My name is Will

a novel and exegesis
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1 April, 2008
Declaration of original authorship

This is to certify that this submission is all my own work completed under the supervision of University of the Sunshine Coast

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In 1902, five years before being awarded a Nobel Prize for Literature, Rudyard Kipling published a collection of children’s short fiction entitled *Just So Stories*. One of the pieces, a poem that fronts *The elephant’s child*, is a verse that has far reaching implications for the study and practice of Creative Writing. Kipling wrote:

I keep six honest serving-men  
(They taught me all I knew);  
Their names are What and Why and When  
And How and Where and Who. ¹

What is interesting about the piece is what Kipling names his “serving-men” – the six universal questions of what, why, when, how, where and who – and how the piece hints at the author’s use of such questions as a learning tool, and an “honest” one at that. Widely utilized in various fields of study as a research framing paradigm², I have utilised Kipling’s notion of the six universal questions as a framework for the exegetical component of my Doctor of Creative Arts candidature. Not only does Kipling’s regard in the literary canon³ position his work as an ideal referential point for study, but the six serving men also offer the scholar-writer a means to encapsulate the process of Creative Writing within an academic context, specifically the crafting of a fiction novel. That is, Kipling’s six serving men are also six universal questions.

² As one example, Horan’s 2005 paper “Framing the new reflection” (in *Nurse Education in Practice*, 5, 5, 255-257) uses Kipling’s questions to examine meaning in nursing practice.
³ Henry James once said “Kipling strikes me personally as the most complete man of genius (as distinct from fine intelligence) that I have ever known” (in Rutherford, 1987).
The central tenet of my exegesis is that a novel is not the answer to one question, as certain theorists claim⁴ – a novel is the answer to six questions. These questions, while intrinsically universal, can be thought of as idiosyncratic; that is, the way a writer interprets the questions in regard to their own work can have massive bearing on how that work is crafted. I have adopted Kipling’s questions as a means of situating the creative process of my accompanying novel My name is Will, and as a means of framing the exegetical component of my Doctor of Creative Arts.

*How do I research writing?* discusses the research behind a novel. I postulate that writing itself can be thought of as research for a novel, as writing is a process where understanding is achieved through the act of writing. I examine the concept of practice-led research and present a viable critical methodology for the studying of Creative Writing in the academy whereby the examination of process-based outcomes can constitute research. I conclude with a discussion of the non-fiction and fiction sources examined as part of my literature review.

In *Where do I get my ideas?* I postulate that inspiration is a byproduct of the writing process, and that while the idea of a novel can come from one source, a novel is the product of *writing out* that first wisp of an idea. I discuss the source of inspiration for *My name is Will* by examining the concept of the narrative sequel. As a case study I examine Thomas Harris’ *Hannibal* as an example of a quality sequel. I conclude with a reflection on the evolution of *My name is Will* from initial inspiration through to the novel’s completion.

To answer *Why do I write?* I consider the words of established writers from Roman satirists to Emmy Award winning television writers, all of whom have searched for the reason they write. From their words, I propose that writing equates to therapy, a concept that has ramifications beyond the realm of fiction. As such, I examine the case of

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⁴ Hawthorn (1985), Checkoway (1999) and King (2000) are but three theorists who highlight the difference between a short story and a novel – the former being a question, while the latter is an answer.
committed schizophrenic and Shakespearean soul mate Lara Jefferson, whose journal-cum-novel *These are my sisters* offers evidence that writing can give voice to the conflict within oneself. I conclude with the implications for *My name is Will*, in which therapy is not only a part of the narrative crux, but a by-product of the writing process.

Next I ask *When do I challenge the rules?* and open a discussion on when a writer can subvert the traditional rules of writing for narrative gain. I offer the metafictional masterpiece *Gould’s book of fish* by Richard Flanagan and Sonya Hartnett’s multiple-voice narrative *Surrender* as case studies of subversive narrative techniques to establish the balance between rule breaking and unsuccessful writing. I conclude with a discussion of the experimental narration of *My name is Will* and the outcomes such narrative subversion achieve.

In *What is my genre?* I examine genre as a means of defining a narrative, both during and after the writing process. Using Tim Winton’s cerebral thriller *In the winter dark*, I examine the conventions of the psychological thriller genre, and I propose traits with which to identify a psychological thriller. I conclude with an examination of the generic concepts employed in the crafting of *My name is Will*.

Finally, I ask *Who is my reader?* and propose that writing to an audience can provide focus during the writing process. As such, I examine mass market publishing and use Stephen King’s *Carrie* as a case study of a work in which audience consideration equated to success. I conclude with a reflection on the possible audience for *My name is Will*.

My exegesis ends with further questions a writer can ask of their writing. While Kipling’s six questions have provided me with a viable methodology for the examination of my own work, every writer is different and I postulate that scholar-writers can utilize a
framework such as Kipling’s questions to not only write a novel but also to investigate Creative Writing in postgraduate study within the academy.
How do I research writing?

Every man must be his own law in his own work, but it is a poor-spirited artist in any craft who does not know how the other man’s work should be done or could be…
- Rudyard Kipling

When it comes to the question of how a novel is researched, there is no definitive answer. Research methods for Creative Writing are as varied as the writers themselves and what invariably works for one may actually impede the writing of another. I know of writers who swear by journal keeping, the collating of data from news articles, non-fiction texts and historical facts; and yet there are others who work primarily from personal experience, their research effectively amounting to subjective observations of the interaction between people. Is either approach right or wrong? The conundrum is impossible to quantify, and as such it is not for this exegesis to postulate the definitive way in which a writer should, or must, research – it is merely to suggest the way that research works for this particular writer. And that is through the act of writing itself.

Writing is akin to learning, with the actualization of a novel often beginning in much the same way a student does in a new area of study – with trepidation. Barthelme maintains:

We have all heard novelists testify to the fact, beginning a new book, they are utterly baffled as to how to proceed, what should be written and how it might be written, even though they’ve done a dozen. At best there’s a slender intuition, not much greater than an itch.

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The theorist highlights an important distinction – the fact that a writer, despite already having written a book or many books, is in the same position as a writer who has written none. Every novel is, in effect, a new start.

Barthelme also calls writing “a process of dealing with not-knowing” which adds to the argument against a definitive answer to the question of how to research a novel. This is a subjective issue, as the personal revelation that comes from the act of creativity is a response to Barthelme’s “not-knowing” – in the search for the unknown, the creator seeks to make it known, not only to her but to others as well. If writing is the process of dealing with the unknown to rediscover our world and ourselves, then writing itself becomes the research.

Emig calls writing “learned behaviour”, and while the term is slightly ambiguous, it does hit at the central advantage of contextualizing writing as research. Terms such as ‘elements’ or ‘principles’ are often used to describe that which has been done in the past, of contextualizing writing within a research framework. Therefore, Emig’s use of the term ‘learned behaviour’ is accurate: when one writes, one is learning about writing through the very act, the behaviour of writing. Writers reshape meaning through writing to clarify understanding, and it is clarification which is of most interest in this case.

Goldberg’s analogy of writing is interesting:

I’m reminded of cooking lessons with my mother… ‘You don’t learn how to cook with recipes,’ she said. ‘Put your hands in it. Taste it. Feel it. Then you’ll know it.’

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7 Ibid.
8 Kundera in Davis & Shadle, 2000, 422-3.
9 Emig, J. 1977, “Writing as a Mode of Learning” in College Composition and Communication, 28, 2, 123.
11 In Ely, Downing and Anzul, 1997, 9-10.
Goldberg maintains that knowledge of writing comes from the act of writing itself and it is only through the production that one can truly understand the process. Writing is a unique form of feedback, since research into the process is materially available in the written product\(^{12}\); thus, while other research uses established facts as a basis, the primary basis for researching a novel can come from the end product itself. Ely, Downing and Anzul claim “we write our way through various versions of understanding”\(^{13}\), highlighting again the ephemeral nature of writing as research. It is through writing that understanding is reached – it is writing which shapes an understanding of writing.

However, while many theorists maintain that how to research a novel can be answered by the act of writing itself, this does not mean such a research strategy is readily acceptable within academia. Creative Writing has been criticized as being “beneath the threshold of valid academic activity”\(^{14}\), with detractors citing the lack of a long established body of knowledge into the art and “no researched and disciplined argument”\(^{15}\) as reasons for its reduced standing. Given that Creative Writing can be situated as a relatively new discipline within the academy, this view would seem to hold truth. Yet, when the concept of what constitutes research is pared back, the idea of writing as research has as much worth as any other research strategy, as Davis and Shadle maintain:

> As academic seekers, we journey toward a state of understanding that subsumes both ignorance and knowledge, a state in which we ‘know’ more deeply our own incapacity for certainty and find that it is uncertainty that keeps us alive and thinking.\(^{16}\)

Davis and Shadle claim that research – “academic seeking” as they put it – is therefore ruled by uncertainty, and that research itself is an act precipitated by not knowing. Does

\(^{12}\) Emig, 1977, 125.
\(^{13}\) Ely, Downing and Anzul’s *On writing qualitative research: Living by words* (Routledge, 1997) touches on practice-based approaches to defining research writing.
\(^{15}\) Ibid.
\(^{16}\) Davis & Shadle, 2000, 422.
Davis and Shadle’s reference to an “incapacity for certainty” mirror what Barthelme terms the “not-knowing” that a writer experiences when starting a novel? If traditional research in the academy is couched in such terms, why should Creative Writing be any different? Research writing is an “act of seeking by presenting the knowledge the act secures”\(^{17}\), and in the context of the writing of a novel, this seeking (writing) offers a direct result of knowledge (the novel as outcome). Facts take on meaning only through interpretation\(^{18}\) and given that Creative Writing has yet to establish a clearly disciplined argument – a body of ‘facts’ as it were – we must look elsewhere for the guiding knowledge of the discipline.

This is not to say that writing as a form of research is any way inferior to the traditional methods expounded by academia. As Everett states:

> Students make discoveries about the subject by practising it to which no amount of reading or analysis could give them access, practical discoveries which nevertheless strengthen their critical understanding of literature as well as their practical adeptness in it. Indeed, improving their practical adeptness informs and broadens their critical understanding.\(^{19}\)

Too often detractors of Creative Writing fail to see the link between creativity and critical understanding. While textual analysis of, for instance, a piece of historical fiction is necessary to understand the established principles of such fiction work, it is only through the writing of such a piece that a critical level of understanding in practice can be achieved.

The Creative Writing learning strategy is moving away from “the modernist ideals of expertise, detachment, and certainty…toward a new valuation of uncertainty, passionate exploration, and mystery”\(^{20}\), which is itself a more than accurate description of what it takes to produce a novel. The uncertainty, passion, and the mystery of the act of writing fiction can be thought of as research, with the ‘knowledge’ such an act procures taking the form of the written piece at the end.

\(^{17}\) Ibid, 421.  
\(^{18}\) Crowley & Hawhee in Davis & Shadle, 2000, 420.  
\(^{19}\) Everett, 2005, 233.  
\(^{20}\) Davis & Shadle, 2000, 418.
O’Conner claims “I have to write to discover what I am doing. I don’t know as well what I think until I see what I say”\(^{21}\) and Everett maintains that “learning about something should include trying it oneself”\(^{22}\), with both theorists highlighting process over fact once more. The same applies to the writing of a novel. A writer may examine a plethora of texts that come before her; she may analyze these texts and reach a critical understanding of the principles such texts make use of; and she may aim, in her writing, to mirror these texts in her own way. But no comprehension of writing is complete unless the writer writes – it is only through the process of writing that a knowledge of writing can truly be demonstrated.

Ely, Downing and Anzul state that all researchers should “trust the process of discovery”\(^{23}\), and again the use of such vocabulary as ‘process’ and ‘discovery’ is distinct. Writing is a process of discovery: it is, for want of a better term, practice, and as such a critical methodology for creative writing can be formed from such a conceptual basis.

Practicing research: a critical methodology for Creative Writing

When it comes to quantifying a research method, other disciplines in the academy have a distinct advantage over Creative Writing. While research can be accurately defined as “a cultural practice that is generated by and through the intersection with other cultural practices (to produce) knowledge that can therefore be understood as ‘situated’”\(^{24}\), the act of situating Creative Writing as representative of a certain type of research is problematic. In the first instance, the traditional models that offer substantiated modes for researching – those of qualitative and quantitative analysis – do not accurately portray the process involved in Creative Writing; specifically, aspects of both research methods can be present

\(^{21}\) In Ely, Downing & Anzul, 1997, 9.
\(^{22}\) Everett, 2005, 233.
\(^{23}\) Ely, Downing and Anzul, 1997, 8.
\(^{24}\) Ibid.
in the process of crafting fiction and therefore neither is mutually exclusive. However, 
coupled with this is the notion that Creative Writing, while struggling for its own place in 
the pantheon of academic disciplines, has yet to be definitively attributed to a type of 
research that not only encapsulates the creative process but also provides a student in the 
field with a solid model on which to base their investigations into fiction.

None more so than this exegesis. While I could attempt to persuade the reader that 
my research method has been a combination of both qualitative and quantitative analysis, 
since at times I rely on a mixture of practical creative writing theory, literature studies texts 
and facts/figures relating to book sales and published titles, it would not do my exegesis nor 
my novel justice. In fact, if I was to conceptualize the creative process for this DCA 
candidature wholly in the vein of either qualitative or quantitative research, the reader 
would not glean the underlying process behind the research that makes up this exegesis 
and, conversely, the novel accompanying it. While undergraduate coursework prompts the 
developing student to investigate specific areas as they relate to course content, 
postgraduate studies seem, at least to this researcher, to promote what could be termed as 
controlled autonomy. Yes, the researcher is ‘free’ to examine their field from their own 
angle, to discuss and conclude on topics relevant to their area of study, and, in a sense, to 
raise the metaphorical bar with innovation and originality – but it seems that any academic 
action must still be governed by the principles of analysis that have ruled scholarly 
investigation since the first red brick was laid. That, in essence, is the problem.

Haseman argues that an exegesis is “individual and idiosyncratic”25, that by its very 
nature the exegesis offers a differing mode of research than what is seen as traditional. 
How then can a researcher measure a Creative Writing exegesis in terms of quantitative or

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Writing Programs Conference, Perilous Adventures: Creative Writing Practice and Research in the Higher 
Degree and Beyond, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Nov 23-26.
qualitative analysis, when the piece is intrinsically reflective and undeniably personal? Should a researcher structure her study to fit one of the established modes or should she show what it really takes to produce a creative work, no matter the form that exploration takes?

Steiner maintains that all serious literature “is a critical act…embodies an expository reflection on, a value judgment of, the inheritance and context to which it pertains”\(^{26}\), which brings another dimension to the argument. If literature itself is critical, and yet the approach to explaining literature inarguably takes a different form (differentiating one as academic and the other as not, is a standard recourse), then the question of how to encapsulate research in this field – specifically exegetical – is fraught with difficulty.

Research in the Creative Writing discipline is process-based, and this process cannot be pigeonholed as research in which the findings are expressed in purely numerical form or in words\(^{27}\). Creative Writing research has another level – that of reflection, or educated reflection to be more precise. More than opinion, this type of research is an examination of one’s own creative process, the putting into words of how the words are written. Granted, this exegesis looks, because of these words and those of others, to be a qualitative analysis, and you could argue that this type of research is merely an evolution of qualitative methodology. Yet, qualitative analysis is still unsuitable when discussing Creative Writing; or unwieldy at the very least.

The exegesis of one of my colleagues the author, Gary Crew\(^{28}\), is a good example. While the creative product for Crew’s DCA award was a piece of fiction, the exegesis


\(^{28}\) Crew, G. 2005, *Sam Silverthorne: Quest*, unpublished exegesis, University of the Sunshine Coast. The creative component of Crew’s DCA submission, the historical novel *Sam Silverthorne: Quest* was subsequently published by Hachette, Sydney, 2005.
preceding the work used ethnographic and historical studies to define his research method, which in itself is problematic (though ultimately not for him, given he has since been awarded his Doctor of Creative Arts). I mean problematic in the context of my research project, because although the process of researching history was perfectly suited to his body of work – his fiction piece itself draws heavily from the potentially counter-creative disciplines of history and anthropology – such a model has little bearing upon my own work.

Over the course of my studies, I had surmised that my exegesis would be, in effect, the ‘explanation’ for my novel and that the research method embodied in the exegesis would mirror this. But how could I produce a scholarly investigation into my work when the work itself has no basis in qualitative or quantitative analysis? Crafting fiction can be comprised of parts of both forms of research, but as I researched it became readily apparent that in order to explain the creative piece, I would have to do something different. The traditional modes of research couldn’t help me. Then I came across the words of Phillips, who maintains, “Doing something properly is a way of not doing it differently” 29. This idea struck a chord.

Postgraduate research actively encourages innovation – many of the models for the DCA exegesis I was shown have specific chapters in which the researcher had to justify the innovation that arose from the creative work. In fact, I remember distinctly trying to highlight the originality of the creative work in my DCA proposal for candidature, almost six months of research before the novel and exegesis were started. So if innovation is as valued as it seemed, why then could I not apply the same thought to the research methodology?

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29 The quote of Phillips’ is from Burrows’ innovative paper “Perilous Practice: a map for getting lost” presented at the 11th Association of Australian Writing Programs Conference, November 2006.
As such, I took a leaf out of Grey’s\textsuperscript{30} book and went with option C – practice-led research. Grey defines practice-led research as “a research strategy carried out through practice, using predominant methodologies and methods familiar to the practitioners”\textsuperscript{31}. Essentially, it is a critical approach that uses practitioners in the field as its research sources. Dallow goes further when he claims that practice-based research “offers the opportunity to try to understand the way an artist engages in an original way with their physical, cultural and psychic raw materials”\textsuperscript{32}. Practice-led research is a type of research which has more than a little in common with Creative Writing itself, especially given that “writers find out both what they want to express, and how to express it, by writing”\textsuperscript{33}. The focus is reflexive in nature and as long as the research that informs the work is relevant, its relevancy is assured.

Practice-led research is a different approach to critical analysis – it is self analysis, but it must be backed up with credibility. A researcher cannot simply include certain information in an attempt to continue the art (so to speak). Practice-led research, while undeniably reactive to the creative product, is not simply a further chapter to the novel or a paper-based portfolio for the artist. A U.K. Council for Graduate Education report states:

Practice-based doctoral submissions must include a substantial contextualization of the creative work. This critical appraisal or analysis not only clarifies the basis of the claim for the originality and location of the original work, it also provides the basis for a judgment as to whether general scholarly requirements are met. This could be defined as judgment of the submission as a contribution to knowledge in the field, showing doctoral level powers of analysis and mastery of existing contextual knowledge, in a form which is accessible to and auditable by knowledgeable peers.\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{30} In Haseman, 2006.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{32} Dallow, P. 2003, “Representing Creativeness: practice-based approaches to research in creative arts” in \textit{Art, Design and Communication in Higher Education}, 2, 1, 417-446.
\textsuperscript{33} Brien, D. 2006, “Creative Practice as Research: a creative writing case study” in \textit{Media International Australia incorporating Culture and Policy} (online), 118.
\textsuperscript{34} U.K. Council for Education report sourced from Hughes, 2006.
While creativity is highly subjective, the exegesis as a research project lends itself to objectivity and practice-led research should be viewed as a highly critical component in which the writer has a dual role – that of “making and assessing”\(^{35}\). It is research that must meet the ‘general scholarly requirements’ as stated above, despite the fact that theorists in the field of practice-led research highlight that “in creative work, exploratory ideas and acts arise during the process and sometimes as side effects, rather than from the explicit objectives being pursued at the time”\(^{36}\). That is, what leads practice-led research is the writing itself, which often takes the researcher beyond the notions that instigated the research in the first place. This is not wrong – if anything it brings dimension to the contextualization of the creative product, as the reader gets to see the drafting process of a work, something any writer will attest is intrinsic to the craft.

With that in mind – and the fact that my studies are focused on Creative Writing – this exegesis has employed a research methodology that can accurately be described as practice-led. If it is true that “to gain an understanding of creative practice, evidence is needed from fields where creative thinking and innovative outcomes are the core business”\(^{37}\), then this project has been situated by research arising from – and in direct relation to – the ‘core business’ of my fiction. The primary texts examined by my exegesis have been used as springboards for further research; that is, the fiction works that have the most relevance upon the creative outcome of this study have prompted this researcher to investigate the aspects linking them to the creative outcome itself.

\(^{35}\) Ibid.


\(^{37}\) Ibid.
Writing books: critical resources for creative research

This exegesis examines fiction texts in accordance with Brien’s claim that creative works are “stocks of knowledge in themselves”\textsuperscript{38}, and O’Rourke and Hunter’s belief that knowledge comes from the researcher’s exploration as a “receiver of texts”\textsuperscript{39}. As such, the sources for this research project have been chosen because of their direct relation to the creative component.

\textit{Hannibal} by Thomas Harris has been used as a definitive example of a successful narrative sequel, a necessary component of my novel since \textit{My name is Will} is a sequel to my first published novel, \textit{Room one nineteen}\textsuperscript{40}. The work of Richard Flanagan (\textit{Gould’s book of fish}) and Sonya Hartnett (\textit{Surrender}) have also been examined, as both writers offer texts in which voice and viewpoint are heavily intertwined with the narrative – again, an element not dissimilar to my own work. A further chapter of this exegesis focuses on the psychological narrative genre, and uses \textit{In the winter dark} by Tim Winton as a basis for a discussion of generic conventions, while Lara Jefferson’s \textit{These are my sisters} underpins an examination of the notion of narrative therapy, which has conceptual parallels with the novel accompanying this exegesis. The work of Stephen King is focused on with his first published novel \textit{Carrie}, which is used as a case study for the ramifications of writing fiction to and for the mass market. Each of these books has something to offer in regard to the novel – and each one is examined in a reflexive process, whereby the creative product may not have been directly influenced by any one title in particular during the writing, but in hindsight it is clear that my intentions in the specific area of narrative are similar. The bulk of my research into writing came from these fiction sources.

\textsuperscript{38} Brien, 2006.
\textsuperscript{39} In Everett, 2005, 233.
\textsuperscript{40} Keioskie, L. 2005, \textit{Room one nineteen}, Lothian, Melbourne.
Texts such as Jute’s *Writing a thriller* and Estleman’s *Writing the popular novel: A comprehensive guide to fiction that sells* provided a basis for the popular narrative angle my work took, and while I found both books to be lacking in depth in places, at the very least I had the basics upon which to examine my own work. By the same token, Baines’ *Innovative fiction and the novel*, Smith’s *The writing experiment: Strategies for innovative Creative Writing* and Hawthorn’s *Studying the novel* show the depth of critical thought that is being published on contemporary fiction by the academy, and set a strong tone for the exegesis. Stone’s *Diaries, self-talk and psychosis: Writing as a place to live* was invaluable in the discussion of narrative therapy; Checkoway’s *Creating fiction: Instruction and insight from teachers of the Associated Writing Program* had dynamic essays from practitioners in the field of fiction writing; and even Mandell’s self-help text *Book editors talk to writers* provided sound advice across many of the chapters in this exegesis.

This combination of fiction and non-fiction sources has resulted in the crafting of an exegesis that puts the work technically in the realm of practice-led research. Haseman maintains:

> Academics across the creative arts, media and design have struggled to meet the evolving needs of research in the new culture…We have traveled far, and creative writers have been among the leaders of this road trip; navigators through innovative poetic forms, reflexive creative processes and the exegetical word.41

For myself, it has been a long journey, one fraught with doubt and subjected to the same insecurity that the writing of a fiction novel can engender; yet it is only now, in hindsight, that I realise this was the only way his exegesis could be written. The act of writing is practice in itself42, so it stands to reason that a critical approach to fiction should be

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41 In his keynote address to the 11th AAWP conference, 2006.
couched in the same terms. *My name is Will* may be an exegesis and novel written primarily for the award of Doctor of Creative Arts; but it has also been a highly beneficial project for this researcher. Practice-led research is a viable research method for a critical approach to creative writing, and it is a methodology this researcher hopes becomes, if not equal to, then at least academically recognized beside more traditional methods of qualitative and quantitative research. After all, if research outcomes are steeped in the notion of innovation, then the researching creative writer has the means to not only fulfill academic provisions, but also cast a reflexive eye upon their own work and the future fiction they will write.

With that in mind – and the preceding list of resources aside – it behooves this writer to make mention of the primary source for this research project. While the resources I have already mentioned have shaped meaning and aided in the construction of the creative component of this DCA, there is one resource in particular that has informed this study. That is *Room one nineteen*, my first published novel and the primary text used in the creation of the creative component, its sequel *My name is Will*. And while the resources I make mention of above offer both critical and creative perspectives on the crafting of *My name is Will*, my primary intention with this research study was to craft a narrative sequel. That is where the idea for the novel came from, the inspiration for *My name is Will*. Where that inspiration took me is another matter entirely.
Where do I get my ideas?

The fluenter (sic) the thing looks from the outside the more worriment and sweat it is to me to evolve.
- Rudyard Kipling

The one question a writer loathes to hear is: “Where do your ideas come from?” I suspect that this is because there’s no easy answer to the question. Smith maintains “many writers probably do not really know how they arrive at their texts, and mental events which occur during the creative process may be difficult to remember or describe”. It is this lack of cohesive explanation that makes the question of where a novel’s concept comes from so challenging.

An early process model of creativity was first theorized by Wallas in 1926, who maintains:

…there are four steps in the creative process: preparation, in which a deficiency or a gap in knowledge is sensed; incubation, in which information is acquired, ideas are explored and solutions begin to be formulated; illumination, in which there is a flash of insight or the birth of a new idea; and revision, in which the options are evaluated and the most promising is selected.

While preparation and revision have their place, inspiration would seem to be intrinsically linked with the third step, illumination, with Wallas’ use of the phrase ‘flash of insight’ bearing strong connotations alone. A flash of insight is the classic notion of what constitutes inspiration – what writer hasn’t had a Eureka moment and jumped up from their

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44 Smith’s *The Writing Experiment: a strategy for innovative creative writing* (Allen & Unwin, 2005) is a valuable source for critical and creative research theories.
metaphorical bathtub, head awash with ideas? Inspiration generated in such a way is hard to predict or describe, and investigating such a concept is an almost impossible task. What Wallas maintains about illumination can’t be pinned down, although the theorist does introduce an interesting term for step two in the creative process – incubation, in which “ideas are explored”\textsuperscript{46}. This is the central tenet of my argument; it is not Wallas’ “birth of a new idea” that has the most bearing in this case, but rather the process that follows such a moment.

Zamel states that because writing is a process, ideas are discovered and not necessarily pre-formulated\textsuperscript{47}. While this may be an overly generalized view, Zamel’s words hint at inspiration being more of a byproduct of the writing process than anything else. Given that Grenville claims few writers wait for inspiration to strike\textsuperscript{48}, it can be argued that inspiration is embedded in the writing process and not a separate entity at all. For example, Yerby maintains that only amateurs believe in inspiration\textsuperscript{49}, as if writers who reach the level of what could be termed ‘professional’ do so without the need of inspiration. It is something of a circular argument; in fact, one could make allegorical use of the chicken-or-the-egg question with writing and inspiration and come to no definitive conclusion.

Yet, if we look beyond the concept of inspiration itself and into the realm of the idea, we may yet reach an understanding of where a novel can come from. DiTiberio and Jensen maintain that “distinct behaviors and thinking processes are required at different stages of the writing process”\textsuperscript{50}, and while I am not adverse to the notion of the act of

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{48} Kate Grenville’s anecdotal musing on the craft of writing comes from The Writing Book: a workbook for fiction writers (Allen & Unwin, 1993).
writing begetting inspiration, the novel that accompanies this exegesis started with one idea. Every story begins as an idea\textsuperscript{51}, as a concept inside the writer’s mind that could be given life. Buccieri and Economy offer a simple analogy:

\begin{quote}
An idea is like a seed ready to be planted. With the right soil and fertilizers, it can develop into a strong plant that can survive many seasons and many generations. In other words, the right idea can lead to a masterpiece of a story.\textsuperscript{52}
\end{quote}

The notion of an idea as a seed is interesting. An idea is not a fully formed, fully grown ‘thing’ inside the writer’s head – it is small, vulnerable, and in dire need of nurturing. An idea for a story needs what the theorists term as “soil and fertilizer” – such things as motivation, faith, persistence and determination – but what can essentially be encapsulated as the process of development of that idea. An \textit{incubation} stage, to use Wallas’ phrase.

But ideas are rarely formulated in isolation\textsuperscript{53}. Just as a piece of fiction can be made up of a myriad of theories, conventions and forms, so too does an idea only have merit if it is cajoled into the sense of a story. Ideas often “arise in the strangest ways and are blended from the oddest ingredients”\textsuperscript{54}, and it is only through this ‘blending’ (or to use my expression ‘cajoling’) that an idea can be given shape and turned into a novel.

The difference between a writer and an aspiring writer is the knowledge of where to begin\textsuperscript{55}. Having had an earlier novel published\textsuperscript{56}, I knew where to begin the novel accompanying this exegesis. In fact, the entire novel came from one idea, the seed, if you will, from which the wild shrubbery that is \textit{My name is Will} grew. At the risk of mixing my

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid, 74.
\textsuperscript{53} Vandenbosch, Fay & Saatcioglu, 2001.
\textsuperscript{55} Smith, 2005, xi.
\textsuperscript{56} Keioskie, L. 2005, \textit{Room one nineteen}, Lothian, Melbourne.
metaphors, if writing a novel is “like building a wall brick by brick”\textsuperscript{57}, then the idea for my novel was the mortar, holding it together. And the idea was simple: a sequel to my earlier novel. I would write a narrative sequel to my first published book, \textit{Room one nineteen}. At least it sounded simple, but I was soon to learn the lesson taught by Bloom:

\begin{quote}
Literature…cannot be detached from its anxieties about the works that possess priority and authority in regard to it.\textsuperscript{58}
\end{quote}

Anxiety is the keyword here, the results of which will be discussed in the conclusion of this chapter. Yet, the decision to write a sequel brought with it more than anxiety – it prompted me to investigate an area of fiction I had yet to venture into: the crafting of a narrative sequel. \textit{My name is Will} grew from the idea of writing a sequel – this is where the inspiration for the novel came from.

\section*{To write (again) or not to write (again): crafting a narrative sequel}

In simple terms, a sequel is a narrative in which elements of a previously written narrative are continued. Sequels are the second offering at the table of fiction; a chance for the author to revisit their own successful work – success, in this sense, being at a narrative level as well as publication and recognition. The lists of new books being published are a testament to what Mulhall terms the condition of \textit{sequeldom}\textsuperscript{59}, and considering the fact that sequels are obviously being written, published and read, this should tell the contemporary writer one thing – writing a sequel is a viable creative endeavor.

\textsuperscript{57} Yerby in Gordon, 2000, 46.
\textsuperscript{58} Bloom, C. 1998, \textit{Gothic Horror: A reader’s guide from Poe to King and Beyond}, St Martin’s Press, New York, 11.
\textsuperscript{59} While Mulhall’s \textit{On Film} (Routledge, 2002) is specifically concerned with motion picture narratives, the theorist’s conceptual definition of narrative sequels has strong bearing in this case.
In a basic sense, a sequel is written to be read chronologically\(^6^0\); it is what happens after the final chapter of the original work. Whereas the original work should be exemplary in style, form or premise to ensure publishing and critical success, a creative product that is a linked narrative – either by a pre-existing character, concept or setting – is more likely to be successful given the pre-established readership it engenders. This is evident in the case of crime author Mickey Spillane. *I, The Jury*, Spillane’s 1947 debut, which introduced the series’ hero Mike Hammer, the archetypal detective whose machismo appealed to America’s post-war taste\(^6^1\). By the 1980s, the Mike Hammer books had global sales of 200 million and seven of the all-time bestselling fiction titles in America were by Spillane. The reason? “People like them,”\(^6^2\) Spillane has been quoted as saying. Although bestsellers are discussed in a later chapter of this exegesis, it is enough to note that Spillane’s use of chronological sequencing may have been a factor in the accomplishment of his fiction work; not unlike J K Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series.

Rowling has become Britain’s highest paid author\(^6^3\), surrounded by a Harry Potter industry, and with the series finale and further cinematic versions of the Potter novels also set for box office release in the near future, it could be argued that Harry Potter has become the most successful sequence of the early 21\(^{st}\) Century, with a readership of millions, a franchise worth billions and a marketing scheme as insidious as Harry’s archenemy Voldemort himself. Given that the first book, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* saw the young wizard starting his first year at Hogwarts, and the final book is his last year of education, the chronological sequence of the sequels would seem to be a lucrative fiction working device.

\(^6^2\) Ibid.
However, one should not overlook the fact that a sequel can be more than just a linear continuation; more than just the story after the story. As Simkin maintains:

…the nature of sequels is such that in some cases there is no definitively correct sequence. Sometimes this applies to the selection of works which actually belong in a particular sequence, in some cases to the order in which the works should be read, while in some cases the works are companion or parallel volumes rather than intended to be read in chronological order.64

Imagination feeds on previous imagination65 yet sequels need not be bound by linearity. Terry Pratchett’s Discworld series is a prime example. Each book in the thirty-strong series is linked – not by chronology of events as in the case of the Harry Potter sequence – but by the setting, with Pratchett’s stories playing out on the flattened fantasy world and adding to the established, fantastical mythos. Given that Discworld has landed Pratchett the quirky title of the most shop-lifted author in England66, then a narrative in which elements of the original novel are incorporated in a non-linear manner can be just as successful as a direct sequel. Or as popular, in Discworld’s case.

Scottish author Ian M Banks has adopted the same notion for his Culture67 sequence of novels. Consider Phlebas, Banks’ first science fiction novel after an auspicious debut with the controversial psychodrama The Wasp Factory, introduced the world to the Culture, a space-faring race of highly advanced hedonists intent on making the universe a better place. Imagine Star Trek with espionage, recreational drug use and storylines that go beyond the ray gun fantasy of the majority of this type of contemporary fiction. Given that

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64 Simkin’s The Whole Story: 3000 years of sequels and sequences (Thorpe, 1998) is an ambitious attempt at compiling a definitive list of narrative sequels, prequels and sequences.
67 The Culture books include: The Player of Games, Use of Weapons, Against a Dark Background, Feersum Endjinn and Excession, as well as the novella The State of the Art.
science fiction should be a comment on society, the *Culture* sequence offers the reader an alien universe which is deeply relatable, with stories that are subliminal portraits of humanity at its best and worst. Each novel in the series is its own universe within the entire universe; that is, each book focuses specifically on its own narrative irrespective of any preceding work, while still fleshing out the *Culture* mythos that links the entire sequence. The novels are not sequels *per se*; but they have cemented Banks as one of Britain’s most imaginative novelists and one of the world’s leading science fiction writers.

So what is it about writing a sequel that makes it so attractive to a writer? Kaveney states:

…the sheer process of making a sequel ought to concentrate the creative mind on what worked in the first and what did not, on how to say things in the second in a way that does not merely recapitulate the first and cash in on its success.

While ‘cashing in’ may be an attractive option for some, I maintain that a quality sequel must be more than just a writer’s reconstitution of the same. A successful sequel should relate to a preceding work, this is true – but it must also be complete in itself, a creative work that can stand alone under the weight of the publisher’s and reader’s scrutiny. A sequel is, as Kaveney points out, a chance for the writer to note “what worked in the first and what did not”, an opportunity to expand elements of the original narrative, look at the story in a different way and make it better. Crafting a sequel is a self-conscious activity, a reflection of sorts, and a writer should not discount the possibilities that joining the ranks of the sequel-makers has to offer. After all, crafting a narrative sequel has worked remarkably well for Thomas Harris, an author with a critically and commercially accredited place in

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71 Mulhall, 2002, 5.
sequeldom. *Hannibal*, the third in the series following *Red Dragon* and *The Silence of the Lambs*, was an extraordinary success as both a continuation of an original work and also as a stand alone narrative.

**Monster of a sequel: Thomas Harris’ *Hannibal***

Notable quotes found in a paperback edition of Thomas Harris’s *Hannibal*[^72]:

*Hannibal* ought to have been a flop – *The Silence of the Lambs* should have been an impossible act to follow. But the opposite is the case.73

The readers who have been waiting for *Hannibal* only want to know if it as good as *Red Dragon* and *The Silence of the Lambs*. It is a pleasure to reply in the negative. No, not as good. This one is better…*Hannibal* is not a sequel at all, but rather the third and most satisfying part of one very long and scary ride through the haunted palace of abnormal psychiatry.74

So does Hannibal live up to the expectations raised by a wait of ten years? Yes. Or rather, it exceeds them…*Hannibal* is the work of a real writer, following his own path despite the pressures of fame. A master breaking his own mould… Edgar Allan Poe for today.75

With kudos like this taking up the first six pages of the edition – prior even to the title page – it’s no wonder that *Hannibal*, the further adventures of Harris’ twisted creation Hannibal Lecter and FBI agent Clarice Starling, has been such a success. Ten years in the making, *Hannibal* is not only a superior psychological thriller but also a definitive example of a successful narrative sequel.

The novel could be termed the ‘further adventures’ of everyone’s favourite cannibal. *Hannibal* sees Clarice Starling once more shoehorned into tracking the elusive sociopath; though this time it is pressure from one of Lecter’s less fortunate victims (he survived), the mentally and physically scarred Mason Verger. Verger wants Lecter for his

[^73]: Francis Fyfield, *Express*.
[^75]: *Evening Standard*.
own twisted vengeance and uses Starling to flush the psychopath from hiding. Added to the mix is Paul Krendler, an FBI agent looking to use the capture of Lecter to elevate his political career, brief but enlightening appearances of old *Silence of the Lambs* guard Barney, and, of course, Hannibal Lecter himself. *Hannibal* is the book in which Lecter is laid bare to the reader, and it has been highly successful as both a stand alone novel and a sequel.

Fuller calls the 1999 publishing of *Hannibal* “a giant cultural event”\(^7^6\), citing the critical and popular acclaim of the previously published *The Silence of the Lambs* as the reason. The sequel had obviously been eagerly awaited; there were 1.5 million copies in American bookstores on its release day, the publisher printed 175,000 hardbacks and had to reorder 71,000 more on its first day in the United Kingdom, and it debuted as number one on the bestseller list by outselling the books ranked from numbers two to fifty-one combined\(^7^7\). Few novels have been as anticipated\(^7^8\), yet given the view of sequels in the fiction market as inferior\(^7^9\), it is surprising that the third in the trilogy would garner such attention – even the fact that the preceding work was so lauded would be a pressure, since to succeed *Hannibal* would have to meet and surpass the standards of the original narrative.

One reason for the anticipation of *Hannibal* was the successful construction of Hannibal the character. One of 20\(^{th}\) Century fiction’s “most frightening and compelling inventions”\(^8^0\), Hannibal Lecter is the cerebrally seductive psychopath who was first introduced in *Red Dragon* giving insight into the mind of a serial killer to FBI agent Will Graham. In *The Silence of the Lambs*, it was Clarice Starling who came looking for Lecter’s help once more, thus beginning the twisted, yet oddly affectionate relationship that

\(^{7^6}\) Fuller’s 2005 paper “Deposing an American Cultural Totem” (in *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 38, 5; 819) is a rich source of publishing facts on Thomas Harris’ novels *Red Dragon*, *The Silence of the Lambs* and *Hannibal*.

\(^{7^7}\) Ibid.


\(^{8^0}\) Fuller, 2005, 819.
lasted beyond *Silence* and into the third in the series, *Hannibal*. And while Starling is an interesting character on a number of levels, it is the Cannibal who is of most interest in this case:

Rarely before had we been drawn to such an evil character – one who charmed and hypnotized us with his combination of verbal gymnastics, Old World manners and awesome intellectual abilities.\(^81\)

Platt agrees and claims that Lecter is “our Frankenstein, our Dracula”\(^82\), and the character has reached iconic status to the point where scenes from the 1989 filmic interpretation of *Silence* are echoed and parodied in contemporary fiction\(^83\).

Despite this, critics have highlighted a deficiency in *Hannibal*, and here we see what can happen when expectation clashes with imagination in the crafting of a narrative sequel. It has been noted by theorists and fans alike that *Hannibal* takes a different route to the preceding books in that the novel allows the reader to gain insight into Hannibal Lecter’s motivations, which in turn prompts the reader to assume a level of pseudo-sympathy for the character. This did not sit well with some:

(In the first two books) Harris works hard to mostly maintain the distinctions between hero, antihero, and villain. Both books satisfy those who prize conclusions that see evil vanquished and virtue prevail, and tend to erase from memory any subtle imbricating of the hero, antihero, and villain categories. In *Hannibal*, however, Harris not only suggests the permeability of these categories, but he also wholly collapses the boundaries, accomplishing this dissolving of distinctions by coupling Clarice with Hannibal Lecter, thereby merging hero with antihero/villain.\(^84\)


\(^83\) Films such as the *Scary Movie* franchise feature spoof scenes taken directly from the Hannibal motion pictures, albeit with a self-parody take on the material.

\(^84\) Fuller, 2005, 819.
It has been argued that Lecter’s character suffers because of this, as humanizing Hannibal made him less compelling\textsuperscript{85}, less of a monster and more ‘real’. I disagree. By delving into the mind of Hannibal Lecter, Harris has crafted a narrative in which the novel situates one of our culture’s most recognised antagonists as a sympathetic protagonist – a bold move, an innovative leap, even inspirational. Although a monster’s power lies in its mystery\textsuperscript{86}, this notion still holds true in Hannibal, for it is in the subversion of this convention that the novel stands alone. Hannibal is not The Silence of the Lambs 2: it is its own narrative, its own take on the mythos that has come before it. And that is the key to Hannibal’s success.

The Hannibal Lecter trilogy may be “shrewdly designed products of the modern culture industry”\textsuperscript{87}, and they may be bestsellers, and they may even prompt motion picture interpretations that scoop the box office; but if they were not self-sufficient narratives in their own right, they would fail. Thomas Harris’s work is studied by academics in feminism, popular culture and psychiatry, and is bought and read by millions of readers worldwide. Hannibal is a successful sequel, an inspired successor to both Red Dragon and The Silence of the Lambs, and since 2006 saw the release of Hannibal Rising, a prequel to the sequence which focuses on Lecter’s childhood and upbringing, Hannibal Lecter looks set to be dining with us – or on us – for a while longer.

The inspiration for My name is Will

I remember the moment I had the idea to write a sequel to Room one nineteen. It was a dare, actually. My partner dared me to write it. Not so much because she thought I couldn’t do it, but more to prompt me into action. Following the publication of my first novel, I experienced a strange period in which I started many different narratives yet

\textsuperscript{85} Gabbard, 1999.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{87} Platt, 2003.
finished none, and while a later chapter of this exegesis considers narrative therapy in detail\textsuperscript{88}, for now it should be noted that being dared into writing a sequel was highly beneficial for this writer. At least it resulted in my finishing something.

But even being dared was not initially enough to sell me on the idea of writing a sequel. I’m a reader, a viewer – I know firsthand how unsatisfying the majority of sequels are. When a narrative has to stand against another successful work as well as stand alone, it places a lot of pressure on that narrative. Therefore, a sequel must be many things in order to succeed, but above all it must be \textit{good}; the word sequel itself offers connotations of a devalued text\textsuperscript{89} to the reader. In fact, the only way for a sequel to garner anything remotely akin to respect, no matter its literary form, is if it is better than the original. So my sequel had to be.

In my original work, \textit{Room one nineteen}, my six characters write fiction as part of therapy at the Green Institute for Wayward Adolescents. These creative pieces make up the bulk of the book, and arising from these pieces are the dictaphone notes of the Creative Writing teacher Carl Luskan, offering a narrative by which the reader can interpret the fiction of the patients and ultimately determine their culpability in Luskan’s presumed murder, a possibility predicted at the beginning of the book. So \textit{Room one nineteen} basically had one narrator connecting a multitude of fictional pieces.

\textit{My name is Will}, then, must be more than that, so instead of having six new patients writing fiction once more, I hit upon the idea of having them write in journals; in effect I substituted fictionalised fiction for fictionalised fact. This was an advance from the original – this was taking the concept to a level in which the \textit{reader} – not the doctor – could literally explore the psyches/stories of institutionalized individuals, as opposed to having to infer the character’s mental states from their fiction – a notion not dissimilar to Thomas Harris’

\textsuperscript{88} The benefits of narrative as a form of therapy is discussed in the \textit{Why do I write?} chapter of this exegesis.
\textsuperscript{89} Sinfield, 2004, 31.
*Hannibal*. The results speak for themselves, cementing the work in the Adult market\textsuperscript{90}, given the scope that the style offered. As well, it was far easier crafting distinct characterisation from first person narrations than from fictions, and the differing voices, each with its own syntax, grammar and writing style, kept the work fresh during the writing. This, too, makes the work more complex than the original – again, another way to raise the metaphorical bar.

But halfway through the first draft of Lee’s chapter in *My name is Will*, I realised the book wasn’t working. I knew the characters from *Room one nineteen* through their fiction – I had written the stories during my undergraduate degree and had formulated the novel by literally collating and editing thirty odd short stories into the semblance of a novel. That was as much as the characters had to give, or as much as I wanted from them in any case. Looking at what happened next to the patients at Greens just wouldn’t do.

Then inspiration hit me: forget the future, I would go back in time. I wouldn’t write a sequel – I would write a prequel. Subscribing to Ruthven’s theory that “narratives become intelligible only as twice-told tales”\textsuperscript{91} I would go back to when Carl Luskan was a boy and patient at the mental asylum he would die in nineteen years later and I would tell his story: the story of how Dr Julius Fontane used electroshock therapy to ‘cure’ the young Luskan of his multiple personality disorder.

The concept sounded good. I had prepared something of a backstory already in *Room one nineteen* with Luskan’s dreams of the crying boy in the room that was more like a prison cell, and I had the electroconvulsive treatment (ECT) – this time real, not simply an acronymic allusion as in the original\textsuperscript{92} – to use as a narrative tool. ECT seems violent to

\textsuperscript{90} *Room One Nineteen* was marketed on Lothian’s Young Adult list and as such its darker elements were deemphasized to match the age of the audience.


\textsuperscript{92} In *Room One Nineteen*, the creative writing course is titled: *Elementary Creative Thought* (or ECT as it is referred to in the teacher’s notes).
me, like trying to jumpstart someone’s brain, and since I was telling a story of the past, the idea of memory and how it affects people – and how they too can write and edit memory much like a story – came to mind. So Lee’s chapter turned into the beginning of Orrin’s, and the other characters from Room one nineteen soon followed suit to change from Stephen, James, Bobbi and Gregory to Constance, Derek, Jack and Lulu. But Toby – Toby stayed all the way to the end.

And that was the problem. I wrote the first draft of My name is Will on the premise that it was a prequel. I incorporated anything and everything I could from Room one nineteen. I strip-mined the original novel in a creative sense. For example, in the original the character who gives Luskan the defining document, the psychiatric report into his own incarceration at Greens, is named Charlie. So Charlie became the head nurse in the 1970s, a type of confidante to the young patients being subjected to electroshock in Greens’ basement. Fontane, too, gets more onstage time in My name is Will, and Toby, as I mentioned, became the pivot on which the climax rested – I was to provide the answer to the question I had left unanswered in Room one nineteen (at least to some of my readers): who is Toby, really?

But then I realised that Room one nineteen has the answer to my new novel’s overriding question between its own covers – as the character Luskan states in his Afterword: “You only have to read between the lines.”93 It didn’t need addressing in a sequel – it had been answered already. I, the writer, had given as much of an answer as I could with the first book. Room one nineteen stands on its own, needs no explanation, and my prequel, while definitely making the central crux of the original novel clearer, was starting to feel more like window dressing. And I also knew that if I was starting to wonder at the point, then the reader definitely would as well.

93 Keioskie, 2006, 236.
Doubt set in. That horrible, sinking feeling a writer gets in the pit of his stomach when he starts to think that all the work, the time, the thought that has been subsumed by the narrative, has been for naught. The dare from my partner was starting to feel like a noose; and yet it loosened when I realised that the constraints of keeping too true to the original narrative – constraints which had resulted in a narrative whose purpose was lost on me – could, quite simply, be thrown off.

I decided to make my novel not a sequel, nor even a prequel – *My name is Will* would be the second in a sequence, with the overriding premise lying with the ‘editor’ of *Room one nineteen* and Luskan’s supervisor, creative literature lecturer Dr Nathan Hallard. I already had an entire narrative formulated, a first draft in hand, and there was no need to give up completely. Some name changes later,

94 Dr Fontane became Dr Amos, Charlie became Albert, Greens became Hobbs Home for the Criminally Insane, and Toby and Carl metamorphosed into Will and Billy.

95 Buccieri & Economy, 2005, 74.

The evolution of *My name is Will* from sequel to prequel to sequence has been an eye opener for me. Prior to this book, my drafting, while extensive during the writing, has never extended beyond the realms of what I have already written; that is, I have never changed a narrative in so many ways after finishing the first draft than I did with the novel accompanying this exegesis. The idea of writing a sequel was off putting at first and yet it proved to be challenging, interesting and rewarding. Sequels are not inferior products as some think; they are actually harder to get right than stand alone works, and as such deserve respect and consideration when done well.

Like the notion that an idea is a seed, my novel has grown into something more than what it was at the start. While I believe *My name is Will* to be a worthy successor to my first published novel, and I dream that one day it may be as successful as *Hannibal* has
been for Thomas Harris, it is enough for me to realise that the writing of *My name is Will* has been a worthwhile experience that has taught me much about where ideas for stories can come from, and where these ideas can lead one’s writing.

In fact, examining where my ideas comes from also makes me wonder why I write. I have a million ideas, and they can come from a million more sources; yet just because I have an idea it does not mean that idea will get written. I have to have a reason to write – there has to be a why before I can even begin to put words on the page. And like a lot of writers, the answer to why I write is one of the driving forces behind my writing, as I will investigate in the following chapter.
Why do I write? 

All that we need is the Fire. That we must find in ourselves.  
- Rudyard Kipling

There is no single answer to why writers write. Such a question merely poses more questions. Why do writers spend their days in front of the computer screen, the journal, the page? What is it about writing that makes us neglect reality in favour of a world of our own creation? Why write at all?

The answer is one that every writer must battle with, but luckily a writer need not step into combat alone. If one writer struggles with the question why write? then it’s a sure bet that other writers have as well. As such, this chapter’s evidence is gleaned from the contemplations of established authors from the Roman Empire through to contemporary authors known for their bestsellers. These writers have proven a certain worth: they have written many works, become known in, and are experts in their respective fields, and are experts in their field. It is these individuals’ words that I will use to investigate why it is that writers write.

The Roman satirist Juvenal once wrote “an incurable itch for writing holds many men fast”. This is the basis of why writers are writers, as what Juvenal terms “an incurable itch” is his attempt, metaphorical though it may be, of encapsulating the insidious nature of the writing craft. His use of the term “incurable” hints at the drive many writers feel, and when Juvenal states that writing “holds many men fast”, he is arguing that the intangible

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96 From a speech to the Royal Literary Society, June 1926 (http://whitewolf.newcastle.edu.au).
97 Mengel (1954) coins the phrase “itch of verse”, which suggests Juvenal’s cacoethes scribendi, or incurable itch, in the paper “Patterns of Imagery in Pope’s Arbuthnot” in PMLA, 69, 1, 189-197.
nature of writing may be the reason why we write; as if writing itself is the cause. George Orwell offers a similar analogy:

Writing a book is a long, exhausting struggle, like a long bout of some painful illness. One would never undertake such a thing if one were not driven by some demon whom one can neither resist nor understand.98

Orwell’s demon is similar to Juvenal’s itch; the desire to write is a compulsion explainable only in terms of metaphor or simile. It is unnameable, defies classification even; yet it is undeniable that such a ‘thing’ exists. Gloria Steinem99 sees the determination to write as the fundamental nature of the vocation: “Writing is the only thing that, when I do it, I don’t feel I should be doing something else”. This, again, points to somewhat of a driving force; in this instance, it is the writing itself that explains why a writer does what he/she does. With Steinem, writing is exemplified by the thought that any other activity, no matter how magnificent or mundane, cannot hope to fulfil a writer as much as writing itself; she maintains there is little to no point in doing anything else but writing.

Is this, then, the demon Orwell spoke of? On the surface it would seem so but Steinem’s words speak of a resigned point of view more than Orwell’s demonizing imagery does. To Steinem there is nothing else, and that is why she writes, while Orwell’s demon of writing is the man’s compulsion, much the same as Juvenal’s “incurable itch”. These are all valid reasons why, and even the poetic turn of the writers’ phrases cannot mask the truth behind the words.

Eugene Ionesco100 is on Steinem’s side: “A writer never has a vacation. For a writer, life consists of either writing or thinking about writing.” Again, the notion of

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writing equaling life should be noted, as if the answer to why is couched in such do-or-die terms.

Ray Bradbury\textsuperscript{101} goes further: “We are cups, constantly and quietly being filled. The trick is knowing how to tip ourselves over and let the beautiful stuff out.” If writers are vessels continually filling with all manner of stimuli, it seems only natural for it to spill out, in this case, on the page. While Bradbury’s view is different from Steinem’s notion of writing as an overwhelming desire to do little else, his standpoint calls for writers to have little control over the process besides the ‘trick’ of knowing how – and possibly when – to ‘tip’ it out. This ‘trick’ is the process of writing, and if the trick is knowing how, then the why could be Bradbury’s allusion to a fundamental reason. If writers are “cups, constantly and quietly being filled”, then why writers write could simply be in order to “tip ourselves over and let the beautiful stuff out”.

On the other hand, science fiction maestro Isaac Asimov\textsuperscript{102} claimed he wrote for the same reason he breathed – because if he didn’t, he would die. A somewhat melodramatic view, but one reaching closer to the truth than most. Again we see Bradbury’s allusion to the metaphorical cup coming into play; that writers do so not of their own will but because it must be done. In this instance, Asimov asserts that writing is much like breathing, making it akin to life itself. His view of non-writing as being ‘death’ shares Steinem’s idea of disregard for all else besides writing. However, Asimov takes Steinem’s notion to an extreme and while it does go some way to defining Juvenal’s “incurable itch”, it may in fact be taking it too far. Though as any writer would tell you, he’s right – metaphorically at least.

\textsuperscript{101} DeSalvo (2000) offers a writing program designed for healing, using Bradbury and other authors’ work to illustrate “how people change physically and psychologically when they work on projects that grow from a deep, authentic place” (in \textit{Writing as a way of Healing: How telling our stories transforms our lives}, Beacon Press, Boston).

\textsuperscript{102} Asimov has authored works in such diverse fields as science fiction, science fact, mystery, history, short stories, guides to the Bible and Shakespeare, discussions of myth, humour, poems, limericks and annotations of literary works. He could also read before he entered the first grade.
Rod Serling\textsuperscript{103} once termed a writer as “a frustrated actor who recites his lines in the hidden auditorium of his skull”. If this is true, then it is the writing on the page that is the rehearsal and, ultimately, the performance. The playwright Edward Albee\textsuperscript{104} claimed: “I write for me. The audience of me.” To craft a story, a writer must follow Albee’s example and write for one’s own pleasure – or at least realise that one’s pleasure may be all that is achieved. For as Margaret Atwood\textsuperscript{105} states, a necessary part of being a writer is a certain amount of nerve, while William Styron\textsuperscript{106} said writing is hell, and it is this view that pervades the form of artistic expression produced by the printed word. I agree that writing is hellish; it is hard work, with little pay-off unless publication is assured, and writers often dwell in obscurity long before they develop any reputation. And it gets worse, as Stephen King\textsuperscript{107} points out:

I think I was forty before I realized that almost every writer of fiction or poetry who has ever published a line has been accused by someone of wasting his or her God-given talent. If you write (or paint or dance or sculpt or sing, I suppose), someone will try and make you feel lousy about it, that’s all.

So the negative aspect of writing would seem, at least in King’s experience, to come from others initially before being reinforced by the writer. Why is this so? True, others can be harsher in their assessments of the vocation than the writer, but this does not take away from the fact that writers themselves must be blamed for negative self-criticism – not of their work but of the work itself. Writers are fierce critics in their own right and all writers

\textsuperscript{103} Wolfe (1993, “Book review” in \textit{Journal of Popular Culture}, 27, 1, 205) in his review of Sander’s \textit{Serling: The Rise and Twilight of Television’s Last Angry Man} (1992, Dutton, New York) claims that Sander “makes us wonder how much (Rod) Serling might have achieved had he learned to stop struggling with himself”.

\textsuperscript{104} Albee’s words come from Murray’s (1982,) paper examining the concept that writers write for themselves, first and foremost (in “Teaching the Other Self: The Writer’s First Reader” in \textit{College Composition and Communication}, 33, 2, 140-147).

\textsuperscript{105} Atwood’s work has been published in more than thirty languages, including Farsi, Japanese, Turkish, Finnish, Korean, Icelandic and Estonian (Atwood, M. 2002, \textit{Negotiating with the Dead: A Writer on Writing}, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge).


should heed the words of Jean Sibelius\textsuperscript{108}: “Pay no attention to what critics say; no statue has ever been erected to a critic”. Good advice, especially if the critic is oneself.

Robert Benchley\textsuperscript{109} once said: “It took me fifteen years to discover that I had no talent for writing, but I couldn’t give it up because by that time I was too famous.” Benchley’s humorous turn of phrase notwithstanding, again we have a writer talking of their work with less than an optimistic air. It would seem as if this negativity of the writing industry pervades, even after a writer becomes famous. Another reason why writers write comes from the father of psychotherapy, Sigmund Freud\textsuperscript{110}: “Writers write for fame, wealth, power and the love of women”. Many writers may pursue the vocation for those very reasons and many may achieve such things because of their writing. But that is not the issue. The point is one of why, and it must be left to Thomas Berger\textsuperscript{111} to point out the answer: “Why do writers write? Because it isn’t there.” What isn’t there is that intangible thing that all writers seek – a truth to their work, a reflection of their world as they see it; a story of themselves that must be pursued until it is bound to the page for the rest of us to look upon. That is the reason why.

As for why My name is Will has been written, the answer is not so simple to quantify (if any of the authors’ words in this chapter can even be termed ‘simple’). Writing, for me, is a cathartic exercise. Much like the writers previously quoted, it is something I must do in order to feel alive – to be myself, for lack of a better term. Ely, Downing and Anzul maintain:

\textsuperscript{109} In Whitton, R & Hollingworth, S. 2001, \textit{A Decent Proposal: How to sell your book to an Australian publisher}, Common Ground, Melbourne.
\textsuperscript{110} Himes (2001) maintains writing is “similar to the psychoanalytic process of free-floating associations motivated by inner impulses” and uses the work of Freud to examine this notion (in “Beyond the Pleasure of the Text: The Writer and the Reader in Psychoanalysis and Contemporary Thought, 24, 335-356).
\textsuperscript{111} Berger has been called by the \textit{London Times} Literary Supplement “one of the century’s most important writers” (www.timesonline.co.uk).
Out of the writing itself may come understandings that enhance our lives, insights that stun and energize, products that teach us and others deeply, and pleasure in the writing that is narcotic in its call to stay at it.\textsuperscript{112}

While the theorists hint towards a variety of reasons why writing is undertaken, it is the overall affect that has the most bearing upon my own work. Writing offers insight, understanding, education and pleasure, which taken together form what Wandor highlights as one of the “by-products”\textsuperscript{113} of the writing process – therapy. Writing is my therapy, and while I am not going to go into excessively personal reasons – I can do that in fiction, but not so well in exegetical work – the notion of writing as therapy not only affected the crafting of the novel that accompanies this exegesis, but it also became a central component of the novel’s subject. I believe that it is through narrative that a type of mental release can happen – a loosening of the inhibitions that so govern our lives away from the page. As such, an examination of the concept of narrative therapy follows, as my way of explaining why \textit{My name is Will} was written at all.

\textbf{A spoonful of story: the use of narrative as therapy}

Writing about personal issues is a staple of contemporary social-clinical psychology\textsuperscript{114} because writing forces the writer to give shape to that which is cluttering their mind; to give coherency to the experiences – good or bad – that are stuck there, flicking on the cinema screen of the subconscious. Writing about an experience relieves the emotional impact on the writer\textsuperscript{115} and Murray maintains that “contemporary uses of storytelling and narrative

\textsuperscript{112} Ely, Downing and Anzul, 1997, 8.
\textsuperscript{113} In Everett, 2005, 238.
\textsuperscript{115} Kalb, C. 1999, “Pen, paper, power!” in \textit{Newsweek}, 133, 17, 75.
(are) powerful tools of insight and change”\textsuperscript{116}. Change prompts evolution and self-realization, and writing can be used as a vehicle for personal growth.

Relief may be through the use of certain types of writing; take letters, for example. Diamond believes letter writing is a powerful healing tool and much of its strength lies in its ability to transfer trauma into recorded moments that relieve mental pressure\textsuperscript{117}. Letter therapy allows writers to deal with conflicts by writing letters to others in their lives; as such it offers safety from a direct confrontation while also precipitating a deeper exploration of what the issue actually is. Diamond likens letter writing to “spiritual mulch” and utilized this notion in his study \textit{Narrative Means to Sober Ends}\textsuperscript{118} in an attempt to understand and remedy an individual’s basis for alcoholic addiction.

“Write it down; then let your body forget it” Matlack\textsuperscript{119} claims and a journal is one way to do it. Writing in a journal is unbound by any convention – it may be words, symbols, illustrations, collage or even doodling – and the act of journaling is a subjective, personal experience in itself. If by writing their feelings down people are literally reading their own minds, then the journal becomes the repository for the recurring stories in a person’s head. Recording in a journal makes hidden meanings in life visible, generating insight through self-reflection while revealing the individual and unique story of the writer. Writing counters what Stone calls “voicelessness”, the “erosion of communication”\textsuperscript{120} that follows emotional trauma. Journals interweave creativity, play and self therapy, thereby creating a unique story of self, and while it is undeniable that writing is a therapeutic tool

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Stone’s \textit{Diaries, Self-Talk and Psychosis: Writing as a place to live} (Edward Arnold Publishers, 2006) details the detrimental effects “voicelessness” can have upon an individual.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
that can alleviate emotional pressure, it is also beneficial in other areas of health beyond the psychological.

Narrative therapy has reached into multiple fields such as the control of blood pressure, the management of cancer and substance addiction, with the treatment being used in primary care, hospitals, hospices, self-help groups and prisons. In 1999, a Journal of American Medical Association\textsuperscript{121} study showed that writing exercises even alleviated symptoms of asthma. Participants were asked to write about a disturbing experience for 20 minutes over four days, and the study found those participants who wrote about inconsequential things showed no improvements, yet those who wrote about traumatic experiences improved lung function by an average of 19 percent. In a 2004 Harvard Medical School study of women with breast cancer, 171 patients wrote about positive and negative feelings for 20-60 minutes a day, and those who wrote for four days a week had a significant decrease in doctors’ visits months later\textsuperscript{122}.

It has also been found that narrative structure in writing is a powerful organisational tool for trauma. In a 2001 Syracuse University study, in which 116 students were assigned to write about control or traumatic events in two ways, a list or a narrative, the individuals asked to form a narrative reported that by being given free rein to explore the issue with fictional elements, the patient gained more from the experience\textsuperscript{123}. Narrative formation allows an event to be summarized, stored and assimilated more efficiently\textsuperscript{124}, meaning the writer, in effect, deals with the trauma from a beginning, through a middle, and to an end. A story is not a story if it has no ending, and the structuring of personal experience into a narrative brings a degree of closure to the potentially traumatized writer.

\textsuperscript{121} Kalb, 1999, 75.
\textsuperscript{122} Matlack, 2004, 58.
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid, 162.
William Shakespeare, spirit guide: Lara Jefferson’s These are my sisters

Life as a narrative brings me to the case of Lara Jefferson, a schizophrenic committed to a mental hospital in Midwest America prior to WWII. During her time at the institution, Jefferson kept a journal, the original of which was reputedly found in the violent ward written on scrap paper. Not much else is known of Jefferson beyond this journal; she died in 1940, seven years before her journal was published, the novelization, one could say, of her life – but Lara Jefferson’s words are more than the ravings of a disturbed mind. Observe:

The flood that was swirling about me was sucking me under – and the pencil I had in my hand was a straw to be caught. It was just a straw – but I caught it and now I have kept my head above water for a while – even if what I have written does not make sense to anyone – at least – it has helped me a little. 125

What must be noted is that Jefferson is not deliberately writing in a metaphorical manner; that is, she is not writing with fictional tools because she is crafting a story, wants to be published, longs to be a bestselling writer or so on. She is using metaphor to express her tumultuous feelings, the dark thoughts that are a “flood” in her mind. Her use of metaphor belays her intentions as she attempts to hold on, to keep her head above water. Jefferson uses narrative formation for emotional gain, as evident by the final admission in the paragraph that what she has written may make no sense to anyone but herself. She continues the employment of metaphor with: “I have sat through floods of raving and built a barrier – a breakwater of small black words around me” and it is words this time, her words, the words she writes day in day out that are her salvation. But it is not only

metaphor, a fictional device, which is helping Jefferson to contextualize her condition – she also gets some help from the Bard himself.

One day Jefferson was spotted writing by a nurse, who asked her what she was doing, and Jefferson reportedly replied that she was “the reincarnation of Shakespeare trying to sidestep a strait-jacket”\textsuperscript{126}. The nurse answered by giving her a ream of paper and telling her to get to it, and throughout These are my sisters, Shakespeare becomes an intra-textual character/companion/reader, sharing the journey of Jefferson’s writing:

Verily, verily, Shakespeare, I had no idea you could be called from your quiet English grave with so little effort. In my present predicament, I know of no one who could be quite such a fortunate choice for a delusion of grandeur. So welcome! I hope you will be as pleased with the arrangement as I am. Poor fellow, this is surely a come-down from your former position.

Morin maintains that the self forms coherency by talking to itself about itself\textsuperscript{127}, so Jefferson’s employment of Shakespeare as a fictional confidante becomes the writer’s conversation with herself – a way to provide Jefferson with someone to talk to, and also someone to talk about given the final reference in the paragraph. This characterization prompts growth, as evident by the fact that Jefferson came to be transferred out of the violent ward near the end of the narrative. Why? The reason’s in the writing:

Goodbye, William. You were one grand delusion! If you had not come to me, perchance this transfer would have been to a place still lower in this limbo – instead of one step upward.

Jefferson is thanking Shakespeare, her institutionalized spirit guide, and transferring ownership of her success in treatment to him; and yet, she is also congratulating herself, possibly in the only way she knew how. And given that the journal was found in the

\textsuperscript{126} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{127} In Stone, 2006, 46.
violent ward and Jefferson was moving on to a less restrictive environment, one could ascertain that Jefferson left the journal behind because she did not need it anymore. Shakespeare could return to his grave – his work was done.

The story of Lara Jefferson is a strong case for the benefits of narrative therapy. Here we have a diagnosed schizophrenic, a patient of the violent ward of a pre-WWII mental hospital, who reached a level of self understanding and mental stability through the act of writing that other therapy could not produce. With Shakespeare as her spirit guide, Jefferson’s *These are my sisters* is a testimony to the power of words to inspire hope, to dispel the darkest of thoughts, and to set the mind free from the shackles that bind the imagination. The journal of Lara Jefferson shows that narrative therapy is more than just beneficial; it shows that story, and indeed the telling of story, can be a powerful healing tool of the mind.

**Therapy and My name is Will**

Narrative therapy is a notion taken up during the writing of the novel that accompanies this exegesis. In *My name is Will*, each of the six characters is given a journal by Doctor Amos in which to record the memories that will surface as a result of electroshock therapy. At the outset of the treatment, the characters use the journals as receptacles for the everyday happenings at Hobbs Home for the Criminally Insane: Constance recounts her work in the kitchen; Orrin writes of missing his two front teeth; Derek explains his role as the unofficial commissary; Lulu bemoans the lack of a window in her room; Jack speaks of weather, of heat; and Will writes of his suspicions regarding the true purpose of Hobbs Home, yet in such a way to make it ordinary, quite different to how he writes later in his chapter.

However, as the ECT progresses and the patients are subjected to more and more of the shock treatment, the narrative therapy of the journals takes on a different tone. For
Jack, it is a way of cataloguing the past happenings of his home The Madchen Arms, an inner city tenement building burned down with his mother inside. Orrin is much the same, although his journal hints towards his twisted upbringing by racist Uncle Roy, events of which ‘leak’ into real life when Orrin becomes violent towards other patients. Lulu, as well, begins to pick at the fabric of reality by her interactions with the enigmatic Drew, a girl she professes to love and yet who may also have framed her for murder. Constance’s memories of her mentally abusive childhood transpose themselves on the walls of Hobbs Home, as the woman tries to reconcile between what is real and what she does not want to remember. And Will, while he claims in his writing to be immune to the ECT, is actually the deepest affected; when Billy writes, and interacts, it is the result of his repressed ‘self’ being brought out by the ECT.

The use of journals is a handy narrative tool. It has its disadvantages, this is true – for one, the characters’ on-stage physical action is hard to play out successfully, given that it is journal narration – but the pros far outweigh the cons in the case of My name is Will. Throughout the novel, the journal form is used to foreshadow events, specifically given the disparate nature of the structure, and acts as a reflective device in the patient’s writing. Given that they can only write about events after they have happened, this is, again, somewhat limiting; and yet it was most useful in crafting the subversive characteristics of memory and their effect on the writing mind. In some cases the patient’s journal acts as an ordering device of a jumble of images through the writing.

As the individual stories progress, the characters question the assumptions they have made about themselves – are they truly innocent, as all proclaim, or are they lying to themselves? Derek, for instance, has a stock standard story of child abuse that he repeatedly tells to garner sympathy from the doctors of Hobbs. Adding ECT results in Derek’s story morphing with a parallel plot involving his older brother Trevor; a plot that
suggests Derek’s story is not his own but his brother’s. Jack, too, (re)experiences a pivotal event in his narrative by the incorporation of journal writing with active hallucinations. In the scene, Jack makes repeated note of the fact that he is in bed, writing what he sees as it plays out in front of him. And as the burning cat races towards Jack – the climax of the scene – his writing deteriorates in panic and ends with a slip that would make even Freud proud.

Narrative therapy is a worthwhile therapeutic endeavor, one this author has co-opted and subverted in order to write My name is Will. The use of journal writing, the reflection such a practice offers, and the repercussions on the writer’s psyche are all a byproduct of the notion that narrative therapy can relieve the stress of trauma on an individual. And while the results in My name is Will are (hopefully) not what the reader suspects, narrative therapy is still a powerful source of ideas for writers, therapists and psychologists.

Narrative therapy is not only an integral part of my novel’s subject, it has also been a direct result of the writing of the novel. The writing of My name is Will has been a highly beneficial practice for me. When I write, I feel I am truly myself; my narrative is my therapy, and even though the fiction I write would seem to have no direct relation to my real life – I am not a marginalised, institutionalized individual like the characters in My name is Will – the writing has been highly beneficial. I agree that writing is the challenge of seeing yourself and your relation to the world more closely. Stories speak of human nature, and the stories we tell about ourselves speak the loudest. In doing so, narrative therapy becomes more than just a fad of pop-psychology or a fiction working tool with only fictional effects. It becomes a reason why writers write.

But writing to me is also much more than a therapeutic tool. I may write because, like Thomas Berger, the ‘it’ isn’t there, and I may use writing as an outlet to combat

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128 Everett, 2005, 238.
129 Diamond in Bauer, 2000, 321.
voicelessness; yet I also write for other reasons, not the least of which is my desire to break the rules. I have studied and taught Creative Writing at the tertiary level and I know there are certain guidelines of narrative that, if adhered to, can produce a successful work. I have read the books, the academic theories and the practical activities, and I cannot turn a page without being confronted by the rules of this, or the rules of that. And, like a number of scholar-writers, I have been plagued by the thought that, should I attempt to break the rules, will that still mean I have created a successful work? And how do I know when it is okay to break the rules, when all the books, all the teachers, only tell me the rules that should be followed? Where’s the advice on when the rules can be broken? That is my underlying argument in the following chapter: an investigation of when the rules of narrative can be circumvented, navigated around or dismissed outright.
When do I challenge the rules?

‘Make your own experiments,’ said he. ‘It’s the only road.’
- Rudyard Kipling

Figure 1

The cartoon above may be an ironic take on the autobiography genre but it is also something much more. Given that the cartoon is a story – it has all the essential elements of character, conflict and resolution – in a mechanical sense it is actually a failed story. This story’s narrator is flawed; he has deviated from the established rules that govern the use of first person voice. The piece is written in first person past tense and the character is

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132 Unless otherwise stated, the term ‘narrator’ used throughout this chapter relates specifically to a first person narrator.
about to die, which in itself is impossible in terms of story logic. Granted, the reader cannot overlook the punch line of this particular work – the point is in the telling – but comedic value aside, this cartoon highlights a playfulness with the first person narrator that undermines and circumvents the traditional rules of narration in literature. And it is this subversion of tradition that is of interest in this case.

It is generally agreed that a narrator has certain rules, or guidelines, that should be adhered to in the crafting of a successful first person story. Hawthorn sums them up nicely:

- first person narrator can only know what they know
- first person narrator cannot know another’s thoughts
- everything is filtered through the consciousness of the first person narrator
- first person narrator’s perceptions are coloured by age, gender, cultural background, social class, education, value system, experience and wisdom

In order for a narrated story to be successful, the rules above must be followed – otherwise, the overriding premise of the work loses credibility. Viewpoint is fundamental to how fiction works on readers, and a first person narrator is the key to the story.

The reader can go only as far into the story as the narrator allows her, both logically and geographically. The narrator should only be privy to what he could possibly know, either through observation or interaction. While a third person omnipotent narrator can flit from thought to thought, it is not logical that someone would know what is going on in another person’s mind, so a first person narrator cannot know such things. All events and observations must be consistent with what the narrator sees, knows, and believes to be true. Now, the narrator may affect these events and happenings – after all, it is through the narrator’s eyes and thoughts that the story is shown to the reader – but nothing outside of

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133 Hawthorn’s third edition of *Studying the Novel* (Arnold, 1985) goes into more detail on the concept of the first person narrator – this list of ‘rules’ is an attempt to simplify the essential elements.
what the narrator observes or knows should be filtered to the reader. Just like a real person, your narrator’s perceptions of events, other characters, settings, and themes are contingent upon who they are and where they’ve come from – all counts in how they tell the story and what they tell about the story.

These are the standard rules, the ones emerging writers are told of in writing courses and workshops across the gamut of Creative Writing. An understanding of the general principles involved in Creative Writing can aid in the crafting of successful fiction\textsuperscript{135}; but in actuality these principles are nothing more than guidelines, yardsticks that a writer can either measure up to or break. As Gardner states:

> When one begins to be persuaded that certain things must never be done and that certain other things must always be done, one has entered into the first stage of aesthetic arthritis, the disease that ends up in pedantic rigidity and the atrophy of institution.\textsuperscript{136}

The theorist’s use of such terms as “aesthetic arthritis” hints at what can happen when presupposed notions are rigidly adhered to in the crafting of a work. It is almost as if the supposed ‘rules’ of writing create a type of artistic atrophy, to borrow from Gardner once more.

Stevick maintains the crafting of fiction invokes connotations of “narrative ease, facility, the arched shape (and) the climactic form”\textsuperscript{137}, hinting again at rules/principles/guidelines that, if followed, can produce a successful work. Yet, he goes on to claim “all of these qualities (are) generally avoided in new experimental fiction”\textsuperscript{138} and herein lies my argument. Given that in a previous chapter I discussed the concept of

\textsuperscript{136} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{137} From Stevick’s introduction to \textit{Anti-Story: an anthology of experimental fiction} (Free Press, 1971, xiv-xv).
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid.
writing as practice, that writing itself is a type of research, a way of learning how; then I would argue that every contemporary novel, every new work, is in actuality a product of practice. And if all writing can be thought as practice – as an experiment, to use Stevick’s term – then the rules of writing must necessarily be broken. Lusero agrees, calling her “favorite approach to creative writing…rule breaking”, and it is a notion that has heavily influenced the writing of the novel accompanying this exegesis.

So when is it okay to break the rules? It would seem always, or whenever the writer wants to; and yet I would argue this is not the case at all. Joella maintains:

The option to break the traditional rules is always there. And rule breaking or not, experimental stories typically succeed in achieving ends similar to the conventional pieces: concentrated emotional impacts, examinations of universal themes, and fulfillments of implicit contracts between the writer and reader.

It is not the means, but the ends that matter when a writer decides to break the rules. The reason is not as important as the outcome, what Joella highlights as “achieving similar ends”. Story is paramount, a story which satisfies a writer and their reader – that is Joella’s “implicit contract”, and that is the key to successful fiction that still breaks the rules. Baines maintains:

The old hierarchies are under question and the orthodox forms in Western literature are undergoing mutation and cross-fertilization; there is a sense that our own voices, our own perspectives matter, and that we are free to invent forms which can convey them.

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139 The concept of writing as methodology is discussed in the How is a novel researched? chapter of this exegesis.
140 Lusero’s 2007 paper “Risk and Revelation: Creative Writing in theory and play” (in Educational Insights, 11, 1) details the writer’s approach to the teaching of experimental creative expression.
141 Joella, 2006.
Narrative techniques emerge in response to changes in the way people live and think\textsuperscript{143}, and Baines maintains it is a byproduct of the mass communication age, that the world has become “multiple…there are many, many viewpoints, and they’re not even stable”\textsuperscript{144} – none more so than in fiction. It seems that the days in which narrators had to adhere to the guidelines set forth by literature are over; there is a new trend in literature in which the established rules no longer govern the crafting of narrative. There are new stories out there, mutli-plotted, multi-vocal and multimedia\textsuperscript{145} and My name is Will is an example of this. As such, this chapter examines two instances of when writers have broken the rules by the use of subversive narration in two published novels – Gould’s book of fish by Richard Flanagan and Surrender by Sonya Hartnett.

The subversive narrator: Richard Flanagan’s Gould’s book of fish

One novel in which the subversive narrator affects almost all conventions of fiction is Richard Flanagan’s Gould’s book of fish\textsuperscript{146}. A Commonwealth Writer’s Prize winner, and touted by critics as a modern masterpiece, Gould’s book of fish is the story of William Buelow Gould, a convict turned painter transported to Tasmania in the early 1800s. Told in a disordered journal style, the novel relates Gould’s adventures – both artistically and personally – during the pivotal colonial era of Australia’s past. Gould struggles to not only capture the wildlife of this brave new world in canvas and paint, but also to survive amongst the bizarre cast of Sarah Island, a convict colony that housed the worst of the worst.

\textsuperscript{143} Hawthorn, 2001, 66.
\textsuperscript{144} In Singleton & Luckhurst, 1996, 131.
Complicated plot aside, the novel has an interesting take on the notion of the *subversive narrator*. For starters, Gould is a narrator whose musings on life, art and literature pepper the work, and at times it is hard for the reader to discern the meaning behind the words given such a presentation. By frustrating the expectations of the reader, writers can draw attention to the changing conventions of writing\(^{147}\), and Flanagan utilizes this technique to full effect. For example:

> He (the Commandant) thought – don’t exasperate me by asking how Billy Gould knew what he thought, for if it isn’t obvious by now that he knew much more than he ever let on, it never will be…

Not only does the narrator refer to himself in the third person on occasion – itself a signpost to the reader that they are not reading a traditional narrator – but this also shores up subversive tendencies to become an essential part of the narrative. The narrator is almost saying to the reader, “Trust me, believe my words,” and this gentle ribbing by the narrator underpins the narrative. Miner maintains that “harmonious or dissonant narration can add dimension”\(^{148}\) and *Gould’s book of fish* is a novel that enters its own dimension – a first person narrator who, through subversive tendencies, becomes an omnipotent narrator to the point where none of the traditional rules of the first person narrator actually apply. Another example:

> ‘No!’ yells the turnkey Pobjoy from the other side as he slides the latch, but I won’t hear him, because he’s not allowed into the story yet, & once he is, like me, I promise you he won’t escape either.

And:

\(^{147}\) Hawthorn, 2001, 66.

But it was no good – Billy Gould could not escape the growing suspicion that he had become entrapped in a book, a character whose future as much as his past was already written, determined, foretold, unalterable as it was intolerable.

The narrator goes beyond the page at every turn, telling facets of the story that he cannot know, foretelling a future he cannot see, describing events that have yet to occur – which goes against the very definition of the narrator. This example:

Please don’t ask how I know such things, please: where fish are concerned I know everything – or as good as - & besides, it’s rude to interrupt when I am in the middle of telling you…

shows not only the narrator’s attempt at answering assumed questions the reader will ask of the text, but also makes light of the reader’s assumptions by saying, “This is a story, stop interrupting me with questions that have no bearing.” Is this asking too much of a reader?

On one level, yes, since as Lukeman states “viewpoint and narration comprise a delicate façade in which inconsistency can be disastrous”149. The subversive narrator, then, has the ability to lose a reader simply given the construction of the narrator – a reader used to traditional representations of storytellers who comes to the narrative with this preconception, will fail to see the point of the author’s use of subversive techniques in the telling, whatever that message may be. Even when the author makes a direct reference to the reader, the point can still be lost:

Can a man become a fish? All you divers who have come so far to fathom my mystery, these questions, this torment, this good & this evil, this love & this hate, this life, resolve them & it for me, make sense of my story, unite me with this life, tell me it is not an inextricable part of my nature – I am begging you…For I am not reconciled to this world. I wished to be & I was not & so I tried to rewrite this world as a book of fish & set it to rights in the only matter I knew how.

Yes, Gould, you may have tried to “rewrite this world as a book of fish”, but there are readers who won’t concede that, nor recognize it amidst the multi-dimensions of the narrative. Is this, then, the greatest flaw in a *subversive narrator*? That an author can be so involved in subverting the traditions that the point gets lost? Hawthorn states that the author cannot sacrifice story for cleverness\(^{150}\), that without the narrative to hang the narration on, the work will fail no matter its intentions.

But Flanagan’s novel goes beyond even these subversive notions when, in the second last chapter, the narrator becomes something more than human; he becomes a fish:

> Behind the face mask of the diver coming toward me now with a net, I recognize the unmistakable visage of Mr Hung, out diving for more specimens for his aquarium, & I know it is only a matter of time before I am gazing out of that neon-lit tank that I once so intently stared into; that while the Conga & Mr Hung plot another scam, in which they will forge a convict’s journal of two centuries ago & try to flog it off as authentic history, occasionally staring in at me, perhaps wondering what it would be like to be a fish, I will stare out at them wondering what it would be like to be like them, knowing that a scam is just a dream, & that a dream is a dangerous thing if you believe in it too much.

Mr Hung and Conga are characters introduced at the start of the novel outside of Gould’s story, as they are the friends of Sid Hammet, the man who found the original copy of the convict’s journal. How is this possible? These stories were existing in separate eras, separate spaces; yet the narrator has bought them together at the end. And even Sid Hammet, the erstwhile overall narrator, isn’t left out:

> For out there, only just beyond our vision, the net is waiting for us all, ever ready to trap & then rise with us tangled within, fins flailing, bodies futilely thrashing, heading to who knows what chaotic destiny. Love & water. Sid Hammet stares at me for too long. I am not afraid, never have I been afraid. I shall be you. I am ascending from the night, rising, rolling, passing through glass & air into his sad eyes. Who am I? he can no longer ask & I can only wish for the certainty to answer: I am William Buelow Guild & my name is a song which will be sung…

\(^{150}\) Hawthorn, 1985, 41.
In this paragraph the fish becomes Hammet, Hammet becomes the fish, and the entire story seems to start over, even as it ends in the delirious rambling of Gould and the song that will be sung about him. However, the final page of the novel throws the rest of the work into sharp relief, when it is revealed:


The narrator, who up until this point has crafted a narrative which featured characters as colourful and contrary as himself, is revealed to be all of these characters, yet only one. The Surgeon, Jorgen Jorgensen, The Commandant, Pobjoy – all have had their stories told by the narrator Gould throughout the book; so much so that, when this final page is read, the entirety of the story is undermined and the reader is left wondering. By the end of the novel, the reader has been expected to believe any number of falsities of narrative, to put aside preconceived notions of what constitutes a successful narrator, and to put their imagination in the hands of one of literature’s biggest frauds.

If Miller is correct and “narrative depends structurally on who knows what and when”¹¹¹, then the haphazard, episodic structure of the work makes perfect sense with the final revelation. The characters that Gould knows so intimately – too intimately for it to be logically true given the narrator’s access to thoughts, pasts and memories – are in fact aliases of Gould, parts of his mind, self fabrications: the subversive narrator is revealed in all his glory.

¹¹¹ In Checkoway, 1999, 11.
The essential point of any narrator, subversive or otherwise, comes down to the story. While narratives like Gould’s *book of fish* invoke questions in readers and break the established norms of literature, it must be for a reason. Any use of subversive tendencies must be grounded in story logic – from the knowledge of others’ pasts/presents to the outright supplementation of one character for another – it must be done in such a way that it could be possible. Any significant novel challenges the expectations of readers; they have assumptions of narratives much like writers. Even if readers are not as deeply concerned with the traditions of literature as creative practitioners are, they are still aware of these rules on some level and this understanding affects their reading of any work of fiction. The subversive narrator may be shored up by narrative twists and stylistic elements, but it is still a minefield for the contemporary fiction worker. Writers must ask themselves the same question the reader will: what is the point of my subversion? And if the writer does not or cannot find the answer, then neither will the reader; and the narrator – and the narrative – are destined to be unread.

The multiple character: Sonya Hartnett’s *Surrender*

Now, the subversive narrator, while a fascinating narrative device, is the natural harbinger to a concept I term the multiple character. This type of fictional character is one who, due to a fundamental narrative premise, is comprised of multiple characters. It is, in effect, a character who speaks in many voices and yet whose voice still offers a syntactic, grammatical, and content specific consistency. Voice is often credited with being a crucial aspect of the writing process, with other narrative conventions such as plot, character and

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152 Hawthorn, 1985, 68.
dialogue contingent upon it\textsuperscript{153}. I agree, especially given the novel accompanying this exegesis is comprised of multiple voices and viewpoints which, when taken together, form a coherent overall narrative. Most writers respond to the injunction of narrative which Kearney highlights as: “tell it, but do not tell it exactly as it was”\textsuperscript{154} and while the unreliable narrator is a fascinating narrative device, in this case I want to look beyond it, for voice is much more than just a tool to fool the reader with.

Voice is everywhere, reaching into every element of narrative and affecting it in some way, shape or form. Voice abides in story\textsuperscript{155}, and I argue that story cannot exist without it; even if one were to go the route of the \textit{chicken-or-the-egg} notion with voice and story, it doesn’t matter which came first. One cannot exist without the other, and this forms the fundamental basis for the construction of a successful \textit{multiple character}. This concept will be unpacked with a critical examination of \textit{Surrender} by Sonya Hartnett, a novel which utilizes the narrative device of the \textit{multiple character} to full effect.

Somewhat of a prodigy in the Australian Lit scene, Hartnett is an award winning author whose works garner critical acclaim in both the adult and young adult market. Her 2005 novel, \textit{Surrender}\textsuperscript{156}, is the story of Gabriel, a young man dying of cancer in his childhood country town; but it is also the story of Finnigan, Gabriel’s long time friend and a ‘wildboy’ who lives in the mountains surrounding the town. Following a blood brother type ritual when they were younger, Gabriel and Finnigan decid to become almost dual identities; that is, Gabriel would be the ‘good’ aspect, and Finnigan was given the right to do ‘bad’. Following this incident were years of bushfires that ravaged the town, the culprit for the lighting of which was never found, and the novel also features subplots revolving


\textsuperscript{154} Kearney, 2002, 22.

\textsuperscript{155} Watanabe in Checkoway, 1999, 202.

\textsuperscript{156} Hartnett, S. 2005, \textit{Surrender}, Viking Press, Camberwell, VIC.
around Gabriel’s dysfunctional family, small town mentality and larger issues such as death and identity.

What’s interesting about the narrative is that it is cut in two – half of the story is told from Gabriel’s point of view, while the remainder of the story follows Finnigan on his various chaotic jaunts through the town and country. Point of view is the framework that shapes fiction and determines its dimensions\(^{157}\), and none more so than in *Surrender*, as the story is heralded by Gabriel’s first narration:

This is where I begin: I am dying in my childhood home. Beyond the window straggles the only world I know and wish to know; I was born and grew up in this few thousand town. There is nothing about its weft and fold that isn’t familiar to me. I know the cracks in the footpaths - I have stepped on them a thousand times. I know the product on the shelves and the reflection in the glass – I have seen myself there, left imprints of my hands. I’ve felt summer’s Sahara heat and seen autumn’s bedraggled blooms; I’ve kicked black crickets from my toes and fed wood to a hissing fire. I know which gate tilts in the wind, I know what’s cropped in which field. I have known the exact moment when every calf and child was born. From here, on the bed, where I see only paneled walls and a haze of curtain which ushers in the breeze, I can distinguish and put a name to every rooster’s cry.

The narrator reveals to the reader the essential conflict of his character – he is dying, bedridden, a wandering consciousness in a closed room. The disadvantage of viewpoint is its definition – the narrative can only go where the narrator can go\(^{158}\), and yet the author circumvents this notion by giving her narrator an imagination. The narrator’s musings allow him to go beyond the hospital room, to explore the world outside, even as it really is an ‘inside world’ of his own creation. It is Gabriel’s imagining mind that allows him, as a character, to extend his viewpoint: that is, he knows things because he can imagine them.

Finnigan, then, becomes the novel’s physically moving narrator, offering the reader a more logical take on the surroundings, at least at the outset:

\(^{157}\) Miller in Checkoway, 1999, 108.
\(^{158}\) Lukeman, 2000, 129.
Me and Surrender fishhook round the town. I know all that goes on in the houses we pass. I tell Surrender about it as we trundle along. Everything here belongs to me: I reign, I infect this town. I’m the unexplained noises, each mislaid bit and piece. I’m the murmur, the shadow, the creaking floor. I’m the blackout, the echo, the scratcher-at-the-door.

Finnigan is much the same as Gabriel, and while as a narrator he passes on to the reader knowledge of the town and its inhabitants and while these basic character details could be termed knowledge the narrator is aware of, this information is still governed by the irrevocable truth – Finnigan is imagining it, much like Gabriel. And when the fundamental truth of Finnigan’s character is revealed, his own musings such as:

> I’ve touched them all: I’m like the plague. I’ve shared a bed with the best of them, I’ve shared their finest meals. I’ve listened to their rumors and the sound they make at night. I have stood beside their children’s cribs while they sucked their thumbs and dreamed.

are further revealed to be not only products of the narrator’s imagination, but also products of Gabriel’s imagination. For Finnigan is not real – he is a split personality of Gabriel, fabricated by the young boy to deal with the traumatic nature of his home life and the accidental death/murder of Gabriel’s younger brother years earlier. Finnigan is himself a product of the narrator’s overactive imagination – a character trait the author highlights time and again in the text – and hence he has access to information the narrator doesn’t, and can go places a ‘real’ physical person cannot. In effect, he is out in the Gabriel’s imagined town doing things that Gabriel imagines him doing.

So the author’s use of multiple viewpoints is pronounced, then the utilization of the multiple character must be shored up with story logic. Booth states:

> We all agree that point of view is in some sense a technical matter, a means to larger ends; whether we say that technique is the artist’s way of discovering his artistic meaning or that
it is his way of working his will upon his audience, we can still judge it only in the light of the larger meaning or effects which it is designed to serve. 159

In this instance, the reason for the author’s use of this technique is part of the narrative – it is not merely self serving creativity, but rather an integral aspect of the overall narrative that cannot be discounted in terms of the larger meaning it offers. If it’s true that first person voice seduces 160 then the seduction, in this sense, is Gabriel’s ability to not only leave out the essential truth of Finnigan’s existence to the reader, but also to himself. Hawthorn maintains that “the teller of a tale can often choose to inform the reader of just what he or she wants – no more and no less” 161, and the narrator of Surrender employs this notion to its fullest effect. And as a multiple character text the ploy is successful – the narrative hinges on the reader believing Finnigan to be a separate, individual entity in the story, and as such the subversion of traditional narrative aspects, in this case, is an essential element of the story.

Narrating *My name is Will*

Both the concept of the subversive narrator and the multiple character played an integral part in the writing of *My name is Will*. The novel that accompanies this exegesis has not one subversive narrator, but six, each with his and her unique voice. I give voice to six characters, and this reaches across many facets of the narrative, though none more so than structure and plot.

Each of the patients’ journals features not only subversive narration due to their mental instability, but also because of the structure of the overall novel. That is, since the novel is represented as a disordered collection of writings and has subsequently been

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161 Hawthorn, 2001, 12.
collated by the fictional editor Dr Nathan Hallard, the narration is intrinsically subversive and contingent upon the multiple viewpoints the narration offers. Non-linear storytelling challenges structure\textsuperscript{162} and My name is Will is my response to that challenge; as such, the very structure of the novel works towards ensuring the subversive narrator is as slippery a customer as he should be.

The plot of the novel is a direct result of the multiple viewpoints of the narrative. All of the narrators in the novel have something to hide. Given that the ECT is designed to unlock repressed memories, this hidden aspect to each character gradually comes to the surface over the course of the thirty day therapy as the characters remember the various ‘plots’ of the murders in their pasts. However, what throws a subversive light on this is also the effect the ECT has on the characters’ regular days at Hobbs Home – the ECT, while effective in forcing the patients to recall their childhoods and the incidents of their psychotic breaks, also brings with it an hallucinogenic veil that covers their present day world. Examples would be Orrin’s fight in the shower room with Wimeru, which slips between present and past times as Orrin’s mind reconstructs his memories; and Jack’s various exposures to fire and the effect this has on his unfocussed recollections. This causes the individual narrations to splinter at opportune moments (in a narrative sense) and to leave the closure of the stories open to the reader’s interpretation\textsuperscript{163}. In a sense, it is similar to the climax of Graham Rawle’s dynamic collage novel Diary of an Amateur Photographer. Consider this page as an example:

\textsuperscript{162} Kercheval’s Building Fiction: How to develop Plot and Structure (Story Press, 1997, 177) maintains writers can “experiment for the pure joy of disobeying the injunctions of your fiction-writing forbears”. \textsuperscript{163} Bennett & Royle’s An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory (Pearson Longman, 2004, 203) highlight narrative “undecidability” as a poststructuralist notion, and given the non-linear structure of My Name is Will, the level of undecidability of my accompanying novel is an essential story element.
At this stage of the narrative, the narrator has reached the point of no return in the collation of his photographer’s diary/psychotic confession. The reader gets the sense that as the narration breaks down into a nonsensical mess of images and words, so to does the narrator’s mind – it’s as if the text that has, up until this point, represented the events of the

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narrative in a fairly straight forward manner (as much as a collage novel can), has finally fractured into the million pieces it has been destined to from the beginning. This is, in part, the model for the narration of *My name is Will*.

As the patients get closer and closer to the truth about their individual psychotic breaks – or the psychotic break to be more precise – then the multiple narrations become more and more subversive, using the breaking of narrative to undermine reader expectations, divert reader attention and, ultimately, showcase the complexity and instability of the mind.

The fracturing of narrative is a useful device and while it can cause problems for a reader more used to traditional linear narration without a hint of unreliability, I have utilised the tool for my own ends: to craft a novel in which the multiple narrators are subversive with meaning. For me, the only time to break the rules is when story logic comes into play. That is, the subversion of narration and the utilisation of multiple viewpoints in my novel are influential facets of the structure and plot. By the climax of the narrative, each narration forms one ultimate viewpoint revealed as an undeniable subversive narrator/multiple character combination that skews traditional writing rules in order to substantiate the overriding hook of the story. *My name is Will* breaks the rules to validate the climatic revelation of the identity of patient number 220, the hook with which I hope to not only catch the reader but also make their minds reel with comprehension.

Aiming for this outcome made me then consider the type of narrative I was writing. Obviously if I am crafting a narrative in which the central hook is the identity of a patient in a mental asylum, and I have used multiple narrations as a way of keeping the reader on their proverbial toes, then my narrative is a part of a certain category of works that has been established well before the first word of *My name is Will* was written. I am talking of
genre, a Literary category I examine in the following chapter as a way of encapsulating what my novel is.
If a Mulvaney tale were written just for folk to read and not because I had to write it…
I’d be deliberately firing at an old target for the sake of making bulls’ eyes.
That way lies death.
- Rudyard Kipling

As a writer, I am constantly aware of the categorization of narrative, both during and after the writing process. What a novel is – or what I want a novel to be – invariably has bearing on the narrative elements I develop and explore during the writing process. And once that process is complete, I am also painfully aware that the work in question requires a label, even if it is merely to satisfy the appetite of a prospective publisher. That is when labeling by genres comes into play.

Genres are literary or aesthetic categories, and while genre is something of a dirty word amongst writers, evoking connotations of a lesser worth when compared to serious literature, it is a necessary principle of the industry. Derrida goes so far as to maintain:

A text cannot belong to no genre, it cannot be without or less a genre. Every text participates in one of several genres, there is no genreless text; there is always a genre and genres.

Some theorists claim genres act as “horizons of expectation for readers” and “models of writing for authors”, while others declare all texts are strongly shaped by their relation to genre. I agree, and I would even go further than Genette who claims genre to be
essentially a specification of content\textsuperscript{171}. I believe that genre reaches beyond subject matter and into all areas of narrative.

In a commercial sense, the terming of a creative work as one genre or another is intrinsically linked to the publishing of the work\textsuperscript{172} – without a classification, the work has no readily apparent position in the geography of a book store. Take a look next time you’re in a bookstore and marvel at the range of genres available and the vast number of publications that sit in these sections. But at the same time, look more closely at the actual books. Pick one at random and read the blurb, the first page, the cover – all of the information contained on these pages will be geared towards the genre of the book.

Some writers would argue that the dependency upon genre can narrow the creative focus of the work, as something of a pre-categorization can occur, thus limiting experimentation and creativity. Texts may demarcate themselves by genre, as if with a genre “a limit is drawn”\textsuperscript{173}. The thought of writing to a genre may constrain a writer from expanding upon or exploring elements that spring naturally from the work that may not fit into the traditional ideas of the genre\textsuperscript{174}. Writing to a genre can also take a writer into the dread realm of writing to a formula as imposed by an established genre. And while genre often precedes formula, the main role genre plays is as an ordering principle, offering resemblance, analogy, identity and difference\textsuperscript{175}. Conventions, character archetypes, plot lines, elements, symbols, motifs, icons – all come from genre, and all can be utilized in the crafting of narrative. After all, “identifiable traits”\textsuperscript{176} are merely fiction devices, no different from the classic ‘pyramid story structure’ or the ‘framing’ story.

\textsuperscript{171} In Derrida, 1980.
\textsuperscript{172} Mandell, 1995, 79.
\textsuperscript{173} Derrida, 1980.
\textsuperscript{174} Cavelos (in Castle (ed.), 1997, 145) states that “many innovations arise from taking ideas outside the genre and bringing them in”, which highlights what writers can miss when their work is too rigidly set in a genre.
\textsuperscript{175} Derrida, 1980.
\textsuperscript{176} Ibid.
Whichever side of the genre fence you sit upon, it is worth considering Perry’s words:

…whether a novel treats literature, history, society, language, psychology, or utter nonsense, the principle of it being a complex discourse in a particular form remains the same.\textsuperscript{177}

Genre would seem intrinsically linked to writing, as Perry’s use of the term “particular form” bears strong connotations with genre. And it is the particularity of this form that can be problematic.

Even if genre can be understood in such simple terms as a type, species or class of composition\textsuperscript{178}, pegging down the definitive conventions of a particular genre is another matter entirely. In the case of \textit{My name is Will}, the genre I was writing to was the psychological thriller. Yet if Todorov is correct and “as a rule, a genre is always defined in relation to the genres adjacent to it”\textsuperscript{179} then what a narrative is perceived to be when compared to another work is often how it will be perceived by potential publishers and booksellers, the great arbitrators of the fiction industry.

Compare McCracken’s statement that the indispensable element of the horror genre is fear\textsuperscript{180} - does this mean a psychological thriller shouldn’t scare the reader? And if it did, would it then be a work of horror and not a psychological thriller? Already the argument is under stress, as fear is a subjective notion that is impossible to peg down in relation to a reader: what one reader fears, another will laugh at. What about romance? Already your mind is conjuring images of bodice-ripping damsels, \textit{happily ever after} endings and Fabio

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\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{177} Perry, G. 2006, “Writing in the Dark: Exorcising the Exegesis” in TEXT, 2, 2.
\item \textsuperscript{178} Smith (2005, 27) begins her own examination of experimental genres with this simplified definition of genre.
\item \textsuperscript{180} McCracken \textit{'s Pulp: Reading Popular Fiction} (Manchester University Press, 1998) provides a number of definitions of mass market genres.
\end{itemize}
covers, and yet Estleman calls the romance genre a diverse market that has experimented
with time travel, westerns, new-age mysticism, murder mystery and comedy\textsuperscript{181}, marking
the genre as indistinct as the next. Does this, then, mean that a narrative in which
conventions of the romance genre feature alongside other generic notions is not a romance?
It would seem that Todorov’s theory is in need of retooling.

In fact, it is possible that generic labelling of texts needs reconsideration. A
contentious issue, that is true, but for every theorist who highlights the necessity of the
principle, there is another who wishes we did away with it altogether. Derrida asks:

\begin{quote}
Can one identify a work of art, or whatever sort, but especially a work of discursive art, if it
does not bear the mark of a genre, if it does not signal or mention it or make it remarkable
in any way?\textsuperscript{182}
\end{quote}

With that in mind, in order to place the psychological thriller into context, I will use as a
case study Tim Winton’s \textit{In the winter dark} and the novel written for my DCA to discuss
and define my genre.

\section*{Genre of the mind: Tim Winton’s \textit{In the winter dark}}

Tim Winton’s \textit{In the winter dark}\textsuperscript{183} is the story of four people living in a valley called the
Sink in the Australian wilderness. There is Maurice Stubbs, a farmer who’s lived in the
Sink all his life; his dutiful yet questioning wife Ida; Jacob, a former gardener who’s
retired to the valley, just happy not to be cutting grass anymore; and Ronnie, a young
pregnant woman whose boyfriend recently left her.

\textsuperscript{181} Estleman, 2004, 18.
\textsuperscript{182} Derrida, 1980.
\textsuperscript{183} Winton, T. 1988, \textit{In the winter dark}, Penguin, Ringwood, VIC.
Strange things are happening in the Sink – animals have been brutally killed, Stubbs finds what looks like the large paw print of a wild cat, and Jacob sees suspicious shadows moving in his orchard at night. Each of the characters has an issue with felines – Ida remembers driving home one night in a storm and seeing a circus truck overturned on the road, out of which, she suspects, something escaped; Jacob’s reason for drinking is because his newborn daughter was smothered by a cat; Ronnie was once involved in a satanic cult that sacrificed cats in weird rituals; and Stubbs once instigated a childhood prank in which he set a cat on fire and let it loose in the house of a crazy woman living in the Sink years ago.

The author could have simply crafted a literary work from these possibilities, a story of oppressive darkness and the fear inside a man’s heart. But the novel opens in an unexpected way with the character Stubbs’ narration:

So I’m the teller. But why don’t I keep my mouth shut? Why? Because someone has to hear sooner or later. Because the bloody dreams don’t go away. Because I’m alone, I’m alone here on the farm, the carrier of everyone’s memories.

Note the narrator’s reference to being a teller, one who dreams, one who’s alone. This means that whatever has happened – the story the reader is about to hear – has affected this character in a number of ways, not the least of which is the final reference in the excerpt to Stubbs being “the carrier of everyone’s memories”. This places the narration – and the narrative – in the realm of the psychological. These notions continue:

This is what I remember, but it’s not only my story. It happened to Ida, too, and Jacob and the girl Ronnie. It’s strange how other people’s memories become your own. You recall things they’ve told you. You go over things until you think you can see the joins, the cells of it all. And there’s dreams. I have these dreams.
Note the reference to recollection and also the continuation of the notion of dreams, and how the narrator can know, against all logic, the dreams of others. But the author doesn’t assume the reader will simply believe that Stubbs has access to other character’s thoughts, just because he tells us so – it must be proven that illogical behavior is possible and accounted for. If Kearney is correct when he states that “what is impossible in reality is made possible in fiction”\textsuperscript{184}, then Winton is, in effect, using the mechanics of fiction to achieve the impossible – a character who dreams other character’s dreams, which is itself a characteristic of a psychological narrative. Stubbs offers further explanation, with:

> It’s as though the things which need telling seep across to you in your sleep. Suddenly you have dreams about things that happened to them, not to you, as if it isn’t rough enough holding down your own secrets. I don’t know how it works – I’m no witchdoctor – but I know I remember things I can’t possibly know. I’m not mad. Not yet.

By introducing a semi-mystical aspect to the narrator’s musings, the author is gambling with two assumptions the reader could make: one, that Stubbs’ access to other’s dreams is magical, hence the reference to ‘witchdoctor’; and two, that the narrator may very well be mad. It is a clear indication, in this age of unreliable narrators, that when a character highlights the fact that they are not mentally unhinged, then invariably they are – if the point the character is making sounds crazy to them, then it’s a fair assumption it will sound just as irrational to the reader. This, too, is a prevalent aspect of the psychological narrative.

Stubbs offers insights throughout the remainder of the narrative, such as:

> I remember every dream from that night: Ronnie’s floating nightmare, Jacob’s terrible memory, I even know what Ida dreamt. Like that old Bible story about the wildman chained up in the tombs, ranting and foaming in all those voices. Call me Legion, he says, because we are many.

\textsuperscript{184} Kearney, 2002, 139.
Again, a reference to madness, this time in the form of a Biblical character named Legion who speaks in many voices. “My name is Legion” is a quotation from the Gospel according to Mark. Jesus and his disciples encounter a man possessed by a multitude of demons who, on seeing Jesus approach, runs to him and cries out to God to free him from the torment of the “unclean spirit” inside him. “And He asked him, what is thy name? And he answered, saying, My name is Legion: for we are many.”

By the end of the novel, in which it is revealed that Stubbs has accidentally shot and killed Ida, a car accident has robbed Ronnie of her unborn baby, Jaccob’s anguish at the events has led the man to become an alcoholic, and the big cat that has been terrorizing the Sink may, in fact, be a figment of all the characters’ imaginations, Stubbs finishes with:

My dreams are not symbols, they are history. Even the ones I don’t understand, the ones I don’t even know the characters in, they are all full of the most terrible truths. They settle on me, the guilty running silhouette. Yes, call me Legion for we are many.

The last admission by the narrator points to the essential element the author employs to craft a psychological thriller – the narrator is not talking of ephemeral, hallucinogenic things, he is speaking the truth; it is history not dreams. These narratives often feature narrators who are prone to telling the reader ‘you must believe me’, almost as if the narrator has to justify himself to the reader to provide that logic, that verisimilitude to the story.

*In the winter dark* is a taut thriller, an inner journey as oppressive as Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. Tim Winton’s ability to shore up narrative inconsistencies by relying on the narrator’s instability makes the novel a formidable model for the psychological narrative. *In the winter dark* features a narrator whose mental state affects the story, a convention as old as Poe’s *The Tell-Tale Heart*, and hints at the core of what makes a successful

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185 Mark 5:6-9.
psychological thriller: a narrative in which the mindscape of an unbalanced character
directly affects not only the subject matter of the narrative but the entire narrative in itself.
Winton’s influence on my fiction is extensive, and the repercussions for the novel
accompanying this exegesis are undeniable.

Genre and My name is Will

Given that my first published novel Room one nineteen was billed as a psychological
thriller, it would stand to reason that the sequel My name is Will would be of the same
genre. Yet, in the writing of my first novel, the notion of what constituted a psychological
thriller was not of paramount interest to me. I was constructing a story that resulted in the
‘psychological thriller’ classification being attributed to the novel in a publisher’s blurb.
However, in the case of My name is Will, I set out to write a psychological thriller and a
psychological thriller was the result.

The very premise behind the novel is steeped in the genre. My name is Will is the
collected journals of six mental patients undergoing electroshock therapy – an experiment
that not only violently retrieves suppressed memories, but also results in the patients’
mental states deteriorating further – as such, the journals are insights into unbalanced
minds. Each chapter is the writings of the mad; the spectacle that the wealthy used to pay a
penny to see in Victorian England. And their stories are as twisted as their psyches.

The narrative is as manic as the characters, with the reader forced to evaluate each
patient at a level deeper than face value. Even the structure supports this, with the reader
having to fill in the blanks at certain intervals, only to have the ‘true’ story revealed by
another character at a later stage in the narrative\(^{186}\). And the final revelation is the last

\(^{186}\) Jute (Writing a Thriller 3rd Edition, A & C Black, 1999, 17) maintains that the denouement of a thriller
must be built to slowly, so that it comes as a shock to the characters as well as the reader.
chapter of the novel; a document that throws into sharp relief not only the other patients’ stories but also that of the nurse, Al.

*My name is Will* began as a psychological thriller and ended as one. It has shock value and features multifarious examples of unreliable narrators. Critics may highlight the utilization of generic conventions as a deficiency in the work, given how prominent these are compared to other narrative elements. But since that is the point this writer set out to make, then it is even better for the distinction. For *My name is Will* is a psychological thriller – it is meant to shock the reader, and to make them think. Anything else I leave that in the hands of my silent accomplice – the reader\(^\text{187}\). As for who that reader may be…that I leave to be discussed in the following chapter.

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\textsuperscript{187} Scott McCloud’s *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (Kitchen Sink Press, 1993) defines the reader as a *silent accomplice* whose imagination affects the work on all levels.
One day a stranger drove up to the Bliss Cottage.
The palaver opened thus: ‘Kiplin’, ain’t ye?’
That was admitted.
‘Write, don’t ye?’
That seemed accurate. (Long pause)
‘That bein’ so, you’ve got to please to live, I reckon?’
It was true.
- Rudyard Kipling

From my research it would seem that the answer to “who is my novel’s audience?” is a moot question – what I should really be asking is “who do I want my audience to be?” Joella offers the term “fulfillment of the implied contract” as an ephemeral contextualization of that which passes between writer and reader – the implied contract, in this case, being that the novel the reader is about to read will be what they expect to read. Joella goes on by situating such fulfillment as the reason why most readers read, and while it is too large a task in this study to fully examine the reasons why readers read, it is who that reader might be that is the primary focus of this chapter.

Writing geared towards a specific audience is conditioned by the writer’s assumptions of what is “adequate, beneficial, necessary, advantageous, and also enlightening” for that audience. Again, the assumptions of the writer come into play, and while this can sometimes be misleading – any assumption is subjective – this should not put off the writer in any way. We already know much about the reader. Given that

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189 Long (1980) maintains that “rather than encouraging a superficial, stereotyped view of a reader...begin with a statement about the audience (you) want to create”.
190 Joella, 2006.
191 Ibid.
readers are familiar with literature through education, published criticism, marketing or simply hearsay, the categorization of the reader would seem an automatic process, whether the reader is conscious of it or not\textsuperscript{193}. Indeed, the most important question a writer needs to ask is “What does my novel do to its potential readers?”\textsuperscript{194}, whoever they may be. To do this, a writer must use his imagination, as Ong points out, “the writer must construct in his imagination, clearly or vaguely, an audience cast in some sort of role – entertainment seekers (or) reflective sharers of experience”\textsuperscript{195}. This role is entirely up to the writer and can easily be extended to encapsulate other reader attributes the writer is aiming for beyond Ong’s generalized roles. But, whatever the role, clearly the writer is the one who decides it – it is his imagination providing the audience to aim for.

Hairston claims writers need to keep the audience of a novel in mind to avoid the habit of “writing for yourself”\textsuperscript{196}, which is a danger many emerging writers face. As discussed in a previous chapter\textsuperscript{197}, a piece of writing can be an undeniably personal thing, written for reasons above and beyond just publication. When a writer is writing, the audience can seem a distant, intangible concept, for the writing, at least at the beginning, is being done for a reason other than to be read. This is natural:

Like most writers, I initially address an audience of one – myself. However, like most writers I live in the hope that my own preoccupations will strike answering chords in others.\textsuperscript{198}

Despite her intentions, Iser lays claim to an audience of some kind – a reader who will find an “answering chord” in her work. This implies yet another assumption, and this hints at

\textsuperscript{193} Todorov, 1976.
\textsuperscript{194} Iser, 2000.
\textsuperscript{196} Hairston (quoted in Long, R. 1980).
\textsuperscript{197} The reasons writers write is discussed in the \textit{Why do I write?} chapter of this exegesis.
\textsuperscript{198} Iser, 2000.
the core of my argument. For writing to an audience is an act based on assumptions and it only works if the role the imaginary reader is assigned\textsuperscript{199} matches the real reader. Herein lies my point.

Haddon claims writers are “both reader and writer at the same time”\textsuperscript{200} and it is this assumption that underpins the discussion of the potential audience for My name is Will. I am a mass market fiction reader and, naturally, my novel has been written with the mass market in mind. Even if the “birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author”\textsuperscript{201}, and the true audience for my novel may not be specifically who I was aiming for, my intention was to write for the bestseller market.

By its very definition, a bestseller denotes a commercially successful work and acts conversely as a title for the author of the work\textsuperscript{202}, both of which are attractive kudos in their own right. A bestseller brings with it recognition, fame, power (of sorts) and, of course, money; and let’s not forget more book sales since, since as Boorstein maintains, a bestseller is a book which sells well simply because it sells well\textsuperscript{203}. Bestseller books are a cultural phenomenon, a barometer by which to read the temperature of the mass market at any given time; but what does a book need to be in order to make the list?

In the eyes of most social and literary critics, the bestseller list … tends to favour popular “storytellers” over more “literary” novelists, celebrities over the unknown, “repeat” authors who write a book every year or so over those who write more slowly or those whose first book had just been published, people with trendy medical, sociological or self-improvement schemes over writers who have spent a lifetime studying more “serious” subjects, brazen self-promoters over the shy, awkward, or physically unprepossessing, and so on.\textsuperscript{204}

\textsuperscript{199}Ong in Long, 1980.
\textsuperscript{202}Encarta Concise English Dictionary, 2001, 131.
\textsuperscript{203}Gordon, 2000, 65.
Korda would have us believe that the bestseller lists – the books that have the highest number of readers of every week, month, year, decade and century of our modern civilisation – are a reserved space off limits for the emerging or developing writer; unless their work falls into the theorist’s above categories, of course. A close examination of what actually constitutes the bestseller list of any given year seems to back up this claim. Take this 1996 bestselling fiction list\(^{205}\) for example:

2. *Executive Orders*, Tom Clancy (Putnam)
3. *Desperation*, Stephen King (Viking)
4. *Airframe*, Michael Crichton (Knopf)
5. *The Regulators*, Richard Bachman (Dutton)
6. *Malice*, Danielle Steele (Delacorte)
7. *Silent Honor*, Danielle Steele (Delacorte)
8. *Primary Colors*, Anonymous (Random House)
9. *Cause of Death*, Patricia Cornwell (Putnam)
10. *The Tenth Insight*, James Redfield (Warner)
13. *Moonlight Becomes You*, Mary Higgins Clark (Simon & Schuster)
15. *The Celestine Prophecy*, James Redfield (Warner)

A cursory glance reveals a number of “repeat” authors such as romance stalwart Danielle Steele, meta-spiritual fantasist James Redfield, as well as fan favourites Michael Crichton, Tom Clancy and John Grisham: three authors whose work has made them virtually household names (even if they are only known as the guy who wrote *Jurassic Park* or *Red October* or even that movie with Tom Cruise as a lawyer). As well, horror maestro Stephen King, whose work is discussed further in this chapter, gets two mentions – one as himself and another as his pen name Richard Bachman, which in itself bears examination. In an innovative marketing and literary symbiosis, the Bachman manuscript of *The

\(^{205}\) Adapted from Korda (2001) who draws attention to *Publisher’s Weekly*, a body that has compiled annual fiction lists since 1913.
Regulators was reportedly found years after his “death” and published simultaneously with Desperation, both of which feature recurring character names and conceptual parallels. The two novels were even published by different publishers, to enhance the marketing illusion. Whatever point King was attempting to make with the books, the novels were successful, as evident by his inclusion twice in the bestseller list of 1996.

Many writers, and indeed publishers, concede that books by bestselling authors are more likely to sell\(^{206}\) but the novelist who is unknown should not throw her metaphorical hat in simply because of this. Bessie maintains that the struggle in publishing is to get attention in a crowded marketplace\(^{207}\) and this applies to all writers, no matter their recognition level. Bookstores are clogged with works covering all manner of subjects and genres, and when a particular store claims to have “a book for everyone” I tend to believe them. It is only the bestseller book that stands apart from the plethora of other titles competing for the consumer’s attention and dollar, and that is its power:

> The bestseller list presents us with a kind of corrective reality. It tells us what we’re *actually* reading (or, at least, what we’re actually *buying*) as opposed to what we think we *ought* to be reading.\(^{208}\)

What readers “ought to be reading” rarely matches what they do, and while the myth of the bestseller\(^{209}\) would have you believe that a book that sells is worthwhile, this is problematic as well.

Bradley maintains “I’ve never quite bought the idea that the public buys or takes what it deserves. I think that publishers dictate public tastes. They’re really more powerful

\(^{206}\) Lippman in Gordon, 2000, 91.  
\(^{207}\) Ibid, 85.  
\(^{208}\) Korda, 2001, x.  
\(^{209}\) HarperCollins editor Rick Horgan (in Mandell, 1995, 16) claims “the big myth in this business is that quality will win out, that cream will rise to the top.”
then we want to admit \(^{210}\) and while I agree with him to the extent that publishers decide
the books which will be available to the consuming reader, it is still the public that plays the
largest part in the creation of a bestseller. Writers, publishers, editors, critics and all may
have an opinion on what constitutes a good book or a book that will sell, but it is the public
that are the true arbitrators of the argument. So what can a writer do?

Hope. And write.

The writer must do both, and in doing so he/she must also think objectively about
not only the individual work in question, but their work overall. It is not for me to presume
that every novelist longs and prays to write a bestseller – I am the first to concede that the
reasons why writers write are as varied as the writers themselves – but given that this
exegesis is accompanied by a novel written with such intent, it behoves this writer to
examine not only a highly successful bestselling book in the form of Stephen King’s
Carrie, but his own work in turn.

**Paperback phenomenon: Stephen King’s Carrie**

I was living in a trailer with a wife and two kids. The phone company had taken the phone
out because we hadn’t paid the bill for a couple of months. I was teaching school and
making $6,500 a year. And then I got a telegram that said, “Congratulations – Carrie
officially a Doubleday book, $2,500 advance, the future lies ahead.” What I remember best
was that line: “The future lies ahead.” \(^{211}\)

What a future it has been for bestselling American author Stephen King, made all the more
romantic by the author’s humble beginnings. From his less than audacious career working
in a laundry in Smalltown, Maine – a time which features in much of King’s fiction work,
either in setting, tone or just a mention – to his self admission that The Shining was written
under the influence of illicit substances and that, consequently, he can barely remember the

\(^{210}\) In Gordon, 2000, 92.
chronology of Carrie’s success.
writing, the story of King is almost as fantastic as King’s body of work. There cannot be a
horror literature enthusiast, nor genre specific researcher, nor, I argue, a paperback reader
who has not heard – in some way, shape or form – the ‘myth’ of King’s meteoric rise to
the status of the most successful author of the American canon. But, romance aside,
there can be no doubting that it was Carrie, the supernatural thriller of telekinesis, teenage
angst and blood – lots and lots of blood – that led the way for King’s bestselling success.

But why? What is it about Carrie, a book that King has called “my little high
school horror” that has made it so successful? There are numerous reasons, not the least
of which is the author’s ability to write to the bestselling market, to the people who actually
buy the books. Cavelos maintains:

Never before had classic horror archetypes, like the vampire (Salem’s Lot) or the haunted
house (The Shining) seemed so possible in our mundane, middle-class world. He brought
these horrors down to earth, making them not the province of unstable minds and rarefied
atmospheres, but of Anytown, USA; in the plumber’s house, the son’s room, right under the
bed.

King’s work shows a pronounced relationship with the “middle class world”. Despite his
employment of fantastic elements, the author crafts narratives in which the extraordinary is
in sharp contrast to the ordinary; that is, his supernatural elements are offset by the fact that
they are occurring to fallible, corruptible and decidedly human characters, in locations that
are the very definition of sleepy towns or woodland-suburbia. There are not two worlds in

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212 Ellison (in Castle, M. 1997, Writing Horror: A handbook by the Horror Writers Association, Writer’s
Digest Books, Cincinnati) calls King “an unprecedented force in literature…there just isn’t anyone in the
history of American letters who has had that sort of success.”

213 King, 2000, 59.

214 In Castle (ed.) 1997, 145.
King’s work, a notion other horror writers play with—there is only one world. Ours.
And it just also happens to be Theirs.

What is interesting about *Carrie* is the massive career it opened for its author.

Stephen King is a writer who is simultaneously denounced as he is lauded; his books sell millions even as critics highlight the deficiencies of his work at every turn. When King received the Lifetime Achievement Award by the National Book Awards in 2003, literary critic Harold Bloom claimed that anyone who believes the writer’s work has “any literary value…or any aesthetic accomplishment or signs of an inventive human intelligence, is simply a testimony to their own idiocy”, a notion that former Simon & Schuster CEO Richard Snyder maintains when he describes King’s fiction as “non-literature”. It is an argument mired in opinion and it cannot be won or lost here. It is enough to note that *Carrie* was the launching pad for one of literature’s most successful authors – even if one measures success in other ways aside from book sales. King’s fiction work is read across the world, has been translated into film, television, graphic literature and online publishing, and Stephen King has become a part of our popular culture.

*Carrie* was King’s first published novel and it is one of the most frequently banned books in U.S. schools; the novel’s initial print run of 30,000 sold 13,000 copies, while the paperback version released a year later sold over 1 million in its first year; and yet the novel was the sixth King had written, after his novella *Getting It On* (later renamed *Rage*) was rejected by Doubleday before *Carrie* was published. The novel has been a paperback phenomenon, but the last words must go to King himself:

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215 Russian horror writer Sergei Lukyankenko’s *The Night Watch* (2004) is a prime example, with the supernatural ‘veiled’ in a parallel reality known as the Twilight, and, in an allusion to literature archetypes, this alternate plane can only be accessed by an Other – the ‘normal’ person cannot see it nor enter.


218 It is rumored that King’s estate bought the van that accidentally hit him in 1999 to stop it being sold on eBay.
I'm not saying that *Carrie* is shit and I'm not repudiating it. She made me a star, but it was a young book by a young writer. In retrospect it reminds me of a cookie baked by a first-grader – tasty enough, but kind of lumpy and burned on the bottom.219

And yet it has been a recipe of success for Stephen King.

**A reflection on the mass market**

Stephen King’s words have a strong bearing on the crafting of *My name is Will*, especially in terms of the retrospective view that the writing of this exegesis has offered me. Given that I am reflecting on the writing process of the novel accompanying this exegesis, it has become clear to me that *My name is Will* is somewhat similar to King’s cookie metaphor for *Carrie*.

I may, in places, touch upon certain literary conventions as worthy models or modes for creative endeavour – and I may expound upon these selfsame elements as handy tools for the contemporary fiction worker – but I can offer no guarantees, least of all to myself. I may have endeavoured to craft a bestseller…but, at the time of writing, it is not one. Or it isn’t yet.

Stephen King’s work encourages me, however. Here’s a writer who has ridden the bestseller lists for more than a decade, whose name is known across the world, whose writing prompts readers to keep turning the pages time and time again; and yet from his humble beginnings he should be viewed almost as a Cinderella figure. Stephen King is a writer who, while I do not directly aspire to be him, I do aspire to be like him and to have such an audience.

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219 King, 2000, 68.
American author and critic Henry James once called Rudyard Kipling “the most complete man of genius I have ever known”\textsuperscript{220}. More than a century after \textit{Just So Stories} was published, Kipling’s allegorical poem of the ‘six serving-men’ still provides a viable framework for the analysis of writing. With six universal questions, Kipling offers a method of framing practice that can lead to exploration and ultimate understanding and I have utilised the notion of Kipling’s six questions to encapsulate the writing and exegetical examination of a novel for my Doctor of Creative Arts candidature.

While I have presented this exegesis in line with Kipling’s six questions, I have done so with an idiosyncratic method. That is, I have interpreted Kipling’s “six serving-men” as a framework for the writing and analysis of \textit{my} novel, and scholar-writers need to realize the benefits adopting such a framework can have to their own work. The remaining lines of Kipling’s poem are:

\begin{verbatim}
But different folk have different views:
I know a person small –
She keeps ten million serving-men,
Who get no rest at all!
She sends ’em abroad on her own affairs,
From the second she opens her eyes –
One million Hows, two million Wheres,
And seven million Whys! \textsuperscript{221}
\end{verbatim}

Every writer is different and Kipling’s six questions offers any writer a starting point for the development of a research paradigm for writing. For example, a writer could ask \textit{Who is the character?}, \textit{What is the conflict?}, \textit{Where is the story set?}, \textit{When does the story take


place?, How is the story told?, and Why is the story important? (theme) to examine their fiction through the principal elements of story.

If genre is crucial to a scholar-writer’s creative work, then asking What is the genre?, How is the genre constructed?, Where do the conventions come from?, Who are the forerunners of the genre?, Why are the conventions followed?, and When should a writer break convention? would seem a feasible course of enquiry. A writer of a specific genre – say that of the quest narrative – can examine the genre critically using Kipling’s six questions: What is the quest?, Who is the hero?, Why is she the hero?, Where does the quest take her?, How is conflict on the quest constructed?, and When does the quest end?

A writer primarily concerned with character has their Who? question covered, while Where the character came from (backstory), What the essential conflict is, Why the character acts this way (motivation), How the conflict is overcome, and When the character reaches epiphany may be viable avenues for exegetical study. Even more ephemeral fiction in which thematic issues are more prevalent than genre, plot or character can be contextualized by interpreting Kipling’s six questions. By answering What message underpins the writing, Why such a message is important, How the message is communicated, Who will be affected by the message, examining instances When fiction has affected change beyond the page, and postulating on Where the future may lead, the scholar-writer has the beginnings of a critical study into his own work.

For myself, Rudyard Kipling’s six universal questions has provided a robust framework for the examination of my own fiction. How I researched my novel, Where my inspiration comes from, Why I write, When I break the rules, What genre I write, and Who I write to are the pertinent questions I asked before, during and after the writing of My name is Will, and my “six serving-men” have served me well. Separately, each question analyses
a certain aspect of my writing process and research. But together, the six questions offer one definitive answer – a novel. And as a writer, that is the only answer I seek.
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My name is Will

a novel
by Luke Keioskie
The following is based on real people.
All but the names have been changed.
To protect the innocent one.
(WILL’S FONT)

Day 29

I don’t care what happens tonight. I really don’t. I’m beyond caring. If I felt how I did when I first got here, then maybe I would give a shit. But it was so long ago now and I feel so different. Like a different person.

The walls. I can’t stand these walls. All around me, every day, every night. Walls within walls, here in Hobbs Home. So many walls. I reach out and touch them and push them and hit them but they never go away. All I end up doing is hurting myself.

The other prisoners are quiet tonight. They know what’s happening tomorrow, that’s why. They know that when the door at the end of the hallway opens at midnight, and when the keys are dangled from nurse Al’s big fist, and when the right key is put in the right lock, they know that it won’t be their door that opens. Oh no. It won’t be them that Dr Amos comes for, to strap into the machine for one last time. It’ll be me.

I don’t know why it’s me and not them. I didn’t kill my neighbour. My brother. My best friend, my sisters, my mother. I didn’t do anything half as bad as they did to get them put inside here. But Amos doesn’t want them. He wants me.

Maybe that’s why they’re so quiet tonight, why there’s no crying, no yelling, no laughing, nothing. Maybe it’s out of mourning, for me.

Ha. I doubt it.

None of them really cares about me. Not one. None will shed a tear when I’m gone. Lulu, Derek, Orrin, Jack, Constance – none of them will remember me after tonight. To them I’m just another sicko stuck here with them, and as soon as I’m gone there’ll be
another, and when he goes there’ll be another. An endless rotation of sickos for the good
doctor Amos to experiment on. They won’t miss me.

There’s only one person down here who might. The boy in cell 8. He just might. I
think I’m as close to a friend as he has in here, so maybe he’ll miss me. Maybe.

It’s getting hard to write. It feels like all I’ve been doing the whole time is writing,
so much that I see words in my sleep now, tons of words, millions of them. I’m tired of it,
tired of you, diary, tired of it all. Haven’t I done enough? Haven’t I written more than one
person should? Maybe I have. I suppose I’ll never really know.

I’m just about done. It’s funny, but I feel like a kid waiting for Christmas, only he
doesn’t want Christmas to come soon – he doesn’t want it to come at all.

Well, diary, I’d like to say our time here’s been fun. But I can’t. You were
supposed to help me, diary but I don’t think you did. I think you doomed me. You see,
diary, they’re going to find you some day. I’m going to hide you, in the space between the
bricks I found the day I first woke up here, you remember? The soft bit that I thought I
could tunnel out and escape into, the hollow space in the wall? Of course you remember.
You helped me find it.

That’s where you’re going, diary – you and all the pages from the albino, the Nazi,
the bitch, the firebug and the buttboy, when I get them tonight, and someday someone’s
going to find you and read you and I’m worried that the story you’re going to tell of me
won’t be true or right or what I want people to know. If there’s one thing I’ve learnt here at
Hobbs Home, it’s that people always judge the cover of the book and not the words inside.
And I know what people will say about me when my words are read.

But I don’t care. I don’t care because tonight it’s over, one way or another. I don’t
care that Amos is close, so close his well shod shoes are click-clacking on the concrete
floor of the wing, the echo making it seem as if he were all around me, all at once. I don’t care that my words say things about me I didn’t write.

Because you see, diary, I know who I am. My name is Will. And nothing Amos does, or anyone – or even you, diary – can take that away from me.
Orrin
orrins die diary fuck off

01/04/77

I never written things before don’t know how to write good but will do my best like uncle says to. Just do your best orrin that’s all you can do in this world yes uncle.

I been trying to make friends but it’s hard here cause of how I look the others think I’m something I’m not. I can’t blame them I think I look mean too when I look in the mirror see my shaved head the tattoo uncle gave me. I think if I saw me I’d be scared too.

I try to smile to make friends but with my teeth missing I just look worse. Missing my teeth is a new thing so I’ve been sitting at lunch or breakfast or dinner just touching the space where my teeth were with my tongue because it’s so new. I think it makes me look scarier because I see people staring at me and when I look at them they look away. But I’m not really that scary if they would just get to know me.

It’s good we have our own group now our own wing I like that it means we don’t have to look anywhere else for people to talk to and we all seem to be in the same way because we can’t member something. But I don’t like how the other lunch tables dare stare at us just because we don’t sleep in their wings how they say things about us while their eyes are on us how they laugh. That makes me go red but I do my best not to show it because that would make it worse if I did. Like today when wimeru says something that made me so red.
wimeru is the biggest here everyone knows him. He’s always starting fights like he wants to stay here for his whole life or something and since he’s the biggest it means he always wins the fights unless one of the nurses breaks it up before he knocks the other guy out. My first day here I saw wimeru beating on dick derek but I didn’t know derek then so I didn’t do anything but I knew wimeru would be after me soon enough because of the way he looks and the way I look. I knew he’d come for me I didn’t know it would be today.

It was lunch I was walking to our table which is ours now that we’ve all moved into the blue wing they keep a table just for us at meals. I could see lulu smiling at constance who is the whitest girl I ever seen derek was offering me his food jack was watching the kitchen the ovens will was writing in his diary because he’d finally woken up. I was looking at them so I didn’t see when wimeru hit my tray and my food went all over me. All the others laughed not the ones at our table the others. wimeru was smiling I saw he had a gold tooth that flashed so bright it hit my eyes. I started getting red the way I do. I could feel the red coming on but I squashed it down I put it down I put it back inside me where it went away but only slowly I could still feel it there. Then constance helped me pick up my food she says I’ll clean it up for you don’t make a fuss. Then all the nurse guy was there with some of the other nurses everyone went quiet I picked up my food and sat down at the table.

But I could feel wimeru looking at me. When I turned around later he was staring at me grinning licking his gold tooth like he was a lion or something.

I thought I’d see him again in the shower block or at lunch or breakfast or dinner but he surprised me when he came at me outside during rec time after lunch.

He says you’re white trash faggot with a punk arse haircut that it was lucky someone had knocked my front teeth out otherwise I’d be a bucktoothed faggot racist and the more he says it the redder I got.
Then the red went over my eyes. It made wimeru darker it made the world around him bleed blood. I tried to stop it but it was too strong I couldn’t stop cause he just kept saying things at me which got me redder and redder.

I could see his face right up close to mine. He spat at me.

The next thing I know wimeru was on the ground with blood on his lips he looked scared so scared because I was standing over him with my foot on his throat I was pushing down hard.

I looked around there were people everywhere shouting screaming spitting words watching me with my foot on wimeru’s throat. Then al tackled me we fell I scratched my face and arms.

wimeru ran away. al held me down until I stopped thrashing he says calm down easy now and I stopped cause I wasn’t mad at al and he was stronger then me so I couldn’t get up unless I did. When I stopped he got off me. Some other nurses came up waved the others away. al picked me up put his hand on my shoulder like uncle always did. He looked at wimeru running away. He laughed he really did he laughed.

He says it was about time someone gave that one a beating I’m only sorry it wasn’t me. He says I won’t report this to cook doctor amos it would only cause you more trouble and I know it’s wimeru’s fault.

I liked that I like al he’s a good guy. He’s the one who takes us back to our rooms after we’ve been let out. When it’s time for us to go somewhere we can always hear al when he’s coming to get us he swings his keys they rattle I think he does that so we know he’s coming just to let us know it’s not someone else.

al took me back inside through the kitchens. constance got some ice for my knuckles which were really sore then al took me back to my room in the blue wing. He
says stay calm and that he’d try to bring me a can of coke in the afternoon which I liked because I like coke.

But when al came back he didn’t have a can of coke he had doctor amos. doctor amos held my wrist flashed his little torch in my eyes. He says I need to get my rest that I have a big night ahead of me. He looked really happy but I didn’t want to ask why he was so happy. I didn’t think it was right that he was so happy in here when everyone else isn’t.

doctor amos saw my diary you writing anything good he says.

I says I don’t write good.

He says writing can help me member my past but I don’t ask him what good that’s for. I been here long enough to know you don’t ask things like that to the doctors. They got all sorts of xperments to run on us. You give them lip they do more.

Then doctor amos says he’ll see me later tonight and I don’t know what that means. I haven’t been out at night since I got here we’re only let out for meals and exercise twice a day. It scares me to think they’re coming for me tonight.
doctor amos has a machine that does something to my head he says. He calls it e-cee-t or something. It’s big black steel wires sticking out. I can see my tattoo on the steel bits when he straps me into it he strapped me in last night.

He says how are you feeling today orrin.

I says okay.

He says how are you getting along with the other patients on Blue Wing.

I says they’re okay. I like constance lulu’s okay I got no problem with jack will don’t say nothing so he’s okay.

He says and derek.

I says I don’t like derek.

He says why.

Because he’s weak he’s got no willpower.

My hands are tight too tight but the straps don’t go nowhere when I try to move. I don’t like it but doctor amos pats my arm tells me calm down. I want to be calm clear but I don’t like my hands being out of my control don’t like being controlled.

doctor amos says that’s an interesting tattoo on your neck did you do it yourself.

I says uncle gave it to me when I turned sixteen. He took me to his mate tyrone’s place on the other side of one mile creek. I sat in his kitchen and they gave me bourbon and tyrone put this gun thing on my neck. It felt like a million tiny needles pricking my skin but I liked it.
doctor monster amos puts some gel stuff on my face then some suction cup things they had wires sticking out of them that went into the e-cee-t machine. He flicked a switch. Smelt all funny all of a sudden like the time the tele blew up caught fire. Burning sparks.

doctor amos says ready orrin just relax that’s it. He puts a rubber mouth guard in my mouth. doctor amos says bite down that’s it it’ll stop your teeth from biting your tongue good man now straps tight good good we’re ready I think we’re ready excellent ready. dokter doctor amos says starting e-cee-t now.

That’s all I can member.
05/04/77

I member uncle taking me to town membered it like a damn dream last night after doctor amos put me to sleep again with his machine.

uncle and me we’d go in his ute and we’d drive drive drive for ages because where we lived was way up in the hills we never came down much only when we needed to. uncle would sing to the radio which always cracked me up because he’s not a very good singer but he didn’t seem to care he just kept singing. He liked split ends enz the best. He’d sing when my baby’s walking down the street and I’d sing I see red I see red I see red and when I told him how bad he was he’d sing louder just because I says he was bad. I always liked our times driving to town cause uncle liked driving it made him happy he’d smile laugh joke. But when we reached the old sawmill he’d stop singing smiling laughing joking cause of what he saw.

The old sawmill wasn’t a sawmill anymore it was a house that people lived in. We’d see them as we drive past just sitting under the trees drinking from paper bags smoking cigarettes cooking on fires. Their kids would be running around kicking a footy or playing with sticks they’d run up to the ute as we went past with their big smiles chitter chattering laughing. uncle’s face would always look real red when he saw them. If he’d been singing before the old sawmill the singing would stop and he’d start talking.

Lousy deadbeats uncle would say why can’t they get a job instead of bludging off the gov-e-ment uncle would say no wonder this country’s going to shit uncle would say no wonder hard working why white farmers can’t get a break with the gov-e-ment giving hand
outs left right and centre uncle would say what do they spend the money on but grog uncle would say dirty scumbags. He’d say stuff like that all the way to town.

In town uncle would give me five dollars. He’d go to the RSL I’d go to the newsagent to see if any new commando comics had come in because I like commando comics I liked the war stories. But the town was so small they didn’t always have new ones which I didn’t like.

I went in the newsagent once and miser mister dodds the newsagent says they had a new commando but I got there too late because someone had bought it before me which made me red especially when mister dodds the newsagent says someone just bought it before I got there. I felt red cause it was my comic no one else’s.

I went outside there were guys sitting under a tree. One had my commando comic I knew because I could see the cover it wasn’t one I had. I recognized the boy. It was dougy he lived on the property next to ours. uncle says they are squatters but the gove-ment couldn’t do anything bout it because of the law. uncle says it’s a crying shame letting a piece of land like that go to waste. uncle says someone should just take care of them all one night do the world a favor uncle says.

I watched dougy for a while he was reading my comic laughing they all were cracking up about something. Then dougy’s granddad came up I knew him uncle always pointed him out when we could see them.

It looked like dougy’s granddad was angry real red bout something cause the other boys skat scattered dougy’s head was hanging real low. dougy’s granddad took the commando off him rolled it up waved it at him pointed at dougy’s chest with it. dougy must have been real scared scared cause he didn’t say or do nothing. I knew how that felt when uncle got up me so I know what he was feeling red probably but in a different way.
Then dougy’s grandad took my comic comic ripped it in half threw it on the ground like it was nothing. He wasted it my comic just tossed it like it was nothing.

I got red.

I could feel the red coming the red that uncle says is my power I got so red the bush around them looked like it was on fire. dougy and dougy’s granddad grew dark in my eyes darker then they really was my head hurt my chest hurt my eyes I hurt all over it was so red.

Then uncle was there hand on my shoulder pulling me away. uncle says don’t worry the time will come as he pulled me away. The red the red went away slow. By the time we got to the ute it was all gone gone away. But my eyes were locked with dougy as his granddad walked him away and dougy watched me the whole way too.

I hate that abo I says. uncle says that’s good hate is good.
10/04/77

When doctor amos isn’t plugging us into his e-cee-t machine he talks to us asks us questis questions in the room at the end. It’s called the common room don’t know why we ain’t allowed in there unless he’s there and only one at a time too. We all know when doctor amos wants to ask us questions cause al comes and gets us one by one and we know cause we go into the common room not up the stairs to the e-cee-t machine.

Today doctor amos says this far into the treatment you must be experiencing some recall what do you member.

I don’t say nothing. I don’t want to tell doctor amos what I member.

docor amos says I’m only trying to help you member to help you you do want to member don’t you. I don’t say nothing.

docor amos says you know that if you remember I we can help you get back to your uncle’s farm you must be missing it by now.

I says yeah a lot.

docor amos smiles says just relax you look so tense just trust me.

I says okay.

docor amos says good. Now I want you to close your eyes orrin that’s it it’s okay everything’s fine. I just want you to relax are you relaxed. Now I’ve read your file and there’s a place I want you to try and member. A barn I want you to picture that barn do you remember it. doctor amos says keep your eyes closed member the barn picture the barn do you see the barn orrin.
I says yeah. It’s big and old and it has two doors on the front that are always open. The barn looks rusted like that old battleship uncle took me to see when I was little. It’s the same colour, like metal and brown all mixed together.

doctor amos says that’s good orrin now I want you to walk towards it just slowly you’re just walking nothing can hurt you I want you to go inside to go through the doors.

I says I don’t want to.

doctor amos says I know you don’t want to orrin but there’s nothing to fear just walk in go through the doors. What do you see what’s inside the barn orrin.

I says I don’t know it’s all red inside and it was all red red red everywhere.
doctor amos says what exactly is dead red.

I says there’s machinery like spare parts and stuff hanging from the walls and shovels and hoes there’s the body of an old ute in the corner with a tarp over half of it the windscreen looks like a big empty eye socket like the ute is a skull it’s all red too.
doctor amos sounded real excited he says what else look around orrin tell me what you see in the barn.

I says the roof I can see the roof like a ribcage like I’m inside the chest of an animal. The beams cross the roof there’s a peak in the middle and and there’s something there hanging from the roof.

I didn’t like telling doctor amos this stuff it hurt hurt my head. I thought bout what he does to us with his e-cee-t how my head hurts when I wake up the next morning how I can still smell the gel stuff on my skin it itches how the lectricity he pumps into me gives me bad dreams day time nightmares. But doctor amos and his words wouldn’t stop I know they wouldn’t not til I’d told him bout what was hanging from the barn roof that’s what he wants to hear from me.
I says it’s hard to see it’s so read I can see a rope there’s someone someone else
someone else here.

doctor amos says who is it.

I says I don’t know they’re behind me I can feel someone right behind me but I
don’t want to look at them I can feel them breathing on my neck.

doctor amos says calm yourself orrin they can’t hurt you here you’re safe here.

But they’re right behind me I can feel them real close to my back I can feel
something on my shoulder gripping me I can’t get it off I try but it won’t let go.

doctor amos says relax orrin relax I want you to turn around now.

I can’t someone’s held holding me holding me there.

doctor amos says yes you can I want you to turn around and look at the person
behind you Orrin.

No it’s too red I don’t want to.

Nothing’s going to happen orrin. It’s just a memoir memory and memories can’t
hurt you I want you to turn around and look at them I want you to see them it’s easy I’ll tell
you what to do. doctor amos says just turn slow slowly just let your eyes sweep across the
barn let your head turn so you’re facing behind you facing the person at your back just do it
nice and easy orrin nice and easy.

I say okay okay I’m turning.

direct doctor amos says what do you see.

I see the walls the barn it looks like the walls are coming closer closing in on
me they’re so red it hurts my eyes. I see the rope it’s there on the edge of my eyes it’s
moving with me and there’s something hanging from it something that looks like an
animal strung up. It’s hard to see to turn the weight on my shoulder heavy getting
heavier I can feel my head turning but something is stopping me holding me the walls the walls are right up to me now they’re so close crowding me in it’s all red so bright.

I can see a face I can see a face.

doctor amos says who is it orrin whose face is it.

But it hurts hurts my head my head my eyes can’t I can’t see who it is I can’t see I see I see I see it’s uncle.

doctor amos says your uncle.

uncle’s got his hand on my shoulder he’s holding me like he does he’s smiling but his mouth is full of blood running running down his chest he looks so happy I’ve never seen him look so happy.

uncle has something in his hand he lifts it up.

doctor amos says what is it what do you see.

It’s our shottie he’s got the shottie he’s lifting it lining up my face with the stock he’s gonna hit me he’s gonna hit me with it he’s gonna hit me he he NO HE HIT ME HE HIT ME WITH THE SHOTTIE NO UNCLE NO UNCLE NO WHY DID YOU HIT ME I DIDN’T DO NOTHING IT WAS THEM UNCLE IT WASN’T ME UNCLE UNCLE I CAN SEE THE ROPE IT’S ME IT’S ME IT’S ME HANGING FROM THE ROPE UNCLE HELP ME I’M CHOKING HELP ME UNCLE PLEASE I DIDN’T DO NOTHING UNCLE HELP ME I DON’T WANT TO MEMBER NO MORE
I saw wimeru today he got me red again.

He was picking on derrick again like he always did. It was breakfast showertime and I was late. When it’s showertime we all go to a showerblock like the ones they have at town pools. Some of the boys here don’t like showering together but they have to there’s no private showers here.

We all shower together in this big room with lots of showerheads stuck in the walls like the pictures uncle showed me once of this showerroom at this camp in Germany where all these bald skinny naked people were taken. Uncle says that is where unclean people go to be cleansed which made sense to me since there were showerheads all around the big room full of bald skinny naked people just like the showerroom here. Only the people here don’t look like the ones in the pictures they were all skinny like sticks.

I was late by the time I got there the other boys were at breakfast. I got undressed, put a towel on and went into the showers. It was steamy like someone had left the hot water on. I couldn’t see much it was like fog. But I heard voices crying, laughing, talking.

I went through the steam until I saw who it was it was derrick lying on the floor. There was bled red blood he was crying lying on his stomach naked on the floor. wimeru was standing over him laughing calling him bitch. He didn’t see me he was looking at derrick.

derrick tried to claw crawl away but wimeru kicked him in the ribs like you would a dog. derrick curled up into a ball crying wimeru went to kick him again I couldn’t let him get away with it. I rushed wimeru pushed him hit him against the wall. He bounced
off it looking all angry like he was gonna hit back but when he saw me he dropped his fist looking all confused now.

I says get off him.

His face got mad I saw his eyes were bloodshot his lips sort of wobbling his teeth grinned.

wimeru says that’s twice now you’ve suckered me and twice is all you’ll get.

I started getting red again like I always did but I didn’t lose time this time like I do. The red came down over my eyes I saw wimeru he looked weird in the steam he wavered like heat on the highway. The red took over everything was red I looked at my fists so tight they made my palms ache my fists were red redder than I’d ever seen them. The red was there all over me waiting to take me over but I held it back I kept it there stopped it just before it could take me.

Then wimeru backed away disappearing into the dream steam like he was never there. Slowly real slow the red left me.

I reached down packed picked derek up but he couldn’t stand on his feet properly he was sort of limping hunching moaning. I walked him out of the showers he walked strange like he’d fallen on his tailbone which hurts like hell I know I’ve done it heaps of times.

I says why don’t you stand up for yerself.

He just cried.

I says you’re a pansy you’re weak you deserve the trouble you get cause you don’t stand up for yerself.

I put him on one of the benches told him to sort himself out go to breakfast and I went and had my shower. The shower was hot read red hot and I wondered if I would be cleansed like uncle says the bald skinny naked people had been in their showerroom back in germany. But I guess it would take a lot more red hot water than this.
I member dougy now more than I did I member things he says to me the places he says them. That’s what the lectricity is for doctor amos says but he says a lot of things too many more much sometimes. But I do member so maybe what he says this time is right.

I member the farm uncle’s farm wasn’t much just a few head of sheep but enough for us. I used to ride the four wheeler round watching the sheep making sure they were okay that was my job the job uncle gave me. The farm had a lot of gullies no piece of it was straight or level the four wheeler was best for that I’d have fun those times. I’d be on a ridge then I’d go down real fast foot to the floor wind streaming over my head and I’d hit the bottom take the other side shoot over the top like it was a jump. Sometimes on the high point near mount nindeery I’d get so high I could see the old sawmill down in the valley and I thought I was so high that all those down there could see me too. When I landed I’d have to take care otherwise I’d crash but I never did.

One day I was going along the north fenceline because uncle says we were missing a few lambs that was the likely place for them to be since it had better grass and I saw dougy his brothers sitting on the fence. I slowed down but they’d already heard me saw me coming. They got off the fence on their side faced me.

I stopped saw they had one of our lambs. Its neck was broken there was blood on it dougy held it in his hands.

I says what you doing to my lamb.

dougy says we found him like this his head was stuck stuck in the wire.

I says you lying mongrel you killed it.
He says no we didn’t we found him like this see you can see where the barbs have caught it.

I says you did that with your bloody boomerangs or what not for all I know.

Then they all laughed the lot of em like what I’d says cracked them up.

I says piss off you’re on my land he says piss off we’re on our land and he threw the lamb over the fence then they walked off laughing to themselves laughing at me. I took the lamb back to uncle told him what happened. uncle says next time take the shottie with you give em something to laugh bout. Then we had the lamb for dinner.

Another time dougy’s people were having this big party they had a huge bonfire going I could see it from our back door I could see shapes moving around the fire dancing they looked like dark night shadows. uncle was sleeping I wanted to see more so I went over.

I snuck through the scrub getting closer closer trying not to make noise. The closer I got the more I could hear the music it was just drums and singing the singing sounded like wailing the rest was just jabbering noise.

I could see people dancing round the fire more sitting in the darkness a little way away drinking from bottles smoking cigarettes. It made me red seeing them having so much fun when uncle says times are hard and we can’t afford to send you to school no more since I can’t work the sheep by myself uncle says. Times are tough for white farmers uncle says. And here they were partying it up like times weren’t tough no times weren’t tough for them at all.

I was lying in a patch of long grass as close as I thought I could get when I heard someone coming towards me. I got down as low as I could go hoping the light of the fire wasn’t enough to see me by I heard voices.

One sounded like a man he says is that the place.
The other was dug dougy he says yeah.
The man says you just leave them be dougy and they leave you be.
dougy says this one’s different he threatened us.
The man says what with.
dougy says he raids rides around with a shotgun he says we steal his sheep but we don’t he says he’s going to get every last one of us.
The man says just stay away from him dougy you and your brothers.
Then dougy says yeah grandfather then they walked off I couldn’t hear anymore. I snuck back home quiet as I could no one heard me no one saw me.
I member something else dougy says to me too and this is the one I don’t member when where why. Its like there’s a red block in my head when I try to picture when why he says these things to me I can’t see it cause of the red that’s there instead. But I know it’s dougy and if I know it’s dougy then I’ll be able to see it soon cause I still member what dougy looks like so it won’t be long I’ll member. But all I member now are his words my words our words.
I says this the last time you come over here.
dougy says please don’t hurt me I’m sorry for what I says but his words sounded strange like there was something wrong with his mouth.
I says what you say shitstain can’t hear ya and I laughed.
He says I’ll kill you.
I laugh and says I can’t hear ya ya got no mouth.
Then someone maybe dougy maybe me says where’s the rope.
That’s all I member for now.
Friend Orrin,

I need your help and if you help me I’ll owe you one and it can be anything you like because all you got to do is ask and I’ll get it for you because that’s what friends are for.

Your friend,

Derek
21/04/77

doctor amos came to see me again to take me to the machine. I says I don’t want to go I don’t want to member but that don’t stop him.

   doctor amos says now orrin I’ve decided to trial you on by-temper-real e-cee-t tonight.

   I says what’s that.

   doctor amos says do not worry orrin it won’t hurt you I’m just hoping if I up the decile dosage your memories should sort themselves out. doctor amos says it’s something I’ve been trying with some of the other patients derek jack and I’m hoping to see better results with you. Of course it has been found that by-temper-real e-cee-t can result in shut short term memory loss but that’s a risk I’m willing to take to get at the more buried long term memories.

   I says what it do.

   doctor almost amos says just help you member orrin. You do want to member don’t you.

   I says yeah.

   But I don’t really think I do anymore.
Something happened this morning something important I know it did but I can’t member it.

I member having brake breakfast with the others and I member derek now. He sat next to me which was wired weird cause he never does. He gave me a note I red read it.

I says help you with what.

He says something can’t member what now but it was something important I know it was.

I says okay sure.

I followed derek to where the food is no it wasn’t there not there somewhere else. I member walking past the tables to the door out to the hallway. derek was taking me to the rooms no it wasn’t the rooms it was the showers yes the showerroom that was it.

derek says he’s in the showers.

derek kept looking back to see if I was behind him he looked scared I member that but he always looks scared derek like what you say to him or how you look at him makes him shit himself. Today he looked different though when I think bout it. He still looked scared but don’t know what it was because he was sort of smiling but like he was trying to hide it yeah I think that’s it. He looked happy first time he’d ever looked like that.

We got to the showerroom and it was steamy like someone had left the heat hot water on.

I says is he in there and derek nodded.

I says something what did I say something like what do you want or what should I do.
derek says do what you do best which was weird because I didn’t know what he meant but I guessed what he meant because there’s stories about me in this place that aren’t true but everyone thinks they are because of the way I look. I get that everywhere I go.

I member going into the showers. I member the steam round me. I member the noise of the water hitting everything tap tapping like rain. I member my shoes slipping on the tiles. I walked slowly walked towards a black shape in the far corner. I member taking my shirt off and binding twining twirling it so it wrapped around my hand like a rope.

I says hey but I hell yelled it really.

The shape turned to me I member now it was wimeru. His hair was slicked down from the shower he was naked. He saw me and stood up tall blowing his chest out his hands were fists at his sides.

He says what do you want.

I says something can’t member.

He says piss off and turned back to the shower but before he did I saw far fear there in his eyes like he membered what happened last time outside and I member hitting him last time outside now and dropping him and putting my foot on his throat and pushing down like he was nothing. Like he is nothing.

I says something again don’t know what can’t member.

wimeru turned round swung a fist at me but I saw it coming he missed. He put up his hands started dancing like a boxer.

I says that your best.

He says something but I couldn’t hear it he snarled at me.
He swung again and hit me in the shoulder but that was what I wanted him to do. It hurt like hell he’s a big boy got some muscle but I needed him in close so I let him have that one. He moved to the side of me with the punch I whipped my t-shirt around his neck grabbed it with my hand so that he was in front of me I had his throat with my shirt.

I remember the red I saw the red and I let it come this time let it take me didn’t try to stop it let the world go red I see red I see red I see red.

wimeru gagged tried to wrestle away but I held him fast he wasn’t going nowhere. I member he kicked back at my shin it stung but I didn’t let go.

I say you lousy deadbeat stealing my uncle’s sheep yeah I member I says that and I squeezed harder.

wimeru says something but I couldn’t hear it because I was choking him.

I say I’m going to teach you a lesson dougy yeah I say dougy I called him dougy.

He says please at least I think that’s what he says it was hard to hear him.

I say you nearly got me last time and when I say that I was suddenly somewhere else.

It wasn’t the showerroom anymore it was the barn and it wasn’t me doing the choking it was dougy and it wasn’t wimeru getting choked it was me.

dougy had his arm around my throat holding me pinning me to his chest I could feel him breathing on my neck. He put his knee into my back and pushed me down. I saw he had my shottie. dougy pulled his arm back hit me in the face with the shock stock it hurt like hell I tasted blood broke my teeth I heard em crack.

dougy says this is the last time you come over here white fella.

I say please don’t hate hurt me I’m sorry for what I say but it sounded weird from the blood in my mouth like warm copper.

dougy says what you say can’t hear ya.
I says I’ll kill you and I meant it I wanted to get him so bad for touching me for hitting me for catching me like he did when I wasn’t doing nothing on his land just keeping an eye on things. It made me so red that I spat at him spat my blood at him it hit him in the face across his cheek.

He stopped laughing then his eyes got real wild like an animal. He punched me in the face again real hard.

He says I can’t hear ya ya got no mouth.

Then dougy says where’s that rope ah here this will do he picked up some rope. He says just like the old days my grandfather tells me all about the white men and their ropes.

dougy tossed the rope over the roof beams where they formed a peak. He lifted the shottie pointed it at me.

Come here he says.

Then there was a bang behind me someone yelled what the fuck’s going on and it was uncle it was uncle he was there he’d come to save me he’d come to rescue me teach dougy a lesson a lesson he should have been taught a long time ago. And my red was suddenly all around me seething colouring everything it was going to help me now that uncle was there now that uncle would stand beside me fight em back take back what was ours what was white rightfully ours.

I looked at uncle striding into the barn he looked so full of red his eyes bloody his jaw clenched then dougy it must have been dougy he hit me in the back of the head with the shottie again and everything went black.

I member now.

I member coming to. I was on my knees in the showerroom the barn was gone all gone wimeru was sitting in the corner with his back against the wall rubbing at his neck saying crazy you crazy boy you crazy. There were hands on my shoulders.
hands someone was saying my name. When I looked up it was al standing over me holding me back. Someone put a needle in my arm I got tired dog tired real quick.

But the barn dougy uncle they were gone like they’d never been there but I member I member I member this before I fell asleep in the showerroon I member it now as I write it I member waking up in the barn. The police were there uncle was gone like he’d never been there and dougy and dougy was he was hanging hanging from the roof he was hanging there like a dead animal just hanging all dead.

The police says you killed him but I didn’t do it I didn’t do nothing he attacked me but I couldn’t member then but I member now I member I can’t forget it now.

It wasn’t me that killed dougy that hanged dougy I was knocked out. I didn’t see it it wasn’t me that hung dougy.

It was uncle.

I member it now. I member.
(ORRIN’S FONT)

25/04/85

uncle

uncle

uncle it was you I know it was you it was you uncle why how could you let em take me bring me here you killed dougy you hung him not me you uncle you uncle you I know it was you even if doctor amos don’t want to know hear don’t listen when I say it was you uncle not me you.

No killer not a killer not what they all say I am it was uncle

uncle

uncle

uncle fucking roy
dear orrin

how are you? i am good. the farm is good the sheep are ready for shearing but with you still away tyrone’s going to help out he’s a good mate only costing me a carton. shame you can’t be here for it i know how much you like shearing.

the neighbours went quiet after the funeral or whatever you call it when they jump round a fire wailing like dogs. bloody animals didn’t even give that boy a decent christian funeral no wonder the country’s going to hell in a handbasket. they took the body and wound it up in stuff and left it up in a tree for a few days i was worried bout the stink but thankfully the wind took it nother way so i didn’t have to smell it. then they built a big fire and sat round it for days and days drinking and singing like the pagans they are. cops couldn’t do nothing bout it when i rang they says it was a tribal custom that would be respected and i’d better stay away since it was my nephew who did the killing. i told the cops they just better stay off my land cause i still had the right to protect my land and the cops told me to calm down but i am i says i am calm calm as a snake.

i was even calm when that boy’s granddaddy came over right after. i saw him coming walking across their land and i just raised my shottie and says you hold it right there you stay off my land. he says he had come to make amends and i says ain’t no amends to make i want nothing to do with you and your bloody family.

he says something in his own tongue sounded like yabbering you know and i waved the shottie at him and he walked away like a coward.

you did a good thing boy killing that one was bout time someone did somethin to prove whose country this is what with the govement doing nothin bout it you did the right
thing you did your best. that stinking boy had it coming been coming for a long time. a
hundred years ago you’d have been given a medal for taking care of that scumbag not put in
some prison like you are.

how is it inside? you have to watch your back in places like that orrin you never
know who wants a piece of you and you’re just as likely to get it in the back as you are to
get it in the front. i know i’ve been there myself once or twice. you stay safe so you can
come back to me you hear? the farm ain’t the same without you.

I am coming to visit you on Saturday they says that was the day to come I can’t wait
to see you my boy no matter what they say about you I’m proud of you like you were my
own son.

uncle roy
Constant constance says I must be excited about seeing my uncle tomorrow.

I say yeah I really miss him which is true I’m not lying.

constance says that’s good I should hold onto my memory of him it’s the one thing they can’t take away from me in here which was a bit weird but constance has been weird lately we all are all of us who have the lectricity put in our heads.

I say yeah.

Yeah. I’ll hold onto the memory of uncle yeah. I’ll hold onto it so tight that he won’t be able to see the red in me no one will see the red that needs wants so much to get out now. uncle won’t no no know it now my red my power it’s not like it used to be it’s more now that I’ve been in here now I’ve membered so much. Yeah I member.

I’m writing this waiting for derek. He still owes me for what I did so he’s bringing me some rope nice strong rope. He wasn’t gonna give it to me until I told him it wasn’t for me. No the rope’s for someone else.

I can’t wait to see uncle tomorrow. I don’t know how I’m going to sleep tonight.

See I member more now member all of it. I member uncle coming into the barn member he says what the fuck’s going on and dougy drops the shottie he’s so scared. uncle he walks right past me and dougy’s saying he’s sorry over and over but uncle still picks up the shottie hits him with it hard so hard I hear the smack.

Get the rope uncle says to me and the red’s all around me inside me apart part of me and I get the rope. Uncle says bout time we had us a lynching he says and wraps the rope round dougy’s neck and loops it over the rafters of the barn.
Watch this orrin uncle says as he grabs the rope and jumps back and dougy’s neck breaks like a chicken’s and the sound the sound is too much too much and the blood coming from dougy’s mouth gauging gushing like water too much too much and the laughter uncle’s ha has are all too much for me and I tried to stop him uncle roy tried to grab for gougy to save dougy but uncle stopped me held my shoulders hard strong. A rifle butt to the face and goodbye front teeth and good night orrin go to sleep.

And uncle blamed me for all of it. I’m the one they send away call a killer.

I can’t wait to see uncle tomorrow no I can’t wait at all.

when my uncle baby’s walking down the street I see red I see red I see red red red
Constance
Dear Diary,

Well, here I am tucked away in ANOTHER room, only this one’s different to my room at home. It’s smaller for one thing, and there’s less THINGS on nightstands and sidetables; in fact, there’s no tables at all, only a desk, and a chair. The walls are bricks in my new room and they don’t have any paint, which is a shame because a bit of colour can do WONDERS for a place. And there’s no windows, either, but that’s fine, I don’t really mind that.

When I first came here, so long ago now, I thought this place was a PRISON. The police car that bought me here had to stop at this gate house and the car was checked by these big men in white clothes, and I thought they looked REAL nice in their white clothes though I thought it must be hard to get the STAINS out. One of the whitemen shone a light into the backseat that hurt my eyes, which I DIDN’T like, but it wasn’t long before he waved us in. The gate screeched like a crow and went slowly, slowly.

It was night, so it was kind of hard to see, but to me the building looked HUGE. It towered over the car like a castle, and as the policemen let me out of the car, for a moment it looked a lot like my old home, back home. It was bigger, of course, but it had the same shape, and it looked like it had as many rooms too. It was IMPOSING, as father would say.

It even had a gate at the front door and I thought that was so BIZARRE until they opened it and brought me in and I realized there’s nothing strange about that at all. There are LOTS of gates here and you have to have permission before they open, and it takes SO
long to get anywhere. There are gates to the wings, gates to the showers, gates to the
grounds where they let us out for a couple of hours a day, gates to outside, which we aren’t
allowed to use. I guess it’s for safety, to keep us where we’re supposed to be, but it makes
the place look like a prison even more than the gate out the front does. That and ALL the
whitemen who watch you like hawks, no matter where you are.

The whitemen are the ones who make you strip when you get here, and make you
stand on cold, cold tiles while they douse you in powder as thick as flour, and then they
hose you, hose you so hard that your SKIN aches like a ready-to-be-pulled tooth. Then
they take your clothes away and you never see them again, which was a shame since I’d
come here wearing my best Sunday dress, and it made my heart shake to see them carrying
my dress away; but then they give you new clothes, ONE colour clothes that tell who you
are to the whitemen, and where you belong. Then the whitemen push you, or drag you, or
carry you sometimes, through gates and gates, and rooms and rooms, and it doesn’t matter
what YOU say they just stare back at you, their eyes clouded, their ears deaf.

Not everyone in here is like that, though. A lot of the patients STARE at me and
call me names that I’ve heard before, and all the doctors want to see me and ask me all sorts
of different questions because of my WHITE skin and my pink eyes. That’s okay, I’m used
to that. I was born an albino and I know what my skin does to people’s eyes. It makes
them LOOK, over and over, and they don’t mean anything by it. They just want to SEE the
albino freak.

But the people who work in the kitchen don’t do that. I think they really like me,
probably because I’m like them, I like the CHORES. They let me scrub the pots and pans
and sweep the floors, which I like because it means I’m needed and a clean floor is a
PRETTY thing. I don’t know if the ladies in the kitchen understand EXACTLY what is
wrong with me, but they don’t seem to mind. They give me chores to do, and I do them because that’s what you do for your family, what I did for my old family.

But now I’ve been moved here to the Blue Wing and I’ve got a NEW family and you can tell we’re a family by the colour they make us wear. When I was in the other wing, all the girls wore these PINK hospital clothes, only they weren’t REALLY hospital clothes because they had backs to them. They’re more like UNIFORMS. But now that I’m here, I have to wear white, all six of us do, the ones Doctor Amos is treating. I don’t mind it, really. All my clothes at my old home were black so a bit of white is nice for a change. I do worry about the stains, though, so I’ll have to be careful.

They moved us in here today. When I say us, I mean me and the others, the six of us taking part in a new therapy that’s going to help us REMEMBER. I talked to Doctor Amos about it on the way down to my new room and he said it’s something new, something he hopes will improve my memory. I told him that I’d like to remember, because sometimes it feels like there’s a GAP in my head that frightens me when I think about it, it’s so dark.

Then Doctor Amos patted me on the shoulder, just like a FATHER would to a DAUGHTER who needed the comfort. Then he told me that we should never forget our memories, that they make up who we are.

Then we were shown the new wing, and it wasn’t much but I liked it, at least it would be easy to keep clean. The new wing has eight rooms for the family, as well as a sitting room with a television and lounges, where Doctor Amos said we’d be doing the interviews. Then I was taken to my new room, and Doctor Amos gave me my diary, which was NICE because no one had really given me anything since I’d gotten here, not unless you count the things they give everyone like the one colour clothes, and the little tube of toothpaste, and the toilet roll once a week, regular as clockwork.
Doctor Amos said to write down everything and anything I want to in my diary, anything I remember, and he sort of LOOKED at me in a certain way that doctors do and I guess he must know what’s wrong with me. Most of the doctors here know ALL about you, even the ones you’ve never met, and in all the years I’ve been here I’ve learnt to trust in the doctor. A doctor is always right.

Doctor Amos is such a NICE man. He came and got me last night, when all the lights were out, and he took me to another room in the home, one I hadn’t been in before in all my time here. I didn’t know WHAT he was going to do but he told me it would be fine.

Doctor Amos said I was a perfect candidate for electro-convulsive therapy and when I asked him what that was, I’d NEVER heard of it before, he said it’s designed to stimulate parts of the brain that other therapies can’t. Doctor Amos said he’s trying to unlock parts of our subconscious, and he frowned when he said it’s a bad metaphor but it’s like jumpstarting a car. Apparently my memory is like a stalled engine and the ECT is the battery.

It sounded PAINFUL, but Doctor Amos smiled and assured me it wouldn’t hurt at all, that I’d be asleep through the whole thing. Then he asked me if I really wanted to REMEMBER or if I was just SAYING I did. Of course, I told him I did – I do, and it doesn’t pay to tell the doctors here anything but the truth, I’ve learnt that over time – and Doctor Amos said that at least, out of all the other patients, I wanted to know what had happened to me, so that would make the procedure easier.

We were at the room by now, and Doctor Amos led me inside and asked me to lie back on a hospital bed. The sheets were PURE and CLEAN and I liked the smell, the feel of them. I thought it was going to be fun, whatever this therapy was.

Then he pulled out a needle. I must have paled – though I don’t know how! – because Doctor Amos said it was just an intravenous barbiturate (I asked him how to spell
it this morning), something he said would help me to sleep. I told him that was fine, but it still hurt when he jabbed me with it.

Then he gave me another needle, something he called succinycholine (another word I asked him to spell this morning) which he said would paralyze my muscles so I didn’t HURT myself. I didn’t really FEEL that needle, though, so that must have meant the other one was working.

Then it got really DARK, dark around the edges, and Doctor Amos was flicking a little torch in my eyes, and saying things, telling me not to worry, that I would be asleep soon. I didn’t feel a thing, either, just like Doctor Amos had said. It WAS just like going to sleep. Until I started DREAMING that is but Doctor Amos said that was to be expected and I should write my dreams in my diary.

I never had a diary at my old home but it wasn’t as if I had a lot to write about then anyway. Only my family, really, and what I did for them everyday, which isn’t that exciting because it was always the same, day in, day out, nothing ever changed. But I suppose it must have changed, some time. I wouldn’t be in HERE if it didn’t change. This ISN’T the same.

So I’ve decided to write about my family here, my new family. They’re not the SAME as my old family, no sir.

One is a young woman named Lulu. She is SO lovely, divine, like an angel. She has long blonde hair and glowing skin, and her teeth are so white they blind me, and she’s ALWAYS smiling, the whole way through our first lunch, the first for our new group. Lulu is so perfect that I hope she becomes like a sister to me. She looks a little like the twins. It would be good to have such a pretty sister like her.

One of the young men in my new family is so big that I’d call him WIDE. His name is Orrin and he has no hair, which could mean he has cancer like those poor people on
the television, but he doesn’t look sick like them. He looks angry, instead. He has a cross on his neck that’s black, and heavy. When he talks his voice is gruff, harsh from the cigarettes he smokes so much, whenever he can.

Derek’s a good boy, although he’s not that young, you can tell from his face. It’s just that he’s SMALL of body, which is why I think of him as a boy. He doesn’t say much, but when he does talk all he says is how he can get us whatever we want, we just have to be his friend. He asked me what I wanted and I don’t need much, I never have, but he looked so desperate to please, like a little lost puppy, that I asked him for some of those EXTRA THICK kitchen gloves, because my hands get so RAW from scrubbing the pots sometimes and it would be good to give my skin a rest. He said he would get them. He’s such a nice boy. At lunch today, though, Derek didn’t eat any of his food and I’m worried about him. Maybe I should cook him something, to fatten him up. I’m a pretty good cook. I used to cook for my family all the time.

Jack, the red haired young man, is a bit strange. He talks like he’s telling stories about some OTHER person named Jack, and not himself. It makes it hard to understand what he’s talking about, but there’s lots of people like that here, who talk strange, so I’m used to it. I heard that Jack likes to BURN things, which is DANGEROUS, so I must keep an eye on him because families look out for each other.

The last young man is Will and I heard they have no IDEA who he is, and that he doesn’t either, that’s he forgotten. THEY say he’s dangerous too, a different type of dangerous to Jack, but he doesn’t look it. At lunch today, he just sat there writing in his diary, not looking at any of us, or talking, or even eating. That didn’t look very dangerous to me. I still better keep an eye on him, him and the others too. That’s what family’s are for.
So that’s my new family. People here say I hurt my OLD family, and that’s the reason I’m in here. I don’t believe them. I’d never hurt the twins, or father, not in a hundred years. It must be a lie, but I don’t know WHY they’d say things like that. People lie just to HURT other people, and people lie a lot, especially if they’re hiding something. If there’s one thing I’ve learnt it’s that everybody has something to hide, even something they may not know themselves. But I don’t lie and I didn’t hurt my family. I’m sure I would remember THAT.

Yours,

Constance
Dear Diary,

This place reminds me more and more of my home as the days go by. It is so clean that it has the same SMELL as my home, as if you’re walking through a pine forest. Father always said that CLEANLINESS is next to GODLINESS, so it’s probably just as well my new home is so clean.

I can remember days at OUR home when my hands were RAW from scrubbing, washing, dusting, cleaning. Days when soap was all I could smell and all that I would; days when I would go room by room, making everything shiny and beautiful. I liked THOSE days. It was my responsibility, as father would say, and I liked that he trusted me with it, that he needed me to do THAT for him, the one thing I COULD do for him and the twins. And I like to clean.

See, there’s something about cleaning that makes my heart go WARM, that’s the only way I can describe it. I like the feel of suds on my fingers, dipping my hands into scalding water, feeling the soap bubbles tickle my nose, watch the water turn my fingers a lovely RED glow. It’s so good to see colours when you’re like me. It makes you realize the world isn’t black and white, like you think it is. Or like other people TELL you.

That reminds me of my little sisters, the twins, Beth and Eliza. When our mother was birthing the twins, something went wrong and she wouldn’t stop bleeding. The doctor called it a complication. Mother died giving life to the twins, and to father’s question of what to name the babies, she said, with her last breath, “Elizabeth”, which was her name.
Father was very sad when mother died, and he named both the twins after her, Eliza and Beth, in her honour.

I don’t know who they named me after. Father never told me. I’ll have to ask him, though I guess it might make him sad given that mother was killed by two babies, and disappointed by another.

We had a BIG home, with almost as many rooms as this new home does. Father would only ever go into his rooms, his bedroom, his den, and his office. The twins had a big bedroom on the second floor all to themselves, and even when they got old enough that father thought they might need a room each, they stayed TOGETHER. They had the same room the whole time, and when they weren’t there they were out, at school, with friends, at parties. So some days, when it was just me and my footsteps would echo off the walls, it felt as if I owned the whole house. Like the home was all MINE.

But all that was mine, really, was the attic. That was MY room. It was so much cheerier than this new room, too. It had a large window that faced south, which meant I had light all day round, and even though I had to put a heavy curtain over it to block it out, it still felt good knowing it was there. The floors were wooden, too, which I liked because in summer they’d be cool and in winter they’d be warm from the fires downstairs. And I liked my attic because father and the twins would never come up there. NEVER.

Probably my least favourite room was the den. When father would have friends over for drinks, I would SCRUB the den until it was spotless, because father always had his friends in the den for drinks and father didn’t like it if his friends saw one speck of dust or one fingerprint on the mantelpiece. It would take me HOURS to get it right, and if I didn’t get it right father would make me go back and do it again. So I always HAD to get it right.

And sometimes, when I was supposed to be up in the attic, I’d SNEAK down to the top of the stairs and listen to father and his friends, and I’d hear the champagne glasses
tinkling and the twins laughing at something one of the young men would say to them, because young men are always trying to make pretty girls laugh, and the cigar smoke would mix in the air and tickle my nose, and I’d want to sneeze but I knew that if I did, then father would know I was there and he would make me go back to my attic, and I’d sit there, on the stairs, and just listen to the people down below enjoying the clean room I had provided for them. That always made my heart go WARM, too.

Afterwards, when everyone was gone, I’d go down to clean up and I was always amazed by how dirty the rooms could get in such a short time. I’d walk into a room that, just that day, had taken me two hours to straighten up, and it would take me TWICE that to get right again. Sometimes it would even take me until the sun came up to get everything back the way it was supposed to be, and on those days I was always worried that the twins would come down and catch me still working and say things that they thought were funny, or WORSE that father would wake and be angry that I wasn’t finished, and he’d make me take something down I didn’t want to take down at all, which would make me clean harder and faster, just the thought of it. I knew, you see, that father wouldn’t like it if it wasn’t done RIGHT.

Cleanliness is next to godliness. And father was the only GOD I knew.

Constance
8th April, 1977

Dear Diary,

Doctor Amos is a NICE man but I don’t think he believes what I tell him, about me, about my family. I can see that he is listening, LISTENING HARD as father would call it. But there is something in his eyes that tells me doesn’t TRUST the things I say. His eyes have a glint of suspicion, a tell-tale narrowing to them, like what he is hearing is nothing more than a bedtime story, something to pass the time with, some fiction. But I am telling the truth, I am not lying. I’m not a LIAR.

I wonder why he looks at ME like that? Like today. Doctor Amos wanted to talk about the twins today.

I’m remembering them clearer nowadays. For a while there, their faces had started to FADE. Of course, they’d always been beautiful – in MY memories – but never as beautiful as they’d been in reality. Beautiful hair, beautiful SKIN. Father said they would very likely marry rich and successful men, they were so pretty.

But I didn’t want to talk about the twins today, not today, no thank you. So I didn’t say anything, and after a while Doctor Amos shrugged and asked me about ME, what it was like for me growing up.

I said my life was pretty normal, and that aside from the fact I couldn’t go out in the sun for too long, I had a good childhood. What with our home being so big and all, I almost didn’t need to go outside anyway. Father had bought the home from an Englishman, whose ancestor was one of the first FREE Englishmen to come to Australia.
They built HOMES big back then, which is why Father wanted to live there. In fact, it had so many rooms that there was always something for me to do, especially when the twins were at school.

Doctor Amos asked what school was like for me, but I couldn’t tell him. Father schooled me at home, for you see it was agreed that I would cause a fuss, for both the students and ANY school that would have me. Father said it was best I take my lessons from HIM.

I told Doctor Amos I missed my father. I told him I couldn’t wait to go back home, as I’m sure there would be plenty to do by now. I told him the twins would have so much washing and dusting and sewing to do, and that Father would be needing his LUNCH, his dinner, his breakfast, and who would be doing all that cooking? NOT Father. NOT the twins, no sir.

Doctor Amos had that look again, when I said that.

Then Doctor Amos said I was going to have more MEDICINE tonight, which is his nice way of telling me I’m due for more of his special treatment. It doesn’t feel very special, though. Sometimes it makes me WISH I was back in my real home, with my real family, and I’m cooking them Sunday lunch, yes I am, Sunday lunch for my BEAUTIFUL twins and my LOVING Father.

It’s a nice wish, that.

Constance
Dear Diary,

I stay awake sometimes just listening to the sounds of my NEW HOME. It gets SO quiet at night. So quiet you can hear things you know you’re not meant to, things that are happening far away and yet sound so close they could ALMOST be in the room YOU’RE in. The walls whisper secrets in this home.

I sit on my bed and I can feel the vibrations from someone snoring in the next room. I KNOW those snores must be loud in the other room, like a buzzsaw, I just know they must be, and I guess that they’re Orrin’s, they sound like a large young man’s. But here, where I am, they’re like pond ripples breaking against my back, and I sway with the motion, like I’m on that water, drifting.

I put my ear against the door, feel the wood scratch my skin, and I can hear another noise. It’s low, so low I can’t tell what it REALLY is, but I can still hear it. It’s like a whine, a buzz, and tonight it sounds like people talking, talking in another room. What are THEY talking about? Probably ME.

That’s the thing about homes this big. When there’s so many rooms, so MUCH room really, you think the things you say are just for you. You think the space in between stops what you say from seeking out other ears. But with a home this big, there’s lots of WALLS too. And the walls are the ones with the EARS.

I think my new family is turning AGAINST me. I walk around my home, making sure everything’s right, picking things up, putting things away, doing good for the family,
all that. But still they LOOK at me. Still they STARE. Lulu stares at me and her pretty face is cold. Orrin stares at me and grins his sour grins. Jack stares at me and his eyes blaze. Derek stares at me and licks his lips. Will stares at me and his pen flies across his page, writing things about me, things of HATE and DISGUST and VENOM. All of them. They can’t help but stare at me.

Every place I go, I feel eyes on me, watching me, judging me. These are the ones who TALK about me, late at night. These are the ones I can HEAR now. I don’t know what they want from me. Father always said you had to do right by your family AND I am doing right. I’m not doing anything wrong. I don’t need to be punished.

Some days I imagine what it would be like if there was no one else in the home. If the only person here was ME. I’d leave all the gates open, for a start, and all the rooms would be mine. I could wake up in a different bed every morning, have the showers all to myself, and sit out under the moon EVERY night if I wanted to. There’d be no one around to sneer at me, to stare at me, to say things about me behind their hands. There’d be no one to clean for, cook for, care for. There’d only be me. I would be the family then.

I think I’d like that. To be the ONLY one.

Constance
Dear Diary,

Someone painted my clothes BLACK. My beautiful, white uniforms. All of them, every set they gave me.

Black.

Why would somebody do THAT?

Constance
Dear Diary

FAMILY is the most important thing, that’s what Father ALWAYS said. But I don’t know about my family in HERE. Father always said if you can’t something nice about someone, then don’t say anything at all. But I suppose I’m not REALLY saying it, if I’m writing it in my diary, am I? I can write WHATEVER I LIKE, and no one has to know about it, or read it, or be hurt by it.

They scare me, my new family. I work in the kitchen most days, just sweeping the floor, making it clean because a clean floor is a pretty thing, and I hear what the ladies say about the other patients, about US in the Blue Wing. I hear the RUMOURS, you see, and I don’t know what to believe. The things people say cannot be TRUE.

They say that Derek, my sweet little Derek who wouldn’t hurt a fly, they say he does things for people here, THINGS FOR THINGS is how they say it. They say that the angel Lulu, she took a knife and she cut someone, many times. The ladies in the kitchen say Orrin hurt a boy, and that Jack burns things. They say all these things, things about my new family, about us in here. And they say things about me, too. They call me a MURDERER.

I had a DREAM today. Only it wasn’t so much a dream, as it was a NIGHTMARE, but you couldn’t even call it that because it wasn’t night and I wasn’t asleep. I think what Doctor Amos does to us makes you see things that look so real, only they AREN’T real at all. Like that fire that Jack set in the hallway of the home yesterday. I had to ASK Al this morning if it really happened or not. It’s like my mind is playing tricks on me, showing me
things that aren’t real and I can’t tell the difference between them any more, if even I EVER could.

But Al told me there was a fire, that it wasn’t a big one, and that we have to keep it a SECRET otherwise Doctor Amos will do something worse to Jack then what he’s doing to all of us right now. So I won’t tell. It would HURT the family otherwise.

But my dream, that’s what I wanted to write about. I was in the kitchen, doing the pots and pans, and I was whistling, there was a song on the radio, don’t know which one, but I was whistling along with it anyway because it sounded SWEET and far away.

I remember looking down at the suds on my hands, and I moved my fingers through the water, and the water became like the magic mirror in Snow White that I remember Father reading to the twins once. It was like the water WAS a mirror. I could see me, my pale face, only it wasn’t me at all, it was me when I was younger. But I saw the skin, and the eyes, and I knew it was me.

Something was happening in the water then, so I leant over to see. I could see the kitchen of my home, my old home, in the water behind the young me. I was standing at the kitchen sink peeling potatoes, and every time a potato skin fell in the mirror sink, it sort of fell UP towards me, the real ME, and it would splash against the water in the sink and just stay there, like it was floating on top of it, or underneath it depending on how you looked at it.

The other me was peeling potatoes so FAST, or at least it looked like it was fast, because the sink was filling up quickly with peels. My fingers, the fingers of the OTHER me, moved like lightning.

I looked at my face, my young face, the FACE I wore years ago. My eyes were bloodshot, like I’d been crying, and the skin was taut across my cheekbones. My teeth
were clicking, like I was really nervous, and my tongue kept darting on my lips, even though my lips looked dry, so dry, like a desert. I thought I even looked PALER.

I got a little nervous. The reflected me was peeling faster and faster, the peels flying into the sink, filling the sink, and I could see TEARS glistening on her smooth cheeks. Her hands flew across the potatoes and the tears splashed into the sink along with the peels, making ripples that spread out in little circles.

Then I heard, I know I heard, but it can’t be right, I shouldn’t have been able to hear it, but I heard, I heard two voices, two voices speaking as one voice, two voices asking the same thing.

WHERE’S OUR LUNCH? is what I heard, and when I heard that I SHRIEKED and closed my eyes and hit the water with my hand, splashing it all over myself.

When I opened my eyes, the potato peels were gone, it was just my face looking back at me, crying, crying, crying so much and I hadn’t even known I’d been crying at all.

I looked around. The radio was playing the same song, nobody was looking at me, nothing had happened, nobody had seen it. Just me.

And that was my DREAM.

Constance
Dear Diary,

Doctor Amos wanted to hear about my MOTHER today. She had a complication, my mother, as you know. Doctor Amos said that must have been hard on me, without a mother, and that Father must have looked to me for certain things after that.

I didn’t know what he meant, not at the time. Father didn’t LOOK to me for certain things. Father TOLD ME what had to be done, and if I didn’t do it, then I would have to TAKE DOWN the STRAP, and that he would have to use it. This happened enough that I knew my PLACE, yes sir.

But Doctor Amos didn’t like that I didn’t answer, I could tell by his look, and he told me the kitchen staff say I’m very helpful, that I’m the only patient they know who actually enjoys cleaning.

I told him I liked things to be right, that Father always said cleanliness was next to…but when I got to that part of Father’s saying, I couldn’t remember what came after. It was like I could picture Father telling me this, sometimes over my shoulder, sometimes HISSING it between straps, sometimes just off hand, thrown at me over the top of his newspaper. But I couldn’t finish it, no matter how hard I THOUGHT about Father.

Doctor Amos said godliness, that the end of the saying was GODLINESS, and I told him how strange it was that I couldn’t remember that, since it had been one of Father’s favored sayings.
He told me my mind was under some STRESS due to the therapy, that it was an INVASIVE technique designed to produce results in a short amount of time. Doctor Amos said it’s natural for other, less important memories to be suppressed in the process. Then he said that was why he had SOMETHING to tell me, something he wasn’t sure I would want to hear but which he was going to tell me ANYWAY.

I asked him if it was BAD NEWS, and he said it was. Father always said bad news was like pulling off a bandaid, the quicker you do it the less the pain, so I told Doctor Amos to tell me.

He had that look AGAIN. Then he said my family was dead.

DEAD.

I didn’t believe him, how could I?

He said they’d been poisoned, seven years ago

It was ridiculous! Who could do such a thing?

Doctor Amos asked me why I thought I was at Hobbs Home.

I told him I didn’t know, that I THOUGHT this was a place where people who cause a fuss like me go, to be locked away from everyone.

That look again.

Doctor Amos said that’s not the reason I was here.

I HATE that look.

Doctor Amos said I killed my family.

Me.

Doctor Amos said I poisoned their lunch, put rat poison in the Sunday cottage pie.

Doctor Amos said he was telling me this to help me, not to HURT me.

That look.

Doctor Amos said the only way I would get BETTER is if I talked about it.
But I didn’t want to talk to him, not anymore.

I hate talking to LIARS.

Constance
Constance

I love your colours.

Drew
Dear Diary,

Sometimes it’s hard to know when people are playing GAMES with you. Like that note that was on my pillow when I came back from lunch. I don’t know who Drew is. He could really MEAN what he says, but he probably doesn’t. He doesn’t like my black clothes or my white skin. People don’t like my colours. They LAUGH at my colours, stare at my colours, make jokes about me.

Someone playing another joke on me. The notewriter’s probably even the same one who painted my clothes. The same hand. If only you could read paint like handwriting, then I’d be able to tell who it was. But even if there is a Drew, a REAL Drew, he’s probably just FOOLING with me, PRANKING me. They do that in here. I know. Like Doctor Amos, with his machines and his needles, messing around inside my head. Last night Doctor Amos told me that it’s natural for less important memories to get LOST in the process. It’s NATURAL, is it? And who decides that, Doctor Amos, sir? Not me.

Just like EVERYTHING. I never get to decide for myself. It’s all just TAKEN from me no matter what I say, taken and thrown away or used to get back at me. Like the twins.

They used my skin all the time. They used my FEAR. They would steal my brushes, taunt me from the front steps knowing I couldn’t go outside, that I couldn’t go in the sun. They stole all my clothes one day and threw them away, leaving me BLACK ones. Black goes with anything, Eliza would say. And Beth would say, Even white freaks.
They’d tell me about the parties they went to, about the pretty people they met, about the boys they kissed, and they knew, as they told me, that they were things I COULDN’T do, a person I COULDN’T be. They knew that I was an embarrassment to the family, a joke. They knew that father kept me locked away in the attic so he could hide his shame at such a daughter, a daughter who would NEVER marry well, would NEVER bring wealth to the family, would only bring SHAME and PITY if she was ever seen, if she was every ALLOWED to be seen. So I never was. I became a part of the furniture. I was BORN a part of the furniture.

I guess I knew it TOO, all along. Like part of me knew what I was, what THEY made me. Or at least I do NOW.

Now that I remember all of it.

Constance
Diary,

Doctor Amos said we were going to do something different today, play a sort of game. I told him people were ALWAYS playing games with me, making fun of me, and that I always LOSE at games.

He said it would be a memory game, and that there would be no winner or loser. I said that sounded NICE, because it did at the time.

Doctor Amos said to close my eyes. I did. Then Doctor Amos told me to picture my home. Then he asked me to tell him where I was.

I was at my front door. There was sunlight behind me, on MY back, on MY neck, but it wasn’t hurting me this time, my skin didn’t prickle. It felt good, and Doctor Amos said that was because nothing could hurt me here, and that I needed to hold onto that thought, that NOTHING CAN HURT ME, because he wanted me to remember the last time I cooked for my family.

I told him I cooked all the time, every meal, but he only wanted to know about the last time, the LAST MEAL.

It was lunch. A cottage pie, Father’s favourite, and I wanted Father to have a good lunch after I had made him so ANGRY that morning. Because of what I told him the twins had done.

I had woken up that morning to find a pair of scissors in my left hand. And one of my PONYTAILS lying next to my cheek. I had still been asleep, hadn’t known what I’d
been doing, and I’d raised my hand to touch the spot where my ponytail should have been.  
Only now there was NOTHING there.

I heard laughing, but it sounded like it was echoing, the way my voice used to echo  
when the home was empty.  It was like there was TWO voices laughing, two voices that  
sounded the same, laughing at me.  When I looked up, there were the twins, standing at the  
foot of MY bed.  Their pretty faces were all BUNCHEMed up and they were pointing at the  
bald spot on my head and at the ponytail lying like a DEAD animal on my pillow.

I screamed for FATHER and the twins laughed even harder, and I grabbed the  
ponytail and pushed past their sneering, spitting faces, and I climbed down and ALL the  
hallways and ALL the rooms were blurry because I must have been crying, only I didn’t  
know I was crying, not at all, and I called out for Father and I RAN to him.

He was in the den, on the phone, and when I burst through the door he gave me one  
of his angry looks and I KNEW I had to be real quiet, but I was SO angry that I couldn’t  
and I cried that the twins had CUT my hair and I showed him the ponytail and I cried and  
cried and CRIED.

I thought Father would HELP me, this time out of all times.

Father said SOMETHING into the phone, slammed it down, stepped around his  
desk and then he SLAPPED me.  Father said he was very angry with me for disturbing his  
IMPORTANT phone call, and he asked me what had happened to my hair.

But before I could say ANYTHING, the twins were at the doorway and they said  
I’d cut it off myself, they’d seen me wake up with the scissors in my hand, and one of the  
twins said it’s no wonder SHE cut off her hair, that she would do it too if her hair was such  
a disgusting colour, and the OTHER twin said she’d do the same.
Father looked at me and his eyes were real angry and he asked me if I’d been playing games again, and LYING, and I told him I wasn’t but I knew he didn’t believe me, he never believed me over the twins, the twins were ALWAYS right.

Then Father made me take down the strap he kept in the wardrobe in his den, the one he always made me get for him, take DOWN for him. The twins never had to take the strap down. Only me.

Then he hit me. He hit me, and hit me, and hit me, and the strap would bite me, my skin, BITE me like an animal. He hit me, just like he always did when I didn’t do RIGHT. I never did anything right. That’s what Father used to say.

That was why I was making them lunch. A SPECIAL lunch for all three of them. Because Father was angry with me and so were the twins for lying about them, and I wanted to make them a special lunch so we could be a family AGAIN.

Family is the most IMPORTANT thing, that’s what I always say.

But Doctor Amos wanted to know about rat poison then.

I said rats are a sure sign a home isn’t clean

Doctor Amos said yes, but he wanted to know about rat poison.

I said we always kept rat poison under the sink.

And he gave me that FUCKING LOOK AGAIN.

I’ve just about had enough of THAT.

Constance
Dear Diary,

I can HEAR the twins calling for lunch. Their voices get so LOUD sometimes that they sound like one person, like there’s not two of them but one, one pretty twin that calls for me. They always call me like I’m a DOG, like I’m nothing. Like I’m just something to come to their beck and call.

An animal.

I’ve never been good enough. Not for them. Not good enough to be a part of THEIR world. Not good enough for FATHER.

He HITS and HITS and HITS but he can’t change my skin, can’t make me something he can be proud of, someone he can call a daughter, HIS daughter.

All I am to him is a SLAVE.

All I am to them is a JOKE.

A COOK.

I’ve got something cooking for them right now.

It’s cottage pie. Father’s FAVOURITE.

I’d better give it to them. They’re calling ME.

AGAIN.
This is not MY home, these people are NOT my family. I know that now.

My family, my real family, is dead. The people here tell me that I was the one who did it, who POISONED them until they died. To be honest, I don’t know if that is true or not, or even what’s REAL any more. They put SOMETHING in my head at night here and I know it’s all part of their GAME, but I don’t feel like playing any more.

What should I tell Doctor Amos? He’s coming to get me soon, to talk, I know he is, the time’s near. Should I tell him about the times Father would HIT me with the strap, times when I was punished for the label of a can in the pantry NOT facing the right way? Or when I’d miss sweeping under the rugs, and Father would find DUST on the toe of his good shoes? Or the days I didn’t change the sheets, when Father said they NEEDED to be changed?

Maybe I should tell the doctor about the twins, my pretty, little twins. I was like a mother to them, and they needed me so much that they didn’t do anything for themselves. They needed me to clean for them, cook for them, mend for them, wash for them, do everything for them. But should I tell the doctor that they only REALLY needed me for their jokes, for the mean little games they’d PLAY? Do you think he would CARE about that?

I think that’s what he wants to hear. I think Doctor Amos wants to hear me say things like that about my family, so he can use them AGAINST me, so he can find a
reason, a name he can label me with and put me somewhere else, away from him. I think I know what sort of answers his questions want, what HIS therapy is really about.

I wonder if I should tell him what I remember. Tell him about the lunch I made Father and the twins, on that last day. Tell him how it felt to sit there moving the food around my plate, not touching it, not EATING it, while father, and Eliza, and Beth, my family, talked like I wasn’t there, like I was a chair or a table, talked about their futures, their lives, the beautiful and pretty WORLD they were a part of; and as they talked, and laughed, and sneered at me in my corner, they spooned the cottage pie into their mouths, the pie I had made, the pie with the poison.

Or maybe I should tell him how it felt to watch their faces TWIST, their hands CLENCH the tablecloth, their eyes ROLL in their heads and their tongues turn GREY before they fell face first onto their plates, and lay still.

I wonder how Doctor Amos would look at me if I told him that.

I don’t think the doctor wants to HELP me, oh no. I think he wants to help HIMSELF. All his questions, his machines, his games. He already thinks he knows me, thinks he knows RIGHT from WRONG. I don’t even know that any more. I can’t tell the difference in my head. It’s ALL messed up now, thanks to him.

Tomorrow, I’m going to COOK something. The kitchen ladies watch me, but they don’t watch me as much as the whitemen do, and the whitemen don’t go into the kitchen. The kitchen ladies think I’m a good worker, who does the RIGHT THING all the time. They watch me less and less the more they see me.

So tomorrow I’m going to cook something for the whole family, for my NEW family, here in my NEW home. Something for Orrin, and Lulu, and Derek, and Jack, and Will, especially him. After what he said to all of us the other day, what he told us to do, I
know now that he can’t be trusted, can’t be BELIEVED out of all of the boys. Father always said you can’t trust boys.

I know now, too, that WILL IS THE ONE who painted my clothes, who faked that note about my colours. It has to be him. He’s the only who I ever see writing. Yes, he is the one I’ll serve it to first. He’ll be the FIRST to taste my cooking.

It’ll be easy to cook, a SPECIAL LUNCH JUST FOR THEM. I know where the ingredients are, too. In every home, the rat poison is always kept under the sink.

You Know Who
Lulu
Night

I wish this room had a window. I used to like looking out my window. Would just sit and watch. Gotta keep watch. Don’t know who’s out there. Lots of crazies. What my girl used to say. Lots of crazies Lulu. They can get in if you don’t keep an eye out. I know.

But this place doesn’t have a window. Wonder why. Probably so the crazies stay in. Can’t let them out. Can’t let them infect the world.

Hate this place. Hate what they make us wear. White. All white all the time. Clashes with everything. White’s not even a colour. It’s the absence of colour. Hate the clothes. Probably Doctor’s idea. Fucking with us some more.

Doctor’s going to open my head tonight. Nurse told me. Doctor thinks he can fix me. Doctor thinks I have wires in there that he can tinker with. Doctor thinks I need lightning between my ears.

He’s the crazy one. The crazy. The craziest. He doesn’t know what’s in my head. Doctor doesn’t know what my mind’s full of. No sir.

I wish I had a window. But all I see is brick. Brick forever. I wish I had a window.
Then I could see her.

My girl.
Day

The others. What a bunch of fruit loops. Can see why they’re here. No better place for them. Dangerous putting them all together though. Very dangerous. I sit beside them at meals. Like today.

Constance, the albino girl, she talks. That’s all she does. Talk talk squawk talk. She cleans her fork like twenty times before she eats. She folds and folds the napkin. She smiled at me today. Her white pink smile. So I smiled back. Like I should. But it didn’t mean I was unfaithful. It was just a smile.

Her white clothes don’t suit her. Too much white. Have to do something about that.

Derek. He’s small. He’s the smallest kid I’ve ever seen. He slouches to the table and slouches at the table. He doesn’t look at anyone. He doesn’t eat. I heard he killed his big brother. Don’t know how. He doesn’t look like he could hurt a fly. He’s the one who gets things for people in here. Things they need. Have to ask him for something. For what I need.

Big man Orrin. He’s like Goliath to Derek’s David. He sits at the table like a bear. He eats and eats. Eats Derek’s food when his is gone. Derek doesn’t complain. Derek can’t. I heard Orrin tortured a black kid. Heard he’s got it in for one in here. Better him than me.
Orrin’s got a mean tat. Want one but not the same. Too political his. Guess what mine would be. A name in a heart. Classic. Would suit me.

Will’s always writing. Write write trite. He writes at breakfast, lunch, dinner. That book never leaves his hands. Never talks. Never says a word. All he does is write. Write and watch. Watch us. Watch me. Watch everybody. He I trust the least.

Jack. The firestarter. He looks like a match with his red hair. He talks strange. Says Jack this, Jack that. They say he likes to start fires. Better watch him. Keep an eye open. He could burn the whole place down, right around our ears. He could torch us all. Watch him. Watch it. That’s how rumors start.

And me. Lulu. Me.

We sit together. We eat together. Like we’re friends. Like we have something between us. I suppose we do. We’re just rats in Doctor’s experiment. Little white lab rats with nothing to lose. Most of us, anyway. I have things to lose. I could lose her.

I sat there today. I smiled when I should have. I talked when I had to. I told them things about me that weren’t true. I don’t want them to know the truth. They don’t deserve my truth.

Then I saw her.
She was on the other side of the room, leaving. She had her back to me but I knew it was her. I saw her scarf, I knew it was her. She turned at the door and I saw her face. It was her. She’s here.

Drew’s here. My girl is here.
Day

Doctor asked about my girl today. Said I mentioned her last night before the lightning struck. Wants to know all about her. Wants me to tell him we met on the bus. The first day at school. Her name is Drew.

Doctor wants me to tell him the truth. I can’t remember it. It’s all chopped up. I don’t know where it starts. Where it ends. I told Doctor this. He said it’s understandable. When a person goes through a trauma it’s natural for the mind to put defenses. It’s a survival technique Doctor says.

I told him this wasn’t about survival. But love.

Doctor wants to know what love means to me. I don’t want him to know. Love is love is love to me. What else could it be? But I don’t tell him that. I don’t tell him anything.

Doctor makes me promise. Promise I’ll try to remember. Remember her. He makes me promise. He asks me if I know what happens when a promise is broken. He asks me if I know how important promises are.

I do. I know all about them.
Night

I see her when I sleep. Drew. She’s there inside my eyes when I close them. As if she’s always been there.

I remember the first time I saw her. She was standing at the bus stop. Waiting. She had dark dark hair. Like a shadow. She was dressed in black and white. She was all rugged up though it wasn’t cold. She had a scarf. Long and white around her neck. She looked like a domino. Black and white.

She looked different which was bad. Good to me. I liked different people. But bad to others.

I didn’t stand near her. Angela O’Brien was already there. Angela O’Brien hates anyone who doesn’t look like her. That’s why I make myself to look like Angela O’Brien. So she won’t hate me.

Angela O’Brien hated Drew on sight.

The bus pulled up. Angela O’Brien spat something at Drew then got on the bus. Drew got on. I got on.

Angela O’Brien was saying things about Drew. Everyone could. Angela O’Brien was hissing them. Hateful things. But Drew didn’t seem to notice.

Drew was doing something instead. I couldn’t see but I could hear. A clicking or a flicking. The other kids were yelling, running, talking. Someone farted. Others laughed.

I leant back to hear better. I saw something glinting. Like metal. It was making the sound I’d heard. A flick. Then a click.

Flick. Click. Over and over. Flick. Then click.

I leant over the back of the chair. Drew had a knife. She pressed a button and a blade flicked out. Then she’d close it against her thigh with a click. Then she’d do it again. I had never seen anyone do that before. Not on the bus.

She saw me looking at her. She stopped. She seemed angry. We stared at each other. Then she smiled. It was a wicked smile. I smiled back.

At school I’d see Drew outside. She’d always seem far away. Walking the fence like a prisoner. Wearing a path with her black shoes. A path she’d walk every day. I couldn’t blame her. Angela O’Brien liked Drew the best for picking on. Angela O’Brien would always get her somehow. Almost every day. So Drew spent lunchtimes walking a path.
I walked her path once. I saw the prints of her boots and I tried to match my own to hers.
We have the same size shoe so it was easy. I walked where she walked.

Every day we’d be on the same bus. She’d smile at me. I’d smile back.

One day I sat beside her. I sat beside her from then on.

Drew had a way of looking at the world. Just like me. We’d sit together on the bus
Drew and me would talk about real things. Things that mattered. Things we cared about. I
liked our talks.

We’d walk home together. We’d walk through the city. It was long to our street but we
didn’t care. She’d show me her knife. I liked it. We’d walk. Once I even held her hand.
She felt so small warm soft. Like a doll.

We were neighbors. At night I’d sit at my window watching her place. I could see her
room. I’d see her shadow against her white curtains. The black and the white. Just like the
albino in here. Now. I did it for Drew. I painted the albino’s clothes all black for Drew. I
know she’ll like it when she sees it. She always loved black and white.

I miss seeing Drew at night. I miss my window. All I have now is a brick wall. I can’t see
through it no matter how hard I try. But she’s here too. In this place. Hobbs Home.
Drew is here. I don’t know how but she is.

Tomorrow I’m going to find her. Tomorrow I’m going to see her.

Then we’ll be together. Forever.
Night

Doctor talks to me. Talks to all of us. Tells us things we don’t want to hear. Things that make Derek cry at night. Constance tremble. Orrin angry. Jack blaze. Will write. All sorts of things Doctor says.

Doctor says I appear responsive and have recall. Not much but enough for now. Doctor says the lightning must be working by now. I think it must be. He’s given me enough.

Doctor says my psyche is scarred. Like that. A scarred psyche. Scarred with a knife. Makes me smile.

Doctor says I have narcissistic tendencies. Makes me smile too.

Doctor tells me stories. Doctor’s read of crazies who have cheated their way out of jail. Quick wits and deluded doctors is the cause. Doctor told me of a boy in Sweden. The boy had his doctor convinced he was a victim of abuse. His father. A man whose murder the boy was standing trial for. Doctor says the other doctor treated the Swedish boy’s memory repression. Got good results. The boy got released into his mother’s care.

Then the Swedish boy killed his mother.
Seems the boy didn’t get the chance to kill both his parents the first time like he had planned. So he used a story of abuse to get out. To finish the job.

I wonder why Doctor told me that story. I wonder if Doctor’s like the doctor in the story. Or if I’m like the boy.
I saw her today. finally.

They let us out after lunch. There’s a quad with a basketball court. Tables. Chairs. Grass. The sun. Most of the others sit around. Jack’s always in the bush away from the buildings. He’ll start a fire there one day. Constance wears a hat under an umbrella. Derek tries not to be seen. Orrin smokes. Will writes. I walk.

I walk the fenceline like Drew used to. I try to see out but the fence is brick like my room. There’s a gate at the front but there’s guards there. They don’t let you stand there. They move you along. Must be worried about the sane people outside. Don’t want our infection to spread. Can’t blame them.

I walk the fence slowly wearing a path. Time’s all we have here besides each other. When I see the others looking at me I smile. It makes them look away which is what I want. I don’t want them to watch me. I watch them. That’s what I do.

The fence goes all the way around. There’s no way out. I’ve looked. But there’s a spot at the back that’s not brick. It’s only a small space, like the wall was knocked down for some reason. There’s wire there instead. Barbed. I like that spot. I can see out. I can watch the cars and people go by on the streets outside. They seem so far away. I can still see them. I saw Drew there today.
She came up and stood beside me. I hadn’t seen her in so long. She looked the same. She had the same scarf. Wrapped around her throat.

She smiled that wicked smile. I never realized how much I’d missed her.

She showed me her knife. I don’t know how she had it. They search us all the time. Search our rooms. Take things from us. But she had the knife.

She flicked it. Clicked it. Then flicked it. Then clicked it. It was so familiar.

We stood there watching the world outside. I smiled a lot more.

I didn’t want to ask her why she was here. I hope it’s not because of me but it probably is. When the police took me I didn’t tell them about her. But that doesn’t mean they don’t know.

Maybe it’s from what I said to Doctor. Maybe he’s bought her here to help me. Maybe. More likely he’s trapped her here as well. He likes to trap us. With his words. With his power. His lightning. He’s just waiting for us to slip up, fall for it, give it away. Waiting for the truth.

Then Drew looked away from me. I followed her eyes. There was Will. Watching us. Staring at us. Staring at me. Staring at my girl. Then he turned away. Drew glanced back at me. I watched Will walk away.

Will.

When the time is up they ring a bell just like school. Drew and me walked towards the others holding hands. She must have been cold. Her hand was cold. Still small like a doll but cold.

Drew left me as we joined the rest. Her scarf scratched at my arm as she turned. She must have known it wouldn’t be smart to be seen together. But I know I’ll see her again. She’s here now. In here somewhere with me. I can’t not see her.

She’s mine.

Will. Will the nobody.

He’s got the same eyes as Angela O’Brien. Accusing. Hateful. Looking at me as if I’m nothing. Looking at her as if she’s dirt. Hate those eyes.

Will.

She’s my girl Will. I’ll teach you to stare.
Night

Doctor was just in my head again. Lighting me up. Ouch. Makes me sting all over. Don’t like it. Only worth it since I know the others get it just as bad.

Taught Will the nobody his lesson today. He won’t watch her again. Won’t stare at her. He’d better not. She’s mine.

Doctor wants her too. Think they all do. Doctor wants me to talk about her. Doctor wants to hear all about her. Like she’s the most important part. Suppose she is now I think about it. But Doctor doesn’t know I can’t tell him. Can’t tell him about her. I promised her I wouldn’t. I’ll keep my promise.

I remember the things she said now.

They all hate me. They hate us. They want us dead. We don’t fit them. We’re different. You and I. Me and you. See my knife. Easy to use. You flick it. You can touch it. Touch it. Touch me. You and I. Promise me. Don’t tell them about me. We have to do something. You hear them talk. You hear what Angela O’Brien tells them to say. You know what they say about us. About you. Look at them. Look at their eyes. See how they stare. Hold me. Don’t leave me. I need you. I love you. Lulu.
Wonder if Doctor would be interested in that. Wonder what would come into his head then. Wonder what he’d say if he knew it was all there now. Sitting inside my mind. The lightning worked. Doctor would be pleased.

Doubly pleased too. Derek the Tooth Fairy’s been. Left my wish under my pillow. Gonna show it to Doctor next time.

See what he thinks about that too.
Maybe Day, Maybe Night

Doctor wants to know why I smile. Doesn’t he know it makes people like me? The world’s a better place if you smile. No matter what’s going on inside.

But what Doctor really wants to know about is Drew. But I’m not going to tell him. I made a promise. Doctor says I promised him too. Promised I’d tell him what I remember.

And I do remember. Now that the lightning’s in my head. I remember lots. I remember that night.

Bits. Spaces in time. Blurs like it’s been sped up. It’s jumbled like a jigsaw. Doctor says that’s normal. The splintering of memory. The breaking. Doctor says it’s like a television flicking between different channels. He says so many things. But he’s right. Doctor says to tell him what I remember and he’ll help me put it together.

I tell him about my window. I’m watching.

There’s blood. A lot of blood. On the floor. The walls. On me. My hands are slick with it. I can’t hold on.

A face. There’s a face. In the window.
I see skin. Bare. Cold when I touch it. So cold. An eye. I see her eye. Staring at me.

Staring right through me.

And a sound. I hear…a sound.

A flick. Then a click.

I ask Doctor if he can hear it too. There. A flick. A click. Doctor says he can’t hear anything. Doctor says it’s in my memory.

Is it? I can hear it. Doctor. Can you hear it now?

But Doctor isn’t smiling anymore. Not now he’s seen the knife.

Doctor says to put the knife down.

Flick.

Doctor says drop it.

Then a click. So simple. Even a child can do it.

Doctor asks me to put the knife down. Or he’s going to call Al with a knockout needle. I don’t do it. So he does.
Now I’m here. Doctor locked me up real tight. Put me in a hole and turned out the light. At four points they call it. Splayed. Like a frog in a bio class. Left me like that to dream away. Dream I did.

Dreamt I was back there. In her room. It had white walls and black carpet. All black and white. Like dominoes.

There was a bed. It had a shaggy doona. Like one of those dogs. But it was a kind of cream colour. Not white and grey like the dog.

A mirror. There were photos stuck in it. A couple of Polaroids of friends. A school portrait. A picture of a field of sunflowers curving away. I took that one in the dream. Maybe even that night. I can’t be sure.

Her wardrobe. Bulging with clothes. Her scarf over one door. I touched it. It felt scratchy.

Her window. The curtains are heavy. That’s why I can’t see through them. Black. Black on the inside. White on the outside.

I pushed the curtains aside. I could see my room. I could see my window. Then I heard a voice.

Then I woke up. In here.
They undid me a little while ago. Let me back into the playroom. Saw the others looking through their little windows. Looking at me. I tried to smile. I think I did. I can’t be sure. Derek whispered to me. Said Jack started a fire in the hall while I was gone. We’re not supposed to tell anyone. I won’t. I don’t care what Jack does. He could burn the whole place down. I’d smile at that.

I write this slowly. My wrists ache. My arms hurt. But I’ll see Drew tomorrow. I have to ask her something.

See. I have the pieces now. The ones I told Doctor. The ones I didn’t tell Doctor. All the pieces of the puzzle. Doctor said we have to put them together. We will. Drew and me will. Drew will help me do it. Tomorrow.

She better. I don’t want any more lightning in my head. That doesn’t make me smile.
I saw her today. She was in one of the rooms. Will was sitting beside her on a lounge. He saw me. He got up. He walked out. Walked past me. I smiled at him. He didn’t look at me. He wouldn’t. Not after last time. He wouldn’t dare.

Drew was looking out the window. Sunlight made her dark hair silk. She wore her scarf but it wasn’t cold inside.

I sat beside her. I picked up a magazine. Flipped through it so anyone watching would think we weren’t talking. Don’t want it getting back to Doctor that Drew’s here. He’ll take her from me then.

I asked her what she was doing with Will. She said she liked him but not in that way. She told me not to be jealous. She said she liked him because they are the same sort of people.

I didn’t want to hear that so I asked her to help me put it together. My memories. That night.

She did.

This is what Drew said.
I was watching her room from my window. It was late. Her house was dark. But there was light in her room.

I went over. The back door was locked but I knew where the key was. I went in. The house was quiet. I went up the stairs. Light under her door.

Inside there was a shapeless lump on the bed. Under the furry doona.

I went through the room. I looked at the mirror. I took the photograph of the sunflowers. I looked at the clothes. I touched the scarf.

I went to the window. The curtains were heavy to pull across. I looked at my window. I could see my room.

Then a voice. It was her. Her calling me.

I went to her. She looked scared. She asked me what I was doing. I smiled.

A sound. Flick.

I showed her the knife. She struggled backwards on the bed. This wasn’t right. She’s not scared of knives. She tried to scream but I covered her mouth. Her skin was cold. Smooth. I smiled.
Her eyes were wild. She kicked at me. I let go of her mouth. I tried to move back but she snarled. She jumped at me. She landed on the knife. Her neck did.

Blood gushed over me. On my hands. My hands were slick. I couldn’t hold the knife. It dropped under the bed.

She struggled against my hand. Hair fell across her face. There was one eye. Staring at me. Then the eye rolled up. Then it stared through me.

She fell back on the bed. I stood over her. Her face was covered by hair. By blonde hair.

I looked out the window. There was my window. There was my room.

Then Doctor was at the doorway of the common room. Drew saw him. Stopped talking. She slipped away. Didn’t tell me the rest.

I watched Doctor from the pages of the magazine. He looked at me. I smiled. He walked away. I looked around but Drew was gone.

But I know enough. It’s all together now.

Now I wonder what I should tell Doctor.
Doctor

Don’t need any more lightning. It’s all together. I will tell you all.

Don’t give me lightning. Okay?

Lulu
Don’t think Doctor got my note. He put lightning in me again.

I told him I don’t need it anymore. I found the truth like he said. I don’t want anymore.

But Doctor said it isn’t up to me. Doctor said this isn’t the sort of hospital that lets patients decide what treatment they want. This is the sort of hospital that just gives it to them no matter what they say.

I told Doctor we could put it together now. But all he wanted was to shock me again.

Bad Doctor.
It was Drew. Not me. I remember it all now. That night.

I was watching from my window. Watching Drew. She was smiling.

Drew was reaching down. Lifting the dead girl’s hair. Her blonde hair. It must have scared Drew. Her face. She jumped off the bed.


It became a different room. A pink room. All pink. Pink and soft.

It was Angela’s room. Angela O’Brien.

Angela’s lying on her pink bed. Dead.

Drew killed her.

Where did you get that?

No I wasn’t. Not about you. I was talking about Angela O’Brien.
I want to talk now. Don’t you?

Where? There’s nowhere to go in here.

No. Don’t say that.

He doesn’t want you. He doesn’t need you like I do. He’s a nobody. Don’t do that.

Drew? Please don’t leave me. Not for him. He told all of us to lie, that’s all I’m doing. Doctor doesn’t know you’re here. It doesn’t matter what I say to him.

Drew, don’t go. Don’t leave me. Not for him. Not for Will.

Drew?

Drew. Where are you?

Drew?

Will.

Will.

Will the nobody.
Last Night

I haven’t seen Drew in so long. But I know where she is. With him. In his room. In his bed. In his eyes.

I miss her.

No one treats me like that. No one makes me feel like this. No one.

The bitch.

Got another present from Derek. Little Derek gives the best presents.

Don’t know when I’m going to get her. Get him too. Get both of them. But I’ll find a way. Million ways to kill a cat.

I’ll make it quick. Easy. Take care of both of them.

I’ll cut Will first. Let her watch what I do. She’d probably like that. Knowing Drew.

Then it’ll be her turn.

Just a flick. Then a click. And no more Drew.
Derek
Monday

Here’s what really happened. We live on a dam but it’s not really a dam but we call it a dam cause our house backs onto it and it’s ours cause no one else backs onto it and you have to go through some bush to get to it which is really our backyard but dad don’t make us mow it cause it’s bush and bush takes care of itself and you walk through the bush and around the skinny white trees but if it’s nighttime sometimes the trees look like white fingers reaching for me and it gives me the willies but past the trees there’s the dam and the dam is this really big hole in the ground with big sides like a meteor hit there like what they say killed all the dinosaurs and I sometimes wonder if that’s what made our dam cause I once tried to touch the bottom out in the middle and I nearly drowned cause I just kept going down and down and down and there wasn’t nothing there and I didn’t know if I had enough air to get back up and it got really cold and really dark and I still couldn’t touch nothing and I looked back and the light was gone and I got real scared cause I couldn’t remember which way was up and which way was down and if I swum the wrong way I’d end up in the wrong place and my air was nearly gone and I was getting dizzy and I kicked and thrashed and I got to the surface and breathed in real deep and it felt good and when I swam back to shore Trevor was there and he said what did you do that for Derek and I said I couldn’t touch the bottom it has no bottom I said which is why I sit on the sides of the dam sometimes and look down and wonder if a meteor hit it really really fast and went so far down it came out the other side and when I told Trevor this he said you’re a dickhead it would have hit China and then everybody would know about it and then he’d jump on me and force me underwater which was fun and he’d splash me and I’d splash him and he’d
say marco and I’d say polo and the water would always be cold no matter how hot it was out on the bank and if you swam to the middle of the dam over the hole that goes all the way to China it would be even colder like ice on your toes and sometimes you could even feel that cold if you went out on the rope swing and swung back real high and swung forward real fast and if you let go at the right time you’d fall right on the cold spot and sink right down almost as far as China I bet before you came back up and me and Trevor we used to spend every day we could down there at the dam.

This one day Trevor and me were going to the dam and Trevor saw a bee hive up in one of the skinny trees. He said check that out Derek.

It looked like the inside of a Violent Crumble only browner. I could see bees flying around it but only slowly like the bees were lazy that afternoon. I knew how they felt. I could get real tired in the afternoon too and it was the only time I could get any sleep because I could never sleep at night.

I said better not touch it Trevor.

Trevor said bock bock bock and I knew he meant I was a chicken.

I said am not.

He said go on then prove it chicken throw a rock at it.

I said okay and I picked up a rock and I threw the rock but it missed. I’m not very good at throwing rocks.

He said bloody useless here watch how it’s done and he picked up a rock and threw it and the rock hit the bee hive. The hive rippled like it was the dam when you throw a rock in it and the hive broke off the tree and hit a branch then rolled down and fell and hit another branch then the hive fell on top of Trevor.

It hit him on the head and a big cloud of dust went up and I jumped back and he yelled and his hands hit his head and there were bees everywhere. He hit at the hive with
his fists and it burst apart and there was his face covered with bees. And the bees they
weren’t lazy no more.

Trevor ran. He was screaming and beating at his head and whipping his arms
around and I could see he didn’t have his eyes open. I knew he had to get to water which is
what you do when there’s bees and I said over this way and he stumbled towards me.

I led him by my voice to the dam and he jumped in clothes and all right off the edge
of the crater and he hit the water real hard cause I heard the slap from where I was and then
he bobbed up and he was screaming cause he’s allergic to bees you see always has been
ever since we was little and he was screaming and I could see bees in his mouth and his
eyes and he was all puffy and white and he went under the water and then his hand came
out and then he went under again and then the water was all wavy and then the water was
less wavy and then the water was still.

I thought he might have sunk all the way to China. But they found his body half an
hour later.
Wednesday

Here’s what I do in here. I’m kind of like a handyman only I don’t fix anything not real things I just get people what they need. It’s a useful thing to do in here. If you have things that everyone wants then that’s all they bother you for. They don’t come looking for you for other stuff is what I mean. Yeah in here I’m everyone’s friend.

I’ve got a system with some of my friends who work here and they’re hard to get along with sometimes cause you have to know what they want before they’ll get you what you want which is actually what someone else wants. It sounds complicated but it’s not.

What I do is I take orders from the others like say one of my friends who’s a girl not my girlfriend just a friend she wants some rose soap which you can’t get here since all the soap is that scratchy hospital soap and the friend asks me to get her the soap and I go and see my other friends and I won’t write their names just in case but these friends go out into the real world and they get the rose soap and then they bring it in here and they see me at lunch or out in the yard and then I know I can pick the rose soap up from under one of the overturned mop buckets in the kitchen storeroom but only if I see them at a certain time for if it’s a different time I can pick up the rose soap from the commissary with my toothpaste or something like that. See. It’s a system.

Then I give the friend the rose soap and she gives me oh I don’t know cigarettes or a box of chocolates or something whatever it is we agree on that another friend needs and then I go to the other friend and barter with them and the whole thing starts again and goes on and on cause everybody wants something don’t they.

I get my friends things. They want something they know they come to me.
I don’t know how I get away with it sometimes. You should see some of the things that come into this place. Food, make up, magazines, posters. Needles. Nunchuks once. And I still haven’t heard about them being used yet. That means they’re still out there. Knives. Always a big call for knives for some reason. Probably cause you can conceal them better than anything else. I don’t know. I’ve never been a big knife person myself.

New therapy tonight. It sounds painful from what I’ve heard. The others who are in here with me say lots of things like Orrin who said they hook a car battery up to your head that’s what he said at lunch today it was pretty funny cause Constance looked really sick all of a sudden and Jack frowned like he was really scared and Lulu she just smiled and Will he just wrote in his book even as he was eating I’ve never seen a kid write so much before.

Orrin ate some of my lunch and I let him cause that’s what you do for your friends and Orrin said yeah they put these clamps on your ears and then they start up the car and give your brain a jump start.

I’m not looking forward to it at all even if he was joking. The joke’s got to come from somewhere right so it must be a little bit true. Oh well. Done it before and I’ll do it again.

I’ve just got to survive that’s all. Survive another one of the little games they like to play with our heads in here. Survive and move on to the next one until all the games are done and I’m the winner. It won’t be long I’m sure of it. I’ll be out soon.

Then I can go back and see just how far down that hole to China goes.
Thursday

Dr Amos asked me to tell him about my brother today not my dad like all the other doctors used to. That’s weird but he is the doctor and you have to do what a doctor says because doctors are smart and they want to help you, especially in here. There’s so many doctors and all of them want to help and I want to help them so I tell them my story and they frown and they write it down and then they help you. But Dr Amos doesn’t want to hear what I say to the other doctors. He only wants to talk about Trevor.

I told him Trevor and I were best of friends who used to talk about everything. Footy. Comics. Dreams, and he seemed real interested in the last one, asked me what sort of dreams, what did Trevor used to dream about. I told him Trevor dreamed of flying, you know, like Superman. Trevor used to dream about flying up up and away over our house and over the dam and just fly around like he was Superman. He said it makes me feel good and if I dream I’m flying I’d always wake up in a good mood. He said it makes the day bright.

I was jealous of that cause I never remember my dreams.

I asked Dr Amos do you want to talk about my dad cause that was what the other doctors always wanted to talk about. Dr Amos said no I don’t but why do you want to. I told him the other doctors always ask me about the things dad did to me. It’s different to the other therapies cause of that.

Dr Amos said well, that’s what this is all about. Something new. There’s nothing wrong with new things.
I asked Dr Amos do you want to hear my story then, the one about my dad. Dr Amos said no Derek, not yet. But soon. Real soon.

That’s good. I was starting to think he didn’t want to know the truth.
Saturday

I have to get this down cause if I don’t I won’t remember it cause I’m having trouble remembering the things that happen every day like I forget if I’ve given people what they want already and I’m getting all mixed up and I think it’s cause of what Dr Amos puts in my brain at night here. He tells us it’s to help you remember but I don’t think it really does cause I’m forgetting more than I’m remembering. It’s not good.

Dr Amos said a person can edit memories. You can, if you’re clever enough – or deluded enough even – you can change your memories to fit a picture you have in your head. Dr Amos said it’s a form of repression that could almost be called selective suppression, really. The mind, when forced to deal with a potentially mind shattering event, literally chooses what it wants to remember – or even what it wants to see. The mind cuts out pieces of the puzzle and tries to put the puzzle together without the missing pieces. Dr Amos says it’s a fascinating process though I don’t know why he tells me this I don’t think my mind edits itself. I don’t know what my mind does.

Like today. Here’s what happened. I was in the showers when everyone else was at breakfast because I like to shower by myself and the nurses they know me and I give them things and they’re my friends so they let me shower by myself after everyone else has gone to get something to eat.

So. I was in the showers and it was just me and the water and it felt so good and then I felt something on my shoulder. It was a hand and a big brown hand too. I looked around and it was Wimeru this big guy who wasn’t one of my friends. He’d had a go at me before and it looked like he wanted another one.
Wimeru he gave me this big old grin that looked even bigger on his big face and he said you the boy that can get anything.

I said yes.

He said do you know what I want and I thought he was talking about drugs or alcohol or even just cigarettes because that’s what most of the guys wanted especially the bigger ones like Wimeru. But I couldn’t be sure so I said no what do you want.

And then Wimeru pushed me up against the wall right against the tiles of the shower with my cheek squashed against my face and the tiles they felt cold like real cold like colder than they should have really been.

I said what do you want I can get you anything you want.

He said you know what I want and then he slapped me across the head with the back of his big hand and I hit the ground and water splashed up into my eyes. He said you gonna give it to me bitch.

I tried to crawl away and I didn’t know where I was going and then something hit me real hard in the ribs and all the air went out of me. My face fell in the water and it was so cold that I just wanted to lie in it and not have to keep getting hit by Wimeru and I became a ball and he just kept kicking me and kicking me and saying bitch you gonna be my bitch over and over and over again.

And then there was this big rush of air and Wimeru wasn’t kicking me no more and I could breath and I breathed and I looked up and it was Orrin my friend Orrin and he was there and he was saving me and he was protecting me. He pushed Wimeru up against the wall and when Wimeru hit it he saw that it was Orrin and he looked all scared like he’s scared of Orrin.

Orrin said get away from my friend and he did he called me his friend. Then Orrin said leave my friend alone.
Wimeru he looked real angry now and he said that’s twice you’ve suckered me and twice is all you’ll get. Then Wimeru he walked away and Orrin picked me up and held me in his arms and put me on a chair and said there now it’s okay now and he saved me and it felt good.

He’s a true friend Orrin and I think he and I are going to be the best of friends. You can just tell sometimes with people. Yes. Orrin and I are going to be just like brothers.
Tuesday

I miss Trevor. He was a good brother. He never ragged on me like a big brother normally would and he always listened to me when I talked and he never judged me not once.

It was always fun in summer. Even though mum was crabby cause of the heat and cause we wouldn’t have enough money for cigarettes and dad would be sleeping the day away in the bedroom with the air conditioner going cause it was so hot he had to if he wanted to get any sleep between hauls and even though it was so hot you could almost bake an egg on the skin of your arm if you held it there real steady and even after all that Trevor and me we still had fun in summer.

We’d sit out in the dam or around the dam or near the dam because it was the coolest spot to be if some wind went by and grabbed the cool of the water and blew it at you. We’d sit there and talk and play stuff like army men trying to take the beach just before a tidal wave came and washed them away and we’d play fight like superheroes and he’d be Superman and I’d be Spiderman cause Spiderman was always the best. And we’d play submarines and see who could stay under the longest and Trevor he could never stay under as long as me and it always made him mad. Trevor didn’t like to play those games much once he got older but he liked them when we were both little.

Some days we’d be out at the dam for so long that our skin would go red like beetroot. The water would be bright like it was the sun itself and I would lift my head and see the heat shimmering against the dirt so much that it looked like thin wavy steps that I thought I could walk on. And mum would yell for us from the back fence and we’d go back home and later when the sun was down we’d have to lie on wet towels with wet
towels on our faces cause we were so sunburnt. And the water it would steam when it touched my skin and hiss like a cat.

Other days Trevor and me we’d be in the dam just on twilight and that’s when dad would come down for his swim. He said it wakes him up and he’d dive in and go under and we wouldn’t know where he was and the water could go so still that Trevor and me we’d look at each other and wonder if dad had gone all the way down the hole or not and then dad would jump out and scare me and grab me and I couldn’t get away from him no matter how much I tried to. He always felt rough around my shoulders when he did that.

And some times when the house was real dark like it was real late I’d get out of my bunk and there would be Trevor out of it with his tongue hanging from his mouth and drool on his pillow. And there would be mum and dad out of it in their bed with the air conditioner going full ball cause that’s how dad likes it. And I’d sneak out the back door real quiet like making sure the bolt didn’t click like it did if you opened the door normally and I’d go outside.

It would always be quiet and still and I’d have to be real careful not to make no noise as I jumped the fence and went into the bush and went down to the dam.

The moon. I remember the moon would be shining down and shining up cause of the reflection it made on the water. I’d look at it bobbing there in the water and it would always look like a door or a hole or just a space that led somewhere other then here.

I’d slip into the water trying not to make a ripple and the moon it would go a little wavy and if I was careful enough I could push off from the side and float out to the middle to over the hole and if I didn’t break the water with my hands I could get to the middle and I could look down and there would be the moon’s reflection on the water and I’d be swimming right in the middle of it.

And then I’d stop paddling and I’d go under. And it would always be so cold.
Shopping List for Blue Wing

1 x Penthouse magazine
1 x carton of Winfield Blues
1 x can of spray paint, black
1 x tube of lipstick, pink
1 x packet extra thick kitchen gloves
2 x switchblade knifes
5 x HB pencils
Wednesday

Dr Amos is always asking tell me again about Trevor.

My brother Trevor he used to cry at night sometimes. I’d hear him on the top bunk just crying real softly. I think he did it that way so no one in the house would hear. I think he really wanted to scream out loud but he couldn’t because that would wake up dad and he’d be real mad. I think Trevor he cried like that because that was the only way he could cry. He never cried when he thought anyone was listening.

But I could always hear it cause I could never sleep at night cause I was always waiting.

Dr Amos always asks did you and your brother ever fight.

Sure we did. He always said Superman would win in a fight against Spiderman and I said no way Spiderman would find a way to beat him and Trevor said you’re such a child, Superman is the man of steel ain’t nothing can beat Superman and I’d say no way and we’d end up punching until mum would yell from the lounge room keep it down you bastards or dad would say I’ll flog you boys if you don’t shut up.

But Dr Amos always wants to know were you mad at him that day, Derek.

I got mad at Trevor. He’d do things to me that would make me mad. And we fought that day, we did.

Dr Amos said that’s not what you’ve said before in your other therapies.

I said this was before we went to the dam. Dr Amos said what was the fight about but I didn’t tell him cause that wasn’t what he really wanted to know about. He just wants to know why Trevor drowned.
I can see it in my head. The dam. I wish I was back there but I’m not.

Trevor had to get to water cause of the bees, that’s what you do when there’s bees and he’s allergic cause he’s always been allergic ever since he was little. I tell Dr Amos this but he says I’ve heard all this before Derek I want to hear what really happened, the truth.

But he doesn’t want the truth. That’s why I wrote it down for him. Maybe if he reads it he’ll want the truth I’m giving him and not the truth he thinks he wants. Maybe.
Dear Dr Amos,

Since you won’t listen to me I decided to write you a letter and tell you all the things my dad did to me. I know you said you didn’t want to hear my story yet and I don’t want to do anything to make you mad but I wanted to write this down for you anyway. Don’t be mad.

My dad he’s a truck driver. He drives all across the country delivering food to supermarkets all across Australia. He delivers cabbages and lettuces and tomatoes and corn and peas and all sorts of stuff to supermarkets in all sorts of different places. He’s gone for days and days and days and whenever he comes back he’s always so tired that he just goes to his bedroom and puts on the air conditioner and goes to bed. But when he wakes up he always calls for me no matter where I am he calls for me.

Mum she would always be out in the lounge room. She was always real quiet even when dad wasn’t home like she was afraid of waking someone up or something. She’d sit on the lounge and watch Oprah and she’d never really eat anything but she never seemed hungry. Trevor said she’s got a bottle under the cushions and I said how do you know and Trevor said I seen it when she goes to pee I seen it under the cushions. But I never looked to see if he was lying or not.

Trevor he’d be at the dam or out with his friends or just somewhere else when dad would call me. I think he knew what I went through. I think dad did the same to him when he was little and the only reason he didn’t get it no more was because I was getting it. That’s what I think anyway. Trevor he never said either way.

My dad he would be calling me from the bedroom. One time he called me and I was half over the back fence and he called me and I had to go back. Most of the time I was
in my room and I’d hear his voice coming through the keyhole and I’d know I had to go
because there was nothing worse if he had to get up and come and get me. He could get
real angry if that happened.

I would walk down the hallway and I hear the air conditioner going burr burr burr
and I could feel the coldness on my bare toes and it would make me shiver. I’d look up at
the pictures on the wall of the hallway. There were photos of me and Trevor from school
and mum and dad’s wedding and photos of Christmas and Easter and holidays we’d been
on. But dad would call again and I couldn’t stay and look at them for too long.

The door his door the door to the bedroom would be open just a little bit. I’d step
up to it and put my hand to the knob and I’d always pull back because it was so cold in
there and even if it was really hot outside the air coming from there always felt too cold.

I’d open the door just enough so I could get in because I knew dad didn’t like it
when there was too much light and I’d close the door behind me. It would be so dark. The
curtains were all drawn and they were so heavy you couldn’t even see a little bit of light
through them. So dark.

The air conditioner it sounded louder with the door closed. It sounded like a big
black animal with icy breath just growling in the corner and waiting to pounce.

Come here dad would say. My eyes they could see a little once I’d been in the
room for a while. My eyes they could see the bed and the lump on the bed and the arm that
was reaching for me and the hand that touched my chest and the fingers that touched my
face. You gonna be a good boy.

Yes.

He’d make me sit on the bed beside him and the sheet it would pool around his legs
and push against my back. His hand would rub my neck. His other hand would take my
hand and put it on him somewhere anywhere he just wanted me to touch him.
The air conditioner it would make such a racket that I thought someone must hear it and when they do they’ll come in and I won’t have to touch any more and be touched any more and when they did I could just leave this room and go outside where it’s hot and I didn’t have to be here any more.

My dad he would get closer and pull me down to him and make me lie next to him and my eyes they could always see by this time and there would be his face right up to mine so close and it would be like the moon and it would fill my eyes and his face would be all I would see.

Good boy.

And me I would imagine I was at the dam and not in my dad’s room and the water would be cold on my skin and the sun would be hot on my shoulders and I would paddle out right out into the middle and just bob there and be there and not be here where it’s too cold so much colder than the middle of the dam.

My dad he did this for years Dr Amos. He did this over and over again and if my brother Trevor and I don’t like saying this but if my brother Trevor hadn’t drowned then maybe just maybe I’d still be in that room with the air conditioner and my dad would be doing those things to me right now.

So. I know you didn’t want to hear my story Doctor Amos but I wanted to tell you anyway. There’s no harm in trying so that’s what this is for. This is me trying for you.

Your friend,
Derek
Sunday

My head is fuzzy from what Dr Amos is doing to me and I have to write this down before it gets washed away like everything else. This happened today or maybe it was yesterday. All the days they seem the same in here and what happened yesterday may have easily happened today for all I know. Nothing really changes that much and with what they do to you and the drugs they give you it’s hard to keep it straight but I suppose it doesn’t matter what day it happened because it happened no matter what day it was.

I was out back of the kitchen. I was picking up the stuff my friends in the Blue Wing asked me for that another friend had left in a milk crate in the freezer. I’d used this place a few times before and I’d never really liked it because it feels like I get locked up when I go into the freezer because I have to close the door behind me in case anyone sees it open so I close it but not all the way just so it looks like it’s closed. One of my friends she said you have to watch yourself with the freezer honey because if the door ever shut and stayed shut for too long it would seal up to keep all the cold air in. I said I’d be careful and she said I know you will.

Today or yesterday or whatever I left the door open a little but made it look like it was closed. But it didn’t fool Wimeru.

I was in the freezer and it was cold. I had goose bumps and it was hard to open the sack in the milk crate because my fingers were numb and I was thinking about frost bite and how those guys that climbed Mt Everest must have felt like this every day like their
fingers were gonna fall off and I didn’t know Wimeru had come into the freezer until I heard the door click shut.

Wimeru he looked real happy and he said you miss me boy.

I didn’t say nothing. I could see that he’d shut the door behind him and I knew there was no way out of there and Wimeru he would take whatever he wanted from me.

I picked up the sack and held it to my chest. Thinking about it now I should have taken out Lulu’s knives but I’m not that kind of person and I suppose if I had taken them out Wimeru he would have just taken them off me and used them against me anyway so it’s probably good that I didn’t.

I started backing away and I thought that maybe I could make my way around so the door would be behind me and I could push it open and run away but Wimeru he followed me and circled around and he looked so big that I wished one of my friends was with me.

Leave me alone I said and Wimeru he laughed real big and his gold tooth it flashed like it was a shark’s eye or something.

Come on now Wimeru said come on and be a good boy.

And something I don’t know what it was but it was like a flash went off in my head and I was back back in my dad’s room and it was like there was a blizzard going on and it was real windy and really cold and I could feel a hand on my back rubbing me and I could feel skin that was so hot too hot to be in such a cold room and where Wimeru was standing there was now a bed and someone was there and they were saying come here good boy and there was a face in front of me and it was crying and smiling at the same time and when I blinked it was Wimeru and when I blinked it was my dad and when I held my eyes shut real tight so tight it was like the sun was blinding me and when I did that I saw a face behind my eyes and it was my brother Trevor.
Then Wimeru he must have hit me or something because next thing I woke up and the freezer door was wide open and Wimeru he was gone. My face was sore and something wet was sliding down my leg and it hurt to stand up like I’d fallen over and I had to pull my pants up and my back was sore and my shoulders were bruises that stung when I touched them. And I picked up the things for my friends and I got out of there.

I got to the showers and I cleaned myself up and saw that I had a black eye and my shoulders they had these black and blue fingerprints on them that I knew would turn yellow in a day or two.

And I thought Wimeru and Trevor and Wimeru and Trevor and Wimeru and Trevor and I couldn’t get them out of my head no matter how hard I tried.

And then I had a shower and the water it made me feel better.
(BILLY’S FONT)

LIGHTER FLUID
Thursday

They let us out in the yard every day here. I like it. It sort of reminds me of the bush around the dam only it’s greener here and the trees they aren’t skinny white ones like the trees at the dam. It’s good to get out.

Not today though. I was in the yard today and I wasn’t feeling too good. My eye it still hurts and I can’t really see out of it because it’s all gummed up like it’s been glued shut and my gut was rolling like the time we got that bad Chinese food and all of us mum and dad and Trevor and me had to take it in turns to go to the toilet because we all needed to go real bad.

I’m still having trouble walking and when they let us out I just wanted to get away from everyone and go into the trees all by myself but because I still wasn’t able to walk right and I kept tripping and I could hear laughing behind me and I knew it was Wimeru laughing at me but I didn’t look around no I didn’t give him the satisfaction.

I got to the trees and I finally looked around and I could see my friend Orrin sitting on one of the tables smoking and I could see Constance in her black clothes and I suppose that’s what Lulu wanted the black paint for and I could see Lulu walking along the fence and I could see Jack over in the bushes and I could see Will writing in his book and no one was looking at me so I went into the bit of bush.

It was dark because the trees make a sort of roof in there. I could still see the sunlight but it was like it was outside and the bush was like a house. My gut it was hurting more and I sat down with my back against one of the trees and it felt rough but it was okay
to lean on. I closed my eyes and it seemed to help only I kept seeing things there in the dark and after a while I started to feel something on my skin.

It was like there were all these hands and they were all different like they didn’t belong to the one person and they were touching me all over and all around. There were big hands and small hands and dark hands and they were just off to the side and whenever I turned my head to try and see them they’d flit away and when I turned back they’d be on the other side of me.

I opened my eyes and some of the trees must have moved because it was now a really bright yellow and it was now really hot where as before it was cool and dark. My back it was now up against the trunk of a skinny white tree.

I stood up and I saw there was something on the ground a little way in front of me. It was moving.

I went over and saw that it was a branch and it must have broken off because one end was jagged and open like a wound and the other end it had this big clump of brown stuff that looked like the inside of a Violent Crumble. This was the bit that had been moving and I saw now that it was a big old bee hive. It had a crack in the side from where it must have hit the ground but the rest of it looked okay which was probably why the bees were still in there and they hadn’t flown off to build another one. The bees they must have all been feeling lazy.

I picked up the branch at the cut end real slow like. Them bees I knew they could wake up real quick and be on me in a second so I picked the branch up and I held it real steady away from me.

My left hand it felt heavy all of a sudden and I looked and I saw that I was holding dad’s hacksaw and I don’t know how it got there and I threw it away because I knew that I didn’t need it anymore, though I don’t know how I knew that.
I started walking.

The bush it was real quiet. I don’t think I’d ever heard it so quiet before and every time I stepped on a twig or tripped on an ant’s nest it sounded like thunder or gunshots or a car crashing. My gut was having a real hard time of it by now and my eyes they kept blinking because everything was real bright. The branch was getting heavy in my hand.

I could see someone up ahead. They were lying on the side of the dam on the raised bit that makes it look like a crater and the person they must have been a boy because they had their shirt off and the boy was sun baking.

I walked closer and the branch got heavier and heavier and the bees they weren’t so lazy no more and I kept the hive as far away from me as I could and some of the bees just a couple were on my arm and I had to be brave and hold on and not let go yet even though they stung me.

I could see the boy. He had a towel over his head. It looked wet and his chest went up and down like he was asleep.

I walked real slow so I wouldn’t make no noise but when I was a little way from him I kicked a rock and it hit the boy on the leg. He lifted the towel off his head and squinted at me like he couldn’t see me properly.

My gut it was screaming and I could see the dam on the edge of my eyes and it looked like it was spinning around me and the water was bright so bright too bright.

I said who’s a good boy now.

And I dropped the branch.

The next thing I know I’m lying on the grass and my friends are standing over me there’s Constance there’s Orrin there’s Lulu there’s Will there’s Jack. The pain in my gut it’s gone and I can stand up now.
My friends they said are you okay and can I help you and they patted me on the
back and made sure I was okay and one of them, I think I know who, even gave me a note
but I found out later it was just that they wanted me to get them something but that was
okay anyway because it’s the thought that counts and at least that means someone was
thinking about me.

And now I’m in my room writing all this and my eye it hurts and my backside it
hurts and I know I’ll have to tell Dr Amos about this because this is what he wants to hear
and I don’t know what I want him to know or what I even want to say anymore.

Because I remember the boy I dropped the bees on now that I’ve written it all down.
The boy was Trevor.
My friend Orrin he must have gotten my note because today he took care of Wimeru for me. Orrin’s such a good friend to have inside here, yes he is.

It was lunchtime and Orrin he gave me this look and he got up and he went out into the hallway. I looked around the table but no one was watching me. Will he was writing and Constance she was cleaning the table and Lulu she was smiling and Jack he was staring out the window and no one was watching me so I got up and I went after Orrin. He went into the showers and I followed him and I stopped at the doorway.

The showers they were misty like in winter when there’s fog round the dam and I had to go in the showers a little way to see what was going on because all I could see was a shadow that was probably Orrin and another shadow that was probably Wimeru. The shower was making a noise and it was kind of like hiss hiss hiss and it was louder than it should have been and it echoed all round me.

Orrin’s shadow it had something trailing from its hand that kind of looked like rope.

Orrin’s shadow it yelled hey and the other shadow it turned.

Wimeru’s shadow it said what do you want.

Orrin’s shadow it said you.

Wimeru’s shadow it said piss off and then it turned its back on the other shadow and put its head under the showerhead.

Orrin’s shadow it said I’m gonna kick your black arse and then Wimeru’s shadow spun around and tried to punch Orrin but Orrin was too quick and he danced out of the way like Muhammad Ali.
Orrin’s shadow it laughed and said is that your best and Wimeru’s shadow growled like a mongrel dog.

Wimeru’s shadow came in again real quick and he moves pretty fast for a big guy and he hit Orrin’s shadow up near his neck and it must have hurt because Orrin’s shadow it grunted. Then Orrin’s shadow it whipped around and that rope thing that was in its hand came up and around the other shadow’s neck and then something happened.

The two shadows they kind of became one shadow and the hiss hiss hiss of the shower got real loud in my ears and it almost sounded like our old air conditioner and the two shadows they were holding onto one another and pushing and pulling and grunting and it kind of didn’t look like a fight no more. The water it looked like it was all around them and wrapped around them and the shower noise changed from hiss hiss hiss to burr burr burr.

The two shadows they were all of a sudden lying down and I was standing in a different doorway and the door it was only a little bit open but I could see in and it was dark but I could see the two shadows and one was on top of the other and it was moving back and forth and the other one was curled up like it was in pain or something and by this time I couldn’t tell which was Orrin’s shadow and which was Wimeru’s shadow and something inside me wanted to know and wanted to see so I stepped into the room.

I must have hit the door open with my shoulder or my leg or something because the room and it wasn’t the showers no more it was another room and the room it was suddenly real bright because of the light outside that I let in and I could see my dad and he was moving back and forth and I could see my brother Trevor underneath him and Trevor he was real young and I looked at my hand on the door and it was real small like I was real young too and then the shadows they changed and my dad’s shadow it was suddenly my brother Trevor and he was smiling and underneath him I could see me and I was the other
shadow and I was the one under Trevor and I knew that my dad wasn’t there no more and he was away and away all the time now and Trevor he was on top of me and he said you’re a good boy and he was pushing against me and it hurt and it hurt and it hurt so much.

And me I looked up from the bed at the me in the showers and my eyes they were screwed up real tight and my face it said I ain’t gonna take it no more and the me on the bed it looked so angry and it looked so mad and it looked so small and it looked so sad all at the same time.

And I stepped closer and the two shadows that were suddenly standing up and the room it was full of water and there was water everywhere and the water was so cold and the showers went hiss hiss hiss and I went up to the two shadows and the one that was my dad and was my brother Trevor and was Wimeru all at the same time I punched it across the face and it felt so good and it felt so right and I knew then what I had to do.

Then Orrin’s shadow it pushed Wimeru’s shadow away from it and Orrin’s shadow fell to the floor on its knees and Orrin he had his face in his hands and Wimeru he crawled into the corner and he said you’re crazy and you’re crazy over and over again like he was the one who was crazy. Then there was someone else in the room and I knew it was Al from the size of his shadow and I ducked into another corner away from it all and Al he mustn’t have seen me and he went over to Orrin and he took a needle from his pocket and put it in Orrin’s arm.

I slipped back to the doorway and I saw Wimeru in the corner and he looked so small and scared and beaten and so much like I used to before Trevor had died that it made me smile and I smiled at him and he looked up at me and his eyes were all red and puffy and I smiled at him and that smile it said I ain’t gonna take it no more.

And then I slipped away before anyone else could see me.

I told Dr Amos all this. But I don’t think he believed me again.
Will talked to us today. It was lunch and everyone looked real tired like they weren’t getting any sleep and it kind of surprised everyone when he did speak because he hasn’t said nothing not a word the whole time he’s been in here.

Will said we’re all in this together and I knew he meant Dr Amos’s therapy and not Hobbs Home and he said the only way we’re going to get out of it is if we all work together and he said you have to trust me.

Orrin said what you talking about, you haven’t said shit the whole time and now we’re supposed to trust you.

Constance said now now Orrin let him talk, he’s been waiting to talk so just let him.

Lulu smiled but I could see that her eyes weren’t smiling, not when they looked at Will.

Will said Amos doesn’t care about you, about us and he said Amos just wants us to tell him what he wants to hear to make himself look good and he said Amos will only use you to his own benefit.

Jack said the mad scientist uses Jack’s memories against him.

Orrin said yeah.

Constance said I don’t know, he’s kind to me. Not many people are kind to me like that.

Lulu smiled.

Will said he’s only being kind to get you on his side. He’s using you, using all of us and he said he doesn’t care about us.
And I said Dr Amos is our friend.

And Will said wake up to yourself, he’s not your friend, we don’t have any friends in here, and I didn’t like him saying that because I’ve got lots of friends who I do things for and they’re friends to me and friends are important especially in here.

And I looked around the table and they were all looking at me.

And I said I have friends.

And Will said no you don’t.

And Constance said leave him alone, we’re his friends.

And Orrin laughed.

And Lulu smiled.

And Jack said the mad scientist thinks Jack stole his lighter but Jack didn’t.

Will said Amos wants to hear the truth and he said Amos wants to know about the things we’ve done and he said Amos wants to hear us admit that we’re killers.

Orrin said I’m no killer, you ever say that again I’ll beat you black and blue.

And nobody said anything for a while.

Then Constance said what do we do then.

And Will said lie. If we all lie together then Amos will fail.

Then Al came walking past and Will he shut right up and looked down at his book, and when Al went past he looked up again, at each of us, one at a time, then he looked back at his book and started writing again.

He’s wrong you know. I have friends in here who help me and look after me and want to see me and want to know me and want to love me. I bet he just said that because he doesn’t have any friends and he’s jealous of mine. That’s why people say things like that, especially in here.
I’ll have to watch what Will says about me now on. I don’t like it when people say things like that.
Sunday

Dr Amos he said after tomorrow you can go back to my old room.

I said I’d like that Dr Amos because that means I won’t have to stay in this brick room under the ground any more and I can be around all my friends all the time again.

Dr Amos smiled at me which is the first time I’ve ever seen him smile even if his smile looked a little forced but he did smile so he must be happy.

That’s good. That means he believes me and that means he liked my story. I didn’t really like telling him it because I can still remember all the good things Trevor and I used to do like playing superheroes and marco polo in the dam in summer but Dr Amos he doesn’t want to know that stuff. He only wants to know the bad stuff and I’ve got plenty of bad stuff to tell him and the other doctors if they want to know. I’ll tell them anything really to leave me alone. Anything they want to hear.

I saw Wimeru today. He was in the infirmary and he was sleeping like he was a baby. He was tucked up in a sheet and he was sort of crying real softly so you couldn’t really hear him unless you got close and I got close because I ain’t scared of him no more just like I wasn’t scared of my brother Trevor the last time I saw him.

My friend she said Wimeru’s had quite a fright and he’s going to be staying in the infirmary for a little while. She said he may be transferred to the state hospital given his run ins with other patients.

She said the doctors are worried that another incident may occur and I knew she meant that the doctors thought that Orrin and Wimeru would have another fight and that one of them would get even more hurt and probably die. It’s just what my dad used to do
when Trevor and I fought only this was much worse because you couldn’t really just send someone to their room in this place because eventually they’ll see the other person and it would start up again. It made sense to me.

My friend she said it’s just ghastly what Dr Amos’s doing. She said he’s a monster and she shook her head real slowly and looked at me the way mum would when she’d had most of a bottle.

My friend she said I’ll let you have five more minutes with him and then he has to take a bath.

I said is there a bathtub here cause I really liked bathtubs and there weren’t any in the showers we used. My friend she said yes the patients in the infirmary take bathes every day at seven and seven and I knew she meant once at seven in the morning and another at seven at night.

My friend she smiled and said do you want to say goodbye to him alone and I said yes thank you because it’s always good to be polite and my friend she walked off to a kid in another bed and Wimeru and me we were alone.

Wimeru they must have given him some strong stuff because he was sort of talking to himself and I couldn’t make out the words because they were just whispers and I leant in real close and I couldn’t be sure but I think he said good boy and good boy over and over. And that made me clench my fists real hard and my fingernails they cut into my skin and a little bit of blood came out.

I said Wimeru.

And he said nothing.

I said Wimeru I’m not gonna take it no more.

And Wimeru he sort of groaned.
I said I’m gonna come back here tomorrow night and we’re gonna play marco polo

Wimeru would you like that.

And he said nothing.

And I said marco.

And I waited but he never said polo.

But he will soon because I’ll make him.

And then I’ll send him to China just like I did Trevor.
Jack
Jack misses the heat. It’s not hot here like it is at the Arms. In summer the Arms gets so hot that people they just stay inside with their fans on. Jack’s mum says there are so many fans that the wires in the building can’t take the extra power and pretty soon the power goes out like always. Then Jack and Jack’s mum have to wait for Mr Babalino to fix it and that takes ages.

It gets so hot in the Arms that the dogs die. They lie in the hallways and on the stairs with their tongues hanging out. They look dead and they don’t even bark or nothing when Jack walks past them. If one of them was really dead, the only way Jack could tell it from the others is if he put his hand on its mouth and felt for its breath. That’s the only way.

In summer it’s like the Arms just sucks all the heat from the city and puts it in Jack’s room. Jack lies there on his bed just sweating. Some days Jack makes himself lie real still just to see if he can be so still that he won’t make no sweat. But Jack always sweats.

Jack’s mum works at Tony’s in the day time and sometimes she lets Jack sit at the back so he can feel the cool conditioned air. Tony doesn’t like Jack hanging around but Jack’s mum’s a good worker and she asks Tony to let him stay some times.

Jack sits and watches the heat on the streets. He tries to do homework but he always ends up just staring at the heat rising from the ground and tickling the ankles of the hot people who walk through it. Sometimes it’s like the heat is waving to Jack, saying
hello or goodbye, but Jack doesn’t wave back in case someone is watching him. Jack wouldn’t be able to say what he was doing if someone asked.

Most days Jack has to stay at home in the Arms. Jack’s mum said he has to stay inside all day and not leave, but Jack he knows a way out. Jack uses the old latticework on the balcony like a ladder, climbing it to get to Ms Dougall’s place on the floor above. And she always lets him in, gives him a biscuit and then lets him out in the halls. Then Jack can go anywhere in the Arms Jack wants to.

Some days though Jack just stays in his room. Those are the days when Jack knows Phillip and his friends are out there in the Arms, somewhere.
(BILLY’S FONT)

BURN

I DARE YOU
Mad Scientist thinks Jack stole his silver lighter but Jack didn’t do it. Mad Scientist brought it into the little room with him today. Asked Jack what it was. Jack said it was a fire thing, and it was, a silver fire thing.

Mad Scientist asked Jack if he wanted to see the fire. Yes, Jack did.

Jack liked it. Jack wanted it. But Mad Scientist wouldn’t give it to him. Then Jack left. Now the fire’s missing. Now Mad Scientist thinks Jack stole it from the little room. But Jack knows it was one of the others. But which one is it, Jack?

There’s lots of weirdos in here. There are weirdos who talk to themselves too soft or too loud. There are weirdos who stand in corners like they’re scared to even touch the wall, even though it looks to Jack like they want to. There are weirdos who sit with blank faces in front of TVs, with drool running down their chins. But the ones in Jack’s block are the weirdest.

Big Man Orrin’s about as big as Phillip was. Big Man smokes and sometimes Jack watches the smoke coming out of his mouth like a curl of hair. Sometimes Jack wonders if there’s fire inside him, there’s always so much smoke coming out. Sometimes he blows rings of smoke and Jack thinks he’s pretty good because not everyone can do that. Is it Big Man who stole the Mad Scientist’s lighter? Jack knows he has to ask one of the nurses to light his cigarettes for him, Jack sees him do that all the time, saw him do it today too. He wouldn’t ask if he had fire himself. So maybe it’s not Big Man Orrin.
What about the White Lady? Jack likes her but Jack thinks she must have some real problems. She’s got pink eyes and that’s the only part of her Jack likes to look at. Jack likes colours. But what would she need a lighter for? She doesn’t need a lighter for anything, so who does?

There’s Pretty Thing Lulu. Jack doesn’t like Pretty Thing. She is one of those girls who never lived in the Arms. She is always clean, too clean for Jack. Jack only looks at Pretty Thing sometimes because Jack knows what girls that clean say about boys like Jack. They say things that hurt. But she has a beautiful smile and Jack can’t help but like that smile even if he doesn’t want to. Someone who smiles like that doesn’t need fire. So it’s not her.

Jack knows it’s not Baby Face. He’s a little guy and he can get Jack anything he wants or so he says. Baby Face Derek wouldn’t need to steal a lighter. He’d just buy one or swap for one if he wanted one or needed one.

Who does that leave?

Strange Boy Will. He’s the last in Jack’s block. Strange Boy doesn’t say nothing to nobody but Jack knows he is watching him. Jack sees him writing all the time in his diary and Jack knows he’s writing about Jack. Jack knows that. Could he be the one, then, Jack? Jack doesn’t know.

About the only thing Jack knows is that it wasn’t him who stole Mad Scientist’s fire, even though the silver lighter’s sitting on his bed right now near his foot. Jack got the lighter with a note, found it when he came back from lunch. Jack doesn’t know who wrote the note or who’s given him the silver lighter. But Jack knows what to do with it.
Jack dreamed about Jack’s mum last night. After they gave him something that made the room spin and keep on spinning after he’d closed his eyes, he saw his mum.

She was dressed up like she was going to work at Tony’s and she was standing at his door. Jack’s mum said she had a late shift to do and that Jack was to stay inside all night and not to leave.

Jack always tried to do what Jack’s mum told him to. Jack’s mum worked all the time and she was always too tired to do anything with Jack after work, if Jack even saw her before he went to bed at night.

Sometimes Jack would go out to get a drink of water and find his mum asleep on the lounge after a late shift. Jack’s mum would still be in her uniform and sometimes she’d have a lit cigarette in her mouth or in her hand, as if she’d just closed her eyes for a second and fallen asleep. That’s dangerous, so Jack would always put the fire out for her.

Jack’s mum was a good mum. She was always hugging him and telling him she loved him. She’d make special dinners just for the two of them and she called Jack her little man. So Jack tried to do everything Jack’s mum said.

But in the dream last night, Jack knew he wouldn’t do what Jack’s mum told him to. Jack knew he wouldn’t stay inside. Jack knew he would be going out into the Arms.

In Jack’s dream last night his mum bent down and kissed him on the forehead like she did all the time. His mum told Jack not to stay up too late and she smelled in the dream like roses.
Then the room it got dark and Jack’s mum was gone. Jack’s scared of the dark but he could see light out in the lounge room. Jack thought that maybe his mum had gotten back from work late again and fallen asleep on the lounge again. Jack decided to look.

But when Jack got to the lounge room he saw that the front door was open and that the light was coming from out in the hallway.

But when Jack got to the hallway Jack saw that the light was coming from the stairs.

But when Jack got to the stairs Jack saw that the light was coming from way down the bottom of the Arms.

But when Jack got to the bottom Jack saw that the light was coming from under a door that said keep out.

In Jack’s dream the door opened. Jack didn’t find this scary but he would in real life, Jack can be a scaredy cat sometimes. Jack could see the light and he went towards it.

He was walking through all sorts of pipes and wires trying to find the light but it just kept getting away from him like it was playing with Jack. Jack liked that, when the light was playful. Jack liked playing with light of all colours.

The light led Jack to this big box on the wall that had more wires sticking out of it. Jack knew what to do in the dream and he opened the box by a latch on the bottom. And Jack thought there’d just be more wires in the box, like a big clump of red, green, blue wires all together, but in the box there were no wires, like Jack knew there ought to have been.

In the box Jack saw Jack.

Jack was in the box.

Ha.

Jack in the box.

Then Jack’s dream ended and Jack woke up here.
It’s late at night and Jack is awake. They’ve been in his head with wires and stuff and Jack can’t sleep now. His head’s all full.

Jack’s room is starting to look like the Arms. The brick walls look like they’re growing away from him, rolling back to show hallways and doors and stairs that go up and down for miles and miles. Jack knows this isn’t possible but it doesn’t stop the room looking like that.

Jack doesn’t want to move. Jack knows that if he got up from his bed and took a step then he’d look back and the bed would be gone and all he’d see would be his hallway at the Arms. Jack doesn’t want to go back there so Jack’s not going to move off the bed.

The brick walls are gone now. It’s dark and Jack thinks he should call for Al. But Jack doesn’t.

Jack stares at the hallway and he’s surprised when a door opens and another Jack comes out.

The other Jack turns back to the still open door and says something. Jack can see the other Jack talking to Ms Dougall. She gives him a Tim Tam that starts to melt in his hand as soon as he touches it, just like they always did, even in winter. Ms Dougall closes the door and the other Jack is walking towards this Jack.

He doesn’t seem to see Jack. He’s walking right towards Jack and then he seems to turn a corner right in front of Jack and then Jack can see the other Jack walking away, down
a hallway to a set a stairs. Jack knows where those stairs go and he knows that Jack is
gonna go down the stairs, when he gets there.

The bed that Jack’s sitting on is moving after the other Jack, following, and even
when it gets to the staircase and over the first step, through a space the bed couldn’t fit, the
Jack on the bed is still behind the other Jack, right behind him, looking over his shoulder.

Jack watches Jack’s back as he follows him down the stairs. Jack was going down
to the basement again, like he always did, to his spot, his secret spot where no one else
goes. The banister twists like a corkscrew all the way down, right down, down to the
bottom.

But suddenly there is light, a flaring of light and Jack, the other Jack, his eyes are
caught by it. Jack hesitates. That light has stopped him, caught him. He steps off the stairs
and into a hallway.

Jack can see someone at the end of the dark hallway. Then Jack sees a bright spark
and there are three faces that seem to shine like the sun for a moment. Then it is dark
again.

Jack walks towards the light and the Jack on the bed follows, still frightened and
worried and scared of what he’s going to see, but Jack can’t stop it, can’t make it stop, he
has to see it, he has to watch the other Jack, watch what Jack will do.

The hallway is bulging in and out and Jack tries to stop what he’s seeing, tries to
make it go away. Jack tries to close his eyes but when he does he still sees the hallway, still
sees Jack’s back as he walks towards Phillip and his friends, still sees it all on the back of
his eyes.

Jack stops in front of the boys.
The light flares again and Jack and Jack can see Phillip, Raymond, Jimmy and the cat. Raymond’s holding the cat’s legs. Jimmy’s holding the cat’s body. And Phillip’s holding a lighter.

Phillip asks Jack what he’s looking at and Jack is so scared of Phillip that Jack can’t talk. Phillip is the biggest kid in the Arms and Jack’s seen Phillip’s fist coming towards his face lots of times before. Jack knows how hard Phillip can punch.

Phillip stands up and he looks angry and Phillip asks Jack again what he’s looking at.

Jack can’t look Phillip in the eye so he looks at the cat instead. It’s got green eyes and it’s crying real soft like it doesn’t want to be there. But out of the corner of his eye, Jack can still see Phillip.

Jack sees Phillip start to come towards him and Jack he asks what they’re doing with the cat, just to try and stop Phillip’s fist.

Raymond and Jimmy laugh but the laughs are real tight like they’ve been caught with their hands in the cookie jar. But Phillip grins at Jack and Jack remembers how that grin makes Phillip’s face look like a skull.

Phillip tells Jack that they’re just playing around and Phillip asks Jack if he wants to play with them.

Jack can’t talk. Phillip has never asked Jack to play with him before and Jack shivers a little now that he’s been offered the chance. Phillip’s the most popular kid in the Arms. All the other kids love him, want to be him, be beside him, be his friend. Even Jack.

Phillip tells Jack he ain’t going to ask him again and Jack says yes he’ll play with them.
The Jack on the bed tries to yell at the other Jack, to tell him not to, that it’s a trick, a trick that’s been played on Jack before, a trick that has hurt Jack before. But Jack’s mouth isn’t working right. No noise comes out.

Phillip puts his arm around Jack’s shoulders and draws him close. He takes him over to the others and the cat. He pulls him down to his knees.

Jack can smell something now and Jack thinks that maybe the cat’s pissed itself. But Jack can see the kerosene cans near Raymond’s feet and Jack sees the cat is all wet, its fur lathered to its body, sticking out in spikes and curls.

Jack is yelling at the other Jack now but nothing comes out, not a word.

Phillip shows Jack the piece of toilet paper they’ve tied to the cat’s tail. Raymond tugs it and the cat meows real loud and Phillip tells Raymond not to do that, they have to be quiet.

Jack doesn’t know what’s going on and Phillip puts the lighter in Jack’s hand. The Jack on the bed starts hitting his fists against the bed, crying out, crying water, and still there is no sound.

Phillip tells the other Jack to light the paper but it feels wrong to Jack so he asks Phillip why.

Phillip looks at Jack as if he’s going to kill him. His eyes go red and his mouth snarls. Phillip tells Jack again to light the paper and Jack is so scared by that look in Phillip’s eyes that he puts the lighter to the paper and flicks it.

Jack screams and screams in silence.

The cat erupts.

Raymond and Jimmy let go of the burning cat and scramble back, Jimmy yelps and Raymond hides his face. Phillip steps back real quick and stands up, but he is laughing, his eyes glinting in the burning fur.
Jack is knocked back as the cat jumps onto his chest. The cat screeches the loudest Jack has ever heard and Jack sees fire shooting from its mouth, little sparks that hit his hair and cheeks. Jack grabs the cat and tries to throw it off him but the cat won’t let go and it wriggles in Jack’s grip and Jack’s forearms sting and burn and blacken.

The cat springs off Jack’s chest and pelts down the hallway towards Jack on the bed and Jack doesn’t know what to do the cat is coming right for Jack there’s nowhere to go and the cat it’s burning it’s burning its eyes are burning its eyes the cat the cat it’s coming it’s coming this way the cat the burning cat the fire cat the fire is coming right for me
Jack saw fire today. It was smaller than the one at the Arms. Not as big as Jack would have liked. Jack always likes it when the fire’s big.

Jack heard it first. He was lying on his bed in his room when he heard a crackle that sounded like hello. He got up and went to his door and looked through the bars. There was the fire.

It was a small pile of paper in the middle of the hall, burning away right under the blue light bulb.

The paper was popping. The fire was eating the paper up, turning it to ash on the edges, making black shapes that twisted on the hot air. The fire looked to Jack like it was waving, hello or goodbye.

So Jack waved to it.

Then White Lady Constance was screaming and there were faces in all the bars looking out. Big Man Orrin was hollering, and Baby Face Derek was crying, and Strange Boy Will’s eyes were wide, wider then Jack had ever seen them, just staring out, staring at Jack like Jack was the one who did it.

Then the door at the end flew open and Nurse Man Al came rushing in like a big bull. He saw the fire and he ran over and jumped on it. The fire fought against his shoes and Jack knew the fire was trying to get away, to be free like Jack wants to, but Jack also knew that it couldn’t go anywhere, that it had nowhere to go. Nurse Man stamped and stamped and the fire went out.
He told everyone to settle down, which made Big Man stop yelling and Baby Face stop crying. Nurse Man went and got a broom and swept all the ash into a plastic bag, and he rubbed the black spot with a towel and washed it away. When he was finished, it was like it had never happened.

Then Nurse Man told Jack that he’d keep this on the qt, and Jack didn’t know what that meant, but when he winked at Jack Jack knew that Nurse Man Al wouldn’t tell the mad scientist, which is what qt must mean.

But before Nurse Man went back through the door, Jack saw him looking at Jack in a certain way, the same way Strange Boy Will was looking at Jack before the fire went out. Jack knows they think Jack did it, probably all of them. Jack could tell from the way they looked at him. It was the same look all the people at the Arms gave him.

Nurse Man Al thinks Jack still has the silver lighter, they all do because they couldn’t find it last week.

But Jack doesn’t have the silver lighter no more. Jack doesn’t know who has it.

But it’s not Jack.
Jack wanted to talk about Philip today. Phillip is a boy who lives in the Arms. Jack’s scared of him.

Phillip’s a big boy, as big as Big Man Orrin. And he’s got lots of friends. Everyone in the Arms is his friend, and if you’re not his friend he hits. He pinches. He pushes you around.

Jack was Phillip’s friend twice. The first time was the burning cat but Jack wants to talk about the second time.

There was fire. Out on the balcony. Down on the street. Big streaks of fire in the sky that burst up in the clouds, making colours. The colours were dancing on Jack’s window, on the glass. The colours looked like they were waving. Fireworks. It was the eve of the year.

Jack’s mum was working at Tony’s and Jack had promised her he wouldn’t leave his room, she said it would be dangerous tonight with the street party on but Jack couldn’t stay inside, not with the fire out in the sky. Jack wanted to see it so much that it hurt. Jack needed to see it.

Jack went out on the balcony. The fire in the sky was so bright that Jack couldn’t look at it and he looked down instead. Jack could see all the people from the Arms out in the street. They were drinking and dancing, and there were so many that Jack thought that he was the only one still left in the building. And Jack could see fires everywhere.
Small ones, little dots moving through the people. Bigger ones dangling on the ends of children’s hands, throwing sparks into their faces. Even bigger ones burning away in drums with people cooking marshmallows on sticks. Jack saw fires everywhere.

Jack saw the fires and he knew Jack’s mum had told him to stay inside, but Jack wanted to see them up close. Jack wanted to see the flames. So Jack went up to Ms Dougall’s place and the window, it was unlocked, like Ms Dougall had left it open just for Jack. Jack went inside, through Ms Dougall’s place, and out Ms Dougall’s door into the hallway. And then Jack stopped.

Jack saw Phillip.

Phillip was looking through Mr Babalino’s mail slot but he stopped when he saw Jack. Phillip let it drop when he saw Jack.

Phillip came over to Jack and Phillip asked Jack what he was doing. Jack didn’t know what to say so he said he was doing nothing. Then there were these big booms, right close to the window at the end of the hallway, and the window was suddenly bright with colours. Phillip’s eyes were shiny in the light and Jack’s must have been too. Phillip asked Jack if Jack wanted to see something cool, and Jack said he would because he thought that maybe Phillip was his friend now, after what they did to the cat. Phillip started walking away from Mr Babalino’s door, down the hallway, and Jack followed.

Jack went down. To the basement. Jack always liked going in the basement of the Arms. He had a secret spot there where no one ever went. Jack liked it down there.

Phillip led Jack through the basement. There were lots of wires and cables on the roof, and Phillip looked like he was following them somewhere. His eyes were still shiny, even without the fire in the window, they still shone. The wires led to a wall, to a box on the wall. A big metal box that was rusted on the bottom.
Phillip asked Jack if he knew what it was, and Jack didn’t so he just shook his head.

Phillip said it was the main, and that every place in the Arms was connected to it. Phillip said that if you cut the wires, then every apartment in the Arms would lose its power, and the whole place would go dark. Then Phillip asked Jack if that wouldn’t be the coolest thing ever and Jack saw that glint in Phillip’s eyes, and Jack said it would be cool.

Then Phillip dared Jack to cut the wire.

Jack knows not to mess with wires. Jack’s mum warned him that playing with electricity makes fire and fire can hurt a lot of people. Jack said no.

Phillip called Jack a pussy, and Phillip said if Jack was too much of a pussy to cut the wire than he, Phillip, would do it. Then Phillip flicked a latch and opened the box.

Inside were wires, lots and lots of wires. There were red and green and blue and black, and the wires were all wrapped around each other in big ropey clumps. Phillip grinned at Jack, and Jack told Phillip he better not. Phillip’s grin turned down at the ends and Phillip called Jack a pussy again and Phillip reached into the box and he pulled. The wires, they must have been in real tight because they didn’t budge. Phillip started to get mad and he pulled again. The wires, they didn’t move again. Phillip told Jack that he better help him or else. Jack was scared of Phillip and the look in Phillip’s eyes, so Jack reached up and together he and Phillip pulled.

The wires came out with a fizz and the basement was suddenly full of sparks. Phillip let go but Jack’s hands were caught in the wires and his hands stung and they hurt and they burnt.

Jack fell back and his hands came free. Then Jack watched as the box full of wires caught fire and Jack watched as the sparks raced up the wall and along the cables on the roof, and Jack watched as the roof caught fire and the basement started to burn.
Phillip ran away like he was the pussy. He pushed past Jack and ran for the door. Jack heard Phillip hit the door and run out in the hallway. Jack heard him crying out for help. Then Jack ran himself because the fire was spreading. The colour was taking over and Jack, he wanted to stay and be a part of it but I wouldn’t let him, I could see how bad it was.

Then Mad Scientist asked Jack what Jack just said.

Jack said Jack could see the fire was bad.

But Mad Scientist said Jack just said I. Jack said I wouldn’t let him. Mad Scientist asked who was Mad Scientist talking to.

Jack.

Mad Scientist said this is the first time Mad Scientist has heard Jack call himself something other than Jack. Mad Scientist asked who I was.

But I wouldn’t tell.
The Mad Scientist is going to put sparks in Jack’s head again tonight. Jack doesn’t want the mad scientist to but that won’t stop him. Just wanting won’t stop him.

Mad Scientist thinks he can fix Jack by firing the wires in Jack’s head. Jack knows it makes his dreams hurt and his days too bright. Jack knows it will confuse him more. Jack knows this but he can’t do nothing about it. Jack’s trying to hold onto what’s already in his head, but he doesn’t think it will stay once the Mad Scientist zaps him again. Jack’s memories are already burning away, turning to ash in his head.

Jack remembers Jack’s mum. Jack’s mum was a good mum. Jack’s mum would go to Tony’s all the time and leave Jack at home, like she did that night. Jack’s mum got all dressed up for work and she told him she’d flog him if he left the apartment because she was going to Tony’s for a good time. Jack’s mum’s eyes were big and shiny, and Jack could see the tip of her cigarette reflected in her tiny pupils.

No. That can’t be right.

Jack’s mum was a good mum.

Wasn’t she?

Jack doesn’t know anymore.

Jack remembers sneaking out and going to Mr Babalino’s door.

Jack? Jack, is that true?
Jack remembers lifting up Mr Babalino’s mail slot and seeing Jack’s mum. Jack’s mum was sitting on Tony’s lap, Mr Babalino’s lap, and Jack’s mum didn’t have any clothes on.

Is that right, Jack? Is that what happened?

Jack knows what people called Jack’s mum, what Phillip called her. Jack’s mum was called a hooker.

Was she, Jack?

Jack’s mum was a good mum, wasn’t she? She wasn’t a hooker.

Was she?

Jack?

Jack? Are you there?

Jack?

Where did Jack go?
I don’t know where Jack is. I’ve been waiting for him and waiting for him but Jack hasn’t come back. Not yet.

I tell Mad Scientist Jack isn’t here and Mad Scientist asks where he is.

Gone. Gone away. Jack’s gone because he didn’t like what Mad Scientist was doing to him in the middle of the night. So Jack’s gone.

Mad Scientist asks if Jack’s gone because of what he did to the Arms. But that’s not why.

Jack burnt his mother. But that’s not why Jack’s gone.

Jack knew she wasn’t a good mum. Jack’s mum slept with men for money. Jack’s mum slept with Tony for money. He was the landlord of the Arms. Jack’s mum used to go to Tony’s to pay the rent. Jack’s mum said it was cheaper that way. Jack’s mum used to say that Tony only wanted a good time.

Jack burnt him as well. They were having a good time together. Sometimes they did it on the hot days and Jack would be in the other room trying to do his homework, listening to it. Jack didn’t like that. Being left alone. Listening.

Mad Scientist wants to know about Phillip.

Phillip saw Jack and Jack asked Phillip if he wanted to see something cool and Jack took Phillip down to his secret spot in the basement. Jack took Phillip to the box full of
wires and Jack told Phillip how if you cut the wires you could cut the power to the whole Arms. Phillip dared Jack to do it and Jack did it.

Phillip ran when he saw the fire because he’s not like Jack. Jack knows fire is a friend because fire is always waving to Jack whenever he sees it. Jack knows that fire only hurts other people and not Jack. So Phillip tried to run and he got caught in the wires and he hit his head.

Jack tried to get Phillip out but the wires were on fire and they burnt Jack’s hands and Jack had to let go. Jack put his hands to his chest, they hurt so much, and Jack didn’t know what to do so Jack ran, ran away. Jack left Phillip there.

Jack is sorry. Jack is sorry for starting the fire, for cutting the wire. Jack’s sorry for daring. Jack’s sorry for Phillip.

But Jack really knows that Phillip deserved it for daring. Tony deserved it for having bad wires in the Arms. And Jack’s mum deserved it because she left him to have a good time. Jack doesn’t like to be alone.

Mad Scientist wants to know how I knew all of these things, if Jack was gone and I wasn’t Jack.

Jack told me. This is what I tell him.

Mad Scientist wants to know if I lit the fire.

No. I tell him Jack did.

The Mad Scientist seems happy with what I said about Jack. Like what I said was what he wanted to hear. That’s good because I don’t want Jack to get in any more trouble than he’s already in. I told Mad Scientist what he wanted to hear and hopefully that’s enough so Jack doesn’t have to stay here for ever. If Jack did then I’d have no way of getting out.
Sometimes I think about Tony and Phillip and Jack’s mum, and the Arms too. I wonder what they must have looked like, burning like they did. I wonder what they look like as ash. The thought makes me happy when it’s dark. Just like Jack I’m scared of the dark.

I hope Mad Scientist doesn’t touch my wires again. If he does then Jack won’t come back at all. He’ll go and hide in the box of wires again and he won’t come out. Then he’ll really be Jack in a box.

I can still feel Jack inside me. He’s in there somewhere. I think Jack is waiting for the right time to come back. I think Jack’s waiting for his chance to do it again. For his chance to burn.

Jack? Jack?

Are you in there, Jack?

I can still feel you, Jack. I know you’re there.

Jack?

Yeah, you’re there.

Hey, Jack? What you gonna do when you get back, Jack?

Yeah?

Jack says he’s gonna burn. Who Jack?

Jack says he’s gonna burn them all. Big Man, White Lady, Pretty Thing, Baby Face and Strange Boy. And Mad Scientist, Jack? Yeah, and Mad Scientist.

When, Jack?

Jack says it’s gonna be soon. Real soon. That’s good. Good that it’s soon.

I hate being alone.

And I do love a fire.
(JACK)

burn

burn burn burn

burn burn burn burn burn burn burn burn burn burn burn burn

burn burn burn burn burn burn burn burn burn burn

burn burn burn burn burn burn burn burn burn burn burn burn burn

burn burn burn burn burn burn burn burn burn

burn burn jack will

burn it all down
Will
Day 1 (they tell me)

I’m supposed to write in you, diary, so I better do it, just to keep them happy. They think that if I write then maybe I’ll start remembering. Don’t they realize they’ve got the wrong person, that there’s nothing to remember? I didn’t do anything. I don’t belong here. I’m innocent.

Get this, diary. The first thing I remember is waking up here, in this room. And I use the term room loosely. It’s more like a cell, with no window, a big old wooden door with a barred hole, and bricked walls like I’m in some kind of underground room. It has a cot bed and a toilet bowl. Nice. I woke up and here I was.

I don’t know how I got here and I don’t know how long I’d been sleeping before I woke up. They drugged me, you see. That’s why I’m not sure if it’s actually day 1 or not. I can only go on their word for it and they’re probably lying, trying to mess with my mind. Trying to catch me out like they do. Like Amos.

He gave me you, diary, the first time I talked to him. He came in, all tweed and compassion, followed by another guy in white clothes who stood in the doorway with his arms across his chest, trying to look tough. And he did.

Amos crouched down, and I guess that’s something they teach him in psycho school, to get on the prisoner’s level or something. Amos said it wasn’t the first time we’d met, which is probably a lie to throw me off but I couldn’t tell because of the drugs. Crafty, hey?

Amos said you would help me, diary, and I didn’t say anything. I’d decided, right from the start, not to say a word. I figured since I was under lock and key somewhere, and
I was too young for prison, and since the first person I saw was dressed in white clothes, I guessed I was in some sort of hospital. And I could guess what sort of hospital it was.

And I knew that, no matter what I said, they’d think I was nuts. If you’re in a place like this, people expect you to be crazy, that anything you say is the talk of a crazy person. It’s just a fact.

So I decided not to say anything. Nothing to nobody.

I think Amos was a little rattled by me not speaking. I could see his eyes pinching together behind his glasses. He said I was staying here for a while, until they could sort out who I was. In the meantime, he said he’d like me to write in you, diary, as much or as little as I’d like to, and here he handed me you, diary. He said all the patients taking part in his program had one, that it was part of the therapy to write down the things that I thought about or that popped into my head. Then Amos said nobody’s going to read my diary, that it’s mine and I don’t have to show him unless I want to. He gave me a blue Bic and he said to call Al if I ran out of ink and he’d get me another one, isn’t that right Al?

The big orderly rumbled that it was right.

Amos asked me if there was anything I’d like to tell him, and I just looked him right back and didn’t say anything. I stared and he stared. We must have sat there for a good five minutes, just staring at each other, before he sighed and stood up.

He said he’d see me soon and then he walked out, and Al locked the door behind them. I heard them talking as they walked away, Al dangling his ring of keys all the way up the hall. Then another door opened and closed, and the sound was gone.

I have to admit, as soon as I heard that outer door close, I threw you at the wall, diary, I did. I thought there was no way I’m doing anything Amos wanted me to and before I knew what was happening BANG! You hit the wall pretty good. I can throw, you know.
And then I saw you, diary, sitting there on the floor, your blank pages tucked under you, your hardcover dented at the top, and I just had to laugh. You are just a book, after all. It’s not your fault that I’m in here. It’s not your fault I can’t remember.

So I picked you up, and it was then that I saw the dirt.

There was a little pile on the floor. It was grey, like the stuff between the bricks of my cell, and when I searched for the spot on the wall where you’d hit, diary, I found a hole, like a dent. I touched it with my fingernail and more of the grey dirt came away. I dug in harder, deeper, and although it hurt my finger, I managed to scrape a hole big enough for my thumb.

Do you know what this means? It means I’ve found a way out. Escape. Freedom. I’ll just have to dig for it, that’s all, have to use something as a shovel or a pick. But I can do that. It’ll take time, but time’s one thing I’ve got in here.

So here we are, diary. Just you and me. You, me and a blue Bic pen. You know, I’m kind of surprised that someone like Amos would give a patient such a dangerous instrument. You could almost call it a weapon in the right hands.
I know who I am.
Day 2

Amos asks me questions.

How are you feeling?
Have you settled into your new room okay?
How are you getting along with the others?

But Amos also says things that aren’t really questions, but you can tell they are meant to be.

The infirmary checked you out when you first came here. There’s no physical reason for your inability to talk, no injury or pre-existing ailment. Do you know what that means? It means two things: one, that you not talking is a symptom of post-traumatic stress…or two, it’s a conscious decision on your part not to talk.

Which is it?

Amos gets angry.

These sessions only work if you open up to me. If you don’t communicate, I can’t help you. I can help you remember. The police found you wandering the streets in a daze, with no ID and no sign of where you came from. They bought you here so we…so I can help you piece something together, something that’s so painful your mind won’t let you remember it.

I can help you remember who you are.

And I don’t say anything to Amos when he says that.
Day 3

I think I know how this place works, diary. I realise I’ve only been here a while, but it doesn’t take a rocket scientist to work it out. Or a psychiatrist for that matter.

You see, the patients here are prisoners. We’re all in here for something that shouldn’t have happened, something shameful, and wrong, and evil. That’s why we’re locked away from the outside world, so the people outside don’t have to look at us and see all the things about themselves that they don’t want to face. Or are unwilling to face, in some cases. But what the people out there, the outside people, don’t realise is that in here – inside – it doesn’t matter what you did. You’re here now. That’s all that matters.

You see, diary, my new cellmates are the perfect example. The Nazi, the victim, the albino, the firestarter, the princess – every one of them is inside for one reason and one reason only. Murder. The most heinous crime imaginable. A crime so unthinkable that the outside world locks you away in the inside world for your whole, entire life. Either that or they kill you.

It’s probably that thought which makes one of the other prisoners out there cry at night. I can hear it from my cell. It’s soft, but whoever it is just cries and cries and cries. They cry all night. Baby.

See, I know that the outside world won’t kill you if you’re crazy. For some reason the outside people won’t pass judgement on a person whose mind is broken. If you’re crazy, then they only try to help you. They try to cure you. And even if you’re not crazy, if you say that you are, if you make out that you are, then that seems to be enough to get off the hook. To stop them killing you, that is.
Yes, diary, I know what you’re thinking. The doctors here are pretty smart. They should be able to tell the difference between one who’s faking it, and another who’s a complete psycho. You’d think that, wouldn’t you? Well, diary, you’d be wrong.

Take Amos for example. He’s so hung up on himself, so sure of himself, so certain that every patient is in here for a damn good reason that if he ever found out one of them was actually innocent, his world would come crashing down. That would mean all his research, all his questions, all his observations and deductions and best scientific guesses are wrong. All his experiments would be failures. It would mean Amos, and all the white coats in here, aren’t as good as they say they are. Not if they can’t tell the sane from the insane.

Hubris, the Greeks called it. The pride before the fall. Me, I call it a loophole. A way out. A weakness. Something I can exploit to get me out of here.

You see, diary, they don’t just let you out if you say you’re innocent. They don’t believe you, nobody does. I mean, c’mon – who in their right mind would believe what a mental patient says? Especially in Hobbs. There’s some real psychos in here.

But if I was to find a way to show Amos, to show all of them, that I’m not crazy at all, then that’s something I could use to get out of here, to get back outside. After all, this is no place for someone like me.
YOU WILL NEVER GET OUT
Day 5

I found a note slipped under my door when I came back from breakfast this morning, diary. A threat. A death threat, I think.

I don’t know why. I haven’t done anything to anybody here, I haven’t even talked. No one knows the truth, no one knows who I really am, so why would one of them threaten me? They are crazy, diary; you just have to look at them, to watch what they do, to listen, to see that. And when you’re crazy, killing someone is as good a reason as any for doing it. But which one is it?

Lulu’s possible. I’ve seen her walking along the fences, as if she’s trying to find a way out, and she’s always smiling, smiling at nothing and nobody. And I’ve seen her talking to herself, too, when she thinks no one is watching. Talking and smiling away, like whatever she’s saying makes her so happy. And when she talks to herself, she even answers; and when she answers her voice changes, so she does, just a little, sound like somebody else.

Could someone who does that be a killer? They say she slit her friend’s throat, some other blonde girl probably as vacuous as her. They say Lulu killed her out of jealousy, that the other girl was more beautiful than Lulu. I’ve seen Lulu looking at me in a certain way. A jealous way. So is she jealous of me, as well? Jealous of what?

Orrin, maybe. He’s already fought with one of the other prisoners, already used his fists instead of his brain. He’s brash, he’s big, and he looks like he’s not scared of anything. A neo-Nazi punk from the hills. No fear.
But I know something he fears. Orrin has something inside of him he doesn’t want to let out. Sometimes I watch him and he looks, honestly diary, he looks like he’s trying to shit, the effort is so much for him to hold back whatever it is that makes him want to punch, to hurt, to kill. Sometimes it looks so close to the surface that I just wait for someone to say something, or for something to happen, that will make Orrin let it out, give it its freedom, let what’s inside come. I just know that Orrin is a killer.

But would Orrin give me a warning? I doubt it. He doesn’t look the type to let you know he’s coming. He’d just do it, corner you somewhere dark and close, end it with his fists. He’s not the note writer.

Constance? Constance spends all her time cleaning, talking about cleaning, and thinking about cleaning. You can see it in her face at meal times, when she glances around at the other tables, sees their dirty plates, their spilled juice, their gravy-spotted cutlery. She starts to look nervous, anxious, and she taps her fingers on the table top, or on the chair, eyes darting, all full of longing and passion.

I heard that she killed her family with a rat poison pie, so I know she’s capable. I don’t know why the people here let her near the kitchen, if that’s the case, but she’s obviously got them fooled in some way. But Constance…I just don’t think so, diary. She may be a killer, but I don’t know why she’d want to kill me. She just keeps trying to be everyone’s grandma, and half the time she succeeds. Then again, she’s always saying we’re her family now, and the only reason that’s true is because she killed her real family. So maybe that’s reason enough for her. Who can tell with the people in here?

Derek’s even less likely than the albino, diary. He’s a weed, a runt. He’s like the errand boy of the prisoners here, the buttboy, able to get you anything you want, apparently. I’ll have to put in an order. The blue Bic that Amos gave me is starting to run out, and I’ve been using it to dig at the hole in the wall of my cell at night, and if I asked Al
for a new pen he’d take the old one off me, I just know he would. Al’s about the only one here who seems to know what we’re capable off. I’ll have to keep my eye on him. I’ll have to ask Derek to get me some pencils, instead of pens. They last longer.

But I don’t think Derek’s the note writer. I’ve seen him writing things to himself, like lists. They could be notes instead. But why would Derek want me dead? He thinks I’m his friend, I’ve fooled him that much. No. Not Derek.

Could it be Jack? The firestarter? I heard he burnt his mother and her pimp to death, put the whole building to the torch to get them. I watch Jack in here, and I can almost see the fire in his eyes. I watch him looking at things, looking at people, and I know he sees everything as ash, as if he’s already burnt it in his imagination. I’m sure he imagines the prisoners’ faces like melted wax, the rooms as gutted and scorched, the whole prison a raging, out of control inferno. You can see it in his eyes, if you know what to look for. It could be Jack. It really could.

To be honest, though, diary, it could really be any one of them. Hell, it could even be the other prisoner, the one in cell 8 they don’t let out for meals, or for exercise, or for anything. The prisoner across from me.

It could even be him, diary. Yes, it could.
More questions from Amos, so many, he pummels me with questions. How are you? Still not talking? Do you remember your parents? Do you remember their names? How about where you live, do you remember the address? The house? The street? What about your bedroom? What’s it like? What posters do you have on the walls? What’s the colour of your bedspread? Do you have any friends? What are their names? What do you do with them? Why don’t you talk to me? Do you have a problem with me, is that it? I’m your doctor, I only want to help you. You do know that, don’t you? Why won’t you talk? What are you trying to prove? There’s no medical reason why you shouldn’t be able to talk, nothing at all stopping you. Except maybe yourself. Are you doing this yourself, consciously? Is this a decision of yours, not to talk? Are you afraid? Are you scared that if you talk, you won’t be able to stop what comes out? What are you hiding? What is it you don’t want to say? Is it something about your parents? Were you there? Did you see it happen? Did you see them get shot? Is that why you won’t talk? Did you do it? Did you kill them? Was it you?

Will?
That crazy bitch Lulu. I think she’s the one.

She attacked me today in the lunch line. Just walked right up to me, grabbed me around the neck and squeezed. It surprised me so much that she got a good grip on me before I even knew what was going on.

She fell on top of me. Her nails were digging into my neck and I know this sounds strange, diary, but Lulu’s lips were painted this bright pink and all I could do was stare at them, at that smile, while she choked me. It was the smile of some animal. A Barbie pink hyena.

Her eyes were wild and she was saying something like don’t look at her, over and over again, and I couldn’t get any air, diary, and Lulu’s smile, that perfect smile, filled my vision and, as I watched, it slowly started to fade away and I knew that I was dying.

My vision went white at the edges, and splotchy, Lulu’s face bubbling, dissolving, fading. Her lips parted and she bared her teeth, still smiling but more like grinning now, a rictus grin that was slowly, ever so slowly, washing away to nothing. It was strange, diary, because I always thought it goes black when you die, like at the end of a movie. But this was white.

Pure white.

Then all of a sudden I could breathe and the white snapped away and I was looking at grey, the grey of the ceiling, and there were hands on my arms lifting me up. Everything was too bright and my neck hurt and my chest was heavy.
I saw Lulu being dragged away by some of the guards. She was screaming, spitting, slashing with her fingernails. She was crying out “You’re dead! You’re dead!” the whole time, and I could even hear it when they got her out of the room and closed the door, she was yelling so loud.

That’s what makes me think she’s the one, diary. The one who wants to kill me in here.
Day 11

Jack set fire to something today, big surprise there, diary.

We were out in the yard where they let us go twice a day for exercise. I was surprised, the first day I was here, that the yard didn’t have one of those long white lines on it, and doubly surprised that they didn’t make us all walk along it, shuffling like zombies forced to exercise for our own benefit. Instead, the yard’s just this open bit of grass and tables and trees, and they pretty much let us just wander around as we please. Of course, even though it seems like you’re free for that small amount of time, there’s always someone watching you, somewhere.

I saw Jack heading towards the trees and he looked, for the first time, happy with himself, so I knew something must have been up. Happiness stands out in a place like Hobbs, like a toenail that needs to be cut off before it scratches.

Jack had some paper in his hand, the same sort of paper you’re made up of, diary, and I thought, then and there, that Jack was secreting himself away to write; and I thought then that he must be the writer, writing me another letter, another death threat. So I followed him and watched him from behind one of the trees.

There was Jack, bending down, with Amos’s silver Zippo in his hand. I could even see the flowery initials, and the silver casing glinting in the sun, so I knew Jack must have been the one who stole the precious lighter.

Then Jack spread some paper out and sparked the flame to life.

You should have seen him, diary. Our Jack, all he could do was stare at that flicker of flame, stare at it like it was the only thing in the whole world, like there was nothing else
to look at, nothing else that mattered. It made his eyes bright and feverish, and I thought
for a moment that that was all he was going to do, just stare at his little piece of fire until
one of the guards noticed and took it from him.

I was wrong, of course. You can always count on firestarters to start more fires.
It’s just a matter of means.

Jack touched the Zippo to the paper and all of a sudden there was yelling and
running and one of the guards, I don’t know which one, went barrelling into Jack like he
was a football tackle, and they fell together in the dirt. The paper curled at the edges as the
fire spread, and I could see the silver Zippo lying beside it. Jack must have dropped it
when the guard hit him.

Jack was screaming at the top of his lungs, and biting and clawing at the guard, but
the guard just held him down and called out for help. I could hear more running footsteps,
coming closer, and I thought about running myself. I didn’t want to get caught along with
Jack. I didn’t want Amos to have something over me, something he could use later to get
me to talk.

I turned to go and Al and another guard came running up and they didn’t even look
at me, so intent they were on getting to Jack. Al’s foot hit the Zippo, spinning it away in
the dust, and I watched as they grabbed Jack’s arms and legs and hefted him into the air.
Jack fought at them but it was no use. The prisoners are no match for the guards in here.

They carried Jack away and I watched him go, we all did diary, because by now all
the others had come over to see. Then we all sort of walked off on our own again.

But diary, here’s the strange part. After everyone had gone, I went back, just to see
if I could find Amos’s lighter. I thought I might have been able to use it as a bargaining
chip some time, or as evidence or something. But I couldn’t find it, diary. The Zippo was
gone.
So someone else has the lighter now. I wonder who it is. And I wonder what they’ll do with it.
Day 13

I can’t sleep, diary. I can hear a clock ticking somewhere, close enough to discern but far enough away that the sound is more of a vibration, more a hum than an actual noise. It’s there when I close my eyes; reverberating on the backs of my lids, thrumming my brain, making the little hairs on the back of my neck stand up. Whatever it is, it’s enough to keep me awake at night. Maybe it’s one of Amos’s games. Another one.

He got me again tonight, only a few hours ago. Pumped me full of power to see what would happen, to see what I’d remember. The fool.

He doesn’t get it, does he, diary? There’s nothing there and still he persists, still he believes what he is doing is right. He says he’s trying to help me remember who I am, remember what made me like this. But you can’t make someone remember something that never happened to them. You can’t make someone think they’re someone they’re not. Can you?

Maybe that’s what his precious ECT is for. To put things in my head, in all our heads, things that aren’t real. Maybe he’s planting memories in our minds, making us commit to false confessions, to own up to things we haven’t done but which others say we have. Things he thinks we’ve done. Yes. That sounds like something Amos would do.

Then maybe it’s time I did it too. Maybe it’s time I planted some of my own false memories. Only this time in Amos’s head. See how he likes it.
Day 15

That boy in cell 8 is laughing again. I wish he’d stop it.

When I first heard it, I thought it was crying, and after a while I thought it must have been Derek. I’ve seen what the bigger prisoners do to him, what they make him do when the guards aren’t looking. I’ve seen Derek come back from the showers walking a certain way, a way that means someone’s had another go at him. So he seems the most likely to cry himself to sleep at night. But I know it’s not Derek. Derek’s cell is just too far away from mine, there’s no way I’d be able to hear him. Sound doesn’t echo down here, it’s weird, diary. Like we’re too far underground for the noise to go anywhere. Like maybe Amos soundproofed the wing in some way, to keep the sound of outside getting inside. Or to keep in the screams.

I think that’s why Al dangles his keys when he comes to get us. Otherwise we wouldn’t know he’s coming at all.

I also know it’s not Derek because last night I heard it again. The laughing.

I went to my door and I looked. The hall was empty and blue because of the light bulb that makes it feel like you’re living in a bug zapper. I looked down as far as I could, all the way to Derek’s door, but his little barred window was dark. So were the others, and when I strained to look, I couldn’t see anything on my side of the hall either.

Then there was a flash, like a gun going off, and I turned my head and saw that light was coming from the cell across from mine, the one with an almost faded number 8 stencilled to the door. The cell that Al doesn’t go to at meal times, the cell that Amos doesn’t even glance at when he’s doing his rounds. The cell that is never opened.
There was light in the window. A flickering. And I knew then that the laughing boy was in there, that that was the cell where he slept. I tried to talk to him, to tell him my name, but he wouldn’t listen. Ignored me, like I wasn’t there.

I’ve thought about it a lot since last night, diary. It’s been on my mind. I’ve been trying to work out why they’d keep someone locked up so tight, away from everybody else. Why they’d only let him out when no one else was around. And I think I’ve worked it out. That boy must be the craziest one in here.

See, diary, if you’re really crazy, that’s what they do. If you commit a crime that’s so horrific that the outside world can’t even bear to look at you, something so bad that you get locked away in a hole in the ground, then the crime you committed must be the worst there can be. Even worse than murder.

And if what the laughing boy’s done is so bad, so very, very wrong, that Amos doesn’t even let him out, then that’s a good enough reason to keep an eye on him. That boy could be the most dangerous one of us in here.

I wonder, though diary, where he got the lighter from. What I mean, diary, is if he’s not let out, then how would he get something like that?

Unless someone gave it to him. That would be the only way.
Day 17

I saw the boy in cell 8 today. He started a fire.

I heard him first. I was sitting with my back against the door, because I can tell if someone’s coming then, I can feel the rhythm of their footsteps on the floor when I do that, and I heard a rustling sound out in the hall. I looked through the little barred window and I saw him.

He was slipping bits of paper out of his own barred window, reaching out with his hand and dropping the paper on the floor in a little pile. He was aiming away from his door, in front of Jack’s door, and the paper, diary, looked a lot like yours. It was covered with writing as well but I couldn’t make any of it out, I was too far away. This makes me think the laughing boy must be a part of Amos’s therapy as well, if he’s got a diary too, and I nearly laughed myself as I pictured what Amos’s face would look like if he saw one of his patients throwing away their memories like that. I don’t think he’d like that at all.

Soon there was a pile of paper in the hall and I was beginning to wonder what the boy was doing, when I saw that flicker of light again, behind his bars. I couldn’t make out his face very well – all I saw was a shadow of a cheekbone through the bars – but I could see the lighter this time, the silver lighter.

Then, diary, the laughing boy’s hand came out of the window again and this time he was holding a piece of paper that was alight on the corner but quickly burning. The boy let go of the paper and it fell almost serenely towards the pile, floating like a falling leaf from an old tree.

Then it went up.
The paper burnt fast, sending smoke towards the blue light bulb, and the fire cackled and spat and I knew someone would hear it soon enough. I could see faces in the other windows – Derek at the far end, his forehead crinkled with worry like it always is, like he’s the one who’s going get into trouble for it, and Jack, staring at the fire like he’d conjured it himself, from his dreams.

I looked away, towards the laughing boy’s cell, but he wasn’t looking out anymore, I couldn’t see him at all now. It was like he disappeared.

Then the door at the end slammed open and Al came pounding in and told us to keep the noise down, which by this time was pretty loud because Constance was crying and Orrin was yelling. Al stamped the fire out, hollering himself as the flames licked his ankles, and although it had looked like a promising fire to begin with, it soon went out. He cleaned it up, and once he’d done that he stopped and talked to Jack for a little while.

I debated then, diary, whether to tell Al the truth or not, to let him know that it wasn’t Jack who started the fire but the boy in the cell across from mine. But I didn’t. I didn’t tell him because I know why the laughing boy did it. I know what he was trying to achieve by starting a fire near Jack’s cell, a fire he knew Jack would get the blame for.

He was trying to get out.

Maybe he thought that if he did something big enough, then they’d have to evacuate the whole wing and he’d finally be let out of his cell. Maybe he did it so he could simply see the sun again. Maybe he did it so Amos would pay him some attention, help him to remember just like Amos says he’s helping all us. Or maybe he did it because he’s sick of being inside all the time and he just wants to get out. I know that feeling all too well, diary.

Unfortunately, though, it didn’t work. Al put the fire out before it could spread, and he never let any of us out of our cells because of it. The boy’s plan didn’t work.
But I know how it could work, diary. Yes I do. You see, diary, the fire the boy started was too small. It didn’t cause enough damage. What we need is a bigger one. A fire so big that Amos will have to let us out. All of us, including the boy in cell 8.

And I think I know just how to do it.
YOU WILL NEVER GET OUT
Day 19

Amos and his fucking machine. He strapped me into it last night, again. Zaps me. Fucker.

And talked. All he does is talk, talk, talk.

I’m sorry for the delay in your therapy, but there’s something I want to talk to you about. I was speaking with a friend from the newspapers earlier tonight, about a home invasion in which two people were killed. It happened on the same night you were bought here to Hobbs. Do you know what my newspaper friend told me?

She said there were no signs of forceful entry to the house, a house with a rather sophisticated security system as well. That means that it was an inside job, that whoever killed the couple knew the security codes, had a key etcetera. Do you understand?

She also said the motive for the crime wasn’t robbery, as was originally thought, since nothing was taken from the home when the police arrived.

And she said that the murder weapon is still missing.

What do you think about that?

You know, your lack of communication is really starting to get on my nerves. I know you know what I’m talking about. I can see it written on your face.

I’m getting tired of the game you’re playing here. Do you want to know what else my friend at the newspaper told me?

She said the couple had a sixteen year old son who has since gone missing. Do you know what that means? It means the police are looking for you, right now, and all I have to do is make a phone call and they’ll come here to Hobbs and they’ll take you to a state hospital where you won’t receive anything like the treatment you get here. Where you’ll be
little more than an animal to them, something to label insane and lock away for a very, very long time.

Do you hear me?

Do you want me to call the police, is that it? Do you want me to tell them who you are? Is that what you want?

Godammit, why won’t you answer me? Say something! Say anything! Deny it at least! Shout at me, bite me, scratch me, do anything the others do, just SHOW ME SOMETHING!

Right, that’s it.

Let’s see if I can’t shock the truth out of you.

Amos flicks the switch.
Day 20

Amos is getting closer. I don’t like that, diary. I don’t like it here either, not anymore, not that I ever did. I’ve been chiseling away at the hole in the wall, diary, the one you found for me, and it looks like my escape plan has been put on hold. I’ve reached another brick, only this one isn’t loose. It’s solid, like stone. There’s no escaping through there.

But at least I have somewhere to hide things, like the notes I keep getting, and you, diary. The new note was on my pillow when I came back from breakfast. I don’t know how it got there, but I suppose it would have been easy for someone to put it there since they leave our doors open when we’re gone.

I’m starting to think it might be the laughing boy, the one in cell 8, but that means that the boy in cell 8 must be let out, at least sometimes. Otherwise he wouldn’t have been able to put the note on my pillow. Either that or it’s what I originally thought – that someone is helping him, probably the same person who gave him Amos’s silver lighter.

Could it be Al? He wants us to think he’s our friend. He always talks to us, cleans up our messes, bandages our bruises, and because he does that we’re supposed to trust him? I don’t trust him, diary. Nobody does that without their own reasons for doing it, and in a place like Hobbs those reasons could be anything. No. I don’t think Al would let him out, even when nobody’s around. I know Al follows us to the meal room and out in the yard when we’re let out because he was there when Lulu attacked me, when Orrin hit the black guy, when Jack tried to start his fire out in the yard that day. He’s always there, watching
us, making out that he’s protecting us but really he’s just keeping an eye on us because he
knows how dangerous we all are.

So Al wouldn’t be able to let the boy in cell 8 out. And Amos certainly wouldn’t, no sir, diary.

So it’s not him, diary. It must be one of the others.

Their faces have changed, diary, since I first saw them. Now they look crazier than ever, as if what Amos has done to them has worked the opposite way to what he wanted. It’s like Amos’s machine has unhinged them all, brought the real them to the surface for all to see; and the real them is not a good them, if you know what I mean.

So which one is it? Which one wants me dead? It could be any one of them, diary. I think the only way I’m going to find out is if I can compare the handwriting of the other prisoners with the notes. If I can match up the writing, then I’ll know.

I just have to get my hands on their diaries, diary. That’s how I’ll know for sure which one of these prisoners wants me dead. But how do I do that?
Day 22

I have a plan.

I think I have to get them on my side, diary. The other prisoners. I have to convince them that I'm one of them. I know they think I'm not because I don't talk to them, ever. So maybe that's the answer. Maybe I just need to talk to them, explain it all to them, show them what's really going on in here, with all of us, with Amos.

Then, when they trust me and believe me and I've convinced them that I mean them no harm, only then will I be able to get away with what I plan to do, the thing that will help me find out which one of these psychos is the note writer and let the boy in cell 8 out at the same time.

Yes.

It's time to talk.
I’m ready to tell you what happened now. I’m sorry it’s taken me so long. It’s hard for me, being in here. I feel like I’ve been locked away from the world and made to sit in a corner, as if I’ve done something wrong, as if I deserve to be a prisoner. But I don’t. I’m innocent.

My father was at the forefront of my life. He was a professor of English, had a Masters in Psychology too. He used to say to me, “You will be a writer, and a doctor,” but he never really specified which type – a doctor of letters or a doctor of the mind. It didn’t matter to him which one I became. Just as long as I did what he told me to.

My mother was a shadow in my life. Always there, behind my father, behind me. Would never speak unless spoken to, unless my father asked her for something, to which she would simply say, “Yes,” with some appropriate title at the end, like “dear,” or “honey,” or “sir.”. I often wondered what my mother had wanted for her life, before she met my father. She never said it, I never asked. I never knew what she wanted for me either, and given her way it wouldn’t have mattered. She would have simply said what my father said, to please him.

My childhood…I don’t know if it could even be called that. I never felt like a child at the time, since my father chose everything for me: my clothes, my hobbies, my books. Especially the books. My father gave me so many books that I cannot remember ever receiving anything but books on my birthday, as Christmas presents, as treats. So many books that my room, as the years went by, came to resemble a library and not a child’s room at all.

My father thought me a prodigy. I suppose I was. Or am, I’m not sure – can you still be a prodigy if you’re not a child any more? Or are you classed as something else, someone else, when childhood is behind you? Just a normal, everyday genius, maybe? My
father didn’t want me to be normal. He drilled me, grilled me, taught me, pushed me. The more he did, the more he made me what he wanted me to be.

At first, I was fine with this. I hadn’t known any different, didn’t realise that there was a world away from what your father told you and your mother didn’t. Sure, I saw it every now and again. The desk my father made me sit at, day in, day out, didn’t have a window; but if I strained against the straps on the chair, and leant just enough, I could see out the bedroom door to the small, barred window in the hall, at the sunlight outside, the people walking past our house, so normal in their lives. They always looked so happy.

I don’t think I ever was, though. I was never happy with all the books. Never happy when my father would test me, ten, twenty, sometimes thirty hours straight, a question added for every question I didn’t get right. I was never happy when he starved me because I didn’t know this, or struck me because I didn’t know that. If I ever said, “I don’t know,” he would push my face into the book so hard my head would ring from the blows, from the words. No, I was never happy. Not then, at least.

The night my parents were killed, I was asleep. They’d gone out to dinner with some friends while I’d stayed home to study, and they were later than they usually were. That night they came home just on midnight, I know because the sound of them opening the front door woke me and the first thing I saw was the numbers of the alarm clock flashing in my eyes. I stayed where I was, already heading back to sleep. I didn’t really want to see them, to be honest.

There was a noise, though, and sleep eluded me.

I thought at first it was my mother getting the tea down from the kitchen cupboard. It sounded like that, the familiar squeaky click of the hinges, a sound I’ll always remember and equate to my family, since my room is right near the kitchen. But I could still hear both my parents in the front room, talking.
The noise had definitely come from the kitchen because I heard it again. For some reason the noise, as innocuous as it was, sounded wrong to me. It felt as if someone else was in the house, someone other than me and my parents.

I crept over to the door, the beam of light coming through the keyhole the only I had to see by. My legs were rubber yet every footstep sounded, to me, like a thunderclap. Crouching down, I put my cheek against the door and, not knowing what to expect, not knowing what I’d see, I looked through the keyhole.

The kitchen was empty.

Then the talking in the front room abruptly stopped. I turned and put my ear against the wall, knowing from past experience that I could hear quite well if I pushed my cheek tight against the wall. I heard a voice, unmistakably my father’s, ask a gruff question. I heard my mother’s nervous laugh, as if what she saw she instantly thought was some kind of joke, it was so unexpected.

Then I realised – there was someone else with them.

There was talking then, from the other person in the room. They, I mean he, it sounded like a he, said something but it was too low for me to make out through the wall. My knees were aching and I shifted my legs, only to cringe in fear as my knee knocked the wall solidly.

The talking stopped. He, the stranger, asked a question to which my father barked back at him.

Then came the gunshot.

It seemed to reverberate through the wall, to sting my ear, to scratch my cheek it was so loud and harsh and definitive. I reeled away, suddenly scared, really scared for the first time I could ever remember. I looked around my bedroom wildly, looking for somewhere to hide. All I could see was books, hundreds and hundreds of books, and I
knew they wouldn’t protect me. I knew the killer had heard me, knew he would be coming for me once he’d finished in the front room.

There was nowhere to go. My father had a security system, which included screens on all the windows much like bars. There was no way out of the bedroom that wouldn’t take me past the front room.

I heard my mother scream.

Then the scream was cut off by another gunshot.

My eyes searched the room frantically, falling on my wardrobe. Part of the old cupboard, I knew, had a small space that was concealed by a set of drawers, and I hoped it would be large enough for me to squeeze into. I once used the spot as a hiding place when I was younger, and it had felt big back then so there might have been room now. It was my only chance.

I skidded across the floor and wrenched the door open. Carefully I tipped the drawers back until I could see the space and, getting my legs in, I reached over and clicked the door shut.

Inside, the wardrobe was dark, far darker than my room had been, and I quickly wriggled myself inside the hole. The drawers fell back into place, sealing me in and, I hoped, hiding me.

The darkness felt like it was right in front of my face. Oppressive. I thought that if I leant forward, my nose would touch wood after less than an inch, as if I was curled up in a coffin. The thought made me want to scream.

But I couldn’t. For my bedroom door was opening.

Blood pumped in my head, sounding like booms so loud I thought they would surely give me away. I looked at the darkness, knowing that soon I would join my parents, that I would be dead.
The killer walked into my room, his footsteps light and sure.

I stifled my breathing, though the sound was still abysmally loud to my ears.

The killer sat down on my bed on the saggy side, I heard it, and I knew he was facing the wardrobe. I couldn’t tell you how long he sat there, or how long I held my breath as he did, but it felt like days. Every second seemed an hour.

Finally he moved, springing from the bed and striding towards the wardrobe as if he could sense me there, somehow. I scrunched in tighter, praying he wouldn’t turn on the light, hoping he wouldn’t look too closely. The door slammed open. The killer’s hand touched the top of the drawers, his fingers closing over the wood tightly. My mind screamed and my body tensed.

He tilted the drawers, the same way I had, and something dark and hot went sailing past my face. It hit the back wall and fell in the small space between me and wall, and I was thankful it had, for if it had landed in my lap the killer wouldn’t have heard that wooden thump and I wouldn’t be here to write this today.

Then he let go of the drawers, rocking them back into place, and in the briefest of moments it went dark again as he closed the wardrobe. I heard his footsteps hurry across the room and out into the kitchen. A moment later the front door opened then slammed shut. Then there was silence.

You know, I’m more ashamed of what I did next than anything else that happened that night. I may have thought only of my own safety when I heard that first gunshot, but I know in my heart that my parents would have wanted me to live. I am their boy, after all. So I did the only thing I could think of. I ran.

I had to. I was so scared, scared out of my mind, that when I’d struggled out of the space in the wardrobe and out of my room, and when I saw my parents lying there in all
that blood, my father's face against the carpet, my mother's hair straggling about her in blotchy curls, the only thing I could do was run. I ran for my life.

And that's how I ended up here, in this cell, writing all this down for you.

I don't belong here. What you're doing to me, I don't need it, I don't deserve it. The others do, for the things they've done, but I haven't done anything.

I hope you read what I've written here and I hope you read it well. I know you have your own ideas of what I am, of who I am or who you think I am, but you're wrong. I'm the only innocent one in here.

Please let me out.
Day 28

Tomorrow night is the night. It has to be, diary. **I’m running out of time.** At midnight tomorrow night Amos *will* come for me and that *will* be that.

He’s already made up his mind about me, worked me out from a so-called confession I apparently left for him. But I didn’t write it, diary. It’s not my confession at all.

I know the truth and I think it’s time I told you, diary. I know, I know – I shouldn’t. There’s no telling who *will* read this after I’m gone. But I’m going to hide you, diary, in the hollow I’ve made, along with everything else I’m going to get tomorrow night. All the other prisoner’s pages, anything I can get my hands on in the confusion that follows – I’m going to get them all and put them where they won’t be found or used against me. It’s the only thing I have left, the only thing I can do to save my life.

Because if Amos knew what I’m about to tell you, diary, then there’d be no saving me. **I’m not who they think I am.** And somebody else in here knows that.

You see, diary, someone’s trying to set me up. I came back to my cell this afternoon and found something under my pillow. I thought, first off, that it was another note, another death threat, because when I reached under my pillow I felt paper, blank paper once I’d opened it. But there was something else, as well, something the paper was wrapped around. I felt metal. Cool, smooth metal.

Someone has planted Amos’s precious lighter in my cell, the same one who wrote the notes to me. Someone who wants me to get caught with it. Someone who wants me
dead. And it’s not just the silver lighter either. They left me a bottle of lighter fluid as well.

I’m going to find out which one it is. I tried getting them to trust me. I talked to them about unifying, about what we have to do to stand together against Amos and his special therapy. They didn’t listen. They just looked at me like I was crazy. Like I was one of them. They don’t realize that the only way to stop Amos is if we all work together.

I have to get my hands on their writing. If I do, I can compare it with the notes I’ve gotten, and then I’ll know which one it is and then I’ll know which one wants to kill me. Then I can stop them. You see, diary, I may not be who I am. But that doesn’t mean I don’t want to live.

Tomorrow night I’m going to start a fire, another one they can blame on poor little Jack. He seems like the likeliest culprit, so no one will suspect me. I’ll start the fire and it will be so big that Al has to open the doors, all the doors, and while everyone is running for their lives, I’m going to find out two things.

One: which of these psychos wants to kill me, and

Two: who the boy in cell 8 is.

Because they’ll have to let him out this time. Especially since I’m going to set fire to his door first.
Day 30

I don’t think I’ve ever getting out of here, diary. The others are gone, taken away to nice safe rooms above me. I can almost hear their footsteps through the stone ceiling as Al leads them up, up and away. But not me.

I’m still in this cell.

I lit the fire, diary, and nothing changed. I waited until I saw Amos take the albino into the room at the back, and I knew I had about ten minutes, because that was usually how long Amos talked to each of us for.

So I gently, oh so gently pushed the flask of lighter fluid through the bars of my window, careful not to scratch the metal in case the sound roused the others, and I reached out as far as I could, my cheek tight against the bars, and squeezed. The fluid squirted across the hall, hitting the door to cell 8, and I squeezed and squeezed until the bottle was empty. By the time I was finished, the door was saturated and the air was ripe with the smell of fuel.

I tossed the empty flask at cell 8 and I knew I had to work fast – the noise of the tin hitting the wood was sure to alert one of the other prisoners. I took Amos’s silver lighter, reached out through the bars once more, and thumbed the flame.

And then I saw him.

The boy. He was looking at me, through the bars of his cell. Only now he wasn’t laughing. Now he was just staring.
I tossed Amos’s lighter at the door to cell 8 and it exploded. The fire leapt up and out, scorching the ceiling and the hall, the flame bubbling the ceiling paint, and for a moment I thought that would be enough, that it would catch on the wood and then they’d have to let us all out, especially the boy in cell 8.

But I could see that the fire was exhausting itself, that it had nothing to catch on and that the flames would quickly go out. If that happened, the only thing Al would do is clean it up; he wouldn’t let us out, just like he hadn’t the time of the other fire. And that wouldn’t do at all.

So I turned to you, diary, because I thought I could use some of your blank pages, the ones at the back. But when I flicked you open, do you know what I found? You weren’t as blank as I originally thought.

Inside there were pages and pages of writing.

Pages that I didn’t write.

Things I never wrote, or said, or thought.

Writing that wasn’t my own.

Words that weren’t mine.

Someone down the end, it sounded like Lulu, was calling out and Al was only the turn of a key away, so I ripped out all the pages that weren’t mine and I threw them at cell 8.

The pages caught and the fire took off. There was screaming now and Al came bursting through the door, his keys ringing in his hand. He sprinted up the hall, past all our cells, past Orrin hollering and Derek crying and Jack’s satisfied grin and Lulu hitting the bars, and he was yelling himself, calling Amos’s name. He wrenched the door open and Constance and Amos spilled out, coughing at the smoke that now blanketed the ceiling.
Al hustled them down the hall and he was yelling at us, saying he’d be back soon, telling us all to hold on. The fire was all around him and he pushed Constance and Amos towards the exit and spun around, and at that moment he looked right at me, and I hoped, diary, oh how I hoped he’d fall for my next trick.

I said, “Help me.”

Al was so stunned he just stared at me for a full second, diary, before he lurched over to my door. I guess when you don’t talk for a month, and then you do, it gets people’s attention.

Beating at the flames, he opened my door, shouted for me to get out, then he turned and disappeared into the smoke, the sound of his key chain clanging in tune to the alarm bells that were now going off. I slipped straight into the smoke after Al, dodging past him as he opened Jack’s door. I made my way through the fiery hallway.

I waited until I saw a few figures stumble past, one of them Orrin by the size, then I snuck back into the smoke. Flames beat at me like hot tongued dogs, but I pushed on, going through each of the rooms, finding the other prisoner’s diaries and taking as many of their pages as I could. I couldn’t see, the smoke made my eyes water, so I just grabbed what I could, I needed their writing, hoping I had enough to prove which one of them wanted to kill me.

I stumbled back to my cell and hid all of it away, in the hollow in the wall, and once the brick was back in place there was only one thing left to do. The boy.

I stepped back into the hall. The smoke was sulfurous, cloying at my throat viciously, and I could barely see in front of me. Someone pushed past me, I think it was Derek, babbling about a dam or something, and I got all turned around. The air was like soup and I could hear the flames crackling close by, closer then was safe.
Then the smoke parted and the door to cell 8 appeared like a wraith. It was still closed, and it was blackened, but the fire on the wood was almost out. Only a few licks of flame remained, and my ruse with the fire had almost played itself out.

I ran to the cell and threw myself against the door, grabbing the bars and trying with all my strength to wrench it open. I tugged and tugged but the door wouldn’t budge, and I wondered if maybe the fire had melted the hinges or something, making it impossible to actually open. It would be just my luck that my plan would backfire and, instead of freeing him, I would trap the boy in cell 8 down here, inside, forever.

I looked through the bars frantically and there he was, the boy. He was sitting in the corner of the cell with his arms over his face like a frightened child, and with the flames still raging in the hallway, my shadow fell across him like a scythe.

He turned to face me and I realized then that he wasn’t scared at all. His face, when he stared me, wasn’t streaked with tears and his mouth wasn’t set in a grimace of a frown.

Instead, he was smiling. Smiling at me.

Then a strong hand grabbed my shoulder, trying to pull me away, but I held onto the bars of cell 8, keeping my eyes on the boy’s face, locking my fingers around the bars. Al’s face appeared close to mine, yelling to let go, but I couldn’t, I wouldn’t, I wasn’t going to leave him there, all alone, in the dark, not again.

But Al was too strong for me. He tore me from the bars and carried me away, and I saw, in the moment before the smoke engulfed us, I saw the boy in cell 8 staring at me, his eyes wide, his grin like a hyena, his face fading into the darkness.

Then Al slumped to the floor and I could see light all around us, and the other prisoners were all sitting on the floor, coughing and crying, and Amos was staring dazedly around, and more guards were rushing into the wing with fire extinguishers. Al put me down gently and sat down himself, breathing heavily and coughing a little.
And I thought that was that. But I was wrong.

You know, diary, I lit the fire so that they’d have to let me out. But it still wasn’t enough. Even though the place is blackened, smoke hangs in the air, and the whole wing smells like wet charcoal, I’m still here. In here.

Amos wants to keep me here.

Amos needs to keep me here.

I could tell by the look in his eyes. They were red from all the smoke but I could see the suspicion in them. The fear. The knowledge. I think he’s worked me out. And that scares me, diary.

Al’s taken the others away, but not before he locked me back in here, in my cell, even though the door’s all burnt. He mustn’t have liked doing it either, diary. I could tell by the look on his face. But Amos’s word is law in here, and Al has to follow it.

Then Amos was there, at the doorway, moving through the smoke like a ghost. He told me that tonight’s ECT had been put back – but not put off – and that he’d come back himself and get me at sunrise. Al looked at him sort of funny when he said that and I guessed he didn’t like it, but like I said, Amos is God here.

Then God called me by a name that wasn’t my own.

That’s how I know I’m in trouble.

You see, diary, I’ve read the other prisoners’ stories, now that I’ve been back in the cell and dawn is close. I now know who wrote the notes to me.

I wrote them.

Shut up!

It’s true, Will. It was me.
Quiet, Billy! I don’t want to hear from you. You’ll get your chance to talk soon enough, once Amos is finished with me. You’ve seen to that, what with the little confession you wrote for him. You’ve condemned me.

**You locked me away.**

No, you locked yourself away. You put yourself in the darkness, just like you did the gun that killed your parents, secreting it in the space in the wardrobe, the space where you used to hide yourself when things happened that you didn’t want to deal with. You hid all the time, leaving it to me, leaving me to deal with the outside world while you stayed inside, leaving me with them.

**I love my parents.**

Bullshit! You hated your parents. All they did was lock you away with your books, trying to make you something you’re not, trying to make you normal. They never saw you. They never listened to you. That’s why you killed them.

**I’m innocent.**

You’re a killer, Billy.

**You’re the killer, Will.**

We’re both the killer, can’t you see that? They came home that night and we decided we’d had enough of it all, didn’t we? We decided that tonight would be the night, and we went to the kitchen cupboard and reached behind the tea to where we knew our father kept his gun, and then we went to our parents and we tried to tell them that we’d had enough, that we wanted to be let out, that we hated being kept inside all the time, behind their bars and buried in their books.

And when our mother laughed at us and when our father ordered us back to our room, what did you do?

I hid.
Yes, you did. You hid away and you left it to me to deal with it and you know what happened then, don’t you?

**You shot them.**

We shot them, Billy. Both of us. We put our father’s gun to their heads and we pulled the trigger. You and me. Together. And then, together, we hid the gun in our secret place and then, together, we ran.

**No, you did that. Not me.**

That’s what Amos thinks, isn’t it? That it’s just me, Will, and poor little defenseless Billy had nothing to do with it. I know that’s what he thinks. I know that’s why he only cares about us now and not the others any more. That’s why Amos wants to hook me up to his magic machine and push the button again and again.

Amos is the one who wants to kill me. He thinks it will save me but it won’t. He’s going to do it to me again, as soon as the sun comes up.

**YOU WILL NEVER GET OUT**

That may be true, Billy, you’re probably right. I don’t think even I can survive out here after another dose of Amos’s medicine, not at the rate he’s going to dish it out. But do you know something, Billy?

**What?**

If I die, then you’ll die with me. Maybe not tonight, Billy, but definitely someday. Someday I’m going to come back and you won’t be able to keep me inside any more. And on that day, well…you’d better just wait and see which one of us ends up back in cell 8, in the darkness.

Let’s just wait and see, Billy. Your time will come.

**DEADBOY**

**DEADBOY**
YOU’RE A DEADBOY

No, my name is Will.
AFTERWORD

In October of 2006, a package arrived on my desk at the University of Melbourne bearing the return address Hobbs Home for the Criminally Insane, Sydney. Needless to say I was intrigued.

Upon opening the package and rifling through the contents – which were comprised of a sheaf of loose papers bound by the broken hardcover of a book – I found a letter from the head of psychiatry at the aforementioned institute; a letter which I reproduce here:

Dear Dr Hallard,

I am aware of the unorthodox nature of my request, so I will get right to the point. Given your recent publication and the notoriety in certain circles that you have received because of it, I have sent you something I believe will be of interest. I would hope that you will read it, and treat it with the same respect you showed towards the patients in your book Room One Nineteen.

I realize this is oblique, and will make little sense to you until you read the contents of this package, but I can see no way around it, for I have exhausted all avenues in search of an answer. I only hope that you, with your own unique research on the writings of mentally afflicted persons, can find some meaning to the work I present to you now. All I ask in return is one favor: tell me how the story ends.

I look forward to your answer.

Yours sincerely,

Elizabeth Rhodes

Dr. Elizabeth Rhodes
Curiouser and curioser, as they say.

My interest well and truly piqued, I put aside the undergraduate papers I had been marking, picked up the hardcover book and started reading the jumble of journal entries and handwritten notes I found within.

At first glance they appeared to be the disordered documentation of an experiment performed at Hobbs Home in 1977; an experiment in which six patients were forced to recall childhood trauma in an attempt to cure their pronounced cases of amnesia. But when I started to correlate the papers, to edit it into some semblance of order, I realized that there was more to it then that. I realized that what I held was not just the writings of six fractured minds…it was a book which proved that truth – much like memory – is always stranger than fiction.

And the end is often no less perplexing then the beginning.

After compiling the first draft of this work, I made a pilgrimage to Hobbs in search of answers. Ostensibly I was there to meet with Dr Elizabeth Rhodes, the erstwhile Virgil that had led me to the Inferno that is this book; in reality, I wanted to see the place where Will and the rest had come from.

I must have chosen a particularly bad day to visit, for although I was ushered into Dr Rhodes’ outer office and told she would see me in a few minutes, thirty of such later I was still waiting and getting restless (as I am oft to do). And when I’m restless, my mind wanders as much as my feet. And my curiosity usually leads.

With my visitor’s pass secure to my lapel and a creative excuse at the ready should I be stopped, I made my way to the hallway, for I remembered a sign I had seen upon entering. BLUE WING, it had said, with a faded arrow showing me the way.

To get to the Blue Wing, one must traverse a series of descending staircases, walk a number of darkened corridors, venture some distance under the institute itself, and all
this before you can even catch a glimpse of the lone blue bulb lighting the hall. It was like walking through a haunted house and my imagination couldn't help but see ghosts in every corner. However, it is not the journey that is of most importance but rather the destination.

The Blue Wing. A hellish place. A dank hallway of seven rooms leading to an enclosed common area, with the only window in the entire wing a slip of glass with a ratty view of a storm drain. The Blue Wing. A place as vivid as it is stark.

I spied a room at the far end with a fire blackened door, the only door in the entire wing to suffer any fire damage it seemed. From the soot and the disuse it was clear it wasn’t a recent fire – I estimated it to be about thirty years old, although I admit I am no expert in this area. But I had my suspicions that went beyond darkened wood.

The door swung outwards with a gothic creak and I stole inside. The room was small, smaller than I had imagined even from the writing, and for a moment I let the claustrophobia grip me, as it once must have done to the room’s occupant.

Then I went to the wall, to the spot I knew was there, and after some searching I came across the loose brick. I didn’t know what to expect – the writing had told me this was where the journals had been secreted away and although I partly suspected it to be empty, a hollow place now, another, more anxious part of me hoped to find an answer to Dr Rhodes’ initial question. How does the story end?

As my fingers pried the loose brick free, my heart thumped like a jackhammer when a voice spoke from the doorway: “Who are you looking for?”

I must admit I yelped, and the brick fell from my hands to smash against the concrete floor. I turned, my readily made excuse escaping me, and saw an old man, beefy but soft, dressed in the nondescript clothes of an orderly. His name tag, I was somewhat relieved to note, said AL.

I explained my purpose, opting to err on the side of truth, and although my words should have precipitated my forceful removal – I was babbling names at him mostly – the orderly surprised me by taking a seat on the sagging bed against the wall.
“I remember him,” Al said, his words strained with the weight of memory. “He came here, oh, thirty years ago, I suppose.

“A tough little guy. Never said nothing to nobody, especially the doc. Kept to himself. Reminded me of me…the way I was, back when I was like him. Back when I was in a place like this…”

His droopy face was slack with thought, and I guessed this was why he had shown such kindness in years past. A shared sympathy for sickness or some such emotion.

Then the orderly continued: “But I heard him talk, that one. At night, the month he was here – when I did my rounds, I’d hear him in here. Talking away to the walls. Talking to hisself.” Al laughed, a crackly caricature of what his laughter must have been like in his youth. He shook his head. “But hell, you could never get him to say boo if you asked. Tough little guy.”

The orderly lapsed into silence. He had told me much, but there was still one thing I needed to know. “What happened to him?”

Al shrugged his mountain-like shoulders, but it was not because he didn’t know – I sensed it was because he couldn’t tell me. Or didn’t want to. Or felt like he shouldn’t.

Then something seemed to let loose within him, and his great body slumped. “He died,” Al said.

“How?”

“One of the doc’s experiments, though she’ll never tell you that. To her it was a success. She cured him.”

“And what do you think?”

Al was looking out the door, not meeting my eyes. He offered that same shrug, only this time I knew I would get nothing more from him. So I went to the wall, to the hollowed out section. I don’t know what I was hoping to find. But find it I did. It was a book. Another journal.
This one was filled with all manner of things: pictures of albino girls from the 1800s; news photographs of an apartment block burning to the ground; drawings of an Aryan cross, a home made dam, a switchblade knife; a page from a textbook showing the lynching of a black man; cuttings from magazines of names such as DOUGY, ANGELA, PHILLIP, ELIZABETH and WIMERU; an advertisement for pink lipstick; the wrapper of a pack of Winfield Blues; the cover of a Commando comic; and a photograph of the actress Drew Barrymore sporting a black and white scarf.

And there was even an article from the 1970s on Electro-Convulsive Therapy, complete with a picture of a Frankensteinesque ECT machine and the doctor who had been spearheading the supposedly revolutionary therapy – a doctor whose name had been AMOS.

My head reeling, I blundered past Al and into the hallway. Dizzy with comprehension, I had to know one thing – the final piece to the puzzle as I saw it.

With the orderly at my shoulder, I rubbed at the sooty stain on the door, wiping free decades of dust, swiping at the charcoal stain as if this door was somehow to blame, had bought me to this brink. And, my hands blackened, my thoughts raving, I found a mark etched into the wood. A mark that could have been made by a thin instrument, say the sharpened end of a Bic pen.

It was a number, though not the number I expected. It was:

\[\infty\]

which is, as one of my mathematically minded colleagues pointed out to me later, the symbol for a number far larger than eight. As to who carved it into the door…I don’t know if we’ll ever really know if it was Will, or Billy, or even a patient who had been there prior to 1977.
As to the room directly across from it – there isn’t one. There is nothing but a blank wall.

But what of the fate of the patient, you ask? Dr Rhodes, once I had gone back to her office, seemed surprised when I asked about patient 220. But not as surprised as I was when she asked to see the letter she had supposedly sent me.

“This is not my signature, Dr Hallard,” she said, eyeing the letter as if it were an affront to her. She then proceeded to interrogate me, thinking me the fraud, but soon enough she admitted how easily it would be for someone at Hobbs to get their hands on her stationary. “We’re a hospital, not a prison. We encourage trust between our patients and the staff…and obviously that trust has been abused.”

Dr Rhodes refused to answer many of my questions – confidential patient information, she called it – but she did go so far as to provide me with extracts of two official Hobbs’ documents. She said that, although patient 220 was cured, some details of his story still remain unknown, and she hoped that this publication might “jog a few memories” out in the wider community. I think, inadvertently or not, Dr Rhodes has provided us all with the truth.

But for me, truth is as intangible as memory itself, as impossible to hold as a handful of sand. For when you try to grasp both, some invariably leaks out and is lost; and what you hold in your hands ends up being less than what it was meant to be. Yes, truth may be stranger than fiction – but there is nothing stranger than the human mind, in which truth and fiction are, as I am slowly coming to realize, indistinguishable.

As for the answer to the question of how the story ends…I cannot say for sure. But I present to you two final documents that, to me, are as close to an answer as we will ever receive.

Or as close to an ending, in any case.

Dr Nathan Hallard
Senior Lecturer in Creative Arts

University of Melbourne
Extract of Psychiatric Evaluation Form

Name: unknown
Prefers: Constance, Orrin, Lulu, Derek, Jack, Will, Doctor Amos
D.O.B.: unknown
Sex: Male
Next of Kin: unknown
Admitted: 01/04/77
Patient Number: 220

Initial Assessment:
Multiple Personality Disorder (extreme)
Amnesia (pronounced)

Notes:
- Patient’s varied personalities include imagined patients, their relatives and friends, and a psychiatrist personality based on dealings with staff.
- Patient is uncommunicative.
- Patient’s writings have been deemed inconclusive evidence.

Recommended Treatment:
One (1) month observation.
Bitemporal Electro-Convulsive Therapy.

Recommendations:
Transfer to Solitary.

Treating Physician:
Dr Elizabeth Rhodes, Head of Psychiatry
Extract of Release Form

Name: Albert Bookman
Prefers: Al
D.O.B.: unknown
Sex: Male
Next of Kin: None
Admitted: 01/04/77
Released: 01/04/78
Patient Number: 220

Notes:
- Patient has been highly responsive to treatment.
- Bitemporal Electro-Convulsive Therapy has been successful.
- Full recollection of amnesia primary triggering event.
- Multiple Personality Disorder no longer evident.
- No detection of psychosis after one (1) year further observation.

Recommendations:
Release into state care.
N.B. Patient would suit Community In Reach employment program.

Treating Physician:
Dr Elizabeth Rhodes, Head of Psychiatry