
Submitted in fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy.

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Swinburne University of Technology.
Faculty of Life and Social Sciences.
April 2014.
THE NIGHT-SHIFT ENDING

W. GERRIT Bos

A NOVEL ACCOMPANIED BY AN EXEGESIS.
ABSTRACT.
This combined, non-traditional PhD project, “‘The Night-shift Ending: a novel’ accompanied by an exegesis”, seeks both to investigate and deconstruct many common assumptions about the writing process, the writing industry and the problems which come with success in the publishing and associated industries.

A postmodern take on the myth of Hercules, my artefact ‘The Night-shift Ending’ is a novel about two aspiring artists, Stephen Murray and Sylvia Thomas. An atypical ‘Artist as hero’ piece (Beebe, 1964: v), it follows their early careers as one, a struggling writer, and the other, a struggling painter, both attempt to establish themselves as self-sufficient and successful artists in the Melbourne area. By surveying and examining the contemporary Australian art world as well as its culture industry, it provides insights into the goings on of that world, particularly offering one who is not familiar with it a rewarding glimpse into that world. And it is that glimpse into the art world which I anticipated and saw as the purpose of undertaking this PhD project and which is part of my contribution to knowledge.

For the purposes of this degree, my artefact is accompanied by an exegesis, ‘A Reflection on Praxis: One Writer’s Journey from Practice to Praxis’. As such, it provides a scholarly commentary and a reflection upon the writing method and the praxis both discovered as well as utilised in the production of that novel.

In the practice-led research model, an exegesis can address a research question; it can also elucidate a concept. The purpose of my exegesis was to present a ‘critical explanation or interpretation’ (Delbridge & Bernard, 1994: 327) of ‘The Night-shift Ending’. In so doing, I interrogate my own writing method in order to discover how that which was once just a process can in fact become one’s praxis. The result I found was that this can only be achieved through hard work, perseverance and by the relinquishing of the preconceived notions that one may have had about oneself qua author before one undertaking a project as large as a literary novel. All this, I discovered, must be carried out so that one can truly achieve or at least strive for excellence in one’s work, which is the obvious
goal of any author as opposed to one who aims merely to be simply another writer.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS & DECLARATION BY CANDIDATE.

Acknowledgements:
My primary and largest debt of gratitude and thanks goes to my parents and to my extended family for their support and for their patience throughout the duration of my candidature and to my principal co-ordinating PhD supervisor Associate Professor Dominique Hecq for all of her hard work and assistance – Bedankt! – not to mention my associate supervisor Associate Professor Stephen Theiler for his meticulous feedback and encouragement as well as the wider Swinburne research community for the help that they accorded me as a PhD candidate.
Declaration by Candidate:
I certify that this thesis, entitled “The Night-shift Ending: a novel’ accompanied by an exegesis” submitted for the degree of PhD contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma; to the best of my knowledge contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; and is not based on joint research or publications.

Full name: Gerrit Wouter Bos.

Signed: __________________________.

Date: /04/2014.
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* * * * *
1. Preface to PhD.
’Hercules was wandering one day, lost in a day-dream … While he pondered over thoughts prompted by the conflict of good and evil within him, he saw suddenly a wondrous vision. Two women came toward him, both tall and uncommon in appearance …

The latter ran quickly to Hercules and commenced to spread before his inexperienced judgement all the allurements which physical delights can offer, if only (he) would accept her invitation to accompany her she would, said she, guard him from every harsh and unlovely thing, and would assure him all that his heart could wish.

"And by what name must I call thee, lady?" asked Hercules. "My friends call me 'Happiness'," was the reply; "but those who hate me call me 'Vice'."

Meantime the second maiden had approached and it was now her turn to speak. She spoke in low and sweet tones as one who was not a stranger … She was confident, she said, that he was destined to achieve greatness, but she warned him that the path (was) not an easy one, and that no great prize is to be won without effort and self-denial.

The first maiden now broke in scoffingly: "See," she cried, "how uninviting is the road which she would have you tread…1"

Using the above excerpt as its point of departure, ‘The Night-shift Ending’ is a novel about two aspiring artists, Stephen Murray and Sylvia Thomas. It is accompanied by an exegesis, whose title is ‘A Reflection on Praxis: One Writer’s Journey from Practice to Praxis’, and which provides a scholarly commentary and, as the title would suggest, a reflection upon the writing method and the praxis both discovered as well as utilised in the production of that novel.

An atypical ‘Artist as hero’ piece (Beebe, 1964: v), ‘The Night-shift Ending’ follows the early careers of two characters, Stephen Murray, a struggling writer, and Sylvia Thomas, a struggling painter, as they attempt to establish themselves as self-sufficient and successful artists in the city. Set in and around Melbourne in

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In the year 2007, in the story that unfolds, Stephen Murray, is presented with the paths of both ‘Virtue’ and ‘Vice’: craving the success he feels due to him, however, he chooses ‘Vice’. Realising too late the charms of Sylvia Thomas, who also acts as ‘Virtue’ in that piece and who goes on to become a success of sorts, he is thwarted and is forced to pick up the disparate threads and to struggle with the demons of his old life alone. On the other hand, despite her early success, Sylvia Thomas is forced to deal with her past mistakes and to resolve some issues that she initially thought were too great for her.

True to the challenging nature of modern-day life, however, there is no resolution in the ending of ‘The Night-shift Ending’, rather there is dissolution for both characters. Yet there is the hope that their lots may improve in time from their hard learnt, life taught lessons. By surveying and examining the contemporary Australian art world as well as its culture industry, it was intended that some interesting insights would be provided, particularly offering one who is not familiar with it a rewarding glimpse into the goings-on of that world. And it is that glimpse, which this writer anticipated and saw as the purpose of undertaking that project and is so part of the contribution to knowledge and to culture that I intended to make with this combined PhD project.

In ‘The Night-shift Ending’, the two main characters must reckon with the high price they have had to pay to achieve their individual goals with their respective journeys ending in dissolution as opposed to resolution. For at the end of my artefact, we see a broken hearted and wretched Stephen Murray working again at a déclassé second hand bookstore – ‘Samuels’ Bargain Books’ – after having tasted success as a writer and having had his first novel, *The DaySleepers*, published and won a prestigious Harvey award for it. In contrast, we see Sylvia Thomas returning to her parents’ house in Lara in country Victoria – after going to great lengths to be independent – and nearly realising her dream of becoming a self-sufficient and successful artist: in her case as a painter. However, that story ends with the hope of redemption for both characters – that they themselves can initiate the requisite change in their own respective circumstances.
‘The Night-shift Ending’ began its existence as an investigation into the evolution of the cycle of the tragic hero in mythology as it is made manifest in the Jungian compilation *Man and His Symbols* by Dr. Joseph L. Henderson in his contribution, ‘Ancient Myths and Modern Man’ (Henderson, 1978). This was done by creating a detailed plan charting that cycle and, in turn, applying that plan to the story at hand. Then began the writing. By placing the myth of Hercules and the cycle of the tragic hero in modern times and placing it in the contemporary Australian art world, that narrative sought to see how, in the present Author’s opinion, it would be played out and unfold in what I perceived to be the aforesaid art world today. That, in turn, was reflected in the theoretical writing in the exegesis of ‘The Night-shift Ending’ in which I explored how I endeavoured to embrace the praxis and methodology both discovered through and utilised in the creation of that novel.

*Qua* novel, my artefact has had a rather long gestation and with the help of many necessary others at what I anticipate is its completion that journey will end with me seeing my work in print and such that it was and was it such for the present Author – *Enjoy!*

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*   *   *   *   *

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2. PhD Artefact.

THE NIGHT-SHIFT ENDING – A NOVEL.

W. Gerrit Bos.
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* * * *
‘Hercules was wandering one day, lost in a day-dream …. While he pondered over thoughts prompted by the conflict of good and evil within him, he saw suddenly a wondrous vision. Two women came toward him, both tall and uncommon in appearance …. The latter ran quickly to Hercules and commenced to spread before his inexperienced judgement all the allurements which physical delights can offer, if only (he) would accept her invitation to accompany her she would, said she, guard him from every harsh and unlovely thing, and would assure him all that his heart could wish.

"And by what name must I call thee, lady?" asked Hercules. "My friends call me 'Happiness' ", was the reply; "but those who hate me call me 'Vice'."

Meantime the second maiden had approached and it was now her turn to speak. She spoke in low and sweet tones as one who was not a stranger …. She was confident, she said, that he was destined to achieve greatness, but she warned him that the path (was) not an easy one, and that no great prize is to be won without effort and self-denial.

The first maiden now broke in scoffingly: "See," she cried, "how uninviting is the road which she would have you tread…(1)"

* * * * *
If you listen carefully, you can hear the night-shift ending;
    the night-trains slowing,
    the night-men going.
If you listen carefully, you can hear the night-voice sending,
to lovers in cars and drunkards in bars,
    the new day dawning,
    its cool warning.
If you listen carefully, you can hear the night-shift ending.
The night-trains slowing.
One –

The night-trains slowing –

**Time** – Where is time going to? Where is the past disposed? Time, Stephen had always thought, was a god. That was all you got – your time. Time would reveal your weaknesses and fears, your insecurities and apprehensions. Nothing could be hidden in time; in time everything presented itself and in time you were found out. But at moments like this, time seemed foolish, redundant, going nowhere, just going, announcing nothing, heralding nothing, not even itself to itself: just going.

In the early morning of that day’s dawn before the sun had even risen, neither awake nor asleep lay Stephen Murray alone: suspended in a miserable half-world of frustration and defeat. Neither capable of action nor of rest, caught between an irresistible inertia and an inescapable lassitude, he tried to fight the ennui that weighted his limbs. Summoning all the strength he could, Stephen rolled himself onto his side and looked at his alarm clock: 3:47, its angry, iridescent hands told him it was. In little over four hours, he would be on his way to work. Work; twelve years being prepared for it – the rest of your life spent regretting it. Work; Work and Stephen – Stephen and work. Work and Stephen – Stephen and work was not something, which sat comfortably – and such that it was and was it such at least that was so for him.

These were the moments he hated the most, thought Stephen, as he lay on his bed: the fear of thinking no thoughts. Feeling nothing, not even feeling nothing. Lying there, nowhere. Seemingly outside of time, of coming and going, of everything and everything other. The even tick of the clock. The second hand racing head long to oblivion echoed this thought again and again and again.

Sitting up, Stephen struggled for a cigarette. Next to the pack he found some matches. He struck one. Its violent, yellow flame lit up the room. Through painful, squinting eyes, Stephen looked around puzzled before remembering what he was doing and bringing the match to his cigarette, which hungrily sucked
its flame from his fingers.

Knowing that hope for any more sleep was in vain, Stephen rose from his bed and stumbled over to his writing desk, carefully negotiating the seemingly infinite space around the clutter of the books, the papers and the clothes, before collapsing into his chair. Blindly, he fumbled to turn his bedside lamp on until finally, after much trying, he succeeded. The darkness sank in a sudden, hateful whiteness. Dazed by its brilliance, Stephen tried to capture the half-thought the light had banished from his mind.

Stephen put his cigarette in the ashtray on his writing desk. He swung his chair around and surveyed the contents of his room. *Not bad for four years’ work,* he thought and took stock of the trappings of what he euphemistically called his ‘delayed success’. One bed – single, second hand. *Twenty-seven years old, nearly twenty-eight, and still sleeping in a single bed,* he thought with a disgust that lingered in his tired bones. *How many twenty-seven year olds still slept in a single bed?*

Next to the bed, a huge bookcase – its four shelves nearly full: mostly with paperbacks and mostly second hand or bought on sale. In the corner, past the bookcase, one, two, three, four – four boxes, that still had not been, and probably never would be, unpacked. Above them on the wall, a calendar. Hanging from that by a string a red felt-tipped pen.

Still half asleep, Stephen rose from his chair and walked over to the calendar. He took the pen that hung from it and marked off another day. The tenth of July: that meant two years, ten months and eleven days. The tenth of July: in three months, two weeks and four days, he would be twenty-eight.

The tenth of July: Stephen returned to his writing desk and rifled through the mess of papers, which had collected there, until he found the letter he had received that day. For a brief moment, he let himself savour the quality of the paper and the richly embossed letterhead before reading:

*Dear Mr. Murray,*
We acknowledge receipt of your manuscript – dated the 24th of March, 2007. We commend you on a distinguished piece of writing: the subject matter was skillfully handled, the narrative able to sustain one's interest. Despite your novel's many qualities, however, we at Smith, Stone & Wiltshire have no confidence or conviction that the publication of such a work would be successful as a financial endeavour. Once again, we commend your efforts, wish you every success placing your ideas elsewhere and hope to hear from you in the future.

Yours faithfully,

(Per) Mr. W. Stone.
Smith, Stone & Wiltshire.

"Successful as a financial endeavour"; the phrase rattled around Stephen's empty head. He enunciated each syllable carefully. "Successful as a financial endeavour"; what a wonderfully polite way to phrase rejection.

“Dear Mr. Murray, it's not that we didn't find your little book to be interesting, entertaining – important even – it's just that we have grave doubts that in today's current climate, such a work, however well-written or crafted, would be – wait for it – "successful as a financial endeavour". Once again, we commend your efforts, wish you well and hope not to hear from you in the future."

"Successful as a financial endeavour"; Was K---'s "S---" ever "successful as a financial endeavour"? Stephen wondered. Never mind that it was considered by many to be a masterpiece. "What about T---’s "The F---"?" That was "successful as a financial endeavour". Pity that T--- had been dead for ten years before it was published.

Mmm … “Successful as a financial endeavour”, thought Stephen: that's what it all came down to.

Fighting the temptation to rip it up, Stephen placed the letter back on his writing desk, took a fresh sheet of paper from his stock, picked up his pen and wrote:
Dear Mr. W. Stone,

I acknowledge receipt of your letter – dated the 8th of July, 2007. I write to thank you for your kind words of praise and for rejecting my novel for publication. I would like to take this opportunity to remind you that K---’s S--- was never quoted successful as a financial endeavour unquote, although considered by many to be a master-piece; that T---’s The F--- was not quoted successful as a financial endeavour unquote until many years after the author's death. Once again, I thank you for your rejecting my novel for publication, wish you very well and hope not to hear from you in the future.

Yours most very faithfully,

Mr. Stephen Murray.

Stephen read what he had just written. He tore the page in two and sighed. Momentarily, he stared blankly into space before getting up from his chair and going to the kitchen. Without having to turn the light on, mechanically he went about making coffee.

"What to do at four o’clock in the morning?" wondered Stephen half-loud, as he waited for the percolator to drip and to trickle into action as slowly, slowly the night-shift came to an end.

* * * * *
Two –

Girls! Girls! Girls!

Violently, flickered the bright, neon light;

Girls! Girls! Girls!

Once then twice, on then off;

before dying completely.

The night-trains slowing – Inside, Sylvia Thomas, dressed in her scant barmaids' outfit, wiped the bar of Servais’ Gentlemen’s Club clean one last time. After throwing the beer-mats, which were wet, into the washing machine, she walked over to the tables to collect the last of the glasses. Having done that, she surveyed what had been her place of employ for the last five months, tired and with disdain. All, however, was in order: surprising, given what it had endured that night and those previous.

Presently, the owner of the club, Mr. Alvisio Servais the third, although everyone knew him simply as Mr. Servais, had arrived with his date for the evening, who was beautiful in an obvious way – though much younger than him: yet both trying to look exactly that – much younger than their years.

As he did every night around closing time, Mr. Servais had come to oversee the cleaning up, count the night’s takings and pay the staff their wages.

"Busy tonight?" he asked, handing Sylvia her pay.

"Oh yeah, not too bad for a Monday," she replied, pocketing her money:

"Dee didn't show again."

"Ah forget Dee; she's a slut. Want me to callya a cab?"

"Nah, I feel like walking. Thanks."

"You sure? Everything all right?"

"Yep, everything's roses," Sylvia answered, somewhat wistfully, and started to walk towards the door.

"Hey!" Mr. Servais called after her, "Hey!"

"What, Al?" Sylvia asked impatiently: for she’d had more than enough for one night.
"What? What?" he mimicked her, trying to be amiable. "Come here."

_Not tonight_, thought Sylvia, _not again_, as she had grown weary of Mr. Servais’ pathetic and all too frequent come-ons.

"Come here, sweet Sylvia," Mr. Servais repeated and began ambling towards her.

Unsure what to do, Sylvia let the door close and stood there awaiting Mr. Servais’ prompt.

"Listen, sweet Sylvia," he said, putting his arm around her. "You're a good kid, forget Dee. I know you and her were tight, but whatcanya do, eh? I toldya she's a slut," he continued: his words running into each other, his accent thickened by too much red wine and Ouzo.

"Here," With all the bathos of a b-grade Mafioso, Mr. Servais reached inside his jacket and produced a large clip of money: "Take this," he said, peeling a couple of notes off and holding them towards Sylvia.

_Timeo danaos_ (2), thought Sylvia, remembering what Dee had told her. She stood there unmoving – not sure whether to take the money or not.

Mr. Servais nodded: "Go on take it," he said.

Sylvia took the money, thanked him and left.

Once outside the club, Sylvia pulled her scarf a little tighter and huddled a little deeper into her great coat. The crisp July air, though, was somehow refreshing after the warm, stale, beery air of the club.

Not passing a soul, clad in her great coat, Sylvia walked the half-dozen streets to her block of apartments as briskly as she could. Lighter than air, she breezed past the large security door and floated up the five flights of stairs to what had been called an inner city “apartment”, but in reality was little more than a glorified bed-sit with what was a free-standing kitchenette – a stove, some cupboards and a bedroom, open plan living at its best.
Safely inside her apartment, Sylvia carefully locked the door, drew the chain, collapsed onto her sofa and began to cry as slowly, slowly the night-shift came to an end.

* * * *

* * * *
Stephen touched his butt to a fresh cigarette and dropped it into his coffee cup. Sss-sch. After watching it bob up and down for a moment, he looked up at the clock on the wall of the inappropriately named and poorly ventilated staff room of “McPherson’s Books - New and Second hand”: 11:14 in the a.m. Only two sales and a lay-by in two hours. 11:14 in the a.m.; no relief until three when one of the students, whose name was Lawrence, came to help him out.

Stephen picked up the book he had been reading and opened it. He tried to read. It took a moment for the black marks on the page to swim together and form words. It was no good. Before he had finished one sentence, he had forgotten the last. Bored, Stephen put his book down – the salvation he had hoped it would offer eluded him. Stephen looked at the clock again: 11:18 – only four minutes had passed. Time to return, he thought and took one long, last drag on his cigarette before dropping it into his coffee cup with the others, his short break all too early finished.

Tuesday mornings were always the slowest at “McPherson’s Books”: not one new customer in the last hour. Armed with a pricing-gun, Stephen walked over to the box of books Mr. McPherson had left for him to price and to put on the shelves. One by one, he checked each book against the list, labelled it accordingly and then put it in its rightful place.

He had labelled about a dozen books when the door of the bookstore opened. Stephen looked up.

"May I help you?" he greeted the young lady who had entered.

"Just browsing, thanks," she replied, before ducking behind a row of books.

To upset the tedium of his work – and because he was an artist, who garnered much material and many ideas for his work in this way –, Stephen made a point of taking note of each customer's appearance and demeanour when they entered.

After the young lady had disappeared into one of the aisles, Stephen wondered how he would describe her in one of his stories: she was twenty,
twenty-one perhaps. Too well dressed to be a student with her designer jeans, label pullover and leather boots.

_Mmm … something about her doesn't ring true._

Methodically, Stephen went on pricing the books as he mused. He was just coming to the last few when the young lady approached.

"Excuse me, do you have anything by – ?" she paused mid-sentence, "anything by Deighton?"

_A bit high brow for you_, Stephen thought and said, "On your left: Classics, second row from the top. After C, D, in D one finds Deighton."

Surprised even by his own curtness, Stephen smiled smugly whilst the young lady went to where he had directed her to find her book.

Sales assistant at "McPherson's Books – New and Second hand" was the first job Stephen had held down since dropping out of University after nearly two and a half years of next to no work. In the enthusiasm of his first few weeks there, he had taken it upon himself to memorise the location of any book from any author of whatever genre. He had had a romantic idea of working in the bookstore by day, writing by night. That was nearly two and a half years and the only thing he'd had published were a handful of short stories, that not even he thought much of, in journals so obscure that not even Mr. McPherson had heard of them.

With a book in her hand, the young lady walked up to the counter.

"Be with you in a minute," Stephen said nonplussed and priced another book.

After he had placed the marked book on the shelf, Stephen walked up to the counter and took the book from the young lady. Trying to hide his amusement – thinking that she was more a modern fiction or romance type, definitely not Classics –, he scanned the book’s barcode, took her money, handed her the change, put the book in a bag for her with the receipt and told her – sardonically – that he hoped she would enjoy it.

Just as the young lady was leaving, a young man entered – not much older than her. A typical upper-middle class toff, dressed in the depths of modern
fashion trying to emulate intelligentsia with his turtleneck sweater, suede jacket and goatee beard, though ending up looking like just another University student.

Stephen loathed these types, who just browsed, rarely bought anything and always tried to impress him with their knowledge of New Age issues and the like; as if the movements of celestial bodies in other galaxies really had any great impact on our day to day lives.

"Can I help you?" he asked abruptly – glaring at the student from behind the counter, hoping that would be enough to make him leave.

"No thank you," the young man replied and smiled at Stephen, before walking over to section of the bookstore marked "Spirituality".

* * * *
Sylvia stormed into her untidy bedroom and silenced her alarm clock. Seven A.M. She had spent the night on the sofa still dressed in her barmaids’ outfit from last night. Seven A.M. Sylvia went to the kitchen and turned the radio on. After listening to the morning news, she walked over to her easel and looked at the portrait of her grandmother, which she had been working on, on and off for the last few days from a photograph that she had – her grandmother having passed away a few years ago when Sylvia was just completing high-school. How differently these things looked the morning after.

Lost in thought, Sylvia studied the portrait silently before squeezing some paint onto her palette. With her brush, she carefully mixed the paint to the right shade of yellow-white and touched the canvas first here, then there. Slowly, she remembered what she had been trying to do and was away.

Painting for Sylvia was a world in which she could escape to and hoped that one day she would escape to and never have to leave. No matter how dire things were and things were indeed dire, she always found she could forget all that was engulfing her when she stood at the easel and picked up her brush.

After painting for nearly two hours, Sylvia took a step back and looked at what she had done. It wasn’t exactly her best work, but still she felt pleased for having done something. Content, she put her brush down and decided to have a shower, get changed, go out and have some breakfast. Fortunately, she had the next two days off work.

Two days on, then two days off. Two nights a week dancing, then two nights a week working behind the bar. Whenever she thought about it, which she had trained herself not to, Sylvia cringed at the idea that she – raised by a good family, educated at a private all girls school in the country – worked in a strip club as a lap dancer. In theory, it seemed simple enough and this, given what else was on offer, made it seem appealing, but in practice, however, it was a nightmare. Her savings running low, her rent nearly overdue, when she had first read the advertisement, it had seemed, as it had turned out, too good to be true:
Earn up to eight hundred dollars a night. No experience necessary. Full training given.

There was nothing in the advertisement, however, about the degradation of having drunken businessmen in inverted commas usually on the tail end of a heavy night out stuffing dollar-bills into your underwear to impress friends in inverted commas. Nor for that matter had she ever earned anywhere near eight hundred dollars in the one night either.

In the first three months she had worked at the club, it had taken so much Dutch courage to get her there that by the time she finally did, she could barely stand up. Fortunately for her, Dee had been there to show her the ropes – how to get the most from a client whilst doing the least, how to pour their drinks to the right effect, not to take "gifts" from Mr. Servais and so on. But now Dee was gone. Dee was gone and she was all-alone. What was she going to do?

On a whim, it seemed in retrospect, she had come to the city after leaving her parents' house in Lara in country Victoria and dropping out of college, much to her parents' dismay and disappointment. Her major had been Fine art. She had left with some facile idea of "making it" as an artist and only one hundred dollars in her pocket. That was nearly six months ago and she hadn't met person one – that is, except for Dee and now even she was gone. Dee was gone; now her only salvation was a part-time job in a strip club.

Walking to the shops, Sylvia remembered the money Mr. Servais had given her last night. She checked the pocket of her coat. It was still there. Fifty dollars – what was she going to spend it on?

* * * *

After having had, by her standards, a large breakfast comprising fried tomato, onion, bacon, eggs and toast washed down by two cups of warm peppermint tea, Sylvia lingered around the shops near the café. For about an hour, she went in the one store and then out the other. Before finally, having
nowhere else to go, she wandered back to her apartment. When she got there, she noticed that her landlord, Mr. Calabria, had slipped a note under her door. Without having to be reminded, Sylvia knew she was six weeks behind on her rent, for she had been hoping to fix it up with her landlord before he noticed.

Sylvia picked up the note and placed it on her kitchen bench. Then she went over to the cupboard where she kept her money.

"One hundred, two hundred, three hundred, four hundred, five hundred, six hundred," she counted out loud, "That's last month's. One hundred, two hundred, three hundred: that's two weeks."

Nine hundred dollars – what a waste on what was a run-down bed-sit that was not even suitable for the habitation of farm animals. Sylvia put the money in her purse and went down to Mr. Calabria's apartment on the ground floor of the building.

As hard as she could, Sylvia rang Mr. Calabria's doorbell. No answer. Once more, she rang the doorbell. Still no answer. Sylvia took the money out of her purse and counted it again. Then she folded it firmly in Mr. Calabria's note, dropped it in the slot for letters, climbed the stairs to her apartment and thought no more of it.

* * * *
Five –

Stephen ripped the page out of his printer and swore. Another evening wasted. Stephen screwed the page tightly into a ball and threw it at the wall. He took a deep breath to compose himself, massaged his weary temples and focused once more on the screen in front of him. Stephen rubbed his tired eyes, looked down at the keyboard, waited as gradually the keys came into focus, and then he typed.

"Only twice before in the long history of van Wallen had a student ..."

No, he hit return twice. Try:

"Only twice before in the long history of van Wallen had a student ..."

Stephen read both sentences out loud. How about:

"Only twice in Van Wallen's long history had a student ..."

First one is better.

Stephen stopped and counted the words. One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten. Not bad progress, he thought, ten words in three hours and fourteen minutes: nearly twenty minutes a word.

Knowing that he would not be able to concentrate any longer, Stephen got up from his desk and walked over to his bed. Without taking his clothes off, he lay down – the light still on. Stephen closed his eyes and told himself not to go to sleep. Languidly, however, he felt himself drifting. The more he tried to resist, however, the more he was overcome by a longing to sleep. Drifting, drifting, little by little, drifting, drifting, little by little.
Stephen opened his eyes and watched as slowly the walls moved in a little closer.

"The man had killed the thing he loved,"

He recited half-loud.

"And so he had to die."

Next.

"Yet each man kills the things he loves…(3)"

Ever so slowly, thoughts merged into dreams, dreams into thoughts. Drifting, drifting, little by little, drifting, drifting, little by little. Ever so slowly, thoughts merged into dreams, dreams into thoughts and soon Stephen was sound asleep.

* * * *
Six –

Sylvia stopped painting and looked up at the clock on the wall in the living room of her apartment.

*Wow, eight o’clock already,* she thought and put her brush down. Sylvia looked at what she was working on.

Although it was not finished, upon returning from Mr. Calabria’s apartment to deposit her rent, she had put the painting of her mother’s mother aside and started on a fresh canvas of the vista of the cityscape as she had remembered it when she had first moved into her present domicile. That was at midday. Sylvia had been enjoying what she was doing and so she had decided to work on.

Presently having turned eight-thirty in the evening, famished, Sylvia went to the kitchen and rummaged through the refrigerator looking for something to eat. She got yesterday’s potatoes and other leftovers out and had just turned the gas on to cook when the telephone rang.

"Hi, you’ve called ---- – ----," her recorded voice began, "we can’t come to the phone right now. But if you’d …"

Sylvia picked up the receiver and activated it.

"Wait!" she cried over the message. "Wait!"

"Miss Thomas …” it was her landlord, Mr. Calabria. "Miss Thomas, I've been trying to call you all day," he said.

*Rubbish,* thought Sylvia, *I’ve been at home all day.*

"Is there a problem, Mr. Calabria?" she asked.

"Yes there is, Miss Thomas, you still haven't paid your rent yet. I left a note under your door.”

"I got your note, Mr. Calabria. I put the money through your door this morning."

"Huh? What?"

"I put the money through your door this morning," Sylvia repeated, this time a little slower, enunciating each word separately.
"Well, it wasn't there when I got home," Mr. Calabria said.

"What?!"

"It wasn't there when I got home," he repeated. "I still expect the full sum, Miss Thomas. Last month's rent, plus two weeks: nine hundred dollars. We agreed."

"But Mr. Calabria, I told you …"

"Thank you, Miss Thomas."

Before Sylvia had a chance to say that she was coming down to see him, Mr. Calabria had hung up and the line went dead.

Nine hundred dollars, thought Sylvia, shit. Nine hundred dollars?! How the hell could nine hundred dollar go missing just like that?!

Sylvia put the receiver back in its cradle. She went to the kitchen, turned the gas off and took the frying pan from the stove. She grabbed her coat and went downstairs to Mr. Calabria's apartment.

Not bothering with the doorbell this time, Sylvia pounded on his door as hard as she could.

"What?" she heard Mr. Calabria cry from inside. "What?"

Sylvia pounded even harder.

Judging by his appearance – a T-shirt that had once been white stained yellow by sweat and cigarettes tucked into greasy, grey trousers –, Mr. Calabria was not expecting company.

"Ah, Miss Thomas," he greeted Sylvia in his broken, immigrant English, "you've come with your money?"

"I told you, Mr. Calabria, I put it through the door. Here …" Sylvia replied, pointing to the slot for letters in his door.

"Oh yeah, then how come when I come home it wasn't there, huh?"

"I did," Sylvia insisted.

"Oh yeah, then where is money, huh?" Mr. Calabria asked, now goading her: "You say, you put the money through the door, but when I come home there
is no money. How come, huh?"

"I told you! I put the money …" Sylvia protested in vain, for Mr. Calabria was not to be convinced.

"Then where is money, huh?" he goaded her once more.

"I don't know, somebody must've taken it or something," Sylvia replied weakly, though realising how empty it sounded as she spoke.

"What? Somebody reach in through tiny slot, take money and go? I don't think so. I'm the only one with the key."

"Okay, okay: then you tell me where the money is," Sylvia demanded. "I know I put the money in, it's you who's saying that I didn't."

"I tell you where it is, you no pay. You have the money."

Realising it was futile to try to reason with Mr. Calabria further, Sylvia decided to try a new approach.

"I know, I know," she said, "I'll call the police, maybe they can help."

With the mention of the police, Mr. Calabria's whole countenance changed – who knew how many people were living illegally in his building: sub-letting, claiming rent assistance, doing anything to augment the few pleasures New Start allowed them and, in light of this, he knew he couldn't survive the police looking into his affairs.

"No, no call the police …" he protested. "I know, maybe Mrs. Calabria take the money and not tell me. But Mrs. Calabria not home right now. No, wait: no call the police. I wait till Mrs. Calabria come home, I ask her. You still pay but; I ask Mrs. Calabria. You still pay: by the end of next week, okay?"

"But … ; why do I have to pay?" Sylvia asked, though she knew, they both knew, that she was in no position to argue – she had signed no lease when she had moved in. Mr. Calabria could just as easily evict her then and there if he wanted to and she needed a roof over her head and somewhere to house her paintings and she had very little money to do so.

"Both our fault. You no put money through door again, okay? You pay one month's rent, six hundred dollars. But no call the police."

"Okay …" Sylvia began, but, before she had a chance to finish her words,
the door slammed shut in her face.

* * * *
Seven –

Furious, Sylvia stormed back to her apartment. Her hands shaking, she stood at her door fumbling for her keys. Finally, she found the right one and let herself in. Once inside, Sylvia threw her keys clear across the room and then slammed the door shut – so hard the whole frame shook.

"Fuck!" she screamed as loud as she could. "Fuck!"

How in God's name was she going to come up with another six hundred dollars? The money she had stupidly put through Mr. Calabria’s door was all but her last cent.

Nine hundred dollars?! How the hell could nine hundred dollars go missing just like that?!

Frantically, Sylvia searched her apartment – checking every place she could think of where she kept her money. Once she was satisfied she had collected every cent, she laid it out on her coffee table and counted it.

Sixty-seven dollars and some change. Sixty-seven dollars, nearly sixty-eight. What was she going to do? Never would she raise another six hundred dollars in a month of Sundays with all her other obligations and commitments.

Mr. Servais paid her a base wage of one hundred dollars-a-night when she was dancing, eighty when she worked behind the bar. But she wasn’t working until the day after next and anyway he wouldn’t pay her until the end of next week – plus there was still the cost of living.

Nine hundred dollars?! How the hell could nine hundred dollars go missing just like that?!

Sylvia decided to call Mr. Calabria to try to work something out with him. Twice she called him, but both times the line was engaged.

In frustration, Sylvia slammed the telephone down – so hard the receiver nearly broke.
With a hand either side, Sylvia picked up the coffee table and tipped it over. Notes and coins alike flew everywhere.

* * * *

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How the hell was she going to raise another six hundred dollars? she thought as she was already struggling to make ends meet as it was. Her current situation leaving her very little latitude to do so. She was walking a tightrope, Sylvia knew, and couldn’t afford to fall, she also knew.

Nine hundred dollars?! thought Sylvia, shit!
Eight –

"... and that's the news for Wednesday the eleventh of July": indignantly, the alarm clock broke into Stephen’s dreams as he lay on top of his bedding, yesterday’s clothes still on. "The time is now 7:32." 7:32: with a wave of panic it registered. 7:32: he was going to be late for work.

7:32: Stephen sprung out of bed. In less than ten minutes, he was dressed and ready to leave. On his way out, he stopped to check his letterbox for mail. One letter and one bill; Stephen stuffed these into his backpack and ran to the tram stop nearest his flat, which was just off the main thoroughfare, Harrison street, in Balaclava. He got there just in time to see his tram pulling away.


By the time he finally got to the bookstore, even though he was only twenty minutes late, Mr. McPherson had already arrived and opened the doors to the public.

"Running a bit late, Stephen?" he asked, his head buried in the accounts’ book in front of him.

"Yes, Mr. McPherson …" Stephen replied, struggling for breath. "Sorry."

"That's twice this month," Mr. McPherson continued, still not looking up from the accounts' book.

"I know, Mr. McPherson, I …"

With his tail between his legs, Stephen crept to the staff room of "McPherson’s Books" to ready himself for yet another day at the office. He dropped his backpack in the corner and then checked his appearance in the mirror. He tucked his shirt into his trousers and straightened his tie before returning to Mr. McPherson at the counter.

"Is there anything you would like me to do?" he asked once there – wondering whether he shouldn't have added Sir.

"Have you priced all those books I left for you yesterday?"

"Yes."

"Filled in the orders for next month?"

"Yes."
"Well, where are they then?"

"Here," Stephen said and reached under the counter for the box in which they were kept and handed it to Mr. McPherson.

By nature and by trade, Mr. Rhett McPherson was an accountant – now more or less retired. By default, he had become a bookseller. On paper, a bookstore seemed like a good investment. The practical side, however, was another question – at least to him. Twice on a good week, thrice on a bad, he would come to the store to check the books and to complain about the figures. "Don't know if we can stay open for much longer, if things continue like this, Stephen," he would say over and over again and moan about increasing costs and not enough sales. But Stephen, who did the books for him, knew that this was rubbish. Mr. McPherson, as he was known – nobody would dare address him as just Rhett, Stephen especially –, was certain to be making at least twice as much from the bookstore as he would were he still an accountant and was doing only half the work.

Today, he hung around the store for nearly two hours before finally leaving Stephen to his own devices. As soon as he had left – with Andrew, one of the part-timers, to cover his absence –, Stephen took his break and went to the staff room of "McPherson’s Books". He made himself a cup of coffee, picked up his backpack and searched for his mail.

Ignoring the bill, Stephen reached for the letter. From the return address, he could tell that it was from another publishing house. Although not exactly the done thing, upon completion in the excitement of having it finished, Stephen had sent his manuscript whole and unsolicited to three different publishing houses without the intervention of a literary agent to be considered for publication. So far, this letter and the one of rejection was all that he had received.

Not having the stomach to open it then and there, Stephen put the letter back into his backpack. He finished his coffee and returned to the counter.

* * *
Nine –

Sylvia spent a restless night tossing and turning.

In the morning, she surfaced only briefly to witness the previous night's destruction. Unable to cope with the mess, Sylvia went straight back to bed and pulled the cover over her head. The rest of that day, Sylvia spent sleeping and waking, waking and sleeping, until finally at seven o’clock in the evening, driven by hunger, she got out of bed and went to the kitchen.

A little better for having had something to eat, Sylvia went back to the lounge-room and began to clean up the mess there. After setting the coffee table upright, she picked up the money she had strewn on the floor, and set it back on the table. The sofa was all right, but she was going to have to sew one of the cushions up. The telephone was all but broken, it might have to be replaced and Sylvia was in strife. There was no debating that.

Once she had cleaned most of the mess up, Sylvia collapsed onto the sofa, lamented her lot and wondered how she could stop herself falling even deeper into the current malaise which was presently engulfing her – suffocating her until all she could breathe was the foul air of that which she had lost. Sylvia wondered, as she often did, what she had done wrong in which past life for her present life to turn out like this.

After crying for nearly two hours, she was exhausted. Spent, she crawled off to bed wondering how she was going to cope with work the next day. Wake up and face another day in what was her paradise neither lost nor found – a thought that became more and more unpleasant and more and more unpalatable as she considered it.

* * *
Ten –

For the rest of that day, all Stephen could think about was the letter from the publishing house. After checking to make sure there were no customers left in the store, he locked the doors – fifteen minutes early – and ran to the nearest tram stop. The usually short tram ride to his flat seemed like an eternity. The tram was just approaching his regular stop, when Stephen sprung up from his seat and made his way to the door. It was still moving when his feet touched the ground.

With little regard for traffic, Stephen darted across the road and ran the short distance to his little flat as briskly as he could. As soon as he was in the front door, Stephen grabbed the letter out of his backpack, ripped the envelope open and, without further preliminaries, read:

Stephen, they had addressed him by his first name.

Stephen,

We write to thank you for the manuscript that you sent us – received the 4th of April, 2007.
It is our standard practice to give any work we receive careful consideration before making further contact with the author’s, whose work we have selected for publication.
If you have not heard from us within the next 60 working days, then we ask you to accept that your work has not been chosen.
Once again, we thank you for your manuscript and the effort that you took in preparing it.

Yours sincerely,

Mr. B. Hooper.
Principal.
Forrest and Hooper.
Stephen read the letter one more time before putting it down. *Better than a complete snub,* he thought, a stay of execution. The excitement now dissipated, he sighed. Stephen put the letter on top of the mess of papers on his writing desk. He placed his backpack where he usually left it next to his couch and loosened his tie – with the receipt of this second letter with the strong resolution that, come what may, to see his work in print and in print would he see his work, that he decided.

With this thought omnipresent, that night Stephen fared forward. He wrote and erased, erased and wrote: always toiling, always labouring. With the receipt of this letter with the strong resolution that, come what may, he would see his work in print. With this thought omnipresent, Stephen looked at what he had written and took off from where he had left off last night.

* * * *

And as he did write that evening, after a meager steak and potato dinner, Stephen wondered whether his novel, *The DaySleepers* as he had called it, would ever see the light of day. At times, the very thought that he one day could ever be a published author of something other than the occasional piece of 'literary fiction', as his work had been dubbed, and his novel see the light of day, seemed like a great joke played on him by the cosmos. He was confident enough of his work – it wasn't that; indeed from the responses he had got and given that he had seen a lot worse published, thus Stephen knew he had some hope. It was just … it was just … Stephen couldn't quite put his finger on it, yet still the thought troubled him.

These things as they were and they were, Stephen picked up his pen and wrote, wrote and wrote with a new determination and a new fortitude – resolute
that, come what may – and with the receipt of this second letter –, he would see his work in print, whatever it would take. After following this train of thought and its implication for a moment or two, Stephen refocussed. He looked at what he had written the night before. He took his pen and crossed a word out here.

*    *    *    *


Page 48 of 366.
Eleven –

For a change, it was Mr. McPherson who was late getting to the bookstore. Stephen, who had made an extra effort to be on time that day, had just begun setting up a front-of-store display when Mr. McPherson burst into the bookstore, briefcase in hand and a harried look on his face.

"Not there, Stephen …" he greeted Stephen. "Here."

And a good morning to you too, Stephen thought.

Mr. McPherson was a little more withdrawn and a little more abrupt than usual and thus Stephen knew it would be best to keep out of his way. After he had "assisted" Stephen with the display for a little while, he stormed off to his office, taking both the orders’ and the accounts’ books with him, telling Stephen that for no reason was he to be disturbed.

And locked in his office, Mr. McPherson stayed until well after lunchtime. Just before one, Stephen knocked on his door to check that everything was all right.

"Come in, Stephen," he bellowed from the other side.

When Stephen opened the door, Mr. McPherson was furiously punching numbers into his calculator.

"Sit down," he ordered, not looking up at Stephen.

He’s going to fire me, was Stephen’s first thought. He’s going to fire me.

"Don't look like that Stephen – the world's not going to end. Well, not today anyway, not if I've got any say in it."

Mr. McPherson rose from his chair and turned the kettle on.

"Coffee?" he asked, after filling his own cup with some milk and hot water.

Stephen was taken aback by Mr. McPherson’s sudden change of mood. He was surprised, though pleasantly so.

"What about the customers?" he began to ask.

"Stephen, forget about the bloody customers for a moment, will you; just close the doors and put the “back in five minutes” sign up, okay? There’s something I need to discuss with you," Mr. McPherson said somewhat
unexpectedly.

“Okay,” Stephen said and did as he was told. He closed the store, locked the doors and put the “back in five minutes” sign up as he had been directed.

When Stephen returned, Mr. McPherson placed two cups down on the desk, reached into his briefcase and took out what Stephen recognised to be some sort of a journal. He opened it to a marked page and then handed it to Stephen.

"Write this did you?" he asked.

Stephen looked down at the page: "‘The Painter’s Swan’ – A short story by Stephen Murray.”

Instantly Stephen recognised it as one of his own. Of course he recognised it as one of his own, it was the first thing that he had ever had published. The Painter's Swan: it had come back to haunt him.

"Did you or did you not write this?" Mr. McPherson asked once more.

"Well, yes," Stephen replied directly, unable to deny the obvious. “A year or two ago, I think,” he said.

Stephen turned to the front-cover. 2005.

"Two years ago," he corrected himself.

"Two years ago, eh?" Mr. McPherson began thoughtfully. "Well, Mrs. McPherson liked it. She showed it to me last night. Much market for this sort of stuff is there then?" he asked.

"If there was do you really think that I'd still be working here?" Stephen felt like saying.

"Not really," Stephen began modestly. "It depends; I got two hundred dollars for that one," he said matter-of-factly trying to hide any sense of artistic pride, which he felt, however, seeing his words published and in print again.

"Mmm: two hundred dollars, eh?" The thought of dollar signs appealed to Mr. McPherson as a small time entrepreneur; "That's better than nothing," he said, "though not enough to retire on. Two hundred dollars, eh?"

“Anyway, that's not the reason I asked you in here."
Mr. McPherson took the book from Stephen and placed it back into his briefcase.

“The reason I did,” he continued, “is that Mrs. McPherson and I want to go on a little holiday. Now as you can see, I've been going through the books and everything seems to be in order – there's no problem there. It's just Mrs. McPherson has her heart set on going away for a month or two, it’s coming to the end of summer on the Continent and we want to make the most of it. Do you know much about accounting, Stephen?”

*Who do you think does the books for you each month?*

"A little, Mr. McPherson," Stephen replied, trying to disguise any hint of sarcasm in his voice. "A little," he repeated doing his best to remain sincere.

"Anyway, I was thinking of bringing someone else in to look after the store and the books when I'm overseas. Hunh, there's no way I could trust Lawrie or Andrew to do it."

Lawrence, or Lawrie as Mr. McPherson called him much to his chagrin, and Andrew were both students of Fine arts at the nearby campus of Monash university, who worked part-time – a combined total of just over thirty hours between them – at the bookstore. Stephen tried to keep as much distance as he could from either of them.

"As we both know, they're both bloody incompetent. Lawrie couldn't operate the cash register if it wasn't already automated and Andrew, well Andrew, only God knows what he's on most of the time."

Mr. McPherson looked up at Stephen and smirked. Stephen, however, remained deadpan.

"Anyway, as I said I was thinking of bringing someone else in to look after things while I am away, but do you have any idea how much they cost?"

Mr. McPherson’s thoughts were, as always, first and foremost of money.

"So I thought that maybe you could take over for a while. Now there's no need to worry, I've spoken to both Lawrie and Andrew and they've both agreed to take some time off from their plasticine modelling classes and work some extra shifts, but I still need somebody to do all this.”
Mr. McPherson motioned to the orders’ and the accounts’ books.

"Now it'll mean extra hours, but it will also mean a bit extra money too."

In the three years Stephen had been in Mr. McPherson’s employ, the only pay increases he had received were the bare minimum compatible with years of service in accord with the retail award.

"Are you sure?" Stephen asked, somewhat surprised.

"You’re the only one who knows how things work around here."

“If you don’t mind me asking: how much extra money will it mean?”

Stephen inquired to make sure he wasn’t mistaken and before Mr. McPherson had a chance to change his mind – prodigal and tightfisted as Mr. McPherson was.

“What are you on now? Seventeen dollars an hour, I think, seventeen, eh? Okay, we’ll make it eighteen fifty starting next pay and it will stay that way when I return and will maybe be increased at your next performance review – we’ll see how you go."

Not knowing what to say, Stephen found himself agreeing, in principle, to Mr. McPherson’s proposal as he laid it out – on the proviso he be given more time to consider it and its implications fully.

* * *
Twelve –

Thursday nights were always busy at Mr. Servais’.

After dancing on the catwalk, the poles and three privates, Sylvia had made nearly one hundred and eighty dollars in tips. Sixty of which had come from the one client, who had got so carried away – even offering Sylvia five hundred dollars to spend the night with him and harassing her to do so – that eventually he had to be asked to leave.

They were always the same on payday.

Knock off work at five and down the pub to get their pay cheques cashed. Charged twenty dollars and subbed twenty dollars so they can have a few drinks – a couple of pots, maybe a shot or two –, whilst they wait for their pays to be worked out. Tired after work, glad that the week’s nearly over – the temptation too great to resist. By the time they get the rest of their money, the first twenty is all but gone. One more drink while they count it. Fifty for the weekend, everything else carefully folded and hidden away in a back pocket.

"Want to get something to eat?"

A few more drinks, and then you go home for a quick shower before going to another pub to get even more drunk.

"Damn, forgot to bank money on the way. Don't worry about it, will do it first thing in the morning."

Fortunately, Mr. Servais had had sense enough to install bouncers out the front of the club to ward off the drunkenest of the punters and get rid of those who caused trouble inside. No fights – Mr. Servais runs a respectable place.

The first fifty soon gone: you reach into the back of your wallet – a crisp
new note.

"Just a few more drinks, won't spend it all."

By the time that Mr. Servais had arrived to lock up, supervise the cleaning up and count the night's takings, Sylvia had had too much to drink and was feeling ill. Although the management of the club didn't give the girls any free drinks while they were working, they did encourage them to get the clients to buy them drinks and make a little small talk when they danced for them to make it seem more natural – more like a date.

As a rule though, Mr. Servais didn't like the girls drinking too much whilst they were working. This was for two reasons: one, it reflected poorly on the club and made the girls look cheap and two, they were usually no good the next day and did not attract new customers. Thus, Sylvia decided to sneak out the back door. This wasn't exactly against any of Mr. Servais' rules, but he did, however, like to see each girl before she left to have a word with her and make sure she could get home safely.

Drunk, Sylvia made her way home to her apartment.

* * * * *
Thirteen –

When he had started at the bookstore, Stephen had made it clear that he was an aspiring writer. Now his secret was out; he was a published author. A poorly kept secret at “McPherson’s Books” given that Mr. McPherson had taken to telling all and sundry, who would listen. The Painter’s Swan; it had come back to haunt him. As he made his way to work that morning on the number thirty-two tram straight to Gardenvale from Balaclava with only four scheduled stops, that he had caught ahead of time on this occasion, Stephen thought about Mr. McPherson’s proposal. He wondered how much extra work it would entail and how much extra pressure it would mean and whether the promised increase in pay would be any better and, through that, whether things would change for him.

Eighteen dollars fifty an hour with the chance of a raise wasn’t all that much for what he would have to do and what he would have to sacrifice to do it, but do it he would and hopefully, through that, things would change for him. And, maybe Mr. McPherson’s proposal might mean a change to his situation, for which Stephen had long been seeking.

Stephen considered the cost of Mr. McPherson’s proposal and Stephen considered the benefit of Mr. McPherson’s proposal. He considered the sacrifice it would entail as well as the gain it would mean in his standing at the bookstore and in Mr. McPherson’s esteem of him. With these thoughts, Stephen thought hard about Mr. McPherson’s proposal, he weighed all these up and thus he decided he would bite the bullet and he would give it his best shot and, this so, found himself looking forward to the new responsibility as well as the challenge it would be.
Work; Work and Stephen – Stephen and work. Work and Stephen –
Stephen and work was not something, which sat comfortably. Stephen, however,
decided that he would meet these as best he could, do his utmost, and give a
good account of himself while doing so and that is how he resolved he would
handle it, come whatever may.

*     *     *     *
Fourteen –

When she woke the next day, it was well into the afternoon and with a terrible hang over. Nauseous, Sylvia crawled out of bed and went to the bathroom to wash her face.

Feeling only marginally better, she returned to her bedroom and picked up the clothes she had strewn on the floor. They stunk of the club, of beer and cigarettes. Sylvia reached into the top pocket of her shirt and took out the money she had earned both in tips and as wages. She counted it one more time, and then placed it on the coffee table with her other money.

Hungry, Sylvia then went to the kitchen to prepare something to eat. When she opened the refrigerator, however, Sylvia realised she hadn't done the groceries for nearly two weeks. She took fifty dollars from the pile on her coffee table and began to make her way to the supermarket.

On her way out, Sylvia decided to stop by Mr. Calabria's apartment again to try to work something out with him.

"Ah Miss Thomas, you bring me the six hundred dollars, huh?" he asked her by way of greeting.

"Sorry, Mr. Calabria. I think I need a few more weeks," Sylvia replied timidly.

"A few more weeks? You gotta be kiddin'.'"

"No Mr. Calabria, I need a few more weeks, sorry; I'm broke. I, ah … I … Did you ask Mrs. Calabria if maybe she picked up the money by mistake?"

"Huh? No, I no see Mrs. Calabria yet. Listen …" Mr. Calabria drew Sylvia close, as if somebody might be listening in on them: "I really need that money; you're not the only one who is broke."

Yeah right, thought Sylvia. "I know Mr. Calabria. It's just I need some more time. You see, I don't get paid until the end of next week," she said.

"Miss Thomas, you got any idea how many people come up and ask me: "'Hey, Mr. Calabria, I need room. You got room for me, Mr. Calabria?', but I have to tell them I got no room and you, you nearly two months behind on your rent
and you want still more time."

"I know, Mr. Calabria, but as I …"

Sylvia was about to explain it all to him one more time, but Mr. Calabria wasn't interested.

"I got all kindsa people wanting room," he continued. "Just last week …"

*And what happened to the nine hundred dollars that I put through your door?*

"Only until the end of next week, Mr. Calabria, I promise."

"Next week Friday, Miss Thomas – six hundred dollars, no later or else."

Once again, before Sylvia had a chance to reply, the door slammed shut and she, angry and irate, stormed off to the supermarket fuming to buy her groceries.

*  *  *  *  *
Fifteen –

That day, a Friday, “McPherson’s Books” had a good trade with a steady stream of customers, who had started trickling in as soon as he had opened the doors to the public, and Stephen was therefore able to lose himself in his work. Thus he did not have time to consider the implications of Mr. McPherson’s proposal upon him further. Instead, Stephen had work to do and a lot of it – and work he did, a lot.

Stephen applied himself to his work and to the tasks at hand as they presented themselves – answering queries, getting books, serving customers. That is, he worked hard and Mr. McPherson’s proposal was the furthest thing from his mind. Thus Stephen did not have time to think more about it, which he regretted, for Mr. McPherson would be seeking an answer when he next saw him.

That day, Stephen kept his head down and laboured away. Always beavering, always with his nose to the grindstone, doing his best to do his best. Not only did the day go quickly when the store was busy, but also Stephen found, in fact, that he actually took and gained some pleasure from the work.

Sales assistant at “McPherson’s Books” was a job and the longest he had held in his brief career spanning only six and a half years in the workforce – and, thus, for Stephen one that had become his way of life. Work; Work and Stephen – Stephen and work. Work and Stephen – Stephen and work was not something, which sat comfortably – and such that it was and was it such at least that was so for him.
Stephen, however, was able to lose himself in his work that day, which meant he could hold back all other negative thoughts and ill will towards his circumstance and his condition. Thus, Stephen did as he always did. He put on a brave face, grinned and bore whatever presented itself and came his way and served the customers all the while with a smile. Stephen kept himself busy and that seemed to help if only for a little while – at least. Stephen kept himself busy and that seemed to help if only for a little while.

* * *
Sixteen –

By the time Sylvia had returned from the supermarket with barely a weeks’ worth of groceries, it was already seven o’clock – by eight at the latest, she would have to leave for the club. Sylvia went to the kitchen and quickly put away the groceries and then she went to her bedroom to change into the tightly fitting, all-too revealing "uniform", which comprised black hot pants and an incandescent brassiere, and which Mr. Servais expected all the girls who worked at the club to wear – and which Sylvia loathed doing.

Covered by a great coat she wore to hide her “uniform” so as not to draw attention to herself, Sylvia passed Mr. Calabria again on her way out.

"Next week Friday, Miss Thomas," he said, as he struggled down the hallway with two large bags of rubbish.

As she made her way to the club, Sylvia decided that she would ask Mr. Servais to lend her three hundred dollars when he came to lock up to help meet her debt.

Fortunately, tonight she wasn't dancing.

It was a larger than usual crowd for a Saturday and the bar didn't close until well after three. For a change, Mr. Servais arrived alone. After all the other girls had left, Sylvia stayed behind and helped him move some tables back into place – the whole time, thinking of ways that she might ask him for the money. The last table in place, Mr. Servais took his handkerchief from his top pocket and wiped the sweat from his brow.

Now or never. "Um, Mr. Servais, I was wondering," Sylvia began somewhat hesitantly: "Well, would it be possible, if maybe I could borrow some money?"

"Sweet Sylvia, of course," he said putting his arm around her. "How much?" he asked.

"Three hundred dollars, perhaps?" she replied hopefully, trying to shrug his arm from off her shoulders.
"Come to my office …"

Mr. Servais' "office" was really only a small storage area in which he had installed a desk, a safe and a few filing cabinets. Bending over to open the safe, Mr. Servais groaned as he fiddled with the lock. Finally getting the combination right, he took the cash box out and, with one of his many keys, opened it. He then took out a large pile of money, it must have been a few thousand dollars at least, Sylvia reckoned, placed it on his desk and histrionically went about counting three hundred dollars out in twenty-dollar notes. Placing it in a small pile on his desk, he then counted out another hundred. With this in his hand, Mr. Servais walked over to Sylvia.

"This, sweet Sylvia," he said, holding it up between two fingers: "is for you."

Mr. Servais folded the money in half and placed it in the top of Sylvia's brassiere and let his hand run over her right breast.

Shocked, Sylvia went to take a step back, but found herself pressed against the door. Seeing the three hundred dollars lying on Mr. Servais' desk, she pressed past him and reached for it. As she went to pick it up, Sylvia felt Mr. Servais' hand again – this time coarsely fondling her backside. Sylvia quickly snatched the money up off his desk and turned around. By now, Mr. Servais was all but on top of her. Sylvia tried to push him away, however, his size and intent made it nigh impossible.

"No!" she cried as though her life depended upon it. "No!"

Somehow, Sylvia managed to squeeze her way out. Not giving up the chase, Mr. Servais got up and pinned her against one of the filing cabinets. This time, his grip was too strong. Forcibly, he went about kissing and licking her face.

"Please stop Al," Sylvia pleaded, "I don’t want to," but Mr. Servais would not.

Sylvia's arms flailed to hit him, but her shoulders were too tightly pressed against the filing cabinet for her to land a blow.

"Please stop," she pleaded once more.
Able to get one arm free, Sylvia searched the top of the filing cabinets for something to hit Mr. Servais with. She grabbed what felt like a small hole-punch. Sylvia hit him once, but to no effect, then twice. This time, Mr. Servais backed off a little, just enough to allow Sylvia a proper swing. With all her might, she brought the hole-punch down – the blow landing on the back of his head, just below his ear. Mr. Servais staggered backwards, cursing and screaming. For a moment, he looked as though he might fall, but then he found his feet again.

By now, the wound had started to bleed – heavily. Sylvia was terrified. She couldn't move. Mr. Servais reached into his top pocket, took out his handkerchief and touched it to the spot where Sylvia had hit him. Seeing the blood on his handkerchief when he took it away, Mr. Servais smiled at Sylvia – brutally – and balled his fist.

Sylvia knew he was going to hit her. But it didn't seem real. Sylvia felt him hit her. But it didn't seem real. For a moment, everything went black. Then she felt a smart and a pressure under her eye.

But it didn't seem real!

Sylvia saw that Mr. Servais was laughing at her. But the sound registered slower, deeper, and more distant than she had ever heard anyone laugh before. Sylvia saw Mr. Servais' fist coming again, but this time she was too weak to do anything. This time, she could do nothing but just let him hit her. This time, everything just went black.

When Sylvia came to all sounds were louder, all colours brighter. The small light above Mr. Servais' head was burning twice as bright. She could feel the sharp bristles of the carpet prickle into her neck. The putrid smoke of Mr. Servais' cigarette sifted into her lungs, polluting them and making her gasp for air. The thought: He hasn't done it yet, registered as a fact. Indeed, Sylvia could feel her clothes were still mostly intact.

He hasn't done it yet.

Sylvia looked up and saw Mr. Servais standing over her, holding his handkerchief to his neck. Calmly smoking a cigarette as though nothing had happened. Seeing that her eyes were now open, he smiled at Sylvia – the way a
schoolteacher smiles at a student, who they knew, and who knew, that they had been caught red-handed doing something wrong and that they were about to be punished for it – severely – and there was nothing – nothing – anyone in the world could do to stop it.

Mr. Servais butted his cigarette out in an ashtray on his desk. He knelt down beside Sylvia and undid his belt. The whole time smiling the same bitter, perverse smile. To Sylvia, it was like she was watching it happen to someone else. She felt no panic. Just an overwhelming sense of peace. A peace that told her that all struggle was futile. A peace that told her that this wasn't happening to her – that it was happening to someone else. A peace that told her that everything was going to be all right.

_This wasn't happening to her, it was happening to someone else._

Mr. Servais had just moved to straddle her, when, as if she had been watching everything until now in slow motion, time seemed to take a leap forward. As a reflex, her knee flung forward until it connected with something firm. Sylvia felt a jarring, then a pain. Her leg went limp and collapsed to the ground. Something out of the ordinary happened to Mr. Servais too, he rolled into a ball – clutching his groin, gasping for air.

Sylvia rolled over. Using the handles of the filing cabinet, she climbed to her feet – her right leg still weak and feeling as though it might buckle. By this time, Mr. Servais, though still rolled up in a ball, had started to grab at her ankles. Sylvia took a step backwards and kicked him once with her good leg, but felt nothing. Lining up his head this time, she brought her leg back and kicked him again – harder, much harder. A wave of pain beginning at her foot rushed through her body again and again – growing in intensity each time. Sylvia staggered backwards and fell onto Mr. Servais' desk.

As she fell, her hand struck the cash box, which was still open. Sylvia seized the cash box, spilling whatever money was left in it out onto the desk. Indiscriminately, she grabbed at it – filling every pocket she had. Mr. Servais was still rolling around on the floor – one hand clutching his groin, the other his head.

"You bitch, I'm gonna fuckin' kill you, you stupid bitch, I'm gonna fuckin' kill
“you,” he had started to groan.

The cash box now empty, Sylvia grabbed it in one hand and swung it like an extended fist. The first time she hit Mr. Servais, it bit deep into her hand; by the third, she could feel nothing. Mr. Servais had stopped moving, but Sylvia kept on hitting him until finally she collapsed into a heap.

Sylvia wept uncontrollably until the realisation hit her: *I've killed him. My God, what if I've killed him.* Then she thought of the police. *I am not going to jail,* she told herself – as though it were a truth upon which all further action would be premised.

*Whatever happens, I am not going to go to jail.*

Sylvia crawled over to Mr. Servais and rolled him flat on his back. She held her hand over his mouth. Intermittently, she felt a warmth.

*You don't roll them on their back,* she thought. *You don't roll them on their back.* Sylvia turned around. She started picking up the money and everything else that was strewn on the floor and began stacking it into neat piles on his desk. *You don't roll them on their back,* she kept on thinking over and over again.

Sylvia turned around and looked at Mr. Servais again, who had started to groan.

*Make it seem like a burglary,* she thought. *Make it seem like a burglary.*

Sylvia looked up at the small ventilation window above Mr. Servais' desk. *That's big enough for someone to climb through,* she thought and climbed up on to the desk.

*They climbed in. Mr. Servais was alone in his office, counting the night's takings as he does every night – everybody knows that – and they climbed in.*

Sylvia opened the ventilation window and gave it a shove. It swung freely forward and then crunch, swung back, the handle jarring into the frame with a thud – although not really loud enough for anyone to hear.

*Make it seem like a burglary. Who knows I was here? None of the other girls know where I live. Never been in trouble with police before. Mr. Servais pays in cash. Keeps no records.*

Sylvia climbed down from the desk and rifled through its drawers. The only
thing she could find that might have her name in it was a small address-book, in
which Mr. Servais kept the girls' numbers. Sylvia took this and Mr. Servais' keys
and then she stepped around his desk to survey the scene. It certainly looked like
there had been a struggle.

Sylvia kicked the cash box away. Looking at Mr. Servais lying there, it
struck her: You roll them on their side. You don't roll them on their back. You roll
them on their side.

Sylvia bent down and tried to roll Mr. Servais over, but he was much too
heavy. Deciding to leave him as he was, Sylvia took one more look around.
There was nothing to say she had been there. Therefore she thought she could
leave safely and without drawing any unwanted attention to herself.

Sylvia opened the door of Mr. Servais' office. The club was dark except for
the white glow of the refrigerators. By touch, Sylvia fumbled through Mr. Servais'
keys until she found the right one, then she locked the door and checked the
handle.

They climbed in. Mr. Servais was alone in his office counting the night's
takings as he does every night – everybody knows that. He had locked himself in
as a safety measure and had no way to get out.

Sylvia gave the handle a tug to make sure it was locked.

There was a struggle; they beat him, took the money and climbed out.

Stealthily, Sylvia crept to the front doors and checked that they too were
locked, then she made her way to the back door. Before opening it, Sylvia
straightened her clothes and buttoned her great coat.

With much care, Sylvia opened the door and let herself out.

Outside the sun was just rising and the morning sky was painted a lovely
shade of pink underscored by a hint of blue. Sylvia carefully locked the back door
of the club and made sure that it too was locked. She dumped Mr. Servais' keys
in the skip, tucked the address-book into the top of her boot and walked up to the
main street.
Sylvia was surprised to find signs of life, as though absolutely nothing had happened. As she walked home, Sylvia felt touched, dirty and damaged. And after all that had happened to her, she was both comforted and betrayed that a new day was beginning.

* * * * *
Seventeen –

Every synapse in her body distressingly alive, jingling, jangling and demanding immediate attention, Sylvia made her way back to her apartment block as briskly as she could trying not to draw the attention of those whom she passed.

Presently at her apartment block, she carefully opened the large security door – making sure she closed it quietly so that no one would hear her. As she climbed the stairs to her apartment, Sylvia could hear a baby crying and Mr. Calabria swearing loudly.

After locking her door and checking twice that it was locked, Sylvia grabbed a half empty bottle of vodka from her kitchen and took a long swig. She ripped all her clothes off and ran to the shower. The water to scalding point. Everywhere she felt Mr. Servais’ hands upon her, touching her and grabbing at her. Sylvia scrubbed and scrubbed until she was raw, but they would not go away.

The hot water beginning to sear her, Sylvia got out of the shower. She dried herself and put her dressing gown on and then she went to the lounge-room and picked up her clothes. She emptied all the pockets and threw the contents onto the ground, then she carried them to the bathroom and threw them all – her great coat included – into the bathtub. Filling the bathtub with hot water, Sylvia rinsed and scrubbed, scrubbed and rinsed her clothes again and again, then she hung them on the railing of the shower curtain.

Finally, exhausted, Sylvia collapsed onto her bed, took another long swig of vodka and wept – all the time with the hope that things would improve for her, for they could not get much worse. As she cried, she wondered what the hell she had done wrong for her life to have turned out like this: why her? Why, in God’s name, her?! Then she thought of Mr. Servais as he had been lying there when she left him. What have I done?! What the hell have I done?! she thought.

Weeping and weeping all the while, wondering how the hell she was going to get herself out of the mess she was currently in, what she had just done and
what the consequences may be for both her and Mr. Servais. Wondering all the while what the hell she had just done. A thought that did not frighten, but rather terrify her.

* * * *

* * * *
Eighteen –

Sylvia awoke from her restless slumber to a knocking on her door. In a panic, she thought: *That's how the police knock; it's the police, that's how they knock.*

"Miss Thomas, I know you're in there. I know you're in there, Miss Thomas. Please open the door."

Sylvia was almost glad to hear Mr. Calabria's voice.

"Miss Thomas," he yelled repeatedly over his incessant knocking.

"Coming," Sylvia cried, "I'm coming."

Sylvia unlocked her door, but left the chain drawn for fear Mr. Calabria might burst in, discover the mess and get a proper look at her battered and bruised face and body.

"Mr. Calabria," she greeted him, as though he were a guest whom she had long been expecting.

"Is everything all right, Miss Thomas?" he asked Sylvia apprehensively, as if he knew all her secrets.

Sylvia looked at him as though puzzled.

"Of course, everything is all right, Mr. Calabria," she replied, doing her best to remain sincere. "Why shouldn't it be?" she asked.

"Well, Mrs. Calabria was up late with the baby last night and saw you coming home lookin' like you might be in trouble or somethin' and then she heard strange noises comin' from ya apartment right through till morning. And you, you been carrying on and screaming like a mad woman all day."

Mr. Calabria paused to take a breath and looked Sylvia up and down.

"Look at ya," he continued in disgust. "It's almost dinner time and you look like ya just got outta bed. You doin' somethin' I should know about? Is there somethin' you should be telling me, Miss Thomas? I think there is."

"No, Mr. Calabria," Sylvia began innocently. "I've just been feeling sick that's all," she said.

"Miss Thomas, you been takin' drugs or something, 'cos Mrs. Calabria
said that you looked like you was on drugs or something. I can't tolerate no one
in the building taking drugs. Not with Mrs. Calabria and the baby and all. Plus I
don't need no more trouble from the police. I told ya that once already, Miss
Thomas."

Sylvia rolled her eyes: "I am not taking drugs, Mr. Calabria," she said
feigning offence, though doing so poorly. "I told you, I've just been feeling a little
sick. Wait there."

Sylvia closed the door, and then she walked over to where she had
dumped Mr. Servais' money. Seeing it all lying there, Sylvia almost forgot herself
and cried out. It was thousands. Sylvia picked up six hundred dollar notes and a
fifty. She straightened her dressing gown and returned to the door where Mr.
Calabria was still waiting – looking more baffled than before.

"Here," Sylvia handed him the money, counting out each note as she did:
"You don't need to worry. Everything is all right, Mr. Calabria. As I said, I've just
been feeling a little sick: that's all."

Satisfied with the money – not to mention fifty dollars extra for his troubles
→, Mr. Calabria took his leave reminding Sylvia once more that he couldn't
"tolerate no-one in the building taking drugs. Not with Mrs. Calabria and the baby
and all."

Once Mr. Calabria had left, Sylvia collected all of Mr. Servais' money
together and counted it. She couldn't believe it – it was nearly four thousand
dollars. Sylvia counted it once more to make sure she wasn't mistaken – three
thousand, nine hundred and eighty-five dollars, not including that which she had
just given to Mr. Calabria.

Sylvia went to the kitchen and turned her radio on to see if there was
anything in the news about Mr. Servais. For nearly half an hour, she changed
from the one station to the next without hearing a thing. Then again the beating of
some sleazy strip club owner is hardly headline news, she told herself. The only
thing she did hear was a short report about a local Nightclub owner, who had
been beaten and was now in hospital in intensive care and in a critical condition:
“... was found in his office by staff, who had to break the door down. Although they have no definite leads at this stage, the police fear that it might be the work of a group of thieves, who are sought in connection with two similar attacks on nightclubs and their operators in the last few months.”

*In a critical condition,* thought Sylvia; *that means he might die – he might die!*

If Mr. Servais lived, he would be able to identify her and report her to the police. If he died, she had killed someone.

*In a critical condition,* thought Sylvia; *that means he might die – he might die!*

*But it was in self-defense ...* thought Sylvia; *he had assaulted me and was going to rape me.*

Who would testify to her innocence?

She was desperately short of money. She hadn't been able to pay her rent in nearly two months. So she had maliciously beaten and robbed the one man, who had tried to help her and taken her under his wing since she had left her parents' house. Mr. Servais had given her a job, mentored her and tried to help her out and how had she repaid this kindness? She had beaten him to within an inch of his life for what – money, almighty dollars and lots and lots of them. She had assaulted and thieved from him like a common criminal after all he had done for her. The day after her boss was senselessly beaten, she was somehow able to repay her landlord the money she had been owing him – six hundred dollars, plus fifty dollars. Plus fifty dollars to keep him quiet. Her landlord's wife had seen Miss Thomas coming home dishevelled only an hour after the beating had taken place.
But it was in self-defense ... Sylvia felt like screaming; he had assaulted me and was going to rape me.

Sylvia's mind began to race; and then it struck her with an almost overpowering clarity and simplicity: fingerprints and DNA. The police were going to find either her fingerprints or her DNA everywhere. On the window, on the door – on the cash box that he was beaten with. Everywhere. The police were going to find either her fingerprints or her DNA everywhere.

Fingerprints and DNA. Once again the inescapable equation ran through Sylvia's mind: "if he lives, he will identify me. If he dies, I have killed someone."

That's it, thought Sylvia: I've gotta leave. As soon as possible, I've gotta leave.

A change as good as a holiday, Sylvia embraced the idea of moving from Mr. Calabria's quarters with as much enthusiasm as she could presently muster. A change as good as a holiday, Sylvia embraced the idea of moving from Mr. Calabria’s quarters with as much enthusiasm as she could presently muster.

* * * * *
Nineteen –

There were times at "McPherson's Books" when things were busy, the store had a good trade, the customers were nice and Stephen found he actually enjoyed his job and was able to lose himself in it. At such times and on such days, he'd work through breaks, take extra care and answer queries, all with a smile on his face. And there were times at "McPherson's Books" when Stephen wanted to be anywhere else.

Today like the day before, however, was not such a day. That day, after opening the store on his own, following what was a slow beginning, Stephen worked from ten until three stopping only for a brief lunch of salami sandwiches and coffee – black, one sugar –, and found that this made his day go more quickly, much more quickly.

That day, Stephen worked the till. He offered advice, found books for customers and barely noticed as the hours passed, enjoying himself the whole time. He therefore decided that he would in fact take up Mr. McPherson's proposal and do the best he could and would tell him so when he next came into the store. Stephen decided that, all in all, he would finally act upon Mr. McPherson's proposal, take him up on it and tell him so when next he saw him. Thus Stephen resolved he would do his best; that he would meet any extra challenges and face up to any extra burdens it would entail and that he would give it his best shot – hoping it would make his work more enjoyable and offer what was some long sought after variety, which would breath a wind of change for him.

"McPherson's Books", with its ageing double glass façade and peeling paint, was situated in a shopping strip just off the main street of Gardenvale on a street named Carver, to be precise, an avenue named Carver; Carver avenue, and Stephen made best use of the shops and the amenities nearby and enjoyed as best he could the mock village life and made the most of its verve and feel for his work to give it colour and detail. There Stephen had his lunch. He did his shopping: bringing it all home on the dependable number thirty-two tram to his
little flat in Balaclava.

Inured to his circumstance and not foreseeing any great change to it in the near future, "McPherson's Books" on Carver avenue had become for Stephen like a second home. And, this as it was, Stephen, thus, made the best of his situation. "McPherson's Books" on Carver avenue was for Stephen like a second home.

* * * *

The young lady, whom Stephen had thought at first was too well dressed to be a student, had started coming in to "McPherson's Books" on a regular basis asking his advice and getting him to order books in for her, Stephen noticed and he found himself looking forward to her company. Her name, Stephen soon discovered, was Sylvia, and she seemed particularly interested in pictorial books about the Cobra artists, who were active in Copenhagen, Brussels and Amsterdam in the late sixties and early seventies, and, as such, were thus very influential on the state of contemporary modern art, the procurement of which in Stephen was able to assist her.

Stephen soon discovered that she was a Painter trying to establish herself as a self-sufficient and independent Artist, which Stephen respected and attracted him to her, and thus he decided he would ask her to have a coffee with him the next time he saw her with the hope that things would develop from there.

* * * *
Twenty –

By promising Mr. Calabria that she would pay an extra month’s rent in advance on top of all the money she had already given him, he let Sylvia leave the belongings, paintings and equipment she couldn't carry at her old lodgings. For nearly two weeks after Mr. Servais tried to attack her, Sylvia had scarcely dared leave her apartment. Every morning, she awoke in a sweat; every voice she heard in the hallway was that of a policeman. Every news bulletin she heard on the radio, Sylvia listened for news of Mr. Servais' condition, but other than that first report she heard nothing.

We begin walking with a crawl, little steps become big ones and soon we learn how to run. Her anxiety at a snail's pace abating, but abating nonetheless. Eventually Sylvia decided to start looking for work and a new place to live. Although she had barely touched Mr. Servais' money, Sylvia knew it wasn't going to last forever.

With the money, however, she did know that finding a new place to live wasn't going to be all that difficult. But finding a job: that was going to be the hard part.

"Oh, my last employer didn't give me a reference because I nearly killed him when he tried to rape me.”

Sylvia had toyed with the idea of returning to her parents' house in Lara, but how could she explain to them what had happened to her. They were disappointed when she said she would not continue at college: what would they think now? Nearly nine months on and nothing to show for her troubles except a host of bad experiences.

* * * * *

After looking at several different places, Sylvia eventually moved a little further up Hawthorn road closer into both the centre of the town and of
Melbourne – and thus well serviced by local conveniences and amenities: remaining, however, still in Gardenvale of which she had grown fond. Situated in a faux-modern block of one and two bedroom studio apartments, Sylvia’s new abode was a bit smaller than her last one, but, however, it did have a nice view of Caulfield racecourse and the Town Hall, was close to Caulfield Junction and was not quite as run-down as Mr. Calabria’s quarters having recently been refurbished as well as freshly painted. And somehow it made her feel safer to be around other people, even if they were people she did not know.

The apartment Sylvia had moved into was situated adjacent to a magnificently treed avenue named Carver, with a strip of quaint, time forgotten shops including, amongst others, a dilapidated bookstore, which she had taken to frequenting as it had an excellent selection of books on modern art, especially modern European art and the work of the Cobra artists, in which she was currently interested.

Sylvia spent there countless enchanted hours chasing their history and reading up on their work. The bookstore had a warm, inviting yet cultivated and refined atmosphere, which made her feel instantly at home and welcome. Sylvia found herself spending so much time there that she had even began to spend some of Mr. Servais’ money and, by placing books on order, had even run up a small tab. The Sales assistant, a Stephen, was always ready to lend a hand, which Sylvia appreciated and she found herself enjoying his company. Thus she spoke and spoke freely with him.

Sylvia looked forward to their conversations. And once she entered the bookstore, she never wanted to leave and so she spent as much time as she could there – not, however, neglecting her painting, which she now tackled and embarked upon with a new vigour and a new rigour – being more conscientious, more diligent and more hard-working than ever before.

With all the help that Stephen had given her, she thus thought he was kind-hearted and considerate, however, a bit too overbearing and overly assertive when he helped her and yet, nonetheless, Sylvia found herself saying
Yes when he asked her to have a coffee with him in one of his breaks at a café nearby the bookstore, where he worked. And coffee did they have, albeit brief, agreeing to meet again for a meal and a movie in the not too distance.

* * * *

After nearly a month of being unemployed and her prospects of finding any type of work diminishing with the passing of each and every day, Sylvia had almost given up hope of finding a new job at all when one day she was buying paints at her local Supply Store for Artists. The owner, a Mr. Benjamin Wilson, recognised Sylvia from the few times before she had come in to the store. His niece, whose name Sylvia had discovered was Justine – "Heard of her? Won the Stone prize last year at Winchester, Winchester College that is. Mmm, don't 'speckt you have," –, who helped him out at the store, had been offered a commission to prepare an exhibition with, and work in the studio of, another more recognised artist. Although he didn't let on, Sylvia could tell Mr. Wilson was quite proud of his niece. Anyway, as this exhibition was going to take up most of his niece's time, Mr. Wilson was looking for someone to help him out in the store. Without knowing how she had done it or what she had said, Sylvia had landed herself the job.

Mr. Wilson, Sylvia soon discovered, kept rooms above the store and rarely – extremely rarely – left them, unless it was on business or to do the store's banking. Why he needed someone to help him, Sylvia couldn't work out. The store had a good trade, but it was hardly flat out. Mostly, Sylvia decided, Mr. Wilson wanted somebody to talk to and talk Mr. Wilson did and a lot.

Mr. Wilson's three main topics of conversation were the work of his niece, Justine, the farcical state of the contemporary Australian art world, of which he seemed to have an almost encyclopaedic knowledge, and his bemusement over his own failure as an Artist. Mr. Wilson, it turned out, had shown great potential as an artist when young. Idleness and cynicism, however, had meant that this potential had largely gone to waste. All too early had he resigned himself to his
failure, given up painting and opened the Supply Store where Sylvia now worked, thereby sating his interest in all things art and continuing to work and to meet with other artists.

However trying working with Mr. Wilson was, at times, his company and the work at the Supply store was a vast improvement from the strip club. Although he couldn't afford to pay Sylvia too much, Mr. Wilson did give her large discounts on any supplies she might want, which helped. Although at times his company could be a bit tedious and his tirades also a bit much, Mr. Wilson did offer Sylvia a lot of advice and seemed genuinely interested in her work.

* * * *

Once when Mr. Wilson was out doing the Supply store’s banking in her second week at the store, a middle-aged man approaching fifty, whom Sylvia recognised as a regular at Mr. Servais’, came in to buy some materials. For nearly an hour, this man quizzed Sylvia about different materials, various magazines and so forth. The whole time, Sylvia, who more than once had danced all but naked on this man’s lap, grinding away and had grown weary of his groping hands – constantly having had to slap them away from her –, was worried he might recognise her and say something to Mr. Wilson about her previous employment, which she had hitherto been able to keep secret.

This man, however, turned out to be quite mild-mannered – not as Sylvia had remembered him from the club – and almost afraid to ask her questions. Once or twice, he looked Sylvia directly in the eye and there was a glimmer of recognition, but then he would continue to ask her questions in the same embarrassed fashion. This man, Sylvia later discovered, turned out to be quite a prominent lecturer at Winchester, the college where Mr. Wilson's niece, Justine, had been a student.
Just like any other customer, Sylvia served this man and did so with a smile on her face, wondering what his colleagues and students would think of his conduct when at Servais’ Gentlemen’s Club.

* * * *
**Twenty-one –**

It had been well over a week since Stephen had received the letter from the publishers, “Forrest and Hooper”, and still he hadn’t heard a thing. Every morning on his way to work, he stopped to check his letterbox for mail with the hope of finding something, with the hope of finding anything, but, alas and alack, still nothing. Yet still he found, regardless, that he remained rather positive.

As he made his way to the bookstore that morning, the conditions the first letter from “Forrest and Hooper” had stipulated ran through Stephen's mind once more:

"If you have not heard from us within the next 60 working days, then we ask you to accept that your work has not been chosen."

"If you have not heard from us within the next 60 working days ..." What would happen if he had not heard from us within the next 60 working days? He could send his manuscript to a few more publishers, then what? Receive a few more letters about the next 60 working days or better still; receive actual letters of rejection or better still: nothing. A wave of anxiety made Stephen feel sick in the pit of his stomach. Night after night, he had, as the poet Eliot had written, *toiled frightfully* over his work, labouring tirelessly – a novel had grown from a blank page. He had rejected everything – friends, the bottle, women – everything – only for 60 working days; 60 working days of waiting; 60 working days of hoping; 60 working days. Then what? Nothing; go on as if nothing had happened – as if absolutely nothing had happened. The best he could say, come what may, was that he could still go to work. Go to work and listen to Mr. McPherson's complaints; to Lawrence and Andrew's “adventures” and “exploits”: the customers’ gripes and the customers' moans. And the best he could say, come what may, was that he could still go to work and wait 60 working days. 60 working days; 60 working days of waiting; 60 working days of hoping; 60 working days: then what?

Without Stephen realising it, the number thirty-two drew to the stop
nearest the bookstore. Vacantly, Stephen rose to his feet and alighted. As if moving along a conveyor belt, not being coerced or pushed, seemingly not moving at all, he made his way to the bookstore; his hand fiddling with the keys in his pocket. It had taken Mr. McPherson nearly a year and a half before he trusted Stephen enough to give him a set of keys – and only then just for the front doors.

As he stopped to open which, it struck Stephen there was nothing much to steal from the bookstore. "McPherson's Books – New and Second hand" was not the type of place that stocked "Antiquarian" or "Specialist" books of any kind or of any value. "New and Second hand" meant exactly that: "New and Second hand".

"New" – "New" were the latest offerings from the malevolent gods of publishing. "New" were writers who made art from cum, who made art from vomit and any other form of human degradation currently in vogue. "New" were overlong so-called "historical" potboilers from authors who should have stayed in advertising – from authors who had never left advertising. Advertising…,

Advertising. How had Orwell put it: "Most copywriters, they say, are novelists manqués; or is it the other way about(4)?"

"Second hand" – It was "Second hand" that were the backbone of the store: the very lifeblood, which kept its faint pulse ticking – barely. It was "Second hand" that were the ghosts of a culture past.

This was the time of day, however, that Stephen liked the most, no customers, no Mr. McPherson; the lights not yet lit, he had trained himself to feel his way to the staff room without turning them on for that one cup of instant coffee before opening the doors to the public.

Meditatively, Stephen sipped his coffee. In the silence, he could almost hear the books sighing, overflowing with the wisdom held therein. He thought of Sylvia. A painter; a painter, no less. She was the one, who had been coming in, asking his advice and getting him to order books in for her. A painter; a painter, no less. Was she his Caitlin? A muse to inspire him and breathe new life into him and into his work once more? he wondered and found himself glad that he had taken the step of asking her out even though it had been a long, long while that
he had ever so much as asked a girl for anything more than the time, and a movie they were seeing that coming Friday, with Stephen hoping that something good would come of their relationship and that he would do everything he could to ensure that this was so.

* * *
Twenty-two –

Another week finished and the Supply store closed for the day. Sylvia took the cash drawer out of the till and went to the back office of the store to count it. As she went to sit down, she looked at the clock above Mr. Wilson’s desk. Nearly a quarter past five. Immediately, she thought of Stephen.

*What time had they arranged to meet?* she wondered as she began to count the day’s takings.

Stephen, Sylvia had discovered from their conversations, was an aspiring writer, who worked for the most of the time part-time at the second hand bookstore, which was near her apartment to support himself, and which Sylvia had taken to frequenting when she wanted a break from painting as it had an excellent selection of books on modern art, especially modern European art.

The two had struck up a rapport and somewhat unexpectedly he had asked her to have a coffee with him to which she had no objection. And as Sylvia had enjoyed his company, coffee became a meal, a meal became a date and one date became another and so it went – and went smoothly for the two. Each seeing much in the other with the possibility of good things happening and something – something worthwhile and lasting – coming of their relationship.

And, this being so, Stephen had promised to take Sylvia to the Astor cinema the next time when they met, a place she had never been before, although she had walked past it many times, and the two were to see a double feature that very night.

Sylvia counted the Supply store’s takings and arranged it the way Mr. Wilson liked it: the larger notes separated from the smaller notes; the smaller notes tightly rolled into a bundle with their own denomination; coins neatly packed in baggies; leaving a fifty-dollar float for the next day. Sylvia quickly finished her end of day duties. She put the day’s takings in the safe, and then she closed it and made sure that it was locked. Sylvia put the rest of the money in the top drawer of Mr. Wilson’s desk, and then she locked it.
5:30: Mr. Wilson had just returned from the bank when Sylvia finished.

"I'm off now," Sylvia told him as he came into the back office of the store: "I've counted the day's takings; they're all in the safe – just the way you like them."

"Ah, okay; I'll see you tomorrow then. Can you come an hour earlier? There's a big delivery of new brushes and other supplies coming and I'll need some help with the pricing. Remember it's a Saturday, so you'll get time and a half."

"Yep, that won't be a problem …" Sylvia said. "An hour earlier, I'll be there."

"Good," Mr. Wilson said, holding the door open for her.

* * * *

Sylvia dashed home from the Supply store. She had a quick shower and changed into the new, pleated dress and matching sweater she had bought especially for her date with Stephen that night. After a quick look in the mirror, Sylvia was out the door and had left to make her way to Glen Huntly train station where she had arranged to meet with Stephen.

* * * *

Glen Huntly train station was within a reasonable walking distance from Sylvia’s new apartment in Gardenvale and, it being a fine spring afternoon, Sylvia decided she would walk there to meet Stephen. The last stop city bound on the Frankston line before Caulfield station, at the top end of Glen Huntly road, Glen Huntly train station is one of the only spots in the South Eastern suburbs where a tram passes through a level rail crossing, which meant that both trains and trams must slow to a virtual halt when they passed over the tracks; something Sylvia learnt for the first time watching both as they went by while she waited for
Stephen that evening.

* * * *
Stephen had arranged to meet Sylvia at seven. Since they had started
"courting", he had cultivated a taste for foreign films, particularly those from
China. Tonight, however, they were seeing science fiction. The truth was that,
before he and Sylvia had started "courting", rarely was it that Stephen left his little
flat other than to go to work. "Courting", what a phrase to use at this, the
beginning of the twenty-first century. "Courting", what was that now? Anonymous
couplings in cars and parks then a few tepid weeks of wait and see followed by a
cold shoulder or can we just be friends?

Courting, Stephen was surprised to find Sylvia already out the front of
Glen Huntly train station opposite the tram stop – the spot where they had
arranged to meet. She looked better than she had when last they had met for a
coffee – much better with her short, dark pleated dress and matching skintight
sweater, which accented her already svelte and sylph figure.

Fortunately, today was payday. Thus no expense would be spared: or its
closest equivalent at eighteen dollars fifty an hour. Approaching Sylvia standing
where they had arranged to meet, Stephen thought of the costly bottle of wine he
had bought on his way home from work. Now safely tucked away in the
refrigerator.

"What is the etiquette of "courting" now in this the beginning of the twenty-
first century?"

Courting; "You're a bit early," Stephen greeted Sylvia, a little surprised,
but, nonetheless, however, still glad to see her.

"Oh, I thought ...; is that a problem?" Sylvia asked somewhat defensively.

"No, I like it: ‘Punctuality is the politeness of princes’," quoth Stephen
sardonically, but with a smile.

First date jitters; coke date jitters; "Want to get a cup of coffee?" Stephen
asked. “The films don't start until eight,” he said.

"There's a place around the corner," he added, as though he were an
habitué.

First date jitters; coke date jitters; Stephen felt Sylvia's shoulders tense as
he passed his arm around them thus he decided to let her be and withdrew it.

And so, the two walked abreast an uncomfortable distance apart until they came to the café.

Sylvia seemed a little more preoccupied and withdrawn than when they had last met; leaving Stephen half-wondering if this was the last time they would meet.

First date jitters; coke date jitters; In silence, they entered the café, which was more or less empty. Stephen pulled a chair out for Sylvia, and then made his way around the table and sat down.

He thus remained with Sylvia in stilted and embarrassed silence until finally a waiter with a closely cropped, designer goatee beard, which looked as though it had been sandblasted onto his face, came to their table.

"Are you all right?" the waiter asked Sylvia rather disinterestedly.

"A long black," Stephen interrupted somewhat abruptly, before Sylvia had a chance to say anything.

"A long black," the waiter repeated: "And you?" he asked Sylvia curtly and with disdain.

"A coffee, thanks," she replied somewhat absently, without really thinking.

"A coffee?" the waiter repeated as though questioning whether such a thing actually existed – in a manner that made Sylvia wonder if one did: "A coffee?"

Then he blurted out a long list of Italian names that Sylvia seemed to have trouble recognising.

Before he had a chance to get too far, however, Stephen interrupted him: "A coffee; she wants a coffee – white."

Immediately, Sylvia was put off by the way in which Stephen raised his voice.

"Oh, a latté," "O r lar-tay," the waiter replied not missing a beat, betraying no sign that he was put off.

"Yes, a latté," Stephen repeated condescendingly feeling the resentment at the waiter swelling up inside of him. "She wants a latté. Is that a problem?"
"Tap water's fine," Sylvia replied quietly, rather embarrassed. "Tap water's fine," the waiter repeated; as though everything was not, in fact, fine. Turning as he was still writing on his little notepad and storming off in a huff to where he had come from behind the café’s bar.

"Did I say something wrong?" Sylvia asked Stephen feigning innocence, taking his hand and stroking it gently.

*What a gesture.*

With this straight away, the tension subsided and abated in Stephen. He sighed, looked Sylvia in the eye and let her continue to continue. He smiled and felt himself blush a little; relieved he muttered an unheard promise. Sylvia through this felt more confident. She became more adventurous and more amorous, which made Stephen feel contented and at ease – this was as he knew that something, not now, but later that something would come of it.

Their coffees soon finished, without further ado, Stephen; Stephen and Sylvia headed out to Glen Huntly road to catch a taxi to the Astor cinema.

* * *
Twenty-four –

Sylvia looked at her watch again: ten to seven.

*What time had Stephen said he would meet her?* she wondered.

Sylvia looked through the sea of faces coming out of the train station. She saw someone who she thought was Stephen, but no. She looked again. Suddenly, she felt a tap on her shoulder. It was Stephen.

"You're a bit early," he said a little too curtly.

"Oh, I thought …" Sylvia was taken aback by the way Stephen said: "You're a bit early." *What was he trying to say?* "You're a bit early."

"You're a bit early." "Is that a problem?" she asked.

"No, I like it," Stephen replied enthusiastically. "Punctuality is the politeness of princes."

A little more relaxed, Sylvia smiled and gave Stephen a peck on the cheek, something that both surprised and silenced him until he asked: "Want to get a cup of coffee? The films don't start until eight."

"There's a place around the corner," he added, confident after Sylvia’s kiss.

As they started walking, Sylvia felt Stephen place his arm around her shoulders a little too comfortably, making her feel even more awkward than she had been when she had been waiting for him.

Presently at the café after a brief walk, as they entered Sylvia began to feel more and more uncomfortable. Stephen pulled a chair out for her, made his way around the table, and then sat down himself. And thus the pair remained in embarrassed silence until finally an Italian waiter came to their table.

"Are you all right?" the waiter asked Sylvia, bored, in what she took to be a broad Sicilian accent.

"A long black," Stephen replied, before she had a chance to answer.

"A long black," the waiter repeated diligently making brief swirling notations on his notepad. "And you?" he asked Sylvia quite rudely.
“A coffee, thanks,” she replied, innocently enough.

“A coffee?” the waiter repeated as though questioning whether such a thing actually existed – in a manner that made Sylvia wonder if one did: “A coffee?”

“A coffee?” the waiter repeated – waiting for more information. Since none was forthcoming, he asked:

“A latté? A macchiato? Espresso?”

The waiter ran down an impossible list of every variation on the theme, and then disdainfully asked once more: “A coffee?”

“A coffee,” Stephen said abruptly, raising his voice a little, “she wants a coffee – white.”

“Oh, a latte,” “O r lar-tay,” the waiter replied not missing a beat, betraying no sign that he was put off.

“Yes, a latte,” Stephen repeated in a manner, which surprised Sylvia. “She wants a latte. Is that a problem?”

“Anything else?” the waiter asked looking now at Sylvia, ignoring Stephen.

“A glass of water,” Sylvia replied, almost in a whisper.

“A glass of water? Tap water …? Mineral water …? Carbonated …”

“Tap water’s fine,” Sylvia replied, barely audibly.

“Tap water’s fine,” the waiter repeated as though an automaton and returning to behind the café’s bar.

“Did I say something wrong?” Sylvia asked Stephen coquettishly taking his hand and playing with it.

Through it feeling Stephen’s frustration subside.

Sylvia stroked Stephen’s hand and rubbed it affectionately. She caressed it and stroked it, all with amazing tenderness and warmth. This made Stephen feel somewhat better, and he responded in kind by following her lead – something, which became more satisfying and pleasing as it continued.
Promptly finishing their beverages, Stephen; Stephen and Sylvia decided to leave for the Astor ahead of time so as to avoid the Friday night queue at the box office.

* * * *
Twenty-five –

The old and antiquated Astor cinema situated as it was near the corner of Dandenong road and Chapel street in Windsor was close to both Stephen’s little flat in Balaclava and Sylvia’s apartment in Gardenvale. And so, with programmes plastered at both their respective workplaces, Stephen and Sylvia decided they would see a double feature there, as Sylvia had never been there before – only ever having walked past it. To get there from the café near Glen Huntly train station, Stephen had offered to pay for a taxi: an offer that Sylvia had taken him up on.

Recently refurbished, the Astor cinema had been bought back to its old Victorian splendour by loving craftsmen with its features from way back when, wide stair cases with carpeted stairs and brilliant chandeliers, Stephen; Stephen and Sylvia were there ahead of time and they were soon purchasing their tickets at the box office for the night’s entertainment.

That night, a Friday, the Astor had a full house and Stephen and Sylvia found seats just beneath the cinema’s dress circle. They had come to see Ridley Scott’s Blade Runner, which was being shown as the second film in a double feature with Stanley Kubrik’s A Clockwork Orange. That night, the Astor was packed to the rafters and Stephen; Stephen and Sylvia both found themselves enjoying the vim and vigour, which surrounded them.

During the intermission, they ordered two of the Astor’s renowned chocolate-coated ice creams. Stephen had mixed berry, whilst Sylvia chose vanilla. Stephen; Stephen and Sylvia; Each having some of each other's chocolate-coated ice creams. Stephen; Stephen and Sylvia sharing each other’s chocolate-coated ice creams at the Astor cinema. Stephen; Stephen and Sylvia sharing each other’s chocolate-coated ice creams at the Astor cinema.

Towards the climax of Blade Runner, the final movie in the double bill for that night, when Rutger Hauer was chasing Harrison Ford through an abandoned
Old world building, Stephen picked up Sylvia's hand and stroked it to which she replied in kind. Stephen; Stephen and Sylvia playing with each other's hands as the movies for that evening came to an end and as the credits began to roll.

The movies for that night finished, Stephen rose from his seat and soon made to leave, whilst Sylvia followed. Stephen; Stephen and Sylvia playing with each other's hands as the movies for that evening came to an end and as the credits began to roll. Stephen; Stephen and Sylvia playing with each other’s hands.

* * * *

A reasonably pleasant early spring evening, Stephen and Sylvia decided to go for a little walk and have another coffee at the Station hotel in Greville street off Chapel street near the Council offices and the Town Hall before they began to make their way to Prahran train station for the trip home to Stephen's little flat in Balaclava. Compared to the café in Glen Huntly, the waiting staff at this hotel were much more humane and hospitable towards the two – even lighting Stephen's cigarettes for him – as they sat in the beer garden, not that Stephen; Stephen and Sylvia would have noticed so caught up were they in each other, gazing intently into each other's eyes, laughing at the jokes the other made, listening to their well-reasoned points of view about everything from the movies they had just seen to the state of our super materialistic society, where possessions and money were priority A number one, what it meant to be and to survive as a person, let alone as an artist, in it, how one could live a good life in an age of self-interest and find meaning both in it and their lives and generally enjoying each other’s company and companionship.

Their coffees soon finished, the two decided to leave and to walk to Prahran train station for the trip home. Stephen; Stephen and Sylvia – Sylvia and Stephen walking to Prahran train station holding each other’s hands.

Before long their train at Balaclava, Stephen; Stephen and Sylvia got out still holding each other’s hands. Stephen; Stephen and Sylvia – Sylvia and
Stephen still holding each other's hands. And as they walked hand in hand, the two discussed the evening's fare.

"It was all right," Stephen said somewhat non-committal referring to *A Clockwork Orange* that he had thought had dated poorly.

"No, I liked it, it was um, different, yeah different – but still good."

"Hunh, different it certainly was," Stephen replied.

Taken aback by Stephen's abrupt response, Sylvia decided she would remain quiet and leave it at that. Stephen followed suit and as they strolled deep into the night, he kissed her cheek and placed his arm around Sylvia's shoulders receiving no resistance from her. Rather she let him and acquiesced, which made the two happy, very happy. For although they had differing opinions about the movies they had just seen, they were not going to let that spoil what was, had been and continued to be a pleasant evening for the both of them.

Stephen; Stephen and Sylvia walking arm in arm in the late of the night. Stephen and Sylvia – Sylvia and Stephen walking arm in arm in the late of the night enjoying being with one another.

And so, the argument put to rest, the two continued on their way in silence.

Until they came to a T-intersection, whereupon Stephen said, "This is my street."

"Oh, okay," Sylvia responded.

"Would you um, like to come upstairs, perhaps?"

"I've ah, got to…. yeah, okay."

* * * *

Seeing his little flat, where it now struck Stephen, through another person's eyes, that in not even three paces you were in the bedroom, he was embarrassed by how little he had to show for himself. Although he had spent a
large part of the previous weekend cleaning, so used was he to living on his own it seemed strange to have another person walking amongst his things.

"Wow, you have so many books," was the first thing Sylvia said.
"One of the perks of the job," Stephen replied on his way to the kitchen. Once there, he searched for the two cleanest glasses he could find.
"Wine?" he asked, trying to sound nonchalant.
"A small glass, thanks," Sylvia replied.
Stephen took the bottle of wine he had bought out of the refrigerator and struggled with the cork. **Out of practice,** he thought as he filled the two glasses.
With a glass in either hand, Stephen returned to the other room where Sylvia was still inspecting his bookcase.
"Sorry about the mess," he said, placing the glasses on his writing desk.
"No, that's all right, I like it, it's …"

"Here you go," Stephen handed Sylvia one of the glasses, before she had a chance to finish her sentence.
"Thanks," she said and raised it. "Cheers."
Stephen had no intention of touching his.
"You said you paint?" he asked.
"I used to …"
"Not anymore?"
"Sometimes, you know …"
Sylvia had turned to face the bookcase again.
"**Tess of the D'Urbervilles,**" she said, taking a slim volume from one of the bookcase's shelves.
"You've read it?" Stephen asked, curious.
"Had it forced upon us at high school."
Uncomfortable standing in the middle of the room, Stephen went and sat down on his bed.
"Have you read **Far from the Madding Crowd?**" Sylvia asked, turning around.
"Yeah, I went through a big Hardy phase not too long ago."
"Which character did you like best Gabriel or Bath …, Bath …?"
"Bathsheba," Stephen corrected her, "Gabriel, of course."
"Bathsheba," Sylvia repeated: "Bathsheba."

Sylvia finished off her wine. She walked over to Stephen's writing desk and placed her glass next to his full one. Then she went and sat down next to Stephen on his bed.

Pretending not to notice, Stephen went into a detailed description of the character of Gabriel Oak.

"Oh yeah?" Sylvia said jokingly, pretending to yawn.

Stephen took Sylvia's hint and moved quite close to her. Clumsily, he turned towards Sylvia and kissed her. She made no attempt to stop him.

When she closed her eyes, however, Sylvia saw Mr. Servais as he had been standing over her at the club when she had regained consciousness and he was about to straddle her.

"Stop!" she protested and pulled away.

"What's wrong?" Stephen asked disappointed.

"Nothing, can we ah; can we just talk?" Sylvia asked, moving away from Stephen.


"Nothing: can you just drop it, okay?" Sylvia said abruptly.

"Sorry," Stephen said, "it's just, I thought, you know …"

Sylvia stood up and straightened her blouse.

"I think I should go," she said.

"No stay, we can talk."

"No, I've got a big day tomorrow, I think I should go," Sylvia insisted.

"Let me walk you home?"

"No."

"I'll call you. Tomorrow: I'll call you, yeah."

"Whatever: I really think I should go, okay," Sylvia said once more and
made her way to the door.

Disappointed, lost for words and reticent, Stephen remained on the bed as Sylvia made good her exit – and such that it was and was it such at least that was so for Stephen; Stephen and Sylvia.

*    *    *    *
Twenty-six –

For the fifth time that day, a Saturday – twice at “McPherson’s Books”, thrice at home --, Stephen tried to call Sylvia and for the fifth time that day he got her answering machine. Stephen waited, then he spoke his message:

"Sylvia, it’s Stephen. I don’t know what happened, but I’m sorry about last night. Listen, I think that we need to talk. Can you please call me back?"

And for the fifth time that day Stephen left his number, said he would be at home for the rest of the evening and hung up.

Stephen walked over to his writing desk. He looked at what he had been writing. Mr. McPherson’s plans for going on holiday had been put on hold for the time being. At the last minute, Mrs. McPherson, whose first name was Lorna, had got cold feet and she had decided to stay in Melbourne.

Thus Stephen had been burdened with the ogre of Mr. McPherson around the bookstore for a time indeterminate. Doubly so, since Mr. McPherson had been looking forward to going away. His presence at the store weighed heavier than it ever had before: when he came in, he was disgruntled on his good days, unbearable on his bad. So between keeping his distance from Lawrence and Andrew, Stephen now had to contend with Mr. McPherson and his moods, something to which Stephen was not particularly looking forward.

Work; Work and Stephen – Stephen and work. Work and Stephen – Stephen and work was not something, which sat comfortably. This weight, however, had been lightened somewhat by Sylvia, but now even their budding relationship was on tenterhooks. Stephen wondered what he had done wrong.

Everything had been going so well until she had come back to his flat after the movies.

Again, Stephen found himself wondering what he had done wrong. Had he come on too strong? Had he not come on strong enough? Had he been too passive? Too aggressive? Had he done too little? Too much? Whatever it was,
although he was at a loss as to precisely what, Stephen was resolute that if he found out he would never do it again, for he wanted to keep seeing Sylvia as he felt she had much to offer him.

With these and other thoughts weighing heavily in Stephen’s mind and troubling him, he picked up his pen and began to write. All the time hoping that Sylvia would return his calls. To help him to put out of his mind what had happened, Stephen decided he would fare forward with his writing and so he continued on with a short story he was working on from where he had left off:

“In the slums lived a painter, van Wallen, who dreamed of opening a school. In the slums lived a painter, van Wallen, who grew to become famous. In the slums lived a painter, whose daughter opened a school.

Of all the brilliant students, who walked the halls of the illustrious van Wallen Academy, none shone brighter than the flaxen haired Joanna Schouten. Her subtlety and taste coupled with an innate aptitude for industry promised her the brightest of futures”.

Progress!! thought Stephen as he wrote. Feeling that everything was in place, Stephen knew that, despite his other misgivings, he was in the mood to write, and, what is more, to write well, to find a bad phrase, to pick a bad sentence, and to write many good ones and thus he continued with renewed zest and gusto.

Stephen was actually writing a short story about two artists based on the Greco-Roman myth of Echo and Narcissus. He wanted to have it finished in as close to next to no time as was practicably possible. He knew that this was within his reach and so he pushed himself to write on.

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“Only twice before in van Wallen’s long history had a student won both the Stone prize for Drawing and the Turner prize for Oil painting; and only once had a student won them both in the same year as Joanna had. Although everything in
her life revolved around her art, never did she question whether she had any real
talent or not; nor did she question the nature of real talent”.

*Could be finished by tonight*, Stephen thought as he wrote and so he kept
his head down and persevered. The story Stephen was writing, which he had
titled *Echo as a Painter*, was about a successful young painter, Joanna
Schouten, who had been offered the opportunity to have the first real exhibition of
her work, which was to be prepared in the studio of an already successful and
established other painter of the name Wim McGarry.

The way that Stephen saw it and hoped it would work out was that
Joanna, who was the embodiment of the Ancient figure of Echo, whilst her
counterpart in the tale, Wim, who was the embodiment of Narcissus would reflect
what he saw happening in the modern Art world. Stephen was interested to see
how it would be played out and so he stole the myth from the Greeks and posited
in today’s art world to investigate whether both or either could survive in it. *Echo
as a Painter* was a short story that Stephen had been working on and off for the
last few weeks, whilst he was trying to garner material for and plan his next novel
and, this being so, Stephen, as ever, persevered and thus set himself the task of
writing on.

Writing; Writing and Stephen – Stephen and Writing; Writing for Stephen
was both pleasure and pain, panacea and poison, voice to his feelings and
frustration and an obstacle for their expression. This as it was, he fared forward –
all the time persevering with the hope of finding some kind of resolution – all the
time persevering – all the time seeking for the right words.

Despite the other worries presently weighing heavily in his mind, Stephen
continued and continued onwards and did his best to finish *Echo as a Painter*
that evening, for he thought that that was possible.

As it turned out, a long awaited second letter from the publishing house of
“Forrest and Hooper” had arrived inviting Stephen to meet with the addressee, a
Mr. Hooper, in the not too distant future to discuss what options there may be for *The DaySleepers* and for future works. Stephen had responded positively, replied in kind and had soon arranged a meeting with Mr. Hooper to have a talk about the possibilities for *The DaySleepers* – hoping that this would be the opportunity he had long been seeking and that it could mean that he might see his work not only in print, but on the shelves of bookstores. This second letter from “Forrest and Hooper” was a chance for Stephen to see his work and words in print, perhaps his only chance. Thus he would not let it slip away.

When he had completed his novel, which he had titled *The DaySleepers* for two reasons: one, the greater part of it was written when they, the Day sleepers, worked, and two it was begun when Stephen was unemployed, and thus keeping irregular hours, Stephen had deliberately targetted three publishing houses – one of which was “Forrest and Hooper” –, which he thought may accept his work, given its nature and its subject matter.

*The DaySleepers* was about a group of friends – students mostly –, who worked hard and played even harder, hence the title. A coming of age novel, the climax of *The DaySleepers* was ambiguous and purposely so insofar as one of the central characters appeared to have committed suicide at the end: leaving a note, but left no body to be found. Thereby, the ending of *The DaySleepers* left it up to the reader to decide whether she was dead or not. With the receipt of this second letter, Stephen realised it could possibly mean he now had a greater chance not only to see his work in print, but distributed by a reasonably respected publishing house with a growing standing and credibility for publishing new as well as experimental authors’ work.

“Forrest and Hooper” was one of the three publishing houses Stephen had sent his manuscript to when completed. The receipt of this second letter from “Forrest and Hooper” meant that he now had a chance to get a foot in the door and would do his utmost to ensure that this was and would remain to be so. Thus, with the receipt of this second letter, Stephen was both anxious and excited and had the presentiment that it may lead to something good, something
a long time coming and something he would not let slip away.

* * * *
Twenty-seven –

From the shower, Sylvia heard the telephone ring again. There had been three messages on her answering machine from Stephen when she came home from work: surely he couldn’t be calling again.

"Hi, you've called ---- – ----," Sylvia heard her recorded voice begin, "we can't come to the phone right now. But if you'd like to leave a message, please wait for the tone."

As she was drying herself, Sylvia heard the tone sound. She stopped and listened to the message.

"Sylvia, it's Stephen. I don’t know what happened, but I'm sorry about last night. Listen, I think that we need to talk. Can you please call me back? I'm going to be at home for the rest of the evening. If you want to give me a call, the number is 9595 – 5959."

After Stephen had hung up, Sylvia finished drying herself. She hung her towel over the shower’s rail. Then she went to her bedroom and began to dress.

Stephen was sweet, Sylvia thought, but a little too intense, not to mention fervent, after what only had been a few dates: a coffee, a few meals, and then the movies. Still, however, she was surprised by her reaction towards him when he had tried to kiss her.

How long would the ghost of Mr. Servais continue to haunt her? she wondered.

With this thought ever present in her mind, Sylvia returned to her easel. Of late, she had been painting a lot – and what is more a lot of new material and covering new ground and accessing new corridors. She was finding, with Mr.
Wilson’s advice, that she was progressing well and, further to which, she was pleased with the results: trying new things in her art, all the time making exciting and surprising discoveries and opening what to her were hitherto unthought-of doors as she went.

Sylvia picked up her brush. She began to paint and this made her feel more at ease and somewhat calmer, all the time wondering, however: *How long would the ghost of Mr. Servais continue to haunt her?* Knowing that it would be later rather than sooner and that she would not be delivered from his ghost for some time to come – if ever – and that the best way, if indeed there were a ‘best way’, to overcome these thoughts was to keep herself busy. And keep herself busy, it was her intent, Sylvia would do with her painting – concentrating upon her work, both her painting and at the Supply store, as she had never done before.

Sylvia thought of her reaction to Stephen, which made her wonder about what he would have thought about her leaving like that and of the attack; that his new girlfriend, Sylvia the Painter, the Supply store employee, had beat a man half, if not to, death when he tried to rape her as well as of Mr. Servais’ state: whether he had pulled through or not? In either case, Sylvia contemplated what the implications and consequences would be for her and whether he would track her down or not.

We all have skeletons in the closet and dark places that we wish were not there and Sylvia was no saint, she knew, but she was no slut either, this she also knew. Working in a strip club as a lap dancer was therefore for her quite an eye opener – an experience that was that an experience, and one she would not do again and it was her intent ever. She had bills to pay. She had just left her parents’ house and *Mr. Servais’* struck her as a good idea – *at the time*.

In the past there had been a few boys, it is true, but after a number of unsatisfying and inadequate couplings in cars and parks, Sylvia had decided to focus upon her work – concentrating her frustration and disappointment into her painting. Sylvia still hoped for someone special, who would take her for what she was and Sylvia hoped that this someone special was Stephen. Thus she decided
she would return his calls and give him a second chance; firm in the knowledge that things would and should change and hopefully for the better, for they could not get much worse.

After a little hesitation, Sylvia put down her brush. She walked across the room, picked up the telephone and dialled Stephen’s number.

“Hi Stephen, it’s Sylvia,” she said when he answered.
“Hi Sylvia, is everything okay?” he asked.
“Everything’s all right I guess, just thought I’d return your call.”
Rather than dwell upon what had happened between them after the movies at his flat, Stephen decided to tell Sylvia his news.
“You’re never going to believe this, but it looks like I’m going to be published.”
“Congratulations: when will you find out?”
“I’m meeting with a Publisher in a couple of days, so I guess I’ll know then for certain. Listen, how about we meet for coffee not this but Sunday week? There’s a nice café near my flat. I’m sorry about what happened and I’d really like to see you again.”
“Okay, how’s ten o’clock sound?”
“Sounds good: the café’s called Crème right near the beach.”
“Great: I’ll see you then.”

Stephen was soon saying goodbye to Sylvia, who was glad that she had given him a second chance. After he had hung up, Sylvia put the receiver back in its cradle, walked over to her easel and continued to paint. All of which left her wondering: How long would the ghost of Mr. Servais continue to haunt her?

* * * * *
Twenty-eight –

Two weeks in advance, Stephen had asked for the day off and begrudgingly Mr. McPherson had given it to him – making Stephen take it as annual leave, rather than just giving him the day off work without pay. As the interview with a Mr. Hooper from the publishing house of “Forrest and Hooper” wasn’t until midday, Stephen allowed himself the luxury of idling in bed till ten o’clock and planning his day out as he listened to the morning’s actualities. And after listening to the morning news on the radio, he got out of bed and went to the bathroom.

Having showered and shaved, Stephen then returned to his bedroom and looked at the suit he had bought purposely for his interview. As he put it on, pants first then shirt followed by tie, poorly knotted at that, and jacket, it struck him as ironic that he who had once looked upon those in suits with such disdain was now doing his utmost to become one of them – and found himself anxious to expedite the process.

On the uneventful, yet long tram journey from Elsternwick to the publishing house, which was located on a side street just off Clarendon street in South Melbourne, Stephen checked the address one more time, then he looked at his watch. As usual, he was running early. After he had alighted from the tram, making sure he had the street right, Stephen walked past the non-descript office block, which housed the offices of “Forrest and Hooper” once, and then continued around the corner until he found a café.

Trying to hide his nervousness, Stephen ordered a weak regular cappuccino and took a table out the front. He pretended to read the newspaper as he waited for the waiter to bring his coffee. With awkward bemusement, Stephen noticed how his hands trembled as he spooned sugar into his coffee.

Nervous energy making him drink more quickly and nearly causing him to spill his coffee a little, Stephen grew embarrassed and soon finished. He paid for his cappuccino and then asked the waiter if there was a toilet.
There was and once inside Stephen washed his hands and meticulously checked his appearance in the mirror making sure that his tie was straight and everything else was all in order.

*Now don't forget – Smile!*

Like a man condemned, Stephen walked the half-block back to the block of offices, which housed that of “Forrest and Hooper”. He took a deep breath, and then opened the large glass door. Immediately, he felt out of place in the sparse, post, postmodern decor of the foyer.

"And indeed there will be time

To wonder, 'Do I dare?' and, 'Do I dare?'

Time to turn back and descend the stair\(^5\)…"

"Excuse me, I have an appointment with Mr. Hooper," Stephen told the receptionist, who had barely looked up from the free standing, plasma computer screen in front of her as he entered.

"Name?" she disinterestedly asked as she punched keys on her computer.


The receptionist ran her finger down the appointment schedule, which was open in front of her, until she came across Stephen’s name.

12:00 p.m. – Stephen Murray, "The DaySleepers".

"Please take a seat, Mr. Murray. I will tell Mr. Hooper that you're here.”

Stephen took a seat on one of the chairs in the foyer and retrieved the folder containing his résumé and the portfolio of his work he had compiled over the years from his backpack. He put this on his lap and then slung the backpack
onto his shoulder.

After a few minutes wait, "Mr. Hooper is ready to see you, Stephen," the receptionist told Stephen: "Please, follow me," standing up and rising from her desk – summoning Stephen to follow, who did.

And Stephen did so, he followed the receptionist down a long passageway until they came to what was a walkway within proximity of the door of what appeared to be a large office, presumably that of Mr. Hooper.

"That's Mr. Hooper's office there," the receptionist told Stephen pointing to a door in the not too distance, before leaving him standing on his ownsome in the corridor to think and to reflect with his doubts and his reservations, which were multiplying as he stood there in the hallway.

"Do I dare

Disturb the universe\textsuperscript{(6)}?"

Stephen braced himself, knocked on the door and waited.
"Come in," he heard cry from the other side.
Cautious, Stephen opened the door and entered.
"Mr. Hooper, I'm Stephen, Stephen Murray," he introduced himself.
Mr. Hooper looked at Stephen quizzically – leaving Stephen standing awkwardly over his desk, reinforcing in him the impression that indeed he was in the wrong place – and then said:
"Of course, Stephen Murray, \textit{The DaySleepers}.”
Mr. Hooper rose from his desk, shook Stephen's hand vigorously and then he sat down, leaving Stephen still standing in the middle of his office.
"Please take a seat, Stephen," Mr. Hooper said officiously. "Take a seat," he repeated, which Stephen did.
Mr. Hooper opened one of the drawers of his desk and took out a large
manilla folder, which Stephen immediately recognised to be his manuscript as he had submitted it.

"Quite a book, Stephen," Mr. Hooper said patting it; "quite a book," he repeated.

"Thank you," Stephen replied, unassuming.

"Now, before we get down to business: let me tell you a little bit about "Forrest and Hooper" and bring you up to speed about what kind of operation we're running here. "Forrest and Hooper" are, as they say, the new kids on the block, but we're starting to give the bigger houses a run for their money. Have you heard of Dian Smith?"

Stephen vaguely remembered reading the name somewhere, possibly in one of the many Literary journals he read – even though he did not recall ever seeing her work on the shelves of "McPherson's Books".

"Yes," he replied.

"She's one of ours: we've got two of her books coming out in December. We're quite excited."

Mr. Hooper looked at Stephen and beamed with pride, as though it were an event Stephen should know about. Sensing, however, that he wasn't that interested, Mr. Hooper continued in a more businesslike manner.

"With her sales and name on board, as I said, we're starting to give the bigger houses a bit of a heads up and are looking to grow our business and add a few names to our list. All this is to say is that at "Forrest and Hooper" we're always on the look out for new talent and you, my friend, are quite a talent."

Stephen didn't know exactly what to say.

"Thank you," he replied, unassuming.

"Now the thing is, "Forrest and Hooper" is only a small publishing company and you're not exactly an established writer as such – no offence –, so we can't offer you much in the way of an advance. But once The DaySleepers is on the shelves of bookstores, we'll do everything we can to make sure that it sells. We've got the brightest, new marketing team in town, who'll be behind you one hundred and ten per cent."
Sitting there listening to Mr. Hooper and his proposal for his work – his delivery, his whole way of thinking –, Stephen was overcome by the disturbing feeling that he was about to be introduced to a new and unfamiliar world, which was foreign to him and which he knew little about; nor for that matter wanted to and one he would enter at his own peril, but enter he would have to if he was to continue and to succeed as a writer.

"So, what do you say?" Mr. Hooper asked with a big smile on his face – laying it all on the line.

"So, you've read *The DaySleepers*?" Stephen asked Mr. Hooper with keenness – for he was interested in what his feedback might be.

"Bits of, bits of," Mr. Hooper replied: “but that's not my job. I leave that to our acquisitions team and my assistant, Emma, Emma Forrest.”

With the mention of that name, Stephen wondered whether that was where “Forrest and Hooper” got its name. Intrigued he asked:

“Is she the Forrest in “Forrest and Hooper”?”

“Kind of: her father and I set up this business together, before he left for another venture overseas. Emma’s a bright girl and so she helps me out.”

“All right,” Stephen said, his interest now sated.

Stephen leafed through the hard copy of "Forrest and Hooper's" actual proposal for the publication of *The DaySleepers* as well as any of his future works, which Mr. Hooper had presently given him and which may have well as been written in a foreign language loaded as it was with jargon and legalese, which Stephen had trouble understanding.

"Umm, I've got a few problems with …" Stephen began, miffed by some of the finer print of the proposal and looked at Mr. Hooper confused.
"We don't have problems at "Forrest and Hooper" only solutions," Mr. Hooper countered without missing a beat.

“That may be so,” Stephen said, “but I'll still need a few days to think a few things through.”

“Look Stephen there’s my card,” Mr. Hooper said, handing Stephen his business card: “give it a few days and we'll touch base, yeah – I've got a really good feeling about this.”

“Ah … okay,” Stephen replied, altogether a bit overwhelmed.

With the sinking feeling he was getting himself into something which was beyond him, subject to conditions, Stephen agreed, in principle, to Mr. Hooper’s proposal, which meant he would see *The DaySleepers* in print sooner than he had expected. This made Stephen feel that he had taken a step, which was irreversible, and so he must continue – entering, as it were and as he knew, at his own peril. And thus Stephen left it at that. He told Mr. Hooper he would look at his proposal and get back to him in the next few days.

And as he did leave Mr. Hooper’s office, “Forrest and Hooper” and made his way back to the main street, Clarendon, in South Melbourne, Stephen didn't know who had been conned; Mr. Hooper for wanting to publish his novel or himself for allowing it to be published by "Forrest and Hooper". This as it was, Stephen was both bemused and beleaguered by what he had just gone through, but thought that he had survived it and, what is more, survived it well.
Twenty-nine –

A humble and soon to be erstwhile, as was his plan, Sales assistant at a second hand bookstore, intrigued, thrilled and overall rather excited by his meeting with Mr. Hooper and its outcome, as soon as he got back to his flat, Stephen searched through his back copies of The Australian Writer, until he found a reference to Dian Smith.

"Dian thumbs her nose at the world!

Dian Smith – Comus.
Publisher: Forrest and Hooper.
Grunge / Erotica.
Ms. Smith's long awaited third and final installment in her Pygmalion’s Whore trilogy.
"Ms. Smith guides us through her disturbing and unredeeming world of sex, drugs and violence". – The Independent Mail.
"Dian's done it again!!" – AntiChrist.
"A compelling and violent account of the dark nature of true obsession". – The New Dawn.
"Ms. Smith doesn't know when to stop". – The Australian Literature Review.
"A wake-up call". – Adelphi.

Quite a reputation; Dian Smith – Author of Comus and her Pygmalion’s Whore trilogy; not bad for someone, who had only just turned thirty, thought Stephen as he read, until the realisation dawned upon him: He and the illustrious Dian Smith – Author of Comus and her Pygmalion’s Whore trilogy – now shared the same publisher.

With this, Stephen was excited and thought that his dream of being a published author was now on the verge of being realised. He thought of all the lengths he had gone to to make himself an Artist and now it looked like he had prevailed and overcome – a thought that both pleased and excited him very much.

* * * *
As he lay on his bed that evening before going to sleep, Stephen let his mind drift over the day’s events and he reflected long, hard and earnestly upon his meeting with Mr. Hooper, his offer and, as a result, his options. It was appealing and, to a certain degree, too good to be true and so Stephen wondered if it was the case and that it was, in fact, too good to be true – at least that’s how it struck Stephen at times, when he considered the proposal and its merits: but he did know, however, that he was but a novice and knew little of the world that he was about to enter.

That night, Stephen gave Mr. Hooper’s proposal much consideration and part of him felt elated that he was going to be published by what Mr. Hooper had dubbed the new kids on the block, which would allow him to retain what he thought to be some degree of artistic integrity as well as artistic independence, although part of him was concerned by the heavy work load it would entail. However, Stephen thought he was equal to this challenge. And hopefully this deal would also mean that some larger pay-cheques than what Mr. McPherson had to offer would soon be on their way.

Stephen therefore decided he would give notice at “McPherson’s Books”; as he now planned to focus upon his writing and would do so more than he ever had before making sure he would give it his all and be a success: despite himself and to spite his past.
And notice did he give at “McPherson’s Books” the very next day as was his intent with Mr. McPherson allowing him to serve this out as a long-standing employee – without the indignity of just being shown the door – something Stephen declined, however, as he now had other obligations and responsibilities to with deal. As well, Mr. McPherson also offered to act as a referee for Stephen for any prospective employers if he so needed it, something Stephen hoped would be unnecessary, with his literary star now rising.

*   *   *   *


A few weeks had passed and Sylvia and Stephen had a couple of long and earnest conversations on the telephone and they were to meet that coming Sunday again for their coffee date. And as she worked that day – a rather slow Saturday –, Sylvia did so mindfully and with much enthusiasm and care. She applied herself to the task at hand, that of taking of stock, which usually bored her, but which became a little more enjoyable and a little more pleasant. And as she did so, she thought of Stephen and was glad she had returned his calls and that they had had a second chance, after some persuading and convincing on Stephen’s behalf, in the form of brunch at one of Stephen’s favourite haunts, the lounge *Crème* in Elsternwick, which was not so far from his little flat to which they may sojourn after, on Sunday week – the morning after the Authors’ Association awards ceremony to which Stephen had received a personal invitation. The idea of dating a now published – possibly award-winning – author thrilling Sylvia and made Stephen an even more exciting prospect.

Sylvia thought Stephen was a really nice, sweet and gentle person – not to mention, not altogether bad-looking with his well rounded features and his boyish good looks complemented by the early signs of ageing and his stylish – but at times lackadaisical – dress sense with him more often than not choosing to dress down rather than up – wearing mostly neat casual clothes, though at times ending up looking more like a human clothes horse than anything else. And, this as it was, she thought something might come of their relationship and so she decided that she would carry on and stick with Stephen for the time being and would try to put what had happened at his flat out of her mind – resolute that she would persevere with Stephen for the time being anyhow and try to make the most of their time together.

At home on her own that night, Sylvia had an extra long and extra nice, hot bath. She exfoliated and cleansed, scrubbed and washed: all in preparation
for her brunch with Stephen the next day. The tub filled to overflowing with soapy water as she bathed, she relaxed and she thought about Stephen and thus she considered their relationship, which raised some doubts in her mind. However, she felt she needed someone in her life in the hope that that, in turn, would make her feel better about herself and help her disentangle herself from some of her maladies and her demons.

* * * *

Waking up and out of bed earlier than usual the next day – especially so since it was a Sunday and she enjoyed her lie-ins listening to the radio –, Sylvia wasted no time getting ready. She dressed in her best casual outfit, which comprised a faded, stripped cotton shirt and blue jeans, and was soon out the door to meet Stephen and on her way to Crème, the lounge, where they had arranged to meet.

Situated in the north of Elsternwick – a stone’s throw from the foreshore of Elsternwick Beach –, the lounge Crème was a flawed attempt at a funky, postmodern beatnik café and thus Sylvia wondered why the owners had bothered, given all that it had to offer in location, as she walked there.

* * * *
Thirty-one –

_The DaySleepers_ had hit the shelves of bookstores and with some clever marketing and advertising had sold well in its first, few weeks – its sales figures solid, even if not through the ceiling – and had received some encouraging reviews, the words of which were honest and which Stephen altogether found to be constructive as he now had a better idea of what the market and the critics expected of him and his work. On top of which, gaining him some hard earned royalty dollars – not many, but enough to please him and to keep a roof over his head for the time being.

With his say-so once Stephen had signed on the dotted line, Mr. Hooper had intentionally fast tracked the publication and promotion of _The DaySleepers_ so that it was released in time and could be considered for a prestigious Harvey award for the best work by a first time author: not to mention the fact that it might get lost in the Christmas miasma of celebrity and established writers and cookbooks trying to cash in on the easy dollars.

Had Mr. Hooper waited and held off, it might have simply fallen through the cracks and not even been considered, which was not going to happen as he thought that it had potential and might gain a nomination – at least – win a Harvey award – at best. For Stephen, no longer a humble Sales assistant, the shock of being nominated for a Harvey award being overshadowed by having had his work accepted for publication and distribution by a reputable publishing house, he thought he was a chance to win when he had received a personal – a personal not corporate – invitation to the Authors’ Association awards ceremony.

A newly published author with a nomination for a Harvey award for being highly regarded as such, Stephen thought that things were coming together well for him and that some of his dreams may be realised in the not too distance.

* * * *

The night of the Authors’ Association awards ceremony had arrived and Stephen was impressed he had even received an invitation – furthermore a
personal one –, *The DaySleepers* being only just published, and that Mr. Hooper had arranged for his transport to which in the form of a pre-paid taxicab to take him there from his little flat in Balaclava to the awards ceremony. The Authors’ Association awards ceremony was being held in a large Reception hall in the outskirts of the Melbourne central business district right near Federation square, which gave Stephen the impression he was entering a world, which had hitherto been foreign to him, yet one which he wanted to make his own – just like an AFL Footballer on the night of the count of the Brownlow medal.

For the night, he had hired a dinner suit; the first time he had worn one since his end of year high-school formal, some ten years ago. And although he had had it fitted, Stephen still did not feel comfortable in it. Mr. Hooper was the first to greet Stephen as he arrived at their table, followed by his assistant, Emma, who greeted him and said as he sat down:

"Dian's at it again," motioning to Stephen with a cynicism, bordering on contempt, born of familiarity.

"Fuckin' journalists," she said staggering over to their table: "So, I fucked Siimon Oswald. Tell me, who really gives a fuck? Nutters, all of them. Completely mad. Absolute fucking nutters. Each and every one of them."

Mr. Hooper shot Dian a look, which silenced her immediately, and gave Stephen a glimpse at some kind of unspoken agreement between them.

Dian slumped drunkenly into the chair next to Stephen and put her arm around him.

Uncomfortably, Stephen looked towards Mr. Hooper's assistant, who rolled her eyes.

"So, you're Stephen Murray," Dian slurred in what was a ridiculous attempt at being seductive.


"I've heard quite a lot about you, Stephen, *The DaySleepers* right …" Dian
said and placed one arm around him, and then she ran her other hand through his hair and moved a little closer towards him.

Once again, Stephen looked towards Mr. Hooper's assistant in mute disbelief. Sensing his outrage, Dian continued, until finally Mr. Hooper told her to cease, whereupon she stopped straight away and withdrew, placing her hands on her lap like an obedient child, though without the pout of being scolded.

Once more giving Stephen a glimpse at some kind of unspoken agreement between them.

"So, you've read *The DaySleepers*, I take it?" Stephen asked Dian, when finally she had stopped teasing him, which all too soon became almost a taunt through its repetition – whether this was its implied meaning or not.

Dian took Stephen's cigarette from the ashtray in front of them, took a long drag and threw her head back laughing.

"You're joking, right?" she asked, looking at Stephen as if he had just arrived from another planet. "I haven't read a book since I was fifteen and even then it was just some *Sweet Valley Highs*.

"Come on, you can't be serious?" Stephen asked credulously. "I mean, you make all kinds of allusions to Shakespeare, Milton, the Greeks in your work – surely you must have read something along the way."

"Honey," she said conspiratorially – almost in a whisper – drawing Stephen closer. "Haven't you heard of editors, researchers? They come up with most of that shit."

"Here's how it works right: I keep a diary, you know a journal. I write down where I've been, whom I was there with and then they help me tone it down. You know change a few names, move the structure around, that way nobody gets pissed off, nobody gets any ideas about suing and hey presto! a novel."

By this time, the Authors’ Association awards ceremony had begun in
earnest, Dian had taken her proper seat and Stephen, although he was piqued by what Dian had just told him, gave his attention to what was happening before him savouring each and every minute.

* * * *
Thirty-two –

Sylvia was at the lounge Crème a little early, knowing that Stephen was attending the Authors’ Association awards ceremony the night previous: a Harvey award for his work he had been nominated. She was excited by the possibility Stephen might actually win a Harvey award and the thought that she may be actually dating a proper, award-winning author added to the attraction she already felt for him. Sylvia found an empty table out the front, ordered a pot of her favourite peppermint tea and poured herself a cup when it arrived.

Sylvia was looking forward to her and Stephen’s post awards ceremony catch-up that day. She had read some of Stephen’s work and taken an interest in it so that they had some common ground to talk about when they were together. And from what she had read of Stephen’s work, she had enjoyed – although she found his subject matter a little dark in places. Nevertheless, she had liked what she had read of The DaySleepers and was particularly taken by the ending, which left her wondering was it suicide or the beginning of a new life for the main character?

As a matter of fact, Sylvia contemplated dating an award-winning author, all the time wondering whether she herself would one day figure in his work and become fodder for his writing. Sylvia had left her apartment a little early so that she could think a few things through and have some time to herself. She thought of how things were coming together for her – and the fact she was now dating a published author, who was albeit a few years her senior with him just turned twenty-eight and her still only twenty-one, yet soon to be twenty-two. This, however, did not worry her all that much as she enjoyed his company and hoped and planned to continue to do so.

* * * *
Tempered by Mr. Hooper, Dian took her seat on the other side of “Forrest and Hooper’s” table and, so doing, left Stephen on his own of which he was grateful. After being told by the Master of ceremony how wonderful they were, what a unique contribution they were truly making and that they should all be proud of their achievements, the presentation of the awards began in earnest. If the truth be known, for Stephen, with his nomination for a Harvey award, it was all a bit of a blur. People spoke, people got up and people received awards.

Given its stature, the Harvey award was the penultimate award to be given that night, the ultimate recognising the best work of the year. Stephen was piqued when it came to the Harvey award and heard nothing until his name was spoken: “And the winner is Stephen Murray, *The DaySleepers*”. Stephen couldn’t believe it, before he knew what was happening he was on stage collecting his award: a feeling no words can describe. Stephen thanked the presenters, his parents and Mr. Hooper and, without knowing how he had done it, was walking away from the podium an award-winning author.

* * * *

The Harvey being the second to last award of the night, the Authors’ Association awards ceremony was soon over. After all the prizes had been awarded and the evening was drawing to a close and a happy and contented Stephen found himself in the cloakroom waiting for his jacket.

"Congratulations," Stephen felt a hand on his shoulder. He turned around. It was Mr. Hooper.

"Thanks," Stephen said, smiling graciously at Mr. Hooper and his assistant, Emma.

The lady behind the counter handed Stephen his coat. He took it, thanked the attendant, tipped her five dollars and turned around once more towards Mr. Hooper and his assistant.
"That should sell another five thousand copies," Mr. Hooper said jesting: 
"not to mention the attention it will bring."
"Well," Stephen began, reserved.
"Ah come on, don't get all self-effacing on me now, Stephen. Nights like tonight make or break a writer and you, my friend, were just made. That award will go a long way and take you to places you only dreamt of when you were working part-time at a second hand bookstore."
"I'm just glad it got published," Stephen started deadpan doing his best to remain modest and to ignore Mr. Hooper's zeal.
"I'm just glad it got published. I'm just glad people came to see the film. Where do you people come up with that shit?" Mr. Hooper asked rhetorically trying to sound incredulous: "Tell me you don't feel great. Tell me you didn't feel like the only person in the room when they read out your name. Come on, don't give me that: "I'm just glad it got published" shit, please or I'll ram that fucken award down your throat."
"Well, it did feel good," Stephen said, warming to Mr. Hooper's enthusiasm.
"Of course it felt good, it felt great and so it should, you worked bloody hard on it, we all worked bloody hard on it, you deserved that award more than anyone else here tonight. Now come on, let's go have a drink."
"Ah, actually, I might give it a miss. I've got a few things on my mind right now," Stephen said, aloof.
Actually, Stephen had only one thing on his mind right now – Sylvia – and he did not want to miss their date the next day at the lounge Crème.
"Come on, Dian's throwing a party or should I say we're throwing a party at Dian's."
Once again, Stephen caught a glimpse of something not quite right between Mr. Hooper and Dian.
"Come on, it'll be fun," Mr. Hooper's assistant said, taking Stephen by the arm.

_Damn it_, thought Stephen, _Mr. Hooper was right; this was his night_ –
Sylvia could wait.

"Ah, all right," he said.

"Great!" Mr. Hooper said putting an arm around both Stephen and his assistant: "Allons-y!"

Mr. Hooper had hired a limousine for the night. It was waiting for them out in front of the Reception hall, where the ceremony had just taken place.

Once inside, Stephen realised that he was twenty-eight and this was the first time he had ever ridden in limousine.

The drive to Dian's was pretty much uneventful and the whole time, Stephen sat in the limousine sullenly nursing his champagne, half-watching "The Late Show with David Letterman" on the small television fixed in the seat in front of them.

"A penny for them?"

"Sorry?" Stephen responded.

It was Mr. Hooper's assistant, Emma.

"A penny for them?" she asked once more. "For your thoughts? Why so glum?"

Stephen was actually wondering what the attraction with David Letterman was and why the CBS Orchestra was called an orchestra when it was more like an extra large rock band than anything else.

"Huh? Ah, nothing," he said, once again somewhat absently.

"What are you kids whispering about?"

Once again, Mr. Hooper was all smiles, offering the open bottle of champagne around and making jokes about the ceremony's presenters, the standard of the other entrant's work, their dress and their acceptance speeches.

"Don't worry," Mr. Hooper said to his assistant. "Stephen's just working on the title of his next book. Aren't you kid?" he patted Stephen on the knee, who smiled and remained quiet.
The group thus spent the ride to Dian’s – all the time enjoying themselves, who and what they were: proud of their accomplishments, pleased with their achievements and altogether smug and self-satisfied with themselves and their situations and firm in the knowledge that they would remain so.

Stephen, however, had his doubts and his reservations: especially about Dian and Mr. Hooper and their relationship. Thus deciding it was best to keep quiet. Stephen who did so and said nothing, rather he admired his award and other regalia he had garnered from the awards ceremony. Proud of the fact that he now held a Harvey award for his work.

And so he passed the rest of the ride saying little more – and such that it was and was it such at least that was so for Stephen with everything and everything other glittering and on the improve, he thought – published, award-winning author and all.

* * * * *
**Thirty-four –**

The group’s limousine was soon at Dian's place of residence, which was right in the centre of the heart of Melbourne, just past the General Post Office. Mr. Hooper stayed behind to give the driver instructions about picking them up, leaving Stephen and his assistant waiting on the footpath out the front.

"Ever been to one of Dian's dos before?" Mr. Hooper's assistant asked Stephen with interest, and not without cynicism, implying that all was not as it seemed – piquing Stephen’s curiosity further and making him wonder more and more about Dian and Mr. Hooper, which in turn made him wonder about the world he had just entered. He hoped that soon his interest would be sated.

"Can't say that I have," he replied, responding in kind to her cynicism.

"Why Stephen, you don't know what you've been missing," she said sardonically.

Mr. Hooper having presently joined the two as they entered, Stephen marvelled at Dian's residence or more rightly studio, which was a large, refurbished warehouse. The entrance of which opened out onto two mezzanine split-levels: one a bedroom with a large, king sized bed cloaked by the finest fabric India had to offer, the other a sort of study or work-area. On top of which was an amazing, oversized reproduction of one of van Gogh’s paintings of a skull that looked more than real. As such, it looked even better than the original. When Stephen thought of his little flat in Balaclava, it paled in comparison.

"Bri, Stephen," Dian greeted both Stephen and Mr. Hooper enthusiastically as they entered. Then disdainfully – almost as an afterthought, she said somewhat contritely to Mr. Hooper's assistant: "Hi Emma."

Dian had sobered up somewhat from the Authors' Association awards ceremony and took both Stephen and Mr. Hooper under her arms and led them to the bar, which was being tended by an impossibly muscled young man wearing nothing more than an iridescent thong and a bow tie.

"Stoli, thanks," Dian said to the bartender: "What'll you two have?" she
asked Stephen and Mr. Hooper bright and sprightly and without slurring her words – an achievement all of its own, given her state at the awards ceremony.

"Scotch," Mr. Hooper said, and then looked towards Stephen.

"The same thanks with soda water."

"Two scotches thanks, one with soda water," Mr. Hooper added.

Just as the bartender had measured out a shot of Scotch whisky and was pouring their drinks, Stephen thought of Mr. Hooper's assistant.

"Shouldn't we get something for Emma?" he asked.

"Oh yeah, and a champagne," Mr. Hooper added absently.

"Listen," he said, handing the drinks to Stephen after a moment's wait for the bartender to finish pouring them: "you take this to Emma. Okay? I've gotta mingle."

"Okay."

Stephen found Mr. Hooper's assistant standing disgruntled in a corner. He handed her the champagne, smiled, and then he turned around to survey the party.

The room, Stephen noticed, was evenly divided between staff from "Forrest and Hooper", other literati, those from academia and Dian's "friends", who nominally covered every sub-culture, counter-culture, minority, "disadvantaged group" and lost cause, which had ever been thought of in any sociology text, which had ever been thought of. They were all on every substance from licit stimulants to illicit depressants; and were all being waited on by five or six other waiters all dressed – or more rightly, undressed – like the young man behind the bar, who had just served Stephen and Mr. Hooper.

Fortunately, the hub of the party was on the roof above where Stephen and Mr. Hooper's assistant were standing. Therefore they were left pretty much on their own and to their own devices.

Still a little awestruck by Dian’s dwelling and surrounds, Stephen turned to Mr. Hooper's assistant and smiled. He had finally mustered the strength to ask the question that had been troubling him all night when Dian approached –
looking more dishevelled than ever with her miniskirt slung a little too low
revealing the top of her scant underwear, a black G-string, as well as some pubic
hair, and her diminutive woollen cardigan almost falling off her shoulders showing
part of a lace brassiere.

"Steve, come and join us," she screeched in his ear. "Come on, you gotta
come upstairs! It's so cool!" "It's sooo cool!"

"No, I'm fine," Stephen said forthright, trying to shrug her grip: "I think I'll
stay here for a bit, Dian."

"Ah, come on," Dian persisted: "come upstairs! Join us."

"Dian, Stephen said that he wants to stay here," Mr. Hooper's assistant
broke in unexpectedly: "So please, leave us alone: okay?"

Dian took little notice of her and continued.

"Come on, Steve," she repeated, pulling the sleeve of his jacket – her
voice growing more and more like a nag. "Come on, you gotta come upstairs."

Mr. Hooper's assistant now stood between them.

"Go away, Dian!" she said.

With that and very little other provocation, Dian tossed her glass of vodka
into Mr. Hooper's assistant's face and told her quite unequivocally to fuck off.
Emma retaliated in kind by slapping Dian across the face.

Watching them fighting, Stephen now understood why it was called a
catfight when two women fought. It was exactly like watching two cats fighting.
Fists flying, hands slapping, hair being pulled and nails scratching. In the midst of
all this, Stephen did his best to separate them, but backed off when he caught
the end of one of Dian’s misguided slaps.

It was only when Mr. Hooper came along that they could be broken up.

"Shit, Dian, shit," he said like a parent chastising a bad child. "Tonight of
all nights. The press are gonna have a fuckin' field day with this."

"But Bri …" Dian began pathetically.
"Don't you fucking "But Bri" me, Dian," Mr. Hooper told Dian angrily. "Don't get started with that shit, okay?"

"But Bri …" Dian persisted. "She started it. I just wanted to …"

There was something in her voice, which gave Stephen the impression of a little baby.

“Dian: would you look at what you’ve done? Shit!” Mr. Hooper said, referring to the state that his assistant, Emma, was in: lying on the ground a mess of tears and smudged makeup.

"But Bri …"

“Just fuck off Dian!!” Mr. Hooper cursed incensed, looked at his assistant on the ground and slapped Dian roundly across the face.

Dian, who by now was little more than a deplorable mess of tears, makeup and eyeliner, was being comforted by one of her friends: some kind of dilettante in checked flares and bright, yellow shirt.

"Now come on, man, that was right out of order. What gives you the right?” he asked of Mr. Hooper.

"What gives me the right? What gives me the right?” Mr. Hooper repeated. “Who do you think paid for all this fuckin' shit? Huh? That drink in your hand, the bloody waiters in their bloody thongs. All this came out of my pocket, which gives me the right: you fucking mook."

"Yeah, is that right, is it?” the dilettante countered. "Is that right?” he defiantly continued – now standing face to face with Mr. Hooper.

Now there was no way that a man like Mr. Hooper, self-made and made well, was going to justify himself to someone wearing a bright, yellow shirt. The press would already report upon the fight between Dian and his assistant; this being so, in for a penny, in for a pound, thought Mr. Hooper feeling riled being confronted like that by a daft mong in a luminescent shirt and that he had had just about enough for one night.

" Fucking dandy,” he said after flattening him.
Somebody had turned the music off and a group of Dian's "friends" had gathered around Dian and her friend, who had still not moved from the floor: all loudly declaiming that it was “just not on”, that it was “typical of the ruling class to act like the thought police even at parties,” and that “nobody understood.”

Nobody understood, Stephen felt like saying – a righteous outrage rising within him –; because you’re all so fuckin' stoned or pissed that you can barely string two words together.

Not knowing what to do, a dismayed Stephen walked over to Mr. Hooper, who was still shaking his head in disbelief and rubbing his sore hand.

"Listen, Stephen, the bathroom's there," he said, pointing to a door in the hallway: "Take Emma and clean her up. Here," Mr. Hooper took his wallet out and handed Stephen a hundred dollar note: "make sure she gets home safely, all right? I've gotta fix this mess up. Okay?"

"Yeah, ah…: okay."

"Thanks, Stephen," Mr. Hooper patted him on the shoulders. "I really owe you one."

The music had been turned back on, the crowd had dispersed and the party resumed as though nothing had happened.

Stephen found Mr. Hooper's assistant in a ball on the ground crying and sobbing – saline, snot and scratches spoiling her otherwise perfect makeup.

"Hey come on," he said, trying to comfort her, "it's not that bad. Come on, let's get you cleaned up."

Stephen gently led Mr. Hooper's assistant to the bathroom and pulled the door closed, making sure that it was locked. He moistened a hand-towel and started to wipe the tears, mascara and makeup from her face.

"You look terrible," he said sardonically.

Mr. Hooper's assistant gave a weak smile and took the hand-towel from Stephen.
"Now, that's better, isn't it?"
"Always Dian," she said looking straight into the mirror. "She always does something like this. Always fucking Dian."
"Don't worry about it, she probably won't even remember it in the morning. Come on. How about a drink?"
"Okay, but make it something strong, all right?"
"I'll just be a minute," Stephen said in a quiet, direct voice, trying to reassure Mr. Hooper's assistant: "You make sure that the door stays locked, okay?"
"Okay."
Stephen went to the bar and ordered two double scotches from the bartender, who smiled at him and pointed to some kind of bizarre threesome going on in the corner, where legs were tangled in arms, arms tangled in legs – the obvious effect of all the ecstasy they had taken beginning to kick in and start to take its effectstasy.
Stephen took the drinks from the bartender and walked over to Mr. Hooper, who was talking to two well-known literati.
"And here's the man of the night," he said, putting his arm around Stephen.
Mr. Hooper briefly introduced Stephen to the literati then drew him aside to ask after Emma.
"She's all right," Stephen said, "nothing more than a few scratches and some bruises, she'll be fine in a couple of days."
"That's good. Just make sure she gets home safely, all right? And tell her to take a coupla days off, okay? Thanks Stephen, you really got me out of a tight one. I won't forget this."

* * * *

Stephen knocked on the bathroom door.
"There's someone in here," he heard Mr. Hooper's assistant anxiously
reply from the other side.

"It's me, Stephen," he explained.

"Oh."
Stephen heard the bolt being drawn, and then the door opened.

"You're looking better," he said, handing Mr. Hooper's assistant the drink.
"Thanks," she said, and then polished the scotch off in one go.
"Hey, I should have asked for the bottle," Stephen said somewhat surprised.
"Got my own," she said, and motioned to a hip flask that stood on the sink.
Stephen picked it up, undid the lid and smelt the contents.
"Whoa, any port in a storm," he said wryly, a little lightheaded.
Stephen fixed the lid, put the hip flask back on the sink, and then he gestured to the mobile telephone, which was standing next to it.
"Should I call a cab?" he asked.
"Go for it," she replied.
Stephen took the mobile telephone from where it stood on the basin and dialled for a taxi. He gave the operator the address of Dian’s warehouse and that of Mr. Hooper’s assistant’s town house and was told they would have to wait thirty minutes: it being a Saturday night and all.

"A half-hour wait," Stephen told Mr. Hooper's assistant, handing her the mobile telephone back after he had hung up.
"I'm not going out there," she said uneasy, looking directly at Stephen.
"Not if Dian’s still around," she continued.
"You don't have to," Stephen replied. "We can stay in here if you want."
Stephen unbuttoned the jacket of his dinner suit. He opened it and then reached for a cigarette from the packet in his inside pocket. Stephen lit his cigarette with his Zippo lighter, then he thought of Mr. Hooper’s assistant.

"Cigarette?" he asked offering her the open packet.
"Thanks, no," she replied.

"Bathrooms of the rich and famous," Stephen said taking a seat on the laundry basket after lighting his cigarette.

"Shit, I almost forgot the award. Tonight was supposed to be your big night and here you are in Dian Smith's, no sorry, Mzz. Smith's toilet."

"Not much of a party anyway," Stephen replied cynically.

Mr. Hooper’s assistant passed Stephen her hip flask.

"In a confined area?" he asked sarcastically.

"Okay, it's not exactly Chivas regal, I admit, but as you said any port in a storm."

"Who are all the freaks?" Stephen asked – fortified by his deep draught of whatever was in the hip flask.

"The freaks, as you so colourfully referred to them, my friend, are amongst Australia's best and brightest writers, artistic directors, academics, scholars, literati and miscellaneous so-called learned intellectuals. Librarians even. You'd be surprised; most of them earn twice, three times what you did before you became "Forrest and Hooper's" new 'golden haired' boy."

"Okay then, what's the story with Mzz. Smith and Mr. Hooper?" Stephen asked in a mimicry of Mr. Hooper's assistant's disdain – a question that had been nagging him all night and one that he thought needed answering and that this was as good a time as any to ask it.

"The story with Ms. Smith?" Mr. Hooper's assistant asked rhetorically.

"The story with Ms. Smith?" Mr. Hooper's assistant repeated. "The story with Ms. Smith is that Ms. Smith is a myth."

"A myth?" Stephen repeated.

"Yep: a myth. A creation of some drug fucked guru in advertising, a brainchild of an over caffeinated wunderkind in marketing: who knows?"

"You're joking?"

"Nah: three, four years ago, "Forrest and Hooper" were a small, I mean small, publishing house. Did mainly magazines, low budget corporate
publications, and self-funded novels, that type of vanity publishing and the like. I mean, everyone thinks publishing is a glamorous business, but it's not – far from it. Anyway, one day along comes a manuscript from a twenty-five year old first year Arts student. Her father was financing the publication. You know the story: the girl's a drug-taking, alcoholic loser, who'll fuck anything that looks twice at it. Father's a busy professional sick of paying for the psychiatrists, the abortions, the jail-bonds, you name it. Daddy's little girl wants to be a writer. Daddy pays for the book to be published, and then put in an attic with a lot of other expensive whims. You'd be surprised how often it happens. Anyway, however, someone made the mistake of reading it; thought with some "in-house reworking" it could be made into a book. Hey presto! Ms. Smith's a bestseller with an option for the next two books not to mention a hefty advance and many thousands of dollars in royalties and "Forrest and Hooper" are the new 'next big thing' in publishing; all on the basis of a lie, some clever marketing and a few bored academics with an underemployed critical faculty willing to endorse anything that makes them seem still relevant in the name of wider cultural reference.”

"Should you be telling me this?" Stephen asked, bewildered.

"You were going to find out sooner or later. I mean, come on: do you seriously think Ms. Smith has ever read Milton or Ovid? Hunh, at most functions she attends she can barely read the menu. Anyway, now Brian is placed in the precarious position of having to be Ms. Smith's minder. I mean, given Dian's sales and status, "Forrest and Hooper" would be lucky to publish the next K-mart catalogue if word of this got out. Fortunately, Ms. Smith has brain-cells enough left to realise that it's a two-way street. She knows who pays the bills and despite her current popularity none of the other houses would put up with her antics.”

Stephen was stunned.

"Luckily, you came along and saved the day."

"How?" he asked credulously.

"No offence, but your little book's the first thing approaching literature to come along since "Forrest and Hooper" first started printing novelty calendars for local Green grocers, not to mention a Harvey award to boot. I mean, the
nomination alone will pay the bills for the next five years."

Mr. Hooper’s assistant offered Stephen the hip flask again and after what he had just heard, Stephen felt he needed a drink and drink Stephen did.

"Why Miss Moneypenny, I do believe you’re getting a little too fresh," Stephen said in his best impersonation of Sean Connery's James Bond after taking another long draught of whatever was in Mr. Hooper’s assistant’s hip flask.

"Oh, James …" she replied.

* * * *

Mr. Hooper’s assistant and Stephen passed the next few minutes in gentle silence until there was a knock on the door.

"It’s …" Stephen and Mr. Hooper’s assistant began in unison.

"Yeah, I know," it was Mr. Hooper; "the taxi’s here," he said.

Stephen put his jacket back on whilst Mr. Hooper’s assistant brushed the hair from her face and wiped the tears from her eyes.

"Everything okay?" Mr. Hooper asked through the locked door of the bathroom.

"Just a minute."

When they came out of Miss Smith’s bathroom, Mr. Hooper was standing in the hallway with an expensive bottle of Möet et Chandon in his hand.

"Stephen'll see you home, okay," he said to Emma handing her the bottle of champagne. "Don't worry about the fare, I've given him some money. I really am sorry about what happened here tonight. As you know, Dian can be a bit of a handful at times. Take a couple of days off and you can return when you feel ready."

Then to Stephen, he said:

"Thanks for everything, Stephen. I really owe you one, I'll see you Monday, yeah?"

Outside it was colder than Stephen and Mr. Hooper’s assistant had both
expected and, after being cooped up in the bathroom with little to no ventilation, was quite a shock to their systems. Stephen took off his jacket and wrapped it around Mr. Hooper's assistant's shoulders before opening the door of the taxi for her.

"Somebody's learnt this boy some manners," she said as she stepped in.

Stephen, however, was still astounded by what he had just heard about Dian, Mr. Hooper and "Forrest and Hooper" and thought about how innocent and naïve he truly was, but hoped, for his own sake and survival, that he could retain this. However, at this very moment, he was at a loss precisely as to how.

* * *
Thirty-five –

The taxi ride to Mr. Hooper’s assistant’s town house was more or less without incident – and thankfully so, given what had happened at the Awards after-party – and Stephen and Mr. Hooper’s assistant were both tired and worn-out from the night’s events, and thus spoke little and so they passed the ride, which was short, in virtual silence. And in this manner, Stephen and Mr. Hooper’s assistant soon arrived at her residence, which was a ground floor, ultra-modern town house in a block situated in the south of the centre of the city of Melbourne with a closed circuit camera and an electronic security gate included.

Stephen waited as Mr. Hooper’s assistant opened the security gate with her P.I.N.. The gate soon began to open, whilst Mr. Hooper’s assistant and Stephen stood there. Stephen, having told the taxi driver to wait, decided to leave it at that, go home and what is more go straight to bed for he was exhausted by the night’s happenings.

Looking like an extra from a b-grade horror movie in a dinner gown, with her abrasions, bruises and smudged and caked makeup smothered across her scratched and swollen face, Mr. Hooper’s assistant asked Stephen as if nothing at all had happened: "Wanna help me drink this?" holding up the bottle of Möet, which Mr. Hooper had given her, as they waited for the security gate to open as it should.

Stephen looked at his watch. It was well past four in the ante meridian.
"I don't know," he said, “it's been a long night."

"Come on, Stevie, I wanna dance, dance with me Stevie. Come on," Mr. Hooper’s assistant said in what was a humourous impersonation of Dian's nasal whine.

"Ah, okay," Stephen said, giving in, “I'll just pay the taxi.”

Stephen paid the taxi driver his fare, got the change, told him not to wait and followed Mr. Hooper’s assistant to her front door.

Presently inside her town house that was furnished as if it had come straight out of an IKEA catalogue, Mr. Hooper’s assistant sat Stephen down on
her couch and went to the bathroom to have a look at herself in the mirror.

"Wow! I am a mess," she said astonished from the bathroom: "Do you mind if I have a quick shower? Make yourself at home while I clean myself up: there’s some flutes in the kitchen – top drawer next to the stove – plus a coffee machine or some instant if you want to make yourself a cup."

"Go for it," Stephen said, who got up and busied himself in the kitchen.

* * * *

"Somebody trained you well," Mr. Hooper’s assistant said when she came out of the bathroom covered in a dressing gown, her long, blonde hair wet, having presently had her brief shower, referring to the little spread Stephen had laid out: the champagne, two glasses, two mugs of freshly brewed coffee, milk, sugar, not to mention, cheese and biscuits.

"I wasn't sure how you take your coffee …" Stephen said absently. He was absorbed studying his award. It had been a long night – the full impact of which was now taking its toll on him.

"What kind of host am I?" Mr. Hooper’s assistant asked rhetorically, walking over to the C.D. player. "It’s your big night and you spend it waiting on your Publisher’s assistant. I'm the one who should be getting you the coffee."

"Hunh?"

"You self-absorbed writer types are all the same."

"Sorry?"

"Forget it."

"Forget what?" Stephen asked, growing somewhat defensive.

After she had turned the C.D. player on, Mr. Hooper’s assistant returned to the couch and, standing, she picked up the award, which Stephen had placed back on the table. She held it up and then said:

"So, Stephen Murray, winner of the prestigious Harvey award, betya never thought you’d see the day?"

Stephen looked over to Mr. Hooper’s assistant, who had now sat down
next to him on the couch.

"Wow, that's going to be big tomorrow," he said, referring to her right eye, which was already quite swollen.

"An occupational hazard, nothing that a bit of makeup won't fix up. What about the guy that Brian hit?"

Stephen couldn't help but suppress a cynical laugh when he thought of the self-important dandy in his bright, yellow shirt lying face down on the floor of Dian's warehouse and then he drifted off again.

Mr. Hooper's assistant uncorked the champagne and filled the two glasses, which she had placed before them. She raised her glass to her lips, took a sip, and then said:

"Damn it, will you stop doing that?" admonishing Stephen and reproaching him for his manifest indifference towards her and his reticence – leaving her wondering what she have to do to draw conversation from him now that he had become so pensive and withdrawn.

"Doing what?" Stephen asked once again defensively, growing more and more annoyed and tired at Mr. Hooper's assistant's incessant questioning.

"One minute you are here and the next you're miles away," she explained patiently, trying to calm Stephen's malcontent.

"Sorry," Stephen replied and played with one of the glasses placed in front of him.

Mr. Hooper's assistant moved the glass a little closer towards Stephen.

"So how does it feel?" she asked.

"How does what feel?" Stephen responded absently, picking up the glass and taking a sip.

"Being a prize winning novelist?"

"Mmm," Stephen murmured thoughtfully.

"So, Stephen Murray, winner of the prestigious Harvey award, what's on the horizon?"

"As I might say in my next book: One can only but wonder what tomorrow
may bring," Stephen said profoundly, taking a sip of his champagne.

"So, Stephen Murray, winner of the prestigious Harvey award, is there anyone special in your life?"

"Anyone special?" Stephen repeated vacantly.

"Yeah, anyone special: you know, girl-friend, fiancée, lover …, pen-pal. Anyone special?"

“A casual girlfriend, someone I’m seeing: nothing too serious. You?”

“Doesn’t quite come with the territory,” Mr. Hooper’s assistant replied, somewhat to Stephen’s surprise.

She took a sip of her champagne and moved a little closer to Stephen.

“Stephen … ?” Mr. Hooper’s assistant began.

Once again, however, Stephen was miles away, lost in his own little world, playing with his Harvey award: admiring it and marvelling at it. He did not respond to Mr. Hooper’s assistant.

Stephen himself, however, was still in awe of the fact he had indeed won; that he had been published and won a Harvey award for his work. All the time, with the thought that he had really achieved something, something of which he could be proud and something, which no one or thing could take from him.

"Ground control to Major Tom(7)," Mr. Hooper’s assistant entered his world again.

"I’m sorry,” Stephen said ruefully and not to mention somewhat apologetically, for he was weary and worn out. “It really has been a long night. I should call a cab.”
"You can stay here," Mr. Hooper's assistant responded a little too enthusiastically. "On the couch, I mean," she explained a little more demurely, "it's too late and the streets aren't safe at this time of night. I'll go get a blanket," she said, which Mr. Hooper's assistant presently did.

* * *
Hung over and feeling seedy, Stephen woke up on Mr. Hooper's assistant's couch to a rustling in the kitchen and the smell of coffee being brewed. He looked up and the wall moved: he looked again and it remained static. He looked up and the wall moved: he looked again and it remained static. It had been a long, hard night, last night – the full implications of which Stephen was now feeling. Nausea, a sore head and a dry throat were all making themselves known and were impacting themselves upon Stephen in what were long forgotten waves of agony.

"He stirs," Mr. Hooper's assistant said all too enthusiastically, emerging from the kitchen with a big plate of toast, bacon and scrambled eggs in her hands.

Stephen looked up at a coffee-cup, which had been placed on the table before him.

"Good morning," Mr. Hooper's assistant greeted him more brightly than the early hour would seem to warrant.

"Good morning, uggh," Stephen replied, sleepy. "What time is it?" he asked.

"A quarter to twelve."

"A quarter to twelve: shit, I've gotta be somewhere."

"On a Sunday morning?" Mr. Hooper's assistant asked credulous, "Where, Sunday school?"

"I've gotta, I've...; shit."

Stephen had arranged to meet Sylvia at the lounge Crème at ten.

"Relax, it's Sunday. I've cooked us some breakfast."

Stephen looked up at Mr. Hooper's assistant.

"Well, you certainly look like shit," he said almost instantly without thinking, as though a reflex.

"Thanks," Mr. Hooper's assistant replied with chagrin: "but take a look at you, you're not exactly Tom Cruise yourself either," she said.
"I'm sorry," Stephen said. "I mean Dian really made a mess of you."

Mr. Hooper's assistant's lips were swollen and underneath her right eye was turning a pallid shade of yellow with a hideous tinge of dark blue – highlighting it and drawing one's attention.

"It's worse than it looks," Mr. Hooper's assistant said. "Howdya sleep?" she asked Stephen.

"I'll tell you when the room stops spinning," he replied, flippant.

"Mmm…; it's a bit like that isn't it?"

"The morning after the night before," Stephen said meditatively, sipping his coffee. "What was in that hip flask?" he asked.

"Just something strong enough to get a bright, young P.A. through a night of Dian bloody Smith."

"Unhh," was all Stephen could reply when the events of the night before all came rushing back like some kind of hideous nightmare. "I should call Brian," he said almost instantaneously when it finally arrived.

"He's already called – twice in fact – while you were sleeping," Mr. Hooper's assistant informed Stephen matter-of-factly.

"The awards after-party sounds like it was a huge success," she continued. "I think the final tally was two o/d's, multiple arrests for drunk and disorderly outside and Dian freaking out on a bad acid trip threatening to jump off the balcony with Brian standing calmly behind her threatening to push her. Oh, by the way, speaking of Brian, he wants to see you tomorrow to arrange some press, maybe hold a conference, and on Tuesday to have a meal possibly at a restaurant called Vito's to celebrate. It's in St. Kilda and Brian likes it."

"Always on the job?"

"Always on the job," Mr. Hooper's assistant replied without missing a beat. "You really should eat something," she said.

"I know this is a strange question, but where am I?"

"Do you always ask that on the first date?" Mr. Hooper's assistant quipped wryly.

"Why, Miss Moneypenny …"
"Actually, you're not that far from home as the crow the flies."

"Always on the job?"

"It's the mark of a true professional," she said to Stephen, who was looking forward to being on home soil and wanted some time to appreciate all that had gone on, all that he had learnt and, above all, all that which he had achieved.

Their breakfast soon finished, Stephen decided to leave. Making sure, however, that Mr. Hooper's assistant was all right and that she could be left on her own. She was and so Stephen left her and her town house for home.

* * * *
Thirty-seven –

Sylvia checked her watch again: nearly ten-thirty. She was certain that Stephen had said he would meet her at ten. Sylvia poured herself another cup of peppermint tea. For the second time, a waiter walked past her table.

10:35: Sylvia finished her tea and placed a pile of coins on the saucer. She made her way out of the lounge Crème and thought of Stephen and wondered where he may be. Sylvia found the main street. All in all, feeling a little melancholy and let down. Therefore, she decided she would walk back to her current “apartment”, even though it was quite a distance from the lounge Crème; doing so she avoided those who passed and kept herself to herself.

As she made her way home to her apartment, Sylvia felt lonelier and more forlorn than she ever had since leaving her parents’ house in Lara. Disenchanted, she made her way back to her dwelling slowly and disconsolately, for she had really wanted to see Stephen to find out how the Authors’ Association awards ceremony had gone and he had stood her up. Sylvia was both unhappy and confused, and thus she decided when she got home she would paint.

*  *  *  *

Presently inside, Sylvia walked over to her easel. She picked up one of her brushes and began to paint from where she had left off – concentrating her disappointment into every stroke of her brush, which became less and less as she did so.

Through an old Art school acquaintance of Mr. Wilson’s, whose name was Mr. William McHardy – yet known to one and all as just Will –, who was impressed with her work and had taken an interest in it, Sylvia had been offered a small space for a two week exhibition of her work at one of the more respected and up market galleries in the city called Buchanan’s for a two week period. A small beginning, but a beginning at that – and definitely not in the manner in which she planned or even dreamed of continuing. A beginning, however, which
meant that Sylvia not only now had the opportunity to exhibit her work, but also hopefully sell some of it. The only problem was Sylvia needed two more paintings to fill the space. The exhibition of her work, if it could be called that, was an opportunity and the prospect of something good happening to and for her.

Even though she had painted regularly whilst working at the strip club, since starting at the Supply store, Sylvia had found that she had more time to paint and therefore more and more did she paint. And, as these things go, the more she painted the more confident she felt in her work. Although at times a bit too cynical and always a lot too cryptic, Mr. Wilson was a veritable fount of knowledge when it came to all things Art and treated Sylvia more like an apprentice than an employee. He even took the time to go over some of her sketches and offered her some invaluable suggestions – as any good teacher would. At times, the depth of his knowledge and his ability to find in her work that which she didn’t know was there astounded Sylvia, who looked forward to their conversations with the nervous apprehension of the most diligent student. She therefore looked forward to Mr. Wilson’s tutelage with much enthusiasm, giving it more than its due attention.

Mr. Wilson’s tutelage was of great help and Sylvia paid attention to it with more diligence than even the most conscientious student and she appreciated each and every moment and the interest that he had taken in her work. Good Tutelage – many Artists would have killed for it, yet none would have been as hard working and assiduous, nor given it more attention than Sylvia would have. Good Tutelage – many Artists would have killed for it, yet the question remains: where to find it? Found it Sylvia had and gave it all the attention it warranted and it was due and more – glad that things seemed to be improving for her, for they could not have got much worse.

*   *   *   *
Thirty-eight –

With much to digest and to absorb, Stephen decided he would walk to his little flat in Balaclava from Mr. Hooper’s assistant’s town house – after they had shared the breakfast she had prepared for them with the appetite of two sharing a bad case of the “hang over munchies” – speaking little, eating much. And as he made his way home – his dinner suit, wrinkled and creased, his Harvey award firmly in hand –, Stephen thought about what Mr. Hooper’s assistant had told him about Dian and Mr. Hooper. Although it was incredible, Stephen had no doubt that it was definitely plausible using what he had already seen as a gauge. As well as the fact that it would explain a lot of that which he had already seen. Miss Smith, thought Stephen. Miss Smith was a myth. Funny how things are always not as they seemed, thought Stephen: that which Mr. Hooper’s assistant had told him, however, made sense of what he had seen, even though it was still quite a surprise.

When he was nearly home, Stephen thought of Sylvia. Shit, he had missed their date at the lounge Crème, he thought as he approached his little flat. With all that had happened and what he had learnt about Miss Smith and Mr. Hooper, Stephen couldn’t help but thinking of Sylvia and their missed date and, as recompense, he decided he would invite Sylvia to a dinner, which Mr. Hooper had organised with his assistant for Stephen to celebrate his winning a Harvey award and to discuss his future with “Forrest and Hooper”, something which was looking particularly bright now he was published and held a Harvey award.

* * * *

Mr. Hooper’s assistant was right about one thing – Stephen’s little flat in Balaclava was not so far as the crow flies from her town house and as soon as he was in the front door, Stephen rang Sylvia, who accepted his explanation of why he had missed their date and congratulated him on his winning a Harvey award. She would be delighted, she said, to have dinner with Stephen, his Publisher and his assistant to celebrate his winning a Harvey award and Stephen
hung up knowing that he had done the right thing and thus felt better for it.

After he had spoken to Sylvia, Stephen wasted no time getting out of his dinner suit. He showered, returned to his living room and studied his Harvey award. Stephen felt excited, that he had really achieved something, something that made him proud, now that he held a Harvey award. Stephen wondered about the impact of what he had achieved and hoped that it would open the doors, which hitherto had remained closed to him, now that he was in Mr. Hooper’s words a “made” man. These things as they were, Stephen felt good within himself and contented – especially considering that he now held a Harvey award for his efforts.

* * * *
Thirty-nine –

Sylvia had been painting for just over an hour and was happy with the results. A still life, she was painting the empty seats of a café near the Supply store as they were just before opening time and any customers had arrived. Still feeling a little let down by Stephen and their missed date, she was channelling this into her work, which as a result, she found her disappointment slowly dissipating.

Sylvia was just mixing some paint on her palette, when the telephone rang.

“Hi Sylvia, it’s Stephen,” Stephen said after she had picked up. “Listen, I really am sorry that I missed our date.”

“Yes.”

“You’re never going to believe this, but the awards, the ceremony; I won the Harvey award.”

“The Harvey award?” Sylvia asked credulously – both interested and guarded.

“Yeah, for best piece by a first time author – can you believe it?”

“Wow, I am impressed.”

“Listen: I really am sorry that I missed our date. What can I say? It was a big night. How ‘bout you come to a dinner with me and my Publisher on Tuesday to celebrate?”

“Tuesday?” Sylvia asked.

“Yep Tuesday: the details are still a bit sketchy at this stage, but I’ll call you when things are organised.”

“Yeah, ah; Okay, it would be my pleasure,” Sylvia said, Stephen’s excitement rubbing off on her.

“Great! Tuesday it is,” Stephen said.

Sylvia, through his voice, sensed how excited Stephen was and, in turn, felt both excited and proud for him.
Although Stephen was worn out after his big night and had still not been to bed yet and it being nearly one o’clock in the afternoon, he and Sylvia shot the breeze for the next few minutes and Sylvia was intrigued by the minutiae of the Authors’ Association awards night as Stephen gave it – not omitting the events at Dian’s afterwards.

“You’ve got good news. I’ve got good news,” Sylvia told Stephen. “It looks like I’m going to exhibit some of my work.”

“Cool: how? Where?” Stephen asked in somewhat rapid succession, for all that was presently going on excited him. “Through who?” he continued.

“Through a friend of Mr. Wilson,” Sylvia told him, “at a gallery in town called Buchanan’s.”

Although Stephen was impressed by Sylvia’s news, he was also tired. “Listen, I really am tired and I really am sorry that I missed our date. I’ll speak to you soon,” he said.

“Okay, Stephen … I.”

“Yes Sylvia.”


“Bye, Sylvia.”

After he had hung up, Sylvia thought about Stephen winning a Harvey award and was equally proud and excited for him. She thought that they thus both currently had much in their lives to be glad about, which they were – both extremely happy that they were young and were who they were and that nothing, nothing, could stop them reaching and realising their full potential; and that they both could realise their situations coming full circle and, what is more, with what looked for both to be happy endings – as well as the fact that they now had each other.

Sylvia was both humbled and privileged by Stephen’s invitation to dinner with his Publisher, Mr. Hooper, and his assistant, whose name she soon discovered was Emma, Emma Forrest, as it had unexpectedly come in the form
of an apology for missing their date after the Authors’ Association awards night. After Stephen had told her what had happened and why he had missed their date, the two had made their peace and so it was that they were tentatively going to a restaurant called Vito’s in St. Kilda to celebrate Stephen’s winning a Harvey award – an event, the significance of which Sylvia appreciated and was mindful. Who would have thought that a chance encounter with a Sales assistant at a ramshackle, time forgotten, second hand bookstore in Gardenvale would have led to dinner with an award-winning author – as his date – and his Publisher and assistant?

* * * *

* * * *
Forty –

After Stephen had had a shower and changed back into civvies, he placed his dinner suit gratefully back into its bag to be returned to the dress hire firm the next day on his way to the press conference Mr. Hooper had arranged for him to discuss his new Harvey award and to promote *The DaySleepers*. A little refreshed, though tired, Stephen was ebullient and relieved beyond words – with everything and everything other glittering and on the improve, he thought.

A reasonably successful – not to mention award-winning – author – *The DaySleepers* early sales not being astronomical, but some people had thought highly enough of it to buy it, which had provided Stephen with a respectable, not large, dividend – the net total of which still being reckoned – and which had received some pleasing reviews. On top of all that, he now had an attractive girlfriend, whose company he took much pleasure in and a promising future.

* * * *

Having informed Sylvia of the details of the celebration dinner to be held in his honour, Stephen decided to rest. First he washed his face and shaved and then he showered – all in preparation for his first press conference tomorrow as a published, award-winning author. Mr. Hooper had done most of the groundwork for the press conference and Stephen hoped he would not make a fool of himself. Stephen thus gave himself the rest of the day off. He rested, admired his award and had an early night so he was fresh for the next day.

* * * *

Held at a hired venue near the offices of “Forrest and Hooper”, the press conference was not only the first one Stephen had attended, but also the first one that he was to be the subject of and, this being so, Stephen was both quite eager and at the same time quite anxious. He smoked a couple of cigarettes beforehand and took some deep breaths to compose himself, yet this did little to
calm him.

After a brief introduction from Mr. Hooper and a few photographs of Stephen with his Harvey award, the questions and the conference began in earnest.

“Stephen, Peter Claus from *The Age*, *The DaySleepers* dealt with some pretty dark issues, particularly that of suicide, were you writing from experience or was it just your imagination?”

“Youth is a very difficult age,” Stephen replied, “in today’s world young people have a lot to reckon with. However, Peter, I do not advocate suicide as a means to dealing with one’s problems and was purely using my imagination.”

“Stephen, Anthony Greene from *The Herald Sun*, the ending of *The DaySleepers* was ambiguous, would you please enlighten us as to whether the main character died or not?”

“The ending was supposed to be that way. I feel too many writers these days explain too much and rather should leave it to the reader to make up their minds. So, I guess it’s for you to decide. As a teacher of mine at University said, a writer has to resist the urge to explain and let the reader work it out for themselves.”

“You have any regrets about leaving University without an award?”

“Sometimes, yes, Mr. Claus, sometimes, no, but right now it is not a moot point.”

“Ken Baker of *The Courier Mail*, Stephen how do you feel now that *The DaySleepers* has won a Harvey award?”

“To be honest with you Mr. Baker, I feel both humble and proud to have won such an honourable award.”

“You publisher told us that you work in a second hand bookstore,” Peter Claus began, “will you now continue to do so?” he asked.

“I actually resigned the position when I got the book deal, so in response to your question Mr. Claus, no.”
“When will we see your next book?” Ken Baker asked.
“Hopefully, very soon, very soon,” Stephen replied.
“Going to enlighten us?” Ken Baker asked further.
“I would love to, but it’s still very much a work in progress, Mr. Baker,” Stephen responded.

After a few more questions, a silence fell upon the press conference and even though Stephen felt that he had more to say, before he knew it the press conference was over with Mr. Hooper thanking those for attending. Stephen felt, however, he had kept his end up. He had answered as many questions as he could and had not been conceited – purposely so.

When the press conference had concluded, Mr. Hooper invited Stephen back to his office to debrief and to talk a few things through.

“That was good,” Mr. Hooper said to Stephen, “you answered a lot of difficult questions and did so well and kept it all on track. How do you think it went?”

Stephen was unsure, as it was the first time that he had really spoken about *The DaySleepers* to an audience, especially on such an intense level: “To be honest, I’m not sure. It wasn’t easy,” he said.

“Never mind: you did well. Okay, our legal team is drawing up your contract and tomorrow I’ve made reservations at a place called *Vito’s* in St. Kilda to celebrate make sure you’re free – the booking’s at seven. Don’t worry too much; good things are going to come of this. Okay?”

Those words made Stephen feel somewhat better and soon he was leaving Mr. Hooper’s office and making his way home to his little flat.

* * * *
Forty-one –

It had been a usual busy Monday at the Supply store and Sylvia had not been in the door for more than five minutes when the telephone rang.

“Hi Sylvia, it’s Stephen. Long time no speak,” was the first thing Stephen said.

“Hi Stephen; how’d the press conference go?”

“Mr. Hooper was happy, but me, I don’t know – it’s all a bit of a blur to tell you the truth.”

“I’m sure you knocked them dead,” Sylvia said, trying to offer some moral support.

“Oh well, hopefully it will sell a few more copies. Listen tomorrow, Mr. Hooper wants us to meet at a restaurant called Vito’s, you know like The Godfather, in St. Kilda – just off Fitzroy street. How does seven, seven-thirty sound?”

“Sounds great,” Sylvia said, trying to mask her excitement.

“Seven-thirty it is. Listen, I’m beat. I’ll see you tomorrow, okay.”

“Stephen, I …”

“Yes, Sylvia.”

“Nothing, Stephen. I’ll see you tomorrow. Goodbye.”

“See you, Sylvia.”

After Stephen had hung up, Sylvia went to her kitchenette and prepared a quick meal of pasta and cheese sauce. Whilst she ate, she tried not to get too excited and tried to make it seem like they were just having another dinner date – only the two of them. Her plate soon empty, Sylvia decided to have a shower and rather than paint that night, read a book and have an early night so she would be fresh the next day and look her best for the following evening.

* * * * *
With the details of the celebration of Stephen winning his Harvey award having been settled and Stephen having informed Sylvia; for the evening, the next day she had bought a short skirt – not quite mini, ending just above her knees – and matching blouse: all of which she had bought during her lunch hour in preparation for what was shaping to be an important night for her and, in turn, for her and Stephen.

Sylvia began to get ready. She put on the blouse, which she had bought as part of her outfit for the evening, leaving the top two buttons open and then the skirt.

_Not too conservative, not too revealing_, she thought as she looked in the mirror, _just right._

Satisfied with how she looked, Sylvia decided that she would leave it as it was. As Sylvia locked the door of her apartment, she felt like she was a nervous debutante, which made her wonder what she had done for her fortunes to change so dramatically. Sylvia thought one day she was working as a stripper in a second rate strip club, living on her own in a deplorable bed-sit without a friend in the world, dreaming of being a successful Artist, the next she was having dinner with an award-winning author – as his date – and his Publisher and his assistant to celebrate his winning a Harvey award. On top of this, as well as having an exhibition of her work in the not too distance – having finished the requisite paintings to her satisfaction and her liking ahead of time and with some new ideas for more.

In spite of all this, Sylvia remained mindful – with, however, the suspicion and presentiment things were not as they seemed and felt a change coming, but decided to continue on with everything as it was regardless.
Sylvia checked the door of her apartment was locked and had soon left to meet Stephen for their dinner date. As she made her way on the number sixty-four tram to Vito’s, Sylvia contemplated all the good that was in her life – glad that things were improving for her, for they could not have got much worse.

*   *   *   *

*   *   *   *
Forty-two –

Relaxing on his own after he had called Sylvia, in the light of the events of the last, few weeks, Stephen compared these to the old days with everything and everything other glittering and on the improve, he thought. He felt excited and marvelled at how things had come together for him and hoped they would continue to do so. Firm in the resolve he would do everything to ensure that they would remain so in what he thought was a manner both orderly and necessary.

To this end, Stephen resolved to take, in his view, the action he thought was necessary to make sure things would continue in the manner in which they had presently been occurring. For a hard learnt lesson, Stephen had found particularly applicable during the years and throughout his hard knocks was the axiom of “necessary action”, whereby action had to be taken to avoid impending disaster. For example, falling behind on his rent or out of favour with Mr. McPherson’s good opinion having left “McPherson’s Books” on a high note, which he did not wish to sour or Mr. Hooper’s lofty standing, being a published author with respectable sales – even if the royalties he had received from which were a bit disappointing and not what he had at all expected.

A byproduct of this axiom was the discipline of “compelling reason”. Compelling reason, or the discipline thereof, was that when action was necessary, by a reason, which was compelling, it was time to do something: ergo, “compelling reason”. “Necessary action” and “Compelling reason” Stephen had discovered were requisite and indispensable and therefore would be essential to what he considered to be his continuing survival, if he wanted to be successful as a writer.

Stephen, nevertheless, looked forward to a change, which he could feel coming his way. He therefore hoped with his novel published and a Harvey award won that doors, which hitherto had been closed, would open for him.

* * *
Still with some time on her hands, Sylvia decided she would walk from St. Kilda road to Vito’s after catching a tram to the Domain road interchange. This meant that she would have time to clear her head and could collect her thoughts before Stephen’s celebration dinner. Although Sylvia was excited by the fact she was dating an award-winning author, yet still, however, she had her doubts and thought Stephen was perhaps a little too good to be true, at least she thought so at times, something she kept to herself.

Sylvia realised, however, that although things were not and would never be perfect between them, she did hope that things would not change between her and Stephen for the time being. All with the hope that through her relationship with Stephen her fortunes would change – for the better. And with this hope, Sylvia prayed for that change.

Sylvia continued on her way to Vito’s. And as she walked, Sylvia realised she had left her watch, which she had taken off whilst dressing, at home. *Never mind; still got plenty of time*, she thought as she walked, remembering it had just turned six-thirty when she had left her apartment and she had agreed to be at the restaurant at around seven-thirty. *Never mind*, she thought, *still got plenty of time*.

Sylvia was still excited about their dinner and humble that Stephen had even thought of inviting her. All of which made her feel happy and in high spirits and that she was riding a wave no one or thing could knock her off.

* * *
Forty-four –

At Vito’s, early ready to introduce Sylvia to Mr. Hooper and his assistant that night, Stephen had decided he would do his best to be his best and so he resolved not to do anything out of the ordinary. Even though he was feeling quite satisfied and pleased with himself and as a result of this a bit superior as well as conceited now that he was a holder of a Harvey award for his efforts – something no one or thing could ever take away from him, Stephen thought about things and wondered what Mr. Hooper and his assistant, Emma, would think of Sylvia. From the outside Vito’s looked like just your average Pizza bar, but once inside it was like you had stepped into Sicily circa the nineteen fifties. Stephen felt good and thought of Sylvia.

Privately, despite her good looks, her voluptuous figure, her youthful innocence and other charms, Stephen had his doubts about Sylvia. At times, he thought that she was a little too overly reliant upon him as well as a bit of a liability with her past as a stripper. Although things were now going well for her with her painting, Stephen, a published and award-winning author, was in no hurry to let people know that in the not too long ago his new girlfriend was a lap dancer. Not to mention, her want of sophistication due to what Stephen presumed was her age – her being a few years younger than him, still only twenty-one, though soon to be twenty-two, and him being twenty-eight. Nonetheless, however, he was still fond of her and interested in what she had to offer him and thus thought he would continue seeing her – for the time being at least.

Stephen enjoyed her company. He liked having someone to share things with, hoped that things would continue to go well between them and that Mr. Hooper and his assistant, Emma, would warm to Sylvia’s charms as he had – with pretty much all going smoothly and with the hope they would not change and that he was able to prevent it from doing so.

* * * * *
For their celebration dinner, to which Stephen had invited Sylvia to join him as he wanted her to become more a part of his life, Mr. Hooper had selected Vito’s, which was an inconspicuous pasta bar just off the end of Fitzroy street in St. Kilda. This was as it was a nice place to have a quiet meal, to discuss Stephen’s future with “Forrest and Hooper” and to celebrate his winning a Harvey award.

Yesterday, after a good night’s sleep, Stephen had survived his first press conference as a published and award-winning author. This press conference was both nerve racking and gruelling and Stephen found it odd speaking about his work to strangers. Mr. Hooper was on hand and made things a little easier for him. Stephen, however, kept his end up: he answered as many questions as he could and tried not to sound obnoxious or conceited. Yet still, however, he found it strange talking about something to people he would never nor usually see let alone talk to, which he had lived with for over three years going on four and which, as thus, had become an elemental and fundamental part of his life.

All things told, the press conference was an experience and Stephen saw and took it as thus. However, he would not want to go through it again in any great rush. Yet knew if he was to be a success as a writer they would become a part of his life and so he thought so be it. And although Stephen was a little nervous, he had done his best and answered as many questions as he could: and thus thought that he had played his part well with the knowledge that if he was to continue as a writer they would become a necessary evil – so make the best of them Stephen decided to do – with the intention of employing them to serve his own purpose, it was his plan, and to serve it well.

* * * *

Still waiting for the others to arrive, Stephen decided to have a drink at Vito’s bar to kill some time. The first one soon finished and no one there yet, he lit a cigarette and ordered another drink. In his earlier days, Stephen had been
somewhat of a heavy drinker, his all too frequent binges bordering on alcoholism: something, which had worried his then friends and whom Stephen had lost many over it, with them getting sick of his constant excesses.

When Stephen had left University without an award and with the intention of becoming a writer, come what may, however, he had decided to put that behind him. Standing there at Vito’s bar, however, he thought a few quiet ones wouldn’t hurt and thus enjoyed his drink and then ordered another.

Even though he had been a pretty heavy drinker, Stephen never considered his drinking a problem – he was only having a good time – and when he decided he would focus on his writing other than the first, few months, stopping drinking was no big problem. Given the difficulty, however, of this first, few months of being abstinent, Stephen had a greater resolution not to drink and marked on his calendar how long it had been since the last one with a red felt-tipped pen. Stephen was feeling good and thus he ordered another drink and reflected upon his recent spate of successes – that which once had seemed so elusive now came to him without him even trying, let alone acting.

Everything Stephen had dreamt of and hoped for, he had achieved with what was very little effort on his behalf once he had started the ball rolling. His novel published, a Harvey award won and a new – not to mention, attractive – girlfriend – and such that it was and was it such at least that was so for him with everything and everything other glittering and on the improve, he thought – published, award-winning author and all. Hoping that he could prove the motto: *Be careful what you dream for* wrong with the knowledge that he would do everything he could to ensure that this was so and what is more, all with a smile on his face.

Whilst he was still at Vito’s bar, Mr. Hooper and his assistant, Emma, arrived. Stephen polished off his drink and greeted them – feeling a little lightheaded, though that everything – especially him – was right in the world. Stephen joined Mr. Hooper and his assistant in an *apéritif*. This soon finished, Stephen had a beer – thinking pleasantly and good-humouredly of all the good things that were happening to him and of those that were to come his way.
Mr. Hooper, his assistant, Emma, and Stephen passed the time talking about nothing in particular and enjoying a few more *apéritifs*. Mr. Hooper’s assistant had scrubbed up well after her tussle with Dian and looked better than perfect with her long, blonde hair tied back, dressed in a delightful after five number – an ankle length dress with jewel encrusted accessories to match. The clock on the wall making them all well aware of how late Sylvia was – leaving Stephen wondering whether she was going to show up at all and whether they should just order their meals, get down to business, which was the reason for them being there, and proceed without her.

And as they talked and began to discuss Stephen’s future at “Forrest and Hooper”, the door of Vito’s opened.

“Better early than late, Sylvia, better late than never,” Stephen greeted Sylvia curtly when she arrived at their table much to the embarrassment of Mr. Hooper and his assistant.

“I’m sorry Stephen; I must have lost track of time,” Sylvia apologised.

“Well as I said: better early than late, better late than never. Sylvia, this is Mr. Hooper. Mr. Hooper, this is Sylvia – the girl I was telling you about,” Stephen introduced the two to each other.

“Pleased to meet you, Sylvia,” Mr. Hooper stated amiably, rising from the table and shook the hand Sylvia offered him.

“And Sylvia this is his assistant, Emma,” Stephen continued, introducing Sylvia to Mr. Hooper’s assistant.

“Hi Sylvia,” Mr. Hooper’s assistant said – not bothering to get up from her chair.

Sylvia sat down at the chair Stephen had pulled out for her and said little more. All the time trying to mask her fretfulness that had somehow suddenly befallen her as she entered the restaurant and sat at the table and which had
been added to by Stephen’s brusque greeting.

Thus the group remained, all until Mr. Hooper said:

“I think it’s time for the champagne,” gesturing to his assistant. “Emma will you do the honours?” he asked.

Mr. Hooper’s assistant took the bottle of champagne from the cooler on a waiter’s friend next to their table, popped the cork and filled four glasses, passing each one as she finished to those seated there, leaving one for herself. Soon complete, Mr. Hooper raised his glass and said: “To Stephen – may there be many more,” prompting the others to raise their glasses and congratulate Stephen on his winning a Harvey award.

Stephen made the most of the moment. He found himself proud and complete. “To Stephen – may there be many more,” Mr. Hooper toasted Stephen prompting the others to raise their glasses and follow suit. “To Stephen,” was the toast they all drank and drank Stephen did.

Buoyed by the warranted praise of Mr. Hooper and his assistant, Stephen drank and drank heartily, proud of his achievements, who he was and all that was happening to him. Before too long the group were all ordering their meals. Pasta, pasta and more pasta, Vito’s being an Italian restaurant and all – with the exception of Mr. Hooper, who ordered a small pizza with all fresh ingredients cooked in Vito’s wood fired oven. Stephen felt ebullient with who he was, whom he was with and that nothing now – nothing – stood in his way of what he wanted and would become to be.

As the group waited for their meals, Mr. Hooper ordered yet another round of drinks. The group all enjoyed themselves. They drank and talked, talked and drank – each and every one that is, except for Sylvia, who was polite, but quiet, whilst Stephen quickly polished off his drink and ordered another – wondering whether any of the group could tell how much he had had to drink.
Inwardly laughing and at the same time raging and fuming at Sylvia’s naiveté and subduedness, who was lost working out which fork to use – picking one up, then putting it down, picking another one up and doing the same. Stephen, who was getting more and more annoyed, couldn’t help but worsen the situation by opening his mouth, which revealed his inebriation.

“Start from the outside and work your way in: that's it.”

Sylvia did as she was told, buttering her bread roll with the correct knife only to spill some butter on her new skirt.

Stephen suppressed a cynical laugh and, as the waitress set their meals before them on the table, asked Sylvia acerbically:

“So, Sylvia: what did the Art school dropout say to the Publisher and his assistant?”

“I don’t know Stephen: what did the Art school dropout say to the Publisher and his assistant?” Sylvia replied deadpan, all the time knowing where Stephen’s question was heading, and thus with disdain – even though she was more preoccupied with the stain on her new skirt.

“Would you like fries with that?”

“Stephen!” Mr. Hooper’s assistant berated Stephen though with a smile on her face.

“I mean,” Stephen continued, growing more confident as he spoke and now with Mr. Hooper’s assistant’s tacit encouragement, “just like the fish and the bicycle what the world really needs is another wannabe Painter – isn’t that right Sylvia? Beset and assailed as we are with images all over the shop, what we really need is another still life.”

“Give it a break, Stephen,” Mr. Hooper interjected, “Sorry Sylvia, I think it’s
“That’s okay,” Sylvia replied demurely, nevertheless appreciative of Mr. Hooper’s concern.

“No really,” Stephen persisted, “I write books; I’m going to keep writing books, which people will read and take something from. What is the point of yet another painting to spoil the view? What I write helps people – it educates them, and makes their lives easier, it doesn’t just help pass the time or give them something pretty to look at.”

“I said, give it a break, Stephen!” Mr. Hooper said through gritted teeth, unable to contain his anger any longer. “I think someone has had too much of the silly sauce and doesn’t know when enough is enough.”

He threw his napkin on the table and looked Stephen directly in the eye.

Although he was quite drunk, Stephen still knew he had gone too far and thus decided he would leave it at that.

“Bugger it, I’m going out for a cigarette,” he said diffidently. “Emma, do you want to join me?”

“Okay,” Mr. Hooper’s assistant said and placed her cutlery on the table before her – somewhat defiantly and much to Mr. Hooper’s chagrin.

And thus Stephen got up from the table and went outside for a cigarette with Mr. Hooper’s assistant following his lead.

“As I said Sylvia, I wouldn’t worry too much about what Stephen was saying, I think it was just the wine talking. Okay? Good girl. Stephen tells me you paint?” Mr. Hooper said after Stephen and his assistant had left.

“Yeah, as a matter of fact I’ve got my first exhibition coming up,” Sylvia replied.

“Your first exhibition; you must be excited.”

“I am to tell you the truth.”

“And so you should be.”
Mr. Hooper took a sip of his champagne, looked at Sylvia and said: “Who would be a bloody publisher – playing wet nurse to a bunch of drunks and Luddites with a good turn of phrase and who can string a few words together? Christ!”

Sylvia smiled wryly in reply and left it at that.

Mr. Hooper and Sylvia said little more and presently, Stephen and Mr. Hooper’s assistant returned to the table to have their meals, which by now were getting cold.

“Sylvia was just telling me that she has her first exhibition coming up,” Mr. Hooper told his assistant as she started on her spaghetti bolognaise.

“Wow Sylvia, you must be proud,” Mr. Hooper’s assistant said politely.

“Better for the fresh air, Stephen?” Mr. Hooper asked as Stephen started on his carbonara made fresh with free-range eggs.

“Yeah, sorry. Sorry Sylvia – that was way out of line. I don’t know what got into me. I guess it was just the wine talking, hope you understand, no offence,” said Stephen before he starting on a large piece of pasta.

“Anyway, the reason we are here tonight is to discuss your future,” Mr. Hooper said directly to Stephen.

“Now The DaySleepers has sold well for a first novel, but its figures are starting to dwindle. However, we need to capitalise on its success and its winning a Harvey award. So, what I’m going to put on the table is a two-book offer with an advance on the first and we’ll take it from there. Now it will mean a lot of work and we will need a new book within the next twelve months, but it will also mean many more dollars than working in a bookstore. How does that sound?”

Stephen immediately saw the dollar signs, of which Mr. Hooper had spoken, and so agreed, in principle, and signed a contract, which Mr. Hooper had brought along for his perusal and signature. And they had soon arranged a
meeting for the next day to discuss brass tacks.

* * * *
Forty-five –

For the rest of that night at Vito’s, Sylvia said little, but rather kept herself to herself and played the onlooker – while Stephen revelled in the praise given him and gloated in the limelight of his recent spate of successes. Brought into line by Mr. Hooper after his outburst, Stephen had toned down a little, being more polite to Sylvia. He was a little nicer towards her and a bit more courteous, which made Sylvia feel a little better, but, however, she was still hurt by what Stephen had said and the derision she felt in his words. Mr. Hooper and Stephen soon got down to business, which was the purpose of the night’s gathering. Sylvia, however, felt terrible. She did not want to be there and wanted to be anywhere else and with anyone else after Stephen’s tirade – all because she was thirty minutes late.

That night at Vito’s was for Sylvia a waking horror, bordering on an unequivocal nightmare, not knowing what to do or to say after Stephen had put her down – just because she had left her watch at home. For the most, Sylvia, though quiet, remained, however, approachable, yet still felt she was out of place and her depth and nothing that she could do or say would improve the situation – simply because she was a little bit late.

And before she knew it, Mr. Hooper was asking for the cheque and the party dispersed. Stephen got up first, and then Sylvia. His hands were now all over her. His boozy breath upon her, whispering pathetic and predictable sweet nothings in her ear, promising her the world and anything else she may wish for and they decided they would sojourn to Stephen’s flat. Sylvia didn’t want to, but something compelled her to go with Stephen. Therefore, go she did.

*   *   *   *
Forty-six –

Even though he had drunk far too much, made a bit of a fool of himself and run Sylvia down, that night at Vito’s all Stephen’s dreams were realised. He had been commended, he had secured a book deal, had had a promising discussion with his Publisher and he had signed a contract, which would see him quite well off: *even better than the real thing*, he thought – drunk, drunk and on his own.

* * * *

After Sylvia had left his flat subsequent to their cursory and abysmal lovemaking, which Stephen took little pleasure in, even though he had been selfish and focussed only on his own gratification: a straight wham, bam thank you ma’am quickie in the missionary position, each barely taking the time to undress properly. She had decided not to stay the night as she said she had to be at work early the next day – according to her –, the real reason being the scene at the restaurant. In the quiet of the night, Stephen compared these to the old days, with everything and everything other glittering and on the improve, he thought.

Mr. Hooper had put an attractive offer on the table and Stephen had accepted, which made him feel he was taking one step further down the path of what he felt he deserved and altogether very pleased and self-satisfied.

In the quiet of the night, in the dark of the moonlight, Stephen compared these to the old days: he was proud and getting prouder. And with these thoughts, he felt himself fall into a delighted drunken slumber – alone.

* * * *
Forty-seven –

After they had made love at Stephen’s flat, which Sylvia had found repulsive, she got up from Stephen’s bed and dressed while he was still half asleep and decided to leave: extremely disappointed with how Stephen had treated her – especially given the company and why they were there.

How dare he run her down like that in front of his Publisher and his assistant, Emma, and then invite her back to his flat to have sex as though nothing had happened?

Sylvia put her coat on. She took one last look at Stephen, who was lying in a deep slumber, and left. All of which made her as if she had lost a part of life and one, which would never return. Thus Sylvia would see it as lost, irredeemable: she would not try to make it or hope for it to return and would rather leave it at that. Steadfast in the resolve that that was that and that her relationship with Stephen was over – this time for good – and that she would focus upon her painting even more so than before. Sylvia left Stephen as he was, firm with the resolve that that was that and that she would have no more to do with Stephen and take better care of herself even more so than before.

And with this resolution, Sylvia was certain. Her first real boyfriend in a long while and one, whose companionship she enjoyed, Sylvia was both saddened and disenchaned with what had happened – especially given the company. It did not take long for her to find out who and how Stephen was and therefore she would not look back, but fare forward with what was lost remaining lost, irretrievable; irretrievable was what it is was and in Sylvia’s eyes and irretrievable it would remain so.

*  *  *  *
Forty-eight –

Waking from his intoxicated slumber in the early hours of that morning, nicotine and alcohol coursing through his veins, the events of his celebration dinner running through his mind, Stephen felt primed – bloated by his own self-importance, vanity and the praise he had received for his writing and his efforts. Stephen rolled over hoping to find Sylvia lying there and to continue from where they had left off. Only to find that what had become her side of the bed, the left, was empty. Drunkenly remembering she had left whilst he was half asleep, Stephen rolled over and lit a cigarette.

Whilst he smoked, propped up against his bed head, Stephen was very pleased with himself and very assured. He felt proud: proud of what he had done, proud of his achievements. He was content with all that was happening to and for him and the praise he was receiving for his work and which he felt that he had earned through his efforts. Stephen felt both self-righteous and complete – something no one or thing could or would take from him.

For three long years whilst employed at “McPherson’s Books”, Stephen had pushed himself to write each and every day. He had battled fatigue and ennui, tiredness and boredom, loneliness and solitude, but he had never given up. He had picked up the pen or sat in front of the computer, when it was the least he wanted to do, but he had persevered and now it looked like he had overcome all the obstacles and challenges that had presented themselves and succeeded.

Stephen now stood at the threshold of a new world that he could see and one that he would never leave ever, it was his intent – doing the best he could to ensure that this was so. For three long years whilst employed at “McPherson’s Books”, Stephen had pushed himself to write, write and write and now he wanted to enjoy the fruits of his labour and no one or thing would stop him or stand in his way.

Stephen had brought to his plate that which he had thought was impossible. The wall, at times, had seemed too high, insurmountable. Now he had climbed it, he had climbed it, his prayers had been answered, his moments
of existential and artistic despair assuaged, he was published and had won a Harvey award. Stephen was proud. He was proud and no one or thing now stood in his way of living on his own terms and attacking life in the manner he wanted to and, what is more, on his terms: deservedly so, he thought.

In the half-light of that morning’s dawn, the sun’s early rays beginning to shine through his bedroom window, Stephen was swollen with pride, pride of what he had achieved and pride of what he had become and knew nothing – nothing – now stood in his way. The morning slowly arriving, first light coming from his bedroom window, Stephen finished his cigarette, butted it out in his ashtray and went back to sleep, at ease and alone. And such that it was and was it such at least that was so for Stephen, with everything and everything other glittering and on the improve, he thought – published, award-winning author and all.

* * * *
Forty-nine –

Even though it was late in the night – nearly one o’clock in the morning – and she started work at the Supply store at ten the next day, rather than going straight to bed when she got home – her head still clouded with resentment and anger –, Sylvia decided that she would paint – hoping that that would dispel her unhappiness and her sadness. As she stood at her easel in the dead of night and painted, however, she found herself getting angrier and angrier with Stephen: *how could one person, one minute, be so sweet and the next poison?*

Sylvia found herself hurt by what Stephen had said – especially given the company. Sure he had been drinking heavily, but they had shared some quite intimate and private moments together, moments she had and would always cherish and had found herself thinking that something good, as well as long term, would come of their relationship. She had been looking forward to the night, hoped it would be significant for them, that it would be an opportunity for them to take things one step further, make something of their relationship and Stephen was the one man she had let touch her after Mr. Servais had tried to attack her and look at what he had done.

*How dare Stephen treat her like that?*

Sylvia felt like she needed a break from her painting and so she went to the kitchen and began to make a cup of coffee. All the time getting angrier and thinking: *How dare Stephen treat her like that?* Whilst she was waiting for the kettle to boil, she remembered she would see him again on Friday at a party that was being held at a mutual acquaintance’s, a poet of the name Pieter van Ryn, for which they had received individual invitations and no excuse she could think of could get her out of given its importance for her at this stage of her career and her upcoming exhibition. Sylvia didn’t want to go, she racked her brain for excuses not to and then decided she would just put on a brave face, do her best and attend anyway, steering well clear of Stephen, if indeed he showed up.

Sylvia poured the hot water from the kettle into her mug. She went to the refrigerator, got the milk out and, after pouring some into her coffee; she put the milk back in its spot. Sylvia stirred her coffee and returned to her easel. Sylvia
picked up one of her brushes. She began to paint, unable, however, to exorcise the thought: *How dare Stephen treat her like that?* – all the time with the hope that things would improve for her, for they could not get much worse.

Above all, Sylvia found herself both disappointed and angry. She had tried, she had been nice and she had accepted Stephen’s flaws and tried to accentuate his strong points. And, after all that, look at how he had treated her, for he was the one man she had let touch her after Mr. Servais had tried to attack her and he had run her down like a school-girl on a night Sylvia had hoped would be a turning point in their relationship, for them to take it and things to another level.

*How dare Stephen treat her like that?* for he was the one man she had let touch her after Mr. Servais had tried to rape her and look at what he had done, Sylvia thought – all the time with the hope that things would improve for her, for they could not get much worse.

* * * *
Fifty –

Late the next morning and hung over, Stephen woke up, made his way to the living room of his little flat and studied the contract he had signed last night, closely. Mr. Hooper was certainly right about one thing, it would mean many more dollars than he would make in a long, long while working at “McPherson Books” despite the heavy workload it would entail. However, Stephen found himself intrigued by the possibilities of starting something new having had The DaySleepers on his mind for too long – three years writing it, nine months trying to get it published, to be precise.

Last night before they had all gone their separate ways, Mr. Hooper had arranged a meeting with him at three o'clock that afternoon to discuss the finer points of his proposal for his new book and contract for further works and so Stephen decided to have a light day, catch up on some reading and flesh out a few ideas he had for his next novel.

* * * *

Having showered and changed into fresh clothes: as he made his way by tram to the offices of “Forrest and Hooper” that day, despite his hang over Stephen felt like a new man. He was published, he had won an award for his work and was ready to discuss a deal that would see him quite better off – with the wind of change he could feel blowing, breathing its new life into him, brushing off the cobwebs of his past life and offering entry to a new one – and that he could right some of the wrongs done against him and make amends for that which he had lost.

For three long years whilst employed at “McPherson’s Books”, he had been a pawn, now he was ready to be a knight and, in his opinion, he thought deservedly so. Stephen felt within himself that he had reached the point of no return and return would he not.

Now a published and award-winning author, at the lavish offices of
“Forrest and Hooper” a little early – as was his usual –, Stephen made his way straight to Mr. Hooper’s office with a firm and purposeful stride, rather than announce his presence to the receptionist at the front desk.

When he entered, Mr. Hooper was on the telephone and gestured to Stephen to sit down, which Stephen did. His call soon finished, he asked Stephen:

“So, how are things looking in the cold light of day? Ready to come on board?”

Stephen said he was, to which Mr. Hooper replied, “Great,” rose from his desk and shook Stephen’s hand.

“As I said last night at Vito’s – that is, if you can remember,” Mr. Hooper began businesslike, “The DaySleepers was a success for a first piece by an unpublished author. It won a Harvey award and sold well and we need to capitalise on all these positives while it’s still fresh in people’s minds. So what we need from you is something new, something bold, something different and something which will consolidate your position as a saleable author. What are you working on?” he asked Stephen.

In the light of the events of the past few days, his work had been the furthest thing from Stephen’s mind, however, he wanted to offer Mr. Hooper something, and so he said:

“I’ve got a new novel on the boil, but this one will be different.”

“That’s good, different is good, different is what we need and as I said you need to build upon what you’ve already achieved. What are you planning to write about?”

Stephen felt an undercurrent of derision in Mr. Hooper’s words and an air of caution; and one, which Stephen heeded, and so he was cautious and explained directly what he was going to attempt to do with his new work.

“The DaySleepers was all about young people at University – working,
playing and living hard, what I’m now interested in is what happens a few years later,” Stephen explained, “and so I want to write about an artist, a composer actually, who is a little bit older and who is struggling to make it in today’s world.”

Mr. Hooper was interested and so let Stephen speak and speak Stephen did: although it was more him that needed convincing than Mr. Hooper.

“So what I’m hoping to show is that money isn’t everything even though most people think it is. And, so doing, they neglect to think about the contributions other people are making through their work and their art unless it is of a direct benefit to them financially. And hopefully this motif will strike a chord in people strong enough to make them want to buy and read the book and it will be a success and will sell well.”

“All good,” Mr. Hooper said, when Stephen had finished: “just remember the clock’s ticking and we need to consolidate on what you’ve already achieved.”

* * * *

Leaving Mr. Hooper’s office altogether anxious and a bit overwhelmed by the task at hand; as he made his way out of “Forrest and Hooper” and on to Clarendon street in light of the events of the last few days, Stephen, nevertheless, was confident he could deliver and deliver he would was his intent and what is more well. After all, he was a published author and had won a Harvey award for being so, which made him feel he could meet any of the challenges that his new life as a successful, published and award-winning author would present him – and such that it was and was it such at least that was so for
Stephen, with everything and everything other glittering and on the improve, he thought – published, award-winning author and all, and now with a new book deal and an option on the third.

* * * *
Fifty-one –

At home after a relatively quiet day at the Supply store, which Sylvia had occupied re-organising stock and taking an inventory of it – a tedious task, but one that needed doing – and setting up a point of sale display with Mr. Wilson, tired she decided to put what had happened with Stephen out of her mind and began to think about the exhibition of her work. For the two weeks, Will had planned all that was required to the finest detail. He had thought of everything – the catering, the bar, the invitations, all of that – and had made sure that everything was just as it should be: and just as it should be everything was. As she worked with Will, Sylvia was impressed by his professionalism, his proficient manner and his attention to detail.

In fact, through this, she thus felt her relationship with Will would be quintessential to her continuing success, not to mention survival, as an Artist and therefore did everything that he told her to do to a T and did not question his judgement, which made her feel better, a bit more secure and gave her a bit of long sought after relief.

That night – alone –, Sylvia passed it pencilling and drafting some new pieces, which she was hoping to include in the exhibition of her work as well as thinking about a few ideas she had for new work, which were weighing heavily in her mind. She was thus well occupied, but nonetheless angry with Stephen and what he had said. Therefore she decided she would paint and paint to prove him wrong: all the time, trying to forget what had happened at Vito’s last night and what Stephen had said.

Still hurt, Sylvia decided that success would be the best revenge and was thus hoping the exhibition of her work would be exactly that – a success – and that she would do everything in her power to ensure that that would be so and so get back at Stephen and make him regret how he had treated her. All the time, trying to focus on the future, on her Art and not dwell upon the events of last night.
For Sylvia her art was both a haven and a place where she was challenged; somewhere where she felt both at home and, at times, out of her depth, something, which both exhilarated and frightened her – a sanctuary, though one not without its pitfalls, but a sanctuary nonetheless and one for her alone. Thus sometimes when she entered she never wanted to leave her sanctuary and saw everything else as superfluous – tasks, which were just that tasks that needed doing, a necessary evil – and it was her hope that one day she would enter never to leave her sanctuary – ever.

Sylvia, however, was still a little upset and dismayed by what Stephen had said last night especially given the company and the reason why they were there, which made her feel both angry and sad. How dare he treat her like that? for he was the one man she had let touch her after Mr. Servais had tried to rape her and look at what he had done. With this thought, Sylvia felt both disappointed and hurt and wondered what she could do to change her lot, but hoped that change it she would through the exhibition of her work, which she would do her best to ensure was a success.

*   *   *   *
Fifty-two –

Pleased though slightly wary with the outcome of his meeting with Mr. Hooper and all of its positive implications for him, despite the hard graft it would entail, and mindful of Mr. Hooper’s tacit scorn after how he had acted towards Sylvia at Vito’s the night before, all things told, Stephen was still happy. He had a new book deal, an option on the third and was excited by the prospect of undertaking something new, something new he knew would be published and that he would be well for imbursed. And, regardless, Stephen felt altogether good with and in himself: all in spite of his recent actions.

On his way home to his little flat, Stephen thought about Sylvia and how he had treated her. He wondered what she would have thought of his outburst and the scene at Vito’s, which made him feel both a little sad and somewhat angry with and at himself and made him realise he would have to bring himself into line and soon if he was to keep her – and to keep her he wanted to do.

So Stephen decided he would give her a call that night and try to make it up with her. Stopping on his way to his little flat to pick up a six-pack of Carlton draught, as soon as he was in the front door, Stephen picked up the telephone and dialled Sylvia’s number.

After three rings and no answer, Stephen thought he would get her answering machine and wondered what he would say. After four, Sylvia picked up.

“Hi Sylvia, it’s Stephen,” he said when she answered.
“Yes,” was all she replied.

“Listen, I really am sorry about what I said last night at Vito’s. What can I say? With the awards ceremony, the after-party, the press conference and all that. I’d had too much to drink and it all kind of went to my head. I regret what I said and how I treated you. It wasn’t called for. I was drunk and I went too far. It was just the wine talking, I do hope that you understand.”

“Stephen.”
“Yes, Sylvia.”

Stephen was about to lay it all on the line, when two beep beeps announced Sylvia had another call.

“Stephen, I have to take this call,” she said.

“Okay, listen I’ll see you at Piet’s party on Friday, yeah.”

“Yes Stephen, goodbye.”

Not without some misgivings, Stephen put the receiver back in its cradle. He walked to his kitchen and thought about his conversation with Sylvia and her curtness, which made him feel both a little bemused and a lot confused – after all, it was just the wine talking, not him – Sylvia knew him well enough to know that. Stephen therefore passed it off on her, being her, not him nor what he had said and decided to have a few quiet drinks, enjoy them and reflect upon what was happening: all of which for him was good, very good and getting better.

* * * *

Sitting on his couch, his feet resting on the coffee table, Stephen read and re-read his copy of “Forrest and Hooper’s” proposal for his new book and future works. He felt embarrassed by the large amounts of money, of which it spoke. But, however, he thought he had earned this through his efforts and what had had gone to to forge a career for himself as a writer. Stephen read his contract one more time, put it down on his coffee table, picked up his Harvey award and admired it – all the while with the presentiment that good things were coming his way.

Having soon finished his first beer, Stephen got up and got another from the refrigerator and thought about things. Stephen wondered how he would spend the money he was about to earn; as money was not something he had a lot of in the past. However, as a rule Stephen was prodigal and so he therefore decided he would leave it in the bank and not touch it until he was more settled, had worked out and was certain what he wanted to do with it.
Feeling a little drunk, though good with the world and everything at large – despite what was presently going on with Sylvia –, Stephen, after today’s meeting with Mr. Hooper, was proud of what he had achieved and happy the way things were headed for him. Rather than cook that night, he decided he would go to his local pub, have a counter meal and think about things, quantify and mollify over them.

Stephen’s local pub or the pub that he liked to call his local, *The Bush Idyll*, and which he rarely frequented at any rate, was quite close to his little flat and he preferred it as it was never too busy situated where it was on the corner of two side streets close to Balaclava train station. Chicken or veal parmigiana and a pot was only twelve dollars that night, so Stephen decided that was what he would have.

His first pot of Carlton draught soon finished, Stephen ordered another.

* * *
Fifty-three –

Sylvia was expecting Will to call that night to discuss the last minute details for the exhibition of her work, so she left work a little early and wasted no time getting home. Presently at her apartment, she went to her kitchenette and began to make a cup of her favourite peppermint tea. As she waited for the kettle to boil, she put her handbag down and thought about getting changed into other clothes, but instead walked over to her easel and considered where she might begin.

Sylvia was looking at what she had been painting – a half blank canvas with some pencilling and a few brushstrokes – and was thinking what she might paint on it, when the telephone rang and Sylvia hoped it was Will: as with all that was presently going on, Sylvia felt she needed a voice of reason. Rather than pick up the telephone straight away, she took a deep breath to collect herself and her thoughts. In, then out; in, then out. A little calmer and somewhat more composed, Sylvia picked up the telephone.

“How’s my girl doing?” she heard say.

As she did not want to talk to him “Yes,” was all she replied.

Stephen apologised for his outburst at Vito’s and took back his words, of which Sylvia was having none. She was just about to hang up; when she was saved by her call waiting and hoped that it would be Will.

“How’s my girl doing?” It was Will. “Ready for your big night?” he asked.

“Ready as I’ll ever be. Listen, Will.”

“Yes, Sylvia.”

“Will, I’m not sure about this. Do you think my paintings are good enough? What if no-one shows?”

“Your paintings are fine and we’ve had a lot of RSVP’s. The gallery will be
packed."

“I’m still not sure.”

“That’s okay, Sylvia, we all get nervous. Just remember that I’m here and that I’m on your side: okay?”

“Okay,” Sylvia said, feeling a little more reassured.

“Simply bear in mind that you don’t want to end up like Benjamin. You’ve got potential and I’m going to help you realise it. I’m sure that everything will go smoothly: okay. Good luck at Piet’s.”

With those words, Sylvia felt somewhat better and, with nothing more to say, was soon saying goodbye to Will, who said that he would speak to her soon. She put the receiver back in its cradle and returned to her easel. Sylvia picked up her brush and took off from where she had left off hoping that she could lose herself for the evening in her work.

* * *
Fifty-four –

Stephen’s veal parmigiana and pot of Carlton draught went down well washed down by a few more beers. And so Stephen decided he would stay at the pub, smoke a couple of cigarettes, have a couple more pots, think a few things through and consider how things were coming together for him. Stephen, having left the bistro, stayed at the public bar, which had been furbished as though it were a bar to be found in outback Australia, was happy and was enjoying his few quiet drinks.

And as he did so, he thought about that day’s meeting with Mr. Hooper and about all the measures he had gone to to succeed as a writer, and felt he had both survived and come through his ordeal, in his own opinion, to all intents and purposes a success. Now, it looked like, he would hopefully see some return on the investment he had made and all the risks he had taken along the way and was thus glad and satisfied of the lengths he had gone to and which had proved worthwhile and had bore a great deal of fruit, which he was he was prepared and ready to harvest.

Stephen wiled away a few hours drinking, smoking cigarettes and thinking about things and soon, before he knew what was happening, last drinks were being called. Therefore he decided to leave. All that he had had to drink catching up with him, Stephen swayed a little as he made his way out of the pub, walked back to his flat and he realised that he was in fact quite drunk – though feeling quite good with things and the world in general.

*   *   *   *

The drink making him feel gregarious and Sylvia presently not talking to him, as he made his way back to his little flat in Balaclava, Stephen decided he would give Mr. Hooper’s assistant a call and see what she was up to.

Thus when he was in his little flat, Stephen picked up the telephone and did exactly that – call Mr. Hooper’s assistant, Emma.
“Hi Emma, it’s Stephen,” he said when she answered. “How are things going?” he asked.

“Not bad, this is quite a surprise. You do know what time it is?”
Stephen looked at his watch. It was well past eleven.

“You sleeping?” he asked.

“Trying to; it’s a school night. Is everything okay?”

“Everything’s fine. Just thought I’d call and see how you are going?”

“I’m fine, you?”

“Yeah good.”

“Are you going to Piet’s party?”

“I have to, Mr. Hooper wants me to go: you?”

“I’m not much one for parties, but yeah I think I’ll go anyway.”

“Listen Stephen: I’ve got a really big day with Dian tomorrow and need some sleep, I’ll see you at Piet’s.”

“Emma –?” Stephen began.

“What Stephen?”

“Nothing, Emma, I’ll see you.”

“Okay Stephen; good night.”

“Good night, Emma, good night.”

Stephen often found himself wondering about Mr. Hooper’s assistant, Emma, Emma Forrest. She was young, attractive with her sylph figure, natural good looks and long, blonde hair and always helpful, but seemed more focussed on her work at the publishing house than anything else. Nonetheless, however, she was always there when Stephen wanted someone to talk to or needed some support – something he found reassuring and welcome and which he appreciated.
After Stephen had rung her and they had chatted for a short little while, it was well past midnight and Stephen decided to retire for the night, drunk – drunk, alone and blissfully intoxicated by his situation.

* * *
Fifty-five –

Sylvia passed the few days between the night at Vito’s and the party at Pieter van Ryn’s studio lost in her work at home, preparing some new pieces for her exhibition, and her duties at the Supply store. That which had been an ogre had passed into more of an opportunity when she thought about it and the party at Pieter van Ryn’s was of consequence for Sylvia and for her upcoming exhibition as there were some people, whom Will thought would be important for her to meet and some others it might be useful to network, and thus she would have to attend despite the fact Stephen would be there. Therefore Sylvia prepared for the worst and hoped that nothing would happen, but with the presentiment that something would. Sylvia was still thankful, however, that she had received an invite to the party and would therefore make the most of it, using it as her ticket to promote her exhibition.

Of middle age, Pieter van Ryn was a poet and a successful one at that – approaching forty, he wore his long, greying hair tied back in a ponytail with a neat, closely cropped goatee beard and small hoop earrings in both ears, left and right. And although he looked like a proper romantic troubadour, his poetry was what could best be called neo-Symbolist meditations on love, life and loss. As her exhibition opened next week, Will thought it would be productive for her to attend and for people to see her in public before it opened. Thus Sylvia decided and was expected to attend and attend she would indeed do.

The party at Pieter van Ryn’s studio was a necessary evil and Sylvia decided that she would treat it as such. She had to meet with people, promote her exhibition and raise her profile. Therefore she would do exactly that and from that she would not detour. The party at Pieter van Ryn’s studio was a necessary evil and Sylvia decided she would go and attend anyway. She would put on a brave face and resolved she would steer well clear of Stephen if he showed up with the intent she would bend nor break from her purpose for being there.

* * * * *
Fifty-six –

Now he had resigned his position of Sales assistant at “McPherson’s Books”, Stephen resolved to focus more upon his writing and in a manner he had never done before, to, in Mr. Hooper’s words, consolidate upon what he had already achieved and ensure his place as a quote saleable author unquote.

With more time on his hands than he had had in a long, long while and now with Sylvia no longer in his life, Stephen wondered how he would fill it – and fill it he hoped to do by writing and, what is more, writing well and more so than he had ever had in the past. However, part of him nevertheless questioned whether this was the right path to take, but he had dreamed of writing full time for as long as he could remember and now this was his chance; and slip away would he not let it not. Now he was published, had a book deal signed and had won a Harvey award, Stephen had every reason to feel confident in his work, to write with a sure pen and confident he felt – writing more therefore was what he decided to do.

Mr. Hooper’s assistant, Emma as he now knew her, was working on the finer points of the contract for his next book with him and Stephen found himself enjoying her company, as well as her professionalism and the way she did things. For Stephen she was a guide to a new world he was about to enter, and to enter and never leave, ever as was his intent. Thus Stephen appreciated her support, her businesslike manner, the manner in which she conducted herself and made the most of their time together, enjoying himself and what she had to offer him.

* * * *

At the end of a long lunch discussing Stephen’s contract for his new book and his future at “Forrest and Hooper” at a bistro called Céline’s in South Melbourne just off City road where they had both had a little too much to drink – all business concluded –, they decided to stay and kept drinking, all at “Forrest and Hooper’s” expense. Laughing at one of Stephen’s bookstore war stories,
there had been a meaningful pause in which they had both looked each other in the eye.

Stephen moved a little closer and so did Emma. He put his hand on her knee, but this being at the time a path she did not want to take yet, instead she took Stephen’s hand from her knee, squeezed it, said “not now” and the two left it at that. Nevertheless, however, they continued to enjoy each other’s company, both talking about what they wanted out of life and how they were going to realise this as they were still both young and had many years ahead of them.

One-and-a-half hours and many drinks later, Emma gave Stephen a kiss on his cheek, got up from their table – not too light on her feet – and said he could call her, something Stephen planned to do: and, what is more, soon.

*   *   *   *


Fifty-seven –

The day of the party at Pieter van Ryn’s studio was upon her and Sylvia had decided she would treat it as business, not pleasure. She would meet with those, whom Will wanted her to, and avoid Stephen if he was there or if he approached her. In this resolution, Sylvia was firm and she felt confident that this was the right way to approach things.

Sylvia made up her mind in advance she would treat the party as she would a night at Mr. Servais’. She was there for a reason and from which, no matter what, she would not divert, which made her feel better and somewhat more assured. She had therefore resolved that she would work the party as she had once had worked the floor of the strip club and thus planned to wear her most eye-catching outfit, made sure she would look at her best and that she would do to what she had.

Sylvia had a quick shower. She put her makeup on and made sure she looked her most appealing. She had attracted men at Mr. Servais’ like moths to a light when she wanted to and she would do so tonight should she so have to, employing every little trick she had learnt whilst stripping to ensure that she was in control of any situation, which may present itself, but hoping at the same time that she would not have to. Dressed in her best evening outfit comprising a tight top, which revealed her ample cleavage, and a miniskirt rounded out with sheer black stockings and high heels, Sylvia left her apartment after making sure everything was as it should be and made her way to the main street to hail a taxi to take her to Pieter van Ryn’s.

The party at Pieter van Ryn’s studio was business and Sylvia was going to do what she had to and decided that she would treat it as such, not pleasure. She was there for a reason and from which she would not detour and that Stephen would not stop her from doing what she had to and do what she had to would she do in that she was adamant and unyielding – resolute.

* * * *
Fifty-eight –

Stephen stood up. It took a moment for the rest of him to catch up. Swaying slightly, he stopped and steadied himself. He looked towards the bedroom door and planned his next move. Quietly, he navigated his way to the door. Holding one arm against the wall to stop himself falling through, he slowly opened the door, went into the next room and flicked the light switch. The darkness was devoured by a sudden hateful whiteness. On the table, Stephen found a cigarette and lit it.

Putting his cigarette down in the ashtray on his desk, Stephen picked up the clock that lay amongst the books and the papers and squinted to make out the time its luminescent hands tried to tell him. Four-oh-nine. He closed his eyes. In a brief flash, he saw himself throwing the clock against the wall; in a brief flash, he saw himself throwing the clock at the photograph of Sylvia he had taken when they were together on a night out; in a brief flash, he saw himself throwing the clock, if only to quieten the roar of its incessant ticking. Good old common sense, however, told him to put it down lest the urge overpower him. Four-ten.

He had nothing, nothing to hide behind.

"Here we go round the prickly pear
Prickly pear prickly pear
Here we go round the prickly pear(8)."

Stephen looked back on the night before.

Slowly the memories trickled back, stopped and put themselves into place. Each a more horrid discovery than the last. Stephen saw himself in none of the events that played out before him, but found himself in all of them. There was time when his actions would have disgusted him, but now they just seemed inevitable. Inevitable and unavoidable, as if scripted and rehearsed.

* * * * *
Lifting the bottle, Stephen poured himself another drink – vodka, neat. The dead, limpid liquid sifted into his glass, struggled against its own weight and then settled. Picking up the glass and holding it to the light, it struck Stephen how much it appeared everything around him was swimming in this liquid – oily and lifeless, stifling and oppressive. It was as if the liquid were a filter – a fog –, which separated him from the outside. He could feel it behind his eyeballs, in the back of his neck – everywhere – making him feel dirty, blocked, sordid and trapped.

Meditatively, Stephen brought the glass to his lips and swallowed. He was surprised by how uncharacteristically cold it was. It seemed to cut through him, momentarily clearing the haze giving him new eyes, new hope, before settling unsatisfactorily, painfully on top of all the others that he’d had. He took a deep breath. He needed something, man, he needed something – something new, something now – something to shock him.

*So this is what they call ‘real life’,* thought Stephen to himself sardonically, *ah, the sweet smell of success*. With that he had to smile. Musing with the thought, playing with it, he looked around and it struck him that everything around him was the exact opposite – devoid of any actual reality.

It was only through the emptiness you got a glimpse of what was real. Like one of those comic sequences where it is presented like an entry in a dictionary, if at this moment such a scene were enacted it would say “REALITY – NOT THIS”. Yet these were the moments to be savoured, this is what you got for your money: strange – strange and sad.

In this world, favour could be curried with an apparently sincere smile, friendships struck upon a common hatred: likewise presenting a truth could inspire hatred. Holding it up to the light only to be told to put it away before being deserted. Yet the funny thing was if you could play the game well enough you could approach something like real; something approaching real, that is, only to be snatched away, recoiled, when you got too close, penetrated its flimsy surface.

This world equated disproportionately with the world he had been
promised – by others, by himself even. The world he had been given the green light to go strive for was beyond this yet this, it struck him, was all there was. Strike the television producers out of the republic, Stephen thought with dejection. Their world was not an imitation, a presentation, or an interpretation of this world, rather it was an ideal – something to be aimed for – an advertisement for a better life, five easy steps to self-fulfillment – this world an embarrassing mimicry of that. The girls in this world purged their real-selves down the toilet with two fingers down their throats and a box of Kleenex to tidy up afterwards, whilst the boys clothed themselves in the bravado and cynicism of yesterday's heroes.

A contempt rose within Stephen, not a contempt for them, but for himself; knowing it was going to be like this, what the hell was he doing there? Night after night like this, it seemed, he had endured the same loneliness, the same futility and forlornness and yet for him now the time in between was to be killed in any manner possible. Once again, he found himself sliding down the sheer inaccessible wall. He was trapped and he knew it: that which he had so often rejected, now rejected him. He stood there defeated looking out the window, looking for something on to pin his thoughts. Nothing.

"This is the way the world ends\(^{9}\)."

No anger, no excitement: nothing.

"This is the way the world ends\(^{10}\)."

As if moving along a conveyor belt, not being coerced or pushed, not actually moving at all, Stephen took his place in the circle again.

"This is the way the world ends
Not with a bang but a whimper\(^{11}\)."

The group’s conversation bubbled over with the news of the day.
Something had happened, yet nothing had really changed. Looking on, paying little attention, it all stopped. Their little world was broken. Silence, his turn: a short “What do you think?” and without realising it the attention was now focussed on him. Taking his time, Stephen nodded agreement, laughing softly, quietly, politely, not telling them indeed what he thought. Smiling, he lifted the glass to his lips lest any words escape. Before any did, someone offered something new salvaging the moment from its embarrassed silence.

Once again, Stephen drifted off, as slowly the momentum picked itself up again. Viewing it all from a distance, himself, the group, everyone, Stephen found that a rapid, shrill, hideous laughter punctuated each sentence, each movement. Not a full self-affirming laughter, but rather a pathetic lost cry seeking affirmation turning in on itself, vacuous and empty. Asking an unanswered question again and again and again.

Looking beyond the group, Stephen sensed a change of mood. The tempo had picked up. Suddenly awkwardly self-aware, an alien, pensive electricity flowed through his veins, defining his movements. Stephen looked at the clock. Nearly ten o'clock; time it seemed had flowed backwards. How much longer should he stay? Two hours; perhaps, two hours; yes two more hours he decided. Playing with the notion; two more hours, two more hours of listening, laughing, and nodding. Two more hours before he could leave. Two more hours: his time was up.

What the hell am I doing here?

Two more hours … with that Stephen’s thoughts stopped.

It was then that Sylvia entered, like a gust of wind breathing new life into the room, relieving it of its incipient boredom. For a moment, the whole room stopped, breathed and continued – its weary monologue replaced by a fresh, new vibrant discourse. Stephen too found himself watching as she strode in. "She looked good," he had to admit, "she looked good". She had really made an
effort, but this time, he knew, not for him.

*Damn, she looked good.*

Sylvia greeted the host, poet Pieter van Ryn, warmly, cordially, as though they had not seen each other in years.

Entering into conversation without hesitating. *"Ha! Ha! Ha!"* laughing loudly and confidently with those at the party and enjoying herself all the while.

It was all too much. Stephen had to leave the room.

* * * *

At a loss for anything else to do, Stephen found himself entering the room again. Things had quietened down. Seeing Sylvia standing there talking with one of Mr. Hooper’s staff, he felt he had to join the conversation. If only to prove to himself that he could.

"*At the party, she was kindness in the hard crowd,*

*Consolation for the old fool now forgotten*\(^{12}\).*"

Seeing the bait, he took his chance. Unannounced Stephen cut in with a bravado that surprised even him.

“So Sylvia, how are things going with your painting? Nearly ready for your exhibition?” he asked, making a concerted effort to sound interested and interested was he anyway.

Sylvia looked on blank, as if she had not heard his question. The pretence betrayed only by the sheer force of will that reinforced it. Taken aback, Stephen puzzled. And it was strange, as it was not hurt he felt, but rather a ridiculous or more rightly credulous irony. Only days before they had spoken on the telephone, if only on the checked, well-trod paths of those who had once been intimate when Stephen had tried to apologise for his outburst at Vito’s and now this.

Stephen’s bewildered reason sought a foothold to comprehend this
stance. His response manifested itself simultaneously as both a nervousness and a willingness to play upon this ridiculous, but unavoidably appealing situation. He knew only too well how far he could go before all was lost and the game was over. How far he could push before Sylvia withdrew completely either into a sobbing mass of tears or into the relative safety of the company of others, but as always he was immediately and insanely and irresistibly drawn to the extreme.

Repeating the question as though in fact he had not been heard, he this time elicited a response - albeit curt and blatant. Leaving their companion bewildered – locked into an embarrassed isolation from the spectacle that was now unfolding before him.

Floored as to what to say next, wanting to play for safety though at the same time finding the game growing increasingly silly, inwardly laughing insanely and raging at both his own meekness and her stubbornness. He continued, bleating the next obvious, obviously inane, question in the progression. As if bouncing a ball against the stonewall of her silence, he caught the same cold response.

Feeling awkward, no longer gaining any amusement from his little game. It struck Stephen now it seemed as if something had been burnt out of Sylvia. Her coldness betraying no anger, no hurt, no hatred, nothing. He had sought to find something of the past if only to escape the tedium of those around him, if only to amuse himself briefly, but now nothing. His awkward playfulness slid to anger not from hurt, but from stupidity. Of what was going on now, of what had gone on before. Everything around him struck Stephen as wrong, alien and absurd. From the well rehearsed regurgitated repetition of those who proffered as opinion. To the premise which furnished her response. That which had once been a game to him, now served only to fuel her anger. Suddenly, Stephen saw with such clarity what she had thought, how she was acting, all of it. Standing there he felt naked, potently self-aware and with nowhere to hide.

*   *   *   *

*   *   *   *
"Found dead by a gardener," Stephen heard say.

Stephen reached for the offered bottle, unable to take his eyes from Sylvia. He took a deep mouthful for relief, followed by another and then he lit a cigarette. One more mouthful and then he passed the bottle on.

"'Spose it doesn't mean much to you," Emma said; although trying to offer Stephen some support, yet with all the indignance of one who was bringing another into line for laughing at a relative's funeral.

“What that another spoilt rock star died from an overdose?”
“You mean that actual one?”
“Who's dead?”

Standing there with him in the middle of the garden! Standing there with him in the middle of the garden – and enjoying his company!

The way Emma presented her argument seemed to sum everything up, it struck Stephen. Her words weren't even her own, she had quoted some radio presenter. The only thing that could be called her own was the stubborn belligerence, anger and ignorance that made her blurt out the statement in the first place; seeking some kind of stupid confrontation just for the sake of relishing the defeat of the other as they stiffened to refute her position.

Stephen would bet Emma was loving this. All along she had envied and resented his relationship with Sylvia, challenged it, fought against it, and now, and now critical mass had been reached. And now all she had to do was just watch. And now, like Pan, she could play her pipes as another entered the woods.

Rather than force himself to endure that which he could not, with an hour seeming like an eternity, which he did not have the means nor the inclination to navigate, two a ticket to hell, Stephen therefore decided to leave and leave Stephen did – alone.
Having left the party at Mr. Hooper's colleague’s, Piet’s, Mr. Pieter van Ryn – Pieter, Pieter, poet extraordinaire, Rimbaud *manqué* –, and the others there including Mr. Hooper's assistant, Emma, early – and not before time – and presently back at his little flat – alone, bored, tired and jaded, Stephen let himself in. He hung his jacket up and poured himself another drink: Scotch, cheap and strong. Stephen took a sip and then he lit a cigarette. He finished his drink and poured himself another.
Fifty-nine –

Her first evening out since the night at Vito’s and dressed in a manner that would stun, Sylvia was prepared for the worst as she sat in the taxi-cab, which she had caught on Hawthorn road and which was soon at her destination in Port Melbourne. When she entered Pieter van Ryn’s art deco furbished town house, she greeted him and a few other guests with a sincere enthusiasm and saw Stephen, who promptly left the living room to the barbeque outside.

Her happy face on, Sylvia spoke for a while with those, to whom Will had wanted her and invited them to her exhibition – personally. She made the most of what became a reasonably and surprisingly pleasant and enjoyable evening, which, in turn, made her even more excited about her upcoming exhibition speaking about it with others and inviting them to attend.

Stephen spent most of the night outside talking with Mr. Hooper’s assistant, Emma, whilst Sylvia made a little small talk with those inside, who were unexpectedly friendly. Having promoted the exhibition of her work and enjoyed a few drinks, she decided she would leave it at that and left after two hours on the pretext of an early start at the Supply store the next day and an exhibition for which she had to prepare.

* * * *

Having survived the party at poet Pieter van Ryn’s studio more or less unscathed and having done her best to avoid Stephen, even though he had tried to engage her in conversation, and had met with those whom Will wanted her to, Sylvia’s attention and energy was now focussed upon her upcoming exhibition, which was opening in two days.

With so far unprecedented and well-appreciated understanding, Mr. Wilson had given Sylvia two days off from work – not deducting anything from her wages – to prepare for the exhibition of her work. Sylvia had finished her paintings with a few days to spare, which gave her time to rest and focus upon what was at hand – and put all that which had happened with Stephen behind
It was Sylvia's good fortune that Will had had the mercy, foresight and talent to pick up her paintings from her apartment and to prepare the show without her having to do that much except inspect her paintings after they had been hung to ensure that all was in order and that they were on display to her satisfaction. All she really had to do – if that wasn’t enough – was show up on the opening night. Sylvia couldn’t work out if the tension that she felt was excitement or anxiety, or both. So consumed had she been with finishing her paintings her apartment seemed somehow barren without them. Sylvia kept herself busy with her work at the Supply store and that seemed to help. Although he said he might attend, Sylvia knew in advance Mr. Wilson would not show up. One thing that really surprised her, if truth be told, was that, after all that had happened between them and despite his flaws, she had really wanted to invite Stephen to the opening night – her better judgement deciding, obviously, against it.

In contrast to Mr. Wilson, Will McHardy was, it was lucky for Sylvia, very well connected and respected within the Art industry both in Melbourne and elsewhere in Australia. Like Mr. Wilson, Will had shown much potential as an artist when they had studied Fine art together at the Institute of Applied Art in the late seventies. Unlike Mr. Wilson, however, his friend had realised this potential. Not as an artist, it is true, but as a purveyor and marketer of Fine art. Although Mr. Wilson resented his success to a great degree and saw him, to a lesser degree, as being a prostitute with his talent – something they joked about; over the years, however, the two had kept steady contact and they had not let this spoil their relationship, but rather had remained quite good friends, despite the differences in their respective circumstances: Fine art being their common interest and mutual love, which formed the basis of their long standing friendship and relationship.

Before working at the Supply store, Sylvia had never thought such an opportunity would come her way. However, one thing working with Mr. Wilson had taught her was that patience was sometimes rewarded and that, in fact, good
things did come to those who waited – a cliché Sylvia thought was exactly that – a cliché, but which had been proved wrong and in the most pleasant of ways – despite what had happened with Stephen and how their relationship had come to an end.

For Sylvia believed in love and believed no doubt, in time, that, despite his flaws, she could have grown to love Stephen, but was also without doubt that, in time, she would find someone new, who would accept and take her for what she was and would give her the respect she deserved and ought to have.

In spite of herself, however, and everything else, Sylvia was still happy with how things were coming together for her and her art, in which she thought she had achieved something. She was grateful and pleased and hoped that things would continue to continue as they were and that she would never see Stephen again – glad that things seemed to be improving for her, for they could not have got much worse.

* * * *
Sixty –

After the party at poet Pieter van Ryn’s, Stephen had drunk and tried to write and had tried to write and drunk for nearly two days without either surcease or success, success or surcease. Late in the afternoon of the second day after collapsing onto his bed after two days of virtually no sleep going on three, Stephen woke up from his restless slumber and surveyed his lodgings: the empty bottles, the papers and the clothes with the smell of cigarettes and alcohol all enveloping: with loathing and abhorrence – that was what it was, loathing and abhorrence. A feeling he could not extricate himself from and which was presently engulfing him.

Stephen poured himself his first drink for the day and lit a cigarette. *Another shit day in paradise*, he thought, nursing last night’s hang over. *Another shit day in paradise, and another one without Sylvia*. Stephen lit another cigarette from his butt. He thought of Sylvia as she had been at the party at Pieter van Ryn’s looking better than good in her miniskirt, high heels and small top and enjoying the company of others and he felt jealous. As he drank that, Stephen thought again of Sylvia. He felt jealous and wished that she was there for him and that he was holding her hand.

For when he had started seeing her, Stephen had thought he had found a kindred spirit in Sylvia. She was an Artist, she had been through tough times and, like him, she was struggling to become successful. Since the night at Vito’s, however, Stephen had found that he missed her company, having someone to share things with and the way that she did things: her quiet determination to overcome the bad when it presented itself and her talent – not to mention her good looks and attractive figure. She had her flaws, it is true; everybody does, but still she had a lot to offer and thus a lot he would miss and miss he knew he would.

Now, however, with all that had happened between them, Stephen felt himself hanging over an abyss with nothing to stop him falling in, and now that Sylvia had left him – feeling the rope, which was holding him, begin to weaken and lose its tether – its slippery knot beginning to fray and unravel. Until he faced,
like today, and for many more to come, just another shit day in paradise and all of them without Sylvia, wondering whether he could ever be happy or whole again without her.

With these thoughts, Stephen lit another cigarette and poured himself one more drink – published, award-winning author and all. In his early days, Stephen had learnt the best way to avoid a hang over and all the guilt that that entailed – having a sense of right and wrong he could do without – was not to stop drinking. Thus Stephen drank and drank quickly and, in his present state of mind, with the intention of not stopping drinking for a long, long while and so poured yet one more Scotch.

* * * *

Stephen lit a cigarette from the butt of his last one and walked over to his writing desk – drink in hand. He looked at the pages lying there and thought about what he was currently writing: just a mess of words written, it now seemed, by someone else. *What the hell was this writing business, anyway?* he thought. Night after night facing and attacking what was a blank page: for what? Was he any better off either materially or spiritually for having written or should he have stayed at University, gone into business, become a Barrister or a Doctor and think that he was making a difference? *What the hell was this writing business, anyway?* Living a narrow, pathological life, niggling at a raw nerve until it became a dull ache and for what? Money – Barristers are paid hundreds of dollars an hour. Celebrity – Stephen was not the type. Neither fame nor fortune sought Stephen through his writing, rather the recognition he was doing something and that he was doing it well: that he could say he had achieved – really achieved – and could contribute something, anything to someone, rather than just “beguile the lazy hour”. *What the hell was this writing business, anyway?* Stephen thought and wondered why in God’s name he had bothered in the first place? And although he thought that he could still and had achieved something through his writing, these and other thoughts weighed very heavily on his mind, and he now
found that he could not liberate himself from them and wondered what his contribution, which he wanted to make, could be?

And with these thoughts, a righteous anger rose within Stephen, who poured himself another drink. With the thought: *What the hell was this writing business, anyway?* foremost in his mind. Stephen sat down on his couch and found himself dozing. It still being early, only eight o’clock in the evening, not wanting to go to sleep, he stopped himself, stood up and felt lightheaded.

Pouring himself another drink, he decided he would sit down again. Without thinking he found himself picking up the receiver of the telephone and began to dial Sylvia’s number on its keypad, then he remembered what had happened at the party at Piet’s two nights previous. Stephen slammed the receiver back into the cradle. Not realising how hard, however, it all but broke. Stephen laughed. Stephen cried. Then he tipped the coffee table with the broken telephone and his Harvey award, which nearly broke in two, over.

Stephen laughed. Stephen cried. Suddenly lethargic, he felt like sleeping and had to focus all his faculties on making it to his bedroom. Stephen did so and made it to his bed. There he lay down – his clothes still on – and felt himself drifting into a light slumber. With the thought: *What the hell was this writing business, anyway?* ever present in his mind.

* * * *

Presently a little more awake and a little more sober, Stephen looked at the clock on the wall of his kitchen. It was still only a quarter to nine. *The night’s still young*, thought Stephen agitated and edgy and made his way to the other room – in a restless mood. Stephen poured himself a drink and drank that quickly with the thought: *The night’s still young* foremost in his mind.

*The night’s still young*. Be this as it may, Stephen drunk, getting drunker, raised his glass: *To Sylvia,* was the toast that he drank; *To Sylvia* and drank Stephen did.

*The night’s still young*. Then Stephen thought of Emma and wondered
what she may be up to. Mmm… might give Emma a call, Stephen thought – the
two having made their peace after she had showed him up at the party at poet
Pieter van Ryn’s – and, with very little deliberation, did so on his mobile – his land
line now broken – and, as usual and as Stephen had expected and was
appreciative of, she had no qualms about coming over. Emma was soon on her
way and Stephen thought it best to clean up at least some of the mess, which
had become his life and was looking forward to what he hoped would be an
extremely good not to mention pleasurable roll in the hay to which he and she of
late thankfully had become habituated.

* * * *

Stephen and Emma’s affair – and that’s what it was, an affair and could
only be and was only seen as thus by both parties, with them doing their best to
keep it a secret – had started with their flirtation around the office of “Forrest and
Hooper” and at functions. Stephen, restless, impatient, wanted to take things
further; to which he received no resistance only willingness and they, having
consummated their mutual interest in each other, reaffirmed it through an
ongoing liaison that was very physical and uninhibited by the thought of any
commitment arising from it.

These things as they were, making love to Emma was different than to
Sylvia. Although initially bashful and to a certain degree self-conscious, Sylvia
was open to experimentation and Stephen appreciated her innocence –
something that was sometimes soon forgotten and which added to their pleasure.
Emma, however, was more experienced and though she pleased him – well –
Stephen was sometimes put off by how truly libertine she was at heart – her
lovemaking that of a more seasoned and liberated campaigner – more
passionate and aggressive, she knew what she wanted and she knew how to go
about to get it – sometimes a little too so – yet Stephen had no complaints.

Stephen took what enjoyment he could from their relationship, which was
considerable, and on the balance would now chose Emma over Sylvia for what
she could do to enhance his career and his standing at “Forrest and Hooper”, not to mention the pleasure he took in their soirées, which was considerable – and such that it was and was it such at least that was so for Stephen. And now that his relationship with Sylvia was all but over, chose Emma he did, as it were, by default for all she had to offer him.

* * * *

When she arrived dressed casually in a short skirt and T-shirt sans brassiere with not much else to take off – something Stephen immediately noticed and appreciated –, Stephen, having cleaned himself and his little flat up a bit, and Emma made some small talk over a glass of wine – Chateau cardboard straight from the cask, vintage indeterminate.

“Any ideas for the new novel?” Emma asked.

“A couple: you know how these things are. Mr. Hooper’s starting to breathe down my neck.”

“Well, he did go out on a limb publishing The DaySleepers.”

“Yeah, but it won a Harvey award.”

“Yeah, but it won a Harvey award,” Emma repeated wryly, taking Stephen off in a parody of his deep voice.

“Well Emma, these things take time. It took me nearly three years to write The DaySleepers.”

“What about your contract; it did stipulate another new book in the next twelve months?”

“As I said, I’ve got a couple of ideas floating around, nothing definite.”

“Well, ideas are fine and all well and good, but a novel they do not make, nor a bestseller and you should really look to be capitalising on The DaySleepers while it’s still fresh in people’s minds.”

“Don’t worry, Emma. It will happen.”

Emma looked at her watch.

“Somewhere you’d rather be?” Stephen asked.
Emma said nothing, but smiled dryly.

Stephen placed his hand on Emma’s inner thigh and moved it up ever so slowly to which he received no resistance until he reached her pubic mound. He penetrated her digitally and then the two moved closer. Inserting one finger in, separating her moist labia and rubbing her clitoris with another much to her delight and satisfaction. Then they began to pet and they began to stroke, then they began to kiss, they began to fondle and they began to undress each other and were soon on the way to the bedroom to enjoy some more of their uncommitted, inconsequential passion, to which they had grown thankfully and gratefully – not to mention mercifully – accustomed.

That night, the love Stephen and Emma made was nothing short of electrifying. They assumed different positions and tried new things. Beginning in the missionary position they both came, one after another – Emma first loudly, and then Stephen next a bit more meekly – and soon extending to postures and situations that would make the best contortionist proud, both exerting themselves to exact the most pleasure from the other they could and which they did – surprising given how much Stephen had had to drink. Yet he was as active a participant as Emma, who was particularly passionate, and, at times, Stephen wondered how long he could sustain their crazed delight without collapsing.

After entering her at first from behind, they concluded what was an amazing session with a nice long grind, Emma on top of Stephen, who enjoyed himself more and more going deeper and deeper until he could go no further. Fondling her breasts and massaging her erect nipples with the utter most attention and care, sharing a powerful mutual orgasm, which arrived amidst the cacophony to their grateful delight and made them both quiver. Making them both feel strong and as one in their youth, who they were and what they were sharing.

Lying in bed afterwards between afterglow kisses, Emma said:

“It’s Sylvia’s opening tomorrow night.”
“What?”
“I said, it’s Sylvia’s opening tomorrow night: are you going to go?”
“Where is it?”
“At Buchanan’s in town; are you going to go?”
“You’re joking right?”
“Listen, that was good – I mean, that was really good, you were terrific, really terrific, that thing you did – fantastic, but I can’t stay. Dian’s having a book signing at the Hill of Content tomorrow and guess who’s got to keep her in line.”
“Oh, okay, I’ll call.”
“You better or I’ll be let down,” Emma said and put her hand between Stephen’s legs, rubbed him to remind him of what he would miss if he did not give her a call. “Gotta go tiger.”

And with little else, Emma got out of the bed and dressed whilst Stephen watched – kissing her ardently goodbye as she left.

On his own, lying in bed after Emma had left, Stephen thought of Sylvia. Her exhibition was opening tomorrow then, he thought. Buchanan’s, heh, thought Stephen, she must be excited. Buchanan’s was a very well-known gallery, would attract a lot of attention. Stephen, however, was too drunk and too worn-out to follow this chain of thought for very long. Tired, he fell into a deep, drunken slumber – alone.

*   *   *   *   *


Sixty-one –

The day of the opening night of the exhibition of her work had arrived and Sylvia was beside herself with nerves. She had Will on standby if she so needed him. He had become inured to this through his years of experience and was thus a great help for Sylvia. Will had organised just about everything meticulously as a seasoned professional would and Sylvia just had to attend – just – and welcome those coming.

As Mr. Wilson had given her a couple of days off and she had finished her paintings to her liking ahead of time, Sylvia decided to rest and think about all that was happening at her own leisure. After her paintings had been collected from her apartment and she had viewed them set up to her approval at Buchanan’s, she had had a good night’s rest. The previous night, however, she had had trouble sleeping – half the night worrying about things she knew would not occur, yet worry did she, and a lot. Sylvia had thought of calling Will, but had decided it was best to work things out for herself by herself.

* * * *

Mr. William McHardy, Will, had started out as a sculptor with the intent of becoming a modern day Michelangelo. To support himself while at college, he had sold the work of his friends at the Institute of Applied Art and made for them and for himself quite a lot of money. A perfectionist at heart, when he realised his talent wasn’t equal to his ambition, he decided to abandon sculpture and became a full time Fine art dealer. The first five years had been tough, but Will had persevered, however, and little by little had grown to be a success and was soon known as a good if not ruthless purveyor of Fine art making many an aspiring artist well off as well as pocketing much for himself.

Will had taken a liking to Sylvia’s work and discovered something in it she did not realise nor recognise, namely that people may actually like it enough to pay good money for it and to hang it on the walls of their offices or their houses. Nevertheless, Will was always there for Sylvia. He listened to her worries, her
concerns and her fears and did his best to assuage these, which made things for Sylvia much easier and she thought she had found a friend in Will and one onto which she hoped to hang.

For Sylvia, when she needed him, Will had become a rock. He had years of experience and knew all the right things to say, having dealt with many artists and their crises over the years – all of which was a great help for Sylvia, who was ever appreciative of his support.

* * * *

Waking late the next day – nearly eleven o’clock in the morning – after a fitful night’s sleep that offered her little rest; for the opening night of the exhibition of her work, Sylvia decided to wear her best formal outfit – a smart ensemble comprising a black velvet jacket and matching ankle length dress, which she wore with her favourite blouse, a revealing after five number –, and which she thought would make her feel more comfortable. The opposite was true, however, it actually made her feel more uncomfortable and nervous. Nevertheless, Will was a great help – just the thought of having him there made her feel more at ease and better within herself.

* * * *
Sixty-two –

Rising late the next morning and alone, hung over and tired Stephen made his way to his writing desk and thought about what he might work on that day. The skeleton of his new book weighing heavily in his mind and starting to take shape, albeit little by little. He lit a cigarette and thought about what Emma had said about Sylvia’s opening after they had made love. Buchanan’s was a small yet trendy gallery situated in the west of the Melbourne central business district near Flagstaff Gardens and the old Mint building – definitely a step in the right direction for her career. *What would happen if he showed?* he wondered as he waited for his computer to boot up, but then he decided he would leave her be.

A little seedy and strung out from the days before and still waiting on his computer to copy and download some files and write its login script, Stephen got up from his desk and got a beer out of the refrigerator in the hope that it would help him focus on his work. After the success of *The DaySleepers* and given his current plethora of worries, Stephen had decided to write a new novel around the idea of what it was like to be young and to be an artist in a hyper materialistic society, where bigger and better was always not good enough and where possessions and the almighty dollar outweighed the fruits of any artistic endeavours, despite what people lost and underwent to attain them.

Primed by his first beer, Stephen opened another and tried to focus himself on the task at hand. This second novel would be bold, it would be ambitious and it would be different. It would be a triumph of a huge scale – his finest hour. Thus Stephen hoped that, through its writing, he could redeem himself both in his own eyes and those of his detractors, as well as exorcise some of his own demons, especially that of drink.

*Stereophrenia* was the working title of his new book. The lead character in which was an aspiring neo-Classical composer, a rather solitary figure whose name was Gabriel Bruce, and who worked in a popular Music store by day, which he loathed, and was composing a symphony of a grand scale in his spare time.

Gabriel had problems not only with his job, but with insomnia and metaphysical angst, which added to his dilemma; hard to be an upbeat Sales
assistant by day when the boundaries between waking and sleeping, day and night, yesterday and today were blurred. Gabriel, however, wanted to make something of himself as a composer and so he persevered much to his own detriment: something his colleagues at work noticed and commented upon.

Based loosely on his own experience and his bookstore days, Stereophrenia, Stephen hoped, would explain everything to everyone and that, through its writing, he would enter a new phase of his life and make amends for what he had lost along the way. Stereophrenia began with Gabriel being excluded from his course of study due to lack of academic progress, failing two subjects he simply forgot he was enrolled in, his resolution to better himself and then finding his job at the Music store. Gabriel had thought he had something to offer with his education, but in reality was really just a glorified check-out operator, who knew and cared little about the music, which he sold.

Gabriel pushed himself hard writing – and, in part, re-writing – his symphony: so much so that every night when he went to bed, he could not sleep. His mind preoccupied by his work and unable to stop thinking about it at the end of the day. As a result of this, at work, he suffered panic attacks when dealing with customers and constantly thought that he was on the verge of a complete physical and nervous collapse.

Stereophrenia would be a breakthrough in Australian letters. It would out do The DaySleepers, sell well, be a huge success, win every and every other award; and, through which, everyone and everything would be at peace and Stephen’s detractors would leave him alone and Stephen would see his name on the bestsellers’ list for a very long time.
Stereophrenia would not only consolidate, but also ensure Stephen’s high standing as a writer of quality beyond repute having already won a Harvey award for best piece by an hitherto unpublished author. Stereophrenia, Stephen hoped, would meet and exceed everyone’s expectations, especially his own – and that peace would, once more, be restored to his kingdom and all would be, once more, better than good.

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Sixty-three –

Situated near Flagstaff Gardens, Buchanan’s was a small gallery with a big reputation. Just off the top end of Latrobe street near Customs House, Buchanan’s was larger inside than it looked on the outside, its entrance being only a hole in the wall. But when she saw the inside for the first time, Sylvia wondered how she would ever fill the space allocated to her for the exhibition of her work.

Will knew the owners and, through this, was able to set up Sylvia’s exhibition and do most of the groundwork without her involvement. Will was ever the consummate professional and he had selected Buchanan’s for Sylvia’s first exhibition as it was small, yet quite well-known and had a good reputation. All of which made Sylvia feel both humble and proud of the fact she was showing her work there and that people would see it on display.

The gallery, Buchanan’s was recognised for showing the work of Australia’s best and brightest talent and thus had a proud history and Sylvia was excited by the fact she was even going there, let alone exhibiting her work there.

Sylvia had spent the day leisurely. She had rested, tried to relax and to put her reservations and her doubts on what was happening out of her mind and concentrate on the good of which there was much. She had read a little and thought about all the positive things that were occurring to her, which made her happy and help her to work a few things out for and in herself by herself.

Sylvia was above all apprehensive. She was up and down. One moment on a high and the next anxious and stressed beyond words, nearly to breaking point. Yet Will was there and a showing at Buchanan’s, which was a reputable gallery, and, as such, was too good to pass up and pass it up would she not – glad that things seemed to be improving for her, for they could not have got much worse.
At around three o’clock that afternoon, Sylvia drew herself a warm bath. She soaked and washed, washed and soaked, which made her feel a little more composed. Not lingering in the bath, she got out, dried herself and began to put her makeup on. As she did so, Sylvia began to feel both anxious and excited. She did her best to settle herself down yet nothing seemed to work. Sylvia, however, was full of pride that her work would be on display at Buchanan’s and she knew that this was her big chance. She was excited and would not let it slip away.

All the same, Will was there. Will was there and he had planned everything and done so well and, for Sylvia, that was a great help. Therefore she felt through him good things would happen and she was relieved to have him on her side.
Sixty-four –

Bloated by all the beer he had drunk that day in the mistaken hope that it would help him concentrate on his writing; although he had only finished three pages he was happy with, which he had eked out making mostly corrections and no headway in either plot or narrative. It was a quarter past seven. Stephen decided he would have something to eat. Not wanting to cook nor wanting to leave his flat, yesterday’s noodles still in the refrigerator seemed like the best option.

Stephen found a clean enough bowl. He poured the noodles in, put them in the microwave and set it to high for two minutes. As he watched the beef and black bean turn and turn, he thought of Sylvia and her opening tonight at Buchanan’s. Stephen poured himself three fingers of Scotch and drank it neat.

The microwave announcing with three long beep beep beeps that his dinner was prepared, Stephen retrieved it from inside, which was tepid and ready enough to eat, and he began to eat. The Scotch kicked in and he could feel it hit the back of his neck. Buchanan’s, heh, Stephen thought as he ate. His frugal meal soon finished, Stephen placed his empty bowl on top of all the other dirty ones in the sink. Then Stephen poured himself another drink. He wandered into the living room of his little flat and lit a cigarette. What would it be like if he showed? Stephen wondered as he smoked. Sylvia would certainly be surprised.

Feeling a little drunk and a lot reckless, Stephen decided that show up indeed he would, come whatever may. He grabbed his jacket from his bedroom and was soon on his way out of his flat, down the stairs. Stephen checked his wallet – forty dollars and some change, nearly forty-two. He decided he would hail a cab.

* * * *

The taxi-driver knew where Buchanan’s was and was soon depositing Stephen on the street adjacent. Stealthily, Stephen walked past the entrance once, saw Sylvia, who looked immaculate made and dressed up for the evening
in an attractive jacket and dress with accessories to match, though she did not see him, and then he continued until he found a bar.

Stephen checked his wallet. The cabbie had picked up that he was drunk and had shortchanged him. It had cost him thirty dollars to make it from Balaclava to the city. Shit. Stephen ordered two pots of Carlton draught and took a seat near the door.

*What am I up to?* thought Stephen. *Sylvia’s a nice girl.*

His two pots soon finished, Stephen bought another two beers, and then he lit a cigarette and looked at his watch – eight-thirty. Stephen drank his two beers and having no money for any more decided he would leave. Stephen made his way back to the gallery feeling very much the worse for wear. He saw Sylvia and this time Sylvia saw him. She looked at him and looked away, then she walked over to an older gentleman and pointed at Stephen standing as he was on the footpath outside.

*What am I up to?* thought Stephen for a second time. *Sylvia’s a nice girl.*

Trying to act casual, Stephen sauntered into the gallery.

“Can I help you Sir?” asked one of the gallery’s attendants, standing in Stephen’s way.

“Yeah, I’m here to see Sylvia.”

“I see Sir and what is your name?”

“Stephen, Stephen Murray.”

*Well at least he didn’t get that wrong,* Stephen thought.

The attendant stepped aside, ran his finger down the list of invitees, and as he did so Stephen pushed past him, cried, “Sylvia,” and walked into a waiter carrying a plate of glasses filled with champagne. What Stephen didn’t collect on himself, landed on the waiter. The sound of glass crash, crash, crashing on the floor.

Stephen stopped, collected himself – though now drenched in champagne – and wondered what he had just done.

Before he knew what was happening the older gentleman, to whom Sylvia
had pointed Stephen out, walked over to Stephen and said: “Look we don’t want any hassle. Can you please tell me what you want?”

“I just wanted to see Sylvia,” Stephen said, slurring most of his words.

“As I said, we don’t want any hassle. Can you please leave?”

In a moment of clarity, Stephen realised what he had done, how drunk he was and what a fool he was making of himself.

“I’m, shit, I’m sorry. I … I just wanted to see Sylvia and see that she was okay.”

“Sylvia is fine. Can you please leave?”

Although he was drunk, Stephen knew he had done the wrong thing and decided he would leave.

“Orright, orright, I’m going,” he said to the older gentleman, not wanting to make things any worse, but then remembered he did not have any money to get home.

“I know this looks bad. I just wanted to see Sylvia. Listen, I don’t have any money to get home. Can you please lend me enough for a taxi?”

The older gentleman reached for his wallet from his back pocket, opened it, handed Stephen ten dollars and said: “Flagstaff station’s five minutes’ walk, a train should suffice. Please not to return.”

Presented by overwhelming stimuli all requesting his urgent attention, Stephen knew that it was best just to follow orders. He apologised once more, turned around and made his way out of the gallery knowing that he would not see Sylvia again – ever –, which made him feel both sad and disappointed at himself. Stephen huddled into his jacket and made his way to Flagstaff train station, deflated.

* * * * *
Sixty-five –

When she pulled the door to her apartment closed, Sylvia knew then there that was no turning back. Will had organised and paid for a taxicab to pick her up at five o’clock that afternoon to take her to the gallery and put the final touches in place. As she made her way onto the street, Sylvia saw the yellow taxicab waiting for her.

Before Sylvia knew what was happening, she was inside the taxicab and on her way to Buchanan’s for her big night. After a ride made longer than it was by nervous energy, Sylvia was soon at the gallery, where Will was already waiting.

“How was the ride?” he asked when she arrived.

“Not too bad: wow!” Sylvia exclaimed, seeing her paintings hanging on the gallery’s walls and the bar set up ready for the public.

“Pretty good, heh? I knew you would like it. How ‘bout a champagne?”

Sylvia was so nervous and so excited that she declined, knowing it would go straight to her head and doubted whether she would be able to hold the glass with her trembling hands.

Then Will said: “I understand, the guests will be arriving soon; you don’t have to say anything, just smile and act gracious, okay?”

“Yeah, ah: okay. Listen, I might have a look ’round,” she told Will.

Will and the gallery had done an outstanding job and Sylvia marvelled seeing her paintings on exhibition and display and everything was set up better than what she had expected, let alone had imagined. Whilst she walked around the gallery, the first guests had started arriving and Will called her to introduce Sylvia to them.

And so, for the next few hours, Sylvia glided around the floor of the gallery Buchanan’s, meeting and greeting people and talking about her work all in what became a pleasant blur. Seven o’clock came and there were nibbles and finger food. Eight o’clock came and Sylvia didn’t want the night to end.

Presently eight-thirty and Will drew her aside to see how she was doing and Sylvia could barely contain herself. She hugged him and thanked him for
what was a wonderful night, holding back tears. Will smiled and then said:

“There are some people I would like you to meet.”

Sylvia followed Will to the people, whom he wanted her to meet, and saw someone, who looked like Stephen outside. She looked again. It was Stephen. Sylvia walked closer to Will, pulled the tails of his coat and said: “My ex is outside, he may be difficult,” and pointed Stephen out to Will.

“Don’t worry, we won’t let him in,” Will said.

But before they knew what was happening, Stephen was inside the gallery, drawing all kinds of unwanted attention to himself. Sylvia retreated a few steps, whilst Will approached him, not before, however, Stephen walked into one of the gallery’s waiters carrying a round of drinks. At this, Will approached him and said:

“Look we don’t want any hassle. Can you please tell me what you want?”

Stephen said something Sylvia couldn’t make out as he slurred most of his words, so drunk that he was. To which Will repeated:

“As I said, we don’t want any hassle. Can you please leave?”

Although Sylvia foresaw things turning bad, Will was soon handing Stephen some money and he left without any further complications. Will returned to Sylvia and said:

“Someone’s a bit the worse for wear, but don’t worry, I don’t think the damage he caused is irreparable and I don’t think that he will remember it tomorrow.”

And so the night continued, and, after that, pretty much without incident.

* * * *

Soon it was ten o’clock and the opening night of the exhibition of her work had all but come and gone, people were leaving, saying their Goodbyes and complementing Sylvia on the quality of work, who was ecstatic, excited beyond words. For, all things told, the opening night had been a reasonable success with quite a few people turning up – despite Stephen showing up drunk, making a fool
of himself and causing a scene – something that was soon forgotten in what was for the most a very positive experience, which had exceeded all expectations having had excessive offers made on six of her works and in which Sylvia took delight in of each and every minute.

The opening night of the exhibition over and a triumph in Sylvia’s and the eyes of others, this being so, Sylvia was above all exhausted. She had spent the night on her feet and was bone tired. She thanked Will for what was a wonderful night and left in a taxicab he had arranged and paid for for her.

* * * *
Sixty-six –

Still in yesterday’s clothes and still with yesterday’s ennui, disappointment and doubt lingering, Stephen woke up, got out of bed and surveyed the pigsty his lodgings had become – a clutter of empty bottles, unwashed clothes and dirty dishes – and poured himself another drink from one of yesterday’s bottle: his first for the day.

His little flat encrusted by a smell of alcohol, of dust and cigarettes, which gave the impression of that which could only be called ruin and dissipation, dissolution and decay. Feeling he had done something wrong, yet he couldn’t quite put his finger on what, the events of the night before flooded back to him.

Overcome by guilt and remorse, Stephen lit a cigarette. He thought of Sylvia and what had occurred last night and poured himself another drink – Scotch, cheap and strong: taste Stephen did not look for in what he drank, but its effect to ease his malaise and to heal his wound. He took a long draught of his Scotch and arranged the events of last night, but still could not believe what he had done.

When it all came back to him, Stephen felt both embarrassed and ashamed at what had happened: disappointed with how he had acted and what a fool he had made of himself. How could he have let himself come to this? All that promise, all that potential and look at what it had come to. How could he have let himself come to this? he thought once more. Enough was enough: Stephen knew that he had to change. Yet he did not know how or that he could – although he really wanted to.

His relationship with Sylvia, the painter, he knew, now over – through his own fault and for which he bore much regret – and his liaison with Emma coming, he sensed, towards what was a timely, and what could be an ugly, close, Stephen finished his drink. Then thought of Emma and her offer.

Angry and a little lost, not knowing how he could break the cycle he was in – with the presentiment if things aren’t getting better, they’re getting worse, and for Stephen, at the moment, that was much worse. Stephen lit a cigarette and poured himself another drink and thought once more of Sylvia as she had been
last night.

For Stephen was a romantic at heart. He believed in love, he believed in affection and he believed in devotion. He had wanted to build a relationship with Sylvia that was impenetrable and enduring and now after last night, he realised that he was, once again, on his own and the way things were looking for a long, long while. When he now looked forward, Stephen saw the years trailing off, all of them without season and without change, all of them with him alone – for each and every one of them.

With these thoughts, Stephen decided he would give Emma a call and Emma a call resolved he to do that very night.

*   *   *   *   *

*   *   *   *   *
Sixty-seven –

On the closing night after all the guests had left, by Will’s estimation and reckoning, the exhibition of her work had been a huge success to all intents and purposes for a first timer. Sylvia, however, was still concerned with some of the reviews her work had received, which though they were honest, nevertheless, some were a little scathing. These made Sylvia feel a little uneasy. However, on the balance they were heeded, given dutiful attention and soon done with and of disposed.

Most of all, however, she felt exhilarated seeing her work on exhibit and having people respond to it – and, above all, respond to it positively. Sylvia was surprised as well as encouraged by having her work in the public domain and, after that, she could hardly wait for another such experience, which made her feel proud and that, in the midst of everything and everything else, she had really achieved something – something good, something lasting, something worthwhile, and something she could be both pleased and contented with and which proved she was just not and anything but a lap dancer manquée.

Sylvia was ever mindful of the words of her critics. She listened to and considered what they had to say. For her, it was strange having other people, strangers, those whom she would not usually speak to, talk about her work. She, however, was ever grateful and respected what was said, which gave to her art a new dimension. What was important, however, was that six of her paintings had sold: sold for well above what she had been expecting, let alone asking or anticipating. The opening night had been both demanding and exhilarating, but after that everything had run smoother than clockwork thanks mainly to Will.

As Sylvia had predicted, Mr. Wilson did not show up at her exhibition, but he did, however, hang one of the show’s posters in the Supply store and offered her much support, giving her all the time off work she wanted and needed. Will’s expectations for the show, though lofty to begin with, had been far exceeded and he was already planning further, more ambitious shows with double the advertising and twice the exposure. He had even thought of advertising on radio and on television and had arranged for Sylvia to have a small press conference
to be held at Buchanan’s, where her paintings were still hung, with select members of the nation’s press gallery early the next week to promote her work and to build upon the success of her exhibition whilst it was still fresh in people’s minds.

All of this made Sylvia feel both anxious and excited. Thus she resolved she would paint more and more and paint more and more she did to build upon and extenuate all the good, which was currently in her life and, through this, attempt to help her to forget some of the bad. In light of this, Sylvia realised that she now had the opportunity to see her life and her situation come full cycle – a complete circle and which no thing or no one could break. She still had her doubts and her concerns, however, yet hoped that, with everything going as well as it was and with Will in her corner, they would continue to continue to do so and that she would do everything in her power to ensure that that would be so.

Now with the greater portion of what was left of Mr. Servais’ money – only two thousand five hundred dollars of which had she spent moving, paying bond – two months in advance –, setting up her new apartment and buying quite a lot of extra equipment for her art, a new easel, some extra brushes and a whole new set of paints –, her income from the Supply store and what she had earned from the exhibition, although there was the cost of living, Sylvia still had quite a bit of money behind her and more than she ever had before, despite her living expenses and her Art supplies, which even though she received quite a large discount on which, her consumption was escalating as she worked harder and harder.

All this with no idea what to spend her money on. She thus decided to leave it in the bank – and wait either for a possible time of need or some other necessity, which she doubted would occur given how well that things were presently going for her. All in all, the way in which she wanted them to go forward and saw no reason why they should not continue to continue in what was, for her, a very pleasant, satisfying and agreeable manner – not even twenty-two and with just about everything a girl of her age could hope for and want and more.
With this behind her, Sylvia knew that she was quite close to being self-sufficient and being able to support herself through her art – something she had long dreamed of and for hoped. Thus she no longer needed to work at the Supply store, instead, however, she chose to and so she would remain there for the time being and not seek greener pastures, for she enjoyed the work and Mr. Wilson’s company as well as the fact she was meeting and helping other artists in their work, glad that she could continue to make a contribution to the work of others and through which was learning much about her own work and herself.

Nevertheless, in her quieter times, however, Sylvia found herself thinking of Stephen. She was still disappointed at how he had behaved toward her and bore some regret for how things had worked out between them, how he had treated her and, in turn, how their relationship had ended. Sylvia wondered how his writing was going, whether he was working on anything new, some more short stories maybe, another novel perhaps. She tried to think kindly of the good times they had had together – and did her best to forget the bad and hoped that he was taking better care of himself than he was when she had seen him at the opening night of the exhibition of her work.

Sylvia was, above all, both thankful and relieved that her exhibition had been a success and that she had sold some of her work. She was content and hoped that this would be the realisation of the reason for which she had left her parents’ house in Lara – and that she would finally see some better days.

*   *   *   *

And with these and other thoughts, as she had a cup of warm peppermint tea without milk before retiring to bed for that night, Sylvia reflected and thought back to Stephen and the state he was in on her opening night of the exhibition of her work. As Will had so aptly put it: “Someone’s a bit worse for wear.” Wholeheartedly, Sylvia hoped he had just had a big day and that she was not
responsible for the appalling condition he was in. *What was that thing he also used to tell her?* "Jay voudrais may tare?" *That's it,* she thought. "Jay voudrais may tare" – "Jay comprends, et na sa – sashant m’explicker sans paroles, pay, payannes. Jay voudrais may tare*\(^{(13)}\)". She would always remember that last bit, Sylvia thought: "Jay voudrais may tare." “I would rather say nothing.” Mmm, I *would rather say nothing*; that’s how Sylvia decided she would leave Stephen and their relationship, she would remain silent and leave it at that and at that she would leave it at and enjoy her success and all the good that was presently in her life and accept and take what had happened for what it was and upon it not dwell.

* * * *
Sixty-eight –

The most of the day wasted spent doing anything but sitting down to write – mostly smoking cigarettes, drinking beer and trying to comprehend what he had done at Sylvia’s opening last night and what she would have thought. His mind wandering, Stephen, thinking pleasantly of what they had enjoyed two nights previous, decided he would call Emma in the hope he could once more forget himself in her arms and lose himself in what she had to offer him. Therefore, that is what he did. He picked up the telephone and called Emma.

“Hi Emma, it's Stephen,” Stephen said when she picked up. “How are you?”

“Busy, busy, as always. Brian’s got me running around in circles as usual.”

“Would you like to come over?”

“Why Stephen, you feeling lonely?”

“Just thought that I’d –, that we’d – you know.”

“I know, how about we see a film?” Emma said.

“A film? Anything you got in mind?”

Having called her, Emma and Stephen had had a little talk and the two decided they would go on a date, see a movie rather than just go straight to bed as had become their usual – as Emma had said, “something different for a change.” And after they had had a little chat, they had decided to see a re-run of the Director’s cut of Donnie Darko, which they had both already seen, but as they had liked it, though both had trouble understanding, but thought that this was part of its appeal.

They thus decided they would see it again at the Art house cinema nearby her town house and afterwards they would have a coffee and then sojourn to Stephen’s little flat for the night – the first time that they had really “gone out” together as such since they had started their liaison, though still on the hush hush.
The Director's cut of *Donnie Darko* was longer than the initially released version and so it was well after eleven when the movie finally finished and Stephen and Emma had a quick coffee at a café near the cinema and then began to make their back to Stephen’s untidy little flat: where they would enjoy more of the same, same old.

And as they did so – as they walked –, they talked about the movie they had just seen – the tale of a deluded and confused young schizophrenic troubled by hallucinations of a large rabbit telling him to wreak havoc and havoc did he wreak, yet all turning out for the good and exposing people for who and what they really were.

“I still don’t get it – even the second time around,” Emma said.

“Get what?” Stephen asked.

“The ending: one minute he’s killing everyone around, the next he’s struck down by the jet engine of an airplane, which he avoided in the beginning when he was on asleep the golf course.”

“But that’s the point: it’s all about precognition. In one scenario, he can see the future, in the next, he becomes a victim of it.”

“Whatever, I still didn’t get the ending.”

“As I said, that’s the point – there’s no existential time, it’s all narrative. The viewer is following the time of the jet engine, which passes through a wormhole and travels back in time. That’s the time the director wants you to follow,” Stephen explained.

“Narrative time; existential time, whatever.”

The Director’s cut of *Donnie Darko* was disturbing and was thought provoking and Stephen and Emma were both at odds with it. Thus they argued about it and thus they disagreed about it – its ending ambiguous. *Donnie Darko, Donnie Darko;* all in all, a very confusing movie, but one which they had both
enjoyed. *Deus ex machina*.

The Director's cut of *Donnie Darko* was as good the second time around and Stephen and Emma had both enjoyed it. And Stephen was finding Emma’s company a welcome change, something to take him away from his writing, himself and all that was troubling him and currently on his mind. *Donnie Darko*, *Donnie Darko. Deus ex machina*.

* * * *

Presently at Stephen’s little flat: Emma’s eyes mocked Stephen with the calm cynicism of delight. She knew, he knew she knew, the power she had over him at this moment. A warm, friendly moment. An indescribable oasis of comfort and certainty in what of late had been a desert of chaos and uncertainty in Stephen’s life. Rising to the moment as sure-footedly as a drunken man, Stephen went on recalling some trivial anecdote of the day’s happening, placing himself as ever as the hero – the champion of what good was left in the universe.

Neglecting with a lack of subtlety pre- eminent to respond to his companion’s invitations, which still hung in the air creating a somewhat awkward and voluptuous void. As if they had not been spoken, pretending they had not been heard, Stephen – stuttering all the while – he blundered towards the close of his tale, which arrived in the form of anti-climax, which though attempting to soothe, these words had entered the room like a stranger, whose presence acted only to suffocate the two.

Stephen darted towards the kettle. With an impatience that seemed to imply some catastrophe, some impending apocalypse would be avoided by it being turned on. With a sigh that only the brave and the truly courageous know, he found with relief that the kettle was in fact on and quite close to boiling. Turning to Emma, he asked with the pride of the victor.

“How would you like your coffee?”

Plainly and unimpressed, Emma replied:
“With milk, no sugar.”

“With milk, no sugar.” The words seemed to have an eminence all of their own. The simplicity of the statement: “With milk, no sugar.” Stephen boldly made his way towards the refrigerator and took the milk from its door. Before he concluded, Emma salvaged the awkward moment from its embarrassed silence by saying:

“Howver, I still enjoyed the film.”

At this, Stephen had to stop, think, before replying:

“Yes, so did I.”

The coffee now poured, not to mention the milk safely added to satisfaction and Stephen content though exhausted, he announced to Emma:

“It’s ready.”

To which she replied:

“Great, let’s drink it in the other room.”

Stephen did as he was told and obeyed Emma’s wise words. He took their coffees to the other room. Stephen placed their coffees on what was a poor excuse for a coffee table he had bought second hand at a Salvation Army opportunity shop, whilst Emma stood.

“Sit down,” Stephen told her, “you’re making me nervous,” he explained.

After she had sat down and sipped her coffee, Emma took Stephen’s hand, gave it a squeeze and then said:

“Stephen, I hate to be the one to tell you this, but it’s better that it came from me than from someone else.”

“What Emma?”
“You’re really under the pump. Brian is getting sick of the excuses, the promises and your drinking. You really need to get your act together and give him something, and give him something good and what is more soon. Okay: he heard about what you did at Sylvia’s opening at Buchanan’s last night and is really disappointed. All right, you did win a Harvey award for it, but *The DaySleepers* is starting to drop off the radar and there are a lot of other people, who would like to be in your position. You’ve got to start to take some responsibility for your actions and a little ownership of them or things might head down a path you don’t want them to and turn out bad. You’re no longer a nobody working at a second hand bookstore dreaming of becoming a famous writer. You’re a published author now, who has won an award for your work – people take note of these things.”

“I’m trying, Emma.”

“That’s good Stephen: just try a little harder, okay? And please stop drinking so much – take better care of yourself. Christ man, you’ve just turned twenty-eight. Do you want to see thirty?”

“As I said, I’m trying Emma. I’m working on a new novel and got a lot of new material. This one will outsell and leave *The DaySleepers* for dead.”

“Okay, just watch out: all right? Brian doesn’t need a Dian mark two on his hands and her figures make yours look pitiful.”

“All right. I’ll try to change,” Stephen said and meant it.

Although Stephen knew Emma’s words were not her own, he did know that she spoke the truth – he was under the pump and would have to deliver soon and deliver soon it was his intent and, what is more, well. However, he did not know how to go about this and was worried that he would not, which made him fear failure. Maybe the success of *The DaySleepers* was just a stroke of luck, a b-grade novel written by a chancer with too much time on his hands with some purple passages, which could pass as literature, that had simply arrived at the right time and that he was only an Opportunist – a very fortunate one at that? he wondered.

Overwhelmed by these and other thoughts and not knowing how nor
where to begin and with insidious anxiety all pervasive, enveloping him and threatening to overcome him, from which he did not know how to free himself. But amidst all this Stephen did know, however, that action had to be taken by him and action would he take to show that *The DaySleepers* was not just a stroke of luck and that he was anything but an opportunist, but a writer and a good one at that. He would write and write well. He would write and write well if only to prove to them and to himself that this was not so.

* * * *

Her words weighing heavily in the room sombly and with little ceremony, Stephen moved a little closer and began to kiss Emma to which she responded in kind. Little by little, they progressed, but when Stephen began to undress her, Emma said:

“This is wrong, I should go.”

Emma stood up and said as she began to arrange her clothes.

“I guess I’ll see you.”

“Yeah, ah: I’ll call,” Stephen said.

“Take care, Stephen.”

“Goodbye, Emma.”

And with that and little else, Emma left. And after she had left his flat with little more than and not so much as a curt goodbye, Stephen was tired, worn out and dissatisfied – repulsed by himself and by his actions and by his omissions to act over the last few months.

Mindful of Emma’s words and the warning implicit in them, he decided he would put the past, few months behind him, stop seeing her, write it and their relationship off as experience, improve himself and his outlook and dedicate
himself to his work more than he had ever done in the past – bearing in mind he was now published and won a Harvey award for being so – even if the pecuniary reward from which wasn’t what he expected nor needed having left his job at “McPherson’s Books” for what he had hoped would be, but were not, greener pastures.

And with this behind him, Stephen knew he would have to find another job and what is more soon his advance for *Stereophrenia* and what he had received in royalties from “Forrest and Hooper” for *The DaySleepers* just covering his living costs as he now had no other income. Stephen found it hard, however, to write wondering how long his money would keep a roof above his head and food on his table – not to mention his drinking, which was becoming a bit of problem and combating his all too frequent hang overs – and was thus struggling for material for his new novel – and such that it was and was it such at least that was so for Stephen, with everything and everything other glittering and on the improve, he thought.

Mr. Hooper had been patient; he had given Stephen some latitude, it is true, but at the same time, he was also seeking some kind of return on the investment that he had made in publishing *The DaySleepers* and signing Stephen on as one of “Forrest and Hooper’s” authors. However, given his current situation and malaise, this was the least of Stephen’s worries in light of the myriad of other problems he was presently facing.

After Emma had left, Stephen took a hard look at himself. He did not like what he saw nor what he had become and felt disappointed – firm in the resolve that he would do everything he could to better himself and his situation. Granted he had just turned and was still only twenty-eight and had many years still ahead of him and it was his plan to make best use of them as he could and change he would. Although he was presently at a loss as to how, but, nevertheless, would try and try hard.

* * * *
Sixty-nine –

The exhibition of her work lasting two weeks that had literally flown by, Sylvia had attended each and every night making the most of it as had Will. After the first week and the opening night, the numbers had started to drop off. However, Sylvia still savoured the best of each and every night and resolving to paint more and more, taking note of the feedback and responses she had received from those, who had come to see her work. Only a small exhibition, at its close, Sylvia had read and heeded the reviews it had received, which were few and which were, for the most, positive. Through these, she had the feeling that she stood on the threshold of a big breakthrough, not only in her art, but also in herself.

Sylvia, nonetheless, was pleased with the turn out. She took heed of the responses of others to her work. She respected their words and paid to them their due attention, which made her aware of both what others thought and wanted from her art. And with this, Sylvia was now aware of painting to and for an audience and what the implications of this were and what it meant in her art.

As she had now sold some of her work, Sylvia didn’t have to work at the Supply store and could quite easily live off her savings and ill-gotten gains for long enough to produce work sufficient for a new exhibition. However, she liked the work and Mr. Wilson’s company, which made her decide to stay at the store and keep working there. With all that was going on, Sylvia felt a change coming her way and that she had reached some sort of watershed, a defining moment – especially now she had exhibited and sold some of her work and was pleased with how things were and would continue to happen for her.

At home on her own that night, a Wednesday, Sylvia decided to have a quiet night in and considered how things had turned around for her. She prayed that they would continue to do so. To this end, Sylvia resolved that she would do everything in her power to ensure that this was so. She had been a failure, she had demeaned herself in a strip club, danced naked on the laps of men, who had repulsed her, and she had dropped out of Art school without so much as an
award, but she had a firm belief in her talent and her star, that she would succeed and hoped now with Will on board that her dreams would be realised. Sylvia was thus quite pleased with how things were coming together for her and she hoped that they would continue to do so and wondered what she would have done and what would have come of her had she not met Mr. Wilson and, through him, Will.

* * * *
Seventy –

When Stephen woke up the next morning on stained, putrid sheets, he was alone. He reached for a cigarette and thought about what Emma had said the night before and he wondered: *How could he break his old habits?* Sure he was published now and had won a Harvey award, but still did not know how or why he had lost his way, nor how to get back on track and was worried that things, as Emma had said, might head down a path, to which he did not want them.

Stephen had long wanted to succeed as a writer and now, it struck him, that, when he had his best chance to, he was doing his best to do anything but; doing everything in his power, it seemed, for the opposite to occur and did not know why nor how he could avoid that which he saw coming his way.

For three long years whilst employed at "McPherson’s Books", he had lived the Spartan way: come autumn, winter, spring or summer. Up at six, writing by quarter past and undisturbed for an hour and a half, eight hours of hard graft at the bookstore, and then the same in the evening, day in, day out, except when he was on annual leave and then he would clean, wash and read, read, wash and clean all in the hope of improving his work, always looking for new material, searching out new ground to cover.

And now with all that he had achieved – his novel published, a Harvey award won, a book deal signed for the next and an option on the third –, he only felt tired and bored and could only think about his next drink – all the time wondering how he could break his malaise? He could seek professional advice about his drinking, he knew, go to a support group or see a G.P., get counselling, but all that, he also knew, would only make him feel worse and so he doubted whether it would help at all. *How could he fill the void, which he felt in his life, not even knowing what it was?* Yet a void there was. His wound growing ever deeper, never healing, he sensed.

When he had started seeing Sylvia, Stephen had felt that things were changing for him and for the better, now all he could see were the years rolling on and he being alone for each and every one of them. *How could he fill the void,*
which he felt in his life, not even knowing what it was? Yet a void there was; and one Stephen felt and knew that would only get worse in time; with him being alone for each and every one of them. His wound growing ever deeper, never healing, he sensed: his wound growing ever deeper, never healing, he sensed.

Whilst Stephen was at University, a lecturer of his had said that there are those amongst us who are condemned to creativity – those were his exact words: condemned to creativity. For Stephen these words had a great impact and this was how he felt at times, condemned to creativity. He felt he had something to say and say it well he thought he could. For some, writing is a vogue, there were authors, who were fashionable for a while, and then their impact passed with the passing of time and a change in that fashion. There were other writers, who made a career of it. There were those, who wrote to herald a new message or spiritual yearning and there were those, who just wrote, wrote they did and published they were and soon forgotten were they also.

For Stephen, writing had been a passion. He had been disciplined and done nothing, but write, write, write and write and work for nearly four years and thought that he had something to contribute – a message to communicate, something to say. Now that he had done it, now that he had published his novel and won an award for this being so, yet he only felt empty, tired and weary as though his well had run dry – right at the moment when he needed it to be a floodgate. He was in a position he had long sought. He had worked hard and achieved everything that he had wanted to and more, yet still he felt he was on slippery ground and sinking ever deeper.

Betwixt and between a bittersweet melancholy and an unavoidable malaise, Stephen was lost, that he knew. He was confused and scared of sinking even deeper, that he also knew – all the time wishing that his footsteps were firm and that he could write once more with confidence and a sure pen. How could he fill the void, which he felt in his life, not even knowing what it was? Yet a void there was; and one, which Stephen felt and knew would only get worse in time. His wound growing ever deeper, never healing, he sensed: his wound growing ever deeper, never healing, he sensed.
With all that was going on, Stephen decided he would heed Emma's words for she had his best interests at heart and try to take better care of himself, but he did not know where to begin or how to start. But with that decided the beginning was the best place. Thus Stephen decided he would begin with the small and cut down on his drinking and admit to himself that maybe he had a problem and take it from there. But he did wonder, however, whether this was the right thing to do or not, for Stephen had heard tales of writers, who stop drinking, stop writing – as well and he did not know where his emptiness stemmed from and whether his drinking was his problem at all, rather it was mere but a symptom. *How could he fill the void, which he felt in his life, not even knowing what it was?* he wondered.

Stephen felt empty, let down by what he had seen, by what he had been through and most of all by what he had become. He longed for days when he felt good within himself once more; he longed for days when he could hope once more and wondered how he could bring these forth and whether things would ever be as they once had and as he hoped them to be.

* * * *
Seventy-one –

Now a reasonably successful artist, making a name for herself in all the right places and having had an exhibition that had done well for a first-timer, Sylvia was on the verge of being self-sufficient as an artist having sold some of her work – six paintings, to be precise, whose exorbitant prices Sylvia had thought would deter even the most enthusiastic buyers, yet deterred, however, were they not – something of which she had long dreamt. Sylvia was happier and felt better in herself than she had in a long time. She was young and things were happening for her – good things. Sylvia was getting happier and was feeling better within herself than she had for longer than she could remember.

She now looked back at what happened and the times she felt her lot was bad and that everything was against her and reflected on how good they were now. All of which made her wonder: How she could keep things continuing in their current pleasant manner? Not, however, neglecting to think of Mr. Servais and whether he had pulled through or not; the consequences of which or whichever were troubling for her at times; the thought she may have possibly killed someone still disturbing her and present in the back of her mind.

Sylvia had seen a lot since leaving her parents' house in Lara. She had worked as a lap dancer, she had nearly been raped, she had had a relationship – although it ended badly – and she had exhibited and sold some of her work and, in spite of the bad, things were getting better and better with the passing of each day, of whose arrival she grew evermore grateful.

At the time and when she reflected upon it, Sylvia thought her experiences would have made her harder, more wizened. The opposite was true, however, they had made her want more out of life and she felt somewhat lighter, but at the same time more resilient and that she could now get what she wanted out of life, which she intended to do. All of which made her wonder: How she could keep things continuing in their current pleasant manner? For Sylvia had long wanted to succeed as an Artist and succeed she felt that she could after the success of her exhibition and all the positive feedback, which she had received for her work – glad that things had improved for her, for they could not have got much worse.
To consolidate upon the success of her exhibition, Will had organised what was to be a small press conference with some prominent local and interstate journalists, with whom he had connections, to be held for her at the gallery Buchanan’s to build upon all the positives of the exhibition and promote herself and her work. Sylvia not only had to attend, but speak about her work and promote it. Something, which made her feel both quite anxious and nervous, but she knew that it was yet another opportunity for her to go from strength to strength both as an artist and a person and as such she would do her best to do this and make it so and that it was.

* * * *
Seventy-two –

Having passed most of the rest of that day, a gloomy and miserable Thursday, whose weight was unbearable, in bed – paralysis analysis – that’s what it was, analysis by paralysis. Stephen thought about his situation and the heavy burden each day had become. Stephen was unhappy. He was lonely and tired, he was poisoning himself, he was hurting himself and he was making a fool of himself in the eyes of those around him, whom he wanted to respect him, but did not know how to stop. This was his big chance and he was blowing it.

Something, which made him pause and think: How could he fill the void, which he felt in his life, not even knowing what it was? Yet a void there was and lessening was it not. Right at the moment when he should be – and had every reason to be – happy, he felt nothing but a chasm, which no thing, one or action on his part could fill – no matter how hard he tried and tried hard he did.

Stephen lit a cigarette. Thinking of his situation, he wondered whether his problems lay with Sylvia and whether how their relationship had come to an end was the source of his unhappiness. Had he treated her better and had made something more of their relationship, maybe he would, in turn, feel better about himself?

For at heart, Stephen was somewhat of a romantic. He believed in love and in devotion and that therein lay happiness – that through loving another one can become complete and whole. Now he was alone and all he felt was emptiness. He tried to concentrate on his writing – extenuate all the positives of his situation – yet could not liberate nor extricate himself from his barrenness he felt in his life.

The DaySleepers had been an elemental part of Stephen’s life: his consuming passion and the object of his desire. He had thought about it, he had planned it to the finest detail and he had forsaken everything else for it. Now it was in the public domain, critics were writing about it and reviewing it and people were buying and reading it, and Stephen felt blasé. The DaySleepers had been published, had won a Harvey award and all Stephen felt was empty, tired and weary.
How could he fill the void, which he felt in his life, not even knowing what it was? Stephen wondered. How could he fill the void, which he felt in his life, not even knowing what it was? He felt used up; empty as though he had nothing more to offer to any one or any thing and with this thought he fell into an unsatisfactory and restless slumber – alone.

* * * *
Seventy-three –

Now an artist, who had exhibited and sold some of her work, Mr. Wilson saw Sylvia as being more of a colleague and a confidante than a casual employee. She had passed the test, undergone her rites of passage and she had not been found wanting – and was now a fully-fledged artist, who had exhibited and sold some of her work. The two thus acted as equals, now Sylvia was a success.

With her career as a painter taking off, Mr. Wilson had also reduced her hours at the Supply store from thirty hours a week to twenty, in order that she could have time to paint more of which Sylvia was appreciative and she found the urge to paint more and more. And more and more did she paint growing evermore confident and evermore adventurous with each stroke of her brush; the results of which both pleased and thrilled Sylvia, building upon all the positives of the exhibition of her work – glad that things had improved for her, for they could not have got much worse.

Sylvia, now an artist, who had exhibited and sold some of her work, painted with firm brushstrokes and was more certain what she wanted to do with her art. She felt secure and that she was on the right path, which made her feel as though she could really achieve something, something – despite the fact there was the ogre of a press conference hanging over her to be held that afternoon, which made her feel anxious, excited and a little nervous, and for which Will had prepared a brief résumé of Sylvia’s career for those attending.

* * * *

A small affair, Will had organised a brief press conference at Buchanan’s, the centrepiece of which was to be Sylvia and her work, to consolidate upon the success of her exhibition. Dressed casually, though smart in a pair of slacks and a neat matching shirt, there were the obligatory photographs when she entered the room, and then Will introduced Sylvia to the awaiting members of the media.
“Esteemed ladies and gentlemen of the press, for the last two weeks, Miss Sylvia Thomas has exhibited her work here – the gallery Buchanan’s, which has a proud and long history – and sold six of her paintings. Given the success of this exhibition and the potential Miss Thomas has to become one of our finest artists, I thought that it would be mutually beneficial for her to meet with you, respected members of the press gallery, and discuss her exhibition and work. I therefore ask you now to direct any questions you might have of Miss Thomas to her, which she will do her best to answer.”

“Miss Thomas, Adam Stiller of The Sydney Morning Herald. Your exhibition was quite a success – congratulations –, in the brief provided it said that you only attended college for eighteen months before leaving and that you are only twenty-one, how does it feel to be a success at such a young age?”

“Well, I only sold six paintings, I’d hardly call that a runaway success, Mr. Stiller, but I do feel privileged that I sold even those six,” Sylvia replied.

“Miss Thomas, Suzie Golding of The Age; most artists with a lot more behind them than you would be glad to sell six paintings in their career, which raises my question: where to from here?”

“I’ve decided to work on a few ideas that people have given me at my exhibition, Miss Golding, as well as address the more technical aspects of my work, upon which people have commented.”

“Miss Thomas, Sean Burroughs of The Sunday Herald Sun; granted this, how do you think you will achieve this? Do you think you will re-enroll in Art school? Or do you think that you’ll just go it alone?”

“No, Mr. Burroughs: I’ve got a lot of good advice from my friends and colleagues and from those, who attended my exhibition and at this stage, I think that that will be sufficient.”

“Your friends must be very generous,” Sean Burroughs said.

“They are, Mr. Burroughs,” Sylvia replied, “they are.”

“Miss Thomas,” it was Mr. Adam Stiller again, “referring once more to the brief that Mr. McHardy prepared, it says that you work in a Supply store, now that
you’ve exhibited and sold some of your work will you continue to work there or will you focus more on your painting?”

“I enjoy meeting and working with other artists, so yes in response to your question, Mr. Stiller, I will continue to keep working in the Supply store.”

“Who knows you might get a raise,” Mr. Adam Stiller of The Sydney Morning Herald said.

“Miss Thomas, Jasper Casey of The Courier Mail, you now have an excellent C. V.: will we see more of your work on exhibit?”

“Hopefully, Mr. Casey,” Sylvia responded, looking towards Will, “hopefully.”

“Soon?” Mr. Jasper Casey asked.

“As I said, Mr. Casey, hopefully,” Sylvia replied.

And thus in a flurry of more questions about her, about her art, her opinion of the modern Art world and other matters, the press conference continued, until finally, sensing Sylvia was tired, Will said:

“Ladies and gentlemen of the press, Miss Thomas has been quite generous with her precious time. She has answered many of your questions and responded to them in kind. I refer you to the brief provided for further information and thank you all for coming.”

And so, with a few more photographs, Sylvia’s first press conference as a successful artist concluded. As she walked away from the platform, which had been set up for her, Sylvia, now an artist, who had exhibited and sold some of her work, had survived her first press conference as such, which made her feel relieved and good within herself, hoping she had not made a fool of herself and
she was also glad that no-one had touched upon nor asked about her past as a strip
der, which, in light of her success, may have been difficult, for she was not proud
and, if the truth be known, a little ashamed of it.

* * * *
Seventy-four –

At high school, which had been a dismal and melancholy private, boys only affair, Stephen had been somewhat of a loner. He had had a couple of girlfriends, whose company he had enjoyed and he took pleasure in, yet none with whom he really saw a future. When asked what he wanted to do with his life after school by parents, teachers and Guidance counsellors, Stephen had thrown up the usual for someone, who was bright, yet didn’t really apply himself to his studies: law perhaps, economics even, psychology maybe. Stephen had really only thought of writing as what he wanted to do with the rest of his life and all the other options were merely pragmatic to satisfy others and keep them off his back.

Then he had hit University, his V.C.E. marks high enough for entry to the academy as a Bachelor of the Arts. He hoped to arm himself with the knowledge with which he could take the Establishment on, the Establishment namely being his educators, righteous arms against whom he wanted to take. After two years of very little progress in his studies, Stephen had decided to take a leave of absence for a year to think about things and consider his future, which had extended until finally he had dropped out without an award.

Sick of himself and his friends at University, Stephen had decided to focus on his writing, become a true master of his craft, a tradesman worth his salt. Given his lack of imagination, he wrote about what he knew – University life: The DaySleepers was thus begun. Stephen stuck at it, had his good and his bad days, and wrote short stories as side projects to help keep him focussed and switched on, and then he had a novel completed. The thrill of sending a copy of which upon completion unsolicited to publishing houses words could not describe – equal only to having his work accepted for publication and then winning a Harvey award with everything and everything other glittering and on the improve, he thought.

Tired of his excesses whilst at University, when Stephen began to focus more on his writing, his mode of life was that of the ascetic. As soon as he picked up the pen, he allowed himself few pleasures and did little else, but wrote, wrote and wrote all with the hope that something good would come of it – heeding the
words of one of his University tutors: “Enjoy all things in moderation, including having a good time.” However, then, for Stephen, writing was having a good time and something he enjoyed and enjoyed in much more than moderation – as soon as he put pen to paper it became an all consuming passion and he relinquished all else – saw them as being distractions, for which he had no time.

When he had met Sylvia, Stephen had felt that his solitary days were gone and that he would let himself enjoy their relationship and savour from it as much as he could, now with what had happened between them, he missed her and having her in his life and knew he would always do and that it is how it and he would remain. For, all things told, Stephen was full of pride that he could call Sylvia his girlfriend, was pleased when he had held her hand and felt good within himself when he did so and thought, at the time, that enduring things from it would come.

Stephen had enjoyed Sylvia’s company. He was sorry that things had turned out as they did and was disappointed with how he had treated her. Sure there was his brief affair with Emma, but that was just that an affair, something he enjoyed, but had taken it for it was – namely, an intense and pleasurable diversion; a bit of fun that both had undertaken with the knowledge that nothing would come of it, which nothing did –, and Stephen thought he had found someone special in Sylvia.

And with this thought, Stephen wondered if his relationship with Sylvia was in fact over, whether there was any possibility of rekindling old flames, which he really wanted to do, with the hope that through that his situation would change and thus he decided to write her a letter to try to explain himself and to apologise for what had happened knowing where she lived, so he could send it to her by post and that is what Stephen decided to do – choosing to write in freehand, rather than using his computer:

*Sylvia,*

*A lot of water has passed underneath the bridge. I have done things that I shouldn’t have; yet at the time nothing could stop me. Now that you have left me and we are*
no longer together, things are different and I find that I miss your company and your companionship. You were, and will always will be, an important part of my life and now since what occurred at the opening night of your exhibition, I find that …

And so, not really knowing what to say nor how to say it, Stephen wrote and wrote on with the knowledge that it would never be sent, that he would never have the strength nor the courage to make this so and that his words would go unread much to his own personal disappointment and regret.

* * * *
Seventy-five –

An artist and a dreamer, Sylvia believed in the power of love and of affection and what it had to offer her and to make her feel complete and whole within herself. When she was at Art school, she had had a casual relationship with a friend’s friend, which was simply that, a casual relationship based on strong mutual physical attraction and which was a highly charged affair. Sexually, Sylvia had quite enjoyed it and it had opened her eyes, though she had lost part of her innocence through which. When she had left college, however, she did not keep in contact with her friend, neither heard from nor saw him and left it at that.

After a few lonely months which were fraught with much chaos, she had met Stephen and things seemed to be changing for her and for the better. With all that had happened before, their relationship was an oasis, a haven, and a welcome one at that, through which she had let part of her past go – albeit little by little – in a time of much upheaval. Now she was single again. She was single again; yet, however, she still believed in the power of love and what it could do for her and that in time there would be someone else, someone new. Sylvia, now an artist, who had exhibited and sold some of her work, was in no doubt that, in time, she would find someone new, someone, who would take her for who and what she was.

Sylvia had seen a lot in Stephen when their relationship had begun. He was a writer, he was on the verge of success, she took much pleasure in his company and felt better about herself when she was with him. When he had all but reached his potential, however, Sylvia felt that he had soured. Now since that night at Vito’s, she wanted nothing more to do with him. And nothing more would she do with Stephen; even more so with all the good things that were happening for her and her art – now she neither wanted nor needed him in her life.

Working as a lap dancer in a strip club had taught Sylvia to use what she had, both as an object and as a person, despite the high cost at which this knowledge had come, but it had come nonetheless; and she would keep this in reserve and use it should the need arise, which she prayed it would not, but knew that she could if she so needed. Thus Sylvia, now an Artist, who had exhibited
and sold some of her work was more sure of herself and use what she had, she would to ensure this would remain so.

* * * *
Rising earlier than usual the next morning, around seven o’clock, as he lay in bed, Stephen thought about the letter he had tried to write Sylvia last night. Although it was now drafted, he knew he would never send it and was thus disenchanted by his lack of courage and rebuked himself that this was so. Therefore, he wondered why he had bothered at all, but still thought, however, that this may be the key to his unhappiness. With all that was going on, Stephen felt himself entering a wilderness from which he may not return, this he knew if he did not take action – and action Stephen decided to take, whether it be too little, too late or not and hopefully it would stop him from entering the wilderness, whose trees he could begin to see. And realising how short life really is, this was not how he chose to pass it and decided that he would not.

Stephen therefore decided to start from the general to the specific. He was sick of living in a dump, his little flat having become a pigsty that he treated, much like everything else, as his ashtray and thus Stephen decided he would spend the day cleaning. He began by opening some of the windows to air his flat – the fresh air soon replacing the heavy odor of tobacco and all yesterday’s beers – and then he started on the pile of empty dishes in his sink, the amount of which even by his current low standards was unreasonable. Then, having few clothes clean enough, Stephen did two loads of washing in the communal laundry situated two flats along from his, hanging them on a clothes horse to dry and got his old iron out and pressed his shirts and somehow this burst of activity made Stephen feel somewhat better in himself.

Although as a writer Stephen spent quite a lot of time alone, rarely did he consider the question of religion. He was a theist through his education – and believed in a God –, but thought little, however, of the abnegation required to realise this in its proper sense and he hated going to Church – especially early on Sunday mornings. Stephen nonetheless did know that he had to change his outlook – rapid. He was becoming all too soon all too cynical and world-weary as a result of this and that was a path he did not want to follow at such a young age. This was not to say he was going to be born-again – singing the praises of
God, whose existence he questioned in any case —, but, however, Stephen thus decided he would begin to take pleasure in the little things, find joy in the detail and the harmony, which lay therein and be more mindful of that which he could once more find beautiful.

When he had worked at “McPherson’s Books”, Stephen had prided himself on his meticulous dress and the care he took in his presentation and it was these things and their like that Stephen decided he would once more take a little more time to enjoy: things like polished shoes, pressed shirts and so forth. Care, Stephen intended to take, even though and because everything was fleeting and transient. He would find pleasure in this, accept it for what it was and hoped that, through this, once more, that he would enjoy writing.

Stephen, therefore, decided that this was the path he would take. He would find magic and wonder in all that he could, no matter how hard he had to try to find it, for try he would and make an effort to make an effort. For he knew it was there and that he would and could find it with a little hard work.

* * * *

And with this behind him and firm in his new resolve and mindset, Stephen decided he would give Mr. Hooper a call. He would apologise for his actions and come on board as he had both agreed and promised. Dialling Mr. Hooper’s direct number, Stephen did not know what he would say, but braced himself for a tirade about his drinking and recent behaviour. However, he did not hang up.

“Good morning, Brian Hooper speaking,” Mr. Hooper answered.
“Hi Brian, it’s Stephen, Stephen Murray.”
“Hello Stephen, how are things going?”
“Good, Brian, good. Listen, I’ve got a couple of ideas for the new novel and some new material and just thought I’d call to report that things seem to be falling into place.”
Now above all, Mr. Hooper was a businessman: that Stephen could make for him money was his main concern. However, with his drinking, Stephen had become a bit of a liability and might possibly draw bad publicity for “Forrest and Hooper”, who already had Dian to reckon with and thus did not need another drunk on their list.

“That’s good, Stephen. Your contract still stands, just remember that we’ve got a lot invested in you and even more riding on your new novel.”

“I know Brian; that’s why I’m calling. What’s done is done. I’m not trying to justify my actions to anyone nor would want to. I just thought I’d call and let you know that I’m back on board and that I’m in for the long haul, whatever it takes.”

“I’m pleased to hear that Stephen, but actions speak louder than words and we still need a new book.”

“I’m doing my best, Brian, I’m doing my best.”

“As I said Stephen, that’s good: keep it up, okay. Listen I’ve got an appointment at eleven o’clock and have to go, but it was good talking to you.”

“Okay Brian, I’ll leave it at that.”

“Goodbye Stephen; take care.”

“Goodbye Brian.”

With a particular and certain degree of ambivalence, bemused Stephen hung up the telephone wondering whether he had said the right thing. Firm, however, in the resolve that he meant what he had said and would do his best to turn things around and let his actions speak louder than his words as Mr. Hooper had said and was glad that he had made the call and said what he had.

This as it was, he would write and write better than he had ever had before and meet the challenge implicit in Mr. Hooper’s words as best he could and not baulk away from it. Stephen thus decided he would approach every day and every project as if it were something new, through which he would discover something of himself; be it good or bad, which and whatever it may be he would
accept it and learn from it and take it for what it was and from it discern new things and from them grow both as a person and as a writer.

* * * *
Seventy-seven –

Given the success of the exhibition of her work and of her press conference, Sylvia decided that she would produce a series of paintings based upon a dream she had had after the closing night of her exhibition about a woman rising from the waters of a lake, which, when she contemplated and thought about it, she believed to symbolise her own redemption through the exhibition of her work and her success.

An ambitious venture, the scope of which she appreciated and thought at times overwhelming, she thus decided she would paint this motif and others along this theme – the bonds on yesterday’s life loosening. Entry to a new world she could see – and create a series of paintings until she had exhausted it and found its true meaning. And paint Sylvia did. She painted and as she did so she thought about her press conference, which seemed to have gone smoothly although she had been quite nervous and, when so, found herself sounding egotistical, despite the fact it was a forum for her to talk about and promote herself and her art.

Sylvia woke up every morning and was growing more and more grateful for the coming of each day and welcomed what it had to offer her. She painted the image of her dream, which at once became more clear at others, more fleeting – yet paint Sylvia did. The image of her dream, Sylvia thought was important for her and thus she laboured hard to catch its essence. The image of her dream was a revelation and Sylvia therefore worked on it, contemplated it and tried to do it justice. Sylvia thus painted and painted and as she did so the image of her dream at once became more clear at others, more fleeting – yet paint Sylvia did and was happy with the results.

* * * *
Seventy-eight –

After he had spoken to Mr. Hooper on the telephone, Stephen had spent the rest of the day cleaning and washing. He then gave himself the night off – a bit of breathing space –, a time for reflection, before planning his next move. His little flat now somewhat cleaner, Stephen knew he could once more enjoy living there. As he had given himself the night off, he had decided to begin reading Marquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude* of which he had a pre-loved, dog-eared copy he had picked up second hand whilst working at “McPherson’s Books”. *What better way to learn how to write again than from a master?* he thought.

Thus Stephen wiled away a few hours reading and then, it presently having turned seven o’clock, decided he would eat. Exhausted by his bout of cleaning and washing – though pleased with the results – and not wanting to cook, takeaway fish and chips from Chippies, the local takeaway fish and chip store two streets down from his block of flats, seemed good enough, especially as it was a Friday.

As he made his way to the store, Stephen felt he had been given a reprieve, a welcome change in light of past events. He, therefore, decided that the past was just that, the past. He had done things he now regretted, things he would never do again and wondered what lessons could be learnt from his mistakes, for he was still young and wanted – really wanted – to change. Therefore he decided to think not of what was and what had been, but rather what could and would be and felt stronger with this thought.

Stephen ordered a fish souvlaki with grilled fish and extra garlic sauce and half a dozen calamari rings and leafed through a *Marie Claire* magazine, the real life end section of which he had grown fond of reading, whilst he waited for his meal to be prepared. His order soon ready cooked fresh, Stephen took it back to his little flat. He enjoyed his meal and as he ate, Stephen tried to think of all the positives of his situation – finding some hope in it – and a new path onward.

Presently back at his little flat whilst he was eating, Stephen reflected on
his telephone call to Mr. Hooper that day and hoped that he had taken his words with the sincerity with which he had spoken them. Stephen wondered with everything that was happening to him, most of it good, why he had taken the path that he had, when all the time he could have and should have been happy and had every reason to be?

Stephen finished the last of his calamari rings; he wiped his greasy hands clean and picked up One Hundred Years of Solitude and began to read from where he had left off. And as he read, Stephen thought and thought about his new novel, Stereophrenia – slowly beginning to take shape in his mind and form: albeit embryonically. He hoped it would consolidate what he had already achieved and he tried to think of all the positives of his situation – finding some hope in it and that, through it, he would see some better days, to which he was looking forward.

* * * *
Seventy-nine –

Up at seven that morning – a Friday –, for she was working at the Supply store, Sylvia had a small breakfast of a bowl of cereal and a couple of pieces of toast washed down by two cups of peppermint tea. Just across the Princes highway near the University and Caulfield plaza, Sylvia decided that, as it was a nice morning, she would walk to the Supply store although it was quite a distance. However, Sylvia enjoyed what was a fine spring morning. She was fresh, invigorated and felt ready to work and, what is more, to work hard.

As usual, when she got to the store, it presently having turned eight-thirty, Mr. Wilson was out the front sweeping away leaves and dirt from the Supply store entrance as he did every morning before opening the doors to the public.

“Early this morning, Sylvia,” he said.

“What do you mean early, it’s already eight-thirty?” she replied.

“Nothing; it’s good to see you.”

“Listen – I’m going to start on those magazines,” Sylvia said, referring to the box of *Artisan Australus* magazines, which had arrived late yesterday afternoon and which needed price labels put on.

“Okay, listen: I’ll need some help with a display that I’ve got in mind for the window; give me a shout when you’re finished with the magazines and we’ll do it together.”

“No worries.”

The more time that she spent there, the more the Supply store seemed like a second home for Sylvia. Therefore Sylvia, confident with her Art and what she was doing in it, was willing to work harder and harder at the store. She did so, kept her head down and gave each task that she approached more than the care, which it was due, and was always friendly when dealing with customers, something Mr. Wilson took note of and appreciated.

The Supply store seemed like a second home – welcome and inviting – and Sylvia therefore enjoyed working there, as it kept her two feet on the ground
and reminded her of what was real. Mr. Wilson was in a good mood that morning
and after Sylvia had finished pricing the magazines and put them on the rack,
she joined him and helped him out with a display he wanted to set up near the
store’s doors.

The rest of the day passed quickly enough and without incident, just
another working day at the end of just another working week: customers came,
customers went, the store had a good trade and things were steady. Soon it was
five o’clock and Sylvia began her end of week duties. Mr. Wilson had gone to
bank the week’s takings, the day was over and Sylvia was in the back office
organising the till in order that it be ready for next week with a fifty-dollar float in
small notes and change.

She put the cash drawer back in the till, locked it and took the key to the
back office. She put the key, plus the surplus from the till in the safe and gave the
handle a twist, making sure that it was locked. Whilst Sylvia was doing so, Mr.
Wilson had returned from the bank, he gave Sylvia her pay packet, which she put
in her pocket, and, having finished what she was doing, she said goodbye to Mr.
Wilson, wished him a pleasant weekend, told him that she would see him next
week and left the store for home.

Although she was only paid minimum wage according to the retail award
at the Supply store despite her success – barely eighteen dollars an hour, time
and a half when she worked on Saturdays –, the work was agreeable and Sylvia
found working there kept her grounded and in touch with other artists, whom she
enjoyed meeting and talking about both her own and their work and this
interaction reminded Sylvia she was not alone, as she sometimes thought and
felt she was.

* * * *
Eighty –

Equipped with his new outlook on life, Stephen felt empowered – not to take on the world it is true, but to enjoy once more the everyday and find the joy that lay therein, no matter how hard he had to try – and no matter of the cost to him. Life was too short and Stephen was too young to waste it and waste it he would not was his determination. Maybe he had enjoyed his fifteen minutes too long? Gloated in the limelight a little too profligately and wore out his welcome? Whether this was so or not, Stephen now felt that he was entering a new phase of his life and resolved to be more mindful – and through that good things would once again come. Stephen wanted to change and change he would he was determined.

After reading *One Hundred Years of Solitude* for two more hours, he felt ready to write. Stephen picked up his pen and the papers he had been working on and before he knew it had finished a draft of the first two chapters of *Stereophrenia*, furthermore he was happy with them and felt that he could write and write well again. Stephen was relieved and resolved he would be more mindful, more mindful though everything was transient and passing – including him, though his work, he hoped, may not be.

Stephen looked at what he had just written, he read it, made some corrections and as he did so, he wondered what lessons could be learnt from his mistakes, for he was still young and wanted – really wanted – to change and, with this, resolved to be more mindful – and through that good things would once again come.

* * * *
Eighty-one –

The next day, a Saturday, Sylvia woke up at seven-thirty and lingered a while in bed: a while longer than she both should have and wanted to, listened to the morning news and the day’s actualities on the radio and thought about things, and then after the sport and weather report she got up and made herself a breakfast of toasted raisin bread and a pot of peppermint tea. Still in her nightgown, she looked at the half finished painting on her easel. It was the image of her dream, a woman standing in the middle of a pond lightly clad. Sylvia decided she would work on it that day and work on it and so she did.

Still living on her own in her small apartment in Gardenvale, Sylvia now had a recurring dream of a house, which was really subterranean, with a large underground pool on its roof just above what was ground level. In this house, whose rooms seemed endless, and which although Sylvia lived alone in, guests always came and went. She was therefore able to explore it at her own leisure with them. Sometimes, late at night, when she woke up after having had this dream, she wondered what it could mean and why she kept having it? As well as, what if any significance it had to her? If so, what?

As she had the woman motif in draft, Sylvia decided to put that aside and that she would work on this new dream and try to paint some of the rooms of the house as they appeared to her in that dream. She did so and through which she thought that with each brushstroke she was learning more and more about herself: something at times both rewarding and difficult.

After she had had some breakfast and put other clothes on, Sylvia painted and was happy with the results, learning a little bit more about both life and herself as she progressed. She painted and painted and was content as she did so.

* * * *
A new day dawning.
Eighty-two —

A new day dawning – Rising early the next morning and alone, his little flat a lot cleaner, a Saturday, tired Stephen made his way to the local newsagent and purchased an Age newspaper. He read My Career closely and found an advertisement for a Stock controller at a bookstore called “Samuels’ Bargain Books”. The advertisement had listed a telephone number, which, after very little deliberation, Stephen decided that he would call at the time it specified.

“Good morning,” Stephen began somewhat self-consciously, “I would like to speak with Mr. Samuels.”

“Mr. Samuels speaking. How may I help?” the voice on the other side asked.


“Yes?”

The owner of the bookstore, a Mr. Albert Samuels, was very impressed that Stephen was a published author, had won a Harvey award as well as having retail bookstore experience and therefore asked if he could start immediately with a one-month probationary period. Back in the work force again, Stephen was relieved more than anything else and was to start at “Samuels’ Bargain Books” on the coming Monday. “Samuels' Bargain Books” was a lifeline; perhaps his last, and thus one Stephen would not let slip away and slip away would he let it not.

Stephen’s bookstore days were not over, a chapter in his life, which he thought was closed, but was not: much to his own disappointment and regret. For three years whilst employed at “McPherson’s Books”, he had put on a brave face, constantly trying to ignore the unavoidable, that he was bored and was jaded by the work, and, although he was disappointed and felt that he deserved better, he did not know a better way to support himself or put food on his table. He had tried, he had given it his best shot, however, he had really wanted to make a career of writing and had all but blown his chance at making this so, by his
arrogance and his pride – by his actions and his omissions to act – something for which he now bore much regret.

When *The DaySleepers* had been published and he had won a Harvey award, it all seemed so easy to Stephen – you write, it gets published, you win an award and you got paid – now here he was back where he had started, clinging to the disparate remnants of yesterday’s life. Stephen, however, had decided he would better himself and be more mindful, which made him feel he could grin and bear whatever came his way and that he would, no matter what it may be.

* * *
Eighty-three –

A new day dawning – Worn out and tired from the exhibition of her work and everything else that was presently going on in her life, she was both pleased and relieved it had been a success and that she had sold some of her work. This as it was, Sylvia applied herself to her painting and her work at the Supply store with a new liveliness and passion. This extended itself to the everyday and overall she was very happy with all the good that was in her life and doing the best she could to dispel some of the bad. Sylvia decided to explore the image of her dream and that, she decided, was what she would work on that weekend.

And as she painted, what was in the rooms became clearer and, before she knew it, she had completed two full canvases and drafted another. Looking at these, Sylvia sought and sought hard for their meaning and that of her dream. She sought hard and thought long about them and at times thought she understood them, at others they seemed completely foreign to her.

The exhibition of her work was over, she was a success and Sylvia thought she was entering a new phase in her life – no longer an apprentice yet not quite a master, now a respected artist, who had exhibited and sold some of her work. Sylvia worked on her series of paintings from the house. Satisfied with the results, she thus resolved to paint the house in full as it presented itself to her in her dream. She did so and worked hard on it and it slowly became clearer.

Sylvia painted this theme until the early afternoon that Saturday working both hard and productively. Finally exhausted, she decided that she needed time to rest, to reflect and to plan her next move: to do which she had given herself the rest of the weekend off – a small bit of serendipity. This so, Sylvia brewed another pot of peppermint tea. She took a seat on her sofa and looked at her work. Sylvia poured herself a cup of tea and let her mind wander. She thought of her exhibition, the build-up, the excitement and the outcome.

Sylvia had long dreamt of doing nothing but painting, living solely as an artist with and for her art and now she had her chance. She was now only working twenty hours a week at the Supply store to help make ends meet and
decided that although she would work hard that would be her leisure as the work was agreeable and made her feel productive, useful and wanted. The rest of the time, she would paint as she now felt confident in her work and that she could make a contribution through her art.

That therefore was what Sylvia resolved to do and to do so in manner, which she had not done before. She would discipline herself, work hard and through which she knew many more good things would come her way. And Sylvia was assured in this approach and firm that it would be the path for her to follow and follow would she.

* * * *
Eighty-four –

The weekend was all but disposed. Stephen had read some more of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, thought about it, wrote a little and not touched the bottle and was feeling a little better in himself. He had formulated a plan for *Stereophrenia*, was going to stick to, fleshed out a few ideas, which he had for it, had even written a character study of Gabriel Bruce and some of the secondary characters and was hoping that it would be a success and that maybe he could turn things around.

He started at “Samuels’ Bargain Books” the next day and so he wanted a good night’s rest. Stephen knew he couldn’t change what had happened, but he could change himself, he knew and he knew he could, which made him feel stronger and that he would try to help himself – no matter how hard he had to try – and to try hard Stephen resolved to do.

Stephen thought about his new book. *Stereophrenia* would be a novel of the sort never undertaken, breaking ground that no other book had. It would be bold, it would be ambitious, it would be different and remain on the Australian psyche for a long, long while a disturbing critique and indictment of the sorry state of today’s world and its implication upon its Artists, both young and old: a long overdue wake up call.

*Stereophrenia*, Stephen hoped, would be both a success and a shock – a warning and a heads up of the first order, which would alarm one and all. Stephen was determined not only to begin, but also complete it. He would write, write and write. He would burn the candle at both ends, work day and night. He would finish it and nothing – nothing – or no one would stop him.

* * * *

In the early morning of that day’s dawn before the sun had even risen, neither awake nor asleep lay Stephen, alone: suspended in a miserable half-world of frustration and defeat. Neither capable of action nor of rest, caught between an irresistible inertia and an inescapable lassitude, he tried to fight the
ennui that weighted his limbs. Summoning all the strength he could, he rolled himself onto his side and looked at his alarm clock: 3:47, its angry, iridescent hands told him it was. In little over four hours, he would have to leave for work.

*These were the moments he hated the most*, thought Stephen, as he lay on his bed; *the fear of thinking no thoughts*. Feeling nothing, not even feeling nothing. Lying there, nowhere: seemingly outside of time, of coming and going, of everything and everything other. The even tick of the clock. The second hand racing head long to oblivion echoed this thought again and again and again.

"What to do at four o'clock in the morning?" wondered Stephen half-loud, as he waited for the percolator to drip and to trickle into action.

* * *
Its cool warning.
Eighty-five –

*Its cool warning* – Who would have thought that all that time Mr. Alvisio Servais the third had been pursuing Sylvia without the involvement of the police? Using only his own resources, connections and wherewithal – albethey somewhat dishonest and nefarious. Tracking her down like Colombo – until finally he had found his woman, something that was not all that difficult given the exposure Sylvia was currently receiving for her work.

One night, Sylvia noticed someone in the hallway of her apartment building as she came home from the Supply store and that someone was Mr. Servais – his gait that of a person, who was injured and ailing, yet still with an air of bravado and audacity.

Against her better judgement and instincts after the attack upon her, Sylvia approached him and said, “What do you want, Al?”

“How long, long time, no see, sweet Sylvia,” he replied, nonchalant.

“I’m no longer one of your girls, Al,” Sylvia said. “I’m a busy person. I have a career and I still haven’t forgotten what you did to me. Can you please tell me what you want?”

“No need to be so harsh, sweet Sylvia. What I want? My money back is what I want.”

Sylvia did not know whether to lie or to tell the truth. Therefore she asked:

“How much?”

“Two five and we’re even, no police, no one needs to know anything.”

“Two thousand five hundred dollars is a lot of money.”

“By the end of the month. Then we’re even or I’ll pay the police a visit.”

“Mmm … okay, I’ll see what I can do.”

And at least given the circumstances and Mr. Servais not wanting to take things further – on the proviso that she return two thousand five hundred of the dollars, which she had taken from him, post haste and that she not tell the police he had tried to attack her – Mr. Servais had decided that he would not press charges or otherwise involve the police due to what he thought was a lack of
evidence and the fear that he may himself be charged for the attack upon her.

His tone that of a threat and one that Sylvia heeded on this occasion. For Sylvia, however, raising the money Mr. Servais wanted was a slight problem – although she had spent little and saved much since the incident at his club there was still the cost of living and other expenses. Thus two and a half thousand dollars was still quite a lot of money for Sylvia and would wipe out all of her savings. Therefore she would have to resign her job at the Supply store and move back to her parents’ house in sunny Lara as she was now unable to keep her apartment – something, which of late had been on her mind – until, at least, she was on her feet again financially.

Free from the spectre of Mr. Servais and an ostensibly free woman once more – and glad Mr. Servais had both survived and let her be –, Sylvia was thus relieved, although now poor, her last dollar all but spent. Sylvia, however, felt that a weight had been taken from her shoulders: one she no longer had to bear.

* * * *

Having given Mr. Servais the last of his money as he had requested and arranged to return to her parents’ house, Sylvia pulled the door to what had been her abode closed. She locked it and pressed her hand against its door one last time. She thought of all of the good that had occurred to her whilst there – and which she would miss having, for the most, having enjoyed living there, having tasted both the good and the bad life had to offer and thus leaving her with little regret or remorse.

Making sure that the door was locked, she picked up her bag and left and she hoped that moving back to her parents’ house would allow her a bit of latitude and let her keep painting and maybe exhibit some more of her work – now she had Will supporting her and in her corner.

* * * *
Back at her parents’ house in Lara, as though nothing had happened and as though nothing had changed – something, which both bemused and bothered Sylvia somewhat and made her feel somewhat lost. A Sunday evening, having shared a meal of roast Lamb complete with baked potatoes and mint sauce with her parents – her first roast meal in a long time –, Sylvia retired to the room that her parents had cleared out for her to work in and walked towards her easel and wondered what she would work on that night. Sylvia was home again.

Sylvia was home again and she had decided beforehand to continue to make something of herself as a painter and working these quiet hours in the dead of night, she could almost hear slowly, slowly the night-shift ending – glad that things had improved for her, for they could not have got much worse.

* * * *
Eighty-six –

Its cool warning – Armed with a pricing-gun, Stephen made his way towards the box of books Mr. Samuels had left for him to put price labels on. Thursday mornings at “Samuels’ Bargain Books” were always a drag – slow and tedious – and, this as it was, Stephen up since five-thirty that morning to write: worn-out, he was too tired and too bored to care. Work; twelve years being prepared for it – the rest of your life spent regretting it. Work; Work and Stephen – Stephen and work. Work and Stephen – Stephen and work was not something, which sat comfortably – and such that it was and was it such at least that was so for him – yet still, however, he made an effort and was glad that he did.

On top of which, the owner, Mr. Albert Samuels – “Call me Bert everyone else does” –, on top of which, Bert was a borderline alcoholic, whose functional capacity after a few drinks was that of a depraved seventeen-year-old schoolboy with a penchant for toilet humour and girly jokes, which sometimes made things difficult for Stephen and especially with him trying to turn his life around. Given, also, that Bert was either half-drunk or the best part of the way there most of the time when he saw him – made Stephen’s life even more difficult.

Work; twelve years being prepared for it – the rest of your life spent regretting it. Work; Work and Stephen – Stephen and work. Work and Stephen – Stephen and work was not something, which sat comfortably – and such that it was and was it such at least that was so for him and he found the work at “Samuels’ Bargain Books” no real improvement on “McPherson’s Books” – although he was relieved to be back in the work force –; even though the wages were slightly higher, the shop a bit more up market and thus the conditions slightly better – on top of which, he now held a little higher position: having two juniors under him. Stephen, however, was resolute to improve and to better himself, thus he did his best to be his best and made an effort at every turn – and such that it was and was it such at least that was so for Stephen.
“Samuels’ Bargain Books” was a job and Stephen had resolved to treat it as such, a job and that he would do everything in his power to keep and to make the most of it and hopefully turn things around.

* * * *

Presently at home after another day of distinguished service at “Samuels’ Bargain Books”, Stephen walked towards his writing desk and wondered what he would work on that night. Presently at home after another day of distinguished service at “Samuels’ Bargain Books”, Stephen walked towards his writing desk and wondered what he would work on that night – all the time unsure, all the time thinking about what had happened to Sylvia and wishing he had made something more of their relationship and disappointed by how he had acted – reflecting upon the time that they had had together fondly and as a reminder of that which he could not keep. A time when he had everything he could not hang on to and a time it would take a lot of effort to make return that he knew, but return he would do his best to ensure that they did and working these late hours, he could almost hear slowly, slowly the night-shift ending – and such that it was and was it such at least that was so for Stephen, with everything and everything other glittering and on the improve, he thought – published, award-winning author and all, and now with a new book deal and an option on the third.

**Time** – Where is time going to? Where is the past disposed? Time, Stephen had always thought, was a god. That was all you got – your time. Time would reveal your weaknesses and fears, your insecurities and apprehensions. Nothing could be hidden in time; in time everything presented itself and in time you were found out. But at moments like this, time seemed foolish, redundant, going nowhere, just going, announcing nothing, heralding nothing, not even itself to itself: just going.
THE END.

* * * *
ENDNOTES:


(2) Bulfinch, T., 1993. Ibid.: 469.

[From: “The Ballad of Reading Gaol”].


[From: “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”].

[From: “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”].


[From: “The Hollow Men”].

[From: “The Hollow Men”].

[From: “The Hollow Men”].

[From: “The Hollow Men”].


[From: “Une Saison en Enfer”] / [From: “A Season in Hell”].

* * * *
3. EXEGESIS OF PhD ARTEFACT.

A REFLECTION ON PRAXIS: ONE WRITER’S JOURNEY FROM PRACTICE TO PRAXIS.
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exegesis – n., pl. – ses. – critical explanation or interpretation […] [NL, from Gk: explanation].

The Compact Macquarie Dictionary.

There were weeks when I spoke to no one in the great house. I sat and read and tried to write and waited for a clear sign of what I could only call the invisible event that was bound to involve me.

Gerald Murnane, The Plains.

Writing; Writing and Stephen – Stephen and Writing; Writing for Stephen was both pleasure and pain, panacea and poison, voice to his feelings and frustration and an obstacle for their expression. This as it was, he fared forward – all the time persevering with the hope of finding some kind of resolution – all the time persevering – all the time seeking for the right words.

INTRODUCTION.

The exegesis of an extended creative literary work can come in many forms and take many shapes. There is no one right exegesis for such works nor can there ever be such a thing for reasons too numerous to mention here. An exegesis can address a research question; it can also elucidate a concept.

The purpose of this exegesis is to present my own ‘critical explanation or interpretation’ (Delbridge & Bernard, 1994: 327) of my doctoral artefact, a novel that has been titled ‘The Night-shift Ending’. Therefore, I shall endeavour to offer some insight into that novel insofar as that is possible. I will also report and comment upon my artefact’s progress, my own idiosyncratic and particular writing method and the praxis both discovered and employed in the production of it as well as the lessons learnt from this combined PhD project – the outcomes of which I seek to embrace as a component of my newly found artistic process.

In this piece, I will also discuss my own reflections qua practitioner and proto-researcher upon the production of this exegesis itself and from that the nature of the exegetical activity and the role of the reflective, self-critical exegete in light of the lessons learnt from that as well. For, their significance for me as an author and for my newly found artistic process, were all part of the contribution to knowledge and in turn to culture that I sought to make with this combined PhD project.

From the outset, I would like to let it be known that, given the personal nature of this exegesis and my own eclectic artist and academic background that can best be said to be a very postmodern amalgam informed by intellectual pique and tempered by financial reality, as well as that which I have learnt about the actual character of the exegetical activity itself, in the beginning, I was not comfortable with the writing and the production of this piece. That was insofar as such an exegesis had been something that had hitherto been foreign to me and so outside of what I know to be my own familiar and customary writerly comfort zone and pre-existent writerly skill-set. Therefore, this unease and the question of theory will be some of the central themes of this exegesis, for as Harald Fawkner states discussing his correspondence with Australian author, Gerald Murnane,
arguing that he, Fawkner, did so ‘without ever believing that a writer can or should say anything significant about his or her own work’ (2006: 9). Or alternatively, as the Franco-Czech novelist and critic Milan Kundera ruminated: ‘[t]he world of theories is not my world. These are simply the reflections of a practitioner’\(^2\) (Kundera, 2000b: preface) and such reflections follow.

The discussion of, and scholarly commentary upon, the creation of an extended and finished piece of ‘literary fiction’\(^3\) chronicles a very special type of writing journey for me. This journey began as an investigation into the evolution of the cycle of the tragic hero found in the mythologies and the literature of the ancient world as it is made manifest in the Jungian compilation *Man and His Symbols* including Dr. Joseph L. Henderson’s (1978) contribution. Indeed Dr. Henderson’s essay, ‘Ancient Myths and Modern Man’, not only inspired me to write ‘The Night-shift Ending’, but it also in fact provided a solid base for that novel’s narrative. That was done by placing the myth of Hercules and the cycle of the tragic hero in modern times and more particularly in the contemporary Australian art world and its culture industry. In so doing, I sought to show how the tragic hero would be played out and therefore unfold in that which I perceived to be that aforesaid art world of today.

It is thus hoped that, through a scholarly and critical discussion of ‘The Night-shift Ending’, light will be shed onto the development of my own idiosyncratic and particular writing praxis and, through those two activities, an understanding of the somewhat nebulous and ill-defined properties of that process will be found, for this process is in itself an *ipso facto* contribution to both

\(^2\)This is a rather spurious claim on Kundera’s part insofar as, to the present date, in his career he himself has published some four non-fiction works dealing with such matters; namely, *Testaments Betrayed* (1996), *The Art of the Novel* (2000b), *The Curtain* (2005) and *Encounter* (2010).

\(^3\)For the purposes of this exegesis, ‘literary fiction’ shall be defined as fiction ‘written with a unique and beautiful style [that] is more intellectually demanding than general fiction’ (Ingermanson & Economy, 2010: 48).
To study writing is not a simple task. On the one hand, it is hard to draw generalizations about such a complex, non-linear process; on the other, direct observations have been troublesome as writing is very much a mental process and it is often a long-term, time-consuming activity (Rossitto, 2004: 5).

Writing about writing, including my own writing and the understanding and the development of both the depths and the heights of my ‘writerly’ or ‘scriptible’ self (Culler, 2002: 22) as an aspiring author of literary fiction, as my work has been characterised by an assessor (Anon., 2005), presents many challenges. One can presume from the term the writerly self (Culler, 2002: 22) that the development of one’s esteem or understanding of oneself as a writer is implicit in that term and so that will be taken to be inherent in its definition throughout this piece. An enthusiastic creative writing aspirant who seeks to turn professional, it could be said to be fundamental that, at this stage of my relatively brief writing journey, I begin to understand and to comprehend what exactly my own writing praxis is and to develop the belief that I am an author in order to improve and to embrace the outcomes of this dissertation as a component of my newly found artistic process as best as I possibly can. To what end do I put pen to paper and what does it take to do so effectively? And do I, or, rather should I, consider these things as I write? If so, how?

In light of these questions, I will reflect upon the creation of an extended piece of ‘literary fiction’, namely ‘The Night-shift Ending’. I shall also discuss the lessons learnt from its production. Furthermore, I will comment upon the nature of the exegetical activity, the role of the reflective, self-critical exegete in relation to that activity and, as a result of all that, the transcendent qualities of the artistic endeavour if not to go beyond then to augment both the artist’s and their audience’s everyday existence. That is to say, I will scrutinise the Romantic problematic of art that establish the very politics that come to foreclose it. Hence, I suggest introspection, which itself involves the practice of a writing that is imbued by the lessons of philosophy and, to a lesser extent, literary theory, as
one possible solution.

Those two related projects – that novel and this accompanying exegesis – whose natures were unique and that I was working on concurrently from the beginning and throughout the duration of my PhD candidacy, have both had a rather long gestation. As such, they are therefore worthy of attention in relation to a scholarly discussion about the understanding and the development of my own writing praxis as well as how I came to embrace the outcomes of that as a facet of my newly found artistic process.

This exegesis, therefore, is divided into three main chapters. The first chapter will deal with some of ‘The Night-shift Ending’s’ themes and the issues it endeavours to resolve. Chapter two will interrogate the writing method both discovered and employed in the production of my artefact; whereas the third and final chapter, which is in two parts for the ease of the reader, discusses the thinkers and theorists who explicitly nourished it and so contributed to developing my writing praxis. All of this aims to illustrate the lengths one must go to in order to achieve excellence in one’s work to become an author rather than just another writer. This exegesis can thus be read either from beginning to end. Alternatively, the reader may pick individual chapters that they wish to read in any order, but should read my artefact first before doing that.
ELUCIDATION: AN EXPLORATION OF THE THEMES AND THE CHARACTERS IN ‘THE NIGHT-SHIFT ENDING’ AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE AS WELL AS TO CULTURE.

This chapter will briefly explore the key motifs of ‘The Night-shift Ending’. Therefore, it shall incorporate a discussion of some of its themes, focussing on the construction of my novel’s two main characters. This will also include a discussion of the contribution to knowledge as well as to culture that I intended to make with this combined PhD project.

As shall become apparent, ‘The Night-shift Ending’ is, in the words of literary historian Maurice Beebe, an atypical ‘Artist as hero’ piece (1964: v). It follows the early careers of two artists as they attempt to establish themselves in the city of Melbourne and, in the story that unfolds, neither of these characters prove themselves to be heroes as such. Through the writing of that novel, the philosophical question of the meaning of existence in light of the passage of time and the inevitability of death as well as the role and the play of opposites in one’s being was also considered. Those and other problems shall be addressed specifically in this chapter and a brief study of my artefact’s two main characters will be provided.

Writing never explains anything for me – it only shows me how stupendously complicated everything is.
But why do I write what I write?
Why do I write sentences? Why does anyone write sentences? What are sentences?
… What are words themselves?
… If I pretended I could answer any of these questions, I’d be a fool.

In his ‘autobiography’, *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche – other than declaring himself to be a Destiny [sic] and expounding to his readers why he is so wise – explained why, in his own opinion, he wrote such good books (1992: no page numbers). Although I will not attempt to make such a claim about ‘The Night-shift Ending’ in this exegesis, I shall, however, try to offer something of my own unique writing praxis and rather distinct experience with the intent that others too may learn from the lessons that I myself was taught from that undertaking. But, I will not exceed the parameters of this objective, for I concur with Murnane that if one pretended that one could do so one would be a fool (2005a: 29).

This as it is, themes are central to both the fabric and architecture of any creative literary work; therefore, I will now concisely elaborate upon that which I, as the author of ‘The Night-shift Ending’, believe to be its central themes. These shall include, but will not be limited to the following points; a metaphorical ‘Hero’s journey’ and how ‘The Night-shift Ending’ differs from the typical ‘Artist as hero’ piece (Beebe, 1964: v); the use of archetypes in my own writing method or archetypal charaterisation; the implications of the passage of time in my artefact for both the characters of Stephen Murray and Sylvia Thomas; the philosophy of Existentialism or, if you will, that of modern-day ennui and its counterpoint; and success and the contemporary Australian art world and its ‘culture’ industry. And so, I will now briefly explore these individually.

Drawing upon my own knowledge of the mythologies and the literature of the ancient world – specifically Greco-Roman, for I was reading Bulfinch (1993) when planning to write my artefact –, ‘The Night-shift Ending’ follows the early careers of two characters who are both artists, Stephen Murray, a struggling writer, and Sylvia Thomas, a struggling painter. My artefact documents their trials and ordeals as they attempt to establish themselves as self-sufficient and successful artists in the city of Melbourne. I chose to represent Melbourne for it is one of the locales with which I am most familiar. In so doing, I was thus able to set my work
realistically in that city and thereby to assist my audience to suspend their disbelief⁴ (Coleridge, 2004).

What begins as a kind of hero’s journey for both the main characters, one of the central protagonists, Stephen Murray, is presented with the paths of both ‘Virtue’ and ‘Vice’. Craving the success that he feels due to him, however, he chooses the path of ‘Vice’. Realising too late the charms of Sylvia Thomas, who also acts as ‘Virtue’ and who goes on to become a success of sorts, Stephen Murray is thwarted and is forced to pick up the disparate threads and to struggle with the demons of his old life alone. In contradistinction, despite her early success, Sylvia Thomas is forced to deal with her past mistakes and to resolve some issues with which she initially thought were too great for her to cope.

True to the challenging nature of modern-day life, however, there is no resolution in ‘The Night-shift Ending’ for either character. Rather, that story ends in dissolution for both Stephen Murray and Sylvia Thomas – the reasons for which shall become evident. Nevertheless, there is the hope that these two characters’ lots may improve in time from their hard learnt, life taught lessons and that the redemption they both seek and require may be available to them through introspection. That can be achieved, I demonstrate in my artefact, namely by looking honestly inward and appraising one's situation both candidly as well as objectively to the best of one’s ability. And, therefore, understanding both oneself – including one’s strengths and, of course, one’s weaknesses – as well as one’s respective situations and circumstances better and, I will assert, in so doing one can thus live somewhat more consciously or self reflectively. In contrast, however, initially both Stephen Murray and Sylvia Thomas neglect to acknowledge this conscious aspect of the Jungian ‘Self’ and their lack of introspection means that they are unable to see their circumstances come full circle.

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⁴The novelist and teacher of creative writing, John Gardner, Jr. identifies that Samuel Taylor Coleridge coined this term, when he wrote in what Gardner avers is one of ‘the most clumsy famous sentences in all literature’ (1991: 22): ‘the willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith’ (Coleridge, n. d. cited in Gardner, 1991: 22).
‘The Night-shift Ending’ is thus that which literary historian Maurice Beebe would have identified as being an atypical ‘Artist as hero’ piece (1964: v). It differs from the typical ‘Artist as hero’ novel (Beebe, 1964: v) for, in terms of their conduct, neither of the central characters can be described or characterised as being heroes as such. This is because neither of them are distinguished or admired for their noble qualities (Delbridge & Bernard, 1994: 449), for both the personages of Stephen Murray or Sylvia Thomas simply do not embody these characteristics in my artefact as is made obvious for the reader.

Therefore, whilst writing that novel and researching this exegesis, I also studied and considered the work of Beebe, specifically his *Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts* (Beebe, 1964). That was done in order to come to an understanding of my own writing praxis, both in an existential sense, as I wrote, as well as my condition as an author during the journey of the creation of my artefact, and in a narrative sense, in what I actually wrote in that artefact. And so, I will now digress and explore Beebe’s work in a little more detail and discuss it in relation to my own understanding of the nature of practice-led research\(^5\) and that which Beebe’s work contributed to the understanding of my own writing praxis.

In my opinion, Beebe offers one of the more articulate responses to the artist’s problem *qua* author of literary fiction and exegete as well as researcher when he states:

> Once we become aware of the life negating aspect of the artist’s *persona*, we are no longer free to interpret fiction as if it were written by ‘one of us’. There is, I think, a fundamental difference between the creative and the critical minds. The good critic, particularly if he is a teacher-critic, is less interested in expressing himself than in understanding someone else, and the acts of teaching and explaining a work of literature imply a certain degree of social responsibility. The archetypal artist, on the other hand, is an anarchist: he seeks not only to express his individuality, but also to free himself from the obligations which would entrap him. (1964: 307 Italics in the

\(^5\)For the purposes of this exegesis, my definition of the term ‘practice-led research’ will begin with, but not be limited to Perry’s (2013) definition that it is ‘research that is carried out in the process of producing the creative work itself’ (Perry, 2013: 157).
Hence writes Beebe on the ‘archetypal artist’s’ or, rather, in this instance, the writer of fiction’s *persona*\(^6\), identifying that this *persona* possesses a life negating aspect as well as highlighting the artist’s anarchist soul: even as distressing as his words may be for me, an aspiring, as-yet-unpublished author and early career researcher as will become clear presently. This is especially so given that which I have learnt from the conduct of this project about the nature of practice-led research from the production of this exegesis, the character of the exegetical activity itself and, in turn, the role of the reflective, self-critical exegete as well as the endeavour upon which this piece provides a scholarly and critical commentary. However, Beebe’s statement is something that I must come to terms with if I am to continue and to succeed both as a writer as well as a proto-researcher. Moreover, given the candour of his words, their message and my own said situation, I may like to think that Beebe is just waning lyrical, but I sincerely doubt that he was. Nevertheless, I believe that one must heed the words of Beebe on the roles of both the ‘teacher-critic’ and the ‘archetypal artist’ as well as accentuate the positives implicit in them and to try to find some hope in them both as an artist and a researcher in the contemporary *milieu*.

Being mindful of these and other considerations, I think that the words of Beebe are important to this combined PhD project itself if only for the manner in which he champions the artist’s plight in the modern world, for, as he writes further in the final paragraph of his *Ivory Towers and Sacred Founts*:

> Our own religious and social views must ultimately determine our attitude toward the private universes of modern art, but for many men there may be a lesson in the example set by the artist. Just as every artist is a man, every man is to some extent an artist, a maker of things, and the alienation of the artist is not unlike that of many men in a world where the center does not hold and where even the crowd is a lonely

\(^6\)To assist the reader to understand what Beebe is here saying, *persona* will be defined as being, after Jung, ‘the outer or public personality, which is presented to the world and does not represent the inner personality of the individual’ (Delbridge & Bernard, 1994: 728).
one. To try to create something out of chaos, if only by cultivating our gardens, is to heed the lesson of the artist. (1964: 313)

However, as Beebe concludes, ‘to offer such a moral is to move beyond the province of the literary historian’ (1964: 313) that he in fact is.

The dichotomy that Beebe here establishes between the jurisdiction of the literary historian and critic and, in turn, that of the artist – making something out of chaos, which both, in a certain sense, are attempting to do through their respective endeavours as separate as those two activities may seem to us at first – is thus important. This is even though that it may be distressing for me given my aforesaid situation, but as Beebe here states we must all ‘heed the lesson of the artist’ (1964: 313) in order to vindicate others’ and, in turn, one’s own undertakings and once again I, qua author, must try to find some hope in his words in the contemporary situation in which I am producing my work.

Works that Beebe would have characterised as previous ‘Artist as hero’ pieces in literature (Beebe, 1964: v) – for example, Auster (1992) in *Leviathan*, Coetzee (2002) in *Youth*, Gissing (1996) in *New Grub Street*, Hesse (1965; 1995) in his *Steppenwolf* and *Demian*, Hosseini (2005) in *The Kite Runner*, Joyce (1992) in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Orwell (1989) in *Keep the Aspidistra Flying*, Sartre (1965) in *Nausea*, White (1973) in *The Vivisector* and Wolfe (1971; 2006) in *Look Homeward, Angel* and *Of Time and the River* to name but a few – despite the differences in their respective aesthetics typically place the artist outside and rebelliously challenging the mainstream or status quo due to either their nature or disposition and the situations and the conditions in which they may find themselves. However, to provide a brief summary, the artists in these works either return to the established order for reasons beyond their control or due to their newly found responsibilities as George Orwell’s Gordon Comstock does (Orwell, 1989) or they continue down the path of their rebellion without affirming a higher purpose to their existence other than their art as James Joyce has his thinly veiled alter ego Stephen Daedalus do (Joyce, 1992). This, therefore, can be said to be an example of disinterested self-interest to the
detriment of others, of which Patrick White’s character Hurtle Duffield in *The Vivisector* (1973) can, I think, be characterised as being a prime example. That is because he is blind to the consequences of his actions upon others; hence the title of the book in which Duffield quite literally cuts people open and thereby exposes their weaknesses and manipulates them to his own advantage.

Whereas, in ‘The Night-shift Ending’, I aim to illustrate that a higher resolution can be found by following one’s own inner light and by seeking deliverance from the consequences, both actual and psychological, of one’s poor prior actions – through introspection. Although this is by no means a unique or new perspective, it is one that has tended to be disregarded in our contemporary extroverted and materialistic society wherein meaning is largely sought through one’s station in life or one’s possessions rather than by a person’s degree of consciousness or awareness to their own and the broader situation of which they are part. And this becomes something that both Stephen Murray and Sylvia Thomas learn to accept as well as to appreciate toward the end of my artefact.

Whilst writing ‘The Night-shift Ending’, I was also interested in the use of archetypes in my own writing method or, if you will, archetypal characterisation. An archetype, of which there are many in the work of Jung, can be defined as being either ‘a model or first form’ or, alternatively, as ‘the original pattern or model after which a thing is made’ (Delbridge & Bernard, 1994: 43). In my artefact, archetypes or rather their imitation or *mimesis* play an important role in both its fabric and its narrative. For example, this is shown when I play the journeys and the ordeals of Stephen Murray and Sylvia Thomas off against each other. As shall be elaborated upon presently, this play of ‘opposites’ between the two characters of both Stephen Murray and Sylvia Thomas – their ‘anima’ and ‘animus’ respectively⁷ (Jung, 1989: 391) is quintessential to the architecture of that novel. An example of this is found in Stephen Murray’s feminine

⁷In his autobiographical work, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, Jung identifies the man’s ‘anima’ and the woman’s ‘animus’ to be the ‘[p]ersonification of the feminine nature of a man’s unconscious and the masculine of a woman’s’ (Jung, 1989: 391).
characteristics when they are revealed in his creativity as evidenced in his writing and Sylvia Thomas’s masculine is discovered in that which she unfortunately has to draw upon just to survive and this thus becomes a fundamental theme of ‘The Night-shift Ending’ in which they are both forced to deal with that in their day-to-day life as well as when they act as a counterpoint to one another. It, therefore, was my intent to address the question of the role of opposites in all of our beings and how we cope with that qua human beings given our collective circumstance.

To assist me further in that process, to lay the foundation of this facet of my work and to help me to come to understand my characters better, I created detailed character studies of ‘The Night-shift Ending’s’ two main characters: Stephen Murray and Sylvia Thomas in light of the work of Jung on the archetypes of the collective unconscious inter alia. Those character studies enabled me to think about who and what those characters were. This in turn formed the basis for and provided a deeper understanding of my work. This is insofar as successful and effective characterisation is important in the writing of any creative piece of work (Conrad, 1990), for, I shall here argue that, this is critical to one’s writing method.

Central also to ‘The Night-shift Ending’ are the implications of the passage of time for both the characters of Stephen Murray and Sylvia Thomas. Western thought since the early pre-Socratic Greeks has long sought to address the question of the meaning of human life in the face of the unavoidably ephemeral passage of time and the inevitability of death in many contrasting ways (Barnes, 1987; Sedley, 2003; Stokes, 2007).

In ‘The Night-shift Ending’ this is a fundamental question – indeed it can even be said to be of its core. Over the ages volumes have been written about the nature of time and what, exactly, it is or is not and I shall not attempt to add to them with my own pithy speculations. However, in my artefact time and the consequences of its passage are pivotal to that piece’s narrative. For example, as is shown in how that novel indeed both begins and concludes:
Time – Where is time going to? Where is the past disposed? Time, Stephen had always thought, was a god. That was all you got – your time. Time would reveal your weaknesses and fears, your insecurities and apprehensions. Nothing could be hidden in time; in time everything presented itself and in time you were found out. But at moments like this, time seemed foolish, redundant, going nowhere, just going, announcing nothing, heralding nothing, not even itself to itself: just going (Bos, n. d.: 22 & 280).

In ‘The Night-shift Ending’, on the occasions that both Stephen Murray and Sylvia Thomas appear to be prevailing against that which may threaten their respective paths to success, unfortunately they both are undone by time. Time and its relentless passage, therefore, becomes a factor that works against both the central characters in my novel. As such, time, both narrative and existential, is an uneasy catalyst in ‘The Night-shift Ending’ and so it will be covered in greater detail in chapter three when I discuss that which the work of Paul Ricoeur inculcated to my own praxis.

Only in dying can I to some extent say absolutely, ‘I am’.

– Martin Heidegger (Cited in Guignon, 2006: 222).

As presently discussed, the consequences of the relentless passage of everyday existential time are a primary theme in my artefact. And so, it is addressed from two opposing perspectives – on the one hand, that of extroverted materialism and, on the other, that of spirituality drawn from the work of Jung, his followers and interpreters on analytical and depth psychology⁸ (for example, as it is found in Jung, 1989). That was done in the anticipation that some kind of resolution between the two could be found. Furthermore, as was my intent from the outset, ‘The Night-shift Ending’ can also be characterised as being supplementary to, as well as acting as a critique upon, the existentialism of the German philosopher,

⁸For the purposes of this exegesis, this will be taken to be a ‘psychological system that assumes that explanations of behaviour are to be found at the level of the unconscious’ (Reber et al. Eds., 2009: 206).
Martin Heidegger (2008a; 2008b). My artefact also aims to engage the divergent thought of the pioneering French existential philosophers and writers Albert Camus (2000a; 2000b; 2004) and Jean-Paul Sartre (1965; 1969). All of which was undertaken in a manner to be touched upon presently.

In 'The Night-shift Ending', Stephen Murray initially seeks to give meaning to his existence and to gain redemption from his demons through his writing. When he becomes successful, however, he quite abruptly loses sight of the object of his desire. In so doing, he fails to affirm himself in light of his rapid rise to prominence as a published and award-winning author. This is insofar as his success *qua* writer proves not to be all that he thought it would be. As I write:

> Betwixt and between a bittersweet melancholy and an unavoidable malaise, Stephen was lost, that he knew. He was confused and scared of sinking even deeper, that he also knew – all the time wishing that his footsteps were firm and that he could write once more with confidence and a sure pen. *How could he fill the void, which he felt in his life, not even knowing what it was?* Yet a void there was; and one, which Stephen felt and knew would only get worse in time. His wound growing ever deeper, never healing, he sensed … (Bos, n. d.: 242).

*Qua* archetypal antihero, Stephen Murray is flawed. And so his personage in 'The Night-shift Ending' highlights what can go wrong when one becomes both complacent to one’s circumstances as well as too proud of one’s achievements and their resultant material gains. Indeed, in my artefact, Stephen Murray loses sight of what is personally important for him and, in turn, that which may offer him some degree of deliverance from both that which he has done and that which he finds objectionable as in fact having actually done.

On the contrary, Sylvia Thomas, who also acts as a counterpoint to Stephen Murray, transcends her situation and the difficulties in which she finds herself by taking a simple, introspective and inward turn, for, as is illustrated in the following excerpt:

> At the time and when she reflected upon it, Sylvia thought her experiences would have made her harder, more wizened. The opposite was true, however, they had
made her want more out of life and she felt somewhat lighter, but at the same time more resilient and that she could now get what she wanted out of life, which she intended to do. All of which made her wonder: *How she could keep things continuing in their current pleasant manner?* For Sylvia had long wanted to succeed as an artist and succeed she felt that she could after the success of her exhibition and all the positive feedback, which she had received for her work … (Bos, n. d.: 244).

Through introspection, self-discipline and by confronting both her problems as well as the darker side of her nature – that is, in Jungian terminology, her ‘shadow’, namely, that which she finds difficult to accept as part of her ‘Self’ (Jung, 1989: 398 – 399) – Sylvia Thomas takes the first step on a long journey. Furthermore, by seeking some kind of resolution of these unacknowledged parts, she thus attains a higher degree of understanding of both herself and her situation when compared to the character of Stephen Murray. In so doing, she moves closer to liberating herself from that which may threaten or undermine her. However, she is still only relatively quite young – twenty-one years of age going on twenty-two – and although she does come a long way, she falls short due to the consequences of her past actions.

Whether either of these two characters takes the right path or not is uncertain and it is a question that we all must reckon with at some point or points in our lives. In light of this, the question of the meaning of one’s existence and its implications for one’s art and one’s approach to it is one of prime importance in my artefact. Therefore, in contradistinction to my own understanding of the philosophy of existentialism and the resultant modern-day condition of ennui or meaninglessness, I posit a Jungian perspective as one answer to that question. This is insofar as I maintain, after Jung (1933), that we all must embrace some sort of spiritual or religious experience, which in turn assists us to deal with the problems that both life as well as our respective situations pose us.

As Metzger asks: ‘How is it possible to speak about religious experiences?’ (Metzger, 2000: 79) It is a truism to say that varieties of spiritual or religious experience differ. However, as already touched upon, in ‘The Night-shift Ending’, we see Sylvia Thomas take a simple, introspective path and she looks
inward to cope with her situation and that which it places upon her. For, as I write:

Sylvia had long dreamt of doing nothing but painting, living solely as an artist with
and for her art and now she had her chance. She was now only working twenty
hours a week at the Supply store to help make ends meet and decided that although
she would work hard that would be her leisure as the work was agreeable and made
her feel productive, useful and wanted. The rest of the time, she would paint as she
now felt confident in her work and that she could make a contribution through her art
… That therefore was what Sylvia resolved to do and to do so in manner, which she
had not done before. She would discipline herself, work hard and through which she
knew many more good things would come her way. And Sylvia was assured in this
approach and firm that it would be the path for her to follow and follow would she.
(Bos, n. d.: 271 – 272)

As this excerpt demonstrates, to cope with her circumstances, Sylvia Thomas
turns inward and, in that manner, she finds some degree of deliverance from that
which Jung would have characterised as being her ‘shadow’ (Jung, 1989: 398 –
399). Yet, she is equally limited by her youth, and so her inexperience, as well as
her previous actions from complete absolution from her past or, if you will,
comprehensive enlightenment or holistic understanding of her actual situation.
Nevertheless, introspection as a means to progress in one’s personal and
spiritual development is one of the key leitmotifs of ‘The Night-shift Ending’. This
is insofar as I maintain that introspection is a fundamental facet of personal and,
therefore, spiritual growth.

Towards the end of my artefact, Stephen Murray also follows a similar
path and he too becomes somewhat more reflective as well as conscious and
acutely aware of his own shortcomings. And we see him attempting to affirm
himself once again through his writing, which he in turn hopes will outlive him,
and, through which, he will transcend his ordinary situation and everyday life as
well as overcome some of the demons which that once presented him; as I
convey:
When he had worked at “McPherson’s Books”, Stephen had prided himself on his meticulous dress and the care he took in his presentation and it was these things and their like that Stephen decided he would once more take a little more time to enjoy: things like polished shoes, pressed shirts and so forth. Care, Stephen intended to take, even though and because everything was fleeting and transient. He would find pleasure in this, accept it for what it was and hoped that, through this, once more, that he would enjoy writing. (Bos, n. d.: 258)

Stephen Murray can thus be said to be both aware of and acknowledge the finite and limited nature of his existence, which is a central tenet in the work of Heidegger (2008a; 2008b), but, at the same time, he hopes that he can transcend this through his labour as a writer and thus give his life meaning in a manner that he so chooses, which is a primary message of the admittedly dissimilar work of both Camus (2000a; 2000b) and Sartre (1969)⁹. In this regard, he is free not only to choose his own destiny, but he is also able to become an active agent in the realisation of that through his own actions and / or his own decisions to act and thus transcend his past ‘Self’ and, therefore, his situation’s incipient ennui or world-weariness as well as its attendant boredom.

Deliverance comes in many forms as well as in a variety of guises and as Joseph Campbell reminds us ‘[e]veryone must come out of [their] [e]xile in [their] own way’ (1993: 91) and deal with the darker side of their being if they are to be whole and to begin on their path on the long journey to ‘individuation’: that is to say, to becoming a complete and functional ‘in-dividual’ (Jung, 1989: 395). Whether one finds this through introspection, by pronouncing one’s belief in a higher power or by whatever means one so chooses is up to the individual to discover for him- or herself. However, in ‘The Night-shift Ending’, both Stephen Murray and Sylvia Thomas must make amends for the consequences of their own actions or their omissions to act as well as deal with the darker sides of their respective natures. Therefore, I maintain in my artefact that introspection is one of the keys to their progress and, although this may not lead immediately to that,

⁹Whilst I acknowledge both the similarities and the differences of the thought of these thinkers, philosophical considerations are beyond the scope of the present discussion.
it is the first step on the path to lead them there and perhaps if we all become somewhat more conscious of both ourselves as well as our situations we may begin our way out of our own exile and find a deeper meaning to our existence qua human beings in order to discover as well as to experience some of the magic that is part of our everyday life.

Although this is not exactly a unique or new perspective, it is intended that this may offer something to ‘The Night-shift Ending’s’ audience from which they may both take as well as learn from that novel and is, thus, part of the contribution to knowledge and to culture, which I seek to make with my artefact. In so doing, I hope that I have not only reinvigorated the ‘Artist as hero’ genre (Beebe, 1964: v), but that, through the writing of my artefact, I have entered into a debate whose subject is perennial and perhaps beyond our current level of understanding and consciousness except for a few enlightened individuals.

Whether that is so or not, success and the Australian art world as well as its culture industry were two other themes I sought to investigate and equally to deconstruct in ‘The Night-shift Ending’. This is as both Stephen Murray and Sylvia Thomas succeed as artists to a certain extent, for Stephen Murray sees his first novel published with many incumbent material rewards and Sylvia Thomas exhibits and sells some six of her paintings. In so doing, this allowed me to explore and to voice various opinions and concerns that I had about the state of the contemporary Australian art world in my artefact. And, by surveying and examining that art world in that manner, it was my further intent that some insights would be provided to people, who were not familiar with it: thus, offering my audience an interesting glimpse into the goings-on of that world. It was that glimpse, which I saw as one of the reasons that inspired me to undertake that project. And so, this was part of the contribution to knowledge as well as to culture I sought to make with ‘The Night-shift Ending’. Moreover, as stated previously, positioning my work to show that artists, though he or she may be habitually portrayed by previous authors both in literature and in popular culture
as outsiders to the mainstream, challenging the status quo\textsuperscript{10}, they are not always heroes. Indeed, as I demonstrate in ‘The Night-shift Ending’, sometimes artists are anything but heroes. My novel also illustrates that love does not always conquer all, for it chronicles what turns out to be a bittersweet romance that borders on a love triangle as part of its narrative.

Part of ‘The Night-shift Ending’s’ subtext, therefore, is the dialogue of the two main characters’ interaction with and journey through that which I perceived to be the larger Australian art world as well as its culture industry. It is through those said interactions with that world that these two characters are fleshed out and given their detail. This includes both their strengths and, of course, their weaknesses. That reflection upon the Australian art world and its culture industry is an additional attempt to present something new to my audience. It was also my aim that this would provide a realistic backdrop to ‘The Night-shift Ending’s’ two main characters’ journeys through that world \textit{qua} artists as they both attempt to place and to understand themselves within it. For example, as Stephen Murray ruminates after being given a rude introduction to the workings of the new world of publishing of which he has just become part:

Stephen, however, was still astounded by what he had just heard about Dian, Mr. Hooper and “Forrest and Hooper” and thought about how innocent and \textit{naive} he truly was, but hoped, for his own sake and survival, that he could retain this. However, at this very moment, he was at a loss precisely as to how. (Bos, n. d.: 137)

As is suggested in this excerpt, Stephen Murray has the foreboding that all is not quite right in the world that he has just entered. However, he is unable to precisely identify what in fact this is and through that and other inherent flaws in his nature, namely, his \textit{naiveté}, his narcissism and his heavy drinking, he is thus unable to rise above those said pitfalls. Sylvia Thomas, on the other hand, deals

with her own success as a painter in a much more practical manner and is thus able to enjoy it a little more than him.

I sought to convey all those messages and many more in ‘The Night-shift Ending’ and thereby to make a contribution through my work: that was achieved primarily through diligent study and hard work. What is more, I found that this was much easier once I had a full first draft of my novel completed. That, in turn, allowed me to refine and to develop both that tale’s narrative as well as to give its detail and content life by introducing a greater level of description and realism. In so doing, this enabled me to have a better understanding and concept of the project at hand. I then sought to polish my artefact by constantly extending that which I previously knew as well as understood myself to be *qua* author. That was also achieved by selectively consulting as many books on the craft of writing relevant to my work that I could.

In this respect, the following question arises; what am I as an author trying to achieve through all this and through my efforts? One answer, which has already been touched upon and shall be discussed throughout this exegesis, is to attain a ‘willing suspension of disbelief’ from one’s audience as defined by poet, Samuel Taylor Coleridge (2004). In order for that to occur, I believe that both successful and effective characterisation as well as a great deal of persistence, are fundamental for a writer to attain that state from their audience. Further, drawing one’s audience into that which one has created by rendering one’s characters and, of course, other facets of one’s work so flawlessly that they actually become real for the reader is paramount. In this state, the reader, thereby, is not only willing to accept, but indeed to enter into the world that is presented to them on the written page. Despite the fact I strove hard to realise that as I wrote ‘The Night-shift Ending’, it was nonetheless difficult for me to gauge my readers’ response to my work, especially as it is unpublished. I found that, through determination, however, I made some inroads into this judging by the encouraging feedback that I received for later drafts of my artefact from those who read it.
This therefore brings us to a discussion of the writing method both discovered as well as employed in the production of my artefact.
METHODODOLOGY: THE PRESENT AUTHOR’S ENCOUNTER WITH PRAXIS AND HOW IT WAS EMBRACED AS MY NEWLY FOUND ARTISTIC PROCESS.

The following chapter will reflect upon the present Author’s own idiosyncratic and particular writing praxis: how I encountered it whilst producing my artefact and how I in fact endeavoured to embrace that praxis as a component of my newly found artistic process. Thus, it will explore and provide a brief commentary upon the writing method both discovered and employed in the production of ‘The Night-shift Ending’ as well as discuss the implications and the significance of my findings for my own writing practice.

Progress!! thought Stephen as he wrote. Feeling that everything was in place, Stephen knew that, despite his other misgivings, he was in the mood to write, and, what is more, to write well, to find a bad phrase, to pick a bad sentence, and to write many good ones and thus he continued with renewed zest and gusto.


What is a writer? A writer is a seer, a prophet, an alchemist, creating wisdom where none existed before. The writer is an entertainer, but hopefully not a court jester. The writer is a bringer of order out of chaos. And the writer is a creator of new religions, new government, new mentalities, new cultures and social patterns. … A writer is a warrior fighting to possess human minds and a composer attempting to capture the music of life for a tone deaf world [sic]. The writer is a poet, trying to compress the complexity and confusion of a spent life into exit lines that scan and perhaps even rhyme. (Stone, 1987 cited in Conrad, 1990: 303 – 304)

The above extract from Irving Stone in his keynote address to the Santa Barbara Writers’ Conference speaks volumes on the nature of writing and what it is to be an author in the contemporary milieu. This is due to the very broad jurisdiction
that Stone attributes writers of all levels with his words.

For me \textit{qua} practitioner, statements in this vein raise many pertinent questions about what in fact the act we call writing is. And as an author, I have learnt much about that through my own practice and throughout the creation of ‘The Night-shift Ending’ – as well as in the course of the production of this exegesis. Therefore, I will discuss how I actually encountered my own writing praxis through both the composition of my novel and the writing of this exegesis and in so doing sought to incorporate the outcomes of that occurrence as an element of my newly found artistic process. But before we proceed, let us define what exactly I mean by a writing praxis as I experienced it in my role of both a novice author and a proto-researcher.

The \textit{Compact Macquarie Dictionary} defines praxis as: ‘practice, esp[ecially] as opposed to theory’ (Delbridge & Bernard, 1994: 769). Praxis, etymologically the Greek word for action (Safranski, 1999: 382), the practical as opposed to the theoretical skill or knowledge that one has when one approaches the keyboard or the blank page, has previously been characterised as being somewhat ill-defined and nebulous given its unpredictable and non-linear nature (Rossitto, 2004: 5). But is this really the case? For my part, I consider my writing praxis to be both something that has developed as I wrote my artefact, which in fact altered the preconceived notions that I had about the act of writing itself before I actually set out to write that piece.

Confronting the blank page with the hope that one can do so effectively is a somewhat daunting task for anyone, be he or she novice or expert. However, as so many will attest that writing is a craft, I naturally became somewhat more confident and assured, not to mention proficient in my practice as I progressed with the creation of my artefact. Therefore, I am of the opinion that praxis, specifically writing praxis, is something that manifests itself when a writer is willing to persevere and to write, for really I believe there is no other way. In my own instance thus, I encountered praxis and in turn sought to embrace it as a component of my newly found artistic process as something that I had long thought about and that which increased dramatically when I indeed wrote my
In the case of ‘The Night-shift Ending’, given that it was produced as part of a non-traditional practice-led higher research degree, I consider myself to be privileged. This is because I had what I will here call a safety net of necessary others – namely, my supervisors, both primary and secondary, and other ‘critical friends’ – upon whom I could rely and draw. However, this safety net came at an obvious cost. That was insofar as I had to produce my work within the confines of that degree and the prerequisites of that which was expected of me as a PhD candidate in such a programme. Nevertheless, I believe that the benefit, which that accorded me, was far greater than the overall cost.

Although not every author is so fortunate in their journey as this, such a safety net of ‘critical friends’ personally allowed me to progress in ways unimagined by both challenging and extending my existent writerly skill-set. Moreover, the praxis that all that inculcated to me as part of my freshly won and hard-fought for artistic process may well sow the seeds of a crop that others too may harvest. Whether this is or not, this brings us to a discussion of what the consequence of that for me as an author may be.

The novel’s sole *raison d’être* is to say what only the novel can say.


(2000a: 36 Italics in the text).

Hence wrote Milan Kundera, on the *ergon* or the virtue of the novel *qua* novel and given his international success and standing as both an author and critic this is something into which he presumably would be able to offer much insight. Speaking from my own experience *qua* fledgling practitioner, Kundera’s statement made me wonder what the person doing the saying can learn from the production of his or her own work and, through that, what they can therefore pass on to others.

I have just attempted to define and to understand my own writing praxis through a brief reflection upon it as encountered when producing ‘The Night-shift
Ending’. That, therefore, leads me to consider and to ask the following questions: how can I as an author in fact come to embrace that praxis as an aspect of my newly found artistic process and what may be the impact of my findings for me as an author? On the surface, what constitutes a writing praxis seems to be relatively straightforward. However, one does not have to dig too deep to find that it is not. Granted this, the further question thus arises, namely: how did I in fact achieve that through the said course of action?

As I have learnt from my own rather unique experience, praxis, the actual application of both the theoretical and the practical understanding that one has when one approaches the keyboard or the blank page, comes primarily from practice – namely, good and productive writing practice, by which I mean consistently writing to the best of one’s ability and thereby continually striving for excellence in one’s work. That practice, therefore, is intrinsic and can so be said to be fundamental to one’s praxis – a case which seems reasonably clear-cut.

In the instance of the writing of my artefact, as stated in the introduction, ‘The Night-shift Ending’ began its existence as an investigation into the evolution of the cycle of the tragic hero found in the mythologies and the literature of the ancient world as it is made manifest in the Jungian compilation *Man and His Symbols* by Dr. Henderson (Henderson, 1978). Creating a detailed plan charting the cycle of the tragic hero and, in turn, by applying that plan to the story at hand, assisted me whilst I was working out what I wanted to write about. Then began the writing. ‘The Night-shift Ending’ was written, as was my then wont and was so for the entirety of its writing, as both a master copy and that which became the final draft; the final draft in that instance being my artefact, whereas the master copy held the main body of the story and alternatively written sentences and passages of that piece as footnotes. And, in turn, the final draft, after some judicious thought and careful editing, was composed from the best of these alternative texts; it was therefore the final draft. Although atypical, that method of writing allowed me to refine, to hone and to revise my work. It also enabled me to let different versions of my work breathe so to speak and, thus, to work on them alternately throughout the production of that novel. This therefore improved both
my work and praxis for it enabled me to conceptualise as well as problematise what would come next in the narrative of my artefact as I indeed wrote.

Discussing my own idiosyncratic and particular writing method and the constant search for excellence in my own work, it is obvious that it is not quite so easy as it would at first seem. In his magisterial study *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Joseph Campbell offers probably one of the more insightful responses to this quandary and to the many *aporias* which present themselves in the comprehension of one’s writing praxis as artistic process, as well as the vocation of an author *qua* artist and hero when he writes:

> The modern hero, the modern individual who dares to heed the call and seek the mansion of that presence with whom it is our whole destiny to be atoned, cannot, indeed must not, wait for his community to cast off its slough of pride, fear, rationalized avarice, and sanctified misunderstanding. ‘Live,’ Nietzsche says, ‘as though the day were here.’ It is not society that is to guide and save the creative hero, but precisely the reverse. And so every one of us shares the supreme ordeal – carries the cross of the redeemer – not in the bright moments of his tribe’s great victories, but in the silences of his personal despair. (Campbell, 1968: 391)

For me, this is a perceptive, intriguing and inspiring statement and one that is particularly pertinent to ‘The Night-shift Ending’ in light of its content: Campbell’s words are thus of much solace for a creative writing aspirant such as myself in moments of existential or other distress or despair, especially whilst I am indeed struggling for excellence in my own writing, for as he writes here after the German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche: ‘[l]ive … as though the day were here’ (Nietzsche, n. d. cited in Campbell, 1968: 391). In relation to the production of ‘The Night-shift Ending’ – as well as with my PhD journey *in toto* –, although I shall not declare myself to be a hero *per se*, I did my best to do exactly that and throughout its writing whereby I heeded the call of my own muse and to adventure and sought ‘the mansion of that presence’ – and at times, tried to act and to ‘[l]ive … as though the day were here’ (Nietzsche, n. d. cited in Campbell, 1968: 391).
Bearing this and the words of Campbell in mind, however, an author can still and should be proud of both their undertakings and their achievements in light of the alarming passage of normal everyday time – as this writer is of ‘The Night-shift Ending’. For as Australian philosopher Genevieve Lloyd writes after Nietzsche whilst discussing his doctrine of the ‘eternal recurrence’:

The author has drawn the happiest lot who as an old man can say that all of life-engendering, strengthening, elevating, enlightening thought and feeling that was in him lives on in his writings, and that he himself is now nothing but the grey ashes, while the fire has everywhere been rescued and borne forward.

– Friedrich Nietzsche, Human, All Too Human.

Ensuring one’s continuing perseverance through one’s writing or one’s literary endeavours and achievements, as well as the knowledge that one has in fact attained them, is perhaps the greatest vindication of an author’s efforts and the most important reason to heed and to embrace the lessons learnt from that – for, after all, we all have only one shot at eternity: in so doing, ensuring that both the depths as well as the heights of one’s praxis and artistic process are accessed, ‘rescued and borne forward’ (Nietzsche, 1986 cited in Lloyd, 1993: 119) long after an author’s earthly demise.

Discussing time and its redemption personally makes me wonder if all time as we experience it is lost time or whether we can salvage something, if not significant then at least lasting from it, particularly in light of its passing? As Lloyd writes further, discussing the work of author Virginia Woolf:

Life passes through its embodiments in individual consciousness, and its passage is experienced both as the relentless force of inhuman time and as the return of human interest and hope. Consciousness merges with the breaking of the waves, the pounding on the shore. Writing becomes a way of resisting the destructive effects of cosmic time by joining forces with it. Human and cosmic times join together in the making of new differentiations. (1993: 159)
The merging of ‘[h]uman and cosmic times’, of existential and narrative time, of time and narrative in and through one's writing – all of which is a powerful tool in a writer's repertoire or rather that which, after author Stephen King, shall hereinafter be referred as the writer's ‘tool-box’ (King, 2000) if an author is to make a lasting impact upon their audience through their work as shall become apparent. Or, in the words of Virginia Woolf herself in her novel, The Waves: ‘Fight! Fight!, I repeated’ (Woolf, 1977 cited in Lloyd, 1993: 159); writers must take a stand in order to make amends for time lost and to make the best of the little that they are given in this life.

This notion is something which is an obvious response to my considerations of time and the work of Paul Ricoeur and Saint Augustine of Hippo: that, then, it, time, was and redeemed, it is hoped, through one's literary endeavours and achievements. All of which leads us to a discussion of the works and the theorists that influenced as well as informed both ‘The Night-shift Ending’ and my own said praxis.
THE WORK OF OTHERS (I): UNDERSTANDING ONE’S OWN PRAXIS THROUGH THE WORK OF OTHERS.

Whilst writing ‘The Night-shift Ending’ as well as researching this exegesis, the present Author explored and considered the work of many others, some of whom were completely foreign to me and some were not. That was undertaken both to place and to understand my own work and praxis, as well as to come to an appreciation of my audience.

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section of it focuses upon the outcomes of that exploration and shall discuss the work of a few notable theorists who assisted me in the process of my own writing. A short and concise overview of their endeavours is provided in relation to the production of ‘The Night-shift Ending’. Subsequently, that which these thinkers and theorists inculcated upon the present Author’s own writing praxis will also be explored. Section two of this chapter provides a rather more in-depth discussion of the influence that the work of Dr. Carl G. Jung, his followers and interpreters had on the conduct of this combined PhD project.

*We begin walking with a crawl, little steps become big ones and soon we learn how to run. Her anxiety at a snail’s pace abating, but abating nonetheless …*


As already identified, ‘The Night-shift Ending’ is that which Beebe would have characterised as being an atypical ‘Artist as hero’ novel (1964: v). This is insofar as both the main characters in my artefact fail in their attempt to become successful as artists and prove themselves to be anything but heroes as that tale
unfolds and its story concludes.

Be that as it may, through the lessons learnt from the writing, the rewriting and the revising of that piece, I began to learn how to exercise and to develop my own writerly ‘voice’ (Alvarez, 2006: frontis) via the ‘system of signs’ or ‘structure’ (Barthes, 1983a: 187) that is the language with which I create. Through that process, I also came to appreciate the fact that I was writing to and for an audience – that is, it is hoped, the broader general public. I found that it is essential for me to imagine my audience as I write, if I want to achieve and to leave my mark as a writer. In other words, during the conduct of the project at hand as well as the production of this exegesis itself, I learnt to speak in short sentences before I intoned, intoned before I shouted – or indeed was shouted at; mindful all the while of the words of French psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan that ‘the function of language is not to inform but to evoke’ (2001a: 94) and to evoke in my audience I sought to do through my work as best as I could through the aforesaid structure, which is language. For as French social and literary theorist, Roland Barthes wrote:

Language is neither an instrument nor a vehicle: it is a structure, as we increasingly suspect; but the author is the only man, by definition, to lose his own structure and that of the world in the structure of language. Yet this language is an (infinitely) labored substance; it is a little like a superlanguage – reality is never anything but a pretext for it. (1983a: 187)

If we opt to follow Barthes’ line of argument, we can further say that an author’s ‘voice’ (Alvarez, 2006: frontis) or, if you will, their ‘evocation’ (Lacan, 2001a: 94) is thus developed by their successful or otherwise employment of the discussed ‘system of signs’ or ‘structure’ (Barthes, 1983a: 187) that Barthes here states language comprises. Even though we are, in the words of both Terry Eagleton (2004) and Mike Harris (2008; 2009) as well as many others, presently ‘post-theory’, the question therefore arises in the face of this and the high esteem that literary theory and criticism are still enjoying in some academic circles: where does it both leave and lead us to as authors and what are their implications for
our writing method?

Literary theory and criticism have their place in all writing and in all writing about writing, especially in a discussion of both the understanding and the embracing of one’s writing praxis as one’s artistic process in a reflective, self-critical piece such as this exegesis and therefore they cannot be ignored – as shall be discussed presently. However, I shall contend, they are limited for, in my opinion, they focus more on readers’ rather than authors’ jouissance, by which I mean both the pleasure and the pain experienced when an author is creating their own work and should therefore be more inclusive of this aspect to understand better that of which they speak. Nevertheless, literary theory and criticism and their study do raise many interesting as well as pertinent questions that need to be both asked and answered in coming to understand and develop one’s writing praxis and, of course, how they influence and affect that and shall thus be discussed in that light presently.

To expand upon my own understanding of contemporary and recent literary theory and criticism, its implications for my approach to my own work as well as that of others and to inform and to improve my own writing praxis, given the subject matter of ‘The Night-shift Ending’ and that which I have learnt about the actual character of practice-led research from the conduct of this PhD project, whilst writing that piece and to better it as well as to come to appreciate what others may think of my work, I explored notions of time, notions of narrative and notions of narratology – all of which shall be considered in kind.

I undertook this research in order primarily to grow as a writer as well as to develop and to gain an understanding of my own writing praxis and the impact which that and my work may have upon others. During that process, I also explored notions of creativity and of aesthetics (e.g., Brophy, 1998; 2009; Conrad, 2007; Hollingdale, 1977; Kant, 1952; Pope, 2005). Once again, that was undertaken in order to develop and to broaden my horizons both as a writer as well as a proto-researcher. In addition to that and as a counterpoint, I also investigated theories of communication (e.g., Kaufer & Carley, 1993; McLuhan, 1967) and of meaning sought through my own as well as the work of others and,
therefore, how that is constructed both narratively and existentially and, in turn, how the ‘Self’ – both narrative and existential – is constructed in and by time. All of which, in turn, gave depth and resonance to the endeavour being discussed and that, therefore, assisted me whilst writing ‘The Night-shift Ending’: the fruits of which I now hope to share with my audience.

Throughout the writing of both ‘The Night-shift Ending’ and this exegesis, given the nature of practice-led research in light of Perry’s (2013: 157) aforementioned definition, I primarily, but not exclusively, explored and studied the work of the French critical thinkers, Jacques Derrida, Paul Ricoeur and Roland Barthes. This was underpinned by considering the work of many other commentators including the American constructural theorists David Kaufer and Kathleen Carley (1993), Irish literary theorist Terry Eagleton (2004; 2005; 2008; – & Beaumont, 2009) and expatriate British academic Professor Gavin N. Kitching (2008). All of whom inculcated in me equally an overview as well as an understanding of the state of contemporary and recent literary theory and criticism and its implications for both my own as well as the work of others. And so, I shall illustrate this in the following discussion and their work will now be discussed as theorists pertinent to ‘The Night-shift Ending’ and to the act of its production.

Although this was not the easiest of undertakings, that abovementioned and assorted investigation helped me both to place and to understand my work in light of the literary theory and criticism to be discussed as well as to discover my audience. In addition to these critical thinkers, I also studied and considered the work of the German philosophers, Theodor W. Adorno (2001; 2002), Martin Heidegger (2008a; 2008b) and Friedrich Nietzsche (1992; Hollingdale, 1977) as well as the work of Russian literary theorist and social commentator, Mikhail Bakhtin (1981; 1984) to give depth, resonance and meaning both to that investigation and to ‘The Night-shift Ending’. However, this eclectic body of work, although informing my thinking and praxis employed in the production of this PhD project, is beyond the scope of this exegesis and I shall hence refer to their
thought succinctly and as appropriate.

Thus the work of Derrida, Ricoeur and Barthes shall be briefly discussed individually and a short and concise overview of their undertakings will be provided in relation to my own writing praxis.

Literary theory has permeated our thinking to the point that it has defined for our times how discourse about literature, as well as culture in general, shall proceed.

(Lentricchia & McLaughlin, 1990: 1)

At the 13th annual Australian Association of Writing Programs (AAWP) conference at University of Technology, Sydney, Mike Harris stated that for students and for teachers of writing it is not a question of ‘whether “theory”’ but ‘what “theory”’ (Harris, 2008 Italics in the text). As I have written this PhD by artefact and exegesis, I too have come to question the role of literary theory and criticism in the development and valorisation of my artefact both as a fledgling practitioner of writing and as a proto-researcher seeking entry to the academy and I find that, despite Lacan’s assertion that language is merely evocative (Lacan, 2001a: 94), I can only concur with Mike Harris as I continue to search for ‘what “theory”’ (Harris, 2008 Italics in the text).

Given the subject matter of my artefact – a work of ‘literary fiction’ – and that which I have learnt about the actual nature of practice-led research, during the conduct of this combined PhD project, I have primarily, but not exclusively, explored the work of critical thinkers, Jacques Derrida, Paul Ricoeur and Roland Barthes in an attempt to inform and to understand my own writing praxis. That has been by no means easy for me. This is as for me qua writer, the question and importance of literary theory and criticism to creative work is, to say the least, contentious.

Do we as writers lose the innocence or naïveté requisite to write by exploring the theories of these thinkers? And how do these theories vindicate, valorise and, in turn, inform our work and praxis? Or, are they simply superfluous to that, something we merely include just to satisfy our examiners? These are the
questions I have struggled with over the last five or so years, particularly as I have grappled with this exegesis, and I will therefore discuss them presently.

In his work *Consciousness and the Novel*, David Lodge identifies four relationships that he perceives between literary criticism and creative writing; relationships that I will expand in the present discussion to also include literary theory. Lodge’s four relationships are:

1. Criticism as *complementary* to creative writing.
2. Criticism as *opposed* to creative writing.
3. Criticism as *a kind of* creative writing.
4. Criticism as *a part of* creative writing.

(2002a: 93 Italics in the text)

Depending upon that which we hold to be true, literary theory and criticism will nevertheless have an important role to play in how we understand our own work as well as that of others. For literary theory and criticism challenge writers of all levels and genres at whatever stage they may be at in their individual writing journey and, I shall posit that, the only way that we can meet these challenges as writers and respond to them in kind is through the achievements that we realise in our work.

Although at times somewhat both disconcerting and testing, the study of literary theory and criticism, I contend, is equally educative and productive for writers and practitioners. Therefore, I persevered with that endeavour during the conduct of this combined PhD project in the hope that it would inculcate something to my own writing praxis. And so, I shall now share my reflections upon this and will discuss the work of Jacques Derrida, Paul Ricoeur and Roland Barthes in relation to that which their work inculcated to my own writing method.

Probably one of the most influential and prolific writers in modern and recent letters not to have produced a creative literary work in the traditional or rather literal sense is the Franco-Algerian philosopher and creative writer *manqué*,
Jacques Derrida\textsuperscript{11}. Derrida’s work provided me with ideas about the reading and interpretation of creative literary works and about the fragile nature of the language with which I was creating whilst writing my artefact. An investigation into the work of Derrida, Derridean \textit{différance} and his theory of deconstruction of literary texts as well as other cultural and philosophical givens proved for me fruitful, despite, at times, daunting.

Central to the understanding of the work of Derrida is the concept, or rather the non-concept, of \textit{différance}. \textit{Différance} can be defined as follows:

Such a play, \textit{différance}, is thus no longer simply a concept, but rather the possibility of conceptuality, of a conceptual process and system in general. For the same reason, \textit{différance}, which is not a concept, is not simply a word, that is, what is generally represented as the calm, present, and self-referential unity of concept and phonic material. (Derrida, 1991a: 63)

Although this is more an avoidance of a definition than a definition \textit{per se}, Derrida’s work and Derridean \textit{différance} – ‘the possibility of conceptuality, of a conceptual process and system in general’\textsuperscript{12} (Derrida, 1991a: 63) – I will here assert are important for writers as practitioners of a craft of all levels to grasp and to try to realise in their work: even if it is, as many might concur, elusive and abstruse at first (for example, Glendinning, 2011; Kamuf, 1991; Kandell, 2004; Lloyd, 1993; Royle, 2003) given \textit{différance}’s dubious, tenuous and inherently transitory nature. However, I will here contend that \textit{différance} remains something that all writers, regardless of their degree of proficiency or skill \textit{qua} writers, should, or at least attempt to, appreciate and to reckon with as they go about producing their work in the contemporary \textit{milieu}. This is given both the currency and the significance of it to their collective work and praxis if an author is of the intent to make an impact upon their audience. For, as Lloyd indeed identifies \textit{différance} to be:

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{11}Although given, however, the theoretical complexity of Derrida’s writing some would argue that this, in fact, is the case – for example, I refer the reader to his \textit{Glas} (Derrida, 1991b).
  \item \textsuperscript{12}So Jacques, what is \textit{différance} then if, in fact, you can define it for me?
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Différance is Derrida’s version of ‘taking account of time’ without the false reassurance of the limiting idea of eternity. Whatever is distressing in being in time cannot be allayed by aspiring to the self-presence of the eternal word. (Lloyd, 1993: 41)

In light of Lloyd’s assertion, the work of Derrida and Derridean différance – or ‘taking account of time’ without ‘allaying’ to that which Lloyd here calls ‘the false reassurance of the limiting idea of eternity’ nor ‘by aspiring to the self-presence of the eternal word’ of the ‘transcendental signified’ (Lloyd, 1993: 41): that is whatever one takes it to be – are, thus, important for writers in their role of practitioners of a craft to tackle with in their work and to try to come to terms with wherever one may be in one’s respective writing journey. This is a task that is not quite so easy it seems. As Lloyd writes further:

Derridean différance is inevitably and intentionally elusive. It is supposed to be conceivable neither as an action nor as a passion of a subject. It moves between the act of differentiating and the static state of difference. It is supposed to break the grip of the idea of meaning as originating in a unitary consciousness, showing its instability in the lack of the complementary theological ideal of divine self-presence. (Lloyd, 1993: 35)

Derrida’s work and his concept of différance are by their character inherently elusive for both novice, experienced practitioners of writing, and theorists alike. Yet, however, given the integral and primary nature of these theories to one’s work and praxis in the contemporary milieu, I propose that they can be said, as stated earlier, to be fundamental for one to understand and to try to comprehend as one approaches one’s own work in relation to the work of others as well as one’s audience.

In addition to différance, I also found central to the understanding of the work of Derrida is his theory of deconstruction of literary texts and other philosophical givens. A key concept in the work of Derrida, this raises the question: what exactly is it and how does one employ it effectively to understand
the workings behind an author’s work? Or, in the words of Derrida himself in his *Letter to a Japanese Friend* written to Professor Toshiko Izutsu discussing the translation of his explicit meaning of *his* concept of ‘deconstruction’ into Japanese, he defines it as:

What deconstruction is not? Everything of course!  
What is deconstruction? Nothing of course!  
I do not think, for all these reasons, that it is a good word.  

(Derrida, 1991d: 275 Italics in the text)

This is a glib and simple answer, yet it is an answer nonetheless and one which is probably one of the most accessible and workable definitions of what deconstruction exactly is or is not.¹³

To understand Derridean deconstruction I shall here propose that one must first understand its context and, in turn, come to comprehend it within that. For as H. Porter Abbott argues:

‘Deconstruction’ … is grounded in the argument that uncertainty is inherent in the activity of making meaning through signs, be they written, oral, graphic or otherwise. For Derrida, closure at the level of questions never arrives, regardless of the text. Moreover, since meaning is grounded not in some absolute contact with reality but in the web of differences out of which any sign acquires its signifying power, any process of narrative negotiation will never shake the differences that subvert it.  

(Abbott, 2002: 172 Italics in the text)

‘Answers,’ Abbott concludes, ‘that appear to emerge with closure at the level of questions will always contain traces of their opposites’ (Abbott, 2002: 172).

For me, this therefore raises the question of whether binary opposites, their differences and, so, their ‘traces’ (Derrida, 1991a), as Jung, his followers

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¹³To give the reader an idea some of the issues surrounding Derridean deconstruction, Annabel Patterson identifies that the term ‘deconstruction’ was ‘inaugurated by Derrida …’ in his work, *Of Grammatology*, which was first published in 1967 (Patterson, 1990: 144) and has therefore already been pointedly considered and debated for some forty-five years now.
and interpreters (e.g., as it is found in Jung (1978)) will be shown to aver, really exist or whether, as one can assert, they are just gradients along a plane. For example, whether hot is not necessarily the opposite of cold, but it is just a higher temperature, likewise good is not the objective opposite of evil and so forth, but rather a subjective judgement that it is. The question of binary opposites, their differences and, therefore, their ‘traces’ (Derrida, 1991a) in relation to the work of Derrida, I found, though integral to my understanding of it, problematic on many levels and this will undoubtedly remain a contentious, controversial and perhaps irresolvable point for a long time to come.

In light of that which has been covered, Derrida’s work and its implications for one’s work and praxis are, therefore, despite my own reservations, important in the understanding of how a text is constructed and, in turn, how an author seeks to make an impact upon their readers. Thus, I consider that one must be both aware and mindful of all these concepts when one puts pen to paper or fingers to the keyboard. For example, speaking from my own instance, in relation to the production of ‘The Night-shift Ending’, I developed an awareness of the fragility of the meaning of the language with which I was creating as I wrote and, by garnering feedback from various sources, attempted to distance myself from my own work – if that is at all possible. That was done during what was a labourious task of the drafting, the writing, the revising and, in turn, the rewriting of my artefact. Whereby, throughout that said process, I attempted to view my own work as both ‘historical’ and as ‘literature’ written to and for a defined audience (Derrida, 1991c: 47).

After reading One Hundred Years of Solitude for two more hours, he felt ready to write. Stephen picked up his pen and the papers he had been working on and before he knew it had finished a draft of the first two chapters of Stereophrenia, furthermore he was happy with them and felt that he could write and write well again. Stephen was relieved and resolved he would be more mindful, more mindful though everything was transient and passing – including him, though his work, he hoped, may not be.
The work of French philosopher, Paul Ricoeur (1981; 1990) on the other hand, furnished me with ideas about time – both narrative and existential –, narratology and in turn *mimesis* and emplotment. Ricoeur’s work, informed as it is by the words of Aristotle and Saint Augustine, endowed me with ideas and perceptions about time – both in its narrative sense, by which I mean that which a reader takes from a text when they read it, as well as its existential sense, namely, its impact upon and correlation with the reader’s own life and the author’s as they are when they produce their work. These concepts, along with my reading into the work of Peter Conrad (2007), Friedrich Nietzsche (e.g., Nietzsche, 1992; Hollingdale, 1977) and Rob Pope (2005), reinforced in me a conviction I had long held that our experience of normal existential time can be both augmented and transcended by one’s own artistic endeavours as well as that of others. For, as Ricoeur himself had this to say of his undertaking in *Time and Narrative*:

> [M]y basic hypothesis [is] that between the activity of narrating a story and the temporal character of human experience there exists a correlation that is not merely accidental but that presents a transcultural form of necessity. To put it another way, *time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence.* (Ricoeur, 1990: 52 Italics in the text)

Ricoeur (1990) here highlights the complimentary nature of both time and narrative to join together to augment the effect of one another.

Studying the work of Ricoeur whilst writing my artefact, I found it to be both complicated and fecund: at times, even pedantic given his meticulous approach to language. Yet I still found, however, reading and considering Ricoeur’s work and related literature that it was both rewarding and profitable for my own work and praxis. Whilst writing ‘The Night-shift Ending’, in light of its content, I focussed specifically – but not merely – on Ricoeur’s *Time and
Narrative (1990) and his other work on hermeneutics and phenomenology (Ricoeur, 1981) as well as secondary and related literature (Ihde, 1971; Lloyd, 1993; Simms, 2003).

To appreciate Ricoeur’s work in *Time and Narrative* fruitfully, I believe that one must first understand the nature and the scope of his undertaking: namely to find a ‘consonance’ or, if you will, ‘resonance’ between existential and narrative times (Ricoeur, 1990: 35). Or in Ricoeur’s own words:

> If it is true that the major tendency of modern theory of narrative – in historiography and the philosophy of history as well as in narratology – is to ‘dechronologize’ narrative, the struggle against the linear representation of time does not necessarily have as its sole outcome the turning of narrative into ‘logic,’ but rather may deepen its temporality. (Ricoeur, 1990: 30)

‘Chronology – or chronography’, Ricoeur concludes, ‘does not have just one contrary, the a-chronology of laws or models. Its true contrary is temporality itself’ (1990: 30). The correlation that Ricoeur here writes of between narrative and existential times (1990: 30) is, when understood and employed effectively, a further powerful tool in a writer’s repertoire or indeed their ‘tool-box’ (King, 2000) even. It, therefore, equally warrants and rewards any attention given to it. For, the question arises in light of Ricoeur’s undertaking: what better way to make an impact upon one’s readers than to give them a consonance or, at least, a resonance of the various aspects of the inhuman passing of time (Lloyd, 1993: 159)? Or, at least, to try to through one’s work. As well as this to attempt to heal the author’s own fractured experience of time, not only existentially in his or her own life as an author, but also creatively while they are producing their work. This is an endeavour, which equally warrants and rewards any attention and energy given to it – as I sought to through my own work.

For me, all this raises the further question: can one indeed find a consonance of, harmony with or even a resolution between existential and narrative time in both one’s work as a writer and, in turn, one’s life – that is to say, both the author’s as well as their audience’s? Or, as Ricoeur himself states:
Yet can we not say that the ‘hermeneutic potential …’ of this kind of narrative finds, if not a consonance, at least a resonance in the untold stories of our lives? Is there not a hidden complicity between the ‘secrecy’ engendered by the narrative itself … and the as yet untold stories of our lives that constitute the prehistory, the background, the living imbrication from which the told story emerges? In other words, is there not a hidden affinity between the secret of where the story emerges from and the secret to which it returns? (Ricoeur, 1990: 75 – 76 Italics in the text)

The consonance or resonance Ricoeur establishes between narrative and in that which he identifies to be ‘the as yet untold stories of our lives’ (1990: 75), I believe, is important for writers of all levels to access and to realise if they are seeking to make an impact upon their readers and, as such, is a further powerful instrument in a writer’s repertoire. This is as it helps one to make sense of the ‘as yet untold’ stories, which comprise all our lives, and in turn the hermeneutic potential of narrative and its influence and congruence with one’s everyday life. This is something that is particularly applicable, equally pertinent and likewise rather troubling when one’s everyday life is indeed the attempt to create and to maintain an extended fictional literary narrative as I did whilst studying and considering the work of Ricoeur (1981; 1990) given my own understanding of the actual nature of practice-led research.

Narratology: the employment of chronology in one’s work and theories of time and narrative as well as the manner in which they affect one’s everyday existence are challenging, fascinating and important concepts for an aspiring author such as myself to explore as I write. This is especially so given the subject matter of ‘The Night-shift Ending’ as well as that which I have learnt about the actual nature of practice-led research from the conduct of this combined PhD project. That is given that both influence the manner in which I approach my own work and praxis and the work and praxis of others and, in so doing, hopefully making an impact on ‘as yet untold’ stories of my intended audience (Ricoeur, 1990: 75), for as Ricoeur indeed writes further in his *Time and Narrative:*
There is thus no need to choose between an aesthetic of reception and an ontology of the work of art. What a reader receives is not just the sense of the work, but through its sense its reference, that is, the experience it brings to language and, in the last analysis, the world and the temporality it unfolds in the face of experience. (Ricoeur, 1990: 75 – 76)

This statement becomes a somewhat interesting consideration in light of the work of Derrida and its implications for one’s writing as well as the interpretation of that of others. Narrative, therefore, in the universe of Ricoeur, comprises both time and narrative itself, chronography and narratology and so they can be said to all join together to form that which can best be described as a continuum for our own fractured experience of human – perhaps inhuman – or existential time and to redeem as well as to heal that through the outcomes of one’s or others’ literary endeavours.

Despite my own initial misgivings about the work of Ricoeur, I soon learnt, nonetheless, to admire his undertaking and to acknowledge the importance of his work in relation to my understanding of my own work and praxis and that of others: as I came to whilst studying and considering Ricoeur’s work (1981; 1990) as well as reading and exploring related and secondary literature upon it (e.g., Ihde, 1971; Lloyd, 1993; Simms, 2003). For instance, as Lloyd writes in the following excerpt of the efforts of Ricoeur and their significance when compared to those of other philosophers:

Ricoeur has argued that narrative responds to problems of time which philosophy of itself cannot resolve – that it offers a different, and in some respects more fruitful, response to the experienced instabilities of self-consciousness in relation to time from that offered by theoretical speculation. (1993: 10)

Time, time and narrative – narrative and time: all of which raises the questions; how do we quantify and explain it, namely time? And, in turn, understand or comprehend its passing? Or, in the words of Saint Augustine in his Confessions: ‘Quid est enim tempus? – What, then, is time?’ (Saint Augustine, 1961 cited in Ricoeur, 1990: xi Italics in the text). As Ricoeur admits after Saint Augustine this
is a very simple question with a very difficult answer (Ricoeur, 1990: xi). Yet it is one that we all think that we can answer and that we know the answer to, but it is one that we all would struggle with and find difficult to answer (Saint Augustine, 1961 cited in Ricoeur, 1990: xi). Time, time and narrative: chronography and narratology – ‘[w]hat, then, is time?’ (Saint Augustine, 1961 cited in Ricoeur, 1990: xi) And, what, then, is its opposite – eternity?

In relation to the production of 'The Night-shift Ending', I employed a very strict and sequential form of narrative time as I wrote – even going so far as to plot its characters' actions on a calendar. Indeed, I attempted to let the reader follow events as they unfolded in normal, everyday existential time. Through that process, I sought to inform my audience with both the tacit and explicit message of my work, whereby I attempted to find Ricoeur’s discussed ‘consonance’ or ‘resonance’ (Ricoeur, 1990: 35) between both narrative and existential times in and through my work. However, in 'The Night-shift Ending' both the main characters ruminated and fell victim in time to time. For as identified in the first chapter, that novel both starts off and concludes with a meditation on time that I will not here cite again, but rather leave the last words of this discussion to Saint Augustine: ‘What, then, is time?’ (Saint Augustine, 1961 cited in Ricoeur, 1990: xi)

For Literature is like phosphorus: it shines with its maximum brilliance at the moment when it attempts to die (Barthes, 1983d: 51).

… to give writing its future … the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death

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14As Ricoeur cites Saint Augustine as saying in response to this question: ‘I know well enough what it [time] is, provided that nobody asks me; but if I am asked what it is and try to explain, I am baffled’ (Saint Augustine, 1961 cited in Ricoeur, 1990: xi) and as Ricoeur continues: ‘In the capacity of poetic composition to re-figure this temporal experience, which is prey to the aporias of philosophical speculation, resides the referential function of the plot’ (1990: xi).

of the Author (Barthes, 1978a: 148).

The work of Derrida and Ricoeur aside, attention shall presently be given to that of French critical thinker and literary theorist, Roland Barthes in light of the conduct of the production of my artefact. Noteworthy for his declaration of ‘the death of the [a]uthor’ as a God-like figure of their text (Barthes, 1978a: 148) and, as a result of this, the nativity of the ‘scriptor’ and the birth of the ‘writerly reader’, Barthes’ work, which I found to be more accessible than that of Derrida and Ricoeur, dealing as it does with the craft of writing. It, therefore, furnished me with ideas about the act and the art of writing, as well as the processes of writing itself – informed as it is by Barthes’ love of the craft and the vocation of the writer. And so, it assisted me with the development and the understanding of my own writing praxis both discovered as well as employed throughout the journey of the creation of ‘The Night-shift Ending’.

Consideration will now be given to the work of Barthes in relation to the production of my artefact, whereby I found my reading into his work both rewarding and enjoyable as well as educative and informative: at times, inspiring even for my own work and writing praxis given the manner in which Barthes champions authors. For, as cultural critic Susan Sontag had this to say of Barthes’ body of work in the introduction to her compilation of his Selected Writings:

Writing is Barthes’s perennial subject [sic] – indeed, perhaps no one since Flaubert (in his letters) has thought as brilliantly, as passionately as Barthes has about what writing is. Much of his work is devoted to portraits of the vocation of the writer … Barthes’s wonderful essays on writers [sic] must be considered as different versions of his great apologia for the vocation of the writer. (1983: xvii)

Thus stated Sontag on the work of Barthes, his love of the craft and the vocation of writing and what it is, a fact that I learnt to appreciate and was grateful for as I, a recent philosophy graduate, had approached Barthes’ work guardedly from the outset. For, I initially considered Barthes and other continental writers as being
people, who were theorists ‘ante–’ the act of writing \textit{qua} writing. But, as is said here by Sontag: ‘[w]riting is Barthes’s perennial subject [sic] … [m]uch of his work is devoted to portraits of the vocation of the writer’ (1983: xvii). Or perhaps it is better to understand this in the words of Barthes himself, as he writes in his \textit{Critical Essays}:

\begin{quote}
Who speaks? Who writes? We still lack a sociology of language. What we know is that language is a power and that, from public body to social class, a group of men is sufficiently defined if it possesses, to various degrees, the national language. (Barthes, 1983a: 185)
\end{quote}

‘Who speaks? Who writes?’ (Barthes, 1983a: 185). Given that I am discussing the work of Barthes and its implications for practising professional writers as well as aspiring creators of content alike and one’s or others’ writing praxis and artistic process, it is well worth considering Barthes’ own approach to writing, especially his approach to \textit{his} own writing and writing praxis. For as he wrote in his ‘autobiography’, which is so aptly, so simply and so beautifully entitled in the French \textit{Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes} (in English, \textit{Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes}) and in which he analyses and interrogates his own life as though it were a text, thus attempting to illustrate how that genre would be written after ‘the death of the [a]uthor’ (Allen, 2003: 146):

\begin{quote}
Writing is that \textit{play} by which I turn around as well as I can in a narrow place: I am wedged in, I struggle between the hysteria necessary to write and the image-repertoire, which oversees, controls, purifies, banalizes, codifies, corrects, imposes the focus (and the vision) of a social communication. On the one hand I want to be desired and on the other not to be desired: hysterical and obsessional at one and the same time. (Barthes, 1995: 137 Italics in the text)
\end{quote}

‘And yet’, Barthes concludes,

\begin{quote}
‘the closer I come to the work, the deeper I descend into writing; I approach its unendurable depth; a desert is revealed; there occurs – fatal, lacerating – a kind of
In light of this statement, the act of writing according to Barthes is therefore multifarious and complex and maybe something that he, Barthes, could have freed and liberated himself from and understood better by actually writing works of fiction and thus by being and living as one of his deceased '[a]uthors'. Whether this is so or not, I think that one must take Barthes' words on it into account as one puts pen to paper or fingers to the keyboard as well as when one reads the work of others and one should be mindful of Barthes' work as and when one does so.

As I am presently discussing the work of Barthes, his declaration of 'the death of the [a]uthor' (Barthes, 1978a: 148) and, as a result of this, the nativity of the 'scriptor' and the birth of the 'writerly reader', I shall here argue that one must understand the context of that statement in order to grasp it and fully comprehend it. As David Kaufer and Kathleen Carley conceive it from the perspective of their 'constructural' theory:

Barthes observed that the writer uses language for a controlled purpose in a controlled situation ... without appreciating the culture-defining properties of language [sic] that are rehearsed in the writer's practice, but usually outside the writer's deliberate control ... The 'author', by contrast, is a person who knowingly understands ... herself as both a reflection of the language system and an instrument through which the system changes. (1993: 94)

Kaufer and Carley conclude that 'Barthes' author' therefore 'attains a certain cultural reflectiveness that is missed by the ordinary writer' (1993: 94). This is an interesting and debatable statement and one which, however, gives an equal amount of cause for action as it does food for thought. That is insofar as it helps us not only to understand Barthes' work, but in the manner in which both readers and writers come together both to complement and to complete a literary work mutually to make it hermetic and whole.
The work of Roland Barthes, his declaration of ‘the death of the [a]uthor’ (Barthes, 1978a: 148), the impact of that upon what we previously knew to be a ‘reader’ and, in turn, the nativity of the ‘scriptor’ and the birth of the ‘writerly reader’ is both fascinating and equally problematic for writers of all levels, who by his definition are albeit deceased. This view is something that is particularly important and equally pertinent in our current feuilleton and electronic age of eEverything in which we are seeing a loosening of the bonds that previously tethered an author to his or her work.

In relation to the production of ‘The Night-shift Ending’, inspired at times by the words of Barthes on the craft and the vocation of the writer, I sought to make myself one – namely a professional and accomplished author; thereby I attempted, through my work, my words, my efforts and my own idiosyncratic writing praxis to disprove Barthes’ thesis, or rather declaration, of ‘the death of the [a]uthor’ (Barthes, 1978a: 148). All the while, however, I heeded and was mindful of Barthes’ work as I produced my artefact and found, in so doing, that it influenced my own writing praxis in many ways. That was insofar as I sought to view my work through the eyes of my own ‘ideal reader’ (King, 2000). I did this by taking on as much feedback upon my work as I could so as to make it hermetic and whole by considering the influence that my work, that is, my artefact, had on others and, in turn, the effect that this had on my own writing praxis. I did not want to neglect, however, what impact Barthes’ work had upon that which we previously knew to be the ‘reader’, who died along with Barthes’ ‘[a]uthor’ (Barthes, 1978a: 148).

So the questions remain: how did all these theorists, thinkers and commentators influence me as a writer? And what effect did they have upon my own writing praxis? As stated earlier, the purpose of this section was to discuss how I have grappled with these theorists and in turn how these thinkers have influenced me whilst I wrote both my artefact as well as, of course, this exegesis. Given I have only completed just one novel so far and am therefore only but a fledgling
practitioner, time alone shall make their impact upon my writing clear and will be the proper judge. However, I will nevertheless continue to strive for 'what “theory”' (Harris, 2008 Italics in the text) as I progress. But, this as it is, I hope to remain mindful of the words of poet William Blake and try 'not [to] Reason & Compare' too much, for as a writer it is 'my business to Create [sic]' (2005: 256).

Be that as it may, this and further to what shall also be discussed raises many interesting and significant questions about writing, its nature and, therefore, the artistic process, which this writer addressed through an investigation into the work of Jung, his followers and interpreters and that will be the focus of the next section of this exegesis.

Throughout the genesis and the writing of ‘The Night-shift Ending’, the present Author was heavily influenced by the work of Dr. Carl G. Jung, his followers and interpreters (e.g., Campbell, 1976; Henderson, 1978; Jung, 1933; 1976a; 1976b; 1976c; 1978; 1989; von Franz, 1981). Jung’s work will now be considered in light of the writing method and the praxis both discovered and employed in the production of my artefact and, as shall become manifest, other aspects of this combined PhD project in a brief theoretical discussion followed by examples from my artefact. This in turn shall lead, in the next section, to a discussion of the practice-led lessons learnt from that attempt, including the outcomes of that and their significance for me as a writer, and, in due course, to the conclusions.

The instincts and the archetypes together form the ‘collective unconscious’. I call it ‘collective’ because, unlike the personal unconscious, it is not made up of individual and more or less unique contents but of those which are universal and of regular occurrence. Instinct is an essentially collective, i.e., universal and regularly occurring phenomenon which has nothing to do with individuality. Archetypes have this quality in common with the instincts and are likewise collective phenomena. (Jung, 1976a: 52 – 53)

Discussing the writing process and my own writing praxis in relation to lessons learnt from the creation of ‘The Night-shift Ending’ and given its nature and subject matter, I found much inspiration as well as an equal amount of solace in the thought of Jung (e.g., Campbell, 1976; Jung, 1933; 1976a; 1976b; 1976c; 1978; 1989) and his followers (e.g., Henderson, 1978; von Franz, 1981). Their work – along with secondary and related literature – I read copiously throughout the conduct of this combined PhD project. In so doing, I focussed chiefly, but not
exclusively, on Jung’s writings on the understanding of the collective unconscious and the cycle of the tragic hero. As will become manifest, this gave a great deal of life to my own work, thinking and praxis.

To begin our discussions of the writings of Jung, one can do no better than consult one of his last works, the highly influential *Man and His Symbols*. In his contribution, ‘Approaching the Unconscious’, that he completed just before his death in 1961, Jung declared:

> Because there are innumerable things beyond the range of human understanding, we constantly use symbolic terms to represent concepts that we cannot define or fully comprehend … Man also produces … symbols unconsciously and spontaneously in the form of dreams. (1978: 4)

What happens when the human mind is presented with that which Jung here calls the ‘innumerable things beyond the range of [our] understanding … that we cannot define or fully comprehend’ (1978: 4)? How do we make sense of that with which we cannot in fact come to terms? How do we grasp what is beyond our understanding: namely, that which Camus would have characterised so aptly as being ‘the Absurd’? (2000a; 2000b)

Jung would aver that we must work seriously and earnestly upon that which we cannot at first comprehend or understand in order to come to terms with it or to attribute meaning to it as we see fit after genuine, careful and patient consideration (1978: 88). In light of that, the following questions thus arise, namely: how does one go about trying to express that which does not lend itself to representation? That which is otherwise without either sense or meaning? And more importantly; where does it both leave and lead one to as an author if one attempts to do this and to try to uncover that in one’s work?

Discussing the attribution of meaning to the symbols and the other things that both our conscious and unconscious minds produce for us *qua* artists and the implications of that upon our work and praxis, I believe that one must be both mindful as well as careful in one’s employment of them when one is trying to make an impact upon one’s audience. For as Jung states on this matter:
The sign is always less than the concept it represents, while a symbol always stands for something more than its obvious and immediate meaning. Symbols, moreover, are natural and spontaneous products. (1978: 41)

‘No genius’, Jung concludes, ‘has ever sat down with a pen or a brush in his hand and said: “Now I am going to invent a symbol.”’ (1978: 41).

What is important, however, to the understanding of the dichotomy between signs and symbols is that, as Jung points out, ‘[s]ymbols … are natural and spontaneous products’ (1978: 41) – whereas he identifies that signs are merely indicative and, therefore, ‘less than the concept [they] represent’ (Jung, 1978: 41). For me, this is a statement which raises the even more important questions, namely; can we or are we capable of making sense of and digesting effectively that which both our conscious and unconscious minds offer us in a plethora of stimuli and symbols and, in so doing, making an impact upon both one’s own work and, thus, one’s audience? And whether some type of harmony can be reached or attained? Or, is that discord simply part of the human condition and situation with which we all must reckon? As Jung writes further:

The sad truth is that man’s real life consists of a complex of inexorable opposites – day and night, birth and death, happiness and misery, good and evil. We are not even sure that one will prevail against the other, that good will overcome evil, or joy defeat pain. Life is a battleground. It always has been, and always will be; and if it were not so, existence would come to an end. (1978: 75)

Strong words indeed and particularly pertinent to the earlier discussions of the work of Derrida and binary opposites, their differences and, so, their ‘traces’ (Derrida, 1991a) in the previous section of this chapter. In my opinion, what Jung is here trying to suggest is that binary opposites and their differences do exist: yet they are not always what they seem. Or, in Jung’s own words: ‘[l]ife is a battleground. It always has been, and always will be; and if it were not so, existence would come to an end’ (1978: 75). If we agree with both Derrida and Jung that everything exists to some extent in its opposite form we can further say
that life is peaceful and unchanging – ‘always has been, and always will be’ (1978: 75).

Whether binary opposites and their differences do in fact exist or whether they are simply gradients along a plane is beyond the scope of the present discussion. However, one of the questions I sought to address through my investigation into the work of Jung is: how does one access the hitherto discussed symbols – both existentially in one’s life as an author and, in turn, in one’s artistic endeavours – that is, in one’s output as such? In so doing, how does one therefore employ them effectively in one’s work: thereby making an impact upon one’s audience’s collective unconscious – that which shall presently be defined, after Henderson, to be our ‘common psychological inheritance’ (1978: 98). Or, as Jung stated in ‘The Structure of the Psyche’ (1976c), discussing and defining his notion of the collective unconscious and its contents, which he identifies to be one of the three strata that constitutes the human psyche:

The collective unconscious … appears to consist of mythological motifs or primordial images, for which reason the myths of all nations are its real exponents. In fact, the whole of mythology could be taken as a sort of projection of the collective unconscious. (1976c: 39)

A rather bold statement – that ‘the whole of mythology could be taken as a sort of projection of the collective unconscious’ (Jung, 1976c: 39). The primordial images – namely, the ‘archetypes’ – of the collective unconscious, what they are and what they mean can be said to be if not fundamental then, at the very least, important to the workings of the creative mind. And, as such, that was a projection that I sought to add to or at least attempt to access in and through my work. I did that by both copiously studying Jungian ideas and also by pushing myself hard as a writer whilst doing so in a manner already and to be discussed presently to articulate my tacit understanding of the work of Jung and, in so doing, to make it an explicit facet of my praxis.

For me, all this raises more important questions, namely; if one wants to access the collective unconscious, what exactly is this rich vein, which
constitutes it? And how and in what fashion does it operate? To know this, I will here maintain that one must first understand how and in what state the collective unconscious functions. In his 'Psychological Types', Jung states that:

The unconscious functions exist in an archaic, animal state. Hence their symbolic appearance in dreams and fantasies is usually represented as the battle or encounter between two animals or monsters. (1976b: 269)

One, however, must work mindfully, carefully and patiently on this strata of the psyche’s contents to uncover both its working, its meaning and its fruit – namely the archetypes of the collective unconscious. For, as Jung indeed writes further:

Archetypes come to life only when one patiently tries to discover why and in what fashion they are meaningful to a living individual. … (1978: 88)


The understanding and the ability to realise or to activate these symbols, however, in one’s work will be shown to be another powerful instrument in a writer’s repertoire in order to make an impact upon one’s audience, which I sought to employ in ‘The Night-shift Ending’. That was insofar as I attempted to define, to understand and to present my characters according to my own understanding of Jungian analytical and depth psychology. After all, notwithstanding the earlier considerations of the work of Derrida and in particular of his concept of différance, I am here in this exegesis discussing ‘the mere use of words’ (Jung, 1978: 88) – most of which we know what they stand for or at least have a fair approximation thereof.

However, through my reading into the work of Jung, my own writing praxis and rather unique experience, I sought to realise those said symbols in my artefact and, so doing, intended to make an impact upon what I can of my audience’s collective unconscious: that shall hereinafter be defined as ‘that part of the [human] psyche which retains and transmits the common psychological
inheritance of mankind' (Henderson, 1978: 98). As Henderson writes on this matter in his chapter of Jung’s *Man and His Symbols*:

… from what … Jung has called ‘the collective unconscious’ – that is, that part of the psyche which retains and transmits the common psychological inheritance of mankind. These symbols are so ancient and unfamiliar to modern man that he cannot directly understand or assimilate them. (1978: 98)

That which Henderson identifies here to be, after Jung, the collective unconscious is, for writers and other artists alike, a powerful strata to tap into in their work: that is, that which has been identified to be our ‘common psychological inheritance’ (Henderson, 1978: 98). But, for me, this raises the question of what better way there is to make an impact upon one’s audience than by accessing the symbols of this ‘rich vein’ (Jung, 1978: 25a) and bringing them to life in and through their work, or at least attempting to? To achieve that becomes something that is a further powerful tool in an author’s selection, for as Jung states:

We find this in everyday life, where dilemmas are sometimes solved by the most surprising new propositions; many artists, philosophers, and even scientists owe some of their best ideas to inspirations that appear suddenly from the unconscious. The ability to reach a rich vein of such material and to translate it effectively into philosophy, literature, music, or scientific discovery is one of the hallmarks of what is commonly called genius. (1978: 25)

Although this is an obviously self-serving notion of what exactly ‘genius’ is – what Jung is here attempting to suggest that not only the conscious mind is responsible for our decision making processes and so our actions, but sometimes also that which are commonly known as ‘epiphanies’ or sudden and unexpected insights or revelations into the true nature of things (Delbridge & Bernard, 1994: 315) are; as is evidenced in Sylvia Thomas’ dream symbolising the actions she can take on the path to her rebirth that she has towards the end of ‘The Night-shift Ending’. And as such, they, therefore, can be said to be the
fruit of the workings of our unconscious. This remains, however, another powerful tool or instrument in a writer’s ‘tool-box’ (King, 2000) – that is, and only, if one can access and utilise it effectively in and through one’s work. This is not so easy as it seems and I refer the reader to my discussions on archetypes in chapter one.

The collective unconscious and its archetypes aside, in relation to ‘The Night-shift Ending’, I found the work of Jung useful to my own work, thinking and praxis supported by an investigation into the work of Joseph Campbell (i.e., Campbell, 1968; 1993; 2004) on personal growth, comparative mythology, monomyths, heroes and hero myths *inter alia*. As well as an exploration into the work of many others, including Bulfinch (1993), Hamilton (1999), Moncrieff (1995), Rosenberg (1999) and Vogler (2007) on the mythologies, the philosophies and the literature of the ancient world. However, a full analysis of this body of work is beyond the scope of this part of my combined PhD project.

That investigation into the work of Jung was relevant to my own work and praxis especially in relation to his and his followers’ efforts into the understanding of the cycle of the tragic hero as it is made manifest specifically in Greco-Roman mythology and literature *inter alia*. As Henderson states:

> Over and over again one hears a tale describing a hero’s miraculous but humble birth, his early proof of superhuman strength, his rapid rise to prominence or power, his triumphant struggle with the forces of evil, his fallibility to the sin of pride (*hybris*) and his fall through betrayal or a ‘heroic’ sacrifice that ends in his death … In many of these stories the early weakness of the hero is balanced by the appearance of strong ‘tutelary’ figures – or guardians – who enable him to perform the superhuman tasks that he cannot accomplish unaided. (1978: 101 Italics in the text)

Thus writes Henderson on the cycle of the tragic hero – this is particularly pertinent to ‘The Night-shift Ending’: in which both the central characters are proto-heroes and in which they both must reckon with forces beyond their control – or are they?
Discussing the cycle of the tragic hero, I shall contend, after Henderson, that the role of tutelary figures is pertinent to the hero’s development to maturity through their trials. For, as Henderson in fact states in relation to what he calls the ‘striking difference’ of the tragic hero of mythology and the novice of the initiation rite (Henderson, 1978: 124):

There is one striking difference between the hero myth and the initiation rite. The typical hero figures exhaust their efforts in achieving the goal of their ambitions; in short, they become successful even if immediately afterward they are punished or killed for their *hybris*. In contrast to this, the novice for initiation is called upon to give up willful ambition and all desire and to submit to the ordeal. He must be willing to experience this trial without hope of success. (1978: 124 Italics in the text)

In turn, this affects the chances of the tragic hero not falling victim to the trappings of their success and, thereby, falling victim to their own *hybris* or excessive or overweening pride: as Henderson identifies:

> The basic theme … raises, in effect, the vital question: How long can human beings be successful without falling victims to their own pride or, in mythological terms, to the jealousy of the gods? (1978: 106)

As already touched upon, the complications arising from worldly and material success is a fundamental issue in ‘The Night-shift Ending’: yet, as in real life, in that novel all struggle beneath its wake. Indeed, Stephen Murray, not only succumbs to the pressures of that and finds them unreasonable, but resolves in fact to write his second novel, *Stereophrenia*, on that exact topic in order to redeem himself in both his own eyes and those of others.

If we apply that which has been discussed hitherto, we can further say that Stephen Murray fails in his endeavour to become successful as a writer because he tries to reach the object of his desire and fulfill his ambition without the assistance of a tutelary figure to learn from and to guide him. He thus exhausts himself in that attempt and thereby fails by falling victim to the sin of *hybris* and
resultant vice, which leaves him bereft of his holy grail of being a successful writer. This grail in fact turns more into a poison chalice as that tale unfolds, that is to the extent that Stephen Murray is unable to cope with the pressures that his success places upon him, as he reflects:

_The DaySleepers_ had been an elemental part of Stephen’s life: his consuming passion and the object of his desire. He had thought about it, he had planned it to the finest detail and he had forsaken everything else for it. Now it was in the public domain, critics were writing about it and reviewing it and people were buying and reading it, and Stephen felt _blasé_. _The DaySleepers_ had been published, had won a Harvey award and all Stephen felt was empty, tired and weary. (Bos, n. d.: 246)

In contradistinction, ‘The Night-shift Ending’s’ other main character, Sylvia Thomas, balanced by the assistance and tutelage of her boss, a Supply storeowner, Mr. Benjamin Wilson, succeeds to a certain degree. This is because she is, through him and one of his acquaintances, William McHardy, initiated into that which I perceived to be the contemporary Australian art world. As I convey toward the end of that novel:

At home on her own that night, a Wednesday, Sylvia decided to have a quiet night in and considered how things had turned around for her. She prayed that they would continue to do so. To this end, Sylvia resolved that she would do everything in her power to ensure that this was so. She had been a failure, she had demeaned herself in a strip club, danced naked on the laps of men, who had repulsed her, and she had dropped out of Art school without so much as an award, but she had a firm belief in her talent and her star, that she would succeed and hoped now with Will on board that her dreams would be realised. Sylvia was thus quite pleased with how things were coming together for her and she hoped that they would continue to do so and wondered what she would have done and what would have come of her had she not met Mr. Wilson and, through him, Will. (Bos, n. d.: 239 – 240)

Very rarely, however, in modern-day life is there what one could call a ‘happy ending’ – or in ancient mythology or antique literature for that matter. This is insofar as life is never easy and things do not always go swimmingly in it

This as it is, in ‘The Night-shift Ending’ the two main characters, Sylvia Thomas included, both must reckon with the high price they have had to pay to achieve their goals with their respective journeys ending in dissolution as opposed to resolution. For, at the end of my artefact, we see a broken-hearted and dejected Stephen Murray working again at a déclassé second hand bookstore after having tasted success as a writer by having seen his first novel published and winning a prestigious Harvey award for the best novel by a previously unpublished author and also having struggled to overcome both himself and his demons – namely, his narcissism and excessive drinking. On the contrary, Sylvia Thomas returns to her parents’ house in Lara in country Victoria after going to great lengths to be independent and nearly realising her dream of being a successful and self-sufficient painter, having exhibited and sold some six of her paintings. However, that story ends with the hope of redemption for both its main characters. This is insofar as they are indeed able to alter their own individual circumstances and initiate the requisite change in that through their own actions or decisions to act.

Rather than positing struggling and later successful artists to be heroes defiantly and valiantly challenging the established order as other ‘Artist as hero’ pieces (Beebe, 1964: v) attempt to do, my artefact shows that after their trials its two main characters are only ordinary young people with ‘all too human’ flaws and faults (Nietzsche, 1992: no page numbers). ‘The Night-shift Ending’ is therefore a departure from the traditional romantic ‘Artist as hero’ novel as defined by Beebe (1964: v), for in that novel neither of the central characters overcome their trials or succeed and can therefore not act as exemplars of

rebellion or archetypes of the hero *per se* and, it is my hope that, if successful in my own journey, I will have learnt something from the characters, whom I so lovingly fashioned, and their fate.

Although that is something that only time will answer, all this, nevertheless, brings us to the questions: what have I learnt from this combined PhD project? And, therefore, what can I pass on to others from all that which has been discussed so far? And what is their significance for me as a writer and, thus, for my own praxis and artistic process? For as Barthes wrote from his own experience in his *Image–Music–Text* on this exact topic:

> What is a piece of 'research'? To find out, we would need to have some idea of what a 'result' is. What is it that one finds? What is it that one wants to find? *What is missing?* In what axiomatic field will the fact isolated, the meaning brought out, the statistical discovery be placed? (1983c: 386 Italics in the text)

And so, I shall seek to resolve some of the issues raised in this exegesis as well as attempt to offer some sort of insight into them and discuss their significance in my closing remarks and conclusion.
CLOSING REMARKS: PRACTICE-LED OUTCOMES AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE FOR THE
PRESENT AUTHOR AS A WRITER – ‘MUST I WRITE?’

Nobody can advise or help you, nobody. There is only one single means. Go inside
yourself. Discover the motive that bids you to write; examine whether it sends its
roots down to the deepest places of your heart, confess to yourself whether you
would have to die if writing were denied you. This before all: ask yourself in the
quietest hour of your night: must I write?

– Rainer Maria Rilke, Letters to a Young Poet.
(Rilke, 2008: 12 Italics in the text).

Hence stated Bohemian-Austrian poet Rainer Maria Rilke in the first of his oft-
cited Letters to a Young Poet written in 1903 to Franz Xaver Kappus, himself an
aspiring poet seeking Rilke’s advice on his own writing.

A lot of ground has been covered in this exegesis and a lot of questions
have been raised. And now the final questions arise, namely; what are the
outcomes of the creation of my artefact for me qua writer? What is their
significance both for me as a writer and for my newly found artistic process? And
what can I therefore pass on to others from that attempt? Has my writing process
in fact become my praxis as a result of this PhD project? And, if so how?

As a novel ‘The Night-shift Ending’, which began from my own life
experience and then germinated in my rather fertile imagination, has had quite a
long gestation – over a decade in various forms and guises and with many
hiatuses as well as, of course, the help of many necessary others. So, what has
all that actually taught me qua author?

Through the writing of ‘The Night-shift Ending’, I learnt to plan my work, to
conceptualise the task at hand before putting pen to paper. I also learnt to push
myself as an author and to write, as it were, and for want of a better term, outside
of my own writerly ‘comfort zone’ – that which I previously knew to be the safe yet
reassuring surrounds of my own familiar but idiosyncratic writing process. That
project, as well as the production of this exegesis, also encouraged and inspired me to try new things in my work, to take risks and to explore theories that were not familiar to me nor to which I was accustomed. I also began to exercise my writerly ‘voice’ (Alvarez, 2006: frontis). Furthermore, I learnt to take on board and to incorporate much feedback into my work, to revise and to redraft it. By garnering feedback on my artefact, I was made aware that I was writing to and for an audience, the discourse I was entering into when I put pen to paper and the meaning that this in turn imbues my work. All of which is integral to the development of one’s writing praxis. This is also pertinent in order to come to some sort of understanding of this as one’s writerly self or the esteem or belief of oneself as an author (Culler, 2002: 22). In so doing, the lessons learnt through that process taught me much about and enabled me to understand and to develop myself _qua_ novelist specifically in terms of technique and understanding of what it in fact takes to be an author as opposed to being just another writer.

In terms of the actual understanding, the development and the embracing of one’s writing praxis as one’s artistic process, one must also ask; why am I putting pen to paper or fingers to the keyboard? What is my motivation for, in the words of poet T. S. Eliot (1975), frightfully toiling over what is a blank page? This becomes something that in turn raises many pertinent questions about the nature of storytelling itself. In response to which, Arnold writes:

Ritual and personal storytelling is the basis of cultural knowledge and hence education. It’s about intriguing, enchanting, including and even seducing the audience to enter into your story. It’s the ‘willing suspension of disbelief’, but it’s also more than that: it is entry into the magical and mystical internal world of the storyteller, which we would now label as the psychological area. Storytelling is the most ancient of human arts. So it is not surprising that the first member of the tribe who was ‘kept’ by the labour of the community was the storyteller: the shaman, priest or priestess. (2007: 83)

In light of Arnold’s statement, both the role and the goal of the author can be said to be to achieve, but not be limited to, Coleridge’s ‘willing suspension of disbelief’
(2004) from their audience in order to augment that said audience’s everyday lives. For me, this raises the question of how this can in fact occur?

Storytelling is an ancient craft with a proud history. It is one of enticing and seducing others into what I hope to make an external ‘magical and mystical … world’ (Arnold, 2007: 83) and is one of the main reasons that I embarked upon the project being discussed. That ‘world’, which Arnold (2007: 83) discusses, I sought to create, to cultivate and to offer entry to others into and through that the conduct of project I feel that this has been both achieved. Most of all, I am satisfied with the result and pleased that I undertook it with the conviction that writing not only entertains, but that it also stimulates the audience’s own internal world from which they may not only learn but also grow.

A rather bold statement, but whether this is so or not, however, ‘The Night-shift Ending’ is just a story I wanted to tell and told it I did: and that, for me, is one of the more significant outcomes of such an endeavour. For, as J. Hillis Miller identifies ‘[n]othing seems more natural and universal to human beings than telling stories’ (1990: 66). In fact Miller states further:

Surely there is no human culture, however ‘primitive’, without its stories and habits of storytelling, its myths of the origin of the world, its legends of the tribe or group of stories about folk heroes. Linguists use the ability to narrate as a measure of advanced language competence. (1990: 66)

Storytelling, the arcane métier of Scheherazade, that Miller writes of here, I thus tried and through my efforts came to an understanding what it is to do exactly that in order to strive for excellence as well as to make it my praxis.

Given this, if storytelling is so fundamental and primary to both our culture and to our natures, why do so many practitioners bemoan it as process – or, in the words of Rilke, ‘it is sufficient … to feel that one could live without writing, in order not to venture it [i.e., not to write] at all’? (2008: 13) Or, to put it another way: why put pen to paper in the first place – or, ‘must I write’? (Rilke, 2008: 12 Italics in the text)

If ‘the novel is as the novel does’ and if writing is a craft which, given its
long-term, unpredictable and non-linear nature (Rossitto, 2004: 5), personally I wonder why one would set out upon and commit oneself to such a journey without a definite end and during which one must endure much inclement weather? For my part, writing is what I do, what I have always wanted to do, what I, for a very large part of my life to date, have always done and, with a bit of luck, shall continue to do as best I can. Therefore, I now believe that I can weather the storm, persevere and finish the race and through both the experience and the exercise of a non-traditional practice-led higher research degree of which this exegesis is part, I can share the boon of both my adventure and my ordeal with others and hopefully make an impact upon the ‘internal world’ (Arnold, 2007: 83) of those for whom I write, which is perhaps the most significant outcome of what has been at times both a rough and challenging as well as highly generative and rewarding journey.

In other words, ‘I [simply] must [write]’ (Rilke, 2008: 12 Italics in the text) and so I shall have to accept all that as part of my situation if I am both to continue – and, more importantly, to continue as best I can as well as to succeed and to strive for excellence in my work – or to quote Rilke once again:

Dig down into yourself for a deep answer. And if this should be in the affirmative, if you may meet this solemn question with a strong simple ‘I must’, then build your life according to this necessity; your life must, right to its most unimportant and insignificant hour, become a token and a witness of this impulse … (2008: 12 Italics in the text)
CONCLUSIONS:

And afterward?
– What to write now? Can you still write anything?
– One writes with one’s desire, and I am not through desiring.


Thus Professor of Desire Roland Barthes concluded his ‘autobiography’ a mere five years before his own untimely death in 1980 at the age of just sixty-four when, it is speculated, he was planning to write his first novel – an ‘utopian’ piece of a grand scale (Allen, 2003: 108). All of which makes me wonder what Barthes would have had to say about the production of a reflective, self-critical piece such as an exegesis, even though, however, he can be said to have been writing his own throughout his entire career.

This exegesis, this writer’s own ‘critical explanation or interpretation’ (Delbridge & Bernard, 1994: 327), of my doctoral artefact, ‘The Night-shift Ending’, began: Writing about writing, including my own writing and the understanding and the development of both the depths and the heights of my ‘writerly’ self (Culler, 2002: 22) as an aspiring author of ‘literary fiction’, as my work has been characterised by an assessor (Anon., 2005), presents many challenges. Foremost was the fact that I was, from the outset, uneasy with the medium for, as was said in the introduction to this piece, such an exegesis is something, which – given its personal nature and its actual character – had hitherto been foreign to me. This may, in some senses, prove problematic for the reader of this exegesis: for, as Theodor W. Adorno’s erstwhile assistant, Rolf Tiedemann wrote discussing Adorno’s Notes to Literature:

Adorno often warned against taking the artist to be the best commentator on his own work. The artist’s subjective additions to the interpretation are rather cause for skepticism on the side of the critic. What counts is what the artwork realizes objectively; the artist’s intention is only one more moment among many, most of
which are more significant. (2004: 379)

Nevertheless and in light of this statement, I persevered with the practice of such a model and thereby learnt both much about myself and extended myself as an author. This also extended my existent writerly skill-set and praxis in many ways. The lessons learnt from that said practice I in turn seek to pass on to others. For, to esteem oneself as an author and to understand, utilise successfully, access effectively and to realise both the depths and the heights of one’s ‘writerly’ self (Culler, 2002: 22) in one’s work is fundamental for writers of all levels and at all stages of their individual writing journeys to realise their full potential both personally and professionally. Therefore, it is intended that, through the production of this exegesis and the writing project discussed and commented upon, I have achieved or at least come to an understanding of this ‘self’ as well as my own artistic process in order to make it my praxis.

* * * *

And so, I thus tried; with the intent that and, of course, the help of many necessary others that things did not and shall not go further ‘aglay’ (Arnold, 2007: 34) both for me and for my writing projects to come. And so, I thus tried; and was glad that I did that, namely try and did so as best as I possibly could.

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