registered a look of discomfort. But she opened the door and they followed her down a strip of purple-flowered carpet to the end of the hall. There was a telephone in an alcove at the foot of the stairs, with a sign tacked above it, 'Pay First in Office. Thank You'.

Dolly stepped down one flight, unlocked a door, and drew them in through a green glass-bead curtain. Inside, the apartment was crammed with odd bits of furniture. There was a sofa upholstered with green-dancing dragonflies and beside it, a dark teak wood table with claw-and-ball legs, littered with bottles and glasses, and an open jar of cold cream with a fag end sticking out. A thick jungle of chandeliers hung down from the ceiling.

Pigeye settled himself on the sofa. "Mrs Brennan?"

"Yeah."

"That would be Dolly Brennan?"

Dolly located a green-agate box in the shape of a Buddha among the debris on the table, extracted a cigarette, fitted it to a black plastic holder. "I reckon you know that already, Mr Donaldson."

Pigeye made an elaborate tick in his notebook. "Well, we wouldn't want to get that wrong."

Dolly clicked the fag holder between her teeth. "I don't really know that I've got anything useful to tell. I was there at the Latin Quarter on the night of the shooting, but it was getting kind of late. I was pretty lit up, and thinking about leaving. Next thing, some bloke squeals, 'Look out, he's got a gun'.

Then I hear a sound like crackers and this funny-looking bloke is laying dead on the floor."

"And?"

Dolly turned towards a side table and fumbled for a match. She lit her cigarette, and waved the match thoughtfully, dropping it, still burning, into a green agate ashtray, then swung back towards them. "And nothing," she said, blowing a half yard of billowing smoke up to the ceiling.

"I guess that about wraps it," said Pigeye, making to leave.

"Hang about." Gus sensed there was something awry, though he wasn't really sure what it was. He said, "I find out you're lying about this, like you lied about Harry ... well, you think that was grief, I promise this will be more than you dreamed." He let the threat hang there, then walked to the door. "Come on, I reckon we're wasting our time."

"No wait." Dolly raised her head slightly, pressing her fingers to her temples. Then, eyeing the half bottle of scotch on the table, poured a neat inch into a tumbler and tossed it straight back. "I didn't say anything before and I know it was wrong, but I've got my reasons. I've cleaned myself up. I'm not the same woman. I would've mentioned it earlier. Only they told me. They warned me —"

Gus interrupted, "Who warned you, Sammy Lee?"

Dolly gave a shrill, artificial laugh. "Oh, Sammy, I wouldn't worry about him. He's as sweet as they come. But Sammy's got problems." She took a long drag on her cigarette, and started again. "It was late in the evening. Just before three. I was talking to a couple of blokes at the bar and this other bloke is trying to squeeze past me. Anyway, I'm ready to give him a piece of my mind, when I feel something hard strike my foot. I bend down and see that

it's a very large pistol. So I look hard at the bloke that's dropped it, and I say, 'That's a funny thing to drop'. But the bloke doesn't say anything. Just picks up his gun and puts it back in his pocket."

Dolly's manner was almost perfect. "What did this bloke look like?"

"It was Ducky O'Connor."

"How do you know? Have you met him before?"

Dolly affected to look shocked. "Do you reckon I'd know somebody like that? After he was shot, they put his picture in the papers. I recognised him from the photograph."

"Think about this carefully. Do you remember the gun?"

"I'm pretty sure it was a Dreyse," said Dolly, brightly. Gus stared across the room in blazing disbelief. Dolly pulled herself upright, indignant. "I can see a gun. I couldn't have missed it. It fell right on my foot."

"Why didn't you tell the officers at the scene then?"

"Because Sammy Lee tells me I'm making a fuss. He says it could've been a cigarette lighter or anything. So I say, 'Okay', and Sammy says, 'No worries. I'll take care of it.'"

"You just left it there, even after you knew a bloke had been murdered?"

"Like I said, I've got reasons. Now I'm tired," she added. "Please leave."

Gus went to speak, but Pigeye intervened, "The lady says she's tired."

Gus stooped down to collect his hat. "We'd like you to make a statement."

"Whatever ..." said Dolly, eyelids drooping delicately shut.

Gus stood there and fingered his hat, then followed Pigeye out into the evening, kicking the door shut behind.

10

ALLAN WAS STANDING AT THE SMALL KOOKA STOVE IN HIS KITCHEN, waving a green plastic eggslice over the pan. It was Thursday night, and on Thursdays his wife was out selling Avon door-to-door. "The Brennan woman," he said, tilting his glasses to make them magnify. "Wasn't she mixed up in that Harry Guthrie business?"

Tanner was sitting on a small aluminum stool, under three flying ducks. He tried to get comfortable. "Yeah, but I reckon her testimony's as good as anybody else's. Maybe you don't understand the style of person who's frequenting these nightclub establishments — " He tried to fix Allan in the eye as he answered, but Allan was already shaking his head.

"Funny thing is I had Driscoll in my office this morning, telling me it was impossible this bloke topped himself, either through accident or anything else. He says the thingummy in the gun was manipulated after the shot was got off. Only way the gun could've jammed."

Tanner shifted slightly in his seat. "I don't want to knock poor Wally, he's good with his tricks. But I reckon his thinking about the gun is a little ambiguous. I also reckon that given the lack of clear evidence the shooting was anything else — "

"Well I don't," said Allan, abruptly. He took the eggs off the stove and the pan on the table. "Do you reckon I'm blind to the slings being copped at CIB?"

Tanner didn't move. But his face drained of colour. "Don't put that on me. I wouldn't cop one from a bloody criminal."

"But you'd drop one on a dead bloke in order to protect one."

"McPherson's a long-standing phizgig of mine."

Allan cocked his head to one side as if to observe Tanner from a more telling angle. "I reckon that you ought to go round and have a talk to that bloke ... who was it?" He picked up the egg slice and started dishing the eggs onto a plate. "The bloke that put the frighteners on the Brennan woman?"

"Sammy Lee."

"Yeah," said Allan. "Some sort of wop isn't he?"

"Four-by-two," said Tanner. "Yid."

Allan rushed on. "Well, I reckon you better square it all off with him, make sure he'll back up this witness you've got." He paused, and said, "I don't suppose everything at that club is above-board? He's living on the wink and I'm sure you can use that to bring him to a workable agreement." Until now Allan's gaze had been lowered, looking down at his eggs. When he looked up he was grinning — and Tanner, marvelling at his daring, and the way in which he had conducted the conversation, started grinning too.

"I take it this is a financial arrangement we're talking about?"

"I would prefer to regard it as a fee for a managerial service," said Allan, and gave a suck to his teeth to underline his shrewdness.

Tanner left Allan to his eggs and headed back to CIB. Inside, the air was filled with the chirping of typewriters and the smell of stale socks. He walked straight down the serried rows of wooden desks and slammed his door shut, then, after a minute, flung it open again.

"Oi dago."

Agnelli flushed up to his ears. "You calling me a dago?"

"There's no other dagoes around far as I can see."

"You're a right bastard, Tanner."

"I think it's high time we had a little talk."

"I've got nothing to talk about," said Agnelli, and made to walk off.

But Tanner reached out and rang the back of his skull with his knuckles. He grabbed hold of his shirt, and dragged him the length of the room to general applause from the crowd of detectives gathering around.

Gus returned to the squad room after the scene busted up. He sat down at his desk, and got on with his work. The squad room grew dark, and little by little grew empty around him, until there wasn't a sound, except the drone of a static-ridden wireless and the flicker of the green aluminium lamp shining down on his desk. He pulled the last bit of paper out of his red Olivetti and pushed back his chair. He was increasingly troubled by the events of that evening, and like it or not, he couldn't shirk off or be quit of them. He stared down at the grey-speckled linoleum between his toes, then hauled himself upright, and knocked on Tanner's door.

Tanner ran his signature over a last bit of paper before raising his eyes. "What's up?"

Feeling encouraged, Gus stepped towards the desk. "Sir," he said. "I need to talk to you about the O'Connor case."

Tanner shifted slightly in his seat. "Yeah."

"It's a bit complicated, about Dolly Brennan. I reckon she's lying."

Tanner relaxed. He eyed Gus benignly. "Look, I can understand you might have a problem with the Brennan woman, after what she did to your

old partner Harry. But frankly, in a matter such as this, we haven't got much choice as to witnesses, and my advice to you is to leave well alone. I reckon as far as everybody here is concerned the matter is closed."

Gus wasn't put off so easily. "But how come Dolly just turns up all of a sudden? It doesn't feel right. Then there's Driscoll's report about the jam in the Dreyse, and the thing about the missing prints on the guns — " Gus struggled on. "I mean, the case has got holes all over it and everything points to the fact there's a copper involved."

Gus had been firm in his own mind about the importance of speaking to Tanner about the things that were bothering him, and of Tanner's ability, and willingness, to dispel all his doubts. But now he felt frighteningly alone in his opinion. He no longer knew what he wanted to say, and had the very strong sense that he'd said too much already. He was feeling that everything was slipping away, and there was nothing he could think of to bring it back.

Tanner said, "Tell me, precisely who is it you're pointing the finger at? Me, maybe? Or some copper who's not got a chance to be in here, defending himself? Yeah, there was a balls-up with the guns. Maybe some copper did it, maybe it was the cleaner. Maybe it was some accident happened down at SIB. I dunno what it was. But I do know that something like this occurs, it isn't a time to be hurling accusations. It's a time to pull together, show some solidarity with each of your colleagues. Every other copper is on your side. So why are you trying to destroy some good copper's career?" He stopped, then said, "You're one of us, aren't you?"

"I suppose," said Gus, hanging his head.

"You don't suppose. You are or you're not."

"I am," said Gus.

Tanner cupped a hand to his ear. "What? I didn't hear you."

"I am," Gus repeated, louder.

"Good to hear it," said Tanner, continuing on. "The reason I got you in here was because I was impressed by your loyalty, the way you stuck to Harry when nobody else would. I've always considered that a police force survives on loyalty between workmates. We've got to go out there, weekly, daily, backing each other up, going into crooks' houses and hide-outs and whatnots, and knowing we're coming out alive because of the copper that's standing beside us."

Gus knew that Tanner meant to be kind, but felt the words smite him. "I came here in good conscience, I would never have gone anywhere else. And also, in the interests of justice," he added, a bit prim.

"Justice?" repeated Tanner. "I find out a brother officer is involved in some trouble, I cover up for the bastard, no matter what sort of mug he might be. I lie if need be, and I verbal any crook that says things to the contrary." Gus struggled to speak out some word of defiance. But a dimness grew before his eyes, and his legs felt unsteady — suddenly, everything around him seemed to soften. A firm hand clasped him on the shoulder. "I'm not asking you to do anything," said Tanner. "Just to look after yourself."

Gus clambered into the Falcon and swung onto Cahill's Expressway, over the Bridge. He drove on, through seemingly enchanted vistas of dragon-flanked restaurants and prawn-cocktail palaces, a counter in the shape of a windmill selling five-cheese fondue, and a billboard peddling imported whitegoods, 'The Best Australian Money Can Buy'. Up ahead, the lights of two television

towers competed with a star-freckled heaven, and then the tang of salt water mingled with the fumes of the highway and the smell of the Harbour washed in. Gus dropped off the main road, curving down through a tangle of side streets, heading towards a handful of California-style bungalows fighting their way through the underbrush. He pulled up on the gravel shoulder of the road, and doused the lights.

Dick Reilly's house was humped on a patch of land inching out into the bay. Around it, clumps of blue gums and sugar gums scrabbled down to the water where a spun-glass speedboat made its way through the dark. Gus got out of the car and walked a few paces, staring up at the ghostly-white bulk of the building, a pile of aging lawn-chairs stacked against the front porch, a crazy-paved pathway wandering towards an ornamental pond in the shape of a wishing-well in the middle of the grass. He didn't move or make any gesture. Just stood there, thinking. Slowly, the sky came over purplish and the rain started falling. It came in glittering pinpoints then in fat-plunking drops that gushed off the brim of his hat like a gutter. After a while, his hat-brim drooped, and the rain came pouring through the lines of his face.

11

ALIGHTING FROM HIS TAXI, Gillespie entered Gate Three of the Sydney Stadium and shoved his way down the aisle. The ring was empty and purplish. Just above the ring-lights the air was split-level with smoke, like a green-tinted mist rising off flat ground. He scanned the thicket of faces shadowed under felt hats, the smouldering orange-ends of cigars flaring over blue chins and foreheads. High mesh wire divided the ring from the terrace, and behind the terrace, were the bleachers, row upon row of bare wooden planks, rising steeply, on all sides, from the small-upraised square in the centre.

Cubitt was seated ringside. Gillespie sat down beside him as the arc lights went down, and the fighters came out — two baby pink spotlights trailing them down the aisle. The champ took the ropes at a hurdle, dancing about the ring, with arms extended, gloves pressed together, and the whole crowd yelling back at him, stomping and caterwauling for the flyweight with the wild, swinging style. ('Born with the Italian's inherent love of spaghetti,' ran the fight promo. 'He is also very keen on Australian steaks.') Then the yammer and hum of the crowd died down, and soon there wasn't a sound, except the surreptitious scrape of a beer bottle on concrete, and the creak of wooden seats as the crowd shifted position, poised and waiting, as the fighters touched gloves.

Feeling distracted, not to mention a bit queasy, Gillespie turned his eyes away from the action. Cameras on trolleys waltzed backwards and forwards under the ring, chip sellers dodged up and down the aisles, and men with dough-fat faces and one-too-many beers under their belts, ducked off to the

gents. His eyes alighted on a technicolour sign, 'Insist on Bell's Double Seated Briefs'. Seated underneath it, was Premier Bob Askin, muttering deferentially to his good friend Frank Packer, owner of Sydney Newspapers Ltd and publisher of the *Telegraph*.

Inside the ring, the referee threw his arms wide, and an incongruous anthem struck up, cranking over the speakers. The crowd surged forward, cramming into the aisles, climbing over seat backs, prying their way with shoulders and elbows. Askin got up, and then he was moving towards them — the crowd falling almost warily back from his passage, and then they were standing together with the crowd moving past.

Askin poked a stubby forefinger to the roof of Cubitt's chest. "Too much weaving and jabbing the long lefts. Left hook, I was yelling. Left hook."

"I reckon the job of holding him up must have been harder than knocking him down," Cubitt chortled.

"That's an unworthy thought."

Cubitt gave out a full-throated roar, and Askin laughed also, and then Askin was patting his coat pocket for a light, and found he didn't have one. Gillespie dug a packet of matches out of his pocket and stroked up a flame. Askin glanced at him with mild surprise, as though seeing him standing there for the very first time. Cubitt introduced them.

"Hackett's got a filly running in the fifth at Randwick," said Askin, glancing sideways at Cubitt as he puffed at the flame. "What do you think?"

"Blue Cairo by a length," said Gillespie.

"Not if he's being asked to rely on any natural agility."

Askin seemed to find this unbearably funny. He slapped his thigh, laughing in quick bursts like a big deep-sea mammal. "Cubitt's told me a few

things about you. He says you've got a friend who wants to make a donation." He wandered off a step, and then, as if recollecting himself, turned back. "Here's what." He rested his cigar hand gently on Gillespie's shoulder. "Why don't you bring him to the racetrack, Saturday? Maybe we can figure out something or other. Also, that way I can cut you up good and proper when your pox horse comes galumphing up the straight a half mile behind."

Gillespie had always considered that being too childishly eager in celebrating such matters was awful bad policy. In the world in which he aspired to live, important pursuits were treated as if they were only mildly significant to the people they most nearly concerned, who always behaved as if they were only half-serious about the things they were chasing. So though his heart was fit to burst with his triumph, he laughed and joked and threw a wet blanket over the matter, as if the whole episode was of no consequence at all.

But once they were shot of the crowd, the charade fell away.

"I mean does Askin know about Reilly?"

"What's there to know?" Cubitt wandered on ahead. "Far as the world is concerned Reilly is a legitimate businessman. He enforces a degree of order in a world of illegal enterprises whose denizens might feel a little different from you or I about seeking official help. I guarantee he's good at making lots of noise, and scaring up the sort of thing that frightens people half to death, but there are some that see such services as a benefit to society. Frankly, I don't know another well-to-do blackguard of whom you might say as much."

Gillespie blurted out. "About his being a criminal."

Cubitt stared at his friend with some perplexity. "And what is crime, but a wilder form of enterprise than the one we're used to? I tell you the criminal fraternity is perhaps the only functional model of pure capitalism, the only instance of free enterprise working as ... well, free enterprise."

Gillespie tried to protest, but Cubitt was awash on a sea of sophistry. He continued up the rise, laughing at the absurdity of such notions, until he found himself standing on the corner outside the Mansions Hotel.

"Where are you going?"

"I reckon we've got to give Reilly the good news."

Gillespie followed Cubitt down a tunnel of buildings, catching him up outside the Kellett Club door. The street was quiet, and there was nobody about except for a bag lady with twin spots of rouge on her cheeks and an angry geranium tucked behind one ear. Cubitt bent forward to knock, but the door gave way under his touch. Inside, the hall was scattered with empty wooden crates labelled 'Darjeeling Tea Co' and carnations of newsprint.

Gillespie blinked hard in the semidarkness.

"I reckon we're a bit late," said Cubitt.

JACK HAD DISAPPEARED. But it didn't take long for Gillespie to find him. He asked behind the bar at the Mansions Hotel and was sent to a crenellated black-brick building on the opposite corner. A sign in oil-slick neon was fixed across the second storey window. But the sign was turned off and the place appeared empty. Gillespie reached the first storey landing, and disappeared through a curtain.

"Good news, Dick. Good news."

"What's good about it?" said Reilly, looking up.

Gillespie scanned the dingy-looking room, taking in the piles of green baize, the stacked chairs and tables, the half-empty packing crates creeping up the walls on all sides, stained with the orange glare seeping in through the window. "What's going on?"

"What does it look like, what's going on?" said Reilly, unreasonably. "I mean, I didn't ask you to set up a transnational merger or nothing. I asked you to reach out to this Askin-bloke, poke a broomstick around, see what falls out. I mean, what is he?"

"Askin's a good bloke."

"Mucking me about, like he is?"

"I don't think he meant to."

"I dunno about that."

Gillespie tried, "I'm sorry, Dick. But I didn't expect to find you in this, ah, kind of situation."

Reilly put his head back and roared, making Gillespie uneasy.

"You feeling all right?"

Reilly caught hold of himself. "Nah," he said. "Guess I'm not feeling too good, maybe some kind of bug, maybe ought to lie down, catch myself some shut-eye tonight." He moved his hands around the inside of his trouser belt, as if to illustrate the point. Then said, "I decided to preempt the whole matter and shut the club down, consider the viability of the whole operation. I guess you've got to understand that this organisation I've got, it isn't a few tosspots standing around, pitching some pennies onto a canvas. Everything I got feeds off another thing, a mixture of high turnover and long-term investment. The more you've got, the stronger it makes you, and the more you can get. Then again, something like this comes up, and there's a knock on and carry on effect. Everything gets forced out of whack, exactly what happens to the directors down at H.G. Palmers & Co., got themselves cash strapped and over-extended."

"Couldn't be that bad, surely?"

Reilly shrugged, "Just got to put around a bit of the wallop, take some of the doubt out of the situation. I take it, you've got a good outcome from your chat to Bob Askin?"

"I reckon."

"He's doesn't mind, I throw him a bit of business?"

Finally, Gillespie got to make his announcement. "I reckon he's pleased. I reckon he's going to need all the money he can get, come next election."

"He does, does he?"

"He'll be at Randwick racetrack, on Saturday. I reckon there's a chance I can arrange for you to meet."

"Meet?" Reilly brightened, almost immediately. "Once was I used to meet all of them politician blokes, coming into the club, making use of the

actual premises. There's something I need, might never it get any other way, that's something I can make a dollar out of." He reached into his pocket, and pulled out a bright wad of banknotes. He hesitated, then thrust the whole roll into Gillespie's waiting hand. "Mind you, this is just on account. From now on, this all goes ahead, it's the same every week."

Reilly stayed in the office after Gillespie departed, and a lightness descended upon him like he'd not felt in weeks. He had strained every nerve to appear composed and indifferent in the hours leading up to the shut-down of the club, and put on a great song and dance to show how the organisation was basically unaffected. He had engaged removalists to shift furnishings, hired on a few workmen to fit out new rooms, splash on some paint, got his contact at the PMG to have an extra bank of telephones installed, so the SP could keep going. But he never felt good. He had let events rule him, the last couple of months, and had to turn them around.

"Ernie!" he yelled, striding back across the carpet.

Chubb stopped a few feet over the threshold, face white and sweating. "What, Boss?" he said, then hacked, and spat a fat purple gob into the pot-plant beside him.

Reilly shuddered, "Jees, Ernie. Thought I told you never to do that?"

"Sorry, Boss," said Chubb. He took out a crumpled yellow handkerchief and mopped off the backs of his ears and neck, then spat the rest of the gob in it. "It's just that I've got a bit of the flu. Only came in because you said it's important. The missus, she reckoned I ought to have stayed in my bed with the temperature I've got."

Reilly sighed, "Okay, I'm not going crook on you. But hell, you keep spitting that stuff in there and the pot-plant is going to die, understand?"

"Sure," said Chubb. "Anything you say, Boss."

Reilly glanced at his knuckles. "I've heard that Tommy Bogle, who's shown he can no longer be trusted, was there on the night Warren's Liverpool operation got raided. I want you to speak to the bloke, find out what's happening."

Chubb hung his head. "I dunno he'll be particularly anxious for a chat. Not after the last talk we had."

"The last talk weren't nothing."

"Well, after it was over, I reckoned he was looking a bit rough."

"Ernie, I told you to go around there, ask him nicely. Just bump into the bloke on the street, wasn't anything you planned, then drop it on him what's he been doing hanging out with Warren and stuff."

"I dunno."

Reilly felt his mood dissipate under the weight of frustration. "I'm telling you to go around and nudge the bloke, see what pops up. He don't talk to you nicely, then talk to him anyway, understand?"

"Sure, Boss," said Chubb, making ready to go. But Reilly stopped him.

"There's one other thing," he said, getting to the crux of the matter. "I want you to tell me what happened, the night of that blue at the Latin Quarter."

"About the blue?"

"Yeah."

Chubb hung his head. "Honest. I was that sloshed that I didn't see a thing."

Reilly rolled his eyes. "Well, I reckon you did and I want you to tell me. Did he knock him or not?"

Chubb stood there, stricken. "I dunno," he said.

Reilly was consumed with an eagerness to turn on the bloke, but kept telling himself that he had always trusted Chubb to look after his interests. "God help me, Ernie. I almost believe you. But I want you to go away a few days, have a serious think, maybe talk to a few blokes, come up with an answer."

"Is everything all right, Boss?"

"I reckon nothing will ever be like it used to."

"No, I reckon it won't," said Chubb, mystified by the philosophical turn in the conversation.

Reilly tried to enlarge. "Changes for the worse, I mean. Blokes doing all sorts of things because they reckon the world allows it."

Chubb swallowed, "You're worried about Lennie?"

Reilly glanced up with a mild sort of surprise. "Yeah, I reckon I am."

Chubb jumped into his battered blue Holden and headed for Woolloomooloo. Outside, the air was steaming and Chubb felt like he was swimming through successive waves of moisture. Sweat ran into his eyes, and out of his armpits, soaking his shirt. Chubb had come up as a street-fighter with the Railway Square Mob (skull fractured, spleen punctured and ribs cracked), and hadn't been having much luck until Reilly came along. Reilly had valued his talents and skills, where others did not. He was acutely aware that he wouldn't be occupying the position he was occupying, Reilly hadn't taken an interest. But

thinking over their conversation back there, it was like Reilly had reached out and touched on these dilemmas Chubb had — and Chubb fell to thinking them through until he was almost exhausted.

Reilly was an all around stand up sort of bloke, who always dealt square and Chubb knew there was margin in that. He only had to sit at the pub counter to hear how crooks on all sides had abandoned any idea of square dealing, a bloke had to keep his mouth shut or his teeth would be taken out. The trouble was Reilly wasn't making a penny. Chubb had honestly tried to ignore this problem, telling himself that things would come right. He still remembered the days Reilly was so big it was like he generated his own gravity — as soon as he walked into a room, you found yourself drawn into his orbit. But now it was like all that gravity was imploding and Planet Dick was falling, falling towards inevitable fragmentation. Chubb didn't really know, he ought to be around, the day that thing happened.

But he also couldn't leave.

Chubb pulled into a small place off Cathedral Street under a sign that read, 'Bogle Bros Auto Electric'. Tommy was standing beside the green petrol pump, taking a two-dollar note off a taxicab driver, giving him fifty cents change. He ambled towards Chubb as the taxi drove off.

"I've got a visit from the messenger boy of the mob, boy am I blessed."

Chubb touched the gun bulge at his side for comfort, as he clambered out of the car. "That last time we talked, it was strictly professional."

"So why are you here?"

"Dick told me."

"Tell him from me I've got nothing to say."

"He's heard that you've been working for that thief, Johnny Warren."

"Then tell him not to worry."

Tommy wiped his petrol-smudged fingers on the backs of his trousers then made his way back to the shop. Chubb trailed behind. He hesitated, then said, "I also reckon he's worried about Lennie McPherson."

"Well, I wouldn't know anything about that," said Tommy, suddenly cagey.

Chubb had really been drunk that night at the Latin Quarter and wasn't real sure that he knew what went down. But he'd taken some time out to ask McPherson about it, and McPherson had told him that it was all in Reilly's interest. Chubb had gone along with it at the time. But now he had doubts. He said, "I stuck to McPherson over O'Connor, but I've decided I'm through. I reckon we should go back to Reilly, and make a clean breast of it. I reckon Reilly is prepared to overlook everything so long as we tell him what's up."

"Are you mad?"

"Nah," said Chubb. "I trust him like a father."

"Well, you shouldn't."

"Why not?"

Tommy leaned towards him confidential-like. "I can't talk about it here. I'll come round to your place at North Sydney tomorrow and tell you what's happening."

13

CHOOKS LOPED OUT OF THE DUST AND DAZZLE of the goods yard at Tempe, c squinting past the usual litter of unloved appliances and rusted-up razor-wire on battered tin spools. Under an advertising hoarding that read, 'Australian Pest Services Ltd. Drive Safely and Leave the Exterminating to Us,' Johnny was waiting in the blue Valiant, but from where Chooks was standing, he might as well have been sitting on the far side of the moon.

Chooks swung open the door as Johnny brought the Valiant skidding round. "Sweet Jesus ... " he spluttered, clambering in.

Gravel sprayed the undersides of the car as Johnny shot backwards out of the side street, missing a truckload of swaying bottles with barely an eyelash to spare. Sweat broke from the pores of Chooks's skin, and a Aileen trickle ran out of his left nostril.

"I don't want to hurt the bloke," Chooks started. "I've got nothing against him. I just go to nick his car and he slams me with a shovel."

"Two of them, was there?" said Johnny, glancing sideways.

"Yeah, that's why I had to take the shovel right back to him. Knocked out a tooth, maybe put him in the hospital."

"That's when that other bloke comes at you, the bloke with the tin can?"

Chooks clutched a spotted handkerchief to his bleeding nose. "He ought to have walked away. I just wanted his car, not to harm him or nothing."

"Is that all?" Johnny was shaking with laughter. "I thought you must've killed the poor bastard, at least."

"Hitting a bloke isn't bad enough?"

Johnny threw up his arms in exasperation, actually letting go of the wheel. "Listen to yourself. Just listen to yourself. It embarrasses me."

"I don't like violence. It's not in my nature." Chooks eyes fell to the floor. He brooded, and sank into himself.

"Look mate," said Johnny, and gave Chooks a prod. "I reckon if it was your car, and the other bloke that was doing the thieving, well, I reckon that the other bloke would've done the same thing."

"You reckon?" said Chooks, rousing himself.

"Yeah, I reckon."

They were chatting away amicably again, when Johnny pulled the Valiant in to the side of the road. He unlocked the car door and got out.

"Why are we stopping here?" said Chooks, scrambling out after him.

"Well, first up I'm getting something to eat. Then I'm giving further consideration to buying a bucket."

Chooks stopped still. "No, you can't mean it."

"What do you think?"

Chooks had to scurry a bit to catch up. "But Glory doesn't like the idea, throwing a bucket of petrol over Dick Reilly. I remember she was very vocal on the point." Johnny laughed, and Chooks stared at him, suddenly crestfallen. "Oh, I get it. You were having a go at me, right?"

They were standing outside Theo's Hot Chips and Hamburgers, inspecting the fly-spotted advertisements on the green-tiled exterior proclaiming 'Pea Floaters' 'Steak Sandwiches' and 'Shelley's Famous Drinks ... Ice Cold'. Johnny walked in through the door beribboned with multi-coloured plastic strips, ordered four hamburgers and a bottle of Stone's

Ginger Beer, and sat down in the corner. Chooks slipped into the booth on the opposite side. Johnny ate in silence then licked off his fingers.

"I've been making a great study of the plans and I've developed a modus operandi that's guaranteed foolproof. But I need you to make a decision. Are you with me or what?"

"Well, I dunno," said Chooks, feeling truculent. "I reckon there's things you've got to tell me before I make up my mind."

"Like what?"

"Well, like how do I know you've got the money to pay me if you're broke?"

"Because I'll pay out the money the next day provided it's a weekday."

"Yeah. But how?"

Johnny glanced around to make sure that nobody was close, then leaned into the table. "The thing is, I'm not going into this alone. Everything's on contract."

"Contract?" said Chooks, sounding doubtful.

"Yeah, that means somebody else is paying expenses."

"Who?"

"I can't tell you that," said Johnny, making Chooks scowl. "For your own protection."

"But how do I know these contract blokes have got any money?"

Johnny crammed forward again. "Remember Tommy Bogle?"

"Yeah, of course I remember Tommy. I worked with him, didn't I?"

Johnny put a finger to the side of his nose. Then failing to get the desired result mouthed the name 'Tommy' and winked.

"Oh," said Chooks. "Tommy."

"Look mate," said Johnny, rather heavily. "This is just between the two of us, right? I don't want you to go telling Glory or nothing."

"Why?" said Chooks, uneasy again. "Doesn't she like it?"

"Nah, she doesn't like Tommy Bogle, that's all."

Chooks thought this over for a minute. Then said, "How could Tommy get his hands on that sort of cash?"

"It's not Tommy's money. He's just the in-between person. The behind-guy is a bloke that's staying anonymous."

"Oh," said Chooks.

Johnny got up abruptly and went to the cash register to pay for the feed. Chooks followed him back to the car. "Look," said Johnny. "This bloke, he's only having people killed that have killed other people. The way I see it, he's doing the town a service. Also, once Dick Reilly's out of the way I'll be able to set up in Kings Cross again, and I promise to make you my second-in-command."

They were standing either side the Valiant, staring at each other over the roof. "I dunno," said Chooks. "Marge might not like it."

"Yeah, Marge says, 'Jump,' and there you go, boink, boink, boink. It just isn't natural."

"I reckon you ought to leave Marge out of this."

"But it still isn't natural," Johnny insisted.

"I said to leave Marge out of it," Chooks repeated, getting hot under the collar. He climbed into the Valiant, folded his arms, and started brooding again.

Johnny gave a right hand signal, and passed through a red set of traffic lights. "I was watching him the other night," he said, fixing his eyes off in the mid distance.

"Watching who?"

"Dick Reilly, of course. I can tell you, it makes a bloke wonder about the way this world works. Seeing him living high on the hog in that mansion he's got, when there are some that don't get enough to feed their own kids."

"Yeah, but it's not even like you've got any kids," said Chooks, glancing at Johnny, then seeing Johnny's expression, stammered, "I mean, there's Kim. But it's not like she's really yours — "

"That's got nothing to do with it, stupid."

"Hell," said Chooks, shrinking down. "No need to get touchy."

"Glory, she's not had it easy bringing up a kid on her own. I feel about Kim like she was mine." Johnny's chest swelled with sentiment.

"Crikey," muttered Chooks. "You've got it bad."

"What's that?"

"Just said you're a lucky man."

Johnny gave Chooks a sidelong angry glance, but let the matter drop. They were heading into Waterloo, when Johnny drew the Valiant up alongside a square of clipped grass bounded by a spiked-railing fence, with a green-wooden seesaw and red merry-go-round. He climbed out of the Valiant and tossed Chooks the keys. "I've got an appointment with Tommy at three o'clock sharp. I'll meet up with you afterwards at the Enmore garage."

"How are you getting there?"

"See that white Valiant?" said Johnny, and grinning, set off along the footpath.

Chooks drove back to Enmore in the Valiant, and was still tinkering with the engine, in the failing brown sunlight, when Johnny got back.

"Oh my God, Chooks. Oh my God," said Johnny, breathless. "All this time I've been scouting around putting our plans together, Reilly's got this bloke out scouting for me."

Chooks, dazed, lifted his head.

"He's put the catchers onto us, Chooks. You've got to help me out. Or else, I'm done for."

Chooks rubbed his nose with a blackened forefinger. He scratched at his belly through a hole in his shirt. "Hell," he said, after a second.

"The bloke's name is Ernie Chubb and I've got to knock him off before he gets any further. I've found out the place where he is, but he's leaving there soon. I've got a gun, but I'll need some assistance." When Chooks didn't say anything, Johnny crept closer. "Haven't I always looked after you?"

"I dunno. Maybe, I guess."

"If you don't help me out here, I'll have to ask Glory to drive."

"Glory can't drive. Glory couldn't drive a bloody scooter."

"Then you've got to help me out, Chooks. Or else, I'm a dead man. The dogs will lift up their heads and howl, they see me coming "

Chooks stood there an extra second but really didn't need to consider. He slammed down the bonnet, tucked a shammy into his rear pocket, and hopped into the car. "Where to?" he said, kick-starting the engine.

Johnny climbed in on the passenger side, and started yelling directions. They headed north over the Bridge before dropping down off the highway,

hugging the roads tight to the foreshore. Dusk fell swiftly, and then it was dark. The road turned moon-blue, glittering with small constellations of garbage. Chooks ran the Valiant up to the end of Kurraba Road and doused out the engine.

Johnny pulled a brown rexine-covered suitcase out from under the seat, and flicked open the locks. He brought out a pair of thick-rimmed black glasses, attached to a large plastic nose and fake black moustaches. Wonder, then amusement passed over Chooks face. "Oh, my God," he said, clutching his belly. "You're not shooting the bloke in that get-up?"

Johnny swore through clenched teeth. He pulled his Parker Hale Safari Rifle out from under the back seat and climbed out of the car. Chooks scrambled out after him and stood at his elbow. Flat buildings, forming a ridge beyond a grey line of trees, shimmered like plum-coloured fuzzy felts pressed against the sky.

Johnny said, "Stay here. Keep the enrning over until I'm back." He put on his disguise and walked off a few paces.

Chooks called after him. "Oi. Chin up."

Johnny grinned and saluted, waving the shotgun. Then, doubling over, disappeared up a short garden path into the dark.

Waiting in the Valiant, some half an hour later, Chooks heard the phut, phut, phut of three shots going home. His mind flashed on a picture of Chubb coming down the steps of his house, collapsing to his knees, in a hail of pink gunfire. Lifting his head, Chooks stared out through the windscreen until he saw Johnny come blundering down the mouth of the road. Chooks teeth were

chattering, but he managed to engage the gear. Johnny ripped off his moustache and false glasses. He fell on Chooks's neck, crying like a baby.

HAVING SET HIMSELF DOWN AT THE GATES OF SYDNEY SOCIETY Gillespie had adroitly got to work picking its locks and slipping inside, and did so with remarkable ease, in the dark of the night, when nobody was watching. He was blessed with a certain skill in pleasing, of dropping soft words in the right person's ear. He knew how to make merry in the right sort of company, but also how to assume the appearance of being steady, at least of not being too impatient or rollicking, and liable to go off. He was prone to the occasional pang of self doubt about the shadier side of some of his arrangements, but crammed all such thoughts to the back of his mind, telling himself that nobody wished to employ the services of an overly honest lawyer, being afraid such a lawyer might not be so well up on other people's tricks. Everything about him was sunny as he swung his new Mustang through the gates of the Royal Randwick Racecourse, contemplating with great satisfaction the Rollses and Bentleys fanned out all around him. He caressed his coat pocket, containing the ticket that would see him straddle the heights of the Jockey Club Committee Room (where the air was rarefied and increasingly thin), and drifted along through the crowd.

The field was swarming with odd characters. Sailors on shore leave, with batik-patterned shirts hanging out around their trousers, country yokels in moleskins and dusty Akubras, shop clerks on half-holidays, red-faced in white seersucker under Panama straw hats. Gillespie edged his way past a track tout in a muddy-brown dustcoat, climbed the stairs of an elongated-wooden grandstand, taking a seat beside the candy-lace balcony, and stared out of deep shade into sunshine. Lifting his binoculars, he spied the orange

dirt track, with its rows of white fence posts and carefully watered flower beds crammed with petunias. He caught a bright burst of silks as the horses shot out from the barrier, and went round the track to the yammer of the race call. He was swept to his feet with the long throaty roar of the crowd as the horses came thundering over the finish line, the noise shutting off suddenly to be replaced by a rustle of paper, as losers tossed up their tickets, and winners turned back to their race forms to place their next bet.

“Well, now that you’re trying out the Opposition, how do you like it?” said George Cubitt to the Labor Leader Jack Renshaw, sitting together in a shady corner of the grandstand.

“We’re getting along,” said Renshaw. “Enough to give Askin a run for his money. And you, are you also feeling happy with the Premier’s performance?”

“I should say I’m delighted,” said Cubitt, grinning wide. “The main thing is he lets us small business folk get on with our stuff, and can bring out the vote in sufficient quantity to keep you other fellows out.”

Renshaw spoke on with perfect coolness. “I warrant he’s full of cheap tricks and windy words, but his only real achievement will be making it through to the end of his term without doing a thing.”

“Ah yes, but a period of quiet consolidation can be the thing in itself.”

Renshaw scowled, “Well, I’m glad you reckon you’ve got your money’s worth then. But don’t be so confident you can go on like you do. Nobody gets re-elected for doing nothing. I reckon you’ll find Joe Public sees through him. Who’s he?” Renshaw added, pointing at Gillespie with his head.

"He's one of those tricky lawyers. Makes his fortune sorting out mess for the rich and the infamous," said Cubitt, stretching the truth.

"Never heard of him," said Renshaw.

"Well, if you haven't already, I reckon you will. I wouldn't be surprised if he stands for a seat on Bob Askin's ticket. He's a smart sort of fellow. Knows how to cock his tail, and crow before company. I wouldn't be surprised if he gets a name for himself."

"One of Bob Askin's mob?" said Renshaw, disdainful, and rising, moved off through the crowd.

Just then, Premier Bob Askin came puffing up the stairs. He hadn't been anywhere near the Jockey Club all morning and as he walked in, the dignitaries started primping themselves, mopping off foreheads, wiping sweaty palms onto the backs of their trousers, sticking down hairs. Gillespie waited several minutes for the motley assemblage to thin, before moving forward. Askin, who fancied himself a great tipster, was discussing the finer points of Frank Packer's horse, and Gillespie, who'd been loudly proclaiming the merits of a rival grey mare, found himself singled out.

"You again!" said Askin, pointing a finger, before turning back to the crowd. "Last week, Charlie here gives me a lead-lined ten-stone-ten-pound handicap at twenty-to-one. I really thought the bloke must of been having a lend of me ... then whoosh! In it comes, charging down the straight on two-and-a-half lengths."

Gillespie basked modestly in the glow of the Premier's favour. He ventured another tip.

Askin cuthim off. "I wasn't asking for any suggestions. I guarantee you were lucky that time, but this race I'm onto a sure-fire proposition. Leastways, old Packer is sure-fire bankable even if his gelding falls in a heap."

Everybody tittered dutifully, if a little uncomfortably. Frank Packer was standing some distance not too far off. But Askin, who already had a couple of whisky-and-waters inside of him, was too high to notice.

"Well, here's my own rival, Jack Renshaw," he said, turning around sharply, and beckoning Renshaw towards him. "Why don't you ask him about Frank Packer's chances?"

"What? I'm sorry — " said Renshaw, taken aback.

"There you go, Charlie," said Askin, with a wink. "You heard the man. I don't think we could find any greater authority on the subject of horseflesh than Renshaw. I guess that means you'll be putting your money where my mouth is."

"Of course," said Gillespie, sketching a comical bow.

"Spoken like a true Minister of the Crown!" Askin crowed, making everybody laugh. "With opinions like those you're a guaranteed high flyer in anybody's Cabinet. See, that's how you pull them into line," he added, giving Renshaw a nudge, and swinging round on his heel, went lumbering back down the stairs

Gillespie also left, striking out across the Paddock, craning his neck for a sight of Dick Reilly, who was meeting him under the clock tower as the hands swept towards one. Reilly was all got up in his gangster-togs, comprising a body-clinching blue suit with silk shirt and shiny-silver tie, and lifting his

fedora to an awkward assortment of customers, most of them track touts or bookmakers who worked under his auspices. Greeting each other, Gillespie and Reilly proceeded in the direction of the saddling enclosure, where Askin was copping an eyeful of the horses. Inside the walking ring, trainers and grooms, dressed in crushed hats and corduroys, were moseying about, waxing loudly about their chances, and swatting at stray swarms of blowflies, drawn on by the scent of manure, which lay heavily on the air. Askin was standing alongside a nut-coloured gelding. A groom threw a saddle and number-cloth over its back, the strapper hanging hard on both reins, as the horse ground ferociously against the bit and pawed at the dirt. Askin turned just as the gelding threw its head in the air, whinnying, and knocking off his hat. Leaning on a nearby fence post, Reilly let out a laugh, and Askin, edging away from the gelding, made a few steps towards him.

“Charlie here says we’ve got something to talk about,” said Askin, taking Reilly by the elbow, and pulling him along.

“Just a few problems with some betting establishments in which I have an interest,” said Reilly, treading carefully.

“So Charlie says. In fact, Charlie’s told me you’re a bit of a bastard. But I reckon maybe you’re not such a bad bloke.”

“Kind of you to say that,” said Reilly, with a grin.

Askin swatted a bluebottle fly off his face. “I used to run SP myself, back in my army days. Kept book for the whole mucking battalion, out in the Pacific, with the Japs raging round. Only bit of fun we had, it was. Rigging up the radio, relaying the race over the broadcast. Being an enterprising sort of bloke, I made a few bucks, and a couple of killings. I’d had the foresight to

slip the quartermaster a pony, so when they shipped in the newsreel on Cup Day, I'd get myself a sneak preview before setting the odds."

"Fair dinkum?" said Reilly, thoroughly disarmed by this confession.

Askin executed a funny little vaudeville step. "Mind, I'm only spinning you a yarn," he said, and slapped Reilly on the shoulder. Then, turning abruptly, set off across the grass, so Reilly and Gillespie were hard pressed to keep up. He came to a halt outside the Steward's Room, standing by the door, as jockeys in bright-coloured silks, like bunches of tropical birds, entered and exited, lugging their saddles back and forth to the weigh-in.

Gillespie, thinking it only prudent to give them the room to say what they would, tipped his hat and departed. Stepping out from the shade of the grandstands, he immediately felt the heat. Sunlight blinded him momentarily as he vaulted over the white picket railing and walked across the grass, where he was struck by the sight of Reilly's moll Aileen Glinn, ambling along a small patch of concrete at the end of the green. Aileen smiled at him warmly, advancing with the light dripping through the daisy cut-outs in the brim of her hat. Gillespie beamed back recognition, and they immediately fell to talking. After a while, Reilly also stepped out of the crowd, moving towards them.

"Not now, Dick," she said, grabbing Gillespie by the sleeve of his coat. "Charlie's offered to take me home and I've told him I'm going."

Gillespie, who had done no such thing, perceived he had landed right in the middle of something. "I'm afraid I won't be leaving for quite some time," he said. "Maybe I could fetch you a taxi?"

Reilly intervened. "Thanks, Charlie," he said, grabbing his hand. "I really appreciate the thing that you've done. But right now I'd be grateful, you can leave us alone?"

Immediately, Gillespie made to leave. But Aileen stopped him.

"He's not going," she said.

Reilly flushed under his shirt-collar. "What do you reckon you're up to? Think you can play me like one of them mugs?"

"I'm leaving you," said Aileen.

"Not again?" said Reilly, contriving astonishment.

"I am, though," insisted Aileen, with a little more conviction. "Do you reckon I wouldn't dare?"

Reilly laughed, and Aileen burst into tears. Gillespie, who wasn't terribly anxious to have a run in with anybody, gazed idly up at an advertising hoarding, down at a stray screw cap by the side of his foot, then gave up and stammered, "Well, I guess I'll be off then."

Gillespie vaulted back over the railing, traversing the lawn until he was free. It was after the sixth race and the crowd was shaking out. Some with money wads bulging out of their trousers, others raking through piles of used betting slips, searching for the illusory ticket that might set them straight. Gillespie made his way back towards the home stretch, the finish line, and the winner's circle. Just off from the track, a band started up, with sun glittering on cymbals and batons. Askin was standing in front of a microphone, on a small stage covered in red and white bunting, pinning a tri-colour medal on old Frank Packer, before shaking hands with the jockey and trainer, and congratulating the gelding.

Many thoughts passed through Gillespie's mind about the day's dealings. How small was the chance of his being named a future MP when he conducted those sordid little dealings on Frank Tanner's behalf? How remote was the chance of his falling on his feet when he had agreed to take on the handling of Dick Reilly's case? But it had all come around to him, and now everything was fixed. He had gained a great deal of experience in the last couple of months. Things once puzzling to him in political life presented themselves differently now that he had opened his eyes to the way the world worked. In fact, confronted no longer by speculation but the actual fact of Reilly's matter being favourably resolved, he began to reconsider his dealings with Tanner as well. For alongside the wielding of political influence his worries on that score seemed very small indeed. He had nothing particularly solid to go on, but his mind began branching in all sorts of directions. Imagining how he, Charlie Gillespie, a boy from the slums, a connoisseur of urban blight, might at last take his place in one of the shiny glass skyscrapers that housed the affluent class. With this in mind, he immediately began roaming the crowd, striving to find another opportunity of engrossing five minutes of Premier Bob Askin's company.

Reilly stuck Aileen in a taxi and made his way into town, absurdly conscious of an easy sort of confident calm he'd not felt in years. Strange, how only last week he'd felt like he'd run out of dodges, as if all the uncharted possibilities of his future were narrowing down. But now it seemed Askin and his Macquarie Street mob were prepared to do business. He could rebuild the company, penny by penny, sling by sling. He could afford to wait, could

afford to bide his time. He was surprised to find himself grinning, and everything he saw, the angles of the buildings, the way their shadows fell simply, slanting plausibly, without any distortion, blended into a happy impression of a world smiling back.

Reilly drove on, through a suburban twilight of orderly houses set back from the road, fronted by patches of green motor-mowed grass, untouched by litter. His thoughts turned to Lyla, his wife and the kids. He and Lyla, they'd been so goddamn young when they started. Reilly had always thought that if any marriage was able to survive the stresses of a criminal career, it should have been theirs. But he was in the clubs and the bars, and the smoky backrooms, spending more time on making deals with the coppers, than on the two of them together. Lyla was gone, and Reilly had to acknowledge it was pretty much his fault. His thoughts turned to Aileen, and suddenly the possibility of losing her stung him so hard he could barely breathe. Consumed by a sudden eagerness to set things to rights, it seemed forever down the length of black-glittering asphalt, swooping along between high walls of sandstone topped by delphiniums, with leaves and flowers like crescents and stars against an indigo sky.

But there were other shadows gathering on the horizon. Had Reilly been less distracted he might have noticed the powder-blue Valiant, which had been following him about the last couple of days. He might also have remembered he hadn't heard word from Ernie Chubb, and thought to ask questions. But he was absent-minded in his haste, not thinking what he ought to be thinking, and amazed and not a little afraid of the good things that lay ahead. He swung his Maserati into Aileen's Manning Road driveway, turned off the ignition, and let the dog out. His legs carried him up the front steps,

lined two by two with glazed pots of japonica, into the bright-white oblivion of the warm room behind.

15

EARLY THE SAME MORNING, Chooks was yanked rudely from sleep by the peal of the telephone. He turned to see if Marge was awake, then threw off his blanket, groped underneath the bed for his tartan felt slippers and — not finding them — padded in his sock feet to the end of the hall, where he stared down at the telephone in a palsy of anxiety. Last week, Johnny had got an electrician from the PMG to come round and put the thing in, so he could ring and tell Chooks when it was time to come over. Consequently, whenever it rang, it scared Chooks to pieces.

Chooks picked up. "Hello?"

"Pipe down for Pete's sake," said Johnny, at the other end of the line. "I can hear you as good as if I was standing there next to you."

"Right-ho," said Chooks, continuing in the same tone. "What's up?"

"I've got a good feeling that we're on for tonight. I want you to come round to Enmore as early as possible."

Out the corner of his eye Chooks caught the soft flash of Marge's blue dressing gown and cranked up his voice to make sure she could hear him. "That's real good news, Johnny. I reckon I can get there as early as half past two."

Johnny said, "Is anything wrong?"

"Nooo."

"It's Marge, is it?"

Chooks stammered, "Okay then. Thanks Johnny. Cheerio. See you then," and hung up.

"Who was it?" said Marge, standing at the end of the hall. "Was that Johnny Warren?"

Chooks glanced up at the flies gathered in the bowl of the light fitting, down at the stain on the rag cotton mat, at anything, because he couldn't look her in the face. Then he did. "He's asked me to help him drive a load of used washing machines up to Newcastle tonight."

"Well, I guess that's all right then," said Marge.

Chooks didn't think so. But he climbed back into bed and slept soundly until twelve, then got up again. He slipped on his blue work-shirt and baggy brown trousers, kissed the kids solemnly, each on the forehead, then walked down a long line of weeping willows to the edge of the road, where he sat at the bus stop, shivering in a puddle of failed sunlight, until a green and yellow bus came trundling round the corner and took him into town.

Over in Enmore, Glory had been up since the peep of dawn, carving ingenious masks out of black-nylon leotards, cutting holes for eyes, and fitting the tops snugly over the crown of Johnny's head. She cleaned Johnny's rubber-soled shoes, mended his black socks, washed, ironed and folded three sets of black T-shirts and trousers. They were simple things, ordinary everyday tasks. Glory performed them all in a daze, never once believing in the reality of their intentions. And once these chores were all accomplished, and there were not more preparations to be made, she turned her mind to other things. The week's worth of washing, the chops in the freezer for tomorrow night's tea, the darning around the hemline of Kim's reach-me-down uniform (in January, Kim would be starting school) ... all these

thoughts, each worrying little detail, growing more pressing, more intense, until they threatened to crush her completely. Ultimately, she was relieved to hear the sound of the doorbell echoing down the hall of the soap-smelling house. She threw open the front door and found Chooks standing on the doorstep, looking stupid.

"Oh, Chooks," said Glory. "You're a bit early."

"It was the bus," Chooks replied, meekly. "It came a bit quick."

Glory tugged Chooks down the corridor into the kitchen. Outside, the sun shone through mauve clouds of jacaranda and the glass of the window onto a tray of stacked tea things, and the familiar cosy clutter of all things domestic. Kim was sprawled on the floor eating crayons, and Glory's mother, Mrs McGlynn, was hovering over the laundry. "I reckon you know everybody," said Glory, turning back towards Chooks.

Glory's mother put the electric hand iron down on the dish rack. "Can I get you a feed?"

"Just a cuppa tea, thanks," said Chooks, and hung his head shyly. He shuffled his toes under the soft leather of his shoes then hoicked a small pail of eggs onto the table. "Here, Marge asked me to bring these around."

Glory's mother beamed. Chooks bent down and gave Kim a nudge. Then he was crooking his elbows and flapping his arms. "Boh, boh. Boh, boh," he mouthed. "Boh, boh. Boh, boh."

Glory got up abruptly. "I'm going upstairs," she announced, and walked out of the kitchen.

Glory went up the stairs to the small attic bedroom under the roof. The door stood ajar. She pushed it wide open. Johnny was sitting on the bed, the Parker Hale Safari Rifle in his lap. He peered down the muzzle of the gun,

then levelled the barrel at the window and squeezed. The mechanism clicked over.

"Was that my mate Chooks just came in?"

"Yeah," said Glory, sitting down on the bed.

Johnny was all business. He put the Parker Hale back in its scabbard, pulled a dark blue duffel bag out from under the bed, and laid it on the floor beside the rifle. He got the double-barrel shotgun out from under the dressing table. Broke it down, oiled it, checked the hammer and put it back together again. He stowed the guns and the tackle in the duffel bag, alongside three walkie-talkies and the piles of black clothing. He was binding the bag together with a bit of nylon cord when the cord broke in half.

"The bloody thing snapped on me."

Glory put calming hands on Johnny's big heaving shoulders. "It doesn't matter, Johnny. Everything's going to be all right."

Glory helped Johnny bind up the duffel bag with a broken bit of string, then descended the stairs, joining Chooks in the kitchen.

Johnny dumped the duffel bag down at the door. "Chooks. How are you, mate?"

Chooks clambered up in alarm.

"Loosen up, mate," said Johnny. "You look tense."

"I'm not tense."

"Well, you look tense."

"Well, I don't feel it," said Chooks, a small flush of annoyance spreading over his cheeks. Johnny threw his arms wide as if to give Chooks a hug, then tightened to a half headlock, and started swinging Chooks round. Chooks laughed, "Cut it out, Johnny. Will you?"

Chooks extracted himself from the headlock. But he wasn't fast enough. Johnny cuffed him one before Chooks got away. Chooks retaliated, giving Johnny a shove. Johnny blundered backwards, causing the coffeepot on the draining board to topple and smash.

"Sorry," said Johnny. He glanced at his toes. "I guess we'll be off then."

Glory had gone over the crime many times in her mind, each time believing she would be terribly afraid, but now the moment was near she found the seconds ticking by in a mechanical fashion, pulling her along. They climbed into the blue Valiant and drove to the garage where the stolen white Valiant was hidden. Chooks got out, started up the stolen car, and they drove in two separate vehicles, meeting in the car park at South Sydney Juniors. Johnny went in through the front doors of the club, signed the admission book, and waited for Chooks, who signed the book also, then continued on down the hall, out the emergency exit to the rear of the Gents. They got into the stolen white Valiant, and this time Glory drove.

Moving through the early evening traffic, Glory found herself looking at familiar things. The cream-coloured whitegoods in the windows of plumbing and electrical supply stores, the advertising billboard saying 'Fly TAA' featuring a tropical island destination, the pitched roofs of the railway workshops, with their blanket of electrical wires trailing off into the distance. On Anzac Parade, a yellow Water Board truck was blocking one half of the street, with arc lights switched on, and workers in blue denim overalls waving 'Stop' and 'Go Slow' signs to regulate the flow of the traffic. Glory brought the Valiant to a halt, then continued towards the Oxford Street

corner. Here, a handful of cars had slammed into each other, with three police cars angled to the curb around the scene of the accident. Several young men dressed in white winkle-pickers and purple-flowered shirts were spread-eagled to the fence, with the coppers running their batons around the inner thighs of their trousers.

Johnny took his black T-shirt out of the duffel bag, and put it on, then slipped into his brown rubber-soled shoes, cramming the black-cotton gloves into his pocket. He took out the extra black mask and gave it to Chooks, who was sitting on the back seat beside him. On the ledge between them a battered wooden wireless was wailing.

"Can you turn off the bloody squawk box?"

"But it stops me from getting the collywobbles," stammered Chooks.

Johnny took out the double-barrel shotgun, nudging the muzzle right up to Chooks ear. "I'll give you the collywobbles."

Chooks was so startled he banged his head on the roof. "Jee-suss," he spluttered. "Jee-suss," he said, again. Gasping, he grabbed hold of the gun, and pushed it away. "What did you do that for?"

Johnny laughed. "Ought to have seen your face," he said, between bursts.

"Yeah, and what if the bloody thing went off. What then?"

"Reckon I'd let something like that happen?"

"I dunno," whispered Chooks. "I reckon maybe you're nuts."

Glory was sitting motionless in the front seat. "Stop it," she yelled. "Just stop it, the both of you."

Johnny's face fell. "Sorry," he muttered, stricken.

"Yeah well," said Chooks, and gave out a spooky laugh.

Glory engaged the gear, gave a right hand signal, then eased the white Valiant back into the traffic, following the lines of the road down to Double Bay. She swung right into Manning Road, and stared out through the windscreen.

Outside the sky was bright indigo and studded with stars, the cloud-light illuminating the streetscape with heartbreaking clarity. The building in front of them rode high above the footpath without any setback, fronted by a generous white portico with a triangular pediment propped up on pillars. Under the portico was a square-tiled entrance and double front door, the dark of the door inlaid with square pieces of glass, so a crosshatch of light leaked over the doorstep. On the footpath below, Reilly's Maserati was angled to the curb, sleek and grey, and gleaming in the ghost-light.

Johnny had planned everything down to the last detail, leaving no space for doubt, not a single deviation, but now the moment was near he found himself filled with a clamour of unresolved questions. He had pictured himself standing behind the stone wall that ran along the south end of the boundary, taking his shot down the side of the building. But Reilly's Maserati was wedged to the curb in an uncomfortable position. One look told Johnny there was a telephone pole directly blocking his line of fire.

He climbed nimbly out of the Valiant, and glanced around.

Just down from the flat entrance a hedge of variegated abelia was growing around the base of a plane tree, the first in a long line that stretched down the block. The tree was almost bare, but the shrubs growing around, and over it, provided more than enough cover. The angle made the shot

awkward, but the quickness of his solution made Johnny elated. He cursed himself for letting the moment overwhelm him, when all that was required was rational action. He pushed aside all thought of failure, and concentrated on the means.

"Right-ho, you lot," he said, turning back to the car.

Chooks got out first. He was dressed in his black mask and gloves, but clutching his arms to his belly. He dropped down on his haunches.

"What's up?" said Johnny. "Don't tell me you're not going through with it?"

Chooks stared at him soulfully from the gutter. "I promised I'd stick to you, didn't I?"

"Good on you," said Johnny.

Chooks picked up his gun, moving gingerly away to the gate over the road where he took up his position.

Johnny watched Chooks go, then turned to face Glory, who was staring at him across the door of the car. They stood there, matching each other's reactions, reluctant to make the next move. Finally, it was Glory who broke the spell. Johnny clung to her briefly then jerked himself away. He picked up the Parker Hale and the double-barrel shotgun, and moved through shadows, crawling the last yards into the trees and the foliage. He wedged himself tight between the branches, easing the gun barrel over the bough. He stilled his head, staring into the unquiet darkness, and waited for Chooks to respond.

Chooks stooped down, drawing himself into the darkness of the gate. It was too dark to see much. Leafs glinted, orange scabs of vegetal matter peeked

through the foliage. Chooks's scalp began to itch from his mask of black nylon. His hands began to tremble along the stock of his gun. He counted off the moments, until he could stand it no longer. His face turned green. His knees buckled under. He threw himself face down on a bed of wet leaves.

Glory eased the white Valiant into the side of the road, and sat alone in the smothering darkness, waiting.

"Johnny," she spoke into the walkie-talkie. But there wasn't any answer. "Johnny," she said again.

"I'm here," said Johnny. "Where's Chooks?"

"I dunno. But I've got a bad feeling. Maybe we ought to call it off for tonight."

"I reckon we call this thing off and we'll never get another chance." Glory didn't say anything, and Johnny spoke on, "Go and find Chooks. Maybe his radio has conked out or something."

Glory climbed out of the Valiant, inching her way along the footpath, alongside a brick fence topped with masses of foliage. She was barely in sight of the gate where Chooks was hiding, when the darkness outside the door of the flat building drew suddenly back. Reilly came out backwards then swung himself round, so he was facing towards them, silhouetted in the door-light against the green of the planters. He was dressed in a dark pinstripe with wide black fedora. One hand was jammed tight in his coat pocket, the other hanging loose as he came down the stairs.

"He's here," said Glory.

"I seen him already."

Glory saw swirling skies and violet haze, feeling herself tumble through dark-purplish cloud-like formations, like somebody drowning. "Good luck, love. Be careful. Don't shoot unless you're positively sure of being successful."

Up in the tree, Johnny was frightened he was losing his grip. His thoughts coiled round him, in tight little circles. He watched as Reilly reached the edge of footpath, the sheen of cement lost in the sprawl of his shadow.

"Who's there?" said Reilly, arms swinging wide towards the trees, as though he could hear Johnny rustling in the foliage. "Who's there?"

Johnny didn't answer. He didn't dare breathe. Soon there wasn't a sound except the shimmer of leaves struck together. Reilly pulled out his keys and stepped towards the car. He pressed the magic button on his key ring and the lights came on, white and brilliant. Johnny didn't hesitate. He fired through the leaf cover.

Chooks heard the report roll towards him over the asphalt. He rushed around the gate, but at first could see nothing at all, the glare of headlights was so intense. Then a dark apparition came stumbling out of the dazzle, wild and reeling, and heading his way.

Reilly let out a long wordless roar and reached for his gun.

Chooks had a clear shot from this angle, and walked over the asphalt to take it. He stood there, stricken with fear, unable to move an arm or leg.

Johnny racked the pump action of the shotgun, and let the empty cartridge fall away. He sighted Reilly through the scope once again, but the telephone pole was blocking his line of fire. Desperate, he let himself tumble through the branches, landing on all fours under the bright light on the footpath. Reilly lunged towards him. For a full second, it seemed they were facing each other. Johnny could see the actual blood spray on Reilly's face, gleaming on the skin of his cheeks, buzzing at the edges.

Next thing Johnny knew, Reilly was at the wheel of his car, swinging out wide, almost knocking him down. Johnny steadied himself, raising his gun as the car put on speed. He fired twice as the car began fishtailing up the mouth of the road. He saw six separate pages of newsprint floating by. And three seconds later, a blaze like pink shellfire filling the sky.

Johnny was a half hundred yards away, but felt the impact in his bones. First, a deep tremor like a building collapsing, followed by several subsidiary bangs, like windows shattering, metal tearing, a fuel tank exploding, and up from this, a dense column of smoke, endlessly rising, in black billowing clouds. Pedestrians ran, throwing their arms out in horror. Johnny also ran, hands clasped to the back of his head to protect himself from falling things.

16

BENNY SPRANG OUT OF THE BLACKNESS and climbed into the front seat of the Valiant. Chooks clambered in, only seconds behind. Glory turned the ignition, and the Valiant leapt forward.

"Listen to what the bugger's got to say," said Chooks. "He's fired at him twice and missed."

"Yeah, and where were you?" answered Johnny. "You're meant to be in there, backing me up. You didn't even let off a shot."

The road curved and turned as it led up the rise. Glory threw in the clutch, and swung the wheel over. She changed gears once again, as the Valiant skidded over the crest of the rise, and the motor began singing with a whet-edge sound, powering along the flat of the road.

Glory said, "Don't tell me you missed with the double-barrel shotgun?"

"I dunno," said Johnny. He was staring very bleakly at nothing at all. "I was there on the footpath, and Reilly kept coming at me like a bloody tank. I fired the gun, and I know that I hit him. I aimed right at the centre of his guts. I mean, the bloke is so huge I couldn't miss a target like that. But he looked right at the spot where I was standing, and kept coming."

Chooks said, "Yeah, maybe you winged him, but you couldn't have got him because he climbs into his sports car, reverses into an L-turn — an L-turn! and drives off like he's going on a Sunday School Picnic. Faster," he yelled. "Faster, Glory. The coppers are swarming all over this place any minute."

Johnny burst into a stream of uncontrollable laughter. "Believe me, Chooks. The jacks are the last thing you've got to worry about. Reilly's alive,

he'll go on a mad shooting orgy after tonight. Sydney will be strewn with bodies."

"Stop laughing," said Chooks, on edge. But Johnny couldn't stop.

Chooks launched himself between the seats. He pounded Johnny's arm. "Why did you shoot, you silly bastard? Why did you shoot when you wasn't sure of getting him?"

Johnny wrenched his arm away. "You'll be right, mate. Nobody's connecting you with something like this. It's me that's got to wear it."

Chooks took this in, sober and frightened. He shook his head with a slight shuddering motion, and sank into himself.

"Is it that bad?" said Glory.

"I dunno, but I reckoned that I couldn't have had a better opportunity. He wasn't more than fifteen feet from where I was standing. I reckon nobody could've survived that." He glanced sideways at Glory, seeking reassurance. Glory couldn't find an answer, and so they drove on in silence.

Streetlights flashed across the windscreen. On either side of the road, boarded-up warehouses stood in weed-choked lots, with chain-link metal fences, and clanking wooden gates, and after a mile or so, the sudden green wastes of a semi-rural suburbia.

"Stop," yelled Johnny. "Stop the car."

Startled, Glory crammed on the brakes, throwing everybody forward.

"What the hell?" said Chooks, waking up.

Johnny pressed a finger to the windscreen, pointing out the run-down garage that abutted the grey paling fence of a wrecker's yard. "Pull in over there."

Glory nosed the Valiant into an empty space alongside a truck labelled 'Blagg Bros Towers & Wreckers' at the mouth of the mechanic's shop. Just beyond the glare of the headlights, a red telephone booth sat on a strip of cracked asphalt with grass sprouting through.

"Chooks," said Johnny. "I want you to ring up the radio and say, 'This is on account of Ducky O'Connor'."

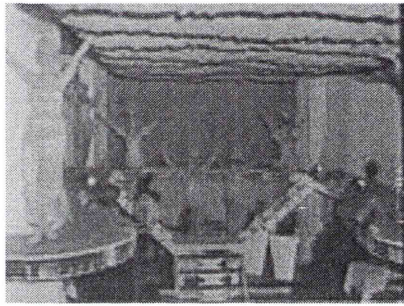
"Well, I reckon I shouldn't," said Chooks, wary. "I think it'll get me into more trouble than I'm already in."

"Well, do me a favour and quit thinking."

"Sure, I only helped you shoot the bloke. What right have I got to think?"

"Look," said Johnny, exasperated. "I've already explained that you're in the clear. It's me that's going to answer for this. In fact, I reckon if you were a real mate and not just pretending, you'd want to help us out." Chooks hung his head and Johnny chased up his advantage. He scrawled down a number on a spare bit of paper. "Just ring this and say, 'This is for Ducky O'Connor and more is to follow.' It'll put the coppers off for a bit, and providing our alibis are okay —"

Chooks was about to start up another argument. Then, thinking better of it, he climbed out of the car and trundled across the lot. He swept a Pineapple Crunch Bar off the green-speckled ledge, slipped a five-cent piece into the telephone slot, and dialled the number.



Part Three

Chequers

1

REILLY'S MASERATI HAD GUTTED THE SHOPFRONT clean to the air, exposing the segmented ribs of Aginian's Gift Store. The floor was strewn with shattered glass and green tile, and crosshatched with odd spokes of shadow from tumbling masonry. The wreck itself was spot lit with yellow arc lights, but only the parts touched by the light made any sense. The rest was a dark smudge of metal and shadow, and dimly, in the middle of this, Dick Reilly was slumped against the driver-side window, thick-bodied in a blue chalk-stripe, with one arm swinging loose, fingers curled, dripping with blood-spray.

"Sweet Jesus," said Tanner, pushing a sweat-soaked grey hat to the back of his head. "I reckon they'll stick a medal on me for *not* finding out who did this

"Maybe," said Gus, uncertain whether he was joking.

Just then, a photographer dodged under the barricade. He jammed his camera right up to the scene.

"I saw you do that. I saw how you got that picture." Tanner turned on the photographer in a fury. He held out his hand, and the photographer, wearing his hat down over one eye, gave up his camera. Tanner extracted the film, and let the camera go, the photographer catching it, before it fell to the ground. "Sweet Jesus," he said again, and turned back to Gus.

"Quick for that lot."

"The half-wit that does this, he rings up the radio and says, 'This is for Ducky O'Connor and more is to follow —'" Tanner's voice trailed off mid

sentence. He wasn't looking at Gus any more, but at something over his shoulder.

Gus swung around. Behind him, the street corner was cordoned off with crime scene barricades and the space in between crammed with tow trucks, demolition trucks, a fire engine, four police cars, and a black mortuary wagon with its doors flung open and the light spilling out. Further along, a big black unmarked pulled in to the curb. Gus watched in astonishment as the door swung open and the Commissioner clambered out, heading their way.

"Oh God," said Tanner. "Now they're all coming down on us."

Allan was evidently winded by his short stroll through the crime scene because he was puffing a little as he arrived. He gave Gus a stare, then waved an arm as if to indicate a path, along which he and Tanner began walking, moving off out of earshot.

"The Premier called," said Allan, by way of greeting.

"Askin?"

Allan pushed his palms down, intimating a lowering of the volume with the flat of his hands. "Askin's particularly anxious that this'll give the Labor mob another good run. Between you and me, it's the last thing I need."

Tanner blew out his cheeks, expelled air. "Well, I don't see how they can," he said, carefully. "Reilly was heavily Labor connected. He had his fingers in a lot of nasty pies. I can't for the life of me see how they can get any mileage out of this."

"You're missing my point. There wasn't any pie those blokes got their fingers in that some dextrous copper hadn't got a hand into first."

"It won't be a problem," said Tanner. "Askin wants it gone. It's already finished."

He made to go, but Allan put a hand on his shoulder. "I find this informant of yours has anything to do with this — "

"He hasn't."

Allan wouldn't be put off. "Anything comes back at us, anything at all — " He supplied the rest of the sentence with a wave of his hand.

"Yeah," said Tanner. "No worries. I'll deal with it."

Standing on the footpath several yards off, Gus watched the two men disappear before turning back to the shop. Workmen in blue overalls were stepping in and out of the casement, carting debris. One bore the arm of a shop mannequin aloft, another was disentangling a row of Japanese rice paper lanterns. Wally Driscoll, from the Scientific Investigation Bureau, stuck his head in through the opening.

"Who's that?"

"It's me," said Gus.

Driscoll appraised him through the inch-thick of his spectacles. "Well, be careful."

Gus lifted his foot, lowered his head, and followed Driscoll inside. The car was wedged half-in and half-out of the window. Gus screwed up his eyes against the light of several lamps, and bent forward to take a closer look. A quantity of building plaster fell over the bonnet.

"I told you be careful."

"How did it happen?" said Gus, stepping back.

"I dunno." Driscoll stared at the wreck with something like admiration or astonishment. "But I reckon it's the telly that does it. Used to be they'd drill them through with a nice little hole and plant them at Botany, maybe some other sandy-type place. But now they're watching these gangster shows on

the telly and they have to get fancy — " Driscoll edged his around the scene, pausing now and then to peer at the trace of a bullet, some odd piece of metal, some particular contortion, and each time he moved, Gus shifted position, following him along. "Just look at this bloke. I reckon they must've shot him with enough ammunition to murder an elephant, and he just kept on going."

Driscoll continued, "I'm guessing there must've been one, maybe two gunmen lying in wait as he comes down the front steps. The first shot sprays off from a heavy-gauge shotgun, cutting a swathe across his left arm and shoulder, with much of the pellet charge smashing into the brickwork behind. The bloke's badly wounded, but he climbs into his car and reverses. When bang, another shot smashes through the front driver-side window, getting him in the side of the neck, severing an artery. This time, there's blood everywhere. Strictly speaking, the bloke ought to be dead. But he brings the car round, and shoots out across the intersection. That's when another bullet shatters through the front offside window, gets him in the shoulder, over the heart. Anyway, he continues up the hill for a bit before his reflexes give out. His foot falls off the accelerator and the car starts rolling backwards. It comes round in a slow arc, mounts the footpath, and the rest — well, I reckons that's the mess you've got here." Until now Driscoll's gaze had been lowered, fixed on his work. When he spoke again, he was staring at Gus. "What's Allan here for?"

"I dunno," said Gus, cautious. "I guess we'll find out."

"Yeah, I reckon we will," said Driscoll, wiping his gloves absently on the backs of his trousers. "But I reckon it won't be for any good reason."

Gus made no answer to this, but stayed for a while, talking over a few points, before stepping back onto the street. Outside, the dome lights had

faded and the stars come out, white and brilliant. The night magnified the glittering expanse of the road. In one direction, the street rose into inky blackness. In the other, an eerie blue light cut across a series of wedding-cake buildings, converging in the gloom where the street fell away. Beyond the area defined by the barricades, the press was arriving in greater numbers, shouting out questions, dropping used bulbs into the gutter, crowding the scene. On the edge of this frenzy, Tanner was crouched by the bumper of an unmarked, staring off into the blue as if he were absolutely alone.

"Problem?" said Gus, as he made his approach.

"Yeah. Hell has popped open."

"Allan?"

Tanner took out a soft-pack and shook out a fag. "Worse," he said. "This thing has got politics all over it."

Tanner smoked off his fag in dead silence, then got to his feet. He seemed to say and do very little, but soon the investigation was unfolding around him, detectives were canvassing door-to-door in search of eyewitnesses, or collecting the shrapnel from the walls of the garage. Gus waited for the crowd of detectives to thin, then asked to be deployed to the canvas.

"Why don't you come and see Reilly's moll round the corner?"

Gus thought he couldn't have a better opportunity.

Tanner said, "Yeah, it seems Reilly was seeing this moll every night. Like you could've set your clock, the times he was going. Maybe should've sent out an invitation, 'I'm here at eight, come round and knock me.'"

Cameras flashed, bright and blinding, as the morgue attendants shifted Reilly's corpse from a sheet-covered gurney into the back of the black wagon. The photographers closed in, but the wagon was already moving off up the rise, with a trail of camera-men running behind it, one trying to grab an extra shot through the blacked-out rear window. Gus stood beside Tanner and watched as the strange cavalcade went by, before heading off. The night was hot, the air thick and heavy, and it seemed as if the whole weight of the stars and the night folded about them as they rounded the corner.

The flat building was bone-white among the night-blackened trees, as they came up the asphalt. Gus knocked on the door. He knocked again, then stared in through the pebbled glass by the doorjamb until the hall light came on.

"I'm not saying a word to any reporters."

"Excuse me. My name is Detective Gus Finlay, I'm with the Police."

The door came open an inch.

Gus had his badge wallet out and open. "Mrs Glinn? We'd like to ask you a couple of questions. May I come in?"

Aileen moved off to one side, and Gus stepped into a startling white entryway with cubed-crystal light fixtures shinning down onto marble-topped hallstands with chromium pedestals. A rectangular mirror stood at the end of the hall. In it, Gus watched as Aileen turned back to the door where Tanner was standing. Her face was blank and didn't show a thing. But her whole body stiffened.

"Will this take long?"

"Could be," said Tanner.

He looked Aileen up and about, taking in everything from the diamante-clipped beehive to the white-feathered mules, then headed off down the hall. Aileen watched Tanner's departing back, then walked down the hall after him. She sat down in a seat that was stiff-backed and modern-looking and waved Gus to a chair.

Gus took off his hat and fiddled with it, letting his fingers trace round the brim. "Obviously you're aware that your ... friend, Dick Reilly, was shot dead earlier this evening."

"I can think of a better word than friend, detective. And I'm sure your friend Mr Tanner wouldn't hesitate to use it."

Gus glanced at Tanner, who didn't seem particularly anxious to enter the conversation. He pressed on alone. "I can understand that this is a bad time, but surely you would like to see the people that committed this crime brought to justice?" He felt the last word catch on his tongue. "Perhaps you could tell us about his associates, the people he worked with?"

"So you can arrest them?"

"Do you want to find out who did this, or did you hate him that much?"

Aileen tried to laugh then turned her eyes away. She got off her chair and stubbed out her cigarette in the ashtray on the sideboard, her face draining so pale it almost vanished into whiteness. "Oh God," she said, as the ashtray went flying.

Gus stepped towards her. But she turned on him. Her face burned with a sudden fury, as if she'd been soundlessly slapped on both cheeks.

Gus edged away. "Was there anyone had it in for him?"

"Enemies?" she almost laughed. "Oh, plenty."

"In particular?"

"Just people who owed him money. People pressing him for money they said that he owed them."

"You think any of these people might be responsible?"

"Maybe, some of them had guns. But Dick said he wasn't worried. He said this lawyer-bloke Gillespie was making arrangements."

Tanner interrupted, "Charlie Gillespie?"

"Yeah, that's him. Why?"

"Nothing. Maybe isn't anything important," said Tanner, and shrugged. But as soon as the next word was out of his mouth, Gus felt a steady hand on his shoulder. "Okay, detective. Guess we ought to push off then. I reckon the little lady is all strung out."

"Why did you do that?" They were standing on the doorstep outside Aileen's apartment. Tanner glanced briefly at Gus. But didn't make any answer. He buttoned his coat, pulled down his hat, and descended the stairs onto the footpath. Incautious, Gus took the steps two at a time and came up alongside him. "Who's this lawyer bloke, anyway? Do you know him?"

Tanner stopped still. "Seems to me that we came to some sort of arrangement last night. But maybe I've got it wrong."

Gus felt his face redden. "No, I reckon you didn't."

"So you're going to take orders?"

"I guess."

"And you're going to like it?"

Gus nodded.

"Well, you don't look it."

Confusion flared on Gus's face.

Tanner laughed, "You don't look like you're liking it, not one single bit."

He cuffed Gus on the shoulder. "Christ, I'll make a copper out of you yet."

2

GILLESPIE HAD ARRANGED HIMSELF in the attitude in which he wished to be discovered, standing in the cramped space between the desk and the window, affecting to study something in the horror of the light well. But when the door finally opened and Tanner walked in with a lackey in tow, not even the most meaningless of pleasantries came to his rescue. He held up a finger, mimed the word 'shush', and bundled Tanner swiftly out into the hall.

"I thought we agreed that we're talking alone?" said Gillespie, pointing at the shut door with his head.

"If it's young Finlay you're talking about, no worries. He's sweet."

"He doesn't look particularly sweet to me."

"This is a murder inquiry, Charlie. You'll take whatever I tell you."

Gillespie considered it prudent to back down, if only for a moment, and made some sort of acquiescent reply before following Tanner inside. He seated himself behind the barricade of his desk, and elaborately straightened all the objects along it. Their opening exchanges were politeness itself. Tanner reiterated that he hoped Gillespie wouldn't hold anything out on him, and Gillespie replied, that seeing as they already had so many square dealings behind them, Tanner ought to feel sure about finding him unchanged in his attitude. Gillespie then cut to the litany of plausible-sounding phrases he had worked up that morning, trying to convince himself he was getting the better of Tanner. But Tanner's continued silence made him uncomfortable, and soon any conviction that he had oozed away.

Finally, Tanner turned to his underling. "Give us a minute, will you, Gus?" he said, then waited for him to leave, before he turned to Gillespie. "So Charlie. Why don't you tell me what's up?"

"I don't think you understand how it works — " Gillespie started.

"Why don't you try me?"

"Reilly was a client. There's nothing in that. I've given you more than enough to get on with. So if you've nothing further to say — "

"But I do have something further to say. Because don't think for one minute that I can't bring you down without damaging myself. Nobody in this town would take it into their heads to question a copper. A bloke that's out there, risking injury, putting his life on the line, making the place safe for a citizen to walk at night. But you, well, like I said ... I reckon that's different."

Gillespie lifted his head, suddenly conscious of the air being brackish, the light disappearing, the mauve shadows ghosting over the shabby interior. Disturbed, he was thoroughly unsettled when Tanner quite cheerfully asked him to pour him a drink, as if there was nothing amiss, and the threat had never been made.

"Well Charlie," said Tanner, putting the drink down on the desk blotter beside him. "I guess you better tell me about it."

Gillespie tried circumlocution. "Of course I knew Reilly from way back. There wasn't anybody grew up in the back slums of this town, didn't know who he was. Reilly, he was a very good middleweight — " Tanner glanced meaningfully at his watch, and Gillespie hurried on, unsure if it was a newly devised strategy of truth telling or some cowardly instinct that made him divulge what he did. "I guess you know Reilly was a Labor supporter from his earliest days. He worked as a chucker-outer at regular and impromptu

Labor meetings in the back-city neighbourhoods where he grew up. Reilly had friends in the old Labor Cabinet and half the Sydney City Council in his pocket. Of course, Askin gets himself elected and it all comes unstuck."

"Which is when Reilly comes to you?"

"Reilly heard I'd got contacts. People who could arrange for him to make a donation."

"Who was it?"

Gillespie hesitated, but only for a second. "Askin."

Tanner let out a long silent whistle.

"Cubitt arranged it," Gillespie rushed on, trying to explain it all away.

"Yeah, I know who he is," said Tanner. "Well, good then," he added in an altogether different tone, "Charlie, you old rogue. Why didn't you tell me about this, I thought we were mates?"

"It wasn't my story," said Gillespie, almost feebly.

"Well, I reckon I can keep it quiet," said Tanner, judiciously. "But you'll owe me a big one for this."

Gillespie sat at his desk after Tanner departed, massaging a sore brow with a stray hand. He had exercised his own judgement in going into business with Tanner, but now that the punishment was coming, he didn't like it one bit. He was beginning to see how far and in what ways Tanner could be a danger to him. He also began wondering if there might be some means of escape. Ideas came into his head (not hopes or exactly formed purposes, or beliefs, or even possibilities), but a vague sort of notion about how he might shake him off —he *must* shake him off, or stumble along, letting his long-cherished dreams slip further from reach.

GUS DROVE TANNER BACK TO THE HAT FACTORY IN SILENCE. He was more than a bit shocked by the few words he'd heard, but also found that he wanted to impress Tanner with his worldliness and win his approval. For this reason, he didn't ask Tanner any questions about what was going on, but once they were back at CIB, walking out across the yard, Tanner waited a moment for Gus to draw level.

"I can trust you to stay quiet?"

Tanner's voice was chummy, but it was obvious he wasn't expecting any refusal. Gus searched for something suitable to say, and the unspoken pledge drifted with them down the corridor as they entered CIB. Inside, there was a flurry in the air, with civilian employees shifting typewriters and boxes of case notes. Tanner was accosted by a Girl Friday and stalked off to Allan's office. Gus continued on his way down the hall.

"What's up?" he said, bracing Agnelli in the doorway.

"Haven't you heard? Scientific Investigations discovered a notebook among Reilly's belongings, containing the sorts of names and particulars that shouldn't be found on a such a bloke under such circumstances."

"Who are they?"

"Got to go," said Agnelli, shaking his head. "Ask Wally," he added, and went banging out the swing door with the rest of his bunch.

Studiously, Gus checked his messages, then finding himself alone, wound his way down the corridor to Scientific Investigations. Wally Driscoll was sitting at one end of a long metal table, resting his big colourless cheek in the palm of his hand. On the table in front of him was an assortment of objects

encased in clear plastic evidence bags, including a fine-tooth hair comb, a brown leather wallet, a small metal nail file, and an assortment of traffic tickets in different varieties.

"Agnelli told me you'd found something big," said Gus, swaggering slightly as he made his approach.

"Yeah, that's it," said Driscoll, lifting his cheek slightly up from his hand. He pushed a small calf-bound notebook across the table. "That's what I found among Reilly's belongings. In it there are names of individuals, together with amounts signifying money."

"Blackmail?" said Gus. He picked up the book.

"No, I don't reckon that'll fly. They're particulars of people he must've had dealings with."

Gus opened the book gingerly, turning the pages, running his eyes down the lists. Every once in a while he let out a gasp. "This is guaranteed to blow the crime world wide open."

"I guess that would explain why they're going to bury it then."

"How do you mean?"

"I mean they'll investigate the thing on some sort of level, but only because it would look a bit strange, all of us coppers sitting on our backsides, doing nothing about it. Then, after a while, they'll call it 'waste of resources' and give it away."

"I reckon you're being a bit cynical."

"Well, I reckon I'm not. I'm telling you as soon as I copped a look at that thing I took it to Allan, on account of not wanting to see the thing buried. Allan says to me, 'Aren't you jumping to conclusions?' So I say to him, 'I'm most certainly not. Everything's there, identities are revealed and

incriminating evidence is given. What else do you need?" Driscoll took a small flask of Scotch out from behind a large jar of formaldehyde. He offered some to Gus.

Gus shook his head.

Driscoll took a swig. He went on, "Allan says, 'Yeah, but the mere presence of names in a notebook doesn't prove anything. There are many people who might know criminals quite innocently. The plumber who fixes his toilet, the man that mends the tiles on the roof of his house.' He says, 'It's a dangerous thing to suggest simply because some bloke with a criminal record dies, or is murdered, or whatever, that all sorts of people should be subject to innuendo and allegation.' 'But it's not allegations,' I say. 'And they're not plumbers and tradesmen, they're politicians and high ranking cops.' Are you sure you won't join me?" he added, in an altogether different tone, before putting the flask back behind the jar of formaldehyde.

"Too early," said Gus. "Just tell me what happened."

"Well, Allan asks me, 'What exactly are you suggesting I do? Send a truckload of coppers marching into these people's houses?' I say, 'So we're just doing nothing?' and he tells me, 'I'm not saying that we're not looking into the matter. Just that we could be embarrassed by where such an investigation might lead, if we don't proceed cautiously.'"

Gus tried to be reasonable. "Well, maybe he's right about that. We have to go carefully with something this big. I mean the names in the book — "

Driscoll cut him off. "I tell you what else Allan says. I'm turning to go, and he asks, 'What are you going to do?' I say, 'How do you mean?' and he tells me, 'Well, you don't want to prejudice your career, for instance?'"

Gus tried to cheer him up. "I wouldn't worry about that."

"Jesus," Driscoll swore. "Look at the names in the book. Look at the officer in charge of the investigation."

"What do you mean?" said Gus, face drained of colour.

"I mean Frank Tanner's there. He's there in the book."

"He can't be."

"Well he is," said Driscoll, relishing the thought.

Gus could see where things were headed. He didn't go there. "It doesn't mean a thing. Tanner's a detective. He doesn't get to choose the company he keeps. Besides, it was Tanner that led the raid that shut down Reilly's club in the first place." Driscoll laughed, and Gus said reproachfully, "I'm not seeing anything particularly funny in this situation. Maybe you should lay off the alcohol."

"Maybe," said Driscoll.

Chastened, Gus said, "What are you going to do?"

"I'm giving it to Allan, of course. He'll shove it under the hugest bloody carpet he can find. Shove it halfway to China, if he can — . I've done my bit. I'm seeing no reason to get involved any further."

ALLAN TRIED TO KEEP THE STORY QUIET. Then it grew. 'GAMBLING MURDER' ran the *Sun*. 'Dick Reilly, 59, Blasted to Death in Busy Double Bay. Victim of ... EXECUTION IN PUBLIC'. The *Mirror* went for a more colourful angle with a three-page spread designed to bring the trappings of the high crime life to the public's attention. '\$100,000 home! \$17,000 car!' with photographs showing the palatial interior of Reilly's Castle Cove mansion with its sweeping views out over Middle Harbour. Allan expressed his disgust, but was inwardly relieved that they hadn't discovered the worst of it. On a more worrying note, the paper also called the public's attention to the city's 'rising wave of lawlessness', compiling a 'Dossier of Death', containing a 'grim list of Sydney's unsolved gangland killings'. The editorial demanded action.

VENGEANCE IN THE STREETS

A man well known to police was gunned down last night in his expensive sports car in the main thoroughfare of one of Sydney's most fashionable districts. Nobody saw the shooting.

A few weeks ago, another underworld figure was shot in a Sydney nightclub. Nobody saw just how it happened.

There are streets in the very heart of Sydney where it isn't safe for a law-abiding citizen to walk at night without risk of

molestation. The frightening aspect is that the public is becoming so accustomed to crime that a most dangerous complacency is developing. It's time public opinion aroused itself and demanded intensive efforts all around to wipe out the illegal activities that give birth to violence.

As Allan had predicted, the longer the investigation took, the stormier things got, with coverage spreading quickly from the murder itself to the flourishing of illegal gambling in general. 'BACCARAT BOOMS,' ran the *Mirror*. '12 games! No arrests!' 'We have no sympathy for gangsters and criminals who get themselves killed preying on people's weaknesses,' the article ran. 'But it is the Police who should be getting tough with these baccarat schools and their organisers. The players can find the games easily enough. Why not the Police Force?' Norman made the critical mistake of ringing the editor and answering this accusation in person. "Police action is taken at all times and in all cases when evidence of any unlawful gaming or wagering is forthcoming," he told them. The news editor put the quote under a headline that said, 'REALLY, MR ALLAN?' and in bold-face underneath, 'Come off it, Norman! Your Boys Don't Know the Way? Ask Anyone at the Cross!'

It was obvious that a change of tactics was in order. Allan asked Tanner to call up some reporters who owed him a turn. He was rewarded with a quote, which Allan read with some satisfaction over his marmalade pot the next morning, 'Since Norman Allen took over as Police Commissioner life has been unpleasant for criminals – they've been booked and chased and charged and kept on the move. My detectives have got more confidence in Norman

than they've had in years.' Allan also gave permission for some trustworthy reporters to accompany taskforce detectives on a series of gaming raids and was rewarded by several blow-by-blow accounts of acts of police heroism on the spot. The reporters dubbed the task force the 'squad to end squads' destined to shut down 'every night trap and gambling hell on the east-side of the Harbour'. Within days the task force was rousting out winos and molls to rack up arrest rates. 'SILENCE IN GANGLAND,' ran the *Mirror*. 'Raids fail to gain lead to murderer!' And more generally, 'MURDER DEAD-END'.

Gradually, deadline followed deadline, and Allan was almost able to convince himself that the fortress had held, and story was dwindling. But, as things turned out, this was a terrible presumption, a point that became rapidly apparent when a three-paragraph item appeared in the middle pages of the *Mirror* stating how a black calf-bound notebook had been recovered from the body of the murdered crime boss Dick Reilly and that the notebook contained 'the names, addresses and silent telephone numbers of prominent Sydney identities. At least nine of the names appearing on the list have shocked high police officers.' The story was expanded in pieces, with speculation adding names to a growing list. Bookmakers were singled out, as were gamblers, moneylenders, and civic authorities — this last inclusion raising a storm at the Monday morning meeting of the Sydney City Council.

Desperate, Allan rang the Premier who asked his good friend Frank Packer to play the matter down. Packer obligingly ran an editorial asking, 'Would it have sounded so sinister if the book had been green?' But it was already too late. The names of several well-known politicians were entangled in the rumours, together with the startling revelation that the notebook contained figures, representing sums of money, indicating the size of each

pay-off. Allan didn't need to open the paper. On every street corner the thing was front page.

MURDER SENSATION — MLA, GIRLS, BIG MONEY

The *Mirror* today exposes a secret list of names and big money transactions found on the body of gangland murder victim, Dick Reilly.

The politicians, the police officers and the massage parlours — the girls, the vice and standover rackets — all figure in the list now held by police.

When the *Mirror* broke this story last week we reported the cops had a notebook "containing the names, addresses and silent telephone numbers of prominent Sydney identities."

And: "About nine of 15 names appearing on the list have shocked high police officers."

Since then more has come to light — or more information has come from people who rightly or wrongly, have seen that list.

- 1) It contains at least 15 names.
- 2) A Cabinet Minister
- 3) At least one MLA.
- 4) At least one senior cop
- 5) And beside each name is a figure representing an amount of money.

That list apparently was NOT found by the cops. There is evidence but no confirmation that it

was found by officers of the Bankruptcy Court.
How? Why?

Why indeed, thought Allan, as his big black unmarked clunked in to the gutter outside the State Office Block, a thoroughly modern edifice comprising a sun-dazzling tower of thirty-four storeys, straight up. He squinted through the dust and dazzle at the large crowd of reporters gathered in the forecourt beside the green marble fountain. Seeing him, the reporters jumped up immediately, like a long line of puppets jerked on a string, and came clambering across the square.

Allan turned to his underling.

"Sir?" said Gus.

"So are you getting rid of that lot, or do you expect me to?"

"What do you reckon you're playing at?" said Bob Askin, swinging around on one heel and yelling at Allan as he came down the room. His tie was yanked down and his shirt collar unbuttoned, a thin line of stubble running along the edge of his cheek. He was standing in front of a large picture window, the city spread out beneath him, almost as if from the tips of his shoes. Here were the white-capped waves of the Harbour, with sailboats and ferryboats chugging up the water, and ribbons of grey terraces unravelling in every direction, with the smokestacks of Glebe Island lighting up the edges. Askin swung back to the window, arms out-stretched, fingers extended, as if appealing to the rackets metropolis for an answer.

"It wasn't my people," said Allan, glumly. "It wasn't my fault."

But Askin seemed not to hear him. "You said you could keep it quiet, you said you could keep everything out of the papers."

Allan opened his mouth to say something, but one glance at Askin told him the course was unwise.

Askin continued, "Didn't I fix it for you when that Labor mob was demanding your resignation? Yeah, I stood by you every one of those times I could've buried you, and your whole mucking Police Force. I ought to have sacked the whole lot of you. But I didn't. Do you want to know why?" Unable to find a satisfactory answer to this, Askin sank back down against the edge of his desk. "Hell," he said, dazed and exhausted. "I thought we had an arrangement?"

Allan finally got it out. "But it wasn't my people. It was the Bankruptcy Boys that discovered the stuff when they went through his house."

"You stuffed it?"

"Not exactly — " said Allan. "The thing is ... well, it turns out Dick Reilly was an undischarged bankrupt. It seems he defaulted on a loan for some radios, and the bank pinched the guarantor-bloke for the missing cash. Naturally enough, the bloke asks Reilly for his money, only Reilly refuses, so he applies to the Bankruptcy Court and has him declared. Soon as Reilly dies, the Court sends their boys round to impound all the movables and they discover the notebook that was leaked to the press."

Askin started pacing again. "How much did he owe?"

"Four hundred."

"But everybody told me the bloke was that rich."

Allan shrugged, "Officially speaking, he didn't have a penny to scratch himself with."

Askin appeared to think the matter over for several seconds. "That Labor mob, they're not going to let it go."

"Well, I reckon I can help it blow over."

"I doubt it," said Askin coming to a halt by the edge of his desk. He stood there, clutching the desk edge with the palms of both hands. "You know why they're doing this, don't you?"

Allan decided to play dumb. "Should I?"

"Because I was born in a back slum and grew up in a shack out at Ironbark. Renshaw, he can't stand to see a working class bloke crawl out of the gutter, turn himself into somebody. Now I've got me an election coming up and he's thinking this smear is his ticket. They reckon they can knock me, because there's some minister involved —"

"That isn't quite right."

Allan pulled a black-vinyl briefcase up onto his lap, clicked open the locks and brought out a notebook encased in a clear plastic envelope, with a tag saying 'Evidence' hanging off it. He tapped it with a finger. "I think you'll find the key word is 'former'. There's a former minister involved —"

Askin lifted the notebook gingerly out of its bag. Allan could almost read his lips as they moved through the long list of names, which included several notable backbenchers, and finally Jack Mannix, MLA, ex-Minister for Justice in the former Renshaw Cabinet. Askin took a sharp intake of breath.

Allan nodded sagely. "That's what the fuss is really about."

Askin actually whistled. He gave the document another glance before laying it and the evidence bag carefully down on his desk. "Of course, those blokes, it doesn't surprise me." He opened a drawer, extracted a cigar and chewed off the butt. He picked up a green agate lighter and began turning the

cigar over the flame, until the orange-end was flaring. "And I reckon I know exactly the right person to put the wind up them."

5

JUST EIGHT MINUTES AFTER ALLAN DEPARTED THE PREMIER'S WING of the State Office Block, Gillespie was clambering out of a taxicab and making his way towards the entrance. He rose up in the empty elevator, crept in through the back door, and, after a few minutes conversation, tucked a brown manila envelop into his outer-breast pocket and disgorged on the footpath. His first port of call was the office of his old friend Jack Mannix, ex-Minister for Justice in the Former Renshaw Cabinet. Gillespie didn't bother to knock. He just threw the door open. Mannix, blustery-faced in a broad-banded blue pinstripe and purple-flowered tie, jumped up from his chair and started across the carpet.

"What are you doing here, Charlie?"

"I'm fine, thanks, Jack. How are you?" said Gillespie, grinning at him amiably but pushing straight past. He sat himself down in the chair Mannix just vacated, and propped up his feet, pulling the long manila envelope out of his pocket. "Just thought I'd stop by, show you something belonged to an old client of mine that got dropped in my cubbyhole."

Suspicious, Mannix moved towards Gillespie with his right hand outstretched. But Gillespie snatched the envelope away. He opened it, took out a roneoed sheaf of documents copied from the infamous notebook and let Mannix take a peek. Obliging, Mannix stared and started, then started again. "What's this supposed to be, some sort of joke?" He took another look at the sheet, then added, warily, "I'd say that's a fake."

"If only," said Gillespie, making a soft clucking sound. "No, old boy. I'm afraid it's the genuine article. My sources are solid. They swear it's true blue."

Mannix sank down on the desk and stared glumly across the room. "What do you want, money?"

"God no," said Gillespie. He contrived to look shocked. "What do you think I am?"

"I dunno what you are," said Mannix, but there wasn't any anger in his tone. Quietly and heavily, he announced, "You're blackmailing me, Charlie."

"I'm doing nothing of the sort," said Gillespie. He dropped his feet from the desk to the floor and got up. "I always liked you, Jack. We go back a long way. Only reason I thought I'd stop by, tell you what's coming." He opened the door and looked back, grasping the handle. "I don't know much about this sort of thing, really. But I reckon the newspapers don't hit their deadline until three. Strikes me, I was you, I'd want to take advantage."

Renshaw, of course, knew nothing of this, or so Gillespie imagined, standing outside on the steps of the Parliament. The press was packed solid to the edge of the footpath, hanging off the spiked-iron railings that bounded the forecourt, or scurrying away to some clear empty space from where they could grab a better shot. Renshaw grinned back at them, waving his hat, not touching them so much as setting them in motion, and gradually, the whole gang of them creamed back from his passage, clearing a path, and he was standing in the wide-open space under the awning.

Renshaw stared out across the small mass of faces. "I'm sure you all know that serious allegations have been made about criminal figures and senior politicians in the Askin Government. Specifically, the names of several high ranking MPs are contained in a black notebook found by police — " An

elbow came up, and knocked Renshaw sideways. He shifted slightly on his feet. "The Labor Party believes that there needs to be a full and open inquiry into associations between criminals and major government figures. When Parliament returns, we will be calling on Premier Askin to summon a Royal Commission — "

"Don't you mean senior Labor Party figures?" yelled a reporter from the back.

Renshaw cupped a hand to his ear. "I'm sorry, I don't think I heard you correctly."

"Don't you mean Labor Party figures?" yelled the reporter again.

Photographers stooped backwards, soundmen taped their equipment to an ever-widening tree of microphones, television cameras cranked into action and caught Renshaw on film, as he widened his eyes and ballooned out his cheeks. "I'm afraid I don't understand," he stammered, on a pathetic rising note, making somebody laugh.

6

WHOOP!" CRIED ASKIN. "WHOO! WHOOP!" He was seated behind a table in the corner of Chequers nightclub under a green-marbilised pillar replete with encrustations and a mermaid on top. Smoke curled languorously up from cigar-ends to the pressed metal ceiling and from everywhere came the clatter of glassware and the tinkle of silver (marked 'C' for Chequers, with a squiggle underneath). The orchestra gave a flourish, coloured water gushed up from a fountain in front of the bandstand. The floorshow began.

Askin got to his feet, bright cheeked and cockeyed. "It stinks in here. Let's find a quiet spot. Cubitt knows one, don't you, Cubitt?"

"Sure do," said Cubitt, talking loudly and at length to a party at the table adjacent.

"Bloke's got a black book that'd knock your investigation sideways," said Askin, and gave Allan a nudge.

Cubitt threw back his head and roared, and Allan laughed too, but foolishly. Then Askin was shooin' everybody up a circular stair, curving about an ornamental pond crammed with tiny crocodiles.

Gillespie exited after the others, who crowded ahead of him on to the footpath. Outside the night was moonless and still, with stars in carnival colours, like balls pitching up into a deepening sky. Packer took three or four sniffs of the metal-smelling air, muttered his apologies, and hobbled back to his newspaper. Allan followed suit, leaving Gillespie with Askin and Cubitt, who was weaving up and down the footpath, taking swigs from a bottle of Bells that they'd swiped from the club. Several months previously a gang of

ABC reporters had invented a song, to which Cubitt was carousing, with Askin joining in for the chorus.

Run, run, run the bastards over

Run, run, run the bastards over

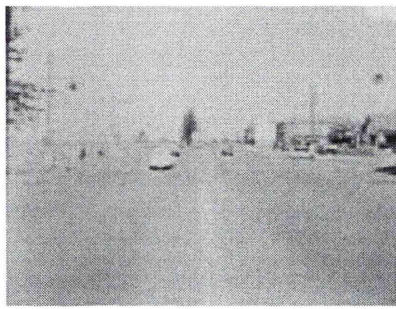
Run, run, run the bastards over

As I said to LBJ

Gillespie stuck out his hand and flagged down a taxi. Askin clambered in first, shoes on the front folding seat, felt hat tipped forward, with Gillespie and Cubitt squeezed in either side. Streetlights shone down through masses of sweating foliage as they drove through the night, alighting in front of a bar on Macleay Street, under a giant jumping bronco studded with stars. They didn't enter through the front of the building, but scampered instead down an alley adjacent, where Cubitt rang an electric bell beside a brass-shuttered door, answered by an obese woman in a yellow kimono.

Askin led the charge up the stairs. "Let's see what they've got. Let's see what they've got."

Cubitt lumbered up after him, catching himself with both arms on the banister. Music and the sound of women's laughter wafted towards them as they crept down the hall. Gillespie hesitated, deciding whether it was prudent to stay or to follow.



Part Four

Brighton Le Sands

1

GUS WALKED DOWN THE MACADAM at Brighton Le Sands, extracting the list from his coat pocket detailing the last batch of names from Dick Reilly's black notebook that he'd been assigned to investigate. In front of him, a dreary half-mile of blue asphalt was staged with telephone poles, with a haze of white water and the prow of a container ship edging out between the buildings. On the opposite shore, the drums, barrels and freight containers of Port Botany were stacked up to dizzying heights, the horizon smudged over with spars, cranes and catwalks, and the roar of an aeroplane dumping its fuel in a glistening spray.

Gus scuffed up a small yellow weed sprouting through the footpath. "Warren, you say?"

Pigeye ran a finger about the sweat-soaked band of his hat, and replaced it. "Yeah, Johnny Warren."

Gus walked up the short cement path and rang the front door. He kept on ringing until the door opened up. "Sorry to trouble you — " he said, grinning ruefully, with his badge wallet out and open. "I'm Detective Finlay, from the Criminal Investigation Branch, and this is Detective Donaldson. I understand Johnny Warren lives here?"

Glory was standing a foot short of the threshold, behind the screen door. "So what if he does?"

"I'd like to have a word with him," said Gus. He put his foot on the doorstep and his hand on the latch. "May I?"

Glory flipped up the lock and opened the door.

Gus followed her down the hall into the living room, a swift movement of his eyes catching the stacked-empty packing crates, indicating arrival, rather than departure, and the scattering of toys. Johnny Warren was sitting in an armchair with a child on his knee. His lavender braces hung down round his trousers. His eyes glanced moodily from right to left.

"Johnny Warren?" said Gus, pulling out a chair from the table adjacent and straddling the back of it. "Your name has arisen in connection with an investigation we are carrying on into the death of Dick Reilly. I'd like to ask you a couple of questions —"

"Yeah," said Johnny, aggressively, "and who are you?"

"I'm Detective Finlay, and this is Detective Donaldson from the Criminal Investigation Branch — " Gus started, but Glory pushed past him and picked up the child, who started crying.

"Leave him alone. He dunno a thing."

"How do I know if I haven't asked him any questions?" Gus suggested, quite calmly, then turned back to Johnny. "Just tell us what you know."

Johnny was grinning. "Well, I heard the bloke got himself shot, and I heard it was showy."

"What else did you hear?"

"That he was a miserable bastard when he was alive, and now he's dead. I reckon that you ought to be grateful."

Gus scowled, "I guess you better tell me where you were then, on the night of the shooting."

"Why should I tell you that?"

"You don't tell us here, you can tell us at the station."

Glory interrupted, "Just tell them, Johnny."

Johnny told them. "Well, I'm sorry to disappoint you, but I was down at the pub the night he got shot. I distinctly remember because I heard the news over the wireless, and I took a spare ten from my billfold, and shouted the joint."

Gus didn't move his eyes off Johnny's face.

"You can check it out all you want."

"We'll check it out plenty." Gus looked around. "Who knows, maybe the bloke got paid enough to put a tidy deposit on this new flat you've got."

For a moment, Gus thought Johnny was going to rush at him. He braced himself. But Pigeye intervened. He jammed his forearm across Johnny's neck.

"We find out you're lying — " he said, and let the threat hang.

Johnny stood there with his hands working his sides. Eventually, they stopped and Pigeye jerked his arm away. He backed off with Gus into the afternoon light.

Out on the macadam, Gus stared at Pigeye over the roof of the car. "Do you reckon he might've had something to do with it?"

"Johnny Warren?" said Pigeye, scratching his armpit. "I reckon he hasn't got enough brains to strangle a mangy cat."

Johnny was almost-nearly-sure they were in the clear with respect to the shooting, but each time he made this happy assertion, Glory met his confidence with a baffling anger. For Glory (who, after all, knew Johnny better than Johnny knew himself), these sudden bursts of cheerfulness seemed to indicate, if not outright deceit, at least the concealment of something.

"There isn't anything they can do," said Johnny, clearing the remains of the tea off the table. "Just so long as we stick by each other."

"Stick by each other," said Glory, and picked up a plate.

Johnny attempted to give her a hug. But Glory just stared at him, and walked out of the kitchen.

Johnny dried the dishes and switched off the lights, before wandering down the short hall into the bedroom. He opened the door an inch or so. Glory was sitting by the window staring down at the Hills Hoist. She didn't move or say anything and Johnny, feeling encouraged, sat down on the bed. In the lead-up to the crime, Johnny had thought that if he and Glory could do what they'd done, then they could do anything. But the thing seemed to have driven them apart, not brought them together. He searched for the words that would explain this. But found none. So he reached out and placed a hand on Glory's shoulder. Presently, she turned her face towards him.

"What's happening to us, Johnny?"

Johnny searched for the words, and again nothing came. "I dunno," he said, and stared down at his toes.

For some reason this got Glory crying in earnest, and soon she was crying too much to speak. She fumbled in her dress for a Kleenex. Johnny took a handkerchief out of his pocket, and handed it over. Glory blew her nose loudly. It seemed to make her brighten. "I loved you, Johnny. I thought you loved me. I thought we were going places ... together."

Johnny sighed, "But we are. Me and you, and Kim — "

Glory raised a hand to Johnny's mouth. "I still got love for you, Johnny. I know that I do. But after what we did ... I feel like it's falling to pieces."

"Don't say such things, Glory," said Johnny, genuinely horrified.

"No, I've got to say it. This bloke we shot, maybe he wasn't that bad. He had a wife. He had kids."

"It was him or me. Just like I told you it was."

"But it was horrible, wasn't it?"

Johnny shifted uncomfortably. "It wasn't that bad."

"That's what we did," said Glory, as if to herself. "And it was horrible."

Johnny slumped forward, elbows on knees. He buried his face in his hands. "It isn't so bad, don't say it's so bad. I bought this place for us, didn't I? Just like I said."

Glory's eyes went wide. "I want to ask you a question, Johnny. I want you to tell me the truth. Where did we get the money to pay for this place?"

Johnny looked at all the things so lovingly dreamed about, and purchased with the hit money, and groped for the phrases that would explain them all away. "It was still self-defence."

"No, I reckon somebody paid you to knock off Dick Reilly. I want you to say who it was."

"I didn't lie to you, Glory. Honest."

Glory didn't believe him. "Was it Tommy Bogle?"

Johnny shook his head.

"It was Tommy Bogle that worked for us at the Liverpool joint."

Johnny tried, "The money, it don't make any difference." But it wasn't any good. He closed his eyes. For the first time it occurred to him that things might not turn out no worries.

Johnny left the apartment at Brighton Le Sands and made his way into town, where he lay in the back seat of the Valiant, smoking. Outside, the night was steaming. Neon signs blinked down at him. 'Money Lent ... Used Tires all Sizes ... We Make False Teeth.' It was true that his spectacular crime hadn't brought Johnny the success he'd expected. He couldn't find criminal employment of any description, couldn't get a backer or the capital to start up a club. Reilly was gone, and with him the fear that clouded Johnny's judgment receded. But nothing was any clearer.

Johnny couldn't quite put his finger on it, but thought there was something behind the things that were happening. Once formed, this suspicion got to work in his head, inspiring a whirl of activity and a general putting this and that together by the wrong ends. Increasingly he'd taken to sitting outside crooks' houses and watching their to-ings and fro-ings for hours on end. He had particularly taken to following McPherson around, and also set watch on his old partner Mick Moylan (and once or twice Chooks), not to mention the coppers who swore out the warrants on the Liverpool joint. He felt like he was holding the pieces of a giant puzzle, but couldn't fit them together.

Johnny didn't sleep well in the back of the Valiant. Gradually, the air grew lighter and brighter around him and he found himself blinking into the milky white light of the hours before dawn. He woke up with a start. His teeth were chattering and his face was wet. He pulled a half-pint of Vickers out of the glove box, and drank a long draught.

It didn't take long to run out to Chooks's house. He eased the Valiant onto the gravel shoulder of the road, and got out. Then, picking his way through the dew-damp hydrangeas, covered the last half hundred yards

almost on tippy-toe. The house was dark. One window was open. Johnny spat on his fingers and hauled himself up, peering into Chooks's room where it was murky as twilight.

"Oi," he whispered hoarsely, shaking the smaller of two mounds in the bed.

Chooks started up with a yelp.

"What the hell do you reckon you're doing?" said Chooks, when they were comfortably ensconced in the kitchen three minutes later. Chooks was only half-awake, and the sleep was still gumming his eyelids. He yawned, and scratched his ribs dreamily through a hole in his striped-flannel pyjamas. "Sneaking up on a bloke like you was some kind of criminal."

"What's wrong?" said Johnny, irritated. "I reckon I'd do the same for you. Give a bloke a bit of grub who's spent the whole night in the shithouse."

Chooks shook his head. "Just gave me the jumps is all."

"Well, get over it. It's like you've got worms."

Chooks stuck the kettle on. Johnny sat down at the table. He opened the sugar pot, and started ladling it in. "I've got great news for you, Chooks. I've got huge plans in train to make back the full 500 I owe you over the Reilly job, plus another 1000, so long as you help me in keeping McPherson under surveillance, and also assist me with the actual crime."

"Jee-suss," said Chooks, burning himself on the gas. "I thought you were over that?"

"Over it?" said Johnny, aghast. "This shooting has created the greatest sensation in the whole history of Sydney — "

"Yeah," said Chooks, sitting opposite. "Where have I heard that before?"

"It's just about finishing what we already started. I'm putting the final hit list together. McPherson, maybe Mick Moylan as well, and also them coppers that swore out the warrants on the Liverpool joint."

Chooks spluttered, "What do you want to go knocking such people for? Knocking off blokes in the bloody Police Force. Hell."

"Well, maybe not the blokes on the Police Force then. But when I get another chance at McPherson I'll give you a call. You can bring the guns down, and I'll go ahead with the actual shooting."

Chooks frowned, "I thought you'd disposed of them guns?"

"Yeah, I dug a big hole and buried them out back."

"Sweet Jesus," said Chooks, crossing himself. "What if the coppers come here and dig the lot up?"

"Who'd want to dig a hole in your filthy back yard? With the hens flapping round and poop everywhere —"

"Pipe down, for Pete's sake. Marge and the kids are asleep." Chooks stared angrily down at the table. "Are you and Glory at loggerheads again?"

"I dunno," said Johnny, suddenly bereft. "I dunno what's happening to us."

"Well, I'm sure it will sort itself. Unless —" Chooks voice trailed off.

"Unless what?"

Chooks frowned, "Do you reckon she could be seeing somebody?"

"Why?" Johnny grabbed Chooks by the front of his pyjamas. "What did you hear?"

"Nothing," Chooks hedged, then started peddling backwards. "I dunno anything. Cross me heart." Johnny let go, and Chooks, still gasping, said, "Well, if you're bent on going after McPherson I'd strongly advise you to

dumdum the bullets this time. That way you'll get a splat wound, the same as a soft-nose bullet, and also the coppers will be unable to trace any of the weaponry."

"You reckon?" said Johnny, almost cheerful.

"Hell yeah," said Chooks. "I'll show you myself."

2

GLORY SPENT THE NEXT MORNING trying not to think. But now and then, when thought was unavoidable, she began to consider Johnny's white lie about the money wasn't so bad. He'd meant it for the best, and all he'd ever done was try to provide for himself and his family. Gradually, she came to believe that she'd treated Johnny unfairly after the coppers came round, that what ought to have been a moment of consolidation, standing together, back to back, against the rest of the world, had become a moment of division — that she had been angry, when she ought to have been tender and careful, that she had been wrong, and would be certain to tell Johnny the minute he was back.

Glory longed to get away from the anxiety in which they were living, and that morning she started to dream of an absolute break. They could go north for the cane cutting or the fruit picking, and start with their happiness afresh. Just love, and be loved, and live like they'd dreamed, without any brass-buttoned copper on the doorstep, or the big end of town pulling them back, before they were three steps in front.

She spent the whole morning embellishing this picture, making endless adjustments, adding fresh happy details. Afternoon arrived, and with it, came resolution. She no longer saw any other possible end. But she also knew Johnny would never be happy as a fruit picker and decided they would start up a game, somewhere where nobody was bothered if they turned a few bucks. They would also need a stake, and Glory was thinking about finding somebody to finance the venture, when there was a knock at the door. Thinking it was Johnny, she flew down the hall and flung it wide open, only

to find Moylan standing on the doorstep, dressed in a bright Malay shirt, his face brick-red and glistening under a Panama straw hat.

Moylan whipped off his dark glasses. "Hello, you beautiful thing," he said, planting a wet kiss on her cheek.

"Why, Mick," said Glory, showing him into the lounge.

Moylan laughed, and watched Glory mix drinks. Then stretching his arms along the sofa, glass in hand, with the ice tinkling in it, casually dropped in, "Nice place you've got here. Johnny must be knocking some berries off the bush."

"We're getting along."

"Uh-huh. What are you doing for money?"

Glory's face clouded. "What's with all the questions?"

"Hey, this is Mick you're talking to." He humped over the coffee table, staring down at his glass. When he looked up, he was frowning. "Where's Johnny?"

"I dunno. But I reckon he'll be back."

"So that's what's eating you. You're nervous as a cat. Thought something was wrong. Don't worry about Johnny. He'll pull himself out of the pub and come swaying through that door any minute. Meantime, the Mickster is here to keep you company."

Glory smiled, and sat down beside him, and soon fell to wondering if he could be talked into staking their venture up north. Determined to put the matter to him, she was leaning towards him with a conspiratorial air, when the door swung open and Johnny walked in. His face was white, with blue onion rings under his eyes.

"Oi," he said, looking ghastly, and taking in the scene.

"Johnny, my mate," said Moylan, arms stretched wide.

Johnny stared him up and about. "What are you doing?"

Moylan shoved his hands in his pockets, and gave Johnny a strange look. "I guess I ought to be pushing along then."

Glory pushed Moylan out into the hall, throwing an angry backward glance in Johnny's direction.

"No worries," said Moylan. He dropped another wet kiss on her cheek.

Johnny poked him in the ribs. "What are you doing?"

"I'm saying goodbye to your missus."

"No, you weren't."

Johnny pushed Moylan's back to the wall, elbow to his chest.

"What's wrong with you, Johnny?" Glory tugged Johnny's sleeve. "I'm sorry, Mick. I think you better go."

"Yeah," said Johnny. He kicked Moylan out, slammed the door, opened it again, and yelled a bit more.

Glory stormed down the hallway into the kitchen and started running the taps, then went back into the living room, picking up glasses. Johnny followed her around, talking non-stop.

"Tell me, what was that about?"

"What about?"

"That thing that I seen." Johnny took a glass out of Glory's hand and set it back down on the table.

Glory picked up the glass, defiantly. "I dunno what you're saying."

"I'm saying what's this thing between you and Mick Moylan?"

"Thing?"

"Yeah, I've been told things."

"What things?"

"Things Chooks told me," said Johnny. "Anyway, I was told it," he added lamely.

"Yeah, you was told it by Chooks," said Glory, in disbelief. "I dunno what's got into you, Johnny Warren. Behaving like you weren't born with a full set of brains. I reckon you ought to leave." Glory hadn't meant to say any such thing; this wasn't the homecoming she'd pictured all morning. But almost against her own will she found herself taking a more belligerent attitude. "Get out of here, Johnny."

"But Glory. What's wrong?"

Johnny hesitated, then spun on his heel and walked out the door. He crossed a clipped square of grass, ducked under the Hills Hoist, then climbed into the Valiant, and disappeared down the long line of blue asphalt, with terracotta roof tiles dazzling above into the dome of the sky.

Johnny shambled down the side of Chooks's house, passed mounds of used tires overgrown with nasturtiums, rusty iron axels and bits of flattened tin. Chooks was sitting on the bottom rung of the back steps, swigging a pint bottle of milk. He screwed up his eyes against the last rays of sunshine. "Crikey Johnny, you look crook. What's up?"

"We've got to dig up the weapons and get rid of them quick."

Chooks put down his bottle and clattered down the steps. He got down on all fours, grabbed a couple of shovels from under the house, and set out after Johnny, down the long line of trees edging the paddock that abutted the back fence. Johnny stuck his shovel in the ground and flipped over a black

clod of turf. Chooks paused for a minute, foot propped thoughtfully on the ridge of his spade. "Hold on a minute, mate. I reckon you ought to tell me what's up."

"Moylan is trying to turn Glory against me."

"Glory would never go against you."

"I reckon I didn't know this woman, Chooks. She was purple as hell."

Chooks pulled thoughtfully at his earlobe. "Marge, she's always going at me, but I never took any notice. Just let her alone for a bit, and things will come right."

"Yeah, but I've seen Moylan hanging around with a whole bunch of coppers. I reckon he might try and put me in. I reckon that bloke would stoop to anything."

Chooks shrugged, "Well, I guess we ought to get cracking then. In any case, I'll be thankful to get the weapons out of my garden."

Chooks dug a deep hole, six feet wide, three feet across, then struck something solid. Johnny jumped down into the ditch, extracted a green plastic packet tied up with string, and gave it to Chooks. Chooks took an army knife out of his pocket, and cut through the knots. Out tumbled two shotguns and six boxes of bullets.

"I reckon we ought to throw them over the Gap," said Chooks, after they dumped the guns on the back seat of the Valiant and drove off.

"Hell no, you dopey bastard. People are jumping off that thing all the time, and the divers are always going in to gather up the corpses. I reckon they'd pull out them guns in less than a week."

"I was only trying to help," said Chooks, suddenly glum.

They were approaching the bridge over the Georges River at Milperra, when Johnny yanked the steering wheel round and swung the car off the road. He got out and immediately started checking the ground along the edge of the water.

Chooks ran after him. "Why are we stopping here?"

Just then, a cloud seemed to slide off the moon and pour light on Johnny's face, with startling effect. "Did you bring the axe?"

"Maybe I did," said Chooks, wary.

Johnny pointed a finger at the water, which was boiling and dusted with filth. Lights from the nearby bridge picked out strange objects in the darkness. Here, a rotten stump in the mud. There, a fallen down jetty with a dinghy tied up to a pole. There were also large patches of blackness, with no light at all.

Johnny said, "I'll break up the guns with the axe. You drive the Valiant out over the bridge and we'll toss them in the water."

Chooks did as Johnny said, and several minutes later they were driving out along the bridge. Halfway across, Johnny swung under the railing onto the furthestmost ledge. Clutching an iron cable in one hand, he stretched as far as he could and let the guns drop. Chooks heard a long silence, followed by a series of soft muffled sounds as stock, barrel and cartridge were swallowed up in the blackness.

"Whacko," he yelled, as Johnny clambered in. "Why don't you bed down with us? I'll get Marge to slap on a roast. Then we could sit on the veranda and crack open a couple — "

"No offence, mate. I've got my hands full. But maybe we could stop off at South Sydney Juniors."

"Marge always gets angry if I go on a weeknight," Chooks stammered. Johnny didn't respond, and Chooks added, dubiously, "Well, I guess we could stop off for a couple."

Chooks drew the Valiant into the lot behind South Sydney Juniors. The place was only half full. Johnny went straight up to the bar, ordered a round and drank his right off. Chooks took a long pull from his glass, and glanced at Johnny sideways.

"Cheers," said Johnny, and ordered another round.

Chooks took a dubious slurp from his fresh glass of beer, and put it down beside his half empty old glass on the counter. Johnny seemed distracted. He started conversations, and failed to finish. He kept ordering drinks, and when it became obvious Chooks couldn't keep pace, bought one for Chooks, one for himself, and drank Chooks's as well. Chooks felt the urge to intervene, but seeing his friend caught in the grip of an emotion much larger than he was, thought it prudent to stay quiet.

"There's something else," said Johnny, draining off another pint. "I reckon there's coppers involved. I've got to shoot every one of them, or I don't stand a chance."

Chooks said, "I reckon you're making too much of this."

"It's not you finding Moylan on the couch with your missus."

"Hell, mate. I'm sorry," said Chooks, and not knowing where to put himself, stared down at his glass.

Johnny confided, "Tomorrow I'm getting another gun."

"I don't reckon you ought to be getting any guns. I reckon you don't understand what you're saying."

"I've got feelings."

Chooks ventured, "Just because a bloke's got feelings, doesn't mean he understands them. A bloke can be mixed up a lot more than he knows."

"You're telling me I'm mad?"

"Hell, no. I wouldn't say that. Just a bit stressed."

Johnny reached out and gave Chooks a nudge. Chooks grinned back at him, though he couldn't conceal the concern in his eyes.

Johnny said, "I reckon I'm going troppo. I can't take it any more."

"Chin up," said Chooks, and took a long embarrassed slurp from his glass.

But Johnny was on the high road to nowhere and just couldn't stop. "I can't provide for myself, can't provide for my family. I'm ashamed, I've sunk lower than a lizard's belly. I hate myself, and I dunno what to do. I can't see a way out. I can't see a way out."

"Gosh," said Chooks, and ordered another round.

Johnny left Chooks at the counter and stalked out of the pub, blundering along in a daze, striking his forehead, feeling demented. He ducked down the side alley that ran out from the parking lot, following a corrugated iron fence plastered with signs saying 'No Bill Posting Permitted'. He crossed the next street without looking, then plunged down a narrower lane. Up ahead, a blue-green light shone down on a grey-paling fence abutting a series of orange brick buildings at the back of the pub. Picked out momentarily in the lamplight, a car moved towards him from the darkest end of the street. On instinct, Johnny stepped back behind several stacked crates of empties as the Holden drew level. He caught the driver's face in the window and was so

astonished that for almost a full minute he doubted his eyes. He watched almost paralysed as Lennie McPherson climbed out, and plunged down the alley out of which he had just come.

Johnny stepped out of his hiding spot, stunned into action by the hideousness of his realisation. Too late, he heard the click of a safety-catch and swung round to see Tommy Bogle standing behind him, like a black paper cut-out in the light of the doorway, the mouth of his gun barrel staring straight at him. Johnny wasn't sure what to do, but had to do something. With eyes squeezed tight he threw himself forward, forcing Tommy's gun arm up through the surprise of his weight. A shot rang out, imprinting a seven-point star on the tin of a roller door as they went flying backwards. The impact as they hit the ground almost knocked Johnny unconscious, but he got up and ran.

Johnny fumbled for the keys to the Valiant and clambered inside. He was swaying all over the road, but the road was lonely and clear, with no traffic coming or going in either direction. He dropped down off the highway, and looked out over the water, the lights of Sydney Kingsford Smith Airport reflected across it in zigzags. He parked the Valiant by the seawall for safety and started to walk, making his way through green-manicured lawns and fresh-planted flower gardens divided by fence palings. The air was bright and got brighter still, illuminating every post box and pothole with a heart-wrenching clarity. He reached the fence that surrounded his flat and climbed the front steps. He saw everything happen in advance — the gun coming towards him, the flash of its muzzle. His arms went up, his eyes went tight. Behind him, a shower of blue petals rained down on the doorstep.



Part Five

The Hotel Australia

1

GUS WASN'T VERY PLEASED WITH THE WAY THINGS TURNED OUT, working the case for almost six months with almost nothing to show. He couldn't help thinking that part of the problem was the way they were working it — nobody got a sight of the infamous black book, so nobody really knew which part of the puzzle they were working. They just did a bit here, did a bit there. Chased something else down. It got awfully exciting up to a point, then all petered out, like ripples in a puddle. Gradually, the case got dropped from the front page of the papers and down the list of policing priorities almost in tandem. Secretaries and typists got suddenly scarce. More and more detectives returned to their regular tasks. Then, earlier that morning, they made it official. The task force was disbanded, any remaining detectives to be detailed elsewhere, a reward was put out, and the case shoved away under 'File and Forget'.

Gus wasn't angry, exactly. But he was ill at ease and dreadfully unhappy.

"I guess they were always going to do it," said Agnelli, who was sorting through a large pile of paperwork on the desktop adjacent.

Gus closed the lid of the file box he was packing, and taped it shut with a tag labeled 'Unsolved'. "I know you've got problems, Agnelli," he said. "I reckon we're all disappointed. But Reilly had everybody in those notebooks, gangsters, politicians and businessmen, together. Sometimes it's impossible to cut through that guff and get to the case."

"I heard that there's coppers who're named in those books. I don't see anybody asking any coppers any questions."

"Because being in the notebooks doesn't constitute any evidence against them."

"They're such good coppers, then why are they in the books?"

"Maybe Reilly tried to reach them."

"So what did they do?"

"Turned him down, I guess."

Agnelli let out a laugh. "I also heard a nasty little rumour that Tanner's involved."

"Tanner's a good copper," said Gus, flushing up. "They're all good coppers."

But this only made Agnelli laugh harder.

Gus demanded, "Tanner led the raid against the Kellett Club, didn't he?"

"Sure," said Agnelli, with a look not so much of anger but pity. He picked up his box, and carted it down the stairs into storage.

Gus scrambled to his feet and tugged at the blind. Outside, the sky was coming over purplish, filling the room with a watery kind of light that made him blink rapidly. He went back to his desk, idling through paperwork, lost in thought, when the dull clatter of the telephone rang him out of his stupor. He clambered to his feet, causing the swivel in his chair to ring loudly, and dived for the telephone.

"They told me you're the bloke to speak to about the Dick Reilly case."

"Then I guess they were right," Gus replied sceptically. "Have you got something to tell?"

"Yeah, he was shot by this bloke that I know of."

"Has this bloke got a name?"

"Yeah, but I'm not telling you his name."

"Uh-huh," said Gus.

"I also got proof."

"So tell us about the proof."

"Well, for starters. I know that the bloke was shot first with a sawed-off and then with the Cannon."

"Cannon?" said Gus.

"That was only Johnny's name for the thing. It was a Parker Hale Safari rifle with a telescopic sight."

Gus felt prickles. He wrote the name 'Johnny' on the desk blotter beside him. "Can you lay hold of these guns?" he said, cautiously now.

"He broke them down and dumped them in the river. But I reckon the rest is worth money."

"I'm happy to talk about that. Is there somewhere we could meet?"

"Do you reckon I'm stupid? First up, I want an ironclad guarantee for the reward with the pardon. I'll call back in five."

Gus stood there with his hand on the telephone, listening to the line flatten out. Ideas assembled themselves, and he considered their possibilities. He remembered a bloke named 'Johnny' who he'd interviewed way back in the case, and immediately began pacing up and down between the packing crates trying to recollect the details. He unpacked the filing boxes stacked across his desk, then unlocked the steel cabinets where the unsorted file notes were kept. He ran his finger down index of frayed ends, dead ends, and abandoned inquiries, and came up with a name, 'Johnny Warren'.

Gus dimly remembered interviewing the bloke at Brighton Le Sands, but seemed to recall he was alibied up. He leafed through the record of interview,

found a roneoed copy of the register from South Sydney Juniors at the back of the bundle. It seemed to bear out the truth of the alibi, but in light of the telephone call it could stand further scrutiny. He also found a note stapled behind the entry, cross-referenced to a set of crime sheets from the Rockdale Police. The note said that one night in January, just three weeks before, Johnny Warren had returned to his flat after a night at the pub, shot his de facto wife Glory and turned the gun on himself. Glory died instantly, with Warren passing away under guard at St George Hospital several days later. There was also a child concerned in the case, who had been sent on to the Strathfield Girls Home for Orphans.

Gus put the stray files back in the cabinet, nudged the drawer shut, and was deeply absorbed in the record of interview, when the telephone started ringing again. He ran down the room and dived for it. But Agnelli was already there.

Gus skidded to a halt on the far side of the desk. "Who was it?"

"Wrong number," said Agnelli, hanging up with a frown. "Why?"

Chooks stood in a telephone booth on a corner in Greystanes with his finger frozen to the dial, unsure what to do and too scared to decide. He put down the receiver, stepped out the door, peered up at the sky through a tangle of electrical wire. The clouds were edged purplish and gave off a greenish kind of light. It was raining in earnest before he got home. He stepped widely to avoid being hit in the face by a bunch of sodden leaves, and scowled as a mud puddle emptied itself neatly through a hole in his green tartan slippers. Several minutes later he was ensconced in the kitchen, chewing the end of a

pencil and writing a letter to Marge's dictation. "Dear sir ... " he started, with Marge, peering over his shoulder, making corrections. He continued —

I may be in a position to supply information about the murder of Dick Reilly, and other murders also, but in doing so I may incriminate myself. I therefore request, before going any further, that I be given assurance direct from the government, that I will be given both the pardon and the money referred to in the reward notice. Faithfully yours — X.

Chooks crumpled the letter into the back pocket of his trousers and took the bus into town. He clattered out at Central, trudged up to Surry Hills, where he handed the envelope to a uniformed copper at the counter, and came home undetected.

2

GUS SAT ON THE EDGE OF HIS DESK, talking to Agnelli who was pacing the room in tight star-shaped patterns, socking a fist into the palm of his hand. They both looked up as Tanner walked in, headed straight down the serried rows of wooden desks, then backed up a few paces.

"Rum-looking bastard left this for you," he said, extracting an envelope from his outer-breast pocket.

Gus sprang eagerly forward and examined the note. Angelli also dropped the file he was holding, and clattered anxiously over.

"Is the bloke still here?" said Gus, ripping it open.

"Out like a shot — " said Tanner. He eyed Gus and frowned. "Maybe you ought to tell me what's up?"

Gus waved the letter. "I reckon this is from the bloke that rang me this morning. He says he can finger the gunman in the Dick Reilly case."

"Another bloody comedian?"

Gus gave a prim tug to his spectacles. "His information was pretty good, I reckon. He knew the make and calibre of the guns, and the style of the shooting. He says he can give us the actual weapons, and hopefully enough information to link them to the shooter."

"Does this bloke have a name?"

"He wouldn't say. He rings up this morning and says he'll ring back in five, but then he gets scared. It wasn't anybody's fault," added Gus, and Angelli confirmed this with a nod.

"Well, I reckon you've got to do a lot better than that," said Tanner. "Because this case is closed. On Allan's instructions. "

Gus said, "He mentioned the name 'Johnny'. I reckon he meant this bloke Johnny Warren who was mentioned in the books —"

"Warren never done it, Warren is an idiot."

Gus wasn't so easily put off. "I read in the crime sheets that Warren is dead. It could be that's why this bloke's stepping forward —"

Tanner didn't appear nearly so pleased with the new turn of events as Gus had imagined. He said, "Okay, I want you to get this informant's name and bring it to me. It's down to me whether it goes any further. Is that understood?"

"One more thing," said Gus. "It could've been this bloke was in on it —"

"What did you say?"

"I said I reckon the bloke might've been in on it." Gus coloured slightly, then went boldly on. "He's says in the letter he wants the pardon as well as the money. He was very particular about it. He won't give us a name without an official guarantee."

"The bugger he won't."

Tanner grabbed hold of the letter and read it through twice, then walked out the door without saying a word.

Tanner tracked Allan down to the Union Club, where he was banging the Premier's drum in the roll-up to the next state election. He steered him between tables of wood-grained plastic-laminate adorned with lace doilies, passed palm fronds, cigar smoke and walls covered in men's photographs, into an anteroom, where he was careful to drop a door-latch behind him.

"I've got a few things that need talking about."

Allan was playing air golf on the carpet. He pivoted suddenly, peering down through the sun-soapy atmosphere of the anteroom, as if imagining a clean-straight shot to the two hundred-yard flag of some distant green fairway. "Sure," he said, grinning pleasantly. "But first up I want you to tell me about the gaming clubs. I take it you had a word with those blokes?"

"Yeah, I did it on Thursday."

"Yesterday?"

"No, the one before that."

"Last Thursday week," said Allan.

"That's right," said Tanner, resigning himself to a lengthy session. He kicked out the nearest chair and leaned back with arms splayed. "I met with them down at South Sydney Juniors, only it turns out there's a problem. McPherson tells me that things aren't going as smoothly as we would've liked the last couple of months, with everybody in a quandary whether to shut or stay open. Some are staying open, but with the lights off. Others are staying shut. McPherson says, 'Everybody's paying me, and getting no protection.'"

"Haven't you told them how it's going to work?" said Allan, readying for a second shot.

"Yeah, I told him, 'There's no protection at the moment and you've got to be careful.' McPherson says to me, 'Careful? For what I'm paying?' So I say, 'Yeah, but there's nothing to worry about. We're not doing anything. Just giving publicity to the fact that we're doing things.' I tell him, 'Soon as the election's out of the way, I reckon you'll find there's a certain relaxation in the clampdown —"

"So they've agreed?"

Tanner stretched out his arms in a hapless sort of gesture . "I had to talk them to it. I said, 'I reckon we've always had a good understanding in this town, we've generally worked well together and always gotten on.' McPherson says, 'Nobody's complaining about the old system, just about the raids, and also getting stood over for additional sums.' So I say, 'I can guarantee you won't be bothered with any of that in the future. The new system will be more organised than anything in the past. Pigeon will be the collect boy. I reckon you've had previous satisfactory dealings with him. I also say, 'The fees will have to go up, but I reckon the sum to be reasonable on account of the murders and so on.'"

"And what did he say to that?"

"He jots down some numbers, and says, 'I reckon nobody will be having any problems with that. But they'll want to have a definite date when things can reopen.' So I say to him, 'Allan's got to talk to Askin about this. That way, everything's squared off at the top.' Overall, I think he was pretty impressed."

"Good," said Allan, putting his imaginary golf club down on the table.

"Not quite." Tanner wiped the too-wide boyish grin off his face. "There's been a turn in the investigation."

"What investigation?"

"The Dick Reilly case."

"I thought the matter was closed. Sleeping dogs and all that — "

"Well, it's not a sleeping dog any more, because there's some clown coming forward to claim the reward."

"If he's trying it on, well, surely you can put an end to that?" hissed Allan, losing patience.

"No, I can't, because the clown's got the guns. I have to go through the motions or it'll look a bit strange. Anyway, it was you put the reward out."

"But I didn't expect anybody to come forward or anything," said Allan, defensive. "Anyway, this informant bloke. Who is he?"

"He didn't give a name. He rang up and spoke to young Finlay."

Allan screwed up his face. "I thought the boy was on-side."

"There are levels to this thing that not everybody's aware of."

"Do you trust him?"

"I chose him."

"Well, you don't have anything to worry about then."

Tanner shifted in his seat. "I can pull my own people into line," he responded, heavily. "But this informant, he wants the reward and the pardon, and he's put that in writing, says that he wants an official guarantee."

Allan got brisk. "Well, we can't go around giving guarantees to anybody who asks. Let me have a word to the boy. Make sure he's running straight."

"I dunno about that."

But Allan insisted. Five minutes later, they were back at Police Headquarters in Phillip Street and Gus was brought in. He stood straight on the carpet, hands at his back, spectacles gleaming.

Allan started, "Tanner here informs me that some rum bloke's been ringing you about the Dick Reilly case."

"Yes sir," said Gus, and though the explanation he gave was remarkably brief, it was obvious Allan was waiting for him to finish.

"Well, let's have it," said Allan, and stuck out his hand.

"Sir?"

"Show me the letter."

Gus glanced at Tanner. Tanner shifted his tie, and pulled out the letter. "Here," he said.

Allan held out the letter and squinted, as if it might spit at him. He read it through twice, tore it through crossways, and dropped it in the wastepaper basket under his desk. "Well, that's solved then. Now there's no letter and no guarantee. Just wring everything you can out of the smart bastard and charge him with something."

Gus made some sort of ordinary answer to Allan's extraordinary demand, and after a few minutes was sent on his way.

Tanner stayed on. "With due respect, I don't think you're taking the right tack on this, Norman."

"Why, is there something you haven't told me? Because if anything comes back at us —"

"Yeah, I know. I'll deal with it."

3

CHOOKS CROUCHED UNDER A RAIN-DRIPPING TREE in the back yard of his cottage in Greystanes, taking to the fence with hammer and pliers. He knocked a nail into the fowl house, hosed the feed bucket, padlocked the gate. Meanwhile, the rain came clattering down on everything, rattling on the tin roof like gravel, and through the rain came fingers of mist, like accusing ghosts, poking at him.

Chooks was brain-boxed with horror at the way of Johnny's going, but when Marge raised the concept of going to the coppers and making a fresh start, he'd felt obliged, at the very least, to give the matter some thought. He'd had a bit of a rough trot since Johnny departed, and there hadn't been many spare quids coming his way. He got a job as a shop clerk at O'Hallighan's Sports Store at Marge's insistence, but eighteen bob a week went nowhere with the rent taken out. Once again, he'd looked to the ponies to set matters straight, but being an out-and-out racing sort of bloke he'd always preferred good odds to a sure thing. His recent investments had taken a terrible tumble. He was dreadfully exposed (bone-thin and naked before his Bookie & Maker), a fact of which Marge was still unaware.

"For the love of God, Chooks. Come inside. You'll catch your death of a cold."

"Marge old girl," said Chooks, clambering towards the house.

Dog-tired, Chooks wiped his feet on the doormat. He hugged Marge gratefully, and kissed her plump face. They stood in the dim light of the hallway and hung on to each other (though Marge said they ought to have

had better sense, with Chooks on the downhill to fifty and she being older than she cared to admit).

"Marge?"

"Chooks?"

"Shall I stick the kettle on?"

Chooks poured out a second cup of strong tea and a glass of warm milk before he got down to business. "I can't go through with it, Marge," he said, surprising even himself. "I'd do anything for you, Marge. But don't ask me to do this. I don't think I can."

"Well, I reckon that you don't have a choice," said Marge.

"But Johnny was a mate. I don't want to do anything that could cast him in a bad light."

"I can't for the life of me think of a worse light than killing the whole of his family —"

Chooks shrivelled up. He still blamed himself for letting Johnny go the night they spent drinking down at South Sydney Juniors. He'd gone out and searched for the bloke, and didn't get home until quarter to three, then spent the rest of the night in the shithouse, owing to Marge's not approving of his drinking. It was well after two when he climbed out of bed. Finding the house empty, he slipped out for the paper. The headlines glared ominously before he even picked it up, 'Come Quickly, Mummy's Shot'. Chooks didn't believe it. Deep in his guts, he didn't think Johnny was capable.

"I don't reckon he did it," said Chooks, staring tearfully down at his glass. "I loved the man. He was the best mate I ever had."

"He was the unmaking of you, Chooks. Everybody said so. He didn't give you your wages when the Liverpool club collapsed, then you helped him out in this business and he don't pay for that either. Bugger him."

Chooks looked up, startled (he'd never known his wife Marge to swear). "But it's a low thing you're asking me to do. Shelving a mate."

"There's nothing wrong with shelving a mate that's already dead."

"I dunno about that," said Chooks, uncertain. "Besides, the coppers dunno it's me. There's nothing to tie me to the actual crime."

"My God, Chooks," said Marge, getting up from the table. She put the tea things in the sink. "You're not thinking straight. It's Reilly's mates, not the coppers you've got to be worried about."

Chooks sat at the table until the electric light faded, and leaked into the street. The clatter of morning worked its way through the walls. He reasoned that going to the coppers wouldn't change an iota of the fact that he missed Johnny sorely. If continued silence could've brought Johnny back, Chooks would've been silent to the grave. But Johnny was gone. Up there, circling about in some celestial whatnot. Cheerfully, he bet himself a shilling to a spent match that shelving the bloke must be the right thing to do if that's what Marge wanted.

4

GUS FELT HIS SPIRITS SOAR as the investigation began unfolding again, and the whole world seemed subtly altered under its impact. They met their informant in the rear lane outside Theo's Hot Chips and Hamburgers, before accompanying him to the Georges River at Milperra, where they walked out along the bridge. Chooks gave them a remarkably persuasive account of events leading up to the shooting, and showed them the spot where Johnny had dropped the guns into the ropy lengths of black water. The diving squad was called in and soon began dredging under Wally Driscoll's command, but the water was so murky with factory run-off and other sorts of pollution that they were forced to carry on the search manually, swimming sometimes in grid fashion, sometimes in circles, skimming the riverbed with the palms of their hands. They found weed-choked Eskys, a black iron lamp post from forty years back, and the abandoned carcasses of several automobiles. Eventually, the gun barrel was discovered under three feet of sludge, with the pin lying next to it, another bolt was found in a separate location, and the pieces sent off to a gunsmiths' laboratory for assemblage and testing. But Tanner looked far from convinced when they confronted Chooks in the smoke-filled interrogation room several days later.

"So tell us again, why did Warren kill Reilly?"

Chooks was meandering about the room, peering at the bolted-down metal furniture and other odd gloomy features. He stepped up to the glassy surface of the two-way and pulled his mouth sideways, as if checking for lost or damaged teeth, smoothed down the collar of his faded-blue work shirt, then backed away slowly.

"Johnny hated the man," he said. "I've seen Johnny talking about Reilly and there's actual spittle coming out of his mouth."

"You also said Warren was figuring on murdering Lennie McPherson, and a whole other bunch of blokes. What did he want to knock them for?"

"It was something to do with taking over Sydney. Through getting rid of his opposition and such."

"Opposition?"

"Yeah, other criminals, by kidnapping them and so forth."

Gus watched the doubt writ large on Tanner's face. "You're sure that this actually happened? You're sure you're not giving us a story?"

"I never would," said Chooks, contriving to look shocked.

"Well, I reckon you are. I reckon Warren upped and shot himself and you thought, bingo! I'll shelf him to the coppers and claim the reward."

"Well, I'd hardly have shelved the bloke if he was alive, would I? I mean it's a bit different to put in a bloke that's already dead."

Tanner shoved out his chair. "Bugger this for a joke," he said, and walked out of the room.

Outside Wally Driscoll was pacing the hallway, light-soaped bifocals plastered together with a Bandaid. He glanced briefly at Gus, then called after Tanner's departing back. "The ballistics on those guns we dug up —"

"What about them?" Tanner swung round.

"Read it yourself," said Driscoll. He gave Gus the report and shambled away.

Gus passed the report to Tanner, who tore open the envelope and read it right through before handing it back. Gus skimmed down to the concluding remarks. He read, 'The characteristics of the reconstructed gun barrel being a

near identical match for fragments of bullets recovered from the crime scene, the guns were almost certainly the weapons used in the Dick Reilly homicide.' Gus grinned, but Tanner was scowling. He took a cone-shaped paper cup from the water-cooler, emptied it, crumpled the cup, dropped it to the floor, and returned to the interrogation room. This time he treated Chooks with utmost caution.

Chooks was nervous at first, then blurted it out quickly, with increasing confidence, in response to each question. He took them to several sites around the Heathcote, Merrylands and Greystanes areas, pointing out rubbish bins, trees and bits of broken bottle into which Warren had test-fired the weapons. He also took them to the Ace Ben Loan Office on George Street, where Warren, finding himself temporarily cash-strapped, had pawned, and subsequently redeemed the guns, days before the shooting. The proprietor of the Loan Office recalled the occasion and obligingly introduced Gus to the proprietor of the sports store adjacent, who readily identified the Parker Hale as the gun he'd sold Warren three years before. It was a tidy result, with damage strictly confined to a dead suspect with a strong revenge motive, and the ends stitched so tight they wouldn't unravel on reaching the Coroner's Court. Gus thought that Tanner seemed pleased (he actually congratulated Gus on the collar), but there were others less happy.

"How come he knows so much?" said Agnelli, staring at Gus over the rim of his mug. "How come he's so anxious about the pardon?"

"He's a crook in his own line of business," said Gus, taking his feet off the desk. "He's also good mates with the bloke and probably an accessory after the murder."

"Yeah, but I reckon there's more to this than the brass are letting on. They've got this look on their faces like they'd been caught pulling a goat. They're just glad to get through the thing without further embarrassment."

"I dunno what the brass think."

"Well, sorry me. I thought you were Tanner's blue-eyed boy. Invited for a smoko with Allan and everything."

Anger flared slightly in Gus's cheeks. "What do you want?"

"I just want to find out the truth. I thought you might too." Gus had nothing to say to this. Agnelli pressed on, "I want to ask your witness a couple of questions. It won't take much more than a minute."

"He's not my witness."

"You found him. He's yours as much as he's anybody else's."

Gus was torn between guilt and discomfort. After a while, he reluctantly agreed on the condition that he carried out the interrogation himself. Three minutes later, he was back in the interrogation room, fixing Chooks with a long look across the blue-metal table. "How come you know so much?"

But Chooks had long ago lost interest. "I'm not saying anything."

"Fine," said Gus. "It's not fussing me. But I thought I'd let you know that it's highly unlikely they'll be paying out reward money for shopping us a suspect that's already dead."

"Maybe I don't care," said Chooks, although the lie was palpable.

"Oh, so you just come in here like a regular Citizen Joe? Well, thanks, mate, for the information. I guess you're free to leave." Gus rose from his chair and gestured at the door, and Agnelli got up with him.

Chooks showed no sign of departing. "I was also promised protection."

"God, you were promised a lot, money, protection, the whole kit and caboodle. But do you honestly think that's what you're going to get? I mean, why does anybody need protection from a bloke who's already dead?"

Chooks eyes widened slightly. "But Reilly was a serious criminal, with mates that might be looking to back up for him. It could look like to them like I'm mixed up in this thing, through just being friends with Johnny and so on."

"Yeah, I'd sure hate to hear about somebody who's only involved through 'just being friends, and so on' with his body riddled with bullets and floating in the Harbour. Then again, I guess you weren't involved, so you don't have to worry. Just happens you know all this stuff."

"Johnny, he was in absolute fear of the bloke. He only asked for me to help out."

"So tell me," said Gus, musing theatrically. "Why did Johnny ask you? I mean did you help him kill somebody before?"

"No."

"Are you sure?" Gus looked mystified, actually scratching his head. "I mean, it's a mystery to me as to why somebody would ask for an upright Bob Citizen such as yourself to help out in a murder. I mean you being the kind of bloke who's off and confessing to the coppers, without even asking for money or nothing —"

Chooks obviously felt this was a view of things he was bound to dispel. "Johnny only put the murder proposition to me because I'd proved a very loyal doorman at the Liverpool club. He knew he could trust me, that I'd keep my mouth shut. Needless to say, I was very flattered when he asked." He frowned, and added, "But I was never going to kill anybody, I wasn't to pull any actual triggers. That was never suggested to me at any time."

Gud tried very hard to contain his excitement. "Are you admitting that you were personally involved in the murder of Dick Reilly?"

"Fair cop. I only participated in the killing to save Johnny's life."

"You're admitting it was you who shot Reilly?"

Chooks was horrified. "But I was never going to shoot anybody or anything. Just to help out. I was already committed, because I'd said 'Yes,' and also because I'd already spent the two hundred I had off him."

"He paid you two hundred to help with the shooting?"

"Well, not exactly. See, I already owed him two hundred on account of some bad investments that I'd made at the track. Johnny said he would write off that money, and pay me another thousand the day after the shooting. But then all I got off him was five hundred bucks."

Gus said, "You're telling us a different story now. Why?"

"I only covered up a few of the facts."

"Yeah, a few of the facts," said Gus, and let Agnelli take over.

Agnelli said, "I reckon maybe there's another few things you aren't telling us, either. See, I don't think you're smart enough to take on somebody like Reilly on your own. I reckon there's somebody else."

"I never met nobody."

"Come on, Chooks. You can do better than that. Who was it?"

"I dunno."

"Are you sure?"

"Of course I'm sure. Everything I know was through Tommy and Johnny."

"Tommy?"

"Yeah, Tommy Bogle. He was the in-between person."

"In-between person?" Gus interrupted.

But Agnelli continued, "How do you know that?"

"Johnny told me about it. He says, 'Remember Tommy Bogle at the Liverpool club? He's the go-between in the situation.'"

"So who was this Tommy Bogle taking his orders from?"

"I dunno."

"Why, didn't Johnny tell you?" Chooks started sulking, but Agnelli kept pushing. "Didn't he trust you enough?"

"I dunno. I reckon you'd have to ask him."

"Who organised the crime?"

"I dunno. Nobody, I guess."

A light came on in the passageway, an ominous yellow-glare fanning under the door.

"Well, I reckon you do and I want you to tell me." Agnelli lunged across the table and grabbed Chooks by the collar. "Who put him up to it, McPherson?"

Chooks gasped for oxygen. "'Do you reckon I'm stupid? Do you reckon I'd go around naming somebody like that?'"

Chooks might have confessed but he never got the chance. Just then, the cell door banged open and Tanner walked in, shouting in a fury. He bundled them out into the corridor, leaving Chooks to smooth down his shirtfront, straighten his collar, rubbing his chin, all alone in the dark.

Tanner was storming up and down the carpet, throwing thundery glances at Gus and Agnelli, who were standing in the wide-open space between the

desk and the door. Gus stayed stoically silent, but Agnelli was too angry to keep quiet. He blurted it out quickly, before thinking it through.

"Brouggy's already copped to the killing. He also says there were others involved, including a bloke by the name of Tommy Bogle."

"Who's this bloke Tommy Bogle I never heard of?"

Agnelli replied, "He worked as a doorman for Dick Reilly, and also for Johnny Warren at his Liverpool club. It seems he approached Johnny with a proposition to shoot Reilly and get paid in the process. Warren hates Reilly on account of it was Reilly that drove him out of the Cross. He's financially very low after the Liverpool club closes, and so he agrees." Agnelli rushed on and on into further assertions, until Tanner stopped him short.

"What do you reckon you're doing?"

"I'm carrying out an investigation," said Agnelli, suddenly prim.

"Into what, the unknown?"

"I've got a statement incriminating this bloke Tommy Bogle. I dunno the money-man but I reckon McPherson's good for it."

"Well, I reckon you're fantasising. I reckon it's all in your head."

"I've got a sworn statement," said Agnelli.

"Are you contradicting me?"

"No, I'm just stating the facts."

"Well, in case you forget, it's me that decides the facts of the matter, and the fact is that everything's stopping right here, right now. I've got no use for coppers running harum-scarum. You've got three months owing, Agnelli. I want you to take it, starting now. And when you get back, don't be surprised if you find that you're out of this squad. Back in uniform. Out doing parking tickets." He turned his gaze back onto Gus. "I'd expect it of him —"

Gus said, "I'm sorry."

"Well, it's a bit bloody late," said Tanner, and walked out of the room.

Later that evening, Gus drove down to 'Bogle Bros Auto Electric' on Tanner's instructions, and picked up Tommy Bogle up as he came off the nightshift. He sat Tommy in a white-tiled cell so he could sweat for a bit, only Tommy didn't sweat. He just smiled politely, and asked for his lawyer. The lawyer arrived fifteen minutes later and took them through a point-for-point rebuttal of everything to which Chooks had just sworn. Things being equal, Tanner said they had no reason to keep him and sent Gus to the cells to let Tommy go. Chooks was also sent home, but was refusing to leave custody before he was granted protection. Eventually, Tanner gave way, telling Chooks that he'd set up a program called Operation Q.

Gus went searching for Tanner as the small hours of the night crept towards dawn. He found him in an empty holding cell, with a litter of Tooths KB Lager cans crushed like metal carnations around on the floor. The moon cast a bluish glare onto the ground on which Tanner was standing, so motionless in the semi-darkness, that for a single split second, as Gus came round the door, the room appeared empty.

Gus put a finger behind his glasses and rubbed his eye. "There's something I wanted to say."

Tanner took a final dreg from his beer can and flung it away. "Anything you want."

"I reckon you're being unfair on Agnelli. Maybe he was wrong in the way he talked back at you, but I don't think he's far wrong about the case. Also, I don't think McPherson is such a long reach."

"McPherson didn't do it."

"I dunno, I kind of like him for it."

Tanner laughed long and horribly, as if some long-accumulated strain was releasing from his system. "You don't understand what I'm saying. I'm telling you he didn't do it."

Gus attempted to say something further, but finding it impossible, went on his way. Face blank. Eyes uncomprehending. Glasses tilted slightly off to one side as he went down the hall.

Agnelli was standing in front of the light. He gave him a hurt look.

"Wait a minute," said Gus, attempting to defuse the situation. "We're friends, aren't we?"

"I thought we were. Then, I guess I dunno any more."

Gus was unable to sleep the rest of that night and lay on the flat of his bed filled with inarticulate emotion. He thought about Angelli and the things that were bothering him, and decided there was no excuse for not standing by him. Strangely enough, the reason he'd behaved as he did was because he wanted to be liked — wanting to be thought of as a good copper had been the overriding thing. Wanting to belong, wanting to be accepted. He woke once again in the odd hours, as new thoughts broke off and rose to the surface. He found himself standing in his sock-feet in the semi-darkness with an ever-clearer apprehension of how wrong he had been. For the first time he gave in to his suspicions. He tore a hole in the fabric of his universe and stumbled straight through.

5

I CAN TELL YOU I WAS SWEATING BUCKETS-FULL SOON AS I WALKED IN," said Chooks. "But I reckon they took a real shine to me in the end. They asked me, can you swear to this, can you swear to that? I said, 'Just put me up before the magistrate and I'll swear like a trooper.'"

"They're giving us the reward?" said Marge.

"Five thousand dollars."

"Dear God!" Marge's eyes rounded out in astonishment.

"Now don't get yourself het up," said Chooks, a bashfulness showing in the crooked grin he gave her. "I reckon those coppers are pretty important blokes in their own line of business, and you've got to respect that. I mean, I'd be the first bloke to kick up a stink if they cocked up on me. The minute some mug tries to push me around, he knows what to expect. But overall, I've got to admit I was pretty impressed — " Marge interrupted before Chooks got much further.

"You've got us protection?"

"No worries. I've taken care of all that. Anything happens, all you've got to do is dial up triple-O and say the words 'Operation Q'."

"Q?"

"That's right. Just say, 'Operation Q'. The place will be swarming with coppers in a jiffy."

Marge stacked the plates in the sink and began running the taps. "I dunno, Chooks. It's a long way out here in the dark, and the road's full of potholes. Maybe I ought to take the kids to my mother's — "

"Aw, Marge. Don't do that. It's lonely out here without you lot to cheer me up." But Marge continued to look doubtful, and Chooks, after giving the matter some thought, came up with an idea. "Here's what. Why don't we do a dummy run? I'll discharge a firearm from out near the fowl house and you can get on the blower and yelp, 'Operation Q'. Just see what happens."

Chooks pulled on his gumboots and trudged out across the yard. He leaned with his back to a fence post and raised the stock to his shoulder.

The sound of gunfire echoed through the blackness.

Forty minutes later, Chooks watched in horror as Marge gave down right there in front of him. "I never should've trusted them. They don't care what happens to us. I'm not important enough. "

Marge was too frightened to say anything.

Chooks said, "I'm sorry, Marge. I love you. I'd do anything for you."

"I know," said Marge. "But I'm scared."

Chooks didn't know where to put himself right at that moment. But knew if he looked at Marge any longer that he might burst. So he dropped down beside her and buried his face in her neck. It seemed to be the only thing he could do. Marge was trembling, and so was he. After a while, Marge got up and led him back into the house. Chooks got on the telephone to CIB. "Fair dinkum," he said, sounding not at all hopeful. "Is that the best your mob can do?"

6

SEVERAL WEEKS LATER GILLESPIE WAS DIGESTING AN ACCOUNT of the Reilly inquest over fried eggs and coffee in his Balgowlah home. Much space was given over to the doings of the mystery witness 'Joe Smith' (already well known in the legal and criminal fraternity as the small-time shyster, Chooks Brouggy). How he was smuggled into court in the well of a cop car, and tendered his three days of testimony in a disguise of dyed hair and dark glasses. Reporters dwelled at great length on his preference for wide-floral ties and shabby-tweed suits, and his disconcerting habit of laughing at unusual moments throughout the proceedings. Out of curiosity as much as anything, Gillespie had idled up alongside the George Street North Court the previous morning, and peered up at the windows patched haphazardly with cardboard, and the handful of mounted cops who fronted the entrance. He was as impressed as anybody by all of the hoopla surrounding the case, but as to the alleged guilt or innocence of the parties to the proceedings he was, like the rest of the world, in a bit of quandary.

Still the matter's being aired in the press once again wasn't doing the Askin campaign any damage, as his wife Sylvia pointed out. It had prompted an awkward assortment of questions at the Labor Party Election Launch the previous evening, mostly from members of the Packer press, who were artfully scattered through the length of the hall. Renshaw and Mannix had so showered each other with praise in response to each query, it was abundantly clear that they had quarrelled — and the fallout might well send the Labor Party into complete disarray.

Gillespie thought through such matters as he headed down George Street North once more, struck the edge of the footpath and hesitated, waiting to cross. On either side was a hullabaloo of fruit-barrows and paper-sellers. Kiosks with bomb-blasted roofs crept up the sides of the newer crystal-glazed buildings. Seagulls strutted in the gutter, gobbling wet bits of paper. From a forgotten chimneypot a neon advertisement blinked down, 'Men's Haircuts \$1'. Gillespie wandered out through the clutter, plunged into the sooty arcades riddling Circular Quay, and emerged on the far side in a tangle of cobblestone lanes and tobacco-tiled pubs. He pushed through the crowd of reporters gathered under the sandstone-trimmed purple brick arches of the Coroner's Court, walked down a hall painted an undrinkable yellow with a muddy-brown dado, and entered the room where the inquest into the death of his former client Raymond 'Ducky' O'Connor (whose life had been brutal and mercifully brief) was already in progress.

Wally Driscoll was up on the stand giving testimony. On a broad ledge in front of him there were photographs of the Latin Quarter, including a close-up of the expended cartridge, the actual head wound, and some dark shiny stains seeping across the carpet.

"You drew this conclusion on the basis of the gun's being jammed?"

"I'm satisfied the only way the gun could've jammed was through manual operation of the slide after the shot was let off."

"You're also of the opinion that it was impossible for Mr O'Connor to have performed this action?"

"Injury was massive and fatal."

Gillespie wedged himself into a seat towards the back, taking in the rich-brown atmosphere of the court, with its high-backed wooden chairs, dark

wooden panelling, and clock hanging from the gallery balustrade ticking over the proceedings. Next up, McPherson took the stand. He stood with his eyes raised enough to meet those of the spectators in the gallery in front of him, but never enough to meet those of the Coroner, whose questions he answered in an un-energetic fashion and not-even-slightly defensive tone. (He couldn't recall. He didn't remember. The last time he saw Ducky was in Parramatta Gaol.)

"I put it to you that you saw O'Connor in Sydney."

"I only heard he was in Sydney that night."

"Did you also hear he was intending to murder you?"

"I thought he was in Melbourne."

"Were you concerned about threats?"

"No."

"Do you normally take precautions against attacks?"

"I never have."

"Really?"

"Well, it seems to me that it don't make much sense. I mean, how would you know anybody was attacking you until they'd already started?"

Gillespie felt a stab of familiarity as the next witness took the stand. Clad in peach nylon, tight as upholstery over her hips, face powdered white around three isolated patches of crimson — it was Dolly Brennan, Tanner's companion at the Latin Quarter on the night that they met.

Dolly said, "I was standing with my back to the booth, talking to this bloke at the table adjacent, when I felt something hard strike the carpet."

"You're sure it wasn't a cigarette lighter or something?"

"I can see a gun. I had a strapless shoe on and it dropped right on my foot."

"You subsequently told detectives you saw a man pick it up?"

"It was the bloke that got shot. I told the coppers I reckoned he must've knocked himself — "

Gillespie couldn't help noticing that the Coroner made no inquiry as to the credibility of Dolly Brennan's evidence, or the prints on the guns, or the way he moved quickly to dismiss the ballistics report as far from conclusive. He summed up by saying, 'The testimony of Mrs Brennan adding sufficient weight to the rest of the evidence, I'm making a finding of death accidentally or otherwise by the victim's own hand.' (In a peculiar postscript to the hearing, the Coroner added to his finding, inserting, after the words, 'death by his own hand', a small pencilled arrow with the words, 'or somebody else's'.)

It was an uncomfortable afternoon and Gillespie was sweating profusely as he trudged up Bridge and Phillip Streets towards Martin Place. The sun beat down from a merciless-blue sky on the clanging of traffic and the scurry of crowds, on street-sellers with sacks full of Boronia they were arranging in green-painted jam-tins, the sticky-sweet smell curling up through the ruckus and billowing dust, and in through the transoms of the buildings hanging over.

Upstairs, Gillespie lay back in his swivel chair with his heels on the desk and his mouth hanging open, listening to the monotonous swoosh, swoosh of the metal fan on the ceiling. It was a marvellous sound, and it suited his

mood, until something more insistent than the patter of a typewriter or the burr of the distant traffic interrupted his thoughts. He dropped his feet from the desk to the floor, and picked up the telephone.

"That you, Charlie? It's me, Twiggy."

Gillespie felt his whole body stiffen. "Got yourself in a spot of bother?" he found himself saying. "How much are they asking?"

"It's nothing like that," Twiggy laughed. "I reckon you might not believe me, but I've turned a new leaf. I've got a copper coming over to see me. I saw you at the inquest ... and well, I was wondering if you'd care to come along."

Alarmed, Gillespie made his excuses. But Twiggy spoke over him.

"I've got money, I can pay."

"It's not that — " said Gillespie, then made her a promise that he came to regret.

Gillespie was marvelling sulkily to himself as he drew his gold Mustang into the mouth of a dirt track that curled along the headland. He edged his way through the underbrush, emerging in a clearing at the foot of a dune, where the carcasses of several automobiles were drawn round in a camp. Tarpaulins were strung haphazard off tailgates. Lines of damp washing were tethered between branches, or suspended off twigs. A young man in striped daks and winklepickers strummed a guitar.

"I'm looking for Twiggy," said Gillespie, idly brushing a leaf off his coat.

"Twiggy Lonragen."

But nobody was paying him any attention.

Frustrated, he turned his eyes towards the ocean lying just beyond the foot of the dune. There was a mess of rock and shingle on the far side of the bay. Beside this, was a four square cottage with a familiar-looking figure trailing towards it.

Gillespie rolled up his trousers and set out across the sand. The cottage was made of sun-shrunken wood with a sprinkling of paint flakes. It had a front veranda, with a slight forward tilt, and a smashed open front window patched with a towel. Clumps of wily nasturtiums took root at the foot of a large septic tank that filled much of the front yard.

Twiggy was waiting for them in the shadow of the screen door, dressed in a yellow-flowered sarong beneath which she was largely and unmistakably pregnant. Gillespie stepped inside. But Gus didn't seem particularly anxious to enter.

"You said you had something to tell us —" Gus started.

But Twiggy, nervous and talkative, had already begun. "There's a few things I reckon you've got to understand at the outset," she said, pacing the bare floor. "Reilly, he was into gambling and extorting and loan-sharking mostly. He took a bit from the card games and most of the SPs. Ducky was the bloke that collected his debts. Maybe some bludger's late with a payment? He sends Ducky around. Ducky, I guess he wasn't the full shilling but he wasn't that stupid. He never did anything without Reilly's say-so. Reilly was always saying how nobody could touch him without Ducky to deal with. And Ducky, he cared for nobody's interest but Reilly's."

Gus intervened, "What about the Melbourne job?"

It was obvious that Twiggy didn't really want to answer this question. "I guess you've got to understand Ducky's been in and out of gaol since he come

out of Boggo Road as a kid. He was deeply into drugs and stuff that was doing his head in. He was apt to give people the wrong impression about things. I reckon it was the quality of drugs he wasn't used to getting inside." She stopped, started again. "Anyway, Ducky gets himself banged up in Pentridge again, and I wasn't sure what to do until McPherson comes round. He says, 'I've arranged with some coppers to get Ducky sprung.' McPherson gives me some money, which I hand over to Charlie here, and Charlie agrees to look after the details."

Just then, a kettle on a gas ring fired by a cylinder started to sing. Twiggy jumped up. "Pardon," she said, and stepped into the kitchen.

"I wouldn't put too much faith in what she's saying," said Gillespie, but getting no response, stared down at his toes.

"Where were we?" said Twiggy, briskly. "Oh yeah. It never occurred to me that McPherson was setting Ducky up for any bag-o-lime funeral. Then again, I don't think about it much. I just do like I'm told. But after he's dead I start to get scared. I think to myself, 'Uh-oh, isn't this a bit strange? Paying a bloke's bail and shooting him?' Then Reilly gets his, and I can tell you, I can't see my way straight for the panic I'm in. I think you've got to understand this killing wasn't about Ducky at all. It was about somebody wanting him out of the way so they could move in."

"Maybe," said Gus.

"Of course it was McPherson did Reilly. It stands to reason. He bails Ducky out and shoots him, and then he gives Reilly what's coming and takes over his racket. You've got to understand McPherson always reckoned that Reilly was stupid, confining his trade to gambling and such. He had these ideas about getting into brothels and organising them. Reilly tells him, 'I stick

to what I know, and that's gambling.' McPherson says, 'The principle of organising the brothels is exactly the same.' But Reilly says, 'I don't want to know any more about any brothels'. McPherson, he doesn't understand the problem. Reilly was old-fashioned. He reckoned hooning was totally beneath him. He wasn't going to touch it, no matter what anybody said, or how much he was cash-strapped. Reilly says, 'I don't want to hear about it'. But McPherson won't listen to reason."

"How do I know you're not making this up?" said Gus.

Gillespie chipped in. "Yes, you haven't given us anything that counts as evidence."

Twiggy stared at them, incredulous. "Haven't you heard? McPherson's putting a gallon of petrol under Palmer Street. The coppers, they don't give a stuff. They aren't doing anything on account of his paying them not to stay focused. Ducky tried to warn Reilly. But Reilly wouldn't hear about it. He says, 'I love that bloke more than my own brother, my own family.' McPherson, well, I guess he didn't want to argue the point any further."

Gillespie was back on the beach a few minutes later, standing a little way off from the shack. Gus stood beside him, fixing his gaze out over the water. Gillespie tried to pin him with a look. "Maybe McPherson gave Twiggy the bail money. But so what? It doesn't have to mean anything."

Gus didn't say anything. Then he said, "I don't care if you paid any coppers down in Melbourne. I just want the name of the copper in Sydney that made the arrangements."

Gillespie felt his mouth quiver. "What makes you think I've got anything to tell?" Gus didn't make any reply to this. Eventually, Gillespie said, "Hang about, I think I forgot something."

Gillespie walked back to the cottage where Twiggy was still standing, watching them go. He pulled a brown envelope out of his pocket, and held it towards her.

"What's that?"

"Something belonged to Ducky. I reckon that he'd like you to have it."

Twiggy shook her head. "Keep it, Charlie."

Gillespie cleared his throat. "I appreciate your saying that. But I'd like you to take the money anyway."

"I've changed, Charlie. I don't want any part of it."

"Please. You'd be doing me a favour."

Twiggy smiled. "I can see you don't want it, Charlie. But it's yours. Put it back in your pocket."

Gillespie made a bewildered gesture. "Take it for the baby, then. Is it Ducky's?"

Twiggy let out an actual laugh. "Oh God, that'd be right. Look, I know it wasn't down to you what happened to Ducky. But you've got yourself mixed up with a terrible lot. If I was you, Charlie, I'd be watching myself." Twiggy pushed the envelope back to his chest.

Gillespie put it into his pocket and walked towards the car.

He found Gus dropped down on his haunches under a large sugar-gum at the end of the track. Head bowed, as if searching for something. Gillespie blurted out, "You don't think Johnny Warren killed Reilly."

"Warren? Oh, I reckon he's guilty enough."

"But you're thinking there's somebody else, somebody behind him."

Gus straightened up. "It doesn't matter what I think. Just what I can prove."

Gillespie laughed, though the laughter was bitter. "Here was me thinking you coppers just counted to three, made up your minds who to pick, and worked up the evidence."

"I guess keeping you shyster lawyers in business is just part of the job."

"Pretty much," said Gillespie, and laughed again, a fraction hysterically. He opened the car door and lifted his foot to clamber inside.

"I wouldn't do that," said Gus.

Gillespie paused, foot mid air, then put it back down. He walked to the rear of the car and stared down. The tires were blown out and shredded.

"Come on," said Gus, grinning boyishly now. "Let me give you a ride."

Gillespie and Gus drove awkwardly and in silence. Gillespie wound down the window and let the salt-breeze of the ocean blow over them, until the ocean disappeared and they entered an urban wasteland of factories and substations with curled-wire fences and chained-metal gates. Here, were trucks slewed belly up by the side of the road, a bombed out car, a car with its bonnet torn off, spectral warehouses open to the sky where the roof had fallen in and a shimmering 'BP' sign rotating like a radar. Gillespie was swept with relief as the landscape around him started to change, and abandoned factories gave way to crystal-glazed buildings, then just as abruptly the surge of relief spiralled down into deep guilty brooding. Sitting at the traffic lights on the corner of King Street, he finally gave in to an overwhelming compulsion and raised the subject himself. "I was there at the inquest," he started.

"Uh-huh."

"I know this might have nothing to do with anything — " he hesitated. "But do you remember the woman made the allegations in the Harry Guthrie affair?"

"Dolly Brennan. Yeah. Why?"

"It was Dolly's evidence that weighed with Coroner, and brought in the finding." Gus said nothing to this, so Gillespie plunged recklessly on. "The reason I'm mentioning this is, well, I've met Dolly before ... with Frank Tanner, at the Latin Quarter." Gus glanced at him sharply, and Gillespie was aware that he'd given up far more than he intended. "Did you know they were mates?"

Gus sat there in silence for almost a minute, his face in a constant state of agitation as if unable to fully resolve itself. Turning into King Street, he eased the unmarked to the side of the road. Gillespie scrambled out. Gus grabbed him at the elbow. "It was Tanner who arranged for the pay-off in Melbourne."

Gillespie didn't say anything, but nodded his head. He watched with a damned look his eye as the unmarked disappeared into the afternoon traffic, then he set off in the direction of the Hotel Australia.

7

THE SQUAD ROOM WITH ITS DUSTY TYPEWRITERS and rows of wooden desks was dark, except for the circle of light under which Tanner was sitting, between stacks of green files. The venetians that masked the window behind him were yanked up, and through them was the square bluish bulk of the building adjacent, and shuttered-up windows, and pieces of sky. Tanner was staring into the blades of a box fan, deep in a brown study, when Gus stepped up to him, out of the dark.

"I've got an informant that tells me you're a crook."

Hastily, Tanner began scribbling over the papers in front of him. "Who's your informant?"

"I can't tell you that."

"God-almighty, I reckon you've got a whole lot of gall, coming in here, making accusations, not giving me the name of the screwball that says so." Gus struggled to speak out some word of defiance, but Tanner, as if sensing this weakness, spread his hands in a conciliatory gesture. "Come on, lad. Why don't you tell me what's up?"

"I heard McPherson arranged O'Connor's bail, then shot him. I also heard coppers were involved."

"You mean you heard I was that copper," said Tanner. Gus glanced up in surprise. Tanner said, "So who's this informant?"

"Twiggy," said Gus, almost choking.

"Twiggy Lonrigan?" Tanner nearly laughed. "I dunno how you can take a thing she says seriously, not a single word, not for a minute. Hell." He stuck

his feet out on the speckled linoleum and stared down at the fan. "I've always had the highest regard for you, as a detective. Especially as a detective — "

"Don't say that," said Gus, the unexpected praise made his situation seem somehow more painful.

But Tanner continued, staring down at the fan, "It could be that my high regard has sometimes given rise to unreasonable expectations, but you can't blame me for trying. I'm not standing aside, watching somebody I recognise as an excellent copper flush his job down the toilet, because that's what will happen, make no mistake."

"How can you let him off like that?"

"Who?"

"McPherson. Why are you protecting him?"

"McPherson's an informant of mine. Every single case I ever did, every single thing I ever asked."

"You let him shoot O'Connor because he's a phizgig —?"

Tanner lifted his hands and rubbed his face, then rubbed his head and scalp all over. He lowered the hands, and let out a long-winded sigh. "There's an underworld in this city brimming with spivs, hoons and standover men. Sydney is a savage place, and we've got to contain that, keep the violence off the streets. Sometimes the way we do that is not very pretty. I've loaded up suspects. I've beaten informants into submission. I've made deals with crooks, I've run thieves to catch murderers and I've gunned down criminal scum in the street when I knew the case against them to be finally hopeless."

Gus fought hard to control himself. A dimness grew before his eyes. His legs felt unsteady. He walked to the door without saying a word.

Tanner called after him, "Anybody shoots O'Connor — far as I'm concerned, they're doing us a favour."

Gus swung round, punched at the door frame. "No, they're not. They're *not*."

Gus blundered his way through the garbage-strewn courtyard, thinking about the things that he ought to have said, but didn't. The stuff about how he didn't want to be a copper any more, if that's what it meant. He'd thought being a copper was about being special ... but there was nothing very special about this. He stopped on the footpath, with arms outstretched, and breathed in the air that was waxy and blurry with stars. He experienced a moment of clear emptiness. He couldn't bury this stuff any deeper. Couldn't hide it. Didn't want to. He knew that he had to seek further explanations. He knew that he had to keep control of himself if he was going to find them.

Gus angled the unmarked hard to the curb at Palmer Street, and clambered out. Up and down the footpath molls in their night attire beckoned from doorways, under the green and pink light of Japanese rice paper lanterns. Seamen and beggars were standing about, and US soldiers out of uniform, and a shambling old bloke conducting long-mumbling conversations with God. Gus walked down the rise past doors like display cases, his feet carrying him in the direction of Dolly Brennan's old house, the brothel allegedly co-owned by his old partner Harry, and shut down by Tanner in the wake of the inquiry. He wasn't much surprised when the door opened up after his third or fourth knock. Dolly tried to close it, but seemed to change her mind.

Gus said, "Twiggy sent me."

"I guess if Twiggy sent you — " said Dolly.

"Twiggy sent me."

"Well, I guess it's all right."

Gus stepped through the door and sat down on the nearest seat. He took in the zebra-striped sofa, the dolphin-shaped vases screwed to the walls, the armchairs of washable plastic upholstery in pinks and umbers, and it all came flooding back. The raids they conducted under Harry's direction, the way they made it clear to the owners and proprietors, through various methods, that the brothels had to go. He looked blankly at Dolly, and said, "Was Harry on the joke?"

Dolly wasn't exactly surprised by the question, but took a few minutes before making an answer. "Yeah, I guess you might say that's when all the trouble started, when Harry got it into his head to drive the girls out. 'Harry,' I said. 'They're just a bunch of girls trying to get along. I wouldn't wish it on them, but they got to make a living somehow. Why is it always the women that are taking the knock?' But Harry wouldn't hear me. He says, 'It's not up to me to decide.' It was like all the years we were friends went for nothing." Dolly lit a cigarette before going on. "I knew there was this other mob I could go and see, blokes with the where with all to fix things. I thought they'd be reasonable. They knew I had problems — "

Dolly's problem was that she was addicted to gambling — all the money she ever made went straight through the tables. But Gus didn't say anything. Just let her speak, and Dolly kept talking, telling the story at her own easy pace.

"It was around this time that a good friend of mine started buying up the houses. Harry, he's chasing everybody around, and my friend Joe Borg's

buying up the empties, quiet-like, one at a time, almost as quickly as Harry can close them. I tell you, there were times I almost split my sides laughing. I guess there are hard things that are said about Joe, but he always looks after his girls, and takes a real pride in the places they work. He's always coming round with his hammer and saw, tinkering with downpipes, making sure the girls don't get roughed up by the difficult customers. He's been doing real well for himself, and that's why there's grief."

"Let's stick to Harry," said Gus, bringing her back to the matter at hand.

"Yeah, Harry," said Dolly in a tired desperate way, then burst out, "Oh God, it was me set Harry up, me all along. But the things that I said ... I never thought that they'd actually harm him. He only had to listen to reason." Gus thought how Harry had lost everything he cared about. First his badge, then his wife and the kids. He thought about the strife that was heaped on him, and his feelings must have showed, because Dolly said, "Stop looking at me. Stop it. Just stop."

"But you killed him," said Gus.

"Harry didn't give me any choice."

"But you killed him. Just as sure as you held the gun to his head."

"I didn't mean it," said Dolly, dropping her eyes, and staring down at her hands. Then added tonelessly, without any expression, "Yeah, and now they're going to kill me."

Gus watched Dolly's cigarette burn up between her fingers, untouched. He said, "Did McPherson shoot O'Connor?"

"I dunno who shot Ducky. Just what I had to say. But they were back here again in less than a month. There's never any end to it. Every other week

they're sending somebody around, splashing a bit of the old petrol about, trying to throw a scare into somebody or other."

"This other mob. Who are they?"

"They're greedy and scary, that's who they are."

"But who are they?" Gus urged.

He tried pressing Dolly for names, but the harder he pushed, the harder it got. Eventually, he got up and walked to the door. "Tell me about Harry," he said, fingering his hat.

Dolly seemed to consider the matter for several seconds. "I reckon Harry didn't understand what was going on around him. He didn't know what hit him, even when it did."

Gus slipped quietly out of Palmer Street, and turned his feet in the direction of the Harbour. There was somebody else he had to see, somebody he was certain could tie things together. He scaled some fence palings, swung a left down a back alley and paused. Above him was a bright-painted sign that said, 'Bogle Bros Auto Electric'. He walked straight between the petrol pumps and up to the counter. Tommy grinned at Gus, tugging his crotch. He tossed a bunch of used docketts into the air, then turned round and ran — leaving a shower of white squares fluttering in a spiral behind him.

Gus jumped the counter, tore through the packing crates, sent canisters flying. He lunged at the door to the garbage room, as a great pile of empty oil drums came tumbling down.

"Come out, Tommy! Don't be a dog!"

There was silence. Gus heard the rear door bang shut, followed by the sound of a motorbike revving out in the alley. He stumbled into the back lane, grabbed Tommy by the scruff of his leathers, as his blue Kawasaki shot out between his legs, and spun to the ground. Gus hauled him up, slammed him back into the brickwork.

"There's a whole pile of shit against you."

"That's all you've got? You've got nothing."

"I guess then, you'll get banged up for nothing."

Gus threw a clenched fist into Tommy's ribcage, sending him back against several stacked crates of garbage. Tommy cowered among the soup cans and lettuce leaves. His eyeballs lay back in their sockets, watchful and flickering.

"I've been belted before this."

"Is that a fact?"

Gus pulled out his service revolver and popped open the cylinder, showing the full round of green-metal bullets inside. He closed it, stuck the gun to Tommy's face.

"You wouldn't dare," said Tommy.

Gus pushed the gun a little closer. "I know you gave Warren the contract on Reilly and I want you to tell me who was doing the asking."

Tommy said nothing at first, but a few minutes later he started to squeal. "I've got orders to get Reilly the bag-o-lime funeral. I reckoned I was a little too well known to do it myself, so I thought, 'Johnny Warren. He hates Reilly's guts'. So I went and talked to Johnny about it. Only it don't take much talking. Johnny, he's so mad at Reilly that he doesn't think much about who's doing the asking."

"Ernie Chubb?"

"Reilly got suspicious and sicked Ernie onto me. I just told Johnny that Chubb was onto him, and he went out and shot him."

"What happened to Warren?"

"He got what was coming."

"What happened to Warren?"

"Johnny saw me at a meeting, along with some others at South Sydney Juniors. He'd been talking up all this underworld takeover bulls, and acting real strange. I guess everybody decided it'd be safer to whack him. Unfortunately, his missus also got knocked in the process."

"Who put you up to it?"

"I dunno."

Gus raised the gun and swiped Tommy with the butt.

"There was no call for that. I answered you nicely," said Tommy.

"Who are they?"

"Please. You dunno what they're like."

"Is it McPherson?"

Tommy said nothing.

"Who then?"

"These blokes, they're worse than McPherson."

"I can protect you."

"Sure."

"The police can protect you."

Tommy burst into a peel of hysterical laughter. "Like they looked after Twiggy?"

"What about Twiggy?"

Tommy said nothing.

"What about Twiggy?"

Gus fired the gun an inch off Tommy's temple. It gave a small orange spurt, then a cloud of blue cordite floated up through the air. Tommy's cheek was grazed, and his hair was singed black where the gunpowder burned through. He blinked, spat out a tooth. "I reckon you better go and see Twiggy again. Then maybe you'll understand what I'm saying."

Gus jumped into the unmarked, and watched the needle dance around the dial. He skidded to a halt on the headland and blundered along the track, the twirling beam of his torch picking out wildlife. Here, a dog barked. There, a ringtail possum hung suspended from a tree. Moths fluttered and stirred. Plants gleamed green between cavities of blackness. His eyes picked out the darker form of the cottage beneath the dark of the rocks. It took a moment for the shapes to register, but then he saw the door hanging open, the red-and-white bath towel floating in the breeze of the smashed-open front window.

Gus crept inside. His pupils dilated in the darkness and soon he made out the huddled shapes on the floor. He fell to his knees, heart bumping wildly against the walls of his chest. He swung the flashlight. Twiggy lay curled in a beam of bright dust specks. Beside her was some heroin in a needle and a bottle of Drano on a purple sarong.

He felt her wrist and neck. There wasn't a pulse. There was nothing. He took back his hand, and backed away.

Gus couldn't remember the hour, the minute, or how fast he was travelling. He drove on through empty streets until another car's headlights

expanded in his rear-vision mirror, and he was no longer alone. A swirl like stars burned low to the horizon. Then the city materialised in a blinding orange glare. He swung right from Taylor Square, and was turning into Oxford Street, when the smoke floating almost invisibly through the night air began filling his lungs.

Crowds were gathered on the footpaths of Palmer Street, clustering in huddles of three and four, hanging off iron-lace balconies, out third-storey windows. Gus pushed through them, prying people apart with the flat of his hands. He saw fire trucks slewed across the footpath, sirens whooping and churning, brigades with shinning buttons, running hoses, surging water. He saw great whorls of smoke roiling out of top-storey windows, bright orange flames fizzling on electrical wires.

Dolly was running up and down the footpath. "They'd never have tried it, not in the old days! They'd never have dared!"

Gus drifted through the waves of false memory. Feeling them, as if everything was happening all over again, but this time for the first time ... this time for real. He covered one whole wall of the squad room with lines and arrows. Conspiracy, coincidence, frayed ends, dead ends. Plots untangling in different directions. Here was everything he knew about McPherson: a Balmain boy, the son of a perennially employed wharfie, grown up in a back slum, fly-filled and tumbledown, sleeping six to a room. He got his first conviction, age eight, for pilfering, then went on to manage the large-scale thieving of cargo by organised gangs on the waterfront. He totalled seventy-three arrests, but only five of them since the war. His last conviction was in

1949, when some bright spark nabbed him for possession of a starting pistol. His last arrest was in 1950, for the murder of a dock worker and habitual criminal on the testimony of several eyewitnesses who subsequently denied everything when the case came to trial. He got out more files. They didn't say much, except that McPherson hadn't seen the inside of a gaol cell since 1951. Several big pushes had been made against him, but each time a phizgig was turned he wound up missing or dead. He remembered a story ...

Fact: In March 1960, Allan announces the theft of highly secret police documents from the monthly meeting of senior offices, containing evidence that a rival criminal had pimped McPherson to the cops. Hours later a copy of the informant's mugshot together with a confidential police report was plastered above the men's urinal of every flophouse and gaming hell in the town.

Fact: Ducky O'Connor's greatest asset was his reputation for violence. He had a talent for killing people, often spectacularly, and leaving no trace. He was Dick Reilly's lucky charm. Nobody could get Reilly without fearing Ducky would find them. Or was psycho enough to die in the attempt.

Fact: Ernie Chubb was Reilly's loyal offsider since Reilly gave him a job when he got out of the Bay. Chubb was the only person Reilly trusted after O'Connor was shot. Only three weeks later Chubb winds up riddled with bullets on the steps of his house.

Fact: There'd been a bunch of gangland shootings. O'Connor and Chubb were just the tail end. There was Pretty Boy Walker, killed with an Owen submachine gun. Jackie Hodder, knifed at a dancehall in Paddo. Jackie Steele, with sixty slugs cut out of him. There was Barney Ryan, Charlie Bourke, and Graham Moffitt with a car bomb planted under his Holden utility. With

clarity of hindsight, the raid on the Kellett Club oddly coincided with the outbreak of violence and its steady escalation.

Hypothesis: McPherson gets O'Connor out of Pentridge and sets him up for a fall, leaving Reilly standing naked. McPherson solicits Tommy to hire Warren to shoot Reilly, and mops up behind him.

Hypothesis: McPherson has to be the most powerful criminal in Sydney. He must be, because all of his enemies have already been eliminated. Or had 'They'?

He thought of Dolly Brennan. 'They're greedy.'

He thought of Tommy Bogle. 'They scare me.'

There were certain things that could not be accounted for.

Question: Nobody could operate on that scale without insider protection.

Who are 'They'?

Gus went back to the files and the wall charts. He didn't need to look at the name and signature of the arresting officer in every single instance. He knew who 'They' were.

Gus saw a great deal now ... and all of it clearly, as if for the very first time. Still, as each idea occurred to him and he felt it, he didn't feel it was something that was new to him, but something that he'd known all along. He sat there, wrapped in the stillness, the creaking and groaning of downpipes soft in his ears. He went over his mistakes. Some of them made him cringe. Others impacted so painfully he was forced to abandon feeling altogether. He would stay calm. He would not try to hide. He would confront everything.

He knew the signs had always been there, they couldn't have shone clearer. The truth was that he didn't want to see them, hear them, do anything about them. He had wanted to believe there were other explanations.

Gradually, as the night wore on, Gus came to understand some much deeper problems that had been afflicting him. Knowing that even as all of his suspicions were being proved, even as his direct physical knowledge of the evidence piled up, still, even then, he was hoping to be proved wrong. He thought a lot about Tanner. Hours ticked by before he finally confronted the worst — that, despite everything, he was a little in awe of the bloke.

The watchful stars blinked down through the window. The pearl shavings of the moon floated down the night sky. He refused to weep. Just sat there, dry-eyed and peering in the semidarkness, under the soft glow of a solitary lamp, and did not see the end of the coming events.

GILLESPIE STOOD MANFULLY AT THE LONG BAR OF THE HOTEL AUSTRALIA until his skin-full of Bells got the better of him. He was trying hard to forget that he was in any way related to the dubious money trails surrounding the case, or the more dubious ends that had come the way of both his former clients. By the end of his fifth drink, he was almost able to see himself as the decent-stalwart-upright-youngish lawyer that he was, the fresh-faced young boy from the back slums, who'd made his own way in the world through his effort and intelligence. He was feeling more like himself again when his good friend George Cubitt walked up to the bar.

Cubitt's face held a pleasant pinkness, his nose scrunching and sweating beneath round horn-rimmed goggles. "Well, I reckon we've done it," he said, by way of greeting. "Taken the wind out of poor Renshaw's sails. Out there, the voters are saying a bloke that can't get his own ducks in a row, can't run a government." Cubitt plunged into a stream of political chatter, before his eyes came to rest on Gillespie, faintly amused. "You're looking a touch under the weather. Just like you killed somebody." Gillespie started in a manner that made Cubitt laugh. "Listen, old man, why don't we hop off to the 33 this evening?"

"33?" said Gillespie, taken unawares.

"Haven't you been there? Where have you been?" Cubitt drew back his eyes so they took in the rest of the bar. "It's fronted by some two-bit pommy with a gambling habit called Michael Moylan."

Cubitt dragged Gillespie in a taxi down Oxford Street, alighting outside a dingy-looking door, set back between brass-shuttered shop windows. Cubitt

rang the bell, a peephole swung open, and the door was released. Gillespie followed Cubitt as he mounted the stairs, and swept through the puce-coloured curtains that divided the first-storey landing from the rest of the club. Inside was a series of mirrored rooms run together, articulated with glazed arches and pink chandeliers. Swivel-hipped waiters wove through the crowd with trays of bright cocktails. Cones of white light shone down on clusters of tables. From everywhere came the rustle of banknotes and click of metal balls across chromium-edged wheels.

Cubitt was talking all the while, "Baccarat is dead, Charlie. There aren't going to be any more baccarat clubs like Reilly had. Now there's manila and blackjack, kino and fantan — " He came to a halt before a giant roulette wheel that covered the span of one room. "Just tell me how they got that one through customs," he said, genuinely impressed. "Of course, they're just starting out in a small way, but I'm told the whole shebang will be regularised after the election. Speak of the devil," he added, nodding at the bandstand, where a bright-cheeked man in full evening regalia was swapping gags with the singer. "Mick Moylan. They say he was once partner to Johnny Warren, the gunman who shot Reilly. Let me introduce you."

"I don't want to get involved."

"Of course you're involved. I mean, if you hadn't floated the matter in the first instance — "

"Isn't he dangerous?"

"Moylan, dangerous?" said Cubitt, aghast.

"Well, nobody could've got a foot into something like this, when Reilly was around."

Cubitt laughed, "But Moylan's a drunkard! Why, if it was that easy to get to Number One I'd have done it myself."

Cubitt grabbed Gillespie by the cuff. But Gillespie shook him off. "I need some fresh air," he said, and plunged abruptly onto the footpath again, standing by the edge of the road, with the traffic shooting past.

Mercury lights shone at fifty-yard intervals down the length of the street. Above them a bright neon sign saying 'We Buy Sell & Exchange Anything' dazzled into the night. Gillespie stood there, gasping for oxygen, then without pausing to consider the consequence went back inside. He found the manager's office easily enough. It had a sign that said 'Private' and 'Michael Moylan — Manager' in white on black plastic. He knocked, but the door gave way under his hand. Inside, the room was low and square like the backstage of a theatre, with an electric fan burrowing into the air from the top of a filing cabinet. A green metal safe was set back in the corner, with the door gaping open. In front of it, Lennie McPherson was flicking through masses of shabby-looking banknotes.

"Who the hell are you?"

Gillespie tried to stammer something, but speech seemed to fail him.

"Tommy, who's this silly-looking cunt you let into my office?"

"I dunno," said Tommy.

Gillespie attempted a friendly grin, but Tommy wasn't grinning. He brought out a clenched fist, and landed his blow square to Gillespie's chin. Gillespie staggered backwards, hitting the wall with such force that he seemed to hang there, eyes flung wide, fingers extended, flat like a picture. He slipped down an inch or so, then crumpled right over, rubbing his fingers along the length of his jaw.

A voice came from behind. "What are you doing?"

Suddenly Tanner was standing in the doorway, in front of the light. Gillespie eyed him with a deep sinking feeling, three heartbeats from panic.

"I was just getting rid of the bloke," said McPherson, defensive.

"Well, this isn't some bloke. Charlie's the lawyer who's been helping me out. Isn't that right, Charlie?"

Gillespie, almost against his will, began to nod back. "I was just poking around, introducing myself. I guess I'd better be on my way, then."

"You do that," said Tanner.

Gillespie stumbled out the side door into the alley adjacent.

Outside, the houses along the alleyway were all shuttered up. Here and there, a chink of yellow light shone through, drawing him along. Gillespie was shaking all over by the time he reached the Oxford Street intersection and stood there a moment, inhaling lung-fulls of complicated air. Strange faces stepped towards him out of the night. He saw soot-faced sailors, beggars with swollen-toothless gums, a drag queen with a face like an Uki-yo courtesan, and a wiry-haired bloke on a puddle of cardboard, waving a chair leg like a Chungara spirit stick.

Gillespie didn't notice the faces disappear as he staggered into Hyde Park. He didn't notice anything much until he blundered out the far side, and onto the road. Cars whooshed passed him out of the gloaming.

"Psst! Charlie! What are you doing there? Come here!"

Gillespie stared at the fat figure in a floppy fedora, reclining against the zebra-striped upholstery of a convertible white Mustang. "Sammy," he said gladly, staggering forward.

"Want a drink? Sure look like you could use one."

Gillespie suspected the best thing to do might be to get well and truly soaked. He climbed into the Mustang and circled the city streets before alighting with Sammy at the door of the Latin Quarter.

"I'm opening again in the next couple of weeks, calling it the Cheetah Room," said Sammy, as he switched on the lights. Gillespie took in the clouds of white building dust, the smattering of cigarette butts, and the dank smell from a burst main in the kitchen, before his eyes alighted on Sammy again, squinting at him in the unaccustomed brightness. Sammy was dressed in a lemon-checked sports coat, with a silk shirt of a slightly darker yellow hue. He righted an upturned chair, and set a bottle on the table between them. "Business was never so good after Ducky got shot."

"Why did you leave in such a hurry?"

"They told me I had to."

"Who told you?"

"They did," said Sammy, lifting his chin, as if mulling over something important he wanted to say.

Gillespie spoke first. "I saw you, the night Ducky got shot. The coppers were giving you a regular walloping. I didn't think it would do any good. Me getting involved, I mean," he added, then flushed, embarrassed by his admission.

Sammy let out a melancholy laugh. "No worries. It was me, I would've run a mile also." Then Sammy got on with what he had been intending to say. "I guess you've got to understand I've been paying these blokes for a very long time, which I don't mind, so long as they don't make any trouble for me. Of course, used to be that I did mind, way back when I couldn't afford the

sorts of sums they were asking. Back then, it wasn't pleasant, but now I can afford to pay, and I do."

Gillespie said, "Organising something like that, Lennie McPherson. He must be bigger than the New South Wales Police Force."

"You reckon this is McPherson I'm talking about?" said Sammy, mingling fear with astonishment. "It's Tanner who's been organising things in this town and has done for years. It was Tanner arranged for Reilly to get shot. It was Tanner shot Ducky. God help me, I was standing right at his elbow, bringing some fresh jugs of beer to the table, and he comes from behind. He hardly didn't speak to the bloke. He just goes, 'Here's yours — ' and sticks a gun to his head." Sammy lifted his face, wane and tear-streaked in the brightness. "There's nothing that bloke wouldn't do. There's nobody bigger than the New South Wales Police."

Gillespie leapt up in a frenzy and stalked into the night. He was frightened and shocked, but he wasn't so shocked he was unable to think first of himself. He knew that he'd blundered very badly, and soon fell to wondering if he could make himself square. His one great object should be to conciliate with Tanner. With this in mind, he found himself mounting the stairs of the 33 Club once more, entering the gaming room with a strong sense of entering something so dark and so dangerous that he wanted to run. But Tanner had already seen him and was moving towards him.

"I reckon there might be a problem," Gillespie started, with an abrupt aimless gesture, before plunging on. "I ran into your mate Gus Finlay a few hours ago, and I'm afraid that I might've cocked up. It wasn't anything I said,

he simply jumped to it. I'm worried that he's taking things the wrong way, and might make some trouble — " Gillespie came gradually to a halt, but Tanner didn't respond in the way he'd expected. There was no angry flare, no burst of deadly threats, only absolute blankness. "It wasn't my fault," Gillespie added. "I thought he was on-side."

After a minute, Tanner broke out of the trance he was in. He fixed him with a look. "I reckon I can set everything straight. But I need to know, Charlie. Are you fully with me on this?"

Gillespie hesitated, imagining all sorts of evil, then he shook his head twice, nodded three times, leaving Tanner to take away whatever answer he pleased.

A drinks tray went by. Gillespie deftly took a glass and emptied it, before turning back to face Tanner, except Moylan was standing there in his place. Moylan winked at him cock-eyed, cheeks bursting with colour, then swept out a hand to indicate a path, and Gillespie set himself dutifully in Moylan's wake, winding through the tables, coming to a halt before the giant roulette wheel, with a crowd gathering round. Moylan spun the wheel hard, sending the small marble skittering along the chromium ridges over the numbers. It bounced a few times, and fell in with a click. And then the croupier was raking up a flurry of polychrome banknotes, adding three wads of the bright stuff from under the table. Gillespie fanned the money in his hands. It seemed to his drink-fuddled mind that the banknotes were multiplying, transforming themselves into molecules of pure colour. They swirled about the ceiling in a dazzling display, before raining down on the cut cards and the chromium-edged wheels, sticking to the palm fronds and the

shimmering lights, making them a world, within a world, where nothing could touch them.

Gillespie floated up through the tumbled clouds of unconscious and lay for a moment on the flat of his bed, trying to rearrange his thoughts, make some adjustments. After the shocks and upheavals of the previous night he had expected something cataclysmic to happen, but now the sun shone in through his window, casting its net of pleasantness over the world, he was conscious only of a sense of anticlimax — nothing had changed, and there was no tangible sign that things wouldn't go on as they'd gone on before. He showered and shaved, and raked a comb through his hair. He swallowed his coffee, and his brains seemed to brighten. He left his wife on the doorstep, and swerved his way through the late morning traffic towards CIB.

Gillespie drew his car into the curb and stood on the footpath, rolling his shoulders, swinging his gaze over the iron-barred brickwork. He nodded at the duty sergeant as he entered the building, following him down a tangle of corridors littered with burnt matchsticks and stained-yellow fag ends. He sat down on a chair of washable plastic upholstery, and waited. Hearing only the clatter of typewriters, the boots of the duty sergeant moving sullenly off, and dimly, the distant anguished burr of the city beyond the window, until a noise like a shot charge shattered everything into silence.

Gillespie clambered to his feet and ran down the hall. He burst through the door to the Gents washroom, eyes swinging wildly over the scene.

Gus was blasted back against the white-tiled wall, his spectacles disentangled from one ear and cocked off to one side. Tanner was standing

under a ganglia of downpipes at the foot of the corpse, a gun slipping from his grasp, clattering to the shiny tiled floor. He looked down as if in painful curiosity at the hand that had fired the revolver, and saw the hand tremble, as if it wasn't any part of him. His upper lip inflated as he attempted to bring himself under control. His mouth worked. He said, "He knocked himself. He didn't have to do it."

Looking back, it would always seem to Gillespie that he had never had a choice, that he could never be other than what he is, do other than what he did. Standing there, among the steel splashbacks and glimmering-metal basins, with endlessly repeating wall mirrors pressing the carnage against him from every direction, he felt only a deep and sudden tiredness well up inside. He leveled his eyes, held his voice steady, and said, "No, I guess not."

Vice King
BLOWN UP!

BOMB RIPS TRUCK APART

A man described by police as Sydney's Vice King died when a bomb ripped his utility truck apart today.

He was shockingly injured when the bomb exploded as he switched on the truck's ignition.

He died soon afterwards at St Vincent's Hospital.

The cabin of the utility truck was burnt out.

The explosion was so fierce that it shattered the windows of dozens of houses.

A neighbour said: "I heard a tremendous roar.

"The whole house shook. The windows rattled and I thought it must be an earthquake.

"I ran out and saw the utility in flames.

"It was shocking."

SYDNEY WOMAN MARKED TO DIE

A woman will be the next one to follow vice king Joe Borg to the grave unless police can quickly stop the long awaited war for control of the prostitution racket.

Her death would give a virtual monopoly of the area to one of the remaining vice syndicates — the one that currently carries the most muscle.

This group is said to have the backing of the worst villain in Sydney's criminal history — a man who though never convicted has been named in connection with upwards of a dozen gang murders.

HALF A MILLION A YEAR

It is said that this man keeps a team of thugs on call at a nearby hotel to attend to any trouble at the brothels he supports.

However, the woman vice leader will not be an easy mark for underworld killers. She is as tough as they come.

Up from the streets herself, she will not easily surrender her share of the profits. The money is too big.

Meanwhile, the Askin Government continues to dither about doing anything to put them out of business. The killing is also likely to continue. And the decent citizens of the area will continue to live in fear and disgust of the things that happen daily around them.

Vice King's
\$250,000
- It all goes to the
Dog's Home

Vice king Joe Borg has left his entire fortune — about \$250,000 — to the R.S.P.C.A.

Borg, who could barely write his own name when he arrived from Malta 15 years ago, amassed his fortune from prostitution.

In his bizarre will he has ordered that Caesar his Alsatian dog, and his four cats should be provided for "For the rest of their days".

The man, an animal lover, told friends "A dog's a man's best friend. I don't trust human beings."

"I suppose there'll be a lot of moaning but I know Caesar will be well looked after at the Dog's Home.

Told of the will yesterday, the wife of the State President of the R.S.C.P.A. said "I just can't believe it. This is a wonderful surprise."

ARSON

7th HOUSE

BURNS IN
VICE WAR

The seventh fire in three months in East Sydney's Red Light area today destroyed an unoccupied home once owned by the Sydney vice king killed last week.

It was the third fire in the district this week and the third of the former crime boss's buildings to be set alight.

Detectives are convinced they are the result of criminals fighting for control of the vice empire in the area.

Prostitutes told police weeks ago a war was on between criminal factions out for revenge.

A senior police officer said today, "We have received certain information about what is going on at East Sydney.

"Well known and dangerous criminals have been named.

"Threats and counter-threats have been made.

"We know of men in the rackets being beaten up. Prostitutes have also been assaulted."

The State President of the R.S.P.C.A. was shocked when told of the latest fire. "Oh no," he said. "Not another one."

TOP GUN

The Man Behind Sydney's Murder Inc

12 EXECUTED

Sydney's overlord of crime, the city's top gun, enjoys amazing immunity from the law.

He has personally killed or ordered the killing of more than a dozen men who were in his way.

Since Dick Reilly was blasted to death at Double Bay last year he is the undisputed leader of the crime kings.

Between them they take more than \$1 million a year out of their extortion racket.

Police seem to be helpless when it comes to Mr Big.

He can be seen in the striptease joints and nightclubs almost any night surrounded by armed lieutenants and bodyguards.

Bullet Proof

Police look with some admiration at his suburban home, which is a virtual bomb-proof residential fortress against new and old enemies.

It has bulletproof windows and a magic-eye camera, which photographs anybody outside the front gate.

Savage dogs are in the grounds at night.

Police say that to get evidence against Mr Big and his rivals is next to impossible because his victims won't talk.

Merciless

If they do they can expect a merciless bashing or death.

Mr Big himself it is known pays somebody very well for protection. And the payments are not paid in the crime world.

Memo, Mr Askin

The men who control organised crime in Sydney are widely known.

The *Daily Mirror* knows the names and can supply them.

Exclusive Interview!

Lennie McPherson says:

I'M NOT MR. BIG

In an exclusive interview with the 'Sunday Telegraph' yesterday Lennie McPherson emphatically denied he was "Mr. Big."

"I am full to my back teeth with my name being bandied about as some kind of crime czar, and also of two-bit hoodlums trying to take advantage of it."

Mr McPherson, 47, is a solidly built man with dark wavy hair.

He came to see me by appointment, wearing a neatly tailored grey suit and soft black hat.

"HOUNDED BY POLICE"

Mr McPherson said he now had reason to believe he was the man people were calling "Mr. Big".

"I am no Mr. Big nor do I know any Mr Big," he said.

"I do not know of any organised crime.

"I wouldn't even know of 12 people who have been murdered."

Mr McPherson said he had been hounded by police over the years, not protected by them.

Mr McPherson then picked up his black hat and left, saying: "I've got some work to do."

ASKIN WINS

The Askin Government crushingly defeated Labor in yesterday's State Election. It won at least five seats and will increase its majority from six to at least 13.

Full Report, Page 2

LANDSLIDE WIN TO ASKIN GOVERNMENT

The Premier Mr Askin said last night:

"This is a sweeping victory for the Government.

"I think we will hold all our seats and could gain six.

"I did not make any idle promises like Mr Renshaw.

"Mr Renshaw said he would win 19 seats and he has not won one."

Shortly before midnight, the Opposition Leader, Mr Renshaw, conceded defeat.

He said: "It is apparent the Government has been returned with an increased majority."

A Labor spokesman, Mr N.J. Mannix, former Minister for Justice, said that the indications were that it would take Labor a long time to get back into office.

\$250 REWARD

FOR 'JOE'

'Joe Smith,' mystery witness at the hearing of murder conspiracy charges, has been paid a reward of \$250 by the Askin Government.

Acting Supt. Frank Tanner yesterday handed 'Joe' the money in \$20 and \$10 bills.

It is believed he telephoned the superintendent of a mental hospital where 'Joe' had been a voluntary patient for the past five weeks, asking that 'Joe' call at C.I.B.

UNDER WRAPS

Last night 'Joe' told me of his visit and the payment of \$250.

"Cop this," said 'Joe'.

"I came forward and spilt my guts, I told the cops everything ...

"I did everything they asked me to and all I get is a lousy 250 smackers.

"The only reason I came forward was for the money.

"What a mug I was.

"I've lost my home and my family. I'm living in fear of my life, my wife has left me.

"And all for \$250.

"I was told by the Ds I was the first ever to come forward in response to a reward. I bet I'll be the last."

'Joe' told me he had planned to get out of New South Wales and try and start a new life with the reward money.

"THE DRUM"

"What can I do with 250 bucks? I can't go to Manly on that," he said.

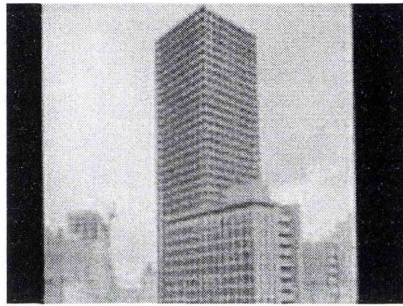
'Joe' said he had signed himself into a mental hospital five weeks ago because he felt he was "cracking" under the worry and strain.

He said he was under remand on a car stealing charge — "but I was framed for this one."

"If I go to gaol I'll get mine inside," he added.

"I've got the drum that the boys reckon I was the one that knocked off Dick Reilly.

"If I'm lucky enough to keep out of gaol then I'll get a bullet between the eyes for sure."



Epilogue

PREMIER BOB ASKIN STOOD ON THE SEVENTH FLOOR of the Premier's Wing of the State Office Block, staring at the fast-rising city beyond the window, in a way that caused Norman Allan to glance up with a worrying frown.

"There's that unfortunate incident of the young copper who knocked himself," he said, attempting to draw Askin back into the room and the conversation they were having. "Looks like he got himself in with very a bad lot, and didn't know how to get out."

"Only takes a few bad apples," said Askin, turning back to his desk with the abstracted air of somebody having their chain of thought broken.

Allan pressed on. "Pity. I knew his father once. Passed away suddenly after the war. A good thing it was too. I wouldn't have wanted him going through something like this."

"Quite right, too."

"I reckon it would've killed him. Dicky heart." Allan tapped at his chest with a stubby finger. "Luckily for us, there was this lawyer chap there. It seems he was going to represent the lad when he was brought up on charges. I guess when the moment came it was too much for the boy. It seems the lawyer-bloke witnessed the whole thing. Name of Gillespie," he added, by way of explanation.

"Charlie Gillespie?" said Askin, genuinely surprised. "Well, you've got nothing to worry about. Charlie's a good sort of bloke. Won't mess you about. I'm thinking of running him on our side come next election."

Allan digested this detail, and moved on. "This crime thing that Labor mob have been stirring up in the papers — "

"They got down in the gutter in their wrecker's role — " said Askin.

"Well, I reckon you showed them," said Allan, but Askin wasn't paying attention.

"I'll fight them again if I've got to."

"I still reckon you showed them," Allan insisted, "and they're still down in the gutter, wallowing."

Askin glanced up, eyes expanding slightly as if he was seeing Allan for the very first time. Encouraged, Allan ventured his toe over the edge of an abyss. "There's a few other things I've been wanting to talk to you about. First up, I guess you've got to understand that the force has long been in the business of managing soft crime. Mind you, these aren't actual crimes I'm talking about. They're social offences, betting and whatnot. Offences that in the interests of good police work and a pragmatic approach to the taxpayer dollar, it's long been our business to tolerate. Give the go-ahead to certain approved groups, in exchange for a certain amount of order and various, um ... other benefits that flow on through the system."

"The people don't want a clean Police Force. They want results."

Allan began to relax. "I guess I should add that there's lots of people — respectable people — who would feel very well disposed for the granting of such concessions, and willing to show their appreciation in a more organised fashion than has been done in the past. They're small business folk, really ... "

Allan didn't say another word. He didn't see the need. But he kept his eyes on Askin's face. It seemed to be drifting away from him, and the conversation they'd been having, as if he wasn't listening any more, but was waiting for something, an answer, perhaps, out there, in the glitter and flash of the burgeoning metropolis beneath the window.

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During the past five years I have read numerous books, magazines and newspapers as background research for the novel, including everything from the *Winner's Guide to Casino Gambling* to the *Handbook of Firearms*. The following were specifically important as background on the historical period in which the novel is set or to the shaping of the actual story.

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