

**UNIVERSITY OF WINCHESTER**

**The Observer and the Observed: Exploring forms of observation and self-  
observation in a novel and commentary**

**Mick Jackson**

**ORCID Number: 0000-0001-5777-2421**

**Doctor of Philosophy**

**March 2020**

**This Thesis has been completed as a requirement for  
a postgraduate research degree of the University of Winchester.**

No portion of the work referred to in the Thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

I confirm that this Thesis is entirely my own work.

I confirm that no material of this thesis has been published in advance of its submission.

I confirm that no work previously submitted for credit or published in the public domain has been reused verbatim. Any previously submitted work has been revised, developed and recontextualised relevant to the thesis.

I confirm that no third party proof-reading or editing has been used in this thesis.

Copyright © Mick Jackson 2020

The Observer and the Observed: Exploring forms of observation and self-observation in  
a novel and commentary

University of Winchester, PhD Thesis

Page range pp 1 – 296

ORCID 0000-0001-5777-2421

This copy has been supplied on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgement. Copies (by any process) either in full, or of extracts, may be made only in accordance with instructions given by the author. Details may be obtained from the RKE Centre, University of Winchester. This page must form part of any such copies made. Further copies (by any process) of copies made in accordance with such instructions may not be made without the permission (in writing) of the author. No profit may be made from selling, copying or licensing the author's work without further agreement.

## Acknowledgements

Without the unfailing support and encouragement of Professor Jude Davies, Professor Neil McCaw, Dr Rhiannon Jones and Dr Judith Heneghan the author is in no doubt that this project would never have been completed. He is deeply indebted to them all.

UNIVERSITY OF WINCHESTER

ABSTRACT

The Observer and The Observed: Exploring forms of observation and self-observation in  
a novel and commentary

Mick Jackson

ORCID Number: 0000-0001-5777-2421

Doctor of Philosophy

March 2020

The primary aim of the research inquiry was to explore a psychic space that accommodates a writer's 'divergent thinking' and to ask whether a comparison with 'hypnagogia' – a state amplified in the 'wake-a-thons' in the U.S. in the 1950s and 60s – might inform our understanding of the creative process. The research study was practice-based and interdisciplinary. This thesis takes the form of a novel and accompanying rationale. The novel, 'Walking After Midnight', is a conspiracy thriller set in north America in the 1970s. In it, the protagonist breaks out of a clinic where she has been subjected to a series of psychological experiments. We follow her attempts to avoid capture, her gradual recollection of events in the clinic and consequent vengeance on those who incarcerated her. The rationale consists of a commentary on the formative development of two potential novels: the one the author assumed he was writing and the one he actually wrote. It also includes an analysis of a series of EEG experiments in which the author participated and an exploration of the notion of 'walking dreamily' which represents a territory where consciousness and unconscious are balanced in a manner that best engenders creativity. The study proposes a model in which the author straddles two perspectives – omniscience and subjectivity – and that the creation of a narrative can be seen as an act of 'remote viewing' in which the protagonist explores the narrative possibilities on the author's behalf.

Keywords: Hypnagogia, Divergent Thinking, Creativity, Conscious, Unconscious, Remote Viewing, Narrative.

## LIST OF CONTENTS

	Page Number
Declaration and Copyright Statement	1
Abstract	2
List of Contents	3
Introduction	210
'Walking Dreamily' (i)	215
Novel 1: Tripp and Gardner, 1950s America	223
The Experiment	248
'Walking Dreamily' (ii)	256
Novel 2: Typhoid Mary, 1970s America	261
Conclusion	287
Novel	4
Declaration and Copyright Statement	208
Rationale	209
Bibliography	291

# **Walking After Midnight**

**a novel**

**by**

**Mick Jackson**

The pick-up took the bend at close to fifty. Which was maybe a touch too fast for a country road. But the driver hadn't seen another vehicle in over an hour and anyone with any sense, he felt, would be indoors, out of the cold.

The road was just beginning to open up, with the woods to the left sweeping over the hillside and fields to the right, bleak and bare, when he saw her – a woman running flat-out towards him, barefoot, in a gray-white hospital gown.

He slammed on the brakes. The wheels locked and the pick-up went into a judder, throwing him forward. The pick-up coming to rest, finally, no more than two or three feet from where the woman had come to rest herself.

For a moment she just stood there, hands raised before her. As if trying to contain the idea of this vehicle ... this morning ... this whole strange world. Then she let her hands fall and caught up on some breathing. Stared, bewildered, through the windshield and began to slowly make her way round to the driver's door.

He reckoned she must be somewhere in her early forties – a clear twenty years or more his junior. He saw how her arms and legs were scratched and bleeding. How she'd bits of leaf and dirt in her hair. She was standing right beside his door now, one hand resting on the wing mirror, staring off down the lane beyond. Then she slowly turned and squinted in at him, her shoulders pumping up and down the whole time, forcing her hot breath out into the winter air.

The owner of the pick-up flipped off the radio, but left the engine running. Wound down his window. Asked if she was okay. He may as well have been speaking a foreign language for all the sense it seemed to make to her. She studied his face, without seeming to find anything there that might help her. Then she turned and looked back down the lane, the way she'd come.

Now she had her back to him the driver could see how the hospital smock was tied in three separate places – could see her bare skin and underwear in between. He felt that he should put something around her. For protection. So he eased open the door, stepped out. Took off his jacket – a solid piece of clothing, properly lined, with leather cuffs and collar, and warm from his

having worn it for several hours – and gently hooked it over her shoulders. Like a modest coronation, way out here between the fields and woods, with nothing but the birds to witness it.

He'd barely let go of the thing, not entirely sure her frame would take it, when he heard her say, 'Uh-oh.'

And she backed up, right on past him. As if any second she might go back to haring down the lane.

In truth, his eyesight wasn't as good as it might be. He'd been meaning to upgrade his glasses for two years, maybe three. Even so, he had no trouble making out, a hundred yards or so down the track, a single figure heading this way. Some guy. Then a second guy burst out of the bushes, looked around and came along after him.

The slam of the door on the pick-up had its owner spin around – away from the men approaching. His first thought was that the woman had shut herself in there for safety. These two men maybe were not her friends. But even as these thoughts turned over in his mind, he heard the motor kick up, saw her pull the stick into gear. Let out the handbrake. Then watched his own pick-up go tearing away. Taking off at such a lick that the back-end swung over to the left as it passed him and gently nudged him out of the way.

He could hear her work through the gears as she went flying down the lane towards them – was already up into third and getting ready to shift into fourth before she was level with them.

The old guy just stood there, stunned. Suddenly calling to mind all the items in his jacket pockets. Housekeys. Cigarettes / lighter. Wallet.

The men stepped back from the track as she bore down on them. The nearest over towards the trees. The other with no option but to push up against the barbed-wire fence that reached off down the lane. The owner of the pick-up saw how this second guy raised his right arm and braced his left hand against it. It was only the sound of the shots in quick succession that had him properly appreciate how the guy had a gun in his hand. Shot one cleared the roof of the cab



by a good couple of yards. The second was more wayward still. Which was understandable, given that the woman in the hospital gown was doing her damndest to pluck him off that fence like a ripe piece of fruit.

\*

Karen raised her right hand and adjusted the rearview mirror.

*Well, look at me, she said out loud. I can drive a goddamned car.*

The road slowly rose, swung round to the left, up into the trees, the wheel rattling between her fingers as the truck went in and out the potholes. The adrenaline seemed suddenly to spread right through her and left her heady. For a moment she thought she might be about to pass out. This would happen sometimes, back at the apartment. Despite Maguire's insistence to the contrary, she might put in a little extra effort on the treadmill, working her arms to really get things moving along. And the next thing, she'd have to step off and drop her head down between her knees to stop herself blacking-out.

Something similar happened now. She could feel her vision thinning, her heartbeat slacken. She wanted to pull over – and maybe puke. Then she thought of the goon by the fence bringing his gun up in her direction. Plus his goon-associate who, she was almost 100% certain, was in possession of a walkie-talkie – had heard him bawling into it as he came after her through the woods. No doubt he'd now have it up to his mouth, conversing with other goons of varying ranks and stripes, regarding what direction she was headed and what kind of pick-up she'd just stole. So she pushed on and kept faith her head would clear and her body would slowly settle. However long that might be.

Soon after, she cleared the brow and the track dropped, deep among the trees now. Cold air whipped in through the open window and Karen drew it way down into her. Her bare feet felt weird against the pedals. When she stepped out of the apartment she'd had on a pair of slippers. She lost one when she leapt out the back of the ambulance and the other within about a second of setting foot in the woods. She'd taken a blow to the shoulder at some point. Just bounced clean off the trunk of a tree. She'd been back on her feet in an instant, but everything – the smell of the leaves, the cold sunlight through the branches – was almost too much for her. *I'm not sure I can take it, she thought. It's gonna blow my mind.*

And now the impossible speed at which the trees flew by her. She hadn't moved this fast, had this much control over her destiny, for as far back as she could recall.

At a fork in the road she slowed, then swung right, into another steep descent. The trees gave out and pretty soon the track levelled and ran alongside a wide stretch of tar-black water. She slowed again, just to marvel at it. On the far side of the swollen river a pine wood came right down to the water's edge. The river itself looked solid, as if she could pull down hard on the wheel and drive straight out over it. She liked that river – liked having it right beside her. But then the lane swung round to the left and took her back up into the trees.

Another mile or so further on she came to a crossroads, turned right again and again found herself on an open track with water reaching out and away off to one side.

Twice more she swung right, to be confronted with water. The last time, the lane gave out at a patch of flattened dirt, obliging Karen to spin around and head back the way she came.

*I'm on a goddamned island, she thought. All this time I've been on a goddamned island and I never knew.*

\*

She couldn't help but look up at the mirror every few seconds, expecting to see some vehicle back there slowly bearing down on her. But each time all she saw was the empty lane stretching away to oblivion. Yet the moment her eyes were back on the road she'd feel the pull, sense something back there and have to check the mirror one more time.

Fifteen minutes after she first took off in the pick-up she pulled over and went through the cab, not wholly sure what she hoped to find. In the glove compartment there was nothing but the owner's manual, rolled up, the pages gummed together, and some empty cigarette packs. Down the side of the passenger seat were a couple of sports magazines. And wedged behind her seat an old toolbox Karen had heard clatter each time she hit a hole in the road. But nothing that offered any means of getting her the hell out of there. No form of pharmacy that would help her state of mind.

She fed her arms into the jacket's sleeves and folded the cuffs back. Twisted the mirror around to take a look at herself. She could care less what anyone might make of her. Was intent only on what she made of herself. The flesh looked kind of pasty – dry and light-deprived. The hair was lank. And then the eyes. Sweet Jesus! What degree of turmoil raged beyond those blue-grey eyes, she wondered. And how might she or anyone else be expected to go about setting it straight?

She stepped out. Checked up and down the road. Then, with her right hand lifting the hospital gown and her left clutching the open door, she squatted down for a pee. She'd left the engine running, but as she straightened up she heard another engine at a different pitch, flat-out, heading down a road not too distant. Further down the valley, maybe. So she climbed back in the cab and drove off in what she hoped was something like the opposite direction, about as fast as the pick-up would allow to her go.

Her left shoulder hurt. She rubbed it to warm it up a little. The sticking plaster on her upper arm was black with dirt. Back at the clinic they changed it every couple of days. Were forever fussing over it. If they'd seen the state of it now they'd have had a fit.

A little later Karen felt herself begin to zone-out. This would happen sometimes, especially late afternoons. But she kept her foot hard down, riding the hills, one after the other, and just about managed to stay on the road. The trees flickered by, the sunlight strobing through them. And when she next felt her mind sharpen-up the light was failing, as if the sun was done with the day. So having finally given up checking the mirror she now got busy with the heater controls.

Karen pictured the lights going on back at the apartment. It must be getting on for dinner time. A soak in the tub. Some music, maybe. Then bed. She considered turning on the headlamps, before appreciating how terrifically dumb an idea this was. All the same, there would surely come a point when she'd either have to do just that or resign herself to blundering around in the dark.

She was continuing to turn this over when she came out onto a bluff. Way below and off into the distance, among the trees, a bridge came into view.

She pulled up. Rolled back a way, turned off the engine. Then crept forward, head down, to where the bridge was visible. Two rusting arches of latticed steel spanned the water where the banks edged closest to each other. Karen couldn't recall any junctions for the last few miles and reasoned that there had to be some way down to the bridge up ahead somewhere. She studied it for another few moments. That would do just fine. She was about to turn and head back to the pick-up but caught a glimpse of some movement down there, which caused her to falter. And, sure enough, as she watched, a solitary car edged out onto the bridge, from her side of the river. Eased its way over. Then turned right on the other side.

The car's lights were out. The sun had dropped behind the far hillside and the air had turned hazy, an atmosphere in which things were easily misplaced. All the same, Karen clearly saw the car follow the lane behind a row of trees running parallel with the river, and fail to reappear where the line of trees came to an end. She stood stock-still and waited for three, maybe four or five minutes before the car finally emerged, turned and headed back across the bridge.

Karen's cognitive resources were significantly depleted. They'd been depleted for a good long while. But she was confident either that the car had stopped to drop someone off – someone

who now waited for her to make her way over. Or, more likely perhaps, someone was already posted there, out of sight, and the driver of the car had crossed back and forth across the bridge in order to stop by and check in on them.

This notion did nothing at all for Karen's sense of wellbeing. A wave of dread swept through her, from head to toe. She clambered back into the pick-up, turned it around and tore off down the lane, back the way she came. Desperate now to cover as many miles as possible before darkness. Saw how she was effectively penned-in on this side of the water, racing frantically up and down, until someone finally caught her or she ran out of gas.

She drove. Tried to catch her breath, but couldn't get on top of it. Her heart pounded away in her chest. She rubbed at the back of her neck. It sometimes helped restore a little equilibrium. But not this time.

She was back under the trees. Had never known a place with so many goddamned trees and bushes. She kept her foot down. Was hunched over the wheel – practically resting her chin on it, with her forehead right up against the windshield – when something of the previous night's dream came back to her. Just a taste. Then gone. But a sure sign of what was coming next.

She felt her eyelids grow heavy, the muscles at her neck and shoulders begin to grow soft.

*Fuck*, she said out loud.

Just about her last conscious thought was that she was out of options. In fact, another option was about to offer itself up to her.

She flew through the woods in the last of the gloaming. Then, just as the pick-up's owner had encountered Karen, so Karen now had an encounter all her own. She came round a bend to find a deer lying prone, its legs and belly stretched towards her. She was right on it before she properly registered it. The creature lifted up its sorry head.

Karen jammed her foot down onto the brake but knew she wasn't going to be able to make it. She pulled hard down on the wheel. The deer vanished, back into the ether. Karen turned her head as she went by – momentarily gazing at the space it had just now occupied. The pick-up left the road and plunged off into the dark.

For a moment all was serene and silent. Karen felt herself pretty much disappear herself. Then the solid earth rose up to meet her.

The fender took out a clutch of smaller trees, four or five feet from the ground. Which may have helped slow the truck's trajectory. Then the front offside wing caught a tree of real substance at an angle and slowed the truck with such uncompromising insistence that Karen was thrown up over the wheel and slammed into the roof where it curved to meet the top of the door.

She was lucky in that she took the full force between her shoulders. But not so lucky in that it knocked her out cold. The truck swung round by ninety degrees and flipped up onto its side. Then slid another thirty yards, slowly turning counter-clockwise. Until at last the action between the side of the pick-up and the ground finally brought it to a halt.

\*

Karen lay unconscious for the better part of twenty minutes. Then spent another five or ten circling some fractured order of sensibility, before slipping off and away again. The side window had been blown in at the first real impact, so she finally came to with her cheek resting on a patch of rough grass, which made no sense at all to her. Any more than the fact that her feet and knees were folded above her. Or that her right arm was pulled right around behind her back.

It was almost dark. The jacket's leather collar was right by her face and she studied its twists and folds without comprehension. Until, in time, she remembered the pick-up. That she was in it. And understood how it was now all turned around.

She was in some pain. She leaned forward and brought her right arm round to where she could see it. Flexed her fingers and toes to check that they were all still there. Her left hand felt pretty smashed up. She would have to see to it at some point. She sniffed the air for gasoline. Then closed her eyes again.

When she next came around she'd somehow managed to shift position so that her legs were at least on the same plane as her head and shoulders. Her throat was so dry she could barely swallow. It may have been this that brought her round. She could smell water, close by. The night air seemed somehow to have absorbed the moisture from the river's surface and brought it to her. And she knew that if she didn't get some of it into her pretty soon she may well expire.

The windshield was shattered, but still clung to the molding like a cellophane wrapper, half pulled away. Karen took a breath and leant her shoulder into it a couple of times and the third time it gave way and she rolled straight out onto the cold damp earth.

She lay there for a while, breathing in the chill air. Then got herself up onto her hands and knees and headed down the slope.

The index and middle fingers on her left hand didn't respond well to having pressure bear down on them. Karen could see the water up ahead, with the light coming off it. If the pick-up had had a little more momentum – had missed the trees, say – it might have reached the water and



she could quite easily have drowned. This wasn't much of a comfort, but it took her mind off the pain firing out from her shoulder and fingers, if only for a moment. She dragged herself to the water's edge dropped her face straight into it and lapped at it like some wild dog.

It tasted disgusting, but finally enabled her to swallow. She scooped a couple of handfuls up onto her face. Then sat back and tried to imagine how she might hope to progress from here.

There was just enough light from the moon to make out the far side of the river, which suddenly seemed a good deal further away than when she'd observed it from up on the bluff.

Her neck and back felt sore. Her face puffy to the touch. A couple of fingers weren't working. She was barefoot. Colder than she'd ever been before. She'd no way of knowing how long she had before the sun rose but understood all too well that she had to get across the river. And that it was better to try and cross it now, in the darkness, than wait until dawn.

As she sat, staring over the water it occurred to her, in a sudden blaze of absurdity, that she'd no idea if she could actually swim. She stared at her arms and legs, as if they might tell her. Well, she guessed she'd find out soon enough.

She got to her feet – slowly, to try and avoid having herself pass out again – and placed her left foot into a few inches of water. This did nothing but convince her she was more likely to freeze to death before she had the chance to drown. The jacket that belonged to the pick-up driver would surely suck up a ton of water and take her under. She turned and looked back toward the truck.

Her first thought was to try and remove one of the seats. A pick-up's seat seemed like the kind of thing that might be capable of floating. She located the box of tools and for a while fumbled on the floor of the cab, now vertical, trying to lock the adjustable spanner around the nuts which held the seat to the floor, before giving up.

She contemplated the front and rear wheels that were up off the ground. Surely they might float? But getting at them would entail her clambering around on top of the pick-up –

something she was in no mood to do. Then she found the spare, housed under the back of the flat-bed. It took a while to release the nuts holding down the cover, and a while longer to release the wheel itself.

She finally got it out and rolled it down to the water. It floated.

She followed it in, before having another thought. Had to drag the wheel back to the bank and limp back up to the pick-up. She found the tool box again. Took it down to the water's edge and rooted through it in the dim light. Pulled out a screwdriver and flipped the end against her thumb. Tossed it. Then found a utility knife, with retractable blade. Stared at it grimly, but tucked it down into her inside pocket all the same.

Now she took the jacket off, rolled it tight and stuffed it into the wheel's concave center, and pushed the wheel out into the river again. Hooked her right elbow into it and kept on going. When her feet left the bed of the river she brought her other arm round, hooked that over and started kicking her feet away from her.

If she pushed too hard the wheel threatened to flip over. The water was right up around her shoulders now and the pain from the cold was almost too much. Every breath was an effort – and she had to force the air down into her chest.

A third of the way across, the current grew suddenly stronger and the point on the bank towards which she'd been heading began to drift away. She quit kicking, to try and muster some energy, but the moment she did so the wheel began to slowly spin and she had trouble keeping a hold of it.

Both banks were sliding by at quite a rate now and she was making no progress between the two. The river slowly carried her round a bend and as she turned on the wheel a long straight reach of water came into view with the rusty bridge down at the far end.

Another couple of minutes and she'd go right beneath it. Her arms started to slip from the rim of the wheel. Her whole body had turned quite numb.

So she kicked – hard. Pushed so hard the wheel flipped up and her head went briefly under. But she came back up and kept right on at it. Till she finally felt she was making progress – was now at least describing a long diagonal across the river, rather than a straight line right down the middle. A couple more bouts of determined kicking and she managed to get beyond the pull of the current. Finally found herself in the shallows of the far bank. She waded towards the trees, one hand still clutching the wheel and the old guy's jacket. Dragged them up onto the mud, took another couple of steps, then lay down on her back.

She waited till she got her breath back then reached for the jacket. Some parts of it weren't as wet as others. She put it on. Got to her feet and climbed up the slope. Then pulled the jacket tight around her and curled up at the base of a tree.

There was no obvious merit in her moving. She had no strength and could barely see a thing. No. She'd wait here either until she was restored to some degree, or her eyes grew accustomed to the darkness. If her thoughts extended to a plan of any sort, then that was it.

So she dug herself down into the earth as much as she was able, and pulled leaves and dirt around her. And pretty soon she was gone.

\*

She came to because of the insects. A number of bugs had encountered something new and unusual in their territory. A sizeable impediment to their tiny routines. So they moved on in, investigated, and found sweat and blood on which to work, plus some trace of heat in the folds of flesh.

To begin with, Karen's dreams remained fixed on the goon posted under the trees by the bridge. Bestowed upon him a baleful face and dreadful tenacity. Again and again, she felt herself reeled in through the darkness, by no more than his sheer strength of will. She would stir and try and shake him from her. But the moment she let herself slip back into sleep there he was again, high up on his ridge, no more than a few hundred yards from her, and he'd start casting around for her again among the dark trees.

Several times in the night, struggling somewhere between sleep and consciousness, she'd been inclined to give herself up. To get to her feet, brush the dirt from her and head on up towards where he was parked. There would be heat in the car. Food and drink of some description. Sure, she'd be back in the clinic in half an hour. But that might be the best half-hour of her life.

In time though, the bad man in the warm car had given way to other preoccupations. Other problems demanding to be solved. Then the bugs set to and Karen began to grow vaguely aware of some insistence, some small-scale bustling activity – in her bra ... her armpits ... the nape of her neck. Until a beetle crept across her face, to pause by her lips and consider the faint breath, the prospect of moisture, and finally woke her.

Her eyes flipped open. Then she was up out of the dirt, swatting the bugs from her face, her hair, her underwear.

*They think I'm dead, she thought. They think I'm their fucking supper.*

Being up on her feet did nothing but reinstate all the various pains and discomforts. Her neck and shoulders felt like someone had stomped on her while she'd been asleep. The fingers on her left hand were sore and twisted out of place. But her feet were what brought her most

distress, sliced and swollen from so much tripping and stumbling. She worried they'd never recover – would remain ripped-up, infected, numb.

But she knew she'd better move on. She'd had enough of this place. Plus, movement, even of a limping, stumbling variety, might generate some heat. It was still dark but a little less so up beyond the trees. So she headed up the slope – a little steeper this side of the river – moving diagonally from one tree over to another. Until she managed to clear the ridge, pushed on through a tangle of bracken and came out onto a stretch of solid asphalt.

She looked to her left in what little moonlight was available to her. Down there somewhere, no more than a quarter of a mile away, was the guy in his car. So either she crossed straight over and continued stumbling through the undergrowth or turned right and headed off along the lane.

Cutting straight ahead, she knew, was the wisest option. Within a minute she'd have disappeared among more foliage. But she wasn't sure she was ready to plow straight back into oblivion. Doubt she could inflict any more pain on her poor feet. So she turned to the right and set off down the road. Telling herself that if any vehicles came along she'd surely see their lights way before they were anywhere near her and that she'd just duck into the trees.

She walked for maybe an hour before the sky began slowly shifting from black to blue. Back at the apartment she'd walk on the treadmill for what felt like half the night, but she was so out of it, and the rubber belt under her feet would keep on rolling she'd just focus on the screen and lose herself and everything would just be fine.

As she walked she reached up and touched her head, just above the temples, where they fixed the electrodes. She felt the fine fur of tiny bristles beneath her fingers. There'd be weeks when they kept little areas of her scalp clean-shaven, for a good connection. And weeks when there were no electrodes and the hair began to grow back.

At some point she saw a set of headlights coming towards her. Just a tight blast of light at first, out towards the horizon. Then more diffuse, filtered through the trees. Karen had plenty of

time to make her way into the bushes and crouch, out of sight. But as the light swung around and the sound of the car moved on in – not just the roar of the engine, but the tires on the road, the solid displacement of air – Karen began to panic and felt a powerful urge to get to her feet and set to running again.

The car swept by, but Karen stayed where she was, clamped to the ground. Her heart rattling up against her ribs again. She tried to breathe deep. Counted slowly up to ten, then back to zero. She must have learned how to do this somewhere. And in time felt herself gradually re-inhabit her skin.

She got to her feet, stepped back out onto the asphalt and continued limping down the lane. Didn't see another car. And by the time the sun was clear of the hills she was starting to wonder if she shouldn't maybe formulate some kind of strategy beyond simply marching down a road until she starved to death.

There must come a point, she supposed, when instead of throwing herself into the bushes at the first sign of any vehicle, she held her ground. Flagged the car down and risked everything by asking a fellow human being for help.

She came to a junction where a smaller lane, not much more than a dirt track, forked off to the left. Karen could trace its progress up the hill between the hedgerows.

A patch of dirt lay at the foot of the hill where the lane fed into the wider road. And across it Karen could see tire tracks, clean and wet. This felt like an omen of some sort. She stood and stared up the lane another few moments. Then set out along it, with the sun now on her back.

\*



After a couple of hundred yards the track cleared the brow and dropped into a second valley. Up ahead, Karen could see some sort of wooden house, half-raised on stilts and set back from the lane, with its own tall wall around it. A sizeable place, in fact, with a complicated arrangement of rooves and gables, and its back turned to the lane to look out over the hills beyond.

Karen walked on up to it and looked in through the gateposts. A double garage stood to the right, with both doors rolled back and a small car parked in one bay. A gravel drive swept round to the left of the house, but Karen saw no sense in heading straight for the main door and freaking out whoever happened to answer. Children, maybe, or old people. Plus, she wanted to try and get a look at the occupants before committing herself to their trust. So she headed right, down the far wall of the garage and into the bushes and low trees.

She had nowhere near as much cover as the woods alongside the road and river, and pretty soon she found herself down on her hands and knees. Up against the wall, where there was maybe more hope of hidden progress, plus the possibility of some perspective on the house.

Two or three times she stopped to study the place, but the only illuminated windows were a couple up ahead just above ground level, side by side. She crawled some more, weaving in and out of the holly and rhododendron, then when she was more or less adjacent to the lit windows nosed her way in towards the house.

Both windows, she discovered, belonged to a large bright kitchen. Steel pots and pans hung from the ceiling and there was a pine table off to one side, where a woman sat, warming her palms around a mug of coffee. Considering the sun was barely up, she appeared to be in remarkably good condition. Her clothes were neat and clean, her hair looked as if it had been worked at. She was a little older than Karen and maybe a little heavier. A lit cigarette rested in an ashtray and a magazine lay open on the table, but she didn't seem greatly concerned with it. As Karen knelt there, feeling her bare knees in the wet earth, the woman hopped down from her stool – first, to fix herself some toast, then to fiddle with a radio. Each time disappearing from view in one window, to appear in the other, before returning to her seat.



*You need to lay off the coffee*, Karen wanted to tell her. *Lay off the cigarettes*.

A couple more minutes Karen stayed hunched and watching. Then finally reversed, ass-first, towards the wall, and crawled on some more. Down a slope and right around to the front of the building, where floor-to-ceiling windows were arranged over a series of terraces.

For a moment Karen turned and stared out at the hills and meadows. The view the windows and terraces had been designed to appreciate. That volume of space made her feel strangely hollow. She'd no idea why. Then she hobbled on, past a large lawn, to peer around the far side of the building. But all the windows there were as blank and dark as the others.

Karen felt almost sure now that the woman was alone. The way she'd carried herself as she moved about the kitchen wasn't that of someone who might be joined at any moment by a husband or children. Plus, Karen was cold and sore and hungry and had had enough of being chased from pillar to post. So she went on up to the main door and knocked at it. Took a step back, out of mercy to the occupant. She pulled the old guy's jacket tight around her and glanced down at her bare, senseless feet.

The woman who opened the door was shorter than Karen had expected, though her reaction was close to being spot-on – jerking her head back, as if someone had just taken a swing at her. Thrown by this vision of weirdness and dishevelment that had somehow appeared at her front door.

*Je-sus*, she said, before she had the chance to stop herself.

She had one hand on the lip of the door still, as if she may yet slam it and high-tail it back to her magazine.

Karen thought she should give the woman a moment, to let her take her in. Otherwise she'd be too distracted to hear her spiel.

She waited another beat or two before announcing, *I had an accident*. Her voice still raw and torn. *Yours was the first place I found*.

Karen watched the woman take a quick succession of mental snapshots: the battered face ... bloody hands and feet ... the dirt and many scratches. Desperately trying to have them cohere.

*An accident*, the woman said, somewhere between a question and a statement.

Karen nodded. *Back down the road away*, for clarification. Hooking her thumb over her right shoulder.

*Jeez*, the woman said, looking directly at her now, eye to eye. *Was anyone else involved?*

Karen shook her head. *Just me*, she said. *I must've hit a hole or something*.

And she paused, to allow the both of them to picture the scene. The hole. A front wheel twisting into it. The inevitable consequences.

*Well ... you poor thing*, the woman said. *You come on in*.

And finally the door was swept right back and Karen stepped into a hall, with utility rooms to left and right and an open stairway of bare timber straight ahead heading up into the main part of the house.

*What about the car?* the woman asked, as she closed the door.

Karen explained how it was clear of the road. Off into the trees and bushes. She looked down at her bare feet again and saw how they were now planted on a rug of significant thickness. Though the soles of her feet were having trouble sending back the necessary information, due to the fact that they were so comprehensively ripped apart.

The woman was starting to get a little ansty – as if she wanted to go off and get something to help fix the situation, without knowing what was required.

*A cup of coffee, maybe?* Karen thought. *Something to eat?*

Then the woman finally managed to get over herself and took charge. Karen should take a shower and clean up, she said, while she fixed her some food.

*You've nothing broken?*

Karen raised her left hand, as much to take a better look at it herself. She wriggled her fingers.

*Well, that's pretty nasty,* the woman said. *You go take a shower and I'll find something to dress it.*

She led the way up the stairs, where the light came flooding in from every direction. Then on up a second flight and round to the right into a bathroom, that was as neat and clean as everything else. She turned on the shower and headed off to find some spare clothes. Came back, carrying a folded blue tracksuit, white t-shirt and sneakers.

*You're a mite taller than me,* she said. *But these should work for the time being.*

Karen took them. Thanked her.

The woman stood and stared for another few moments. *You clean yourself up and I'll fix you something to eat,* she said.

Then she exited the room, pulling the door firmly to as she went.

Karen ran the cold faucet in the washbasin and ducked down under it – hadn't appreciated quite how thirsty she was. Then lifted her head to look at herself in the mirror.

Her face looked like someone had taken it apart and put it back together without due care and attention. Like she'd just come out of surgery.

She sat on the rim of the tub, dragged off the jacket ... the gown ... her underwear. Then stepped under the shower. Watched the water turn bloody and dirty as it circled the drain.

For a good few minutes she stood and let the hot water pound away at her, wanting the heat to reach right into her, right down into her frozen bones. All the towels were cream and freshly-laundered and Karen was sure she'd smear them with blood from some scratch or wound whilst drying. Well, there wasn't a whole lot she could do about that. But as she dressed in the t-shirt and tracksuit she sensed some other, more troubling problem.

She looked at the sneakers sitting side by side, neatly obedient.

*They're going to be too small, she thought. I'm gonna have to take the boxcutter and slice the toes open.*

Then looked at the hospital gown, crumpled beside them.

*Someone knocks at your door, she thought. Barefoot. In nothing but a hospital gown and some old guy's jacket. Wouldn't you ask what that was all about?*

She dressed, took the track shoes up in one hand, the jacket in the other. Crept out onto the landing and stood at the top of the stairs, listening hard.

The house was quieter than when she'd first entered a few minutes earlier. The radio, maybe? Yes, the radio had been turned off. Some clattering came up from the kitchen, and Karen headed on down towards it, pulling on the jacket as she descended, though it was still half-soaked.

In the kitchen the woman was over at the stove. All bright and breezy.

*There's coffee and toast right there, she said, pointing to the table. The eggs and bacon are pretty much done.*

Karen took a seat, poured herself some coffee and started in on the toast. She looked around the room.

*I'm guessing you don't live here alone, she said.*

A house this size. The double garage.

*No, no, she said, spooning scrambled eggs onto a plate beside the bacon. I have a husband, but he's out at work.*

She carried the plate over to the table and set it down before Karen.

*What's he do?* Karen asked and watched her. Could see her stall, for the shortest moment. Saw that colossal brightness briefly eclipsed, before being firmly restored.

*He's a pharmacologist, she said, with maybe a little less pride than usual.*

*A pharmacologist?* said Karen, all innocence. *What's that?*

The woman fussed with the items on the table.

*Medicine, she said. You know, drugs.*

She fussed some more, then looked over at the plate of food, untouched. Saw how Karen hadn't even taken up her knife and fork.

Karen looked down at the food herself. *It makes no sense, she said. As if still working things out in her own mind. I show up on your doorstep wearing next to nothing. Telling you how I've*

*totaled a car. Your only concern seems to be whether anyone else was around to see it. Or whether the car's still sitting in the road.*

The woman wasn't smiling now. She looked as if she may never smile again.

*You don't even offer to call the cops.*

*I called them just now,* the woman said. Like a child caught red-handed and seeing no other option but to lie till they're blue in the face. *While you were in the shower.*

*You made a call for sure,* Karen thought, *but not to the police.*

\*

The Chrysler Vega pulled off the lane at speed, hit the gravel and came to rest before the double garage. The driver opened the glove compartment, took the .45, climbed out of the car and set off down the drive with the gun hanging at his side. He did his best to keep to the grass, but not so much that it slowed him down.

Peters was six feet plus – bespectacled, balding, but in reasonable shape for a man well into his fifties. He wore the same beige suit, the same shone shoes as always. And would've reached into the back for his coat and hat if he hadn't been in such a hurry.

He slowed as he reached the front door. Drew back the slide on the .45. His housekey was on the same ring as his car keys. So, gripping the other keys to stop them rattling, he brought the door key up and slowly guided it towards the lock. Like some docking maneuver a hundred miles above the surface of the moon.

The key slid home, Peters twisted it to the right and felt the door release itself from the frame. He withdrew the key, folded it in alongside the others, tucked the bunch back in his pocket and pushed at the door.

He had his gun raised now. Listened hard but could hear nothing. Stepped into the lower hallway and over to the wooden stairs. He set off up them, each footfall landing soft and slow. Feeling the grit between the sole of his shoe and the bare timber. Something that would normally bug him – the sound, the sensation, the idea of bringing dirt into his house. He was half-way up the stairs when he first set eyes on the two women – in the sunlight over by the door to the kitchen. His wife facing him, with Karen standing right behind her – their arms folded together, like lovers, but with Karen holding a boxcutter up against the older woman's throat.

*Hey, look, said Karen. It's the Medicine Man.*

Peters carried on up the rest of the stairs, even slower. Shaking his head now.

*You mustn't hurt her,* he said.

All this time Karen barely blinked.

*Oh, you'd better believe I'll hurt her.*

Peters was at the top of the stairs now, no more than eight or ten paces from Karen and his wife.

*Goddammit, Karen said, you'd better hurry up and put that gun down.*

Peters tilted the .45 back in his palm and glanced over at it. As if to say, *What, this lil ol' thing?*

*Over there,* said Karen, and nodded across the hall towards a low table with a telephone sitting on it.

Peters took a moment, before slowly lumbering off in that direction.

He turned and looked at his wife. *You okay, honey?* he said.

*She's fine,* said Karen.

She watched as Peters continued to creep over to the table.

*Where's Maguire at?* she said.

*You want Maguire?* Peters said. *You just sit tight. He'll be right along.*

*Oh, I bet he will,* she said.

And all the while, Peter's wife stood mute, her head half-turned, resting back against Karen's collarbone, with that squat blade up against her throat.

Peters finally reached the table. He turned and looked straight back at Karen.



*Your counts are way high, he said. Your skin's blotching ... your eyes are shot.*

He placed the gun on the table, quietly sliding the safety into place as he did so.

*I didn't sleep so good, Karen told him.*

Peters shook his head as he stepped away from the table – no more than a yard or two.

*It's exposure to the air ... the sunlight, he said. You been hallucinating yet? Did you pass out?*

Karen said nothing.

*Five mil of Clozapine, he said ... ten of Trandolapril. Half an hour from now you'll be right as rain.  
I got everything you need out in the car.*

It occurred to Karen she'd never been in this man's company without a pane of tempered glass between them. Almost always he was hovering at the back somewhere. Sometimes leaning in towards Maguire to whisper something. The two of them poring over acres of print-out.

*Okay, she said.*

This caught Peters off-guard. Which made Karen feel a whole lot better.

*Let's go, she said.*

It took a while before Peters began to move back towards the stairs.

Karen nudged Peters' wife in the direction of the table. A shifting triangle had formed between the three parties – the table, the pharmacologist and the women. As Karen and her companion approached the table the triangle's primary angle slowly diminished. Finally folding into a single line.

Karen only stopped when she felt her hip hit the lip of the tabletop. Then she glanced back, located the pistol and took a hold of it in her left hand.

*If he's going to run at me, she thought, now's the time he'll do it.*

But Peters just stood and watched as she dropped the boxcutter into her jacket pocket and switched the .45 over to her right hand. And Karen saw just how intently he monitored her flipping the safety back off with her thumb.

\*

It was only when she stepped onto the gravel Karen realized she'd left the sneakers in the kitchen. Well, she wasn't about to turn everyone around and go back and fetch them. So she carried on, with Peters four or five yards out in front, then Karen and his wife staggering along behind.

Somewhere between leaving the house and reaching the Vega she decided to take Peters' wife along with her. Every other decision seemed to follow on quite naturally from there.

The car was facing the house, with the driver's door still open. Karen indicated to Peters to step back, out of the way. She peered into the car.

*Where are the keys,* she said.

Peters fished them out of his jacket pocket.

He had them in his right hand and made to toss them over to Karen, but she shook her head.

*Open the trunk,* she said.

Peters stepped forward, not entirely sure what Karen had in mind. He found the key and popped the trunk.

Karen waved him away again. Then shuffled Peters' wife over and leaned in to the trunk, to get some idea what was in there. It looked practically empty. She turned to Peters' wife.

*Okay,* she said. *Get in.*

Just about everybody seemed to think this was a bad idea apart from Karen. But she waited and waved the pistol back and forth. Then cursed and threatened. Until eventually Peters' wife just sort of shook her head, ducked down and made to climb on in.

Karen took the keys from the lock, made sure Peters' wife had her fingers and toes out the way, then slammed down the lid of the trunk.

As she headed towards the driver's door Peters was glaring at her, full of venom.

*What?* she felt like saying. *All of a sudden you have a problem with holding a woman against her will?*

She slid into the driver's seat. Slammed the door. Found the key to the ignition and started it up. She had the .45 on the passenger seat, its grip towards her. Then swung herself around to lock her door and the door behind her. A great jolt of pain shot out from her shoulder, up into her neck and down into her ribcage. Dealing with Peters and his wife had taken her mind off her generally shitty condition. Some natural anesthetic, released into her system maybe, aided by being in ownership of a gun. She picked it up off the seat, reached out and with the tip of the barrel tapped down the locks on the far doors. No way now Peters was going to try and clamber in as she pulled away.

For a moment she stared out the passenger window.

Meanwhile, Peters had moved back in from the other direction.

*You're not well, Karen,* he said, mouthing at her through the glass. *You need your medication.*

Karen turned back around – with a little more care this time – flipped the lock on her door. Pushed it open and stepped out onto the gravel with the gun still in her hand.

She stood in the crook of the door. Slowly brought the gun up.

Peters backed away. But Karen carried on turning, arm out over the roof, until it settled on the Corvette in the left bay of the double garage.

She fired off three rounds. The first two went through the hood and deep into the engine, rattling around in there, releasing all manner of oils, coolants and other fluids. The last shot she closed her left eye and took a little more time. Relaxing her arm a little, but not so much that her shoulder flew back on the recoil.

She hit the front nearside wheel. And for an instant she was back in the woods somewhere, early morning, doing target practice. The thrill of it. With two or three buddies alongside.

*Now, where the hell did that come from?* she thought.

Karen climbed back in the car and locked the door. It took her three attempts to find reverse. But then the wheels kicked up the gravel and the car flew back out into the lane.

She had two options. Either swing the wheel counter-clockwise, drop down the slope a little, then push on up the lane. Or reverse up the hill and head back the way she came. She chose the latter. Wanted to get off this narrow lane at the first opportunity. So rather than set off up the hill into what she pictured as a maze of ever-diminishing tracks – oblivion – she swung the tail of the Vega round to her right, then motored down the hill, intending to rejoin the main road and extract herself from this house, the latticed bridge and the freezing river as quickly as possible.

She chose wrong. Halfway down the lane Karen rounded the bend to find another car racing up to meet her. She slammed on the brakes, but the Vega kept on sliding over the loose stones. The oncoming car braked also but, heading up the gradient, managed to stop in no time at all. The Vega kept on until the V in the center of the fender was only inches from the other car.

Maguire sat in the driver's seat, stupefied. One of the goons who'd chased Karen through the woods was squeezed into the passenger seat, the other tucked away in the back.

No way in the world could two cars pass each other on this track. There was barely a couple of feet clear down either side.

Karen struggled to find reverse again, crashing the transmission. Her right foot pounded at the pedal. She had hold of the handbrake. Trying not to stall the thing. Whilst the engine screamed and a great plume of exhaust went flooding out into the air.

The goon in the front was half-out of the car with one foot on the ground when Karen finally found reverse. She hit the gas again and the Vega set to kangarooing back up the hill.

She was turned right around, her left hand on the wheel, her right clutching the back of the passenger seat. Just doing her damndest not to run into the bank on either side. She could hear Maguire's car roaring up behind her. Had it on her mind, certainly, as she swung around the bend.

Then suddenly there was Peters, sprinting down the lane towards her. Karen had no time. He leapt to one side but Karen couldn't help but hit him, clipping him with the rear offside, so that he went rattling between the bank and the wheel arch, the doors, the hood.

Karen kept on but shot a quick glance back through the front windshield. Peters lay on his side in the dirt, clutching his leg. But still moving. In fact, full of animation. And right in the way of the other car. So now Maguire was on his feet, beside the goon. The two of them bending over Peters, either tending him or trying to drag him out of the way.

Karen flew on back. The Vega's engine screeching. Pulled back into Peters' drive, shifted into first and pulled away again. Knowing Peters would now be shouting, *She's got Sharon / Cheryl / Charlene*. Whatever the hell her name was. *Has her locked in the goddamned trunk.*

\*

Karen drove as hard as she could without losing control of the vehicle. And when a fork in the road made itself available to her she endeavored to go left or right without premeditation. Hoping that if there was no logic behind her decision there was maybe less likelihood of Maguire being able to follow her.

The lanes stayed snug to both sides of the Vega, but within a mile or so the hedgerows had fallen away. So that, once or twice, she came out of a bend having gained a little altitude and was relieved to find no sign at all of water as far as the eye could see.

Peters' wife had started complaining pretty much the moment they pulled out of the driveway. And to be fair Karen could see that it must be no fun at all being flung around in the trunk of what was quite a narrow automobile. An automobile, more to the point, which wasn't doing too good a job of maintaining traction on anything but the slightest of bends.

All the same, whatever Peters' wife was yelling about didn't make it through to Karen, drowned out either by the screaming of the engine or absorbed by the foam and leather of the rear seats.

*If she's complaining, Karen told herself, then she's still breathing.* Her wellbeing wasn't too high on her list of concerns. But as the lane opened out and Karen found her right foot pulling back a little, the sound coming out of the trunk seemed to grow more desperate. Then she must have managed to turn herself around somehow, because soon after she took to kicking at the back seat.

In the mirror, Karen could see the whole panel being shunted forward. She worried she was going to kick the bank of seats free from their fittings and come flailing out into the car.

Karen drove on for as long as she could stand it. Then cursed out loud and pulled over to the side of the road.

She turned off the ignition, grabbed the gun and made her way around to the rear of the vehicle.

*I should just shoot her, she thought. Shoot her in her stupid head and be done with it.*

She slid the key into the trunk's lock with her left hand and aimed the .45 just below it with her right. Peters' wife had quit yelling and stomping just as soon as the Vega pulled over, but Karen didn't doubt she was just as pissed as she was the minute before. She twisted the key and flipped the trunk in one swift action. Stepped back and raised the .45.

The moment daylight fell upon her Peters' wife sat up and peered all around, blinking, like a new-born chick.

*What?* said Karen.

*I can't breathe,* said Peters' wife. *There's no goddamned air in here.*

*Well, sure there is,* Karen told her, pointing the barrel of the .45 vaguely around at the space Peters' wife had just vacated.

But she was thinking, *It does look pretty tight in there.*

The woman's trousers were all scuffed and this provoked in Karen a pang of guilt, then a blast of righteous anger – at feeling sorry for a woman who'd almost had her dragged back to the clinic not an hour before.

She told her to take off her shoes. Nonplussed, Peters' wife eventually leant forward and pulled at the laces on first one, then the other. Handed them over. Karen took them, shoved the woman back into the trunk and forced the lid down again, before she knew what was happening. Then, with the yelling and stomping already starting up again, took the shoes off to a patch of dirt, sat and tried to force her feet into them.

They were as tight as she'd imagined. Tighter. But she didn't have the energy to find the box cutter and set about hacking away at them. Not when Maguire and his cronies were still crawling over the countryside not so far behind.



She climbed back in the car and started it up. The kicking and screaming increased in volume. Karen sat there, clutching the wheel.

*If I'd only managed to eat some food back there, she thought. I might be able to handle the situation a little better.*

She took a couple of breaths, then shut off the engine. She turned and looked at the back seat, where Peters coat and hat were laid out. Opened her door. Went back round to the rear of the Vega and opened up the trunk again.

*Just let me sit in the car with you, Peters' wife was saying. I won't do anything ... I swear.*

Karen shook her head and raised the gun a little higher.

*Where's the medicine ?* she said.

Peters' wife couldn't understand what she was asking.

*Your old man said he had drugs in the car – for the shakes ... hallucinations. Where's he keep them?*

Peters' wife leapt up out of the trunk before Karen could stop her. Then she turned and leant right in, to yank at the thick grey felt that covered the side of the trunk's interior. Beneath it was a steel box, welded to the car's body. The box had a door set in it, with a lock half-way down on the right.

Peters' wife stepped aside, to let Karen get a closer look.

*The key's on the ring, she said, ... with the others.*

Karen still had them in her left hand. She handed them over. Peters' wife picked through them, found the right one and unlocked the small steel door. A leather case sat snugly in the locker. She took it out and slid it over to Karen.

A heavy metal latch sat in the center, between the two handles. Karen clicked it back, pulled at the handles and the whole thing separated into two symmetrical stacks of trays, with rows of labelled glass phials and small cardboard packs with the manufacturer's name printed on them ... pills ... syringes, sealed in cellophane.

Some of the drugs Karen recognized by name. Others she had some notion what they would do to her. The rest were a mystery. All the same, this felt like currency of some sort – if nothing more than the possibility of giving a helpful little shunt to her own physiology and state of mind.

Karen turned. To find Peters' wife had backed off a yard or two. She had on her face now a strange expression, whose meaning Karen could not decipher.

Karen saw how she had the keys in her hand. Saw how she turned her head. Locked onto a spot, deep in the trees. Gulping for air now. Pulled back her arm and threw the keys as hard as she could.

Then she turned and ran off down the lane.

Karen stood there, stunned. One part of her thought she'd better head off into the bushes after the car keys. Yet some other part of her watched, mesmerized, as the woman, barefoot, ran away from her.

She thought, *Now who the hell does that put me in mind of?*

A moment later, the answer came to her.

*Well, sure, she thought. That would be me.*

\*

She was always semi-engaged in some act of retrieval. Turning over in her mind a moment, unsure whether it was the trace of an actual event, a dream, or nothing more than random electrical energy her brain was firing off, for fun.

Less than twenty-four hours and already her grip on the apartment seemed to be growing flimsy. Another day or two and it might be gone. The main room, with the little kitchen in the corner. The glass panels across the length of one long wall. An armchair and the sofa where she spent half her conscious hours gaping out at the barren courtyard. Fifty or so square yards of paving, with a brick wall along the other three. She'd track the light out there as it shifted – the slow sweep of shadow. One time the wrapper of a candy bar found its way into the yard and rattled madly in one corner. In no time at all it threatened Karen's entire equilibrium. They had to get someone out there to take care of it. Karen stood at the glass as the guy retrieved it. He picked it up, smiled and tucked it in his pocket. Then it was back to watching the shadows make their way.

Left and right off the corridor behind the kitchen were the bedroom and bathroom. Both windowless, functional, plain. At the far end of the corridor stood the door to the treatment room, opened five minutes or so before each session. As she went about her day Karen would suddenly feel her stomach churn, her throat run dry. Then realize she'd heard the lock on that door click open – had been notified, albeit unconsciously, that things were about to roll.

Some days she'd receive a schedule. Others there'd just be a voice come through on the intercom. One session might last no more than fifteen, twenty minutes. The next might feel like an eternity.

The intercoms were fixed to the walls in such abundance Karen could practically reach out and lay a hand on one wherever she happened to be. Uniformly small and gray, their corners rounded (a feature Karen found disturbing, for some reason) and, bottom right, the neat black button you held down to speak.

There was always someone there. *Hey, Karen. What's up?*

*I got a headache. Can I get some pain relief?*

Had there been a day when she *didn't* have an ache, if not in her head then in her neck, her gut, her shoulders?

The sound of papers being swished across the desktop. A notebook opened. Sometimes the merest snatch of a conversation when they pressed their own black button before they were through.

*Sure thing, Karen. Two minutes and we'll get it to you.*

Almost always it would be Dean or Stewart keeping an eye on things. Maguire in and out, but always busy. Saving his energy for the tests and trials. And then Margaret – indomitable, colossally-assed Margaret – only ever around for the psyche sessions. Eyes swimming fiercely behind those huge square spectacles, the corners rounded just like the intercom. The low bangs, trimmed with precision. And those heavy wooden earrings and necklaces. As if the woman didn't have enough to lug around the place.

On occasion, Peters – and sometimes an entirely unfamiliar face – gawping through the glass partition. Intrigued. Excited, even. But doing their best not to let it show.

Meals slid through the drawer at regular intervals. Supplementary snacks – fruit, juice, biscuits – always stocked in the kitchenette. Otherwise, Karen kept busy with a row of books and a stack of National Geographics, all suspiciously threadbare. Some days she'd be midway through a novel and think, *Did I read this one already? Cos it sure as hell is beginning to ring a bell.*

And, of course, music. A cassette for every occasion. '*Morning sounds*' (Grieg, Mozart, Bach, sundry plinkety pieces for piano). '*Evening sounds*' (More Mozart, Handel, slow, drawn-out choral stuff). '*Calming sounds*' (dolphins, whales, other submarinal sonic honking, some of it mixed with synth and strings). But curiously no '*Get Up and Go Sounds*'. No '*Raze This Place to the Ground Sounds*'. No siren.

Did she once consider setting fire to the apartment? Either just for kicks or as part of some serious bid to escape? What got in the way maybe was the notion of being left to slowly asphyxiate in the thickening smoke. The idea of her flapping around the place in flames. She had, she knew, a deep-struck, very real fear of fire.

She is almost certain of having once taken a heavy object – a chair from over by the kitchen table, say – and swinging it full force against one of the panes of glass. She sees herself studying a chip in the glass – a small, milk-white valley – still breathing heavy. Yet the next time it came to mind she took a look and the glass had healed itself. A miracle.

Just another little thing to be picked away at. Like the circumstances under which she first arrived at the apartment. However long ago that might have been.

*Well, how long do you think?* Maguire asked during one of their regular pow-wows. *More than a month? Or less?*

Karen considered this. Had considered it already. *Well, it's gotta be more than a month, for sure?*

Maguire nodded, calm and slow.

*Well, a whole year, would you say?* Maguire wondered aloud. *Or under a year?*

This was trickier. Three steps in any direction and she was in the dark.

*No*, she said. *No way it could be a whole year.*

And Maguire nodded, smiled. As if it was all starting to come back to her. Rather than constantly, inexorably fading away.

\*

There'd been no word of an upcoming daytrip. But they'd had her hooked-up to a drip since breakfast, dragging its wheeled stand around beside her, which, in turn, stirred in her some almost-memory of a different space ... in a different building – even brighter, bleaker, with even more equipment stacked around the walls. A tight white tunnel, perhaps, and lying super-still while answering questions. A journey there and back in something like an ambulance.

This time she had all of ten minutes' warning. Was encouraged to use the bathroom and when she emerged Dean and Stewart were at the door, in clean scrubs and face masks. They handed her a neat stack – hospital gown, slippers, a mask of her own – and left her to change in the privacy of the bedroom.

A tartan blanket was draped around her shoulders. Then, when word came through that all was ready, she was escorted to the door out of the apartment. Some way off a buzzer sounded – sustained, serious – practically new to Karen. And as the door swung open Dean and Stewart took up positions either side of her – quite possibly to catch a hold of her should she fall.

A dozen or so more steps through a stone-floored lobby before they reached the main door, past a row of lockers, sinks and coat hooks, but already Karen could sense the change in temperature, the quality of air.

Departing the building was a near-crippling experience. The sunlight, even this deep into winter, seemed to sear at her. A light breeze across the front yard threatened to knock her down. The air was too rich. The sounds and colors too complex. If she could only take a little time – a couple of hours maybe – she might be able to get her head around it. But here was Maguire, masked also, directing her to the open doors of an ambulance. To the left a gurney was locked to the floor with a crisp white sheet and small stack of blankets. A bench seat to the right. Then Karen was being helped up the two steps, Dean taking hold of the drip stand. On into the vehicle. Stewart settling her into place.

As the doors were closing Karen leaned forward. Asked Maguire how long the journey would take.

He shook his head slightly. *No time at all*, he said.

One last glance around the yard, then the other door swung to. Karen watched the steel handle on the inside turn counter-clockwise. Could hear Maguire lock it. Saw it jiggled, just to be sure. The guys had Karen lay down on the gurney, the top portion of which was raised by forty-five degrees, allowing her to look around the place. A rail was brought up, to stop her rolling out onto the floor. Stewart and Dean sat opposite, one of them taking hold of the stand for Karen's drip which stood between them. The same guy – Karen couldn't now recall which one – suggesting she take a grip of the rail on the other side with her free right hand. But reassuring her that they wouldn't be moving at too great a speed.

A car door slammed just behind them. Soon after, the ambulance pulled away and out onto the lane.

Karen couldn't say for sure when she committed to the idea of trying to break out of there. That morning, maybe, when they began hooking her up for the journey? Or that very moment, as they headed off? It was a decision she'd been working towards for some while now, but made real and immediate when she looked up and saw the slim fire extinguisher, strapped to one side of the rear doors.

They rolled along. She kept looking away so as not to draw attention. Wondering how she might release it from its holster. And what the hell she would do with it once she had a hold of it.

It appeared to be held in place by a metal clip. Surely easily dealt with? A narrow cone hung down one side of the cannister. This, Karen assumed, would swing forward, once out of its bracket. Above it, two levers jutted out at an angle, like a bird's open beak. Karen felt sure that in order to kick the extinguisher into action you'd need to squeeze the two together. The top lever came out a horizontal, so the lower one must come up to meet it. But poking out from between the two was a plastic strip, with a ring at its end. Two or three times Karen glanced over at it, before figuring this must be some safety mechanism. That it might have to be pulled free for the thing to work.



In the meantime, they'd put no more than a mile or so between themselves and the apartment. Karen wracked her brain for some memory of a previous journey's duration. Nothing. They might keep moving for another hour, or arrive at their destination in ten minutes. Karen thought she may as well get on with it.

She took a breath, pushed back the rail. Swung her legs around and got to her feet. With her right hand she took hold of a strap that hung above her head. Her left hand was now clamped around the drip's stand.

She stared at the floor, deadly serious. *I think I'm gonna puke*, she said.

It's amazing how much room folk are inclined to give you when told you might be about to spew. Stewart and Dean backed off further and at greater velocity than if she'd pulled a gun on them.

As the two men shrank back towards the front partition Karen blundered towards the doors. Halfway there she began to appreciate that she was dragging the drip's stand along with her. She got to the door, reached up with her right hand and released the latch around the extinguisher. But instinctively brought her left arm up to help bring it down. The tube between her arm and the drip went taut. Karen felt the needle snag in her arm. The stand went over.

For a moment she found herself torn between pulling back the clip from the extinguisher and removing the intravenous needle. Whatever time she'd bought with Dean and Stewart was about to run out on her.

She pulled the clip free from the extinguisher, lifted the cone and squeezed the levers.

A jet of fine white dust headed in Dean and Stewart's direction. Then swirled up to the roof and back around. It made quite a sound – urgent, industrial. Karen kept at it, then released her grip, to see if the extinguisher would just keep on firing. It didn't. So she squeezed the levers a second time.

After that second blast she tucked the cannister under her left arm and yanked at the tube in her forearm. It took a couple of tugs before it came free. Then she gripped the extinguisher with both hands, swung it back and high for maximum impact and aimed it down at the lever between the doors.

The moment that first strike landed the driver of the ambulance hit the brakes and Karen would have been thrown towards Dean and Stewart had she not managed to grab hold of the strap above her head. She steadied herself, took aim and brought the cannister down onto the lever a second time and this time the lever swung down all the way. She pushed at the door. The ambulance had slowed but the ground was still racing away from her.

*Fuck*, she said.

Then leapt out through the doors.

\*

Karen stood and watched Peters' wife stumble away from her. The .45 still hung from her hand.

*If I put my mind to it, she thought, I could probably still hit her.*

Peters' wife was quite likely thinking something similar. She began to zig-zag from side to side, as if her steering was shot.

At one point she pulled up – maybe brought her foot down onto something sharp, or twisted an ankle – and hopped and limped a while. Then she went back to zig-zagging. Until finally she zig-zagged right out of sight.

Karen turned to the trees. She had a pretty good idea what direction the keys had been heading. She replayed the moment, of Peters' wife flinging them away, and followed the trajectory through the air. Fixed her sights onto the point where she reckoned they disappeared into the bushes and went in after them.

This time at least she had shoes on her feet as she crashed about in the undergrowth. But they were a size or two too small, forcing her toes right under, like claws. Plus she could feel a sheen of sweat or maybe blood slicking-up the soles of her feet, working into all the cuts and scratches she'd picked up the previous day.

She somehow expected to find the keys within a couple of minutes. It was a sizeable bunch, after all, with half a dozen or so different keys hanging off the ring. All that steel would surely stand out among the ferns and bracken.

Not so. After many minutes on her hands and knees, she crawled back up onto the lane to check her bearings. Replayed the scene again, blocking out where she and Peters' wife had been standing. Running the dialogue – or some approximation of it – right up to the point where Peters' wife turned and threw the keys away.

Karen headed back in. Five minutes later, she re-emerged, empty-handed.

The driver's door on the Vega still hung open. She went over, leaned in and surveyed the interior. She noted the coat and hat laid out on the back. Took in the front seats, the dashboard, the steering wheel.

She swung herself around and dropped back down into the driver's seat. There was some way, she knew, to fire this thing up without the need of a key. She'd seen someone do it. No, wait. She'd done it herself.

The ignition was set high up on the steering column. She had to somehow pop that casing open. There would be cables – different-colored cables – running parallel. She had to pick out one or two cables. Cut them. Strip the ends and reattach them. But which ones and in what order she couldn't recall.

The blade of the box-cutter wouldn't be anywhere near strong enough to prize apart the column's casing. She leaned over to the glove box. Found two spare magazines for the .45 but nothing else of any use. She took them out and dropped them on the passenger seat.

She turned right around and reached out to Peters' coat – patted the pockets. A cotton handkerchief, various pens, a wallet.

She pictured the bag of meds sitting out on the asphalt and brought to mind the items she'd seen laid out in it. The rows of tiny jars, boxes of powders, hyperdermics – again, nothing that would be of any use to her here.

So, finally, she laid herself down, out across the passenger seat, until her head was almost up against the far door. Drew her left leg up to her chest, took a breath and brought her heel down hard against the side of the steering column, with as much force as she could bear.

The whole car shook but the column remained intact, defiant.

Karen took a breath and brought her foot back up. Then slammed it down again, just below the glint of the ignition, with the spare mags for the .45 jiggling around her shoulder, and the

handbrake jabbing at her ribs. Thinking, *I've got the box-cutter for the cables. All I have to do is crack this damned thing open and the old guy's box-cutter will do the rest.*

But the casing around the steering column wasn't in any way troubled. Karen lay there a couple of moments, her left foot and leg and shoulder wrenched and hurting from the impact. At last, pulling herself back up, wincing, breathless. And seeing Peters' wife again running off down the lane. Thinking how she should have shot her. In the leg maybe, just to slow her down a little. So she might at least have had some sense of achievement. Something to show for the day.

Twice more Karen limped down into the trees, determined that this time out she'd track down the keys. Till finally she crawled back out, went over to the Vega, took Peters' coat, the two spare clips, his leather bag of pharmaceuticals, had one last look around and headed off down the lane.

She'd walked a couple of hundred yards before it occurred to her she might as well wear Peters' coat as carry it. She folded back the cuffs, so that the silk lining showed an inch or two. Then managed no more than a quarter mile in total before having to pull up from the discomfort in her feet.

She sat on a mound of raised ground and eased off the right sneaker. Fished out the old guy's box-cutter and began hacking into the seam where the leather folded under and was tucked in deep, above the sole. She could feel the stitches popping as she worked through them. And having cut around the toe from left to right she sliced a crescent over the top, right through the fabric, until the two incisions met.

She lifted her foot and twisted it around to take a look. It was swollen and covered in welts. It also stank. But there wasn't much she could do about all of that, so she brushed the dirt away and eased it back into the sneaker. And now at least her toes came out the front and could move about freely. Though they may well freeze and fall clean off within an hour or two.

She sat and listened for a moment. Looked up and down the track. Removed the other shoe and repeated the procedure, cutting first around the rim, feeling the blade click through the

individual stitches. Then bringing the box-cutter up and sawing away at the material above the toes from left to right. But this time she must have cut back a little higher into the shoe. So that where the incision across the toes reached the sole it found an extra layer of leather, which was tougher for the box-cutter to get through.

She held the shoe flat on her leg. With her left hand she pulled the loose flap out the way and with her right hacked away at the thick strand holding it. Either she pulled too hard on the flap of leather or put too much effort into the sawing. Because suddenly the blade slipped, skipped off the sneaker and sunk deep into her thigh.

Karen pulled out the blade. Dropped the shoe and grabbed her leg with her left hand. Sat there, stock-still for several moments, barely daring to breathe. Waiting to see how much pain was coming. How much blood there'd be.

She looked down and slowly released her fingers. As they spread, already she could see where the blue tracksuit trousers had gotten darker around a neat, inch-long tear.

She shifted her leg. The split in the material winked open and through that small window the only thing visible was blood. It started to hurt now. She straightened her leg but that only brought about more discomfort. But she had to lift her ass off the ground and yank down the tracksuit to get a better look at what was going on.

It was a mess. Whatever blood had already seeped into the tracksuit now smeared across her thigh. Karen clamped her hand over the gash. As if this might fix it, or as a way to atone for what she'd done. When at last she pulled her hand away and squeezed the flesh around the wound the cut puckered and popped open. Like a well, quickly filling with a fresh pool of blood. She pinched it shut. Already the blood covered her fingers. But, she reasoned, with a really serious cut there'd be blood pumping out of her like a fountain. If she could just keep it clean and compact then surely the bleeding would eventually cease.

Yet even as she did her best to stay objective and positive, two thoughts came to her. First, she imagined herself slowly bleeding to death, alone, out here in the middle of nowhere. Then,

contrarily, she felt herself suddenly vulnerable and exposed – easily caught by Maguire and his knuckleheads. Decided she should get off this road and on her way as quickly as possible.

There were no bandages in Peters' bag. Why would there be? But there were cotton pads for cleaning the skin prior to an injection and to hold over the site once the needle was removed. She took a handful and put them to one side. Now she needed something to hold them in place.

The hospital gown, torn into strips, would have been ideal but was back on the floor of the Peters' bathroom. She looked at the tracksuit ... the old guy's jacket ... before deciding that the silk lining of Peters' overcoat was the closest to a good thing.

She didn't bother taking it off. Just took hold of the lapel, brought it out and hacked into the lining with the box-cutter. She wound up with four or five strips long enough to go around her thigh a couple of times. She took the cotton pads, held them against the wound and did her best not to disturb them as she tied them in place.

Once she was through she got to her feet, slowly and pulled her tracksuit trousers back up over the bandage. Was she going to pass out? No. She was fine. Really, this was no trouble at all.

\*

Those first couple of steps hurt like hell. Each time she swung her left leg forward she pictured that inch-long split in her skin puckering-up and more oily blood easing out. She wondered if maybe the blade had reached into muscle. It was the idea of having butchered herself that so disturbed her. Perhaps to try to process this – to purge herself of it, rather perversely – she saw the box cutter’s blade repeatedly disappear through the tracksuit and go deep into her leg.

Within five minutes she’d settled into a sort of limping, grunting rhythm. She imagined the scene back at the Vega. Saw Maguire’s arrival – with more goons, more walkie-talkies. Peters’ wife jumping out of a back door, a real eager-beaver, having directed the cars to the spot. But no Peters. Karen had him lying in the lane, twisting and cursing. Then taken back to the apartment. Or his own home. Somewhere out of the way.

So maybe six or eight men in total, congregating round the Vega. Maguire spreading a map across the hood. Portioning-up the landscape for two or three separate parties. Cool Maguire. Determined Maguire. Looking hard into the eyes of first one man, then the next. *Let’s get this done.*

The Vega had pretty much blocked the road when Karen abandoned it, but it wouldn’t take a minute to let out the handbrake and shunt it over to one side. They would then work on the basis that Karen would continue in much the same direction. That she was unlikely to spin around and head back the way she’d come. There must be a general line of thrust, of propulsion, to a person with other people in pursuit of them. And, taking the road as its center line, she’d be unlikely to veer away from it at more than 45 degrees or so. But, like the cone on the fire extinguisher back in the ambulance, the greater the distance from the source, the greater the coverage. Meaning they’d want to impede her progress at the soonest opportunity.

The guys with the guns would cover the woodland. Maguire and a buddy would be the ones heading down the road. Karen could sense him, back over her shoulder. So much so that she stopped and stared off in that direction. Then she buttoned herself into Peters’ overcoat and swung right, off the track.



She worked her way through the trees, which seemed here to be growing wider, taller – with less brush and bracken in between. At some point, she knew, she should maybe consider where she was heading. But for now her only concern was to keep well ahead of the men behind her – men who wished to do her harm.

Here and there she'd catch a glimpse of sky between the trees. All the time she tried to push forward but felt the steady temptation always to drift a little down the gradient. And once or twice, in the sky's lower reaches, she caught sight of a mountain top, snow-streaked and way off. Which had her wondering whether she was, in fact, heading deeper into the wilderness. And, if so, whether this was such a bad thing.

But she was really hurting now. Her hand and shoulder, from the smash in the pick-up. Her feet ripped-up from traipsing barefoot through the woods. And now her left thigh, where she'd contrived to stab herself. The fact that she'd managed to acquire a pistol did not necessarily bode that well. It was surely just a matter of time before she shot herself in the head.

Plus, she was so goddamned thirsty. Karen couldn't recollect the last time she needed a pee. If she could only lay her hands on a jug of ice-cold water she envisaged all those pains and aches being washed right from her. She would be pure, serene.

She pushed herself on. And on. Until at last she said to herself, *Okay, I gotta stop now.*

She tucked herself in behind a fallen trunk – a monster tree, dead and rotten, thick with amber moss. Was about to take a peek at her most recent injury, but decided against it. The dark patch of blood didn't appear to be getting any bigger. She still didn't feel as if she was about to pass out. Maybe better just not to think about it for a while.

She dragged Peters' bag around, popped the lock and prized it open. There surely must be something here to go some way to alleviating her manifold pains. The rows of glass phials chinked against one another as she ran her finger along them. She twisted a couple around to try and read the labels. One or two she took out and brought up before her face. Bupivacaine? Dichloralphenazone? Not a single one made any sense to her. Countless times she'd observed

Dean or Stewart administer pharmaceuticals to her via hypodermic and could conceivably break down some of the effects they'd had on her. But she never knew their proper names, or what to expect with any certainty once they got inside her. She may have been told, *This is gonna help you relax*. Or maybe, *This should perk you up a little*. But beyond that it was just a matter of waiting and seeing. And half the time once the needle was withdrawn she'd be out – away off into oblivion.

But didn't she occasionally catch sight of a label, inverted, as one of the boys drew the bottle's contents down into a syringe? If so, she wasn't able to bring that information to mind right now.

The light was failing again. *Jesus, already?* Or was she just so deep among the trees? Either way, it was no help to her. Out of desperation, she took up a hypodermic, unwrapped it. Plucked off the cap and picked out a phial at random. Peeled away the seal, just as she'd seen the boys do back at the apartment, and pierced the rubber cap with the tip of the needle. She drew the liquid up into the tube, clear and mysterious, till the glass was practically full. Pulled it free and flipped the syringe around so that it pointed up towards the tree tops. Tapped it and gave the plunger the merest squeeze, to clear any air from it.

Karen stared in at the dope, wondering at its properties. Brought the needle up to her nose and took a sniff, but it failed to evoke anything of substance. Maybe her sense of smell was shot, along with everything else. She looked again at the little jar's printed label. Braced herself. Then finally squeezed the liquid off into the bushes in a perfect arc. And threw the bottle after it.

She dropped the syringe into the bag and leaned back against the fallen tree. Monitored her breathing. Now she'd stopped moving she could feel sleep, or some version of it, begin to creep up on her. The thirst and pain may keep her conscious. She wasn't sure she cared much either way.

She went through her pockets again. Found Peters' handkerchief and wallet. The old guy's wallet, cigarettes and lighter. She should maybe have used the handkerchief to try and staunch the bleeding an hour or two ago. With the lighter she could get a little fire started. Though she

saw, almost immediately, that any benefit of heat and momentary comfort wouldn't stack up against the risk of the smoke acting like a great arrow for the men chasing her. *That woman you're after? She's HERE ...*

In one pocket of the old guy's jacket she had the box cutter. She reached into the other and pulled out the .45. Her hand folded easily around it. She had it out, at arm's length. Closed one eye and swung it slowly round to the left, then right, picking out individual trees, the tips of branches. Then brought her left hand across and placed it over her right hand. With the thumb on her right hand she slipped off the safety. Oh, boy. How she would love to let off a shot or two. To feel the barrel kick up and that solid block of energy shunt back into both shoulders as the slug went on its way. To be in control. That would do her soul the power of good right now. But a gunshot out here would be an even bigger break for the knuckleheads than her lighting a campfire. So reluctantly she checked the safety and dropped the pistol back in the jacket pocket, alongside the spare magazines.

She opened Peters' bag again – pulling both sides right back this time so the trays on both sides spread wide – and in the base Karen discovered a whole other array of small cardboard boxes, with the pharmaceutical company's name and logo printed on them. She fished a couple out and found a box marked 'Vicodin'. The text below was too small to be legible, at least in this light. But she flipped the box's lid and slid out a plastic tub. Unscrewed the lid and shook some of the pills into the palm of her hand.

*Well, these little guys sure look a little more familiar,* she thought.

She brought one up to her mouth and licked it. She was almost certain these were the kind of meds Dean or Stewart would slide on through to her when she had a headache or muscle pain.

She shook all but two of the pills back into the bottle. Then had a change of heart and jiggled a third back out. She looked around, as if she might yet find a faucet. Then flipped all three pills up into her mouth.

She'd never been able to swallow a pill without a glass of water. First she'd have to rinse her mouth and get it good and wet. Insert the pill and swing her head back two or three times to try and shunt it as far back on her tongue as possible. Followed by a large slug of water to try and wash the damned thing down.

She knew if she tried to swallow the pill dry she'd have trouble. So she set about chewing them instead.

The bitterness wasn't that big a problem. It was the chalkiness made her gag. Perhaps half the chewed-up pills she managed to get down her. The rest got packed down into her teeth or coated the roof of her mouth, with no spit to send it on its way. She wiped the sweat from her arms and forehead and tried to lick it from her fingers. But that still wasn't enough. And, quite suddenly, she couldn't swallow. She got to her feet in a panic. Considered cracking open an arbitrary phial from Peters' bag, just to get some liquid into her.

She tried swallowing again.

She saw the amber moss hanging from the fallen tree, damp and sodden. Reached out and ripped a hank right off. Brought it up and sucked at it. For all she knew the moss was more lethal than all the drugs in her medicine bag. She didn't care. The moisture allowed her to swallow and the swallowing allowed her to breathe.

She stood there for a minute, heart pounding. Waiting for her breathing to steady out. Since she was on her feet she couldn't see much reason in sitting back down. So she shut the bag, pulled the coat tight around her and headed on through the trees.

\*

Her only real plan was to continue moving, in what she hoped was the opposite direction to the one she'd come. There were no paths as such, so she'd just lock on to some feature fifty or sixty yards off into the distance and advance towards it, slowly weaving between the trees. In her left hand now she had a hefty stick, four feet or so in length, to try and take some pressure off her leg, but also to stab at the ground out before her and get some sense of the depth of the leaves and what they hid.

The drugs, she thought, had maybe started to kick in now. Her many discomforts were still very much in evidence, but their volume had been diminished, their presence softened somehow. More intriguing, though, Karen sensed a shift in her consciousness. Typically, she'd have trouble recalling with clarity any event beyond three or four weeks earlier. And even those moments would come through to her bruised and disfigured. Some fragment might sometimes spring up from deeper waters. But nothing solid, verifiable. Now, though, it felt like the mist might be beginning to lift a little. Lost features of some inner landscape began to take shape. And as the day wore on she felt herself almost able to reach way back, beyond her time at the apartment. Nothing more than the vaguest taste, or colors. But enough to give her hope. The easing of her pain she put down to the pills she'd popped. The rest, she felt, related more to the increasing distance from the apartment and the time that had elapsed since her last session in the back room.

She limped on. The dressing on her left thigh seemed to be holding. Though she had to nudge it back up into position every five minutes or so. She'd no strong sense of the ground she'd covered or how many hours' daylight she still had in hand.

She'd stopped. Was leaning on her stick and looking around for more moss to chew on when somewhere behind her a mighty *Crack* fired off and went echoing through the trees. She spun around and dropped down behind the nearest Fir. Pulled the pistol from her jacket pocket and leaned right into the bark.

She didn't move for some time, listening hard for any sense of movement. Then slowly rolled herself around the Fir's great trunk to peer back into the murk. Overhead, branches rattled against one another. Down the valley some birds made a crazy racket. But that was all.

Very slowly she got to her feet.

*Is that just how things are out here?* she thought. *A branch shards off. Hits the ground. A whole load of noise and action. Then it's back to the nothingness. Everything just carries on.*

She took up her bag again and returned to walking, but now kept the pistol in her hand and looked over her shoulder more frequently than she'd previously done.

A mile or so further on she stopped to check on her makeshift dressing. She pulled the tracksuit pants down and prodded at the wound through the bloodstained silk and cotton to see how much pain this generated when another, quite different sound came through to her. Where the last had been sharp and sudden, this was soft and continuous. She turned her head, to try and better locate it. There it was again. Almost melodic. She yanked her tracksuit pants back up, gathered her belongings and set off after it.

Before she was halfway there the cover of the 'Calming Sounds' cassette came to her. She was practically salivating before the stream was even in sight. All things considered, it was a relatively modest affair, no more than three feet or so wide, but hammering down the rocks and stones at quite a rate.

Karen dropped her bag, her stick and practically plunged her head right in, where the water was white with spray. Then found a little gully where she could kneel and scoop the water up a little more easily. She kept on drinking until her hand and mouth were half-froze.

She sat back and belched. Having found a source of water she was reluctant to leave it. Her intended path, vague as it was, cut square across the stream. She looked down to her right now and imagined the water's course through the roots and briars. The stream at least was headed somewhere. She weighed up her options and decided to keep it company for a short while. To maybe see where it wound up. She took up her things again and headed down the hill.

But this didn't do the wound on Karen's thigh any favors – the effort of slowing her stride and the impact as her foot came down on the rocks and stone that seemed to have gathered at the water's edge. A couple of times the stream cut so deep into the ground it practically vanished and one time disappeared entirely. But Karen limped on in pretty much the same direction and a little way on the water came coughing back out into the air again and carried on its way.

Like the mountains, Karen's first glimpse of the river was between trees, off into the distance. A solid entity, but slowly shifting – and with an abundance of light and space accompanying it. A little further down the hill and the trees gave way. Then the river was there before her, kicking up silver over broken boulders and in the shallows and with a wide scree beyond both shores.

This seemed to Karen to be a different river to the last one – the one that almost drowned her as it made its way toward to the latticed bridge. And not simply because she encountered this stretch of water in what remained of the daylight but from its very nature. The way it carried itself.

She slid down the scree on her ass, setting a small landslide in motion. Then clambered over the rocks and the battered scraps of timber that had got caught up in between. Close up the water seemed to be in no great hurry. On both sides the valley reached way back, most of it thickly wooded, but bare patches here and there. And way up by the ridge great blocks of rockface staring coldly out over the whole scene.

The air was cold and fresh down by the water. For a few moments she sat and watched it go by. The current looked sure and steady. Maybe if she dragged along some sizeable piece of timber and rolled it in she might be carried downstream some miles. But she wasn't about to slide into another freezing river without good reason. Plus the river was heading back in the direction she'd just come from.

Looking round, Karen saw how she was now visible from any number of locations – the only movement on the river's shoreline. She hadn't the strength to climb back up into the trees so she set off upriver, pulling back from the water as she found her rhythm. She still had her stick

in one hand, Peters' bag in the other. The sun had already fallen below the ridge way up behind her. The temperature was dropping. Another hour or so and the light would be gone.

Her progress across the rocks and shingle was just as tough as it had been through the trees. The river slowly swung around to the left, then right, each new vista a little darker and colder than the one before. Until Karen saw that if she didn't pull up soon and try and find some shelter she'd be flailing about in the dark.

Soon after, she came upon a pile of planks, some way back from the water. And it was a moment or two before she saw that the silvered wood and strips of rusted tin had once constituted a shack or cabin, that with the weight of time had ruptured and collapsed in on itself. A low gable at the end nearest the river was the only feature that was in any way half-raised from the ground, and that by no more than a foot or two. Beneath the peak was a small opening. Karen peered into the shadows. She thought she might just about be able to squeeze her way in there. She turned and looked up and down the river. It had to be better than spending the night out in the open air.

She crawled on in. Then dragged her medicine bag in after her. When the shack collapsed the roof and gable must have fallen forward because beneath her she felt nothing but cold, bare stones. She considered climbing back out and fetching some branches or suchlike from the woods – for insulation and comfort – but never quite got around to it. *In a couple of minutes, maybe*, she told herself on several occasions. But with each couple more minutes she was less and less inclined to follow it up.

She was suddenly monumentally hungry. To occupy herself she tried to work out how many meals she'd missed out on back at the apartment, and what form they might have taken.

Her toes were so cold she could barely feel them. So she drew her legs up to her chest, under her overcoat. But that just tugged at the gash in her thigh and got her thinking about how that wound must look now. Which got her thinking about her left hand and shoulder. And so didn't really help at all.



But she was, at least, cognizant of her surroundings. The woods above her and that dark, wide river a stone's throw away. Some sense of the territory through which she'd passed. Along with some growing sense of the place she'd inhabited prior to her travels.

When she'd been led out of the apartment to the ambulance, high on fresh air, she'd briefly turned and looked back and taken in the building. At something like a farmhouse. And now, lying half-buried beneath a flattened shack, she had a faint memory of that same view – the door, the roof, the yard out front – when she first arrived there.

But, just as these thoughts rose up in her, and sought to make connections, Karen felt the merest click in her left arm, deep beneath where the sticking plaster should be. And she felt all that precious coherence start to slip, off into the river and away between the wooded hillsides. And Karen thought, *The next chance I get I really must look into that*. Then the waves came up to meet her and she was gone.

\*

Back at the apartment they played with time non-stop. Pulling it this way and that, just to see what happened. Some of the pills she popped – the various tests and trials – made the hours fairly fly by. Like she was holding down the FFW key on the cassette player. Other times, in the midst of other treatments, it felt like someone had hit the brakes and every second would be a speck of dust drifting in the light, like an orbiting planet. And she'd be so incredibly present through every single moment she'd begin to wonder how in the world she'd ever manage to hack her way through such a mountain of time.

Way back, she was sure they'd been more vigilant about wearing face masks. But was it the fact that Karen carried some infection? Or that she was somehow more susceptible to be taken out by every little bug? This was why they had to keep the doors locked. They'd been extra-clear about it on any number of occasions. But within a week or two she'd lose hold of the information and they'd have to be extra-clear all over again.

Some days they had her sit up and pick out numbers or study pictures projected on the far wall. Other days they'd have her lie down with the headphones and let some tape loop rinse through her for half a day. She could see the spools on the reel to reel in the next room, slowly turning. So many machines, with so many cables snaking on through to her – coming out the floor and walls – she couldn't be sure whether they were pumping something into her. Or something personal, private being drawn away.

Blue light sessions were somehow different to red light sessions. But, like all else, she had trouble hanging onto which way round it was. As often as not, Maguire would be there through the glass, squinting at the dials, the read-outs. His voice would sometimes burst into the room via a speaker in the ceiling.

*You okay, Karen? You're doing really well.*

Now and then she'd pick out a tinny voice from the earpiece of Dean or Stewart as they tended her. A brief pause while they listened for a moment. They'd maybe nod a time or two. Then carry on.

Each individual brought their own particular scent into the backroom. With Maguire it was aftershave and a relentless keenness. Others, plain body odor. Or maybe the powder they used to wash their clothes. With Margaret it was mints. As they talked, Karen would sometimes hear the damned thing rattling between her teeth, like a pebble. But the smell of cigarette smoke always came through around it. An underlying fug of dirt.

She talked so much. Margaret and her little quizzes. Tests for Maintenance of Wakefulness, Sleep Latency, Vigilance. Because in the end that's where everything was headed. The drugs, the endless hours on the treadmill. Forever being nudged towards that place where Karen almost, almost tipped from exhaustion into sleep. Held up there at the end of a pin, walking the fine line between consciousness and sweet oblivion.

*I need to sleep, she'd say. Maguire. Jesus Christ.*

*I know, I know, he'd say. Just tell me, Karen. Up ahead. What is it? What do you see?*

\*

Karen first woke deep in the night. She'd grown so cold, she figured later, that some alarm, buried deep and ancient, must have stirred her. Alerting her to the fact that, should her body temperature drop another degree or more, there'd be a complete shutdown and that would be the end of her.

The night showed no sign of ever ending. There was no moon or stars as far as she could see. She turned onto her left side, one half of her body numb, the rest mainly painful. Remembered Peters' lighter and fumbled in her pockets for it. An item suddenly as precious to her as the pistol. If need be, she told herself, she could take it out, bring it into action and be assured that she was there. Not simply some demented idea of a person, curled up in the dark.

She gripped the lighter in her fist and pulled the coat and jacket tight around her.

Some time later she considered making a fire from the flattened shack. Touched the timber around her – there was a good chance it was dry enough. Then there'd be both heat and light, in abundance. She envisaged herself standing, mesmerized, before the flames. Her body buffeted by the heat. Surely, whoever was pursuing her would have stopped to take some rest, just as she'd done. If anyone turned up well then she'd just scuttle off into the trees.

When she next came to it was broad daylight and she couldn't understand how she hadn't woken earlier. Perhaps due to her being so deep in the valley. And practically interred in the ground.

She wasn't inclined to move. But the thought slowly came upon her that by now Maguire's goons would almost certainly be up and about and, in all likelihood, steadily heading towards where she lay.

She had her arms and chest clear of the shattered gable and turned back to get a hold of her bag when she sensed some minor imposition, coming down the valley. A steady hum – like something motorized, or mechanical. The wind dropped and the sound died with it. Karen waited. The wind picked up and the sound was reinstated, just as strange now but with a little more strength. She turned and looked upriver. In the distance, the better part of a quarter mile

away, a small boat was pulling round the bend. And even at this distance Karen could see a speck of white either side of the craft, where its outboard kicked up a modest wake.

Her first thought was that this must be an adversary. The boat was some way off but she doubted she'd have time to make it to the tree line without being spotted. The flattened shack was too obvious a place of refuge – whoever was on the boat would be bound to direct their attention to it. So, keeping low, she grabbed her bag, moved down the shore a little and took cover behind a couple of larger rocks.

She crouched right down, breathing in the cold, damp stone. Then, as she waited, thought, *But that boat's going in the wrong direction. Any goons would surely come the other way.*

Within seconds, this was superseded by another thought. That Maguire's men had cars and means of communication and so were perfectly able to radio ahead and have an associate get out on to the water and initiate a search from beyond the point she'd reached.

By now, the boat had covered more than half the distance to her. Karen felt the chilled grit beneath her fingers and had a sudden conviction the person on the boat might be the last human being she'd ever encounter. Lying in the dark just a few hours earlier she'd sworn she wouldn't spend another night out in the cold. Didn't think she could take it. The owner of the boat might be her only hope of keeping her word. Even so, she couldn't bring herself to raise her head. And the closer the sound of the outboard, the lower she cowed behind the rocks.

The boat was riding on the current but barely racing. As it drew parallel Karen saw just how little there was to it. Couldn't have been more than ten or twelve feet in length. Flat and open, tapering up at the front and square at the back where a guy in his thirties or forties was bent over the outboard.

He had on yellow oilskins and a woolen cap pulled way down over both ears. He was slight and bespectacled, keeping his eyes fixed on the river.

As he went by Karen got to her feet. She stood there, watching.

Already the waves of the boat's wake were working down the shore towards her. *If he was looking for me, she thought, he'd be scanning the shoreline. This guy is looking dead ahead.*

Another few moments and he'd be gone.

*Hey!* she called out. And began hobbling after him. *Hey, wait!*

The second time he spun around. Saw her. But continued to steadily drift away from her.

Karen limped after him, bag in hand, but was never going to catch him. Might have pursued him right down the river, tripping over the smaller stones, dodging in and out of the bigger ones. And all the while that scrap of a boat getting further and further from her, if its owner hadn't finally gathered his wits, eased back the throttle, pushed the tiller over and come around.

*Jee-zus*, he said, gawping at her.

He had a thick brush of a moustache which, along with his hat and spectacles, didn't leave much room for anything else.

He began to bring the boat in towards the shore. Looked Karen up and down with a kind of skepticism. She was in such bad shape – bruised and bleeding, a filthy coat hanging off her, bare toes poking out of sneakers. She might be crazy, he thought. Might do something unpredictable.

*What the fuck you doing way out here?* he said.

He was still ten feet from the shore, but there were too many rocks in the shallows for him to bring the boat in where Karen was standing. She didn't seem to hear him. Seemed about to plough right on into the water.

*Wait up*, he said. Then pointed to a spot a little way upriver where he could come ashore without impediment.

For a short while they moved along, with just that thin strip of water between them – Karen limping and stumbling, clutching her bag of pharmaceuticals, the owner of the boat keeping the motor running just high enough to keep ahead of the river's pull.

At the guy's feet Karen saw a couple of large plastic pails, colored floats, coiled rope and such.

*You okay?* he called out to her.

Karen shook her head. Kept moving along.

He turned in towards the shore a second time. Was about to give the motor one last kick, to bring the craft up onto the gravel when a voice came rolling up the river.

He and Karen both turned. A hundred yards or so down the shore a guy had one hand raised – was half-waving as he jogged towards them.

Karen didn't recognize him. It didn't matter. She headed straight into the water now.

*We got to go*, she said.

*Why?* The owner of the boat was still staring off at him. *Who is he?*

*We got to go*, she said again.

The lip of the boat was still a little way shy of the shoreline. Karen was up to her knees with the boat inching towards her. The owner of the boat saw how, as things stood, he'd likely hit her. So he brought the revs right back and pulled the tiller in towards him, so the boat swung back around to the right.

The guy coming up the shoreline was waving still and calling out a bunch of stuff, most of which was all but inaudible. He was laughing, smiling. As if the whole situation was some kind of joke.

Karen threw her bag into the boat.

The guy at the outboard was saying, *We should wait, maybe. See what he's got to say.*

Karen had both hands on the side of the boat now, almost up to her waist in water. As she heaved herself forward the boat owner instinctively leaned back, to counter the force. *She's gonna have us over*, he was thinking. *She's gonna drown the both of us.*

She got first an arm, then a leg up into the boat. *We need to get the fuck away from him*, she said.

The guy on the shore was now only eighty or so feet from them. The boat's owner turned back to look at him. The guy had stopped. Had quit waving and calling, and was bringing a long, slim case around from over his shoulder.

*Okay*, he thought. *This is all getting way too weird for me.*

The moment Karen rolled herself in he opened up the outboard and squared the tiller so they were headed back up the river.

But now the guy on the shore was on his feet again. Running hard along that final stretch, a shotgun gripped in one hand.

The boat's owner pulled back the throttle. Would've swung the boat around to pick up the current if that hadn't taken them right on past the guy with the gun. So he pulled the tiller in a little more, meaning they cut a diagonal somewhere between heading straight upriver and straight across to the far shore.



It made no difference. Another couple of moments and the guy was standing where Karen had stood the minute before.

He brought the shotgun up and tucked it into his right shoulder. He was maybe fifty feet from them now, the toes of his boots dipping into the water.

*Turn around*, he called out. As if this was a government instruction. *You need to turn around and head back over to me.*

The guy at the outboard looked to Karen. She glared back at him and shook her head.

The first shot was just a blast that shook the valley. It hit neither them nor the boat, so must've caught the water or gone right on past and into the trees beyond.

Karen looked back and saw the guy rack the gun. The empty shell spat out and hit the shingle. She watched him bring the stock back up to his shoulder. She dropped down and he fired again.

This shot caught the boat right on the waterline. Not too far from their feet. But, rather than knock the boat back, it jerked it forward. And water started to make its way in. Momentarily, Karen was somehow transfixed by this. Meanwhile, the guy had drawn back the forestock and punched another round into the chamber. He let it go.

Karen saw the consequences before she heard the gunshot. A foot-wide bite was taken out of the boat's trim. Shards of wood flew up and off in every direction. Now people were screaming and shouting. Trying to take cover where there was no cover to be found.

It had taken this long for Karen to bring to mind her pistol and to figure this might be an opportune moment to take it out.

There was a lull. The guy on the shore had lowered the shotgun, pulled a clutch of shells from a pocket and was loading them, one by one, up into the gun.

The boat was taking on water but still making progress. Its owner reckoned they couldn't be more than twenty feet from the shore. He had his head down, thinking, *What the fuck have I got myself into?* Then somewhere off behind him he heard the guy rack the gun again and knew that this was it.

The shot caught him up under the left arm and knocked him clean over. Slowly, he brought his head up. The left side of his oilskins was shredded, like they'd been caught in a waste disposal. For a moment or two he felt no more than winded. But when he tried to set himself straight the pain suddenly came raging up into him.

*Fuck*, he said, incredulous. *What the fuck.*

Karen had pulled out the pistol and released the safety. But was staring at the blood spattered bright against the yellow oilskin.

*Well, shoot him*, he said. *Chrissakes, shoot the fuck.*

She raised her right hand, closed her left eye, settled the barrel on the vicinity of the guy's torso and fired off a shot.

She must've missed because the guy went ahead and kept on firing. The boat was coming violently apart. Again, there was screaming and shouting. Between their feet the plastic pails were dancing and rattling. Then there was a longer moment as the shooter took aim. The next shot came at them. The guy beside Karen went over. His spectacles flew off. And when he settled she saw how a whole piece of his neck and head was missing. There was a stench of blood. Raw meat.

He'd come down over the tiller, pulling it right in towards his gut. So now the boat began to swing around to the left, in a wide arc, taking them back towards the shore they'd worked so hard to leave behind. Without really knowing it, Karen had been using the guy as a wall, a shield. But the more they swung around the better view she had of the guy with the shotgun and the better view he had of her.

The guy paused and dug his hand back into his pocket. Reloaded, pumped the rack back and began firing again. Now he seemed determined to keep on at it until the boat and its occupants were gone.

Karen fired but it didn't seem to faze him. She couldn't focus. Had difficulty catching her breath.

She needed to get the boat back around and moving in the right direction. Its owner wasn't too big but was pretty much wedged right over the tiller. The motor was running high and the boat was still moving. Just not in the direction Karen wanted it to go.

The shots kept on coming. Slowly tearing the boat apart. Till finally Karen lay back, braced her shoulders against the gunwale and with her left leg pushed the guy's slumped body away from her. His torso shifted with the tiller tucked up beneath it. The boat slowly swung back round to the right.

The guy on the shore must've fed a dozen or more cartridges up into the shotgun, shunted them down into the barrel and had the empty cartridges fly out the side. Before the echoes of one shot had faded, the rack went back and the next blast followed. The valley had likely never carried so much sound. Karen stayed low, with her foot pinioned against the poor dead guy. The boat kept on running. But much lower in the water now. Ten feet from the shore she took hold of her bag and slipped over the side. She held on for dear life but the moment her feet touched the bed of the river she scooted back, pulling the boat along with her. And with her hand on the bag's handle, still tucked into the boat.

When the water dropped down to her waist she reached her right arm across the boat and waited till it swung round those last few degrees. The second he came into view she fired twice, without bothering to close one eye. She saw him stop. Then kneel. As if in prayer. Then he flopped forward and slowly the river took a hold of him and carried him away.

The last time she turned back the boat had disappeared, taking its owner and outboard with it. The silence crept back into the valley. And Karen ran on, up into the trees.

\*

She stumbled on. Up out of the valley. Away from the river and whatever the hell had just happened back there.

She'd mislaid her stick – at the flattened shack, maybe. Or following the stream down through the trees on the other side of the valley. The higher she climbed the closer those trees across the way seemed to be to her. Till finally she had to turn her attention away from them, to stop her freaking out.

After an hour or so she found she was done with climbing. Rather than drop down into another valley she determined to stay as close to the top of the ridge as possible, where there was more light and an occasional vantage. And so each time she felt her footfall quicken she'd check herself, look for higher ground and head towards it. Even if it meant having to hack her way through thick scrub.

She began to grow tired but kept on going. She was getting thirsty again. The air up here felt sharper. Such a jolt of cold to her lungs she briefly wondered if she'd been walking long enough for the seasons to have shifted. Or covered such a distance that the climate had changed.

A couple of times she'd pause, put down her bag and lean into a tree – to check on her leg, her smacked-up hand, her ravaged toes. But she did her best to resist sitting, fearful now she'd fall asleep and never come to. Be incorporated into the landscape.

She'd got another stick, broken it down to a suitable length, but still wasn't happy with it. Was neither strong nor thick enough. She scanned the ground for something better. Then, when she looked up, she saw the two-lane blacktop a mile or so away to her right.

At first, she took it for a river. The same stretch of water she'd recently encountered, but a couple of miles further upstream. It seemed to snake between the wooded hillsides with the same blind determination. She saw her mistake pretty quick. How it was, in fact, solid asphalt, silver-gray from the cold, catching the light.

She stayed high on the ridge. Then dropped down to the right and picked up a rough path that zig-zagged the last few hundred yards, till she was close enough to smell the oil and rubber on the road.

She stood at the edge of the trees. Sooner or later, she felt sure, a car or truck would come along. She ran this scenario in her head. Pictured herself flagging it down. But swiftly rejected it. Because the driver might have some link to the apartment? No, not that. Then why? She didn't know.

She turned to her left and followed the road for a mile or so, keeping to the trees as much as she was able and walking on the dirt beside the asphalt when she was not. In time, sure enough, a couple of vehicles swept by. A station wagon with some guy at the wheel, seemingly oblivious. Then a huge truck, pulling a load of gargantuan lengths of timber, chained between six upright posts. Both times Karen slipped into the trees as soon as she heard them coming. The station wagon passed without making much impression, but the truck seemed to disrupt the entire valley. And, having passed, threatened to drag every element after it.

Twenty minutes or so later Karen was out on the asphalt looking up ahead when she saw how the road swung round to the right. A light mist had settled, turning the whole scene vague and muted. And it was maybe this moisture that picked up the color, faint as it was, as she got closer. An orange hue radiating from beyond the bend.

As she limped on and finally came around she saw how the light spilled from an electric sign, out in front of a gas station. The word 'Gulf' was brightly illuminated, the letters blue on white with a bright orange crescent above and below. The sign was clamped to one side of a huge white post, so that it hung out towards the road. Karen had seen this exact same sign before. In her dreams maybe. She'd dreamed of being here. When the weather was kinder. And it was maybe closer to sunset. Either she'd dreamed it or it was some time ago.

The feeling was deeply unsettling. As if she wasn't fully in control of her thoughts. The memory didn't come back to her wholesale, but in sudden snatches. And more like a taste or a deep-rooted emotion that had suddenly crept back up on her.

Set back below the sign were two pumps, square and squat, with a rack of oil cans between them and a small rectangular roof sheltering all three. Beyond the pumps was a low white building, with a locked workshop to the left and a tiny store-cum-office over to the right.

Karen had advanced a little. She could see a single strip light hanging from the store's low ceiling. The cold white light spilled out onto the forecourt – through the window and the glass in the door.

She made her way towards the light between the oily puddles, pushed at the door and found herself in a small warm room. There was music playing. To one side was a small island of snow chains, coolants and so on – and all around it other motor spares, stacked up on metal shelves. To the right was a waist high cold box and a modest counter with rows of candy and snacks in neat little tiers. A young guy, maybe somewhere in his early twenties stood behind the till. He had long mousey hair, pulled back in a loose ponytail. He was standing in such a way that suggested he'd been sitting only moments earlier. A transistor radio hung from a strap on the wall behind him, beside an open cabinet of cigarette packs, in uniform columns.

The young guy said, *Oh, hey. I didn't hear you pull in.*

He was staring at Karen. It took him some effort, but he managed to turn and look out at the forecourt. For the car he hadn't heard pull in. Then he seemed even more confused than he'd been the moment before.

He turned back and continued to gawp at Karen. Looking at her coat. The one that had once belonged to Peters. It hadn't been in great condition the previous evening but when she looked down now Karen saw how it was smeared with blood, dried dirt-gray.

She limped on into the tiny store. Flipped the lid on the cold box, scanned the contents and fished out a couple of bottles of Coke. Dropped the lid back down. Then picked out four or five bars of candy and two bags of chips. If there'd been anything more nutritious on offer she'd

have taken it. She shuffled everything together on the counter and the kid bagged them up whilst hitting the keys on the till. One final button brought up the total.

*Okay, that's three, twenty-five, he said.*

He'd yet to put the Cokes in the paper bag. *You want me to pop one of these for you?*

Karen looked back at him, nonplussed.

*You want me to pop the cap on one of your Cokes?*

Karen shifted her gaze to the bottles.

*Sure, she said.*

So the kid picked one up, tucked it under a metal opener fixed to the side of the cold box, levered the bottle so the cap sheared off and fell into a small plastic bucket, below.

*And this one too, Karen said, pointing to the second bottle.*

The young man reached out, took the second Coke and eased its cap off as well.

Karen knew she had some cash on her somewhere. In fact, she had both Peters' and the old guy's wallets, but the one belonging to Peters was the first to emerge. So she opened it up, took out a bill and handed it to the kid. He rang it up and gave her the change.

*Do you have a bathroom?* she said.

*A washroom? Sure, he said. And pointed around to the right of the building.*

Karen took one of the Cokes and went out, past the workshop, turned right and found the door to the washroom two-thirds of the way down.



She avoided looking at herself in the mirror and went straight in to one of the two stalls, dropped Peters' bag on the floor and sat on the toilet, nursing the Coke, with the tracksuit pants tucked below her knees. The bandage she'd patched together for the wound on her left thigh was gone. Most likely slipped away down into her clothes somewhere. The wound itself looked pretty ugly, but wasn't actually bleeding. Something else to deal with at a later date.

When she'd done and had pulled herself back together she went out to the basin and turned both faucets until one ran warm. She eased both hands under and as they took on some heat, she stole a glance at her reflection. Then she brought a few handfuls of warm water up onto her face.

She dried herself on the towel roller, went back out the door, but turned right and took the extra few steps to the back of the building. Peered around the corner. Then headed back to the store. The music was still coming out of the tiny radio. A different tune now. She put her empty Coke bottle on the counter, tucked the other bottle into the paper bag and headed for the door.

She walked a hundred yards or so then stopped. Turned. The 'Gulf' sign had taken its place back in its dismal firmament. Karen crossed the blacktop, headed into the trees and worked her way up the hillside a little. Then cut back, alongside the road. She found a spot where she could see the pumps and the lights of the office through the branches and settled herself down there. Brought her feet up under the coat and ripped open the chips and candy bars.

She'd no idea what time it was. It wasn't particularly important. She saw a sedan pull in, the kid come hurrying out to take the hose from the pump. Then the two of them head back into the office. A minute later the driver reappeared and drove off. The same routine a little later with a pick-up. Then another monster of a truck, minus the timber, heading the other way.

Two or three times she drifted off for maybe a minute or so, coming to with a jolt, lost and breathless. But reassured in some way by that big electric sign. And on the final occasion she was still coming round when the white and orange light was suddenly extinguished and it was as

though she was back out in the woods or the flattened shack and the night was about to slam right down on her again.

She squinted and in the failing light saw the kid step out of the office door, stride over to the pumps, fiddle with them, then take the rack of oilcans, tip it in towards him and wheel it back into the store. The single strip light went out, the kid stepped out, locked the door behind him and went off, past the workshop and the restroom she'd used a few hours earlier.

She waited. Didn't want to go haring on in after him. But also didn't want to wait so long she'd break a leg trying to find her way out of the woods.

\*

She left her trash in the trees and made her way down to the roadside. Without the lights from the store and the forecourt things were suddenly an awful lot darker. She crossed the blacktop. Cut across the forecourt and went down the side of the main building. She stopped and peered round the corner. Twenty-five yards away stood a trailer, green and shabby, its corners propped-up on cinder blocks. From the back of the workshop a cable ran over to one of the trailer's windows, held in the air by a pair of metal poles.

The drapes in the trailer windows were a warm amber. She'd give the kid five or ten minutes more, she thought. To allow him to settle in.

She held on as long as she could, then headed over to the trailer. A dirty wooden stool took the place of a step. She could hear more tinny music. Either he took his little transistor everywhere with him or he had one for the office and another for over here.

She banged at the door and soon after the music stopped. It wasn't clear whether he was on his way over, so she banged again. Soon after she heard the latch turn and the door swung open. Both his hands flew up in the air. Karen looked down. She was holding the pistol. She hadn't meant anything by it. Just wanted to be sure of asserting herself in whatever circumstances happened to arise.

*Can I come in?* she said.

*Sure*, he said. But looked properly terrified. So once he'd backed off and she'd closed the door behind her Karen dropped the pistol and encouraged him to lower his hands.

The place wasn't so big. A small table over to the right. To the left, some kind of kitchen. And beyond that a little corridor leading off to another room or two. The walls were all made to look like wood but weren't wood. One or two of the panels had started to buckle. The place stank of sweat and tobacco smoke, plus the fumes coming off a box gas heater that stood in the center of the room.

The young man stood still, silent.

*I gotta sit down,* Karen said.

She headed over and took a seat on the end of one of the foam benches that faced each other across the table.

*What's your name,* she said.

*Hayden.*

*Okay, Hayden,* she said. *I need to ask a favor.*

Hayden continued to stare at her.

*I'm being followed,* she said.

Hayden nodded.

*By some bad people,* she added.

*Okay,* he said.

*I've had a couple nights out in the woods and I don't think I'd survive another.*

*Shit,* said Hayden. He seemed to relax a little. *So you don't want the money?*

*What money?*

*The takings,* he said. *The takings in the safe.*

It took Karen a moment to grasp what he was saying.

*No, I don't want your money,* she said.

*Okay, that's good,* he said.

She asked if he'd mentioned her turning up at the store to any of his customers.

*No,* he said.

*Not any? Not to anyone on the phone?*

The kid thought hard and shook his head. *No,* he said again.

Karen said Okay and dropped the pistol in a pocket. The foam bench was covered with some oatmealy material. She glanced down and dragged her palm across it.

*So did they hurt you?* Hayden asked her.

*Who?*

*The people who're following you.*

Karen said she didn't think so.

*You'd know if they hurt you,* he said.

She looked pretty hard at young Hayden. He wasn't being weird, she thought. Just wanted some understanding of what went on.

*Maybe,* she said. *I don't know.*

*So what happened over here?* Hayden pointed to the dried blood on Peters' coat. Karen's bloodied face and hair.

*I hit a tree, she said. I came off the road and went through the windshield.*

The kid winced. *Oh, man*, he said.

The two of them sat awhile, envisaging this.

*And these people*, Hayden said. *These bad people. Will they come here?*

*No*, she said.

Of course, Karen couldn't know that. It just felt like the situation called for a little certainty.

*I lost them a couple of days ago.*

*Okay*, said Hayden, but didn't look entirely convinced.

They talked a little more. The idea of Karen spending the night in the trailer was never raised directly, but she worked on the basis that it hadn't been rejected. She asked if the trailer had a shower. Hayden shook his head. It had been bust for as long as he'd been here. So Karen asked how he managed to keep himself clean and Hayden explained how he just heated some water on the stove and washed himself down whilst standing in the dish bowl. Karen looked over at the lime green bowl currently holding dirty crockery.

He offered to heat some water for Karen now, and she accepted. When the bowl was half-full he handed her a bar of soap, slim and cracked, plus a towel, then retreated to the bedroom, telling her to give him a call when she was done.

Her body ached and stung as she eased the water over it, and no more so than where she'd stabbed herself with the box-cutter. Her feet were numb. Her left shoulder bruised and fragile.

She dried herself off, then looked at the pile of filthy clothes she'd acquired at the Peters' place. There was no way she could countenance putting them back on again. She wrapped the towel around her, went over to the door at the back of the trailer, where Hayden was holed-up and knocked a couple of times.

*Hey, Hayden,* she called out.

*Yes?* He sounded a little nervous.

*I need to borrow some clothes.*

A pause.

*Sure. I guess. What do you need?*

*A pair of jeans, maybe. A t-shirt and sweater?*

*Hold on,* he said.

She could hear him tramping round the room. The trailer gently rocking beneath her bare feet. A while later the door opened a crack and Hayden's hand reached out with a bunch of clothing hanging from it.

*I'm sorry,* he said. *They ain't exactly clean.*

*That's fine,* she said, and took them from him.

When she was dressed and had given him the all-clear he came back out into the trailer's main area. The clothes fitted pretty well. Karen took Peters' wallet and offered Hayden some money. She couldn't see how she'd be returning the clothes anytime soon.

*Keep it,* he said. *You might need it later.*

He said he planned to make some food. Just rice and beans from a packet. So while he stood at the stove Karen sat at the table and looked around the place.

There were a number of books stacked up on a shelf and a couple open, face-down on the table, to keep their page. A metal ashtray with a small stub perched on the rim. The transistor radio hanging from its strap. Not much else.

Karen asked how long he'd been here.

*Just a couple months,* he said.

He planned to work through till Spring. Save a little money. Then head south to meet up with a couple of buddies and try and get some work down there. This time of year the manager of the gas station only stopped by two or three times a week – wasn't due till Tuesday. Fuel was delivered Mondays and Fridays.

*You don't get lonely, out here on your own?* Karen asked him.

He shook his head.

*It's not forever. My mom and brother aren't too far away. I visit maybe once a week.*

They ate. The rice and beans were nothing special and Hayden smothered his with ketchup to try and liven them up a little. Karen followed suit.

She thanked him, more than once.

*No problem,* he said.

Karen told him she'd work out what she was doing and be gone first thing.



*That's fine, he said. You could maybe hitch a ride with one of the logging trucks. I know some of those guys pretty well.*

Karen must've still looked pretty beat-up because as they talked she saw how Hayden glanced around her face. When they'd finished eating he offered her some codeine and she took it. She drank three tumblers of water, one after the other. Then Hayden cleared the table.

*Hey, look, he said. It's none of my business what went on back there. But why'd they come chasing after you like that?*

Karen tried to explain without being too specific. Told him how a fair amount of what happened was either vague or simply lost to her. Her memory wasn't so good. She'd been incarcerated and ultimately had had enough of it. That was the bottom line.

She felt divulging much more than this wasn't in either of their interests.

They talked a little longer but it soon became clear Karen was getting drowsy. The food had hit her and her body was beginning to slow right down.

Hayden unclipped the table and refitted it at the same level as the seating. Rearranged the oatmealy cushions so they formed a bed. Karen stepped out, barefoot, and went on over to the washroom. The sky was clear. The stars were out. It was bitterly cold and she was grateful she was able to step back into the warmth of the trailer.

Hayden had dug out an old sleeping bag. It was damp and musty but Karen knew she'd be asleep within a minute of climbing into it. Hayden headed off towards his bedroom. Halfway there, Karen asked if the trailer door could be locked from the inside.

*Sure, he said. He took a couple of steps back towards her. But I thought you said you'd lost them.*

*I did, she said. It's just to make me feel safe.*

He turned out the light. Karen had folded the old guy's jacket in two for a pillow and tucked the pistol underneath.

She was pretty much asleep when Hayden turned the light back on a minute or two later.

*Sorry, he said. I'm gonna make myself some hot milk. Do you want some hot milk?*

*No, she said. No thanks.*

She could hear him moving about, chinking cups and saucepans.

*Can I ask you a question?* he said.

Karen had to haul herself back to consciousness. Something she'd done a million times before.

*Sure, she said.*

*These people, he said. If you know they're bad. And that they want to hurt you. Why not just go straight to the cops?*

Karen turned and looked over at him.

*I don't know, she said. That's what really bothers me.*

\*

She slept for a solid six hours and barely moved an inch. Had her right arm tucked under her, so when she finally stirred it was dead, like someone had stitched it to her. She rolled over and lay with it limp at her side, until the blood began to work its way back down into it. Finally pounding away so hard and relentless she felt it was about to burst.

She wanted to reach up and check on the pistol, for reassurance. She recalled the weird familiarity of its weight in her palm. First at the Peters' residence and most recently when she knocked at the trailer door. Her ability to shoot the thing failed to match her ease at holding it. Hitting the guy at the river seemed to owe as much to luck as competence. In her defense, she was trying to take aim while the boat and its now-dead owner were being taken apart by a shotgun. But still.

She thought a little target practice might be of benefit. Tomorrow or the next day, maybe. She'd just begun to visualize herself in a clearing when that earlier target practice swung back into view. The one that'd come to her when she was about to drive on out of Peters' place. She was standing in the sun somewhere. Her right arm extended, with a heavy pistol at the end of it. A little way off, a clear glass bottle was set down on a stump. She brought her left hand up to fold it over her right hand. Took aim, breathing slow. Then felt a light tap against her left shin. Someone kicked her. Someone who knew that standing square on to a person who might have a gun of their own was a bad idea. And that turning side-on gave them less chance of hitting you.

The person who'd kicked her shin was a guy. She could hear his voice almost, somewhere off in the distance. There were other people too. A woman – some friend of hers, maybe? But the moment she tried to turn and take in the faces the whole scene folded and disappeared.

Karen lay in the dark, waiting for sleep to move back in on her. This memory, she thought, was different to the others. Had its origins in some pre-apartment era, a period that had up to now remained benighted and out of reach.

From time to time she'd have a momentary flash of something just before it happened. Like with the Gulf sign. Or maybe that was different. Something they worked on in the back room.

And listening to the cassette player she'd sometimes pick out the tune, very faint, before the track came in. She'd lean right in to the speaker. Mentioned it to Maguire one time.

He nodded. Seemed pleased. *It's called 'pre-echo', he said. Sound bleeds through from one piece of tape to another and gets picked up by the playback head.*

He watched her for a while, smiling.

*This is what you do*, he said.

\*

It was still dark when she pushed at the door to the bedroom. She'd turned on the light in the main part of the trailer and some of that light spilled in and helped her make out where to put her feet. There wasn't much else in there beyond a bed and a built-in closet.

She took a couple more steps. Whispered, *Hey, Hayden.*

He was just a shapeless form, buried under the covers.

She moved closer in and touched him on the shoulder.

*Hayden.* A little louder this time.

He sprung up and looked around, frantic. *Are they here?* he said.

*Is who here?*

*The people. The bad people.*

*No-one's here,* she said.

*Jesus Christ.* He dropped his head back onto the pillow and brought a hand up to his face. *What is it? What's going on?*

Karen asked how long it would be till he opened up the gas station. He turned and squinted at the clock.

*Not for another couple of hours,* he said.

*Good,* she said. *I need your help with something.*

\*

Within five minutes he was dressed and back out in the main room. Karen stood under the ceiling light, pulled back the left sleeve of her T-shirt so it was bunched up over her shoulder and pointed to a pink scar, three or four inches in length.

*Tap it*, she said.

Hayden slowly reached out and touched her arm. It was certainly taut and solid.

He shrugged.

Karen brought her hand down from her shoulder. Said, *Okay, now feel it from the sides*. And showed him what to do.

Hayden again reached out and this time gently applied some pressure to the left and right of the part of her upper arm she'd just indicated.

*Well, sure*, he said, looking more than a little disturbed.

Back in the apartment Dean and Stewart always ensured she kept that part of her arm covered with a sticking plaster. They were pretty much obsessed with it. Since she'd left and quit being dosed with such regularity, she'd noticed a 'clicking' – sometimes once, sometimes twice a day. And each time, within a matter of minutes, she'd feel everything change. Slow right down. Like someone had pulled the plug on her.

Hayden stared at her arm. *Well, what do you want to do?*

*I want you to get it out of me*, she said.

As far as she could see, two things were required to bring about its removal. A blade sharp enough to get right down to it and something to make her arm numb enough for her not to mind. She had Hayden riffle through the cutlery drawer but he found nothing useful.

*Maybe there's something in the workshop, he said. This guy Larry left a couple of months back but some of his tools are still there.*

He'd picked up his jacket and taken a step or two towards the door when Karen stopped him.

*Wait*, she said.

She went over to where she'd been sleeping. Dug around in the coat and jacket. When she turned back she had the boxcutter in her hand.

That tool had already proved its worth at making its way into her. Hayden thought they should maybe sterilize it and he put a pan of water on to boil. He took a quarter and undid the single screw that held the knife together. And, like a filleted fish, its two halves separated, revealing a neat stack of blades within.

Making Karen's arm numb had seemed pretty straightforward. She showed Hayden her bag of meds. All they had to do was find something that would work as an anesthetic.

Hayden picked out a couple of little bottles. *Protriptyline*, he said. *Viloxazine*.

Both contained a clear liquid.

*You got any idea what kind of thing these might do?*

Karen shook her head.

She proposed injecting a little into her arm, close to where they planned to cut it open, then waiting a while to see what happens.

*That's crazy*, he said. *You could give yourself seizures. Or a heart attack.*

This didn't help the situation. Karen had a whole host of pharmaceuticals and was reasonably confident at least a couple of them could make her arm as numb as a side of ham.

The two of them picked out more phials, trying to guess at their possible properties. *Oxypertine. Paraldehyde. Phenazocine.*

Hayden thought about the little weed he had hidden away. That would maybe help subdue her. But being stoned whilst having someone you barely knew hack away at your arm might be even worse than doing it straight. He wondered if the manager maybe kept a bottle of liquor somewhere in his office. A few good slugs of bourbon would surely dull the pain.

*Oh, fuck it,* Karen said, before he'd gone any further. *Get me something to bite on. It can't be that deep into me.*

So Hayden re-arranged the foam seats, re-assembled the table and wrapped a stack of books up in a blanket, so Karen could sit and face across the table, with her left arm raised to the height of her shoulder. He gave her a hand towel for her to bite into. Placed the blade in a bowl of boiling water. Then fetched the lamp from his bedside table and set it up over her arm.

*I should maybe wash my hands,* he said.

Karen said this was probably a good idea.

He picked out the blade and wound the corner of a dish cloth around one end so he could take a grip without slicing off his fingers.

*What if I tied something round your arm,* he said. *Up above where I'm gonna cut into you? Like the junkies do.*

Karen remembered how numb her arm had felt when she'd slept on it. That seemed like a pretty good option. Then remembered the sensation when all the blood returned and envisaged a jet of blood shooting across the trailer.



*No. Dammit. Just get on with it.*

Hayden took a seat to her left. Leaned in towards the arm. Then paused again.

*What am I supposed to do when I actually get down to it?*

Karen was beginning to lose it.

*Dig it out, she said. Just get the damned thing out of there.*

She folded the hand towel over a couple of times, tucked it up into her mouth and bit down on it. She looked round at Hayden and nodded.

The scar ran north and south along the length of her upper arm. Given the choice, Hayden would've preferred to follow it down, from top to bottom, but being right-handed had to cut from bottom to top.

He glanced at Karen one last time. She had her head turned towards the window. It was still dark out there. He found the base of the small scar and pushed the tip of the blade a quarter inch or so down into the flesh. Then he pulled the blade back, nice and slow. It was like cutting into a rare steak.

Karen screamed. She was biting down hard on the towel, but a good deal of sound still came out of her.

A dark bead of blood rolled round her arm and soaked into the blanket. The stain steadily spread as more blood came along behind. Karen was crying. Her head suddenly burning.

Hayden was thinking how he had yet to feel the blade make contact with anything solid. Rather than slice away at her two or three times he thought it better to make a second, decisive incision and get it over with. He wasn't sure Karen would be able to take too much more of this.

He took a good grip of the blade through the cloth, inserted it into the base of the first incision, pushed a little deeper and pulled the blade right up along the same course.

Karen was rocking her head back and forth now, desperately chewing on the towel.

There suddenly seemed to be a lot more blood. And it occurred to Hayden they'd made no real plans as to how to fix Karen up when they were finished. How would they close the wound? What happened if she just kept on bleeding? If she bled right out?

He told himself they'd just have to deal with the situation when they got to it. There'd be tape of some sort around the place. He pictured himself holding the wound together. All day, if necessary.

*I felt it that time*, he said, trying to reassure her. *One more cut and we'll be through.*

The blade really had come up against something that seemed unwilling to give. As the tip of the blade ran along the object's surface, the tissue parted, like a tiny zipper. He was through to a layer of yellow fat now. A gray lozenge, an inch wide and no more than three inches long, sat in a little pit within it. The top end seemed rounder at the corners. A puddle of blood quickly formed over it.

Rather than dig it out, Hayden thought he'd try to bring it to the surface by gently pushing at it from left and right. He put down the blade and pressed his thumbs either side, up towards the top. The smooth end slowly began to ease up out of Karen's arm.

*Here it comes*, he said.

Karen turned to see the tip emerge into the light. She hadn't realized there was so much blood. It covered her arm, Hayden's hands, the blanket. She bit down into the fold of towel again.

Hayden kept squeezing, as if trying to force a stone from an olive. But, halfway out, the little box suddenly stopped and held firm. He puckered the flesh up between finger and thumb of

one hand and lifted the lozenge with the other. Thin white tendrils had laced themselves around the base of the thing.

*It's stuck*, he said.

Karen took a breath. *You gotta cut it out*, she said.

He took up the blade again and scraped it down the box's underside. The tendrils gave way, one by one. This was even more painful for Karen than the first incision.

She'd turned away again. Then she heard Hayden say, *Okay, we're done*.

When she looked back she found him holding up the slim box, smeared with blood. He placed it on the table in front of her.

*Why the hell would someone put that inside of you?* said Hayden.

She didn't answer.

*Now we got to figure out how to stop you bleeding*, he said.

For a while they both just sat there, Karen with her head resting on her good arm and Hayden holding the wound tight shut. He told her he had some gaffer tape over in the workshop and could cut up one of the T-shirts to go over the actual wound. Karen shook her head and said that there were bandages – real bandages – in the meds bag. Hayden got her to pinch the wound together and went off to gather up the tape and bandages.

He did a pretty good job wrapping the bandage around her arm and holding it in place with a couple of short lengths of gaffer tape. Tight enough to try and staunch the bleeding but not so tight he'd shut down the supply entirely. On reflection he felt he should maybe have cleaned Karen's arm up a little better before wrapping round the bandage. It was pretty messy, but neither one of them wanted to go back through the whole thing again.

Karen took another couple of codeine and slumped in the corner, hurting.

Once he'd washed, Hayden came over and sat at the table. He picked up the tiny cannister and studied it. Brought it up to his nose and sniffed it. Recoiled a little.

*What's it smell of?* Karen asked him.

He winced a little. *Nothing good.*

He looked it over again. *There's no way it could be a sort of ... transmitter?*

She shook her head. *If it was, then they'd be here.*

He slid it across the table top to her. One end had a tiny nozzle with a pinprick hole in it.

*How do you feel?* he said.

*Not so good,* she said. *Ask me again in a couple of hours.*

And with her good arm stretched out, she slowly let herself down onto the cushions and closed her eyes.

\*

A little later, Hayden led her through to his own bed so she'd be more comfortable. Then she slept for most of the day. He wheeled out the rack of oil and turned on the lights in the store and over the pumps. Sat with his transistor playing, but crept back around every hour or two to check in on her.

She came around late afternoon and started puking soon after. The first time just rolling over and being sick straight onto the floor. Hayden cleaned it up on his next visit and placed a metal pail in the same spot. On each subsequent visit he'd take the pail and sluice it out in the washroom. Give it a rinse with disinfectant, before putting it back in place.

When the light went he shut up the gas station then hung out in the trailer with the door to the bedroom door open a foot or so. He saw no point offering her anything to eat, but insisted she drink a little water and, later, she took a few sips of orange juice. By mid-evening she was well enough for him to check the dressing on her upper arm. It didn't look too good.

One time, whilst fooling around with a buddy, Hayden caught his arm on a spike in the ground. It bled, was a real mess but he refused to have stitches and over the days that followed he

watched the wound blossom and swell like something almost sexual. It hurt like hell but eventually healed-up. He guessed something similar would likely happen with Karen's arm. He bathed the wound and cleaned it up and that certainly brought about an improvement in appearance. He gave her painkillers every three or four hours and she didn't complain of feeling feverish, which he took as a positive sign.

He also noticed something of a change in her since he'd eased that tiny block of plastic out of her and she'd slept and puked a dozen times or more. She seemed more *serious* somehow. As if her feet had finally reached the ground.

It was late. He was sitting, reading by the table when she emerged from the bedroom. She nodded at him, took up her jacket and headed straight out to the washroom. When she returned, she let herself down slowly onto the foam bench across from him.

She asked about his book. Hayden mentioned two or three things, but he wasn't sure how hard she was listening.

She said she was starting to remember things, from way back. Hayden asked what kind of things.

She said, *Well, I'm pretty sure I was in some kind of house fire.* And she twisted her right arm around, so that the softer, whiter flesh faced forward. She ran her fingers down it and studied it. *I remember the heat and the smoke. The taste of the smoke at the back of my throat.*

They talked some more. Hayden opened a can of peaches, poured them into a bowl and put a couple of forks on the table, but neither he nor Karen reached out for them.

Previously benighted neighborhoods, she seemed to suggest, were now on the periphery of illumination. Scenes that had been locked and frozen were slowly grinding back to life. The manner in which she delivered this news suggested it might have brought with it its own particular burden. For his part, Hayden couldn't conceive she'd still no recollection of where she

was raised, for instance ... whether she had sisters or brothers ... whether her mom and dad were still alive.

*You don't remember their faces even?* Hayden asked her.

Karen was still, staring off into the distance.

*I remember them being around me, she said. I remember a room.*

Then there she was, for those few moments. All of them sitting round the table, eating, with a hard light streaming in through the window. So that everything but the very sharpest edges were burned away.

*When I was a kid, I suppose, she said.*

For a while Hayden let her be, half-in, half-out of some lost world. He had questions all lined up but waited. Till it felt appropriate.

*And the place you escaped from? What went on while you were there?*

Karen turned and pulled him into focus. *Experiments ... of some sort. Trials, I guess. To try and make me better.*

She shook her head. No, that was horseshit. Along with the notion of her somehow being contagious. Otherwise poor Hayden here would get ill himself. Would feel as bad as she'd felt. And she'd no wish for that to come to pass.

*They were trying to get at something, she said. Something way, way deep.*

*And you've no idea who these people were?* Hayden was starting to sound a little anxious. *Or why you were important to them?*

Karen shook her head. Went back to staring. Knowing, more and more, this wasn't strictly true.

\*



It was clear Karen's plan of being out of Hayden's hair and back on the road in a timely fashion had been optimistic. Neither she nor Hayden made any reference to it. The following morning she'd improved a little but was still ill and fragile. She drank and ate some toast. The wound on her arm was pretty painful; the wound on her thigh seemed to be benefitting simply from her not being on the move. She'd slowly reduced her intake of painkillers. Which was just as well, since they were running down pretty fast.

Tomorrow morning, she thought, might be a good time to aim to move along. Although she'd no idea of a destination, either specifically or in general. Hayden offered to drive her pretty much any distance that might feasibly be covered between him closing up the gas station in the evening and opening up the following day.

The entire world was uncharted territory. All the same, she found herself reluctant to put too great a distance between herself and the apartment. And not simply because this was the only place with which she was familiar.

Twice that day she limped across the forecourt to gaze up at the Gulf sign. She looked up the road, then down it. As if she might catch a glimpse of her dreaming self there.

Around five or six she was lying on the bed when Hayden came bursting in.

*Marshall's here*, he said, frantic and distracted. *We might end up in here. I'm gonna have to move you somewhere else.*

He took her hand and pulled her to her feet.

*I'm sorry*, he said.

For a moment Karen thought maybe he was going to try and roll her under the bed. Or tuck her in a wardrobe. Instead he led her through the trailer and out into the dark. She wore the same clothes Hayden had lent her the first night. Her feet were bare. He ran back in, grabbed a

blanket, threw it round her shoulders and ushered her off towards the bins at the back of the building.

*I shouldn't be long, he said. Go try the door to the workshop. I think maybe I left it open.*

Hayden headed straight back into the trailer and closed the door behind him. Karen could hear him tramping around in there, tidying, moving stuff. She heard footsteps round to her left and pulled back into the shadows.

A middle-aged guy marched over to the door, pulled on the handle and went straight on in. Drew the door to behind him.

Karen wasn't sure what she should do. It was no use standing around here, where she was sure there was oil and glass and other trash. She pulled the blanket tight around her and crept round to the front of the building.

All the lights were out. Marshall's car was parked up over to the right. She pulled at the big sliding doors to the workshop but they weren't moving. The door to the store was locked. Hanging around out here was a bad idea. So she crept back around to the rear of the building and for a while stood under the trees. Hayden and his boss had gone on through to the bedroom. She could see the two figures moving the other side of the drapes. It didn't take her long to appreciate that they were leading up to having sex. Either fucking or something close to it. Marshall in particular seemed to be making quite some noise as they went at it. Within five minutes the sounds and the disturbance in the trailer seemed to be reaching a climax. Then everything was still.

Karen was getting cold. For all she knew, Hayden's boss might spend the night in the trailer. Then she remembered Hayden's Beetle, just fifty yards away beyond the trailer. She thought there was a chance it would be unlocked. At a pinch she could wrap herself up in the backseat and survive the night there. She stepped out from the trees to head in that direction, but had to back up pretty much straight away. The door to the trailer opened. A small rectangle of light fell onto the ground. Marshall stepped down onto the stool, shut the door behind him. Walked

around, past the washroom, up the side of the building and a minute later Karen heard the car start up and, soon after, pull away.

She shuffled back over towards the trailer. Then waited. Cold as she was. Feeling it was Hayden's prerogative to let her know when he was ready to invite her back in.

The next minute the door swung open, Hayden popped his head out. He located Karen.

*You okay?* he said.

She nodded.

*He's gone, yeah?*

She nodded again.

*Okay. Come on in.*

He apologized more than a couple of times. Karen sat and checked on her feet. Hayden seemed a little ashamed. He filled the kettle. Put it on the stove to boil.

*So is that part of the deal?* Karen said, after a little while.

Hayden stared at her. *What deal?*

*You working here.* She indicated the trailer. *You having somewhere to stay.*

*No,* he said. *It's just something we do.*

It seemed as if he might be about to say something more, but he didn't.

*And you're as happy with the arrangement as he is.*

Hayden looked her square in the eye and told her that he was.

*Well, then. I guess that's okay,* she said.

\*

That night was the last time she slept in the bedroom. The next morning Hayden changed her dressings, made some coffee and while he was opening up Karen made another little trip out to the Gulf sign to see if it might stir something useful up in her.

Heading back to the trailer she passed the pay phone. She'd seen it before but never stopped and properly taken it in. It stood on a solid steel leg, with all the equipment sheltered by a square Perspex hood. Considering its location it looked in reasonable condition. Though where the different elements of the hood met – at the edges and the corners – you could make out where the rust was just beginning to take a hold.

Karen stood and stared. At the chrome. The neat block of buttons, with the receiver half-obscuring them. The vertical slot up top for coins. The horizontal lever to the right to return them. And as she stood and stared a sequence of numbers rose up out of the dirt and laid themselves out before her, as sharp and clear as all that polished steel.

Like a rhyme learnt by heart. Almost melodic. And as those numbers rang in her head Karen felt a sound take shape in her throat. A single syllable.

*Roy*, she said out loud.

\*

She'd hardly set foot in the store since the day of her arrival. Hayden was busy bringing through the cash from the office and restocking the cooler. He didn't seem particularly pleased to find her there.

She said, *What change do I need for the phone?*

Hayden stopped and looked over her left shoulder, in the direction she was indicating.

*Just nickels and dimes*, he said. *Same as any pay phone. Why?*

*I've got a number, she said. It just came back to me. I think I'm meant to call it, in an emergency.*

And she recited the sequence of eight digits out loud, for Hayden benefit. It seemed to him to be a legitimate number. Had an area code, albeit one he didn't recognize.

Already, Karen had decided to call the number. She got hold of some change from Hayden and headed over towards the phone.

She tucked herself under the hood and placed her hand on the receiver, not entirely sure how to get the thing up and running, when Hayden joined her.

*Whose number is it?* he said.

*I'm not sure, she said. I think maybe some guy I used to hang around with.*

She was staring at the coins in her hand, like runes.

*Okay, said Hayden. But even if he's a friend. What if they've tapped his phone?*

Karen looked up. *Who?*

*The bad guys. The guys who were chasing you. What if they listen in and somehow manage to trace the call back here?*

Karen looked at the pay phone with newfound skepticism, as if it may have been trying to take her in with all its gleaming chrome.

The two of them went and stood out back, behind the washroom. Hayden tried to think of all the other pay phones within a ten or twenty mile radius. Locations that were sufficiently remote for Karen to carry out a conversation without being overheard by passers-by but not so close that they might lead anyone back here. He finally settled on a pay phone situated right by a crossroads that was some way from the nearest town, some fifteen miles south and east of

here. But told Karen she'd have to wait till he'd closed up the gas station around five before he could drive her there.

All afternoon Karen would see herself at the phone booth beside a crossroads she'd tailored for the scene, the receiver up to her ear. Waiting for Roy's face to return to her. But it refused to come. And all that Roy info she knew she had remained buried and inaccessible. Till eventually she heard Hayden make his way over to the trailer, he came in, fixed himself a sandwich. Then the two of them went out to his VW Beetle and headed down the road.

It was odd being on the move again. The trees in the headlights somehow seemed to come at them in Full Color against the dark. But Karen could also see how they were just lifting this stretch of road into the light for those few moments, and that a second later the darkness would move back in.

It seemed to take an awful long time for them to reach the pay phone. Hayden insisted he knew where he was going and finally they slowed at a junction, swung around to the left and there was the phone booth standing all on its own. He pulled up another twenty feet or so further on, killed the lights and engine. And Karen crossed over to it.

She'd already been instructed in how to charge it up with the necessary change, when to hit the buttons, when to speak and so on. In one pocket she had a roll of brand-new quarters. In the other she had her .45.

She tapped in the digits and after a brief wait heard the call tone going out into the ether. Then there was a crackle and a voice broke in. It belonged to a woman – middle-aged and tired-sounding. Not at all what Karen had been anticipating.

Karen asked to speak to Roy.

The woman said, *I don't know no Roy.*

Another blow. It was a couple of beats before Karen figured she'd have to reconfigure the conversation. *He doesn't live here?* she said.

The woman said, *There ain't been no Roy here in years.*

Karen placed a hand on the cold top of the box, moved in a little closer. *It's important,* she said.

*Well, that may be,* the tired woman said. Then, *Who's calling?*

*It's Karen,* she said.

Silence. For a moment Karen thought maybe they'd lost their connection.

*Give me your number,* the woman said. *I'll see if I can get a hold of him.*

This was a step in a more positive direction. But Karen envisaged she and Hayden sitting in the Beetle for hours at a time, bored and vulnerable.

*That isn't going to work,* she said. *I'll try again a little later.*

She was about to replace the receiver. *Hold on,* the woman said.

She must have placed her hand over the mouthpiece. A conversation, semi-stifled, seemed to be going on beyond it.

Eventually, a man's voice came on the line.

*Who is this?* he said.

*It's Karen,* she said.

*Jesus Christ,* he said. He was quiet for a couple of moments. *They told us you were dead.*



But Karen was almost laughing, with relief. *I can see your face*, she said. *Soon as I heard your voice I could see you. You came right back to me.*

They barely started talking when he said, *Listen. I've got to head out. Give me your number and I'll call you right back.*

*That won't work*, she said. *I don't want to hang around here for too long.*

*No, you don't understand*, he said. *This may not be the best line for us to talk on. Just give me a couple of minutes. I swear I'll get right back to you.*

So she found the number that was printed and laminated just above the phone and gave it to him. Then hung up.

She stood there, in the dark and the sudden silence. With the stars coming out way above her. She looked over at Hayden in his VW. He showed no sign of moving. And, sure enough, within another few minutes the phone rang and she took up the receiver straightaway.

*Okay*, he said. *This should be a little safer. I'm in a bar just down the road. Where the hell are you?*

*I don't know*, Karen said. *She wasn't lying. Up near the mountains somewhere.*

*And what kind of shape are you in?*

She shook her head. *Not so good. But I guess I'm getting better.*

*And can you tell me where you've been all this time?*

'All this time?' she thought. How long a time is that? *Well, they had me locked up. But I managed to break out of there.*

*Jesus Christ*, she heard him say. And now it sounded like he was crying. Or just overwhelmed with emotion maybe.

*Okay, well look*, he said, trying to get a grip. *Tell me where you are. I'll come and get you. I've no idea where the hell we'll place you. But we'll find somewhere. Tomorrow sometime.*

Karen interrupted him. *We're friends, right?* she said.

He quit talking. *What?* he said.

*I need to know if I can trust you?* she said.

A short pause. While he took this on board.

*Of course*, he said. *One hundred percent.*

He talked some more, but she was having difficulty concentrating. Out of nowhere almost, she was hurting and exhausted and wanted to be done with the whole thing.

He was still talking when Karen saw the lights of a vehicle sweep in towards the crossroads, the opposite direction to the way she and Hayden had arrived. The lights grew brighter on the blacktop until it slowed, pulled up and stopped at the junction. A sedan, with the bulk of its body stacked up behind. Karen turned to look over at the Beetle, half-expecting Hayden to start it up. But he didn't. The car just sat there in the dark. And as the sedan turned and rolled on towards the phone booth and its lights caught the Beetle Karen saw no sign of Hayden, as if maybe he'd slid right down in his seat. Karen took a hold of the .45 in her pocket. The sedan slipped past, accelerated and carried on its way.

Karen tried to catch her breath. She realized Roy had stopped talking.

*What's that?* She said.

*Where'd you wanna meet?* he said. *Where can I pick up?*

And now Karen heard the Beetle fire up. The lights burst into the darkness. And Hayden drove right up, alongside the phone booth. He reached across and popped the door.

*C'mon*, he said. *Hurry the fuck up.*

Karen nodded and raised a hand, to try and get him to calm down.

*Just give me a minute*, she told Roy. And not quite knowing what to do with the receiver, hung it up again.

She stepped out towards the car.

*Give me the name of a town near here*, she said.

Hayden was baffled. *What sort of town?* *Any town*, she said. *What's the place your mother lives?*

*Talbot?* he said.

*How far's that from here?*

Hayden looked to his right. *I dunno. Another six or eight miles, I guess.*

*Okay*, she said and turned to head back to the pay phone. But then stopped and turned back to the car. *Where would I meet someone there?*

Hayden said, *In Talbot?*

He looked worried now. Didn't want any bad men getting anywhere near his family.

Yes, she said.

*Why? What're you going to do there?*

Karen shook her head. *Nothing. Just meet a friend.*

Hayden couldn't think of a way out of it. *Well, he said. There's a diner. Called Jennie's. Right off the main drag. That's about the only place, I guess.*

*Okay.* Then Karen turned back to the phone, just as it started ringing.

She picked up the receiver. *Hi,* she said.

*What was that?* Roy said. *Were you talking with somebody? Have you got somebody else there with you?*

*No,* she said. *I put the phone down by mistake.* Funny, but lying on some level seemed to come quite naturally to her. *Okay, so there's a town called Talbot. We should meet there. At a place called Jennie's Diner.*

Roy said he'd be there the following day. Around mid-day.

Suddenly, the conversation – such as it was – seemed to have reached its destination. Karen was about to hang up again when a thought zipped through her consciousness.

*Tell me,* she said. *How did you think I'd died?*

There was another short period of silence.

*The explosion,* he said, *out at the cabin. They told us everyone died in the fire.*

\*



All the way down to Talbot the next morning she had an eye on the milometer. Watching the numbers slowly roll back on their chambers, till she'd gone the fourteen or so miles, as instructed, joined the highway, then followed that straight on down for another eight or so.

Hayden had lent her the Beetle without any bother and filled the tank with gas before opening-up. Karen wondered if free gas was maybe another perk of sleeping with the manager. He'd drawn her a map, with a couple of landmarks to look out for and assured her she'd be there in under an hour no matter what sort of speed she did. All the same, just being out among the few other vehicles that time of the morning with the sun still hauling itself up off the horizon made her feel peculiar. Like someone playing at being a regular member of the community. Which was maybe not that far from the truth.

Though Karen knew she was heading south, halfway there she found she had to work the gears a little more and had the sense of gaining altitude. The windows were shut tight and the heater was blowing hard but she could feel the temperature drop. She'd set out early so she'd have time in hand to look around town, settle her nerves and generally scope the place out. But the clock on the dash had yet to reach 8.30 when the power lines began to loop from pole to pole off to one side of the highway. She passed a truck stop. A car park for a nature trail. Finally, an abandoned cabin. By which time she could see the town itself up ahead.

The journey had started tight, snaking through the valleys, opened up once she got on to the highway, but the mountains suddenly seemed to pull back now. As if they'd made way for the town – had accommodated it. But were still right there, keeping an eye on things. A white mist had come to rest midway down from their summits, like an avalanche stalled in mid-descent. Karen drove on and soon enough found she'd slid on under it. The light changed. Then she turned off the highway into the town.

It took two or three minutes to locate the diner. A single storey building on a street corner, white with bright red trim. A neon OPEN sign was already lit in one window. And a rectangular sign above the door had 'Jennie's Diner' in red handwritten script and BREAKFAST LUNCH DINNER in block capitals beneath.

She slowed. Drove by. Then embarked on a little tour of Talbot. Barely a soul was stirring. What time did people go to work round here? The roads were wide as well as empty, with cars parked at a diagonal into the kerb – though it looked to Karen you could pretty much abandon a vehicle just about anywhere without causing too much impediment.

She wove her way around the grid of streets. Stopping at every STOP sign and keeping to a regulation 25 or 30. She passed a concrete church, five or six national flags hanging from their flagpoles, a hardware store, a Post Office way out on its own. Until the larger, smarter houses with evergreens bordering their gardens gave way to smaller clapboard buildings, in need of paint and maintenance with chainlink fences, waist-high, cornering the yards.

She worked her way back around to the main street and parked up right across from Jennie's Diner. Turned off the engine and sat and watched awhile.

It wasn't yet 9am, but she wanted to have an up-close look at where she'd be meeting this guy she knew. A truck rolled by, hissing and wheezing. She stepped out of the car, headed over to the diner and took a seat.

There couldn't have been more than half a dozen customers in there – most of them up at the counter on a row of circular stools, fixed to the floor. A waitress strode over. Karen ordered a coffee. And, when she felt an appropriate period of time had elapsed, she got to her feet and followed the signs to the restrooms, round to the left of the counter, with a guy working away at the stoves tucked behind.

There was a door out back at the end of the corridor, just beyond the men and women's restrooms. It had an emergency release bar across its center. Karen pushed at it and stepped out into the light.

She peered round to the left and right to confirm there was no access down either side of the building. The only way to reach that door from the outside was the service alley which ran right up to it. She took a firm grip of the handrail at the top of the steps, to check its strength. Then turned and went back inside.

Driving back around town the pain in her arm began to flare up again. She had to pick up some more painkillers but had yet to pass a pharmacy.

Within a few minutes she'd found her way back to the hardware store. She pulled up to the sidewalk at a diagonal, like the other two or three vehicles in the vicinity and went inside.

It wasn't a huge store. Just three or four aisles, thirty feet or so in length. But the owner had done his level best to pack as much as possible into the available space. Rows of paintbrushes hung on hooks according to size and quality. Glasspaper was filed vertically above stacks of gloves and mufflers. A whole wall of tiny wooden drawers, holding nails, bolts and screws of various length and thread and finish.

There were brooms and shovels. Plastic pails stacked up by size and color. But also snow shovels and claw hammers – the more serious kind of equipment you'd most likely only find in a rural, northern store.

At the far end of the aisles was a wall on which a range of drums of cable hung, the ends of the myriad chain and cable all dangling down, ready to be measured and clipped. Karen looked them over.

She'd recognized the smell of the place the moment she first set foot in the place – linseed oil and turpentine and fresh-cut lumber – though she'd yet to see any lumber on display. But standing before the drums of cables she could remember being in a store like this one, clutching a list in one hand. And her being riven with fear – or guilt, maybe. That someone of authority might snatch that list from out her hand. Read it. And say, What the hell do you want with all this stuff?

*You lookin' for something in particular?*



Karen turned. A large woman with short gray hair was standing right beside her. Her apron was pulled tight over what appeared to be any number of jerkins, so that it wasn't clear how much of her bulk was the woman and how much was the clothes she wore.

*No. I'm fine,* said Karen.

She nodded. *Sure thing,* she said. Then turned back towards the counter.

Karen called her back. *One thing,* she said.

*Go ahead,* said the woman.

*I was wondering if you sold those cable ties ...* said Karen. And held both hands out before her, with the wrists touching. *You know, like the cops sometimes use instead of cuffs.*

*You mean zip ties,* the woman said. *Well, sure.*

And again she turned her back to Karen and waved for her to follow. As if the expedition she had in mind might take some time and effort, but that if they set off now they might arrive before dark.

As they headed down the aisle the woman spoke over her shoulder. *Ty-wrap is what people calls 'em. At least, they're the brand we always got.*

Then she came to a halt and pointed at an open carton, squeezed in among sundry other stacked cartons.

*All sizes. Gray and black,* she said. *Anything else?*

Karen shook her head. Then thanked her. And the woman headed back off towards the till.

Karen picked a foot-long strip out of the carton. Bent it around and fed the loose end through the buckle at the other end. Like a snake eating its own tail. She lassoed it over her wrist. Began to tighten it up. The notches ran through and took a hold with a solid click of plastic as it ratcheted up.

An inch or two short of complete constriction she stopped and tugged at the band. No give whatsoever. She made a perfunctory effort at feeding the strip back through to release it, but gave up. Slid her hand back out, as though removing a tight bracelet. Tossed it back in the box and picked out two new ties, of the larger variety. Studied them. And picked out another two.

She paid and drove back out to the highway. Turned right and headed south again. She didn't intend to drive more than a mile or two.

Long before Roy had made reference to it Karen knew something about the fire. She knew it when she half-dreamed of setting fire to the flattened shack down by the river. She knew it from the strange sensation she'd felt down her right side. It still burnt, buried deep inside her and she was knowing more and more about it as time went by.

But Roy referring to it as an explosion made it real and overwhelming in its potency. And all last night she tried to find her way back to that place. That cabin. When the fire was suddenly all before her and the pieces began falling from the sky.

Ten minutes south of Talbot she turned off onto a track. Followed it for another quarter mile. Then pulled up onto some hard ground. A meadow of modest acres lay beyond a five-barred gate. She stepped out of the VW, buttoned-up her jacket and climbed over it.

A hundred yards away sat a modest barn – more likely used for storing machinery than anything harvested. She walked most of the way towards it. Then stopped and carefully lay down on her side.

*This is about the distance, she thought. This was the way I was facing when I came around.*

Both feet faced the barn. She propped herself up on her left elbow, which pulled at the two wounds down that side of her body. This seemed to help in some way.

All night she'd remembered lying like this. The cabin only thirty or so yards from her, blown apart and going up in fierce orange flames.

*I came to and the cabin was already burning, she thought.*

She hadn't been in the cabin. She'd been on her way back there. From a walk maybe. With someone else.

Over to her right and behind her was another person. Another woman who'd been knocked down by the blast, just as she had herself.

For a while neither one of them said a word. There was too much going on to take in. Until at last the woman to her side said, *We got to go. We gotta get out of here.*

\*

Karen woke.

It took her a while to make sense of the situation. She was in the back of the Beetle, on her side, the soles of her sneakers pressed up against the upholstered panel on one side and the top of her head right up against the other.

She swung herself around. She'd maybe spent the night in the VW after Hayden's boss had come to call again? But there was no trailer, no gas station. Then she saw the gate, the field beyond it, the barn staring blankly into space and remembered returning to the Beetle after her little lie-down in the meadow and thinking she'd like to lie down a little more.

She checked the clock. Just gone 11am. She'd been out for an hour and a half. But still in time to make her rendezvous. So she straightened herself out, turned the Beetle around and headed back in to Talbot. Drove on past the diner. Turned right and right again, till she reached the service alley she'd checked out from the rear of the diner. Drove another couple of blocks and pulled up, just short of the Post Office, where there seemed to be a little more activity.

She took the .45 from her jacket pocket. Pulled back the slide and checked the chamber. Released the magazine and counted out how many rounds she had in there. A couple of zip-ties got tucked down into her inside pocket, so that the buckles sat just proud and available. She had cash and she had the box-cutter, which had become something of a personal talisman.

Karen locked the car, crossed the street and took a left, taking a different route around to the diner – for the hell of it, and to get another perspective on the town. It wasn't quite noon when she passed under the BREAKFASTS LUNCHES DINNERS sign for the second time that day. *If I come back in another four or five hours, she thought, maybe I'll get some sort of certificate.*

The place was no busier than it had been earlier. The waitress looked up from a table by the window she'd been tending and when she pulled away there was Roy with a coffee and a glass of water before him.

The moment he saw Karen he sprang to his feet. But he was such a big guy his legs got pinned under the lip of the table so he couldn't quite manage to reach his full height.

Karen recognized him right off the bat. But the mass of curls she remembered spooling off his head in every direction had been lopped back, like an unruly piece of shrubbery. Plus he'd put on weight. A big guy to begin with, but now well on the way to being a shlub.

He leaned in and spread his arms, offering something like a bear hug, but with the table in the way ended up being more a double upper arm squeeze and Roy's right hand gripped Karen right where the implant had been cut out.

Karen slid into the seat across from him.

*Jesus Christ*, he was saying. His eyes filling up with tears now. *Jesus Christ*.

Again, it was his voice that knocked Karen sideways and threatened to illuminate parts of her memory that had long been in the dark.

He was studying her closely. *You okay?* he said.

*How do I look?* she said.

He nodded heartily.

He said, *I just ordered food. But I can cancel.*

And he made a half-hearted effort to lift his ass off the seat again, ready to go.

*No. I need to eat*, she said.

By now the waitress was heading back over to them, clutching a laminated menu. Karen asked Roy what he'd ordered. A BLT, he said, with a side of home fries. She said she'd have the same, plus a Coke.

Roy waited till the waitress was gone. He seemed more nervous about the situation than Karen. He lent forward, over his folded arms – was about to speak, but Karen beat him to it.

*You thought I was dead?* she said.

He nodded.

*Who told you I was dead?*

*A friend. Then I heard it on the radio.*

Karen thought, *The radio? Someone announced my death on a radio?*

He glanced around again, at the other customers. Mostly old timers. There was no-one within five yards of them and not a single one seemed the least bit interested in what they had to say.

*We can talk when we're on the road,* he said.

The waitress brought Karen her Coke and a tumbler that was clouded from having been run through the dishwasher so many times. Roy smiled up at her and waited till she'd gone.

*And how come I knew your number?* she said.

*We all knew the numbers,* he said. *We memorized them, in case of emergency.*

He stared at her again. *You don't remember any of this?*

She shook her head.

He hesitated, perhaps trying to find a diplomatic way of coming at it. *The people who held you ... What kind of things did they do to you? Did they hurt you?*

So she told him about the apartment and some of the experiments she'd undergone there. *Mainly to do with consciousness, she said. They'd keep me awake for days, walking up and down. Talking to me. Then set me these tasks. Run these videos ...*

She looked up at him. *You never thought to come and try and find me?* she said.

*I told you already. They said you died in the fire.*

And even just the mention of it had the flames come roaring up before her again.

*What sort of questions did they ask you? Did they want to know about me?*

She shook her head. *I don't know. How long have I been gone,* she said.

*You've really no idea?*

*Well, if I knew I wouldn't be asking you, now would I?*

She wondered if this was how they used to talk to each other. Had they been lovers, perhaps? Is this how people talk, when they've been together too long?

Roy was doing a little mental arithmetic. *Three, must be getting on three and a half years,* he said.

This shut Karen up.

Roy just let her be for a while. She stared down at the table, then out of the window. Finally back over at him.

*They had me pumped full of dope, she said, as if she needed to excuse herself.*

She reached across to where there'd been the implant. Momentarily considered pulling back her jacket to show him, but couldn't muster the energy.

*It'll come back, said Roy. In time, it'll all come back to you.*

Karen wished she shared his confidence. Another pause. Then she said, *What were we doing – out at the cabin?*

She waited, while Roy glanced round the diner again, clearly uncomfortable.

*You know, he said in a whisper. You know what we were doing.*

Was that right? She envisaged the fire and worked on back from it. What materials might conceivably bring about such a state of affairs?

*How many of us were there?* she said.

*Four, he said. Me and Mel were going to join you two days later.*

*We were training, Karen said quietly, staring down at the table. I remember doing push-ups ... going running out in the woods. We were preparing for something.*

Roy nodded.

*And something went wrong.*

He nodded again.

*What kind of thing were we preparing for?*



Roy seemed reluctant to engage in this line. He sat back and shook his head.

*What?* Karen said, a little lower.

Roy hunched right in towards her. *The same stuff we'd already been doing. Just a different sort of target ...*

It was the word '*target*' that switched the lights on in that particular neighborhood. She saw herself in a dress suit, walking past security at the doors to some government building ... taking the elevator ... finding the washrooms ... closing the door in one of the stalls ... stepping up onto the john ... popping a tile back in the ceiling ...

*Did we hurt anyone?* she said.

He looked blankly back at her.

*Did we kill people?*

Soon after, the waitress turned up with their BLTs. Even if she hadn't, Karen doubted whether Roy would've got around to answering the question.

Roy set about his food with great gusto. She wondered how much food he must take in daily to maintain a frame that size. He took a bite from his BLT, then lifted the top layer of toast to check on the exact situation underneath it. Shook some salt onto it and a heavy dash of ketchup.

No way, she thought, had she and this guy been lovers. Also, she'd have some recollection of his body. The smell of the man, close-up.

She took a bite of her own BLT. She wondered if Roy had been the guy who showed her how to stand whilst holding a gun. But again he didn't quite fit the bill. More likely that would have

been one of the guys in the cabin, who'd been fiddling with explosives. One of the dead guys, of whom she currently remembered precisely nothing.

Roy switched his attention to the home fries.

*I'm sorry, he said. I haven't had a decent meal since yesterday afternoon.*

He sat back and did some chewing. Took her in again.

*You'll be fine, he said. We'll fix you up. I know medical people who'll take a look at you. Help sort you out.*

Karen said nothing.

He had another bite of the BLT. Took a slug of coffee to wash it down. Wiped his mouth with a paper napkin. Again, he leaned in towards her.

*The people who held you prisoner, he said. They were like scientists? Did you get any of their names?*

Karen nodded. Roy shook his head. Turned his palms out, the napkin still clutched in one hand.

*And what reason did they give you for you being there?*

*They said I was sick, she said.*

*Sick how? he said.*

*That I was contagious.*

Karen saw no sign of Roy being fazed by this.

*Also, that I'd consented to my treatment.*

Roy paused then. *And had you?*

*I don't think so, she said. And even if I had, I doubt I would've been in any fit state to have known what I was doing.*

He thought this over. Then tossed a little more salt over his fries.

*What do you do now?* Karen said.

Roy didn't understand, so Karen had to clarify. *Your job. How do you pay the rent?*

He laughed, more like a release of breath. Sarcastic. *Oh, house painting, mainly. Some gardening. Whatever's on offer.*

*So you're not ... active these days,* Karen asked him.

He looked up and shook his head with great solemnity. Though Karen couldn't tell whether it was because he missed it, or regretted what he'd done.

*That ship has sailed,* he said. He took a break from his food. *Things'll come around again. They always do. But it'll be a different bunch of guys who do it. With their own particular grievances and objectives.*

Karen said, *I'm not coming back with you.*

Roy stopped dead. Just stared right back at her for a good few seconds.

*Are you insane?* he said at last.

She shook her head.

*I got things I need to sort out up here.*

He'd still yet to chew. *They find you they'll fucking kill you*, he said.

She shrugged.

*And just what the fuck exactly do you hope to sort out?*

*I'm not sure*, she said. *I guess I'll know it when I see it.*

Roy was properly put out. *I just drove half the night to get here.*

But Karen wasn't in the mood for it. *Shit*, she said. *I've spent years locked up, had my brain fried, people are trying to kill me. But you're whining about driving a couple of hours to check me out. Well, here, let me cover your gas. How much d'you need?*

She made to pull out her wallet.

For the first time, the other customers were starting to take an interest in their conversation.

*And by the way*, she said, *you're as keen to find out what went on back there as I am to get the fuck away from it. So don't pretend this is all some act of charity on your part.*

People were turning their heads towards the raised voices. The tone of irritation.

The two of them fell into silence for a while. Roy in a funk, wounded. Karen determined not to feel bad about what she'd said.

It took a while, but little by little, they got back to talking. He asked where she was staying but she made up some hinky story about a shack up in the mountains.

*Where'd you get the jacket?* he said, pointing.

She looked down at it. She'd had it so long she'd begun to think she'd always had it. With a little effort she recalled the guy in the pick-up.

*A friend*, she said.

Another pause. Then she asked where they'd lived back then and he told her about the cramped apartment in the Bay Area, and how they'd planned to move out East, but were worried they'd miss the sun.

He was asking if she remembered the clothes they bought from thrift stores, the foam mattresses and so on when his words suddenly lost all momentum and Karen saw his mouth go slack. He was looking out of the window, over her left shoulder, and even as she turned, to see what was going on back there she already knew something of what she was going to find – and what it might entail.

At first, she only saw the guy closest to them. He was halfway across the street and would've made it to the diner a whole lot sooner if the Chevy hadn't hit him. There was a squeal of brakes. The guy reached out a hand, as the fender took his right leg from under him. He lay down on the hood, as if taking a little rest there. But bounced straight back up onto his feet as the Chevy jerked to a halt. Then he was running again, with the second guy now right behind. And it was this other guy Karen recognized as one of the goons who chased her through the woodland after she leapt out of the ambulance.

She reached into her pocket, pulled out the .45. Brought it up over the table. Roy's hands went up, either side of his face. Where the curls used to be. He was shaking his head, eyes wide.

*I swear to God*, he was saying. *I told nobody. Not a soul.*

Karen slid out from the table, stood and turned, with the pistol aimed square at the door now. Two things troubled her. First, whether this was a more sensible course of action than simply

running at top speed in the opposite direction. Also, whether she could recall if either of the men had their guns drawn as they'd crossed the street. She thought not. It probably didn't matter. If they didn't have a gun in their hand as they came running they'd surely have one out as they came through the door.

She took a breath. Half the customers had turned in their seats at the squeal of the tires; the rest had done so when they heard Roy make a commotion. In time to see the woman with him get to her feet and swing the gun round towards the door. Anyone in that vicinity swiftly moved away from there.

She fired twice. In case the goons mistook the first shot as some sort of accident. The glass blew out from the top of the door, then the window beyond it. She hoped like hell she hadn't hit anyone. Not so much the goons, but anyone between here and the mountains five miles away. Her only intention was to delay the two men's entrance. The moment the second shot was out of the chamber – before the glass had even finished collapsing out onto the sidewalk – she turned and headed to the back.

Roy was up on his feet, pinned in again by the table. But she didn't see him.

On the way, she saw a guy on the other side of the counter, where it was a foot or two higher, just emerging from the kitchen at the back. The owner, maybe. Or just the cook. And as she passed she felt a little remorse at having blown out a couple of his windows. For upsetting his clientele. But something in his face made her retract that guilt, for some reason. He looked at her, then instinctively he glanced over at a pay phone on the wall. As if she might know somehow that he'd been there to call the appropriate number, and have these two hoodlums come rushing through his door.

At least he didn't try to stop her. She ran down the passage, got to the fire door and bust right through it. Then she turned and pinned it back in place with her left knee. She pulled open her jacket and went to take out one of the zip-ties, but found the .45 still in her right hand.

She'd no idea how far the goons had advanced through the diner. The door was solid, so couldn't tell if they were halfway towards her or about to take a shot or two at the door themselves.

She dropped the pistol back in her pocket and took hold of the zip-tie. Tucked it under the spindle of the door handle, then looped it over the handrail to her right. The handle and the rail weren't quite as close as she'd imagined. There was about four inches spare at each end of the tie. She guided the free end towards the buckle. Stabbed at it. Missed. Came at it again.

Down the passage now she could hear feet falling, heavy and moving at speed. She considered taking out the gun and letting off a couple more shots – just to hold them back. But in the time it'd take to drop the tie and retrieve the pistol they might well be on her. She pushed at the door with her shoulder. Stabbed at that small oblong gap again, and this time she hit it and the tongue slid through. But it was still the smooth strip of plastic inserted in the buckle. She had to take hold of the loose end and pull it back. Get the ridged strip up into place for it to hold. So, with the footsteps almost upon her she got a grip and yanked it. And felt the click, click, click as it tightened-up.

She drew it back as far as it would go. Then flew down the steps and started running. Her immediate concern was whether the tie would actually hold or whether the goons would simply shoulder their way right through the door. Twenty yards on, she glanced back. The door remained shut but she could see it moving – jerking out towards her. Like some malevolent heart pounding away. She carried on running. Her next concern was whether anyone would appear at the far end of the service alley and get in her way. Because there was no alternative route. No other lanes branching off of this one. Nothing but cinder block walls and more solid doors to left and right.

The closer she got to the end of the alley and the more that space opened up for her, the more convinced she became some other goon was about to leap out at her. But she kept on, thinking, *If I can just get to the end and be out of sight before they're through the door then I might make it.* And as she reached the bottom of the track, she glanced back again and saw the door still

intact, though starting to buckle now. Then she swung to the right along the sidewalk, and got ready to run some more.

The Post Office was away off in the distance. If she ran flat-out she'd be there in under a minute. But she'd barely taken a step when she heard the drag of tires on asphalt a block or so away and an engine being pushed to its limit, as it headed her way.

Her chances of reaching the Beetle before the goons caught up with her were close to zero, she thought. Perhaps the only saving grace was that, as things stood, they'd no way of knowing which car was hers. They wouldn't know till she attempted to get in it. Then they'd know which one to shoot at. Which one to try and drive off the road.

She cut across the street and took a left. Still running, but trying to slow herself down – not draw attention to herself. There must have been a maximum of four other people in view, all further down the way. The houses here were of a respectable size. Of course, she could simply step up to the first door and start hammering at it. Explain how some men were chasing her and beg to be let in. But in the time it would take to reach that point the goons would surely be here – homing in on any minor disruption – and would be on her before the scene had played out. She could pull out her gun and insist the home-owner let her in. But even the time to find an occupied house and stir someone in it was time she felt she couldn't spare.

The houses on this street were all raised up off the ground, with four or five steps leading up to the front door, and a crawl space of a yard or so beneath, boarded with plain rough timber. There were no gardens at the front as such. Just a small patch of grass leading straight on to the sidewalk, with gates and timber fences running from house to house. The second house on her left was in slightly worse repair than the others. A couple of the boards around the base were slightly cockeyed. Karen checked the street, for goons and any members of Talbot's population, then jogged over the grass and tried to find a way through.

The pitch of the engine dropped as it got closer. It must be slowing. She'd levered one of the horizontals back, then crawled on into the darkness. She lifted the length of timber back up and held it in place. She could hear the car pass the end of the street and head on towards the Post



Office. She'd no idea where the goons on foot had got to. Or maybe there was now only one goon walking and the other was in the car.

It was hard to make out what was going on under that house. There didn't appear to be anything stored down there. Just foundation blocks every three or four yards, some with pipework or electric cable following them up into the house. Karen couldn't see herself staying here too long – it was damp and didn't smell so good – but it was preferable to wandering around town right now. Surely someone would've phoned the cops after the shots were fired. Something like that would be a big deal in a town the size of Talbot. Any town. But would Talbot have its own police force? Or its own individual officer? Or would they have to call the cops in from some larger town? By which time there might well be more goons with guns striding up and down the sidewalks, even more intent on finding Karen, watching out for any vehicle in which she sat behind the wheel.

She now felt she could recognize the sound of that particular engine – big and blousy, like some kind of high-spec vehicle. A racing car. It was also just about the only vehicle on the move this side of town. After it passed the end of the street she'd heard it grow slowly distant. But now she heard it turn and head back towards her. She pulled the piece of timber hard towards her and a tack or two found their way into the upright and held the horizontal in place. Then she heard the car turn down her street and slowly begin to creep from one house to the next.

There was no shortage of space under that house and she shuffled back into it. One foundation block was a little wider than the others and she crawled behind it. As she sat there with her back turned to the street she could feel loose strands of her hair getting caught in the rough stone. She fished out the .45 again. The car rolled slowly by and carried on down the street.

Karen stayed there for some time, knees pulled up to her chest, not moving. Convinced she could hear footsteps out on the sidewalk, slowing and picking up speed again. Roy had been adamant he hadn't had anything to do with the appearance of Maguire's men. Why would he? Certainly, the cook's reaction was different to everyone else's. He didn't seem surprised at the sudden drama. Almost as if he'd been expecting it. Was it conceivable someone had gone

around, handing out flyers with Karen's picture on them? Or had someone just managed to eavesdrop on one of her calls?

*Where are the goddamned cops?* she thought.

She was becoming agitated. Maguire's men would know there'd be a limit to how much ground someone could cover in the time it took them to arrive on the scene. If they were methodical – and there was no evidence so far to the contrary – then sooner or later one of the goons would very likely start poking around in the crawl space where she currently hid.

She shuffled further back into the darkness, till she began to pick up the light coming in from the rear of the house.

Karen's current plan was to maybe find a way out between some loose planks at the back of the house, just as she'd found her way in there at the front. Then maybe cut through the garden and on into other gardens. Some Lost Eden, ideally, where she could peacefully live out the rest of her days

But she'd yet to find a way through when a pair of denim legs swung into view from the right ... took a few steps ... stopped. And a head dropped down to peer on in.

*What the hell you doing in there,* the woman said. *You had me thinking I had racoons, or maybe rats.*

She was in her 70s. Maybe even a little older. Whatever her age, she was talking too loud. Likely to draw attention. Karen kept the .45 on the ground, tucked away behind a leg.

*I'm so sorry,* Karen said. Then, after a pause, *I'm in some trouble.*

*I did wonder,* said the woman. She peered a little harder. *What kind of trouble?*

Karen suspected there was an acceptable answer to this question. Luckily, the woman offered it to her.

*Is it man trouble?* she said.

Karen nodded. *That's right*, she said.

It didn't seem that much of a stretch.

*How can I help?* said the woman.

It took a couple of moments for Karen to work out the answer to this one.

*Can you drive shift?* she said at last.

*Wait there*, said the woman.

She was back in under a minute, wearing a plaid jacket that came down to just above her knees. She bent back down.

*You'll not be able to get out this way*, she said. *My boy Carl replaced the timber last summer. It's all aluminum back here, bolted right in. Next summer he's promised to do the front.*

The woman stared in at her.

*So, what's the issue?* she said.

Karen kept on whispering to try and set a level of volume that wouldn't have the goons come running. But the woman just ignored the signals and continued blasting away. Karen thought she should keep conversation to a minimum.

*A guy and a couple of his friends are searching the town for me*, she said.

*Why's that?* the woman said.

*I don't really know,* said Karen.

*But you know this guy?*

Yes.

*And you don't like him?*

*No, ma'am. Not anymore.*

This seemed sufficient for the old woman, though she had one possible reservation.

*You been fooling around?* she said. *With someone else?*

*No, ma'am.*

The woman peered in at Karen, all caged-up in there.

*Okay,* she said. *Well, what is it you have in mind?*

So Karen took the key for the Beetle and eased it through the bars. Told the woman where the car was parked up and asked her to drive it back around to the front of the house and to wait for her.

The woman nodded, then got to her feet. A moment later her head dropped back into view.

*Is he dangerous, this fellow?* she said.

Karen couldn't see any point in lying on this score.

*I guess he could be, she said.*

*Well, okay, the woman said. That's good to know.*

Karen watched the woman's denimed legs stride along the back of the house, go down the side, then pause. She heard a bolt slide back, a latch lifted, the side gate swing back into the yard. Then on she went.

Karen pictured the woman crossing the street, rounding the corner and heading on towards the parked VW. Being a little older she maybe wouldn't walk at such a brisk pace. She pictured her arriving at it, unlocking the driver's door, easing herself in and taking a few moments to figure out how to drive the thing. Then all she'd need to do would be pull out and swing the car right around. Or maybe drive on until she had the opportunity to turn at a junction.

Karen waited. She listened hard but picked out neither the heavy rolling sound of what she was sure was the vehicle belonging to Maguire's men or the tighter, slightly tinny engine of the VW.

A couple more minutes crept by. Karen had no option but to remain where she was. Then she heard the Beetle's high ticking, off in the distance. It reached the junction and came down towards her. Karen shuffled forward under the house. The car pulled up to the kerb, just beyond the patch of rough grass. Karen was thinking, *Well, don't pull up like that, you fool. Or I've got to run out into the street to climb into the passenger seat.*

The woman sat with her hands on the wheel and the motor idling. She turned and looked over at the house. Karen was right up against the timbers. She raised her thumb and hooked it round to the right, to try and get the woman to reverse into the driveway. The woman kept on staring for a while, then wound down the window. She had a puzzled look on her face. Maybe she couldn't see what was going on. So Karen got right up to the slatted timbers, nudged the loose one down and out of the way again. Then poked her thumb out and swung it right around, in a crescent.

The woman suddenly seemed to cotton-on. She shifted her attention back to the car's interior and set about trying to find reverse. Two or three times she tried to force the stick into an area it clearly didn't feel uncomfortable occupying and the air was filled with the sound of metal grinding against metal. Then finally she found reverse, turned her head as far round over her right shoulder as it could go and slowly began backing the Beetle up.

She drew back a couple of yards, then pulled down on the steering wheel. A little too early, in fact, so the rear nearside wheel bumped up onto the kerb before it dropped. But she eased the steering wheel back a little, so the car just skirted the edge of the grass. Then backed right up onto the paving between her house and the neighbor's. But so tight to the wall there was no way she could open her door if she'd wanted, and Karen worried she'd scrape the paintwork clear down one side of the car.

Karen had begun to crawl back out into the daylight, but heard another motor heading back towards them. The same powerful engine she'd heard before. She propped the piece of timber back into place and shuffled back into the shadows. She saw a black automobile glide by. She didn't recognize the driver, but he scanned the street intently.

Karen waited half a minute, till the sound of the engine had died away. Then she pushed the timber to one side, crawled out and ran around the front of the VW. Opened the passenger door and slipped on in.

She hunched herself down in the well. The only way anyone would see her would be if they stood right by the window and peered in.

*Okay, what now?* the old woman asked her.

Karen asked her to try and drive through town without drawing attention to herself. To get to the highway and head north.

*Sure thing,* the woman said.

As they made their way through Talbot, the old woman kept up a brief commentary as to what she was seeing.

*Some kerfuffle at Jennie's by the look of things. And, Oh, what's this now?* as a police car belatedly raced towards the main street, lights flashing.

Karen could only guess as to where the goons had gone. She assumed they'd slip away just as soon as the police car showed. From the floor of the car she asked if the old woman knew the picnic area just beyond the town's boundary.

She said she did.

Karen asked if she thought she'd be able to walk back into town from there.

*Oh, sure, she said. That'll be no hardship.*

Once out on the highway she picked up speed. She seemed quite happy, as if she did this kind of thing most days of the week.

They pulled into the rest area and parked around the back, behind the cover of a row of stubby trees. Then waited a couple of minutes, to make sure no-one had followed them out of town.

The old woman kept looking through the windshield.

*No, I think you're okay, she said.*

Karen heaved herself up onto the passenger seat. She located the wallet, took out \$30 and offered it to the woman. Was a little surprised when she accepted it, with a smile.

*Do me one last favor, she said, and don't mention this to anyone? At least, not for a week or so.*

*Sure, the old woman said.*

*What I mean is, if the wrong people happened to hear what sort of car I was driving even. Then that could make life very difficult for me.*

The old woman pulled at the latch to the door. *Honey, she said, I wouldn't know the name of one make of car from another.*

And she stepped out into the day.

\*



It seemed to take longer getting back to the gas station than it had taken on the way out. A couple of times she felt suddenly all at sea and wondered if she'd maybe taken a wrong turning, and this provoked a period of intense, almost puke-inducing panic, in which she doubted she'd ever find her way back to the one place she'd felt relatively safe.

Then she'd spot a fallen tree or cross a junction she recalled from that morning and the panic would abate, leaving nothing but a shortness of breath and a pounding in the head, with her thinking, *Why would I freak myself out like that? As if just for goddamned fun?*

But by following Hayden's directions in reverse – turning off the highway after eight or so miles, then following the tighter stretch of asphalt between the trees – she finally brought the Beetle off the road, round the edge of the forecourt and into the shadows at the back.

She killed the engine and for a while sat and stared off into the trees. Maybe waiting; listening hard to see if another vehicle had followed her. Or maybe just seeing how it felt to be in the VW's tightly insulated silence and to imagine nothing ever happening again. No words. No people. Not even her existing. Just a numbness, timeless, with nothing to report.

She was still sitting there, inert, when she heard a tapping at the passenger window. She knew it'd be Hayden. She turned to find him looking in at her.

He opened the door. *You okay?* he said.

She nodded at him. Then she pulled the key from the ignition, gathered up her belongings and got out of the car.

He walked her back over to the trailer. Asked her a couple of times how it had gone down in Talbot, but she didn't seem inclined to talk much on the subject. So once she was settled he went back out to the gas station and Karen was left alone.

She sat at the table for a while, her jacket still on. She wasn't sure she was functioning properly. This had been the case for as long as she could remember – certainly since leaving the clinic –

but there seemed to be something newly at odds in her, and she worked back through the events of the last few hours to try and locate a particular moment – a hotspot – which might in some way lead directly to her being so unsettled now.

Coming up against Maguire's goons again couldn't have done her any good. But her uneasiness seemed just as prevalent when she thought back to her conversation with Roy. To such a point that she wondered if he might have slipped something into her Coke when she wasn't looking. Or if the creepy chef-guy might have dusted her BLT with something untoward.

She was having trouble sitting still. After five minutes or so she got to her feet and headed over to the washroom, locked the door and undressed, checking every inch of her body for some other small block of plastic, tucked under her flesh, and slowly leaking dope into her.

She pulled on her clothes, but instead of returning to Hayden's trailer she set off out into the woods. Within two minutes she hit a gradient which swiftly grew in steepness, till pretty soon she felt like she was scaling a wall.

She pushed on till her shirt clung to her back with perspiration. Then she found a boulder and sat, with the gas station a hundred feet or so below.

*I have the gun, she told herself. If I go completely insane I can always shoot myself. I'll always have it in my power to bring it to an end.*

Already the light was draining from the landscape. She watched a station wagon work its way along the road, headlights lit. Then all was still and silent and Karen sat and felt the heat begin to slip from her.

It was no real news to learn she'd been active. She'd had that information filed away somewhere in her and hearing it from Roy was little more than confirmation – another room in which the lights were suddenly turned back on. But she had trouble accepting she'd instigate a campaign in which people were killed or maimed. That didn't sound like her at all.

Also, the individuals in their little cell didn't make sense to her. Hearing her name, she could see Mel, Roy's partner, godforsaken and dreary. Never entirely one of the gang. And then Steve and Garry. Both men had begun to take on form now. Which was a little strange given that she was also processing the fact they'd been practically atomized in the explosion. Steve was always talking about his latest socio-political discoveries, his endless texts and latest learning. Garry much quieter, sullen even. Maybe he should have done more reading more technical stuff. Perhaps that would have been time well spent.

But surely there was another. The other female. The one Karen felt sure she'd turned to, the moment after the cabin went up.

*We got to go*, she said.

Karen half-turned now, to try and find her.

And Roy had wanted to ignore her. Almost deny her existence.

She let the failing light and the silence settle back on her.

\*

Karen knew she had to be going without knowing where it was she needed to go. By the time she'd got back to the trailer she resolved to depart the following morning. She told Hayden as soon as he came in from closing up and she got the impression it wasn't exactly a big disappointment to him.

He fixed some food and mentioned a couple of truckers who normally pass through on a Tuesday morning. Regulars from the logging companies. He felt sure one or the other would gladly give her a ride a good couple of hours south from here.

So the following morning Karen packed her things into an old hold-all of Hayden's, along with some bread, a block of cheese and a flask of water, and Hayden went out to open up whilst

Karen sat at the table, with the hold-all on the seat beside her and Peters' medical bag at her feet. As if she was waiting for an interview or an appointment to see a specialist.

Some time around nine-thirty she heard Hayden come sprinting up to the step. He pushed the door open and told her he'd fixed her a ride with a guy named Warren, and that he'd be leaving just as soon as he'd finished filling up with gas.

Karen had heard the truck pull up a good few minutes earlier – a solid rumble of weight and gears, followed by a small explosion of pneumatics. She buttoned up her jacket, took up both bags and followed Hayden back around to the forecourt.

But the truck stood quite still now – just the vast yellow snout, the huge tires, brown with dirt and a dozen or so huge lopped lengths of timber, their bark still fresh and hanging from them, bound by chains and stacked between the posts.

The truck was similar to the others she'd encountered over recent days – fifty feet or so from front to back, the cab and hood an alarming yellow, colossal in scale. The tread on the wheels wide enough to dip your hand in. The hood itself a solid block, and more like something you'd find at the front of a locomotive.

Karen made her way around the front, past the bull bars covering the grille that easily cleared her head. The driver and Hayden were heading around the back of the trailer as Karen came round the front. Presumably, heading off to the office to settle up the payment. Karen went along after them, but in no great hurry. Her two bags hanging from her hands. She could smell the sap from the timber as she walked their length – maybe a dozen pieces in all. The black-red bark scuffed-up where they'd been mechanically handled, not least where the chains gripped them and held them down.

She stood at the back of the trailer, by the sawn ends of the timber, raw and white, till she saw Hayden and the driver come out the door and head her way.

Hayden introduced them, a little nervously. Warren was a sizeable guy, well over two hundred pounds. He wore a creased gray baseball cap, which showed signs of having once been navy blue, a thick jacket, over-trousers, plus boots that were covered in the same red dirt as the wheels of the truck.

His tin hat.

The driver fired up the engine and the whole cab shook, came alive. Warren let out the brake – another blast of sound. Put it into gear and the truck and its load of timber began to slowly pull away.

Karen looked out and back over her shoulder. Hayden stood, arms folded. Then raised his right hand.

They'd run through two or three gears before even reaching the lip of the freeway. And were still hardly moving at speed. Warren leant forward, checked both ways and headed straight out onto the asphalt. A minute later they were still picking up speed.

Karen looked around the cab. Warren didn't seem to go in for much embellishment. The only touch of domesticity was a square canvas bag, caught between the passenger seat and Warren's, which had a Tupperware box embedded in it and a Thermos flask poking out at ninety degrees.

Warren was checking his mirrors and settling into his seat now.

*We got more heat, if you need it. Let me know.*

Karen said she was fine.

*How far d'ya need to go?* he said.

Karen still didn't know.

*Is it okay if I just tell you when I want to get out?*

*Fine by me, he said. Just try and give me some warning.*

Karen said she would. Then there was nothing for a while but the great roar of the Kenworth heaving its load along.

*So you're one of Hayden's regulars?* Karen said then. She somehow considered it her duty to maintain some low level of conversation.

There was a moment of incomprehension and it dawned on Karen that Warren didn't actually know the name of the pony-tailed young man who pumped his fuel for him.

*Oh, sure, he said. Yeah, he's a good kid.*

*It's on your route, I guess, she said. The gas station.*

Warren nodded.

*Well, that and the fact there ain't no other gas station in any direction.*

They rolled along for another quarter mile. Karen was staring square at the dashboard.

*I'm sorry, she said. You need to let me out here.*

Warren couldn't quite believe it.

*Are you okay?* he said.

*I'm sorry, she said again. I just realized I left something behind back there.*

It took another few minutes for Warren to find somewhere to pull up without risking someone coming round a bend and running into him. When the truck finally juddered to a halt, its driver looked a little troubled. As if he might have done or said something out of line. But Karen opened the door, took up her bags, apologized a third time. Then jumped down onto the gravel. Slammed the door to. And by the time she'd got herself straight and taken her first step the truck and its great stack of timber was pulling away.

For the first hundred yards she kept to the asphalt and thought, *Fuck it. I'm done with leaping into the goddamned trees every time a vehicle goes by.*

But after a Chevrolet heading north slowed down and had a good look at her – probably just wondering what someone was doing walking out here in the middle of winter – she lost her nerve and returned to scuttling off into the shadows as soon as she heard a vehicle heading her way.

It took her a good thirty minutes or so to get back to the gas station. A blue sedan was parked by the pumps, so obliged her to hold back a couple of minutes, but as soon as it had gone she walked the last hundred yards or so and headed straight on in to the office.

She was too caught up in her thoughts to notice how Hayden was taking her reappearance.

*Your pal Warren reckons there's not another gas station for twenty miles,* she said.

Hayden shrugged. *That's right,* he said.

She talked like he'd been keeping something from her.

*And not just North and South, she said, but East and West as well.*

She hooked a thumb over her right shoulder, in the vague direction she'd come from three or four days before.

*That's right, he said again.*

*So unless they're driving all the way down to Talbot, or God-knows how many miles in the opposite direction, the guys who had me doped and locked-up for the last three years must also be filling up right here, she said.*

Hayden had to concede that this might be the case. Karen took a Coke from the cooler and popped the top off into the little basket. She knew that the logging companies had accounts at the gas station, to make things easier and to avoid them being ripped off. The drivers just filled up and signed a form which was kept in a ring binder beside the till. Karen had Hayden go through all the accounts, trying to find a company that might resemble the organization that had held Karen in the apartment. But there were no more than a dozen active accounts and none of the names or signatories bore any resemblance to the people Karen wished to identify.

She went through the names of the individuals who'd worked at the apartment – Maguire, Peters, Margaret – but none of them rang a bell. Then Karen described Margaret's appearance – the low bangs, wooden jewelry, the unmistakable vastness of the woman.

*Oh, sure, Hayden said. She drives a Pontiac. Comes in here every week or so. Buys her smokes and a packet of Lifesavers.*

Karen let her head drop forward. For a moment she felt like crying. From the sheer relief of finally getting somewhere. Of bringing these individuals down into her new world.

Then she tried to describe Maguire. The cut of his hair, his height, the color of his eyes. But, aside from the fact that he was usually smart in appearance, he proved to be remarkable in his being so unexceptional. The closest she got to a quality that might set him apart was that he was always smartly-dressed – perhaps unusual for these parts – and super-intent about his business but not enough to Hayden identify him.

*You don't know what he drives? he said.*



Karen shook her head.

*Wait*, she said.

She'd seen his car – at least, she'd caught a glimpse of it when she was being bundled into the back of the ambulance. It was right there. And as he closed the door he'd turned towards it. Moments later she'd heard a car in that direction start up.

*It was a dark tan*, she said.

Hayden gazed out towards the forecourt, trying to picture it. That could be any number of cars he saw from week to week. She'd have to be more specific.

*Nothing unusual about it?* he asked.

Karen thought. *Well, yes – maybe*, she said. *It somehow didn't look like your typical car.*

*Why not?*

*It was ... kind of boxy.*

She put both fingers out before her at shoulder height and with them drew the outline of the hood and trunk, then turned her fingers at something close to a ninety-degree angle, to represent the front and rear windshields.

This didn't much seem to help Hayden.

*You don't remember any details?*

Karen thought hard. Then, quite suddenly, had something of a breakthrough.

*Oh, sure*, she said. *It had a badge, in the center of the trunk.*

What did it look like?

Karen thought hard again.

*It had blocks of blue. Sky blue ... in some sort of circle.*

Hayden was going through all the possible makes and models.

*It wasn't a BMW, maybe?*

Karen said, *What's that look like?*

*Well, kind of ... European. But, like you say, boxy. A bit more upright than U.S. models.*

Then he said, *Oh, shit. We have a tan BMW. Like a 2002 or a Bavaria. He comes in regular.*

*What's he look like?*

Hayden looked at the floor, trying to conjure the guy up.

*Dark hair, he said. Average height, I guess. Almost smart, like you say.*

*That's him, Karen said. I'm sure of it.*

Hayden was still trying to recall this particular customer.

*He has this way of talking down to you. Like he's a little in love with himself.*

*That's him.*

Then, almost to himself, *To be honest, it kind of bugs me out.*

*That's Maguire.*

\*

Hayden wracked his brains, but just couldn't pin down a day of the week when Maguire called in to fill up. Karen was inclined to get out there as soon as possible. She borrowed a second coat off Hayden, bought a couple of candy bars, and once she'd reorganized the contents of her hold-all somewhat she was in position within half an hour.

Her options were pretty limited. Standing among the trees across the asphalt would've given her a decent perspective, but it was some serious distance to cover and seemed to be asking for trouble. She could have asked Hayden to open up the doors to the workshop and hidden behind them. Squinting through a crack every time a car pulled in. But if Maguire did finally show she'd be creeping out towards the car at the worst possible angle and it would be easy to pick her out.

The only sensible option was to crouch down round the back of the low concrete bunker built to cover the fuel taps to the south of the pumps. The structure had been up long enough for scrub and grass to grow around it, which provided some cover from the highway. As each vehicle pulled in she just had to peek around the side and check it out. The rest of the time her main goals were to keep herself from freezing and to stay awake.

At the apartment she'd spent half her life doing the latter and brought this experience to bear, increasing her breathing whenever she felt it slacken, adjusting her posture to maintain some degree of discomfort and rolling her head around her shoulders.

If she needed a pee she could go right there among the bushes, or run on over to the washroom. Getting a little thirsty or hungry she was prepared to endure.

Her strategy evolved as the day unfolded. When she'd first shared her intentions, Hayden had drawn her a map and provided her with written directions to a location he felt might serve her purpose. But once the sun went down and the gas station was closed he drove her out to the turning, two miles or so north of where the road crossed the railtrack. Told her if she wasn't sure, to monitor the distance on the clock. He drove back to the gas station and made a call to a friend who was studying medicine at UCLA from the payphone, scrawling copious notes on a folded sheet of paper while Karen handed him quarters, two at a time. They shared a can of soup. Karen again slept on the foam, but things were different. From the moment she had her little epiphany in the log truck she was all but absent. Already gone.

She had to wait another couple of days before being rewarded. This didn't seem a problem. The gash in her leg continued to heal. Her smashed hand and battered shoulder did a little less complaining. Plus she had the time, as she sat crouched around the back of the pumps to work through events as she anticipated them unfolding, moment by moment, and to visualize herself in their undertaking.

That first full day she found a wide strip of corrugated cardboard and folded it over, hoping it would reduce the speed at which her ass would lose all feeling. The second day, just as Hayden had predicted, the tanker made its delivery, and for that half hour or so she watched from the workshop. The BMW didn't show.

It finally pulled in around mid-morning on the Friday. Karen had developed a technique whereby, instead of going to the trouble of getting up onto her knees each time a vehicle pulled in, she'd just roll round to the right and look out over her shoulder and get a pretty good view of what was going on out there.

She heard a car heading up from the south. Heard it slow, hit the dirt and ease up under the gas station's roof. She rolled around and took a look. Like she was checking on her kids out in the yard.

It was the BMW, dark tan and boxy.

She ducked back. Suddenly wide awake, alive to every little thing. Waited a moment or two, to give the driver time to step out and for Hayden to walk on over to meet him.

Karen got up and onto her knees and looked out again. There he was, opening up the fuel cap, nodding vaguely at Hayden. He was wearing a leather jacket with a thick fur collar. She wondered if this would be a problem. Well, if it was she'd just have to work around it.

Maguire and Hayden had a mutual acquaintance but only one of them was aware of it. Instead of stirring in her some great rage she worried the burden of this knowledge might somehow prove too much for Hayden. He'd maybe talk to Maguire in such a way that would alert him to the situation. Or Hayden would inadvertently glance over to where she was crouching. Maguire would turn. Spot her. Then all her plans, her endless projections would fall apart.

She pulled the hold-all in close beside her. Took the .45 from her jacket pocket. Peaked out and checked on him a couple more times. Until finally she heard the chink of the pump's nozzle up against the lip of the fuel cap and she knew Hayden had done filling the tank.

She looked out again and saw the two of them heading over to the office. The moment they passed through the door she was on her feet and moving towards the offside rear door, head low – before Maguire had time to pause at the till and maybe turn to admire the scenery. There'd be a few moments, she reckoned, when he'd hand over some bills, accept some change – a brief period in which she needed to open the door to the BMW and enter. Then she'd have to get herself as far down as possible while he was on his way back out to her.

She opened the door, pulling it back only about a third of the way and crawled on in. But the space between the rear seat and the back of the passenger seat was half the depth she'd expected.

*Jesus Christ, she thought. How do European passengers put up with it? Or is the back seat just for kids?*

She dropped the hold-all down behind the driver's seat and jammed herself into the space available on the other side.

She could care less about her comfort. She just didn't want Maguire seeing her before he'd got into the car himself.

She faced into the car. By shoving her right shoulder into the leather back of the passenger seat she managed to draw herself down a couple more inches. She had the .45 in her right hand, up across her chest. If she'd been left-handed it would've made life a whole lot easier.

She released the safety. Once they pulled out onto the highway he'd be physically occupied. But if he didn't detect her bumbling about in the back there, he'd surely smell her. She stank – of panic. It had been pouring off her since the BMW first pulled in.

Karen could hear footsteps approaching, right on up to the car now. She detected a change in the light. He tugged at the latch. The door swung open. And in that moment she felt quite keenly that fate would either swing in her favor or his.

He stood at the door. Could simply have been adjusting his clothing. Or maybe reaching around to pull out a gun of his own. But then she felt the car take his weight. The door slammed shut. Maguire started up the engine, released the handbrake and pulled away.

The suspension bucked as they climbed back up onto the highway. Maguire was continuing to head north and this was a good thing. Karen wouldn't have to get him to turn the car around.

She waited till he'd worked through the gears and picked up speed a little. Took a couple of breaths to steady herself, drawing in the smell of the seat's cream leather. The wind was blowing at the glass. They were starting to really move now. The most important thing, she told herself, was to bring the .45 up and have it on him as soon as possible. Once she reached that point, she assured herself, she'd be in charge.

She forced herself up out of the well and back into the corner, the .45 aimed right at his head.

Maguire jumped. Momentarily loosened his grip on the wheel and pulled his foot back off the gas pedal.

*Don't stop*, she said. Not yelling, but insistent. She'd rehearsed this scene.

He glanced around, over his right shoulder. Turned back to face the road. Then laughed – loud and hard. Slamming his hands down onto the wheel. As if he was delighted with the whole situation.

*I told them*, he said, shaking his head now. *Give her time and she'll come on back to us.*

He reached up with his right hand and adjusted the rear-view mirror. Beamed back at her.

*She won't be able to stay away.*

This wasn't quite the reaction Karen had been anticipating. Which was maybe Maguire's intention. She wished there was a way of exacting a little retribution – right then – without either shooting him or giving him a little pistol-whipping and risking having him drive the car off the road. She kept the .45 aimed right at him and with her left hand reached over and dragged the hold-all up onto the seat beside her.

Maguire tried to glance over his shoulder.

*Keep your eyes on the road*, she said.

*Okay. Sure*, he said.

For a while Karen didn't move. *Just keep on driving*, she said, *I'll tell you when to turn.*

And as she spoke she drew back the zipper on the bag and eased it open.

Karen looked up ahead, trying to work out where they'd got to. Then back over to Maguire, her gun still on him.

*How is everyone?* she said.

*We're all fine,* he said. *We miss you.*

He checked her in the mirror.

*All except for Peters, of course. He's kind of sore at you running him over and breaking his legs.*

Karen considered this.

*He deserved it.*

Maguire sucked in his cheeks and frowned. Like Karen was being unnecessarily harsh.

Karen said, *And what about the guy at the river?*

For a moment Maguire seemed genuinely not to know what Karen was talking about, before quickly restoring his equilibrium.

*Oh ... Earle? Yeah, he's been missing for some days now. Whatever happened to him?*

*I shot him,* Karen said.

She still couldn't quite believe it. But, in a flash, recalled the boat being ripped apart around her, along with the boat's owner.

*Who was he?* she said.



Maguire shrugged. *A hired hand*, he said. He glanced up into the mirror. *But all the same, soon enough someone somewhere is going to be mourning him.*

Karen was doing her best to have none of it.

*I only shoot at people who shoot at me*, she said.

Maguire nodded sagely. *I shall bear that in mind*, he said.

For a while they drove along in silence. Passed a couple of cars heading the other way. Another three or four miles, she estimated, before they reached the junction.

She tried to make herself comfortable. The car's interior wasn't as spacious as she'd pictured it.

*So what's the plan*, he said.

Karen said nothing.

*Where are we headed?*

*It's a surprise*, she said.

*Okay.* And again Maguire had a sly glance back over his shoulder, to see what was going on back there.

Another quarter-mile slid by. He said, *I'm trying to work out how you managed to find me.*

Karen did her best to ignore him. She had her left hand tucked into the top of the hold-all now. Carefully peeling back the folds of the cotton tea towel she'd borrowed from Hayden.

*You must have somehow figured there were no more than a couple of gas stations in a thirty mile radius. And sooner or later I'd have to fill up.*

He looked back at her in the rearview mirror. That winning smile of his.

*I always said you were smart,* he said.

*I'm pretty sure you've never said any such thing.*

*Oh,* he said, mock-hurt. *Well, that's either your faulty memory. Or your lack of self-confidence. People with low self-esteem never hear the compliments. They did a study out East. The words just don't register.*

*He's at it again,* she thought, and tried to let it wash right on over her.

They kept on moving, up into a steady gradient.

*How far now, Karen?* he said.

*Not far,* she said. She couldn't see much point lying. *Another two or three miles maybe.*

This got him thinking. Trying to work out whereabouts that might take them.

She parted the last of the cotton towel. The hypodermic sat there, swaddled. Filled right up with juice. No way Maguire would be able to see it without pulling over and turning right around.

*So where were you headed just now,* she said. *Before I got in here.*

Maguire said, *Oh, you know – just going about my business.*

Karen looked through the gap between the front seats – down at his shoes, his trousers. He was pretty smartly dressed.

*The apartment?*

He nodded.

Karen shook her head.

*I doubt it. My guess is you shut the place down.*

Maguire was being unusually unforthcoming.

*The first day or two you'd maybe still be hopeful of finding me. But as time went by you'd start thinking, 'Who knows – she may come back ...*

They swung around a long bend and began dropping down towards the railtrack.

*... And if that's the case, then who might she bring along with her?'*

Maguire still said nothing. Like he was focusing on the driving. The crossing was still a hundred yards ahead when the lights started flashing, left and right. Just as the bell began ringing, urgent and mechanical. Like a length of steel being struck with a spanner

Maguire began to slow, but Karen wasn't having it.

*Go on through*, she said.

The barriers had yet to fall. Still stood to attention, beside the alternating flashes of red lights.

Maguire continued to brake. Then the two barriers juddered briefly and began to slowly swing down into place.

Karen hadn't factored a pause by a rail track to her itinerary. Each barrier only barred the right-hand lane. As far as Karen was concerned there was still a way to keep on moving.

*Drive on through*, she said, and waved the barrel of the .45 in that direction.

Maguire looked back at her in the mirror. *No*, he said. And drew the BMW to a halt.

A second later they heard the plaintive wail of the locomotive's air horn, fifty yards or so off to their right. Then a second blast. The train wasn't moving at any great speed. Just steadily, solidly advancing. The horn wailed a couple more times.

Karen wasn't sure how to proceed. She reached out with her left hand and took hold of the hypodermic. When she looked up Maguire was watching her in the rear view mirror.

He lay his right arm out along the back of the passenger seat and turned.

*What're you up to?* he said. Not entirely joking now. *What've you got back there?*

He'd yet to pull on the handbrake. All that held the car in place was his right foot on the brake pedal.

The locomotive engine had groaned right by and now the carriages began to roll on past. Rust red and yellow, orange, weather-worn. Solid blocks of steel.

The lights flashed still. The bells ringing, insistent.

*Put the brake on*, she said.

Maguire ignored her.

He leaned to his right. Tried to peer around, behind his seat. Karen still had the .45 out, less than a foot from his face. She held the hypodermic in her fist now, tucked in behind the hold-all, out of sight.

*What've you got down there?* he said.

Karen glanced down in that direction. She couldn't help it. Maguire's arm whipped around and snapped Karen's arm back and away. Over towards the side window. Then he turned in, swung his left arm round and hit her hard in the face.

Karen's head shot back. Everything went white. Her ears were ringing. Her head was filled with pain.

The carriages continued to slide by. She could hear the squeal of metal on metal. The wheels heavy on the tracks.

She still had hold of the .45, but Maguire had her right arm pinned back and now he'd dazed her with the first blow he turned around – as far as he could without taking his foot from the brake pedal. So that he was practically squeezing between the seats, with her right arm pushed up towards the roof, out of the way, while he hit her a second and third time with his left.

The lights flashed. The bells rang. The carriages kept on rolling. Already Karen could feel the blood, wet and warm, draining down her face, into her mouth.

She brought her left hand up, to try and get the hypodermic at him, but the driver's headrest was in the way. She was having trouble clinging on to consciousness. If he hit her again she'd be out cold.

Instead of bringing her left hand right around she tucked it in close. Tried to lift it up over the leather headrest. Then, when he reached back again she brought it hard down, in the region of his neck. The needle went into the leather. She let go of the hypodermic, reached to her right, found the lever on the door and jerked it up. The door swung open under her weight and she fell out onto the ground.

She landed on her back. Her head hit the asphalt. The gun was no longer in her hand. The door to the BMW was open, but she couldn't see Maguire. Could hardly see anything. Couldn't tell whether he was in or outside the car.

Then the lights stopped flashing. The bells quit ringing. And the barriers slowly rose, as if in a dream.

Karen lay on her side on the ground. She had double vision. She squinted but the two frames refused to cohere. She'd no idea if the needle managed to get through the leather. Didn't know if she'd managed to push the plunger. But then the car engine briefly roared and the BMW headed off, over the tracks, the rear offside door still swinging open. But the car not moving at any great speed. It covered maybe fifty yards. Then veered off the road. Up onto the dirt, and slowly rolled to a halt.

.....

Maguire came to an hour or so later feeling cold and nauseous. He was leaning into the wall of what appeared to be a large steel box. He could smell oil, dirt and sawn timber. He tried to lift a hand to his face but found his wrists bound together, way over to his left side. As if he'd taken a swing at a ball and his hands had locked there, held by some invisible force.

A thin strip of light ran down the length of an open doorway. His head felt like it'd been packed with ash.

Nearby, somebody moved. Shuffled right in close to him.

*Well, hello there, sleepyhead,* she said.

.....

The BMW had stalled and cut out before Karen reached it. Maguire was slumped over the wheel with the hypodermic poking up out of the top of his jacket.

Karen needed to straighten things out before anybody happened to pass and assess the situation. Her original plan had been to load Maguire into the trunk so she could concentrate on the driving. But once she'd pulled on the brake, removed the hypodermic and got her hands up under his armpits to try to lift him she appreciated just what a struggle this was going to be. So she brought up his knees, lifted his legs over the gear shift and, through sheer brute force, managed to shunt him over into the passenger seat.

She'd no way of knowing how long he'd be out for. She'd loaded 50ml of Sufentanil into the hypodermic, but had no idea how much she'd managed to get into him. His general demeanor suggested he wasn't likely to regain consciousness in the next few minutes.

She pulled a zip-tie round his wrists, another round his ankles and looped a third between the tie at his wrists and the arm rest on the passenger door.

She got in behind the wheel and twisted the mirror to have a look at herself. Blood was smeared across her face, from her eyes right down to her collar – some of it starting to dry already, some still wet and shining. Her nose was swollen. She eased open her mouth and pressed at her teeth to see if any were loose or broken. Her top and bottom lips were split. She wiped her sleeve across her face and some of the blood came away. She had a flask of water in the hold-all – she'd wash the blood away once they'd reached the cabin. And take a fistful of painkillers to see if that helped at all.

She turned and looked at Maguire. Then, to reassure herself, she leant across and put her ear to his mouth. She could hear his exhalations, slow and weary.

*Okay, she thought. Well, I haven't accidentally killed him.*

She was about to start the car when she worked out she no longer had the 45. So she jogged back along the road and over the railtracks to where she'd hit the ground when she fell from the car. The gun lay in the dirt, over towards the grass and gravel. She brushed it down, tucked it in her coat pocket and headed back to the BMW.

To keep Maguire from slumping forward she pulled the seat belt tight around him. She started the engine, let the handbrake out and pulled out onto the road.

In no time at all she'd reached the turning— broad and open where it joined the blacktop then keeping wide enough to accommodate a large, wide vehicle heading up between the trees. It rose steadily, until, after a mile or so, it broke into three separate routes. Karen swung to the right, just as Hayden had instructed her. Then, a couple of minutes later, she cleared a ridge and entered a landscape where every tree had been stripped away in every direction as comprehensively as if it had been flattened by a bomb, with the sawn-off stumps and scattered branches already parched and silvered from the sun and wind and rain.

She drove on through the devastation, the track undulating now as it continued to rise. Then she saw the loggers' cabin up ahead and off to the right, just before the trees were suddenly reinstated. She approached, pulled off the track and got as close as she could without worrying she wouldn't be able to get the vehicle back out of there.

The cabin was a modified CONEX container, eight feet square at the end – the same dun color as half the carriages that rolled by at the level crossing, if only half the length. It had been the store for some of the loggers' equipment as they cleared the hillside and a place of shelter for the men themselves, if necessary. At some point the company might get around to retrieving it, but they were evidently in no hurry. Last winter a friend of Hayden's, out hiking, got caught by the weather and spent several hours there, which is how Hayden came to know about it.

It took Karen some time to figure out how to open it up. The doors had long steel rods running up and down, locking into braces below. On each door two levers were fixed at waist height and she wrestled with them in vain for a couple of minutes, thinking her plan might be about to hit the buffers, before seeing how she had to release a metal catch above each lever in order to free them up and draw them out. Finally, the door to the right groaned open and allowed some good air in and the bad air out.



A little more light came in through a meshed hole, high up at the far end. The door could be propped open a foot or so by chaining it to a steel pin that had been driven into the ground.

It wasn't much warmer in the cabin as it was outside. Karen wasn't sure how long they'd be able to survive in there. The floor was pretty much clear, except for a few coils of steel cable, some clips and joints from heavy machinery and other metal bits and pieces. A couple of hard hats hung on hooks beside a torn jacket and along the far wall a narrow worktop had a few spanners and other tools strewn across it, everything coated with oil and dirt.

Karen went back out to the BMW, opened the driver's door, reached across, released Maguire's seat belt and with her boxcutter cut the tie binding his wrists to the other door. Then she walked around, popped open the passenger door, got a hold of Maguire under his armpits and dragged him out of the car. It was only thirty feet or so from the BMW to the cabin, but Maguire was surprisingly solid, and progress was further impeded by his feet which plowed a furrow through the twisted shards of timber and threatened to pluck his shoes clean off. Twice he slipped from her grasp and fell to the ground. She simply didn't have the strength to stop him. The third time she was tempted to abandon him. Just drive off and let the elements work him over. But that wouldn't suit her purpose. So she braced herself, brought his torso up by the shoulders, dug her hands back under his armpits and dragged him on towards the open door.

It started snowing. Just enough to powder the ground. Maguire was still out cold when she finally laid him out. For a moment or two she caught her breath, then sat him up and dragged him on his ass over to one side. She went to the hold-all for another zip-tie, but couldn't find one. Dug down deeper, without success. She stood up straight and pictured the store where she'd bought them. As if she might jump in the car and drive back out there.

*Dammit*, she said out loud.

She had the duct tape from the gas station as a back-up for keeping him immobile, but preferred the zip-ties for ease of application. Plus, when you wanted to release them you just cut through the plastic, thick as it was, and you were done.

She lifted Maguire's jacket. He was wearing a leather belt. She pictured herself undoing the buckle, sliding it out of the loops on his waistband. Maybe having to roll him around a little to get it right out. But she saw that while it would be strong enough to hold his zip-tied wrists to the steel bar that ran the length of the cabin, once she'd tightened it up there'd be no hole for the prong to slide through. So she'd be running around, trying to find something to punch a new hole in the leather, hoping like hell to make it at the right place, so the belt would stay tight.

So she took the duct tape for the bag and took it over to where Maguire lolled against the wall. The gap between the steel bar and the wall looked to be about two inches. Not enough to pass the whole roll round behind it as she wound it out. So she pulled out a length of a couple of feet, ripped it off with her teeth. Lifted his wrists and fed the tape down behind the bar and between his wrists three or four times.

For a while she sat on a stool and studied him. Maguire had always been a model of composure. Always so completely in control. Now he looked downright disheveled. And this was a source of great joy for Karen.

She washed her face with a little water from the flask, took a couple of painkillers, then stepped outside and went through the BMW. There was nothing in the trunk except the spare. Nothing of note in the car itself. No briefcase. The glove compartment was bare.

As she headed back towards the cabin she noticed something. Spots of darkness in the snow. It took her a second or two to see that these were drops of blood from her nose, from a previous journey. Her bleeding didn't bother her, but the dark red against the white snow disturbed her somehow.

She went back into the cabin and checked Maguire's jacket pockets. The only thing in his wallet was a few bills and a driver's licence.

She busied herself, getting things ready. A couple of minutes passed and his breathing grew a little audible. Then began to be punctuated by an occasional groan. As if he'd shifted from 100% neat unconsciousness to something closer to a state of dreaming. The groans were short,

exasperated. Karen sat down on her stool again. She saw him twitch a couple of times. Roll his head and try to force his eyes open. Then he cleared his throat, raised his head and looked around.

*Well, hello there, sleepyhead,* she said.

He brought his right leg in, to try and push himself up the wall a little and take some strain off his wrists, where they were strapped to the bar. He winced and rubbed his face with a raised shoulder.

Karen waited till she felt he was properly conscious. Then said, *Didn't your momma ever tell you it's bad manners to punch a lady in the face?*

Maguire shook his head and looked right at her.

*Someone had a gun at my head,* he said. *It was self-defense.*

He looked coolly around Karen's face, as if appreciating his handiwork.

Then he checked out his wrists and scanned the cabin.

*So this is where you've been hiding?*

Karen didn't reply. So he went ahead and answered himself.

*I doubt it. You'd have frozen to death by now.*

He looked over towards the strip of light and the devastation beyond. Ran his tongue around his teeth.

*You got something I can drink?* he said.

Karen went to the workbench and took up the flask of water. She unscrewed the cap as she headed back over to Maguire and raised the flask to his lips. He took a gulp, rinsed his mouth and swallowed.

*So what did you hit me with?* he said.

Karen didn't understand. Or maybe didn't want to get into it.

*The drug,* he said. *In the hypodermic.*

Karen was back over by the workbench. She turned and smiled.

*Whatever it was,* she said, *it sure did the trick.*

Maguire watched her, a little steadier now.

*Well, my head's pretty fuggy ... I'm a little nauseous. So I'd rule out Haloperidol. But my mouth's dry and my fingers are tingling, so I'd go for one of the newer opioids. At a guess, I'd say most likely Lofentanil.*

He raised his eyebrows. *Am I right?*

Karen said nothing.

*Well, sure I am,* he said.

Karen had turned away again. She had her hands deep in the hold-all. Maguire waited. Taking in everything around him.

*So, what's the plan?* he said.

Karen turned.

*I have some questions, she said.*

Maguire seemed to brighten. *Is that all? Well, shit, you should have said.*

*The thing is, said Karen, I need some solid answers. And I'm not sure you're capable of providing them.*

Maguire lifted his chin.

*Shoot, he said.*

*Okay, said Karen and took a step towards him. Question one. How long was I in the apartment?*

Maguire looked back at her. *How long do you think?* he said.

Karen shook her head.

*See, there you go, she said. This is the kind of behaviour that'll end up getting you in trouble.*

Maguire smiled. Seemed determined not to back down.

Karen said, *So ... would you say it was closer to six months ... a year ... or two years?*

Maguire nodded, considering the question.

*I honestly don't know, he said. But we'd have the details on file back at the apartment.*

Karen turned and busied herself again, at the workbench. It was a while before she turned back around.

*I've been away from you and your goddamned drugs for a week or more now. I even dug that goddamned piece of plastic out of my arm. People tell me everything will eventually come back. But I'm not sure how patient I can be, waiting to remember who the hell I am. Do you think that's unreasonable?*

Karen was sitting on her stool again now. She was quiet for a while. Then, almost out of the blue, she said, *You got a wife ... kids?*

Maguire took his time. *No*, he said.

Karen watched him.

*Have I asked you this before?* she said.

Maguire nodded.

*How about me?* she said. *Have I got kids?*

Maguire looked straight back at her.

*No*, he said.

Karen shook her head.

*You see, I don't think so either. But I can't tell if that's because it's the truth – or whether it's just something someone's told me to think.*

Maguire didn't say a thing.

Karen went to the door. It had stopped snowing, for the moment at least. If she'd had the courage, she'd have released the chain and closed the heavy door, but she'd worry she'd never get it open again.

*You once told me about a couple of scientists who went underground. They lived in a cave for a month or so, for some experiment.*

*That's right, said Maguire. Kleitman and Richardson. They were studying zeitgebers, circadian rhythms. To see what happens to the body's internal clock when it's deprived of sunlight.*

Karen nodded. She said, *You put me in a cave once.*

Maguire said, *Not a real cave. A simulation.*

*It felt real enough to me.*

Again, Maguire said nothing.

*You put me down there ... in the dark – why? To see how I'd cope? To see if I could find my way out of there?*

Maguire said, *You did find your way out.*

He was trying to be conciliatory. Karen took a step or two towards him.

*I think I must have something you want. Some information ...*

Maguire shook his head.

*Something buried deep down inside me. But you had me in the apartment two whole years and you still didn't manage to find it? I mean, just how incompetent must you be at your goddamned job?*

Maguire shook his head again. *You're coming at it the wrong way, he said.*

*The gas station, she said, where I found you. I knew it. I remember the Shell sign, all lit up. It was like I'd been there. In my dreams, or something.*

*Well, your dreams or somebody else's.*

Her legs felt tired, all of a sudden. From all that night-time walking. She'd have a flashlight. Boots on her feet, maybe.

Karen said, *Okay.*

She turned and went back over to the workbench. She dipped her hand into the hold-all and pulled out a rag that had been rolled up into a bundle. The little glass phials chinked against one another as they were lifted, and jingled as Karen carried them across the cabin.

*I honestly don't know why you don't want to help me. Maybe you're worried you'll get into trouble ...*

Maguire had his eyes on the bundle clutched in Karen's hand now.

*So I'm gonna try to help you. Just like you've helped me.*

She smiled. *We're gonna loosen you up a little, she said. Whaddaya say?*

She sat on the floor, right by the door, and opened up the scrap of material, like a tiny winter picnic. Picked out a hypodermic and placed it on the floor. Then she took up a small bottle, twisted it round, so the label faced her. Swung it over towards the light.

*Alfentanil, she said. Then turned to Maguire, apparently puzzled. Now, what the fuck is that going to do to you?*

Maguire didn't say a word.



Karen placed it back on the floor and pulled out another. Again, twisted the bottle so the label faced her and leaned over so that it caught the light.

*Or how about a shot of 'Etomidate'? She attempted a second pronunciation with a different emphasis. Or maybe that's 'Etomidate'? She looked up. Sounds kind of serious. What do you think? Shall we give it a whirl?*

Karen waited.

After a while she said, *You know what? I only really have one question ...*

Maguire watched her.

*Just how the hell did I wind up at the apartment?*

Maguire said, *You make it sound so arbitrary.*

Karen just stared back at Maguire.

*Like we just picked you up off the street.*

*Then what did happen?*

*You came to us,* he said.

Karen shook her head. *Why would I come to you?*

It seemed, for a moment, like the conversation had drawn to a close.

Then Maguire said, *We struck a deal.*

*A deal?* Karen said. *What sort of deal?*

Maguire said, *One that benefitted both parties.*

Karen stared at him. Winced.

*What the fuck does that mean?*

Maguire had definitely quit talking now. Seemed to have relaxed somehow.

Karen didn't take her eyes off him.

*The other day, she said, when your boys came storming into the diner – was it Roy gave me up?  
Or someone else?*

Maguire smiled. *What do you think?*

*Jesus Christ, she said. Why the fuck do you find it so hard to give me an answer?*

*You know the answer, he said.*

Karen was quiet for a moment. *So, not Roy, she said.*

*That's right, said Maguire.*

*The guy behind the counter.*

Maguire nodded. *Plus, you knew we'd be there. That's why you brought along the ties for the  
fire-door.*

*It was just a guess, she said.*

*You guessed right.*

Karen considered this.

*Did you pick Roy up?* she said.

Maguire shook his head.

*You don't have him locked up somewhere?*

No, Maguire said.

*Why not?*

Maguire said, *He's not important to us.*

A pause.

*But I am?*

Maguire nodded.

*Why?*

Maguire said, *Your capabilities.*

*Capabilities?* Karen said. *What sort of capabilities?*

But Maguire smiled, shook his head and again let the silence settle on him.

Karen decided to come at it from a different angle.

*We were planning something, she said. Roy told me. I can almost remember. We were building up to some big event.*

Maguire remained expressionless.

*I have two theories, she said. The first is you wanted to stop it.*

She paused to see how Maguire reacted.

*The other is you wanted to help it go ahead.*

Maguire looked back at her, steady. He shook his head.

*Okay, said Karen. Then let a moment or two pass. I've got to come clean with you.*

She pulled a sad-clown face.

*That truth is I do know what some of these drugs are gonna do to you. A friend, he's training to be a medic. So he's got to know all his drugs by heart.*

Karen reached into her coat and pulled out a folded piece of paper.

So ... she said.

And she picked up a glass phial, apparently at random, and studied the label.

*Chlorpromazine, she said.*

She consulted her piece of paper.

*My medic-friend reckons this is good for 'vertigo, vomiting and during drug withdrawal'.*

She looked up at Maguire.

*You having trouble coming off any drugs right now? She raised her eyebrows. I know I am.*

She put the phial down and picked up another.

*Now, let's see ...*

She scanned the label.

*Phencyclidine, she read aloud. Then consulted her check-list again.*

*My pal says, 'causes numbness, intoxication ... is also an hallucinogen.'*

She looked up, outraged.

*Hallucinogen? Who needs a fucking hallucinogen? Isn't everything fucked-up enough as it is?*

She put the second phial down on the floor. Then looked around for another, taking a little more care in her choice this time. She leaned in, till she found a phial she seemed to recognize. Lifted it up, triumphant.

*Now, what's this? she said. Sodium thiopental.*

She looked over at Maguire.

*Now, when I told my pal I had a little bottle of this stuff he got all excited. Because apparently it's no longer meant to be available. Sure, it's good for relaxing your patient. And for lowering inhibitions. But he said it's got another name ...*

She paused.

*You know what they sometimes call it?*

Maguire said nothing.

*The 'truth drug', she said. That's what they used to call it. A shot of this and all the doors to the vaults swing open. He says after about twenty minutes those people who aren't normally so chatty start talking – and pretty soon you won't be able to get them to shut up.*

She shook the bottle

*So then I was thinking – what's that nice Dr Peters doing carrying this kind of drug around in his little doctor's bag?*

She stopped shaking the bottle.

*Oh, that's right, she said. You're not too keen on answering questions.*

Another pause.

*Well, let's see if we can't help you out with that.*

She picked up the hypodermic, popped the cap and put it down on the cotton rag. Took up the glass phial, peeled a foil cover from the top. Then took up the hypodermic and jabbed it into the top of the bottle, so that it slid through the rubber and on into the clear liquid inside.

She drew the plunger back and the hypodermic flooded with the liquid. Then she plucked the bottle off and placed it on the ground.

She got to her feet and set off over towards Maguire, holding the needle up in her right hand.

*Now, you don't need me to tell you just how hit and miss I can be with needles, she said. So my advice would be for you to hold nice and still ... so I don't rip a hole in you.*

She edged round to her left. Maguire turned and followed her over his right shoulder.

*It's okay. It's okay,* said Karen, like she was trying to get a leash on a stray dog.

His hands were bound in the opposite direction but Maguire swung his legs round as far as he could. To kick her, maybe. Or just get in the way. Karen decided she'd try and trap his shins with her right foot. Then she'd have the whole of his right flank at which to aim.

*You got to clear the air,* said Maguire.

Karen stopped

*From the hypodermic,* he said. *You pump all that air into me it'll give me a goddamned aneurism.*

He told her to hold the needle right up, and to tap the glass, so that any air bubbles rose to the surface. Karen did as he instructed.

*Now, squeeze the plunger,* he said. *Just a little. Till the liquid comes on through.*

Again, Karen did as she was told. She was still looking into the hypodermic – marveling at its supposed properties – when Maguire spoke.

*I have a question for you,* he said. *How come you didn't call the police? You could've called 911 any number of times. But you didn't.*

*I was too busy,* she said, *trying not to get killed.*

Maguire looked straight at her.

*You consented,* he said. *I have the documents back at the apartment.*

She shook her head.

*You know it, he said. Deep down, you know it's true.*

Karen stopped, hypodermic aloft, laughing.

*Jesus Christ, she said. I can barely remember my own goddamned name. What makes you think I'd be able to remember something like that?*

*Because it's important, he said.*

But Karen had quit listening. She stepped forward and, with her right foot, tried to pin down his legs, just below the knees. But Maguire swung his legs away and back around.

Karen tried again. The same thing happened. She was beginning to get a little irritated.

*You know, she said. I really could not give a fuck where I stick you. I'll stick you in the goddamned face if I have to.*

And she kicked his legs out of the way and made to move on him from the side. Then she stopped.

She could make out a thrumming sound. Like the sound the refrigerator used to make at the apartment in the middle of the night. She listened some more then went across to the doorway. Over to her right, a jeep was coming along the track, out from the trees.

She stepped back. The jeep had a brown detachable roof over the cab and cargo area. The sort that looked like it should just clip on and off, like a toy. It kept on moving – went another twenty or thirty yards. Then stopped.

*Fuck, said Karen.*



*What is it?* said Maguire.

For a while the jeep just sat on the track, with its engine idling. Karen took another step back, into the dark. She pictured the driver looking in his rear view mirror – at the BMW and the container with its door ajar.

Then she heard the gears shift, saw the hood dip a little and the jeep start to reverse back up the track.

*Fuck*, said Karen again.

She turned, looked at Maguire bound to the wall. Thought for a moment. Then strode over to the workbench at the back. She set down the hypodermic and took up the roll of duct tape.

It took a moment or two to locate the end. Then she pulled out a foot or so as she headed over to her prisoner.

Maguire was shaking his head, frantically. *No, don't*, he said. *I won't be able to breathe.*

Karen ignored him and managed to plant the tape over his mouth the first time, and wrapped the two loose lengths back around his neck.

She checked, to make sure the tape was clear of his nostrils. Then looked him in the eye.

*Do not make a fucking sound*, she said.

She got back to her feet. As she headed back towards the door she could hear the jeep reversing up alongside the cabin. She went out into the light.

The handbrake was ratcheted on. The engine cut out. The driver's door opened and the driver stepped out onto the track.

The guy wasn't overly tall, but was broad and pot-bellied. His thick canvas jacket had trouble buttoning up the front. His jacket and boots, even his hard hat all looked to have been issued by the same company – were all coated with the same color dirt.

*You okay there?* he said.

The phrase implied an offer of assistance, but was as much a demand for Karen to explain herself.

*Sure*, she said. As she spoke she was still reaching in her head for whatever reason she might have for occupying the cabin that was closest at hand.

*I was getting nervous about the weather*, she said. *So I thought I'd better just take shelter for a little while.*

Karen half-expected the guy to take a look across the treeless vista, where barely a quarter-inch of snow lay on the ground. Instead, he kept on staring at her.

*What the hell happened to your face there?* he said. *You got blood ...*

And he brushed the air before his own nose and mouth with his fingers.

He took a couple of steps towards her. Karen didn't want him getting any closer to the cabin so she shuffled forward herself, like a move on a chess board designed to block a line of attack.

*I had an accident*, she said, and brought her hand up to her face.

She hoped that might suffice, but was working hard now on possible specifics.

*Out here?* he wanted to know. Karen couldn't work out how much kindness the man had in him.

She shook her head.

*Back home, she said. That's why I came out here. To be on my own.*

The guy was nodding but looking pretty grave now.

*All the same, he said. All of this ... He swept his right arm across the whole blasted landscape. ... is off-limits. Didn't you see the signs? Which way'd you come?*

Karen was talking again, blindly obfuscating. But the guy was looking over her shoulder now, at the container's open door.

Karen glanced back. The glass phials piled up, just inside, caught the light.

Deeper into the darkness, Maguire had brought his face up to the bar where his wrists were bound and clawed the duct tape away from his mouth. It was still stuck fast to his cheeks, but he could at least fill his lungs now.

The top of the bar where his zip-tied wrists were fastened had a thin, sharpish edge. He began to drag the wrapped tape back and forth along it. Once or twice he caught the soft flesh on the inside of his wrists against the metal. But he carried on. Until the tape began to snag and tear and split along the grain of the threads.

But the edge of the bar could only cut so far before it hit the zip-tie. Maguire saw how he was never likely to saw right through the plastic. So he leant in again and got his teeth onto the top half of the duct-tape – and began to gnaw away at it.

It was cold outside but there was barely a breeze blowing. Whenever Karen took a breath, to try and think which way to direct the conversation she could hear something. Something shifting, shuffling. Till finally the guy from the logging company looked over at the cabin and back to Karen.

*You got someone else in there with you?* he said.

She was surprised just how quick it came to her.

*My dog*, she said, wondering what exactly Maguire was up to back there.

*You brought a dog out here?*

*I'm sorry*, she said.

Maguire bit at the duct tape till there was just a tangled string of tape holding it together. He sat back and yanked down hard on it. And finally that last twist of tape and glue gave way. Then he started shuffling on his ass, over towards the workbench.

The guy from the logging company could see something was wrong. He might have offered to help if she'd've asked him, but right now he got the feeling she just wanted to be shot of him.

*Well, look*, he said. *I'm gonna come by again in an hour or so. I'm sorry an' all, but when I do you'd better be gone.*

Karen was nodding. *Sure thing*, she said.

He waited another beat before turning, for emphasis maybe. But Karen was already on her way. By the time she stepped back into the cabin, Maguire had given up sliding across the floor, caterpillar-style, and had got to his feet – started hopping.

She ran in, pushed him to one side. With his ankles bound together, he went over like a felled tree. Karen picked up the gun from the workbench and pushed back the safety.

(Should there be more of a scrap here?)

(Did she put the gun on the workbench before she left?)

Outside she could hear the jeep start up.

I will happily shoot you, she told Maguire. And if that fucker out there turns around and heads over I will shoot him as well.

Maguire lay still and the jeep drove off down the track.

Okay, she said – to herself as much as anyone else.

It took her all of ten seconds to settle on her course of action.

She went over to the door and her little stash of bottles. Flipped through them till she found the one she wanted. Then took a new hypodermic, filled it from the phial. Turned the needle over, as Maguire had shown her. Squeezed any excess air from it. Then moved back in on her prisoner.

\*

It was pitch-black when Maguire next regained consciousness. He lay on his side in the front of the BMW, the seat cranked so far back it was practically horizontal. The heater hummed; the engine was running. But because of the dark and the drugs it was a while before Maguire could make out where he was.

He pushed himself up, off the vinyl upholstery and looked around him. There was nothing to see. His neck was stinging where the duct tape had been ripped away. He brought his hand up to touch it. The zip-ties at his wrists and ankles were gone. He turned to his left to open the door but pawed at thin air. He'd assumed he was in the driver's seat. In time, the news came through to him. Then he swung round to the right, found the door, followed it down to the handle and squeezed the lever underneath.

The cold air hit him deep in the chest. The sky was a little less dark than the trees and hills. Maguire's fingers were tingling now. He stood on a cinder track, but sensed there was something else, beyond the row of trees.

He left the car, still running, walked the fifty yards or so to the end of the track and found himself back on the main road. It took a few moments to work out where he was. To slowly fit it into his map of the world. Maybe a mile or two north of the level crossing. He looked out towards the horizon. There was no sign of the sun making an appearance anytime soon. He turned, walked back down the track, back into the heat of the BMW. Then drove away.

\*

Some time later Karen pulled off the highway and onto the same cinder track in Hayden's VW. After leaving Maguire she'd walked the whole way back to the gas station – a distance she may have been able to cover in an hour or so in daylight, but one that took a good deal longer in the dark. At the level crossing she stopped and glanced down the tracks, looking for an engine's lights approaching. She imagined the barriers dropping, the lights flashing, the bells ringing. What it would do to the night.

Hayden was pretty stoned by the time she reached him. He found her some food and gave her the keys to the Beetle. Karen told him something of what she'd been up to that afternoon. He listened intently, though she wasn't sure how much of it he'd be able to remember the following day.

She dragged a foam mattress off one of the benches, dropped it on the floor and climbed into the sleeping bag. She woke twice, still tired, and on the third occasion decided she'd had sufficient sleep to sustain her, sloughed-off the sleeping bag, drank some water straight from the faucet, then headed out.

There was still next to no light when she pulled up close to where she'd parked the BMW. She left the engine running, the lights on and walked over. There was the metal block from the loggers' cabin with the duct tape wrapped around it and the length of tape hanging from it. She pictured Maguire coming round, stepping out of the car, taking in some air. Being thirsty. Wishing he had water with him. His fingers tingling again. She saw him get back in the car and head off, back up onto the highway. The red lights disappearing into the night.

Karen got back in Hayden's Beetle and, carefully making her way around the metal block, she followed him.

The sun was coming up now. Just brightening the sky a little – enough to bestow upon the trees and fields some vague form.

She covered two or three miles before the first turn, off to the left. A sign appeared a hundred yards before it. She slowed. Saw Maguire at the wheel of the BMW, pale and groggy. Saw him drive straight on. So drove straight on herself.

Another two or three miles further on she started to gain a little altitude and the road bore a dusting of snow.

Soon after, she came to a crossroads, though the roads to left and right were smaller, rural lanes. Something had happened here, she felt. She saw Maguire wrestling with the gears. Checking the mirror. Pulling down on the wheel.

She drove on, pulled up and got out of the VW. Walked back along the road.

She stood at the junction. Imagined the BMW coming towards her. Saw it slow. Then swing to her left – off down the lane's gradient. She walked on after it and, even with the trees crowding around her, there was enough light now to pick out a little glimmer on the asphalt.

She bent down, ran her fingers through it. Rubbed them together. Felt the oil there. Then she turned and headed back up to the car.

She followed the track down the hill, then along the bottom of the valley. A narrow track forked to the left. Karen was close to certain Maguire didn't take it, but pulled over and walked along the main road another fifty yards before finding another smear of oil in the dirt.

She didn't know whether strapping a can of oil under the trunk of Maguire's car was something she'd done before – when she was active maybe – or an idea she'd come up with on the spot. The second option was more appealing. Gave her some hope for the future. It certainly seemed to have come to her as she stood there in the cabin, with Maguire unconscious at her feet and the clock ticking. The necessary ingredients were all around her. But even without the splashes of oil on the road to tell her, she felt she could see his choices. She'd locked onto him.

Another five minutes' driving and the road began to rise again. Halfway to the top, where the trees were beginning to move in and multiply, Karen looked to her left and saw a path heading into the woods. She stopped. Nudged the stick out of gear and let the VW roll back a little, until the path came into view again.

She knew that path. She'd walked along it. Or, like the Gulf sign, had maybe dreamed it. But she knew where it led – how the view opened up another hundred yards or so further on. And could feel the journey in her bones beyond there.

She drove on again. The sun had come up but was buried in the clouds somewhere. It didn't seem to be getting any warmer.

A little more snow fell. Just enough to dampen the windshield. Karen wondered whether the snow might cover any sign of the oil. But her confidence in her own abilities only grew stronger. And at the next couple of turns – where Maguire had the opportunity to fork off the road – Karen checked and found spots of oil, clear and evident, as if it had burned right through the snow.

She recognized another two features. A stone bridge off to her right, in a patch of marshland. Then, high up on the other side, a rocky outcrop. Both so solidly established in her mind there was no doubting she'd encountered them before.

Pretty soon the whole landscape seemed familiar to her. The folds. The brutal promontories. The distant peaks. She'd spent time here, on one of her journeys. Something significant had taken place.



Then, in an otherwise featureless environment – just a land slowly rising between fields – she suddenly knew that she had to pull up. And did so. Knew, without fear of contradiction, that the place she was looking for was just on the other side of the hill.

She pulled in by a gate into a meadow. Got out the car, checked her jacket pockets and set off walking up the lane.

A minute later she could make out the rooves of the complex, partly obscured by trees. But she was halfway down the other side before she could assess the place properly and try and establish how she might make her way in.

A high wall faced the slope she stood on. Karen left the lane and cut over to some trees for cover for the last two hundred yards or so.

Out front she saw three vehicles – a grey saloon, a new-ish pick-up and the BMW. The building itself looked like it had been configured a little differently to Karen's apartment, but the basic premise – of taking an old cottage or farmhouse and extending it out the back substantially – seemed to be the same.

At the base of the hill the lane swept round the front of the building and headed off again. Karen stayed among the trees as long as she was able, then slipped over the low wall and kept her head down as she approached.

The face of the building was also different. Karen's apartment – or rather the old house to which it was attached – had a small porch, beyond which were the cloakrooms and lockers, with the technical rooms off to the right. This building was not quite so old. The original gateposts had been removed and the gap between them broadened, to allow access for more vehicles. The saloon and pick-up were parked to the right with the BMW pulled in at an angle, as if it had been left there without too much thought.

Karen moved in and peered around the first gatepost. The windows looked blank, as if there was something solid behind them. She had her right hand around the .45 in her jacket pocket now. She brought it out and crept in among the cars.

She edged round the back of the BMW and saw how a small pool of oil had formed on the paving beneath the trunk. On her hands and knees she moved between Maguire's car and the others, to get as close as possible. The front door was six or seven feet wide, composed of vertical strips of timber and split down the middle. It appeared that the door to the left was used for entry and that the right pretty much stayed in place. Old fashioned steel hinges, picked out in black, came in from the sides, a foot from the top and bottom, like great arrows. Karen turned and looked back to the lane. Tried to gauge the width of the gap available. Then looked at the double doors again.

She thought about creeping round the other two sides of the complex, but given what she'd already seen of the building she couldn't imagine there'd be any easier way into it.

She crept away, on her hands and knees still, and was almost at the gates, with the .45 still in her right hand, when she stopped. She turned and checked out the BMW – its relationship with the other two vehicles. Then she edged back up to it, took out the boxcutter and sliced away at the walls of the tires on the two nearside wheels until the air came hissing from them.

She took the same route back up the hill as the one she'd taken down it, stopping two or three times to make sure no-one was following her and that she wasn't too clearly exposed. Point of fact, there didn't seem to be any windows this side for anyone to look out of. Unless there were cameras buried away underneath the gutters. Something she felt wasn't beyond the realm of possibility.

She got back in the car, fastened her seat belt and started the engine. Suddenly all the pains and aches her body had picked up these last few weeks came back to her. She felt weak, vulnerable. But decided not to fight it. Karen let all the fear and foreboding steep her. Then she brought Maguire's face to mind, put the car into gear and pulled back onto the road.

At the top of the hill she paused, with her left foot holding down the clutch and the car still in gear, while she fished the .45 out of her pocket and placed it on the passenger seat. Then she drove down the lane in as high a gear as was practical so as not to draw attention with the whine of the engine, but not so fast that she lost control.

Rounding the last bend she changed down and picked up speed. Fifty yards from the gateposts she wondered if she'd have to change up again before reaching her target. It didn't really matter. If necessary she'd have the car at full revs, screaming its little heart out. By then it would be too late.

Twenty yards from the posts she edged to the left of the lane – just a matter of inches – to give her maximum distance from which to swing back in. Her only thought now was whether she might clip the post on her way through. Or be moving so fast she'd drift to the left and hit the wall instead. She'd know soon enough. Right now she was fixed with the car – its speed and intention. As she began pulling round to the right, with the engine at full pitch now, she was sorely tempted to reach out with her right hand, to stop the .45 slipping from the seat. She resisted. The car flew by the gate post. So close she almost caught the front fender and clipped the wheel arch at the back. The VW did indeed coast to the left a little as it momentarily lost traction. The slight rise where the road met the yard threw the car up off the ground. But it only slid a little. Then it got a grip and it was only a matter of moments – half a breath – before it met the doors.

Karen tweaked the wheel a fraction, doing her best to have the hood aim straight for the split down the middle. She jammed her foot to the floor. Braced her hands on the wheel. Then ducked her head down. Suddenly it didn't matter about the brakes or the accelerator. The VW and the double doors now had their own intimate business, with Karen just a witness, head down, in the very center of it all.

The door's lower hinges were the first to give, both doors buckling into the building together. Then splitting as the VW's hood went deeper, and briefly forming a mirror image of the porch outside the other building, miles from here.

The Beetle ploughed on and the top hinge to the right also gave way – perhaps, as a matter of basic principles of force and tension. There was simply more force applied to it – whereas the top hinge to the left clung on, though twisted to the half door on that side. This might’ve been a problem for Karen. As the car flew through, the doors flipped round so comprehensively that the tops almost found a way into the windshield, like a package being delivered through a postbox. Luckily, the roof provided enough resistance to help it on its way.

Karen could have hit the brake if she’d had any notion where the pedals were located. But whilst the main doors had done the lion’s share of slowing the vehicle, the job was completed when it reached a wall with a large noticeboard fixed to it. The VW hit it and came to a halt.

Despite bracing herself against the wheel, Karen’s head was whipped forward onto her right hand. Like someone had punched her, just above her right eye, but without sufficient force to knock her out. Around the car, timber and plaster was still falling and settling. Karen had had vague plans of springing out, gun in hand and setting about her task. But it took her a couple of moments to release the seat belt and another few seconds to locate the .45 which was now on the floor.

She turned to her right, expecting to find a corridor, leading down to the control room. But there was just a solid bank of metal cabinets. To her left, through the window in her door she saw what she’d been looking for. The building appeared to have been laid out in a neat inversion of her own apartment. There was the corridor she’d expected on the other side and, beyond it, to the right, the door through to the apartment itself.

She tried to open her door but it was jammed shut.

The engine had quit – had either stalled when her feet first slipped from the pedal as the car hit the doors. Or when it hit the wall. The first person she saw was an orderly. Not Dean or Stewart, but in the same sort of scrubs. He was tall and prematurely balding. He tentatively approached the car. Karen wound down the window. As if for all the world she’d just taken a wrong turning and needed directions to get her back on her preferred route.

The glass went down about six inches then refused to go any further. Karen pointed the .45 through it.

*Jesus Christ*, the guy said.

It was probably the gun, but could just as easily have been the state of Karen's face. The blood coming down the right side of her face.

*Where's Maguire?* she said.

The guy hitched a thumb over his right shoulder. Karen nodded.

*You've got a count of ten to leave the building and start running*, she said. *If you're still here when I'm done counting I'm going to shoot you.*

The guy nodded. As if this was most reasonable thing he'd ever heard. Then he was gone.

Karen saw she had a choice. Either punch a hole through the shattered windshield. Or try and force her way out through one of the two doors. She hadn't the energy to do much moving. Or the patience to devote too much time to it. So she turned to her left, tugged back the silver latch and shunted her left shoulder hard up against the door. It hurt. Two more shunts and the door gave. After that it was just a matter of bringing a foot around and pushing it open. There was the sound of metal scraping metal. Then she was out and on her feet.

*Maguire!* she called out.

If a vehicle of any make or model made an unexpected appearance at your workplace you'd expect everyone within a mile to come running, if only out of curiosity.

She headed down the corridor. A dozen or so steps along it, she stopped. Backed up a little. There was a door to the left. No sign on it. Just a steel push plate. Even standing there she

could smell the disinfectant, the cleaning agents. She brought the .45 up in her right hand and pushed at the door with her left.

The fluorescent strip on the ceiling was lit, a block of opaque ice. The tiles and mirror made it brighter. She took a couple of steps. Up ahead and to the left were a couple of washbasins, with porcelain urinals beyond them. To the right were three johns, the doors and side partitions constructed of plywood, with a dark brown veneer.

All three doors were closed. Karen crept in a little closer. The metal dials on all three had 'vacant' rung up in red. But looking more closely – comparing them – the doors to the left and right of the triptych were open just a half-inch wider than the door in the center. And focusing on the lock, Karen sensed it had been touched – or twisted – in the last few minutes. She could sense some recent disturbance in the mechanism, caused by the activity, still hanging in the air.

Another step, almost silent. The .45 out in front of her. She could feel the other person in the room now. Could feel them breathing. The bad air pumped out into the atmosphere. The heat behind the door.

One last step. Then she turned and shifted her weight back onto her left foot. So as to kick the door square-on with her right. She swiveled her hips, both feet still placed on the floor.

Then, three shots were fired out of the closet. Blowing three separate holes in the plywood. Six inches apart.

Karen jumped back.

It didn't feel like she'd been shot. She looked down. She hadn't been.

She looked back at the door, brought the .45 up and fired twice into it.

Someone called out. On either the first shot or the second. Karen couldn't tell. Now finally she kicked back the door – just a tap – with the sole of her right foot. And there was Maguire, sitting

on the can clutching his stomach. There was blood on his clothes. His hand was still hold of the pistol, but something was wrong with it. Maybe because of the pain in the stomach. Or because it had been hit.

She stepped in and took the pistol from him. Just sort of eased it out of his grasp.

Karen stood and looked at him for a moment. He really was in quite a state.

*Where is she?* she said.

Maguire was too preoccupied with his injuries. Fretting and groaning.

*Forget it, she said. I'll find her myself.*

She went back to the door, swung right. Back towards the Beetle, then around to the left. To where the main access point to the apartment would be in the mirror-image of her own.

She went up to the door. It was steel and had runners at top and bottom, on which the door would slide to one side. But she could see no obvious button or lever, or even a keypad that would set it in motion. Above the door, up in the top left corner, was a steel box, which may have housed the motor. Karen took a step back and aimed the .45 up at it. Fired. The bullet pierced the box, but failed to generate any movement and despite Karen working at it in any number of ways the door remained where it was.

Standing there she imagined an aerial plan with everything switched right around. She stepped back and looked to her right.

At the end of a plain white wall was a wooden door. Almost identical to the one through which the guy had stepped to make his way into the courtyard in order to retrieve the candy wrapper that had been driving her half-insane.

She headed on over to it. It was nothing fancy. Just a Yale lock, which she twisted, then the door swung back to her.

The courtyard was practically identical to the one she'd looked out onto for two years. But not in a meditative, pleasing way. It was abysmal – a void.

Karen saw how she now had a pistol in both hands. She brought Maguire's up and looked at it. There was blood smeared over the grip and had gotten onto the palm of her left hand. She tucked the gun into her jacket pocket.

The only obvious difference to the lay-out was the positioning of the door. In Karen's building it was on the other side of the glass.

She walked out in the yard and looked into the apartment. The sofa, the neat little kitchen, even the rugs laid out on the floor – ever last little thing was the same but swung around into reverse. And there, in the center of the room, a woman was standing. She had her back to Karen. Wearing the same kind of clothes Karen had been given. The same height. The same hair.

The woman seemed agitated. She must have heard the car come crashing into the building. The gunshots – in the bathroom; then another, closer still. She was now standing in a state of anticipation. Wondering what was coming next.

Karen knew that if she waited another moment or two, she'd turn around. She didn't need to hammer at the glass or call out. It was going to happen. And, sure enough, a moment or two later, the woman began to turn.

Karen saw herself beyond the glass. The hair, the face, even the look of disbelief. And as she stared, Karen felt herself flood over into that other Karen. To stand, imprisoned again, looking at the identical woman out in the yard.



Karen took a step forward, towards the glass. And as she did so she saw the features of the other woman shift a little. The eyes narrowed slightly. The chin was now a little sharper than hers. The hair thicker.

The woman in the apartment moved in towards the glass. It was the woman Karen had been following. The woman from the fire ... who'd led her away. Gail.

She raised a hand – her right hand – and placed it up on the cold glass. Karen stepped forward.

*Okay, she said. It's okay.*

Karen still had her .45 out. She brought it up, stepped back and aimed the pistol down to the right, in the corner of the pane of glass.

The glass shook, but failed to shatter. A scar, milky-white was left there.

So Karen looked up at the woman and pointed to the back of the apartment – to the corridor that leads from beside the kitchen down to the bedroom and bathroom – and the door to the exercise room.

As she passed the Beetle again, she heard the BMW start up outside. The engine squealing and screeching. Like someone was trying to operate a piece of machinery beyond their means.

There was blood on the floor – all the way back to the bathroom. But Karen went on, right along the corridor, till she came to the door to the control room.

Most of the door was smoked glass, but Karen knew the room itself would be low-lit. The steel handle was cold to the touch. She pushed down and the door swung open. Inside were the same banks of machines – EEG readouts, computers, video playback – and, again, all turned-around to face the other way.

The same two swivel chairs were pulled up to the main console right by the window. The room beyond was dark, illuminated only by the light which spilled through the glass. Karen bent over the controls, looking for a switch or button that would release the lock on the door at the end of the corridor and let the other woman on into the treatment room.

To her right was a board of dials and lights. This, she felt, could be discounted. As could a six foot bank of electronic equipment behind her, with different colored cables linking different sockets.

The door release must surely be somewhere within arm's reach of where she was sitting. To her left was the door through to the treatment room – the next problem to be dealt with once she'd overcome the one at hand.

She could picture the woman standing at the end of the passage – watching the lock and handle, waiting for the click. Karen traced a finger along each row of knobs and buttons off to her right and began hitting a few, twisting others. Just to see what happened.

She sat back. The edge of the console was trimmed with upholstered vinyl, for the operator to rest their elbows. Below this and round to the left was a neat set of plastic levers, each three or four inches in length. Karen bent down. It was hard to read the text printed on them, there was so little light in the room. But, squinting, she saw the word 'LOCK' in capitals. Moving in closer, saw DOOR Lock A'. She held it down and off away somewhere else in the building heard the electric buzz – the same sound she knew from her own apartment.

She'd released the lever and was considering holding it down a second time, just to be sure, when she saw some movement in the room before her. The other woman was moving, slowly making her way between the treadmill and the day bed. Right on up towards the glass. Like a ghost, or something coming up from deep water.

Karen smiled at her and she smiled back.

Then she saw a second figure in the glass, coming up out of the shadows – one she dimly recognized. And as she tried to make sense of what she was seeing (What was Margaret doing in there?) she saw the expression of the other woman change, to one of horror.

Karen caught a glimpse of the red cable as it swept down in front of her. Saw it again when she brought her hands up to try and get her fingers behind it. To try and stop her being choked with it.

She was pulled right back in the chair, but also lifted, so that both her feet left the floor. She did all she could to keep the cable from her windpipe. Managed a shallow breath or two, and in those breaths caught the distinct whiff of mints mixed with Virginia tobacco smoke.

In the glass she saw Margaret, grimacing as she leant right back. Saw her own self struggling. And, beyond, the other woman – waving, shouting – though her words barely came through to her.

Margaret pulled Karen into her so that the back of her head was drawn into Margaret's cleavage. But when Margaret saw how this angle wasn't fulfilling her purpose and that it allowed Karen room to get her hands in the way she pushed Karen's head forward. And crossed her hands over one another her neck.

Gail was hammering on the glass now. Karen saw her disappear from view, to try and get through the access door. As less air found its way into her she felt herself slipping into that familiar semi-conscious territory. A place where her sense of the exterior world diminished and slowly began to turn in on itself.

She heard herself wheezing. The sound of someone being throttled. And maybe because Margaret heard this and knew her job was nearly over, or perhaps because she was tiring of lifting Karen's weight, she leant forward ... just a little. Karen had been kicking, just the same as anyone would kick when they were having the life eased from them. But now she determined to kick with a little more purpose. Gail was hammering up against the glass. Was yelling.

Despite its thickness and her lack of oxygen, Karen could make out that she was saying, *The door, the door.*

And she was in her head now. Gail knew the button's location. She had information Karen didn't have.

Karen kicked again, with her left foot, but only hit the console. The upholstered edge where Maguire and Margaret would lean. Then she reached out. Tried to somehow lengthen her body – not the tallest person to begin with – and kicked, just below it. But still, she could see, five or six inches short of where it needed to be. She tried again. Slipped down, so that the cable came up against her chin and she slid right down, through all the clothes she'd borrowed. Until she felt she was somewhere close to where she needed to be. She kicked, two or three times. And finally heard the buzzer. Like the one that had released the door between the apartment and the treatment room, but much closer.

She was on her way out of this world. Began to slump. She had one last look up at the glass. To where Gail had been standing, raging. But she was gone.

She'd only managed to hit the lever for a fraction of a second, but it had been enough. The electrical circuit was complete, the mechanism shifted, the door was released. By the time Gail entered the control room Karen was lifeless. Held up by Margaret, who now backed away. Gail moved towards her. She saw the gun on the console. Took it up and pointed it at Margaret. Didn't bother to talk. Just released the safety, pulled back the pin and fired.

She'd aimed just to the right of Margaret. The bullet hit the wall. Margaret raised her hands, the red cable still hanging from her right fist. Karen fell to the floor. She was wheezing, desperate for breath. But on all fours now. Then pulling herself up from the soft edge of the console. When she was up on her feet she had to lean forward, hands on her knees, till she had enough air flowing in and out of her. She brought a hand up to her throat and rubbed away there. Then she turned to Margaret. Shifted her weight onto her back foot and punched her in the face.

They sat her in the swivel chair, brought her hands round behind her and used the cable to tie her wrists and ankles to the chair. They'd no need to gag her. Sooner or later someone would come down the lane, see the state of things and investigate.

Karen and Gail saw how they were the follower and the followed, and that while Karen had been relentlessly walking on the treadmill, half-conscious at her location, Gail had been leading the way, either here or sometimes out in the field.

But why spend so much time and effort on such research? Imprison two women, feed them, care for them, pump them full of every sort of pharmaceutical. To what ends?

Margaret's spectacles had fallen to the ground in the scuffle. Without them she looked mole-like, stripped bare. They put their questions to her.

*So you can get ahead, she said Predict someone's decision-making.*

Karen led the other woman along the corridor, past the Beetle and then out into the light. In the yard, Gail stumbled. Reached out a hand and took hold of Karen: the blinding light, the hard air, the endless sky. A couple of moments to steady herself. Then they went on, out into the lane.

They turned to the left, back the way Karen had driven down here. Quite soon, they could make out two furrows – through the snow to the asphalt and on into it, gouged by the rim of the wheels of the BMW. Two continuous lines, sometimes finding a shared frequency but increasingly oscillating to left and right.

They walked up the hill, slowly rewinding Karen's charge down it. And then they saw the car up ahead, abandoned, the driver's door open, askew across the lane.

It was clear which way he'd gone from the footprints and the occasional blot of blood against the snow. They climbed the gate and carried on. Not in any great hurry now, since they could see him off in the distance. Stumbling. Stopping. Then stumbling on some more.

*Did I always follow you?* Karen said. *They never tried it the other way around?*

Gail shook her head. *I guess not,* she said. *It never felt that way.*

*I could feel you, moving up on me,* she said. *Till suddenly, you were right there with me.*

Maguire had quit making any progress. By the time they reached him he was on his side, his clothes all soaked with blood along his left side and now beginning to taint the snow on the ground.

He stared up at them, his face ashen. Clutching just below his ribcage.

*You gotta help me,* he said.

Karen looked down at him. She couldn't remember a single previous occasion he'd ever said such a thing.

She shook her head. *Sure,* she said. *But first I need your help. The same question – how the hell did me and Gail wind up on your doorstep?*

Maguire winced as he turned.

*You agreed,* he said. *As a group.*

*Agreed to what?*

*There's a phone ... back at the house,* he said and nodded down the slope towards the complex. *Call Peters.*

And Karen couldn't help but think how quaint it was that he would refer to such a place in such a way.

*Agreed to what?* she said.

*To take part in the study.*

Karen shook her head. *Why the hell would we agree to that?*

Maguire tried to move. To try and make it a little less painful.

*To keep you off the streets,* he said.

Karen half-turned, back in what she felt was the direction of Talbot.

*But what about Roy? How come he wasn't cooped up ... like me and Gail?*

Maguire had dropped right back now. Even keeping up on his elbow was getting too much for him.

*The two of you just worked better together. That was the deal we agreed.*

*Agreed with who?*

*Roy.*

Karen looked hard down at him now.

*He traded us?* she said. *Roy traded us and you let him go?*

Maguire said nothing.

Gail was looking out, over at the car abandoned in the lane. *We should go,* she said.

Karen nodded.

They turned to go.

*Call Peters*, Maguire said, as she set off.

They crossed the field, climbed the gate and walked back down the lane to the complex.

They passed the VW, went on into the control room where Margaret sat, still bound to the swivel chair, with Gail still standing over her, holding the gun. Margaret's mouth was gagged now with her silk scarf. Gail was staring at her, a little madly, but turned as Karen entered.

*She wouldn't stop talking*, she said.

Karen located Margaret's purse and took the keys and what cash she had. Then she led Gail out into the front yard.

She made herself guess whether it was the saloon or the pick-up that belonged to Margaret. For some reason, she assumed it was actually the pick-up. The key slipped into the lock and turned. She was right.

She turned and saw Gail, bent forward, her hands on her knees.

Karen went on over. Put her arm around her shoulder. *It's okay*, she said. *I was the same. Just keep on breathing.*

Then she led her over to the passenger door of the pick-up and helped her in.

Karen went around and climbed in herself. Started it up and carefully reversed out onto the lane. So they were facing in the opposite direction to the way she'd come.



In her mind she was already drawing up a list of items that needed attending to. First, to get some cash to Hayden, to compensate him for the loss of his VW Beetle. Then to track down Roy. Pay him a visit. The latter might take a little more time.

*Do you know what you're doing?* she said.

*I guess so,* Karen said.

Then she found first, let out the brake and they headed off down the road.

No portion of the work referred to in the Thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

I confirm that this Thesis is entirely my own work.

I confirm that no material of this thesis has been published in advance of its submission.

I confirm that no work previously submitted for credit or published in the public domain has been reused verbatim. Any previously submitted work has been revised, developed and recontextualised relevant to the thesis.

I confirm that no third party proof-reading or editing has been used in this thesis.

Copyright © Mick Jackson 2021

The Observer and the Observed: Exploring forms of observation and self-observation in  
a novel and commentary

University of Winchester, PhD Thesis

Page range pp 1 – 295

ORCID 0000-0001-5777-2421

This copy has been supplied on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgement. Copies (by any process) either in full, or of extracts, may be made only in accordance with instructions given by the author. Details may be obtained from the RKE Centre, University of Winchester. This page must form part of any such copies made. Further copies (by any process) of copies made in accordance with such instructions may not be made without the permission (in writing) of the author. No profit may be made from selling, copying or licensing the author's work without further agreement.

## **Rationale**

**‘The Observer and the Observed: Exploring  
forms of observation and self-observation in a  
novel and commentary’**

## Introduction

The initial research proposal has its origins in two items in an exhibition about sleep at the Wellcome Collection.<sup>1</sup> One was a record of Nathaniel Kleitman's *Mammoth Cave Experiment*<sup>2</sup> in 1938, in which he and a colleague, Bruce Richardson, spent thirty-three days underground studying the relationship between exposure to daylight and circadian rhythms. The other featured text and photographs documenting two 'wake-a-thons' by Peter Tripp, a New York DJ, and Randy Gardner, a high school student from San Diego, who forced themselves to stay awake for 201 hours and 264 hours respectively, in 1959 and 1964.

Kleitman and Richardson were physiologists and pioneers in the relatively new 'sleep sciences', whereas Tripp and Gardner were simply amateur self-experimenters attempting to set a world record in staying awake, but as I researched the events I recognized that in both instances the participants were subjecting themselves to extended periods of deprivation – in the case of Kleitman and Richardson a deprivation of daylight, and for Tripp and Gardner a deprivation of sleep. I saw also how both parties could be perceived as exploring a liminal psychic territory – indeed, one that might be represented visually by Kleitman and Richardson's descent underground.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Sleeping and Dreaming* ran from 29<sup>th</sup> November 2007 to 9<sup>th</sup> March 2008 and combined art and medical science to explore sleep.

<sup>2</sup> The objective was to discover 'whether the natural 24 hour cycle of sleep and wakefulness could be influenced by changes in light and temperature.' (p 42, *Sleeping and Dreaming*, Black Dog Publishing, 2007).

In the photographs from the Mammoth Cave experiment, Kleitman and Richardson are to be seen washing, reading and sleeping in a patch of light in an alien landscape. The territory being plumbed by Gardner and Tripp, however, is less tangible, being psychological and physiological: if they are buried then it is deep within themselves. Seated at a microphone after 80 hours without sleep, Tripp appears ravaged by tiredness, his head propped in his hand, barely able to keep his eyes open. This state, at the cusp of sleep, is universally familiar – when our breathing slows, our temperature drops and our ability for rational thought begins to falter.

Three of my four previous novels have featured protagonists under duress – characters whose state of mind has been impaired by trauma. In *The Underground Man*<sup>3</sup> a Victorian aristocrat's eccentricity threatens to tip over into madness. In *The Widow's Tale*<sup>4</sup> a woman is beside herself with grief. A protagonist at risk of being overwhelmed by their situation is no rarity and has obvious appeal, revealing an individual stripped of sophistication and reaching for whatever resourcefulness they might possess. In Tripp and Gardner and the research of Kleitman and Richardson I saw the potential for another narrative focusing on humanity 'in extremis'.

Towards the end of his marathon Tripp believed he witnessed mice and kittens running around the studio and spiders crawling out of his shoes.<sup>5</sup> Gardner became convinced he was the African-American running back for the San Diego Chargers.<sup>6</sup> These were individuals, it seemed to me, whose situation and behaviour were ripe for exploration, with potential for an unusual fictional narrative.

---

<sup>3</sup> Jackson, M. (1997) *The Underground Man* (Picador)

<sup>4</sup> Jackson, M (2010) *The Widow's Tale* (Faber and Faber)

<sup>5</sup> Bartlett, T. (2010) *The Stay-awake Men*, The New York Times, 22 April

<sup>6</sup> Gardner, R. (2007) *What it feels like to stay awake for 11 days*, Esquire Magazine, 7 March

Material will typically appeal to me without my fully appreciating how it might be developed into a narrative. Indeed, an inexplicable appeal may be the primary reason I choose to investigate it. The development and composition of the novel is one way of satisfying that enquiry – of bringing an object of curiosity into the light. Zora Neale Hurston described research as ‘formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with curiosity.’<sup>7</sup> For Jenn Webb, curiosity is ample justification ...

Many writers do research because they are curious about the world or an aspect of it – because they find it intrinsically interesting. This is perhaps the most important reason for doing research.<sup>8</sup>

My original intention was to explore the wake-a-thons and the history of sleep science with a view to creating the outline of a narrative I might present to my publisher. I hadn’t yet conceived of the project as a subject for an interdisciplinary piece of academic study.

In 1949 the psychologist J.P. Guilford proposed a distinction between ‘divergent’ and ‘convergent’ thinking<sup>9</sup>, convergent thinking in his view leading to a single, identifiable answer to a problem and divergent thinking having the capacity to produce a variety of options as a result of a less linear, more adventurous juxtaposition of ideas. The term has since been employed to identify particularly lucid periods of creativity for writers and other artists and in my own practice I had identified such reveries, usually brief, when the processing of ideas would seem to draw more heavily on my unconscious and be less restricted by conscious interference.

---

<sup>7</sup> Hurston, Z.N. (1984) *Mules and Men* (Indiana university Press) p174, quoted in Webb, J. (2015) *Researching Creative Writing* (Creative Writing Studies) p12

<sup>8</sup> Webb, J. (2015) *Researching Creative Writing* (Creative Writing Studies) p3

<sup>9</sup> In 1949, as President of the American Psychological Association in his Presidential Address.

I had also noticed how, in my own experience, the state of ‘hypnagogia’<sup>10</sup> seemed to share some of the qualities of divergent thinking. So, some time after first encountering Tripp and Gardner, I began to speculate whether their ‘wake-a-thons’, as well as offering the possible ingredients for a novel, might be perceived as an amplification of that hinterland between waking and sleeping and serve as a focus of a more formal study alongside the novel.

As research and development proceeded – initially in my own time, then as part of the PhD – the focus shifted. In this commentary I shall articulate how a research project whose original intention had been to write a novel about the wake-a-thons and to carry out a series of experiments comparing hypnagogia with a writer’s state of ‘divergent thinking’ evolved into a 1970s thriller alongside an investigation into the relationship between ‘the observer and the observed’ as it applies to the creative practitioner.

The critical shift is essentially one of perspective: from the subjective / experiential to an objective model. The original doctorate proposal was a series of EEG<sup>11</sup> sessions in which I would participate. In two discrete sessions I would attempt to engender the states of, first, hypnagogia and, second, ‘divergent thinking’ whilst being monitored with EEG for later comparison. If the two states could be shown to have common qualities in clinical terms might it then be possible for our understanding of one state (ie. hypnagogia) to inform our understanding of the other (the creative act)?

---

<sup>10</sup> ‘A twilight zone partway between wakefulness and sleep’ Martin, P. (2002) *Counting Sheep: the science and pleasure of sleep and dreams* (Harper Collins) p92

<sup>11</sup> An ‘electroencephalogram’ is a means of measuring the electrical activity in a person’s brain, via a series of electrodes attached to the subject’s scalp.

The experiments, when executed, initially appeared to be a failure, but what I perceived at the time as a flaw in the EEG sessions – the fact that I was attempting to act as both the subject of the trial and part-overseer – led me to explore the notion of self-consciousness in creative practice from a new perspective and later to apply the same duality that obstructed the experiment as a means of considering the author’s role in the creation of narrative.

This doctorate was a practice-based study and a sizeable part of the project consisted of the development and composition of a novel. As the narrative moved towards completion it became evident that two aspects of this particular narrative offered a useful model for the duality that had emerged as the study’s focus: (i) the protagonist’s progress through the wilds of NW America (as a representation of the author exploring narrative choices), and (ii) ‘remote viewing’<sup>12</sup> (as a representation of the relationship of the author with his/her protagonist).

This concept of ‘the observer and the observed’ and how these roles might be said to relate to the creative process is the cornerstone of this research project. I will posit how the concept applies particularly in terms of: the level of self-consciousness required in the act of writing (not least when carrying out a practice-based creative writing research project as a ‘writer-researcher’); the questions arising from a series of EEG experiments, comparing the hypnagogic state with a writer’s state of ‘reverie’; the notion of a novel’s protagonist serving as a representative of the author in the act of decision-making regarding their narrative choices; and the resulting novel serving as a model for the above proposition, with one character in the narrative ‘remote viewing’ the actions of another.

---

<sup>12</sup> The supposed ability to envisage activities in a separate location by visualizing the location, or by having an ‘out-of-body’ experience.



This rationale consists of two passages exploring the notion of ‘walking dreamily’, a passage detailing the EEG experiments and a chapter each on the novel the author initially researched (concerning the ‘wake-a-thons’ and set in the U.S. in the 1950s) and the novel he went on to write (about a woman escaping from a clinic in the U.S. in the 1970s).

\*

### **‘Walking dreamily’ (i)**

A practice-based research doctorate in Creative Writing can be regarded as a self-experiment of sorts – not necessarily on a par with Kleitman and Richardson’s month underground, in which they monitored their sleep patterns through prolonged deprivation of sunlight, and certainly not as physically taxing as Tripp and Gardner’s ‘wake-a-thons’ in which their sole aim was to resist sleep for weeks on end, but in terms of the necessary duality of being both participant and observer.

Writing fiction requires a balance between creative freedom and critical restraint but the added element of reflection when researching and writing a novel within an academic framework can easily generate a self-consciousness capable of, at least, impeding progress and at worst, bringing it to a halt.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> The phrase, ‘Self-consciousness is the enemy of all art,’ is usually attributed to Ray Bradbury.

The original focus for research was a state of mind in which a writer might be said to cede control of his or her critical faculties – a psychic plane (typically referred to in this text as a ‘reverie’ or as ‘divergent thinking’) where the constraints of the conscious mind and the abstractions of the unconscious are in mutual abeyance, allowing a mental playfulness to flourish, albeit briefly. But over the course of the project the notion of ‘walking dreamily’ eclipsed the comparison between hypnagogia and divergent thinking, representing here the author’s willingness to incorporate material reached at the periphery of his/her comprehension as well as the state in which a protagonist acts as the author’s surrogate as narrative choices are made.

As I shall explain, the initial idea for a novel proved inadequate, partly due to the fact that I was determined to create a narrative in which action and drama made a more significant contribution than in my previous fiction. The development of an alternative narrative, in which we witness a woman pursued through the wilds of north America and gradually learn of her incarceration as a human guinea pig, presented a more compelling alternative as well as a more useful focus for the critical study. An individual persevering through unfamiliar territory in a heightened psychic state became a representation of the author finding their narrative and illuminated how a writer constantly cuts back and forth between the objective and subjective perspective as that narrative is founded.

The act of walking has long been employed as a means of active reflection, particularly for writers – a means of occupying oneself physically, allowing one’s mind to open up, whether that be in finding novel perceptions or working through creative conundra. As Henry David Thoreau wrote in his journal, ‘Methinks the moment my legs began to move, my thoughts began to

flow.<sup>14</sup> More recently, Margaret Atwood wrote, 'Slow walking leads to rumination, which leads to poetry.'<sup>15</sup>

But for the purposes of this project the term 'walking dreamily' is employed metaphorically, as a state in which the author attempts to explore beyond the familiar and projects him/herself into the shoes of their principal character, considering the narratives options as they appear.

Appropriately, the novel's protagonist, currently named Karen, is an amnesiac and wandering herself through the wilds of North America. The novel and the critical reflection run on parallel lines.

This motif has been a constant through the study. One of the photographs in the Wellcome's *Sleeping and Dreaming* exhibition shows Gardner, several days into his wake-a-thon, striding down the middle of a deserted and benighted street, hands stuffed into his pockets and the lenses of his spectacles catching the flare of the photographer's flash. Like Kleitman and Richardson in their cave, Gardner appears to occupy a territory of the unconscious. We find him caught on camera, like a nocturnal animal, or a man who has contrived to find himself wandering in his own dream.

Dickens explored this psychic territory in *Night Walks*, a collection of essays based on a series of journeys the author carried out around London when suffering from insomnia, setting out soon after midnight in order to encounter, 'the restlessness of a great city and the way in which it

---

<sup>14</sup> Thoreau, H.D. (1947) *The Portable Thoreau*, (Penguin)

<sup>15</sup> Atwood, M. (2020) *Caught in time's current* The Guardian Review, 7 November

tumbles and tosses before it can get to sleep.’<sup>16</sup> G.K. Chesterton describes the ‘eerie realism’ Dickens achieves in these essays through his descriptions of a window, a lock in a door or a railing as ‘more actual than things really are,’ brought about, as he saw it, by ‘walking dreamily’.<sup>17</sup>

On one of his night walks Dickens finds himself at the gates of Bethlehem Hospital, where he has what he calls a ‘night fancy’.

‘Are not the sane and the insane equal at night as the sane lie a dreaming?’ he wonders.

‘Are not all of us outside this hospital, who dream, more or less in the condition of those inside it, every night of our lives?’<sup>18</sup>

Like Dickens, Immanuel Kant saw the lunatic as a ‘wakeful dreamer’. Schopenhauer suggested a dream ‘... as a brief madness and madness a long dream.’<sup>19</sup>

I had encountered Werner Herzog’s non-fiction narrative, *Of Walking in Ice*<sup>20</sup> prior to this project, but its febrile tone and Herzog’s unique assessment of his experience seems fitting. The book is an account of a journey Herzog made on foot from Munich to Paris between November 23<sup>rd</sup> and December 14<sup>th</sup> in 1974. Hearing that a colleague, Lotte Eisner, was seriously ill, Herzog vowed

---

<sup>16</sup> Dickens, C. (1861) *Night Walks* (originally published in *The Uncommercial Traveller*, reprinted by Penguin Books, 2010) p1

<sup>17</sup> Solnit, R. (2001) *Wanderlust* (Verso) p184

<sup>18</sup> Dickens, C. . (1861) *Night Walks* (originally published in *The Uncommercial Traveller*, reprinted by Penguin Books, 2010) p1

<sup>19</sup> Windt, J. (2015) *Dreaming: a conceptual framework for philosophy of mind and empirical research* (MIT) p217

<sup>20</sup> Herzog, W. (2014) *Of Walking in Ice* (Vintage)

that 'this must not be'<sup>21</sup> and decided that the means to ensure her recovery was by walking the six hundred miles from his home in Germany to the hospital where Eisner was being treated.

It is an irrational act: a secular (or possibly superstitious) pilgrimage. The text, which is transcribed from the notebook he carried with him, appears to have been written in a state of near-delirium, with little distinction made between what he observes and what he imagines.

Today I often said 'forest' to myself'<sup>22</sup> ... 'An orchestra appears but doesn't play, although it is haplessly entrapped with the audience in a discussion about the Decline of Music.'<sup>23</sup>

Herzog is 'dreaming on foot',<sup>24</sup> he tells us. While we don't doubt his conviction that the journey and the discomfort he suffers is somehow necessary, the transformation Herzog seeks through this pilgrimage is not simply in Eisner, but in himself. The fact that Eisner is alive and well by the time he finally reaches her is almost irrelevant. Herzog has endured the elements, temporarily reduced himself to a state of primitivism and emerged back into the light.<sup>25</sup>

Dickens's 'walking dreamily' and Herzog's 'dreaming on foot' came to represent my protagonist's state of mind whilst sleep-deprived and walking on the treadmill in the clinic, but also of her progress through the wilds of America's North-west following her escape. Karen has no reliable memories prior to life in the clinic: the landscape through which she advances is entirely new to her – a dreamworld. For the author, to '*walk dreamily*' is to advance through an

---

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. p1

<sup>22</sup> Ibid p59

<sup>23</sup> Ibid p44

<sup>24</sup> Quoted by Jenny Hendrix, in 'Werner Herzog Takes a Walk', Slate magazine, 5<sup>th</sup> May 2015.

<sup>25</sup> The closing lines of the text, when he sits with Eisner, are 'For one splendid, fleeting moment something mellow flowed through my deadly tired body. I said to her, open the window, from these days onwards I can fly.'

imagined world, still under construction, and to remain open to the narrative opportunities as they present themselves.

Narratives are almost bound to create form and that form is made more tangible when following a physical route, whether it is Odysseus's encounters on his return to Ithaca from the Trojan War or Howie's preoccupations as he rides the escalator between floors in his lunch break in Nicholson Baker's *The Mezzanine*.<sup>26</sup>

Some journeys are determined by the protagonist. In John Cheever's *The Swimmer*<sup>27</sup> Neddy Merrill, having become bored at a friend's pool party, perceives an alternative route home via the county's many pools ('he was an explorer, a pilgrim'<sup>28</sup>) whereas in John Buchan's *The Thirty-nine Steps*<sup>29</sup> it is fate that obliges Richard Hannay to head north to the Scottish Highlands after becoming embroiled in the murder of a spy.

With this novel I determined to allow more arbitrariness into Karen's journey: to attempt to hide how the writer steers a protagonist through the terrain. For the psychogeographer<sup>30</sup> the physical route, often urban, is a means of accessing neglected voices, of gaining insight. Iain Sinclair cuts a 'crude V into the sprawl of the city'<sup>31</sup> and follows it, 'recording and retrieving the

---

<sup>26</sup> The novel consists of the protagonist's often eccentric reflections on the minutiae of life and takes place between him stepping on and off an escalator.

<sup>27</sup> Cheever, J. (1990) *The Stories of John Cheever*, (Vintage), story first published 1964.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p272

<sup>29</sup> Buchan, J. (2018) *The Thirty-nine Steps* (Penguin English Library), first published in 1916.

<sup>30</sup> The term was coined by Guy Debord in 1955 as a way of describing how place affects one's feelings and behaviour. 'Psychogeography' as a form has its roots in the notion of the urban 'flaneur' ('stroller' or observer of the city) in 19<sup>th</sup> century France and was revived, first by the avant-garde Situationist International movement in the mid-twentieth century and, more recently, by writers such as Iain Sinclair and filmmaker Andrew Kotting.

<sup>31</sup> Sinclair, I. (1998) *Lights Out for the Territory* (Granta) p1

messages in wallsp, lampposts, door jambs.<sup>'32</sup> He intends to unearth an 'alternative reading'<sup>'33</sup> of the city – 'a subterranean, preconscious text capable of divination and prophecy.'<sup>'34</sup>

Similarly, Bill Drummond<sup>35</sup> traces letters of the alphabet onto the city's streets – an act of apparent arbitrariness, allowing for transgression but also the prospect of transcendence.

'It had something to do with magic,' he says. The walks '... took you down streets, up alleys, across back gardens, over ditches that you would never normally have visited. You would discover things: shops, cafes, old saucepans, skips full of discarded treasure ... and secret signs.'<sup>'36</sup>

In my previous novels my protagonists are often undertaking their own personal pilgrimages, either consciously<sup>37</sup> or not.<sup>38</sup> Both women are hoping for their own personal epiphany – the alleviation of their own personal ills.

The poet John Clare's eighty-mile walk from Matthew Allen's High Beach Private Asylum in Epping Forest to Northborough in Cambridgeshire in the mid-nineteenth century had none of the contrivance of Dickens' or Herzog's journeys. It was an act of desperation that drew him

---

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ex-manager and producer of The Teardrop Explodes and Echo & the Bunnymen, co-founder of the KLF and currently writer and artist.

<sup>36</sup> Drummond, B. (2001) 45 (Abacus) p71

<sup>37</sup> The protagonist in '*Yuki chan in Bronte Country*' (2016) is retracing her mother's footsteps in the hope that she might understand how she came to take her own life.

<sup>38</sup> The nameless protagonist in *The Widow's Tale* (2010) only appreciates the significance of her journey to north Norfolk after she has got there.

stumbling across East Anglia, half-starved and crippled, searching for his wife, Mary, who the reader discovers had died six years before.

Reading his account of the journey, far from 'walking dreamily', he would seem to be trapped in his own nightmare. Yet elsewhere he recalls how, as a child, he had a 'feeling to wander about the fields ... into unknown solitudes ...', walking through the furze '... till I got out of my knowledge, when the very wild flowers and birds seemed to forget me and I imagined they were the inhabitants of new countrys.'<sup>39</sup> He became lost, he says, but felt no fear, '... my wonder seeking happiness had no room for it.'<sup>40</sup>

Getting 'out of one's knowledge' is a key phrase for Sinclair, who retraced Clare's walk from Essex to Cambridgeshire in *Edge of the Orison*<sup>41</sup>, the phrase taken as encouragement, one assumes, not just to go beyond a terrain with which one is familiar but to be prepared to enter a state – a way of perceiving the world – that is beyond one's normal realm. This phrase seemed particularly applicable, both to a writer who is prepared to reach beyond their own experience and a protagonist who, for all intents and purposes, may as well have fallen from the sky.

In *The Rings of Saturn* W.S. Sebald loses his way on Dunwich Heath, experiencing it as a sort of mild, existential horror. He is lost in time as well as space.

---

<sup>39</sup> Clare, J. circa 1820 (1996) *John Clare By Himself*, edited by Eric Robinson and David Powell (MidNag/Carcenet) p39

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Sinclair, I (2006) *Edge of the Orison: in the traces of John Clare's 'Journey Out of Essex'* (Penguin)



In the end I was overcome by a feeling of panic. The low, leaden sky: the sickly violet hue of the heath clouding the eye; the silence, which rushed in the ears like the sound of the sea in a shell; the flies buzzing about me – all this became oppressive and unnerving.<sup>42</sup>

It is a discomfort of almost Herzogian proportions. Again, chronology collapses, along with a conventional delineation between reality and dream, event and thought, leaving the reader oppressed and unnerved themselves.

Getting lost was to be a predominant feature of the first year or so of the research study, in both the novel I originally conceived of writing but also in the experiments I hoped to carry out with Dr Rhiannon Jones. It would be some time before I appreciated that there might be some merit in it, and the fact that it would lead me to what would ultimately be a more interesting perspective than the one I had set out to explore.

\*

### **Novel 1: Tripp and Gardner, 1950s America**

At the time of my visit to the *Sleeping and Dreaming* exhibition I was actively seeking a project in which I could utilize a recently revived interest in science. My brother, Professor Ian Jackson, is a well-respected researcher in human genetics and I had approached a couple of publishers

---

<sup>42</sup> Sebald, W.G. (1998) *The Rings of Saturn* (Harvill) p172

with a proposal for a non-fiction book which would employ our relationship as a means of investigating why one child might be drawn towards the sciences when a sibling with the same conditioning is drawn towards the humanities. In many ways – physical appearance, political outlook and so on – my brother and I are remarkably similar, but from an early age he was always intent on being a scientist, whilst, despite an enthusiasm for experiments in transformation (melting candlewax, snow, biro, etc.) I was not. In the proposed book I intended to explore the creativity in scientific research as well as the rigour and methodologies required to write a novel – to hark back to a period before the separation famously articulated in C.P. Snow's essay, *The Two Cultures*.<sup>43</sup>

Sadly, neither of the two publishers I approached shared my enthusiasm. But the following year I was commissioned to write a short series of stories for Radio Four, later published by Faber and Faber<sup>44</sup>, and this commission allowed me to establish a writing residency at the Science Museum (2011-12) where I continued to research and develop a number of projects, including that of Tripp and Gardner's wake-a-thons.

During the residency I read some of the work of Professor James Horne, one of the UK's pre-eminent sleep scientists who founded the Clinical Sleep Research Centre at Loughborough University. I contacted him and through various phone calls and e-mail exchanges began to conceive of a way of combining the development of a novel alongside a more academic piece of research.

---

<sup>43</sup> C.P. Snow was a novelist and scientist. *The Two Cultures* was originally delivered as a lecture in Cambridge in 1959 and later published. In it he says, 'I believe the intellectual life of the whole of Western Society is increasingly being split into two polar groups.'

<sup>44</sup> Jackson, M. (2011) *Junior Science* (Faber and Faber)

In Horne's *Why We Sleep* I first encountered the idea of 'hypnagogic imagery', where 'some conscious control can be exerted ... and a few people can maintain these pleasant states for many minutes.'<sup>45</sup> In Peter McKellar's *Imagination and Thinking* the hypnagogic state is credited with offering insight into problems with which an individual might struggle when fully awake<sup>46</sup>. McKellar refers to the Victorian psychoanalyst Herbert Silberer, who claimed that hypnagogic thinking enabled him to reconcile Kant and Schopenhauer's different theories of time.<sup>47</sup> I would later read how the German chemist, Friedrich Kekule is said to have seen a visual representation of a benzene ring (a snake swallowing its own tail) whilst in the hypnagogic state and how Salvador Dali induced a state of hypnagogia in order to access the visual world of the unconscious.<sup>48</sup>

By chance, around the time I first encountered the concept of hypnagogia there had been a couple of instances when, whilst falling asleep, I had been suddenly brought to my senses, only to discover that what I had assumed to be a perfectly rational train of thought had, in fact, long left the tracks of reason. Further, in my writing practice I had come to recognize how, during a period of deep reflection, an idea or juxtaposition of ideas would sometimes come to me, seemingly unbidden, from what felt like my 'unconscious' mind.

As an occasional Creative Writing teacher I am in the habit of discussing aspects of the writing process in seemingly opposing terms, for example 'the creative' and 'the critical', and even 'the unconscious' and 'the conscious'. In my practice I will sometimes find myself in a state of

---

<sup>45</sup> Horne, J. (1988) *Why We Sleep* (Oxford University Press) p258

<sup>46</sup> McKellar, P. (1957) *Imagination and Thinking* (Cohen and West) pp45-46

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Dali, S. (1992) *50 Secrets of Magic Craftsmanship* (Dover)

profound reflection – particularly in the earliest stages of a project’s development, when the elements remain inchoate and unformed – deliberately ‘daydreaming’ around those elements as a means of exploring the possible narrative options. It is a process which seems to generate results of a much higher calibre than if I were to attempt to do such a thing with a clear head.

When Joseph Heller was asked where he finds his inspiration in an interview with *The Paris Review* in 1974 he said, ‘The ideas come to me; I don’t produce them at will. They come to me in the course of a sort of controlled daydream, a directed reverie.’<sup>49</sup> No doubt, many writers experience something similar. I wondered, then, if it might be conceivable that the hypnagogic state one passes through whilst falling asleep might have something in common with the state of reverie writers such as Heller employed in developing their ideas. This psychic space seemed to me rich in potential, both as raw material for a novel and as a study of the creative process.

By 2015 I had what I considered to be the makings of a viable research project and contacted Dr Rhiannon Jones at The University of Winchester’s Department of Psychology.<sup>50</sup> We discussed the practicalities of comparing existing data of an individual in both the hypnagogic and creative states, and the possibility of generating data of our own. Dr Jones explained that the options for monitoring brain activity consisted primarily of fMRI (blood flow) and EEG (electrical activity, via electrodes attached to the skull). fMRI scans are prohibitively expensive and – as I have since discovered, having had an MRI scan for unrelated reasons – deeply unpleasant. Winchester University’s Psychology Department has its own EEG machines to which Dr Jones has access, so my original proposal included a series of EEG procedures in which the electrical activity of my

---

<sup>49</sup> Plimpton, G.(Editor) (1992) *The Writer’s Chapbook (Edited interview from The Paris Review)* (Penguin) p77

<sup>50</sup> Dr Jones was one of the project’s three supervisors at Winchester University.

brain would be monitored in both states. Even at this point, prior to beginning the research in earnest, I saw how the process might also provide an insight into the experience of being a 'human guinea pig', a concept which would become more significant as the novel developed.

Once my research was formally underway I directed my attention to the history of 'sleep science'. Many of the first sleep deprivation studies were carried out on dogs. In 1894, the Russian physician Marie de Manaceine found that puppies died after being kept awake for 4-6 days.<sup>51</sup> In 1898, the Italian psychologist Lamberto Daddi kept three adult dogs awake by walking them at regular intervals: they died after 9, 13 and 17 days.<sup>52</sup> His colleague, Giulio Tarozzi, examined their brains, post-mortem, and compared them with those of healthy dogs (as well as the other dogs in the experiment: one of the three dogs had not been fed throughout the study). Later that year the psychiatrist, Cesare Agostini, kept dogs awake by standing them in metal cages, in order to eliminate any exhaustion from activity as a contributing factor (the dogs died after two weeks)<sup>53</sup> and in 1907 Henri Pieron and Rene Legendre kept dogs awake for ten days, then transferred brain extracts, serum and cerebrospinal fluid to healthy dogs. When the healthy dogs showed signs of exhaustion, Pieron and Legendre took this as proof of the existence of a 'sleep-inducing molecule', which they named 'hypnotoxin'.<sup>54</sup>

The first formal study into human sleep deprivation was by G.T.W. Patrick and J.A. Gilbert at Iowa University in 1896<sup>55</sup>, when three adults went without sleep for 88-90 hours (less than half the time Peter Tripp would stay awake in 1959). The subjects were found to have trouble

---

<sup>51</sup> Kushida, C.A. (2005) *Sleep Deprivation, basic science, physiology and behavior* (Marcel Dekker) p32

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Dement, W. C. (1974) *Some Must Watch While Some Must Sleep* (Stanford University) p6

memorizing, and to have impaired reaction times and motor abilities.<sup>56</sup> The sleep research from that study through to Kleitman and Aserinsky's discovery of REM (rapid eye movement) sleep in 1953<sup>57</sup> may be considered the basis for modern sleep research. One of the most significant developments in this period was Richard Caton's discovery of electrical activity on the surface of the brains of rabbits and monkeys (presented to the British Medical Association in 1895) and Hans Berger's extension of his work, by the identification of oscillating rhythms via an electroencephalogram (EEG) in 1924.<sup>58</sup> By attaching two electrodes to a patient's scalp and monitoring the electrical signals that passed between them, Berger was able to create an inked graph, representing changes in activity in the brain.

With this equipment it was possible to identify fast, high frequencies (with a small amplitude pattern) when a subject was awake and a tendency towards a slower, lower electrical frequency (with an accompanying larger amplitude) as the patient became drowsy.<sup>59</sup> Later studies (by W. Grey Walter) classified the brain wave patterns further, into what are now categorized as beta waves (when one is wide awake and fully engaged) through alpha and theta waves to delta waves (when one is in deep, dreamless sleep).<sup>60</sup>

I researched the discovery of rapid eye movement (REM) sleep in 1953 by Eugene Aserinsky and Nathaniel Kleitman (and the relationship between REM-sleep and the occurrence of dreams) and Mary Carskadon and William Dement's development of the Multiple Sleep Latency Test

---

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Dement, W.C. *The Promise of Sleep* (Pan) p33

<sup>58</sup> Ibid. p30

<sup>59</sup> Kushida, C.A. (2005) *Sleep Deprivation, basic science, physiology and behavior* (Marcel Dekker) p225

<sup>60</sup> Dement, W.C. *The Promise of Sleep* (Pan) p19

(MSLT) in 1976.<sup>61</sup> By the 1960s sleep research was well-established, initially by Kleitman, and then his successor, Dement, with the focus of sleep science activity centred on Stanford University.

According to Professor Horne, the data from hundreds of studies in the first half of the twentieth century have been discarded due to a lack of appropriate regulation and ethical codes. He considers this a waste of potentially useful material. At the time of my initial reading I found the treatment of animals and the lack of ethics in human experiments unacceptable (servicemen were obliged to participate in some experiments without being informed of the content or dangers) and could see no place for them in my work, but when the focus for my fiction shifted from an individual choosing to participate in a wake-a-thon to an individual who has been incarcerated against her will, then the more transgressive and non-consensual experiments presented themselves as possibilities for my narrative.

At the outset I saw in the hypnagogic state a scenario in which the individual might be said to straddle the conscious world and the world of sleep. In my mid-teens I once maintained a conversation with a friend as he fell asleep. Quite soon his words failed to make any rational sense. I imagined, naively perhaps, that he was reporting back from the depths of his unconscious (a place I would later find represented by Kleitman and Richardson in Mammoth Cave). Early on in my research I read about Ken Kesey's participation in the US government-funded experiments in which he was given doses of LSD.<sup>62</sup> Kesey went on to become a great advocate for the drug and the access it provided to one's unconscious mind and when he and

---

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. p58

<sup>62</sup> In *I Have America Surrounded: the life of Timothy Leary*, the author, John Higgs claims that during one psychedelic trip Kesey had a vision of a 'strange, primitive face' that he turned into Chief Broom, the Native American narrator of *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest*.

fellow LSD-enthusiasts went on the road,<sup>63</sup> Tom Wolfe briefly accompanied them. In *The Electric Kool Aid Acid Test* Wolfe wrote of Kesey's attempt at 'combining grass and speed to try and prop that LSD door open.'<sup>64</sup>

For my work with Dr Jones I hoped to explore what Arthur Koestler referred to as creativity's 'two way traffic between the conscious and unconscious' and '... the most fertile region ... the marshy shore, the borderline between sleep and full awakening.'<sup>65</sup> But with the novel I too wanted to prop open a door – between the conscious and unconscious – and to investigate the fictional possibilities of that particular terrain.

Since the U.S. wake-a-thons had taken place in the late '50s and early '60s much of my initial reading focused on that period. I read David Halberstam's *The Fifties* and the period's popular social studies books: William H. Whyte's *The Organization Man*; C. Wright Mills' *White Collar* and David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd*. I learned how the prosperity of the post-war years in the U.S. encouraged a move away from manual labour into white collar work, creating a burgeoning middle class and a shift from the cities out into the suburbs.<sup>66</sup> For Wright Mills there was concern that the economic boom had brought with it a subservience – a generation lacking self-motivation. White Collar Man was, he claimed ...

... always somebody's man, the corporation's, the government's, the army's; and he is seen as the man who does not rise. The decline of the free entrepreneur and the rise of the

---

<sup>63</sup> Kesey and friends, collectively referring to themselves as The Merry Pranksters, infamously drove a converted school bus east across the U.S. in 1964 to see the World's Fair in New York.

<sup>64</sup> Wolfe, T. (1971) *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (Black Swan) p58.

<sup>65</sup> Koestler, Arthur, *The Act of Creation* (Pan, 1964)

<sup>66</sup> In *The Age of Anxiety, a history of America's turbulent affair with tranquilizers*, Andrea Tone claims that during the 1950s 18 million Americans moved from the city to suburbs.



dependent employee on the American scene has paralleled the decline of the independent individual and the rise of the little man in the American mind.<sup>67</sup>

I read Richard Yates's *Revolutionary Road* and Sloan Wilson's *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, whose male protagonists, in their different ways, both wrestle with the burden of conformity. When a practical stranger confronts Frank in *Revolutionary Road* and describes how he lives his life back to him, he appears to hit the nail squarely on the head ...

You want to play house, you got to have a job. You want to play very nice house, very sweet house, then you got to have a job you don't like. Great. This is the way ninety-eight-point-nine per cent of the people work things out, so believe me, buddy, you've got nothing to apologize for.<sup>68</sup>

In short, I was preparing to write a critical text about post-war America which would not be dissimilar to a hundred already in existence. In the accompanying novel, I saw how Tripp and Gardner – or at least my fictional versions of them – might represent a rejection of the period's conformity. The wake-a-thons, could be an act of transgression. In Peter Tripp I had a rock 'n' roll DJ who could easily be presented as a corrupter of the country's youth. At a pinch that youth might be represented by the 18 year old Gardner. The desperation of the non-stop dance marathon in Horace McCoy's *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?*<sup>69</sup> was a possible template. But the concept failed to gain traction, flagging-up a problem in the construction of the narrative that would resurface later – namely, how to generate intrigue and tension within the span of a novel

---

<sup>67</sup> Mills, C. Wright, *White Collar* (Oxford University Press, 1950) xii

<sup>68</sup> Yates, Richard, *Revolutionary Road*, (Methuen, 1989) p187

<sup>69</sup> McCoy's novel, set in the Great Depression, was first published in 1935 and adapted into a feature film, directed by Sydney Pollack in 1969.

when the reader is doing little more than waiting for the protagonist to abandon the wake-a-thon and hit the sack.

The other obvious strand to be explored in a study of the U.S. in the late 50s/early 60s, was the political paranoia at large, primarily regarding the spread of Communism. In 1952 China had shown they were willing to participate wholeheartedly in the war in Korea,<sup>70</sup> but it was the Soviet Union that most preoccupied the U.S. Government. The House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) had been in existence since 1938, partly in response to the perceived radicalism of Roosevelt's New Deal, but it was not until the Fifties that it gained notoriety, with the arrest of Klaus Fuchs, a German émigré who had worked at Los Alamos, leading to the conviction and execution of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg.<sup>71</sup>

For the novel, it seemed perfectly viable to mirror the McCarthyite paranoia abroad in the U.S. with the paranoia Tripp and Gardner suffered whilst deprived of sleep. Dr. Louis Jolyon West, a leading psychiatrist at the time, monitored Tripp throughout his wake-a-thon and was joined by the sleep researcher, William Dement. In *Some Must Watch While Some Must Sleep* Dement says that Tripp bore up well for the first week or so, but began to struggle as time went on.

The disk jockey developed an acute paranoid psychosis during the nighttime hours, accompanied at times by auditory hallucinations. He believed that unknown adversaries were attempting to slip drugs into his food and beverages in order to put him to sleep.<sup>72</sup>

---

<sup>70</sup> Halberstam, D. (1993) *The Fifties* (Fawcett Columbine) p101

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. p42.

<sup>72</sup> Dement, W. C. (1974) *Some Must Watch While Some Must Sleep* (Stanford University) p8

Common lore has it that following his wake-a-thon Tripp was plagued with depression, which led to him separating from his wife. The marathon, the story goes, had left him psychologically scarred.<sup>73</sup> In fact, his career was ruined due to a payola scandal, in which he was convicted of having accepted bribes in return for playing certain records.<sup>74</sup> No doubt, he was a different kind of man to Gardner but there is no evidence of his life having been wrecked by his wake-a-thon.

Four years later Dement was also present at Gardner's wake-a-thon, having read about it in a newspaper.<sup>75</sup> Though Gardner experienced hallucinations, it would appear he suffered less from paranoid thoughts than Peter Tripp. Of course, as a work of fiction this needn't have been an obstacle. As the wake-a-thons took place several years apart I explored ways of bringing them into each other's orbit. Given poetic licence, I could simply shift the setting of Tripp or Gardner's record attempt and have them occur simultaneously, setting the two characters in direct competition. But instinctively this felt like too much of a contrivance. So, instead, I considered a narrative in which, through sheer exhaustion, Gardner began to 'see' Tripp – an hallucinatory incarnation who either threatened Gardner or attempted to coax him into sleeping, in order that his own record would stand.

This briefly seemed to have potential. But if it solved the problem of a dual chronology it raised other concerns that proved more difficult to set aside. Peter Tripp died in January, 2000. As I write, Randy Gardner is still alive. On several occasions I have been tempted to make contact with him. No doubt, he would be able to provide any number of useful details and insights into his wake-a-thon, but on reflection I felt that the potential price would be an obligation to

---

<sup>73</sup> Dement, W. C. (1974) *Some Must Watch While Some Must Sleep* (Stanford University) p87.

<sup>74</sup> Ravo, N. (2001) *Peter Tripp, 73, Popular Disc Jockey* (obituary) New York Times. Feb 13.

<sup>75</sup> Dement, W. C. (1974) *Some Must Watch While Some Must Sleep* (Stanford University) p9.

construct a narrative that stayed true to the events as seen through Gardner's eyes, when what would benefit the novel was the freedom to take creative liberties as and when they arose.

This concern is not without foundation. My first novel took the form of a first person narrative based, very loosely, on the life of the real fifth Duke of Portland.<sup>76</sup> Promoting the book, I was invited to read and attend a Q&A session in the area where the duke had lived and experienced some hostility from a member of the audience who felt that I had somehow exploited a popular local character. The real duke had died in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, so no-one present had any direct connection with him. The local's ire was based, I think, on the idea of an outsider appropriating, and possibly profiting from, something personal and precious – a sentiment with which I have some sympathy. I could only imagine that there would be much greater outrage engendered by my fictionalizing events in living memory, albeit from across the Atlantic – if not from Gardner himself, then from others with an interest in the actual wake-a-thons, who couldn't accept that real events might be utilized and distorted in such a way.

My inclination then was to employ the wake-a-thons simply as inspiration, to distance myself from the real events, changing the names of my two protagonists and creating a narrative so outlandishly different that it was clearly a piece of fiction, despite the obvious origins. The demands of the wake-a-thon and the possible consequences intrigued me, as did the individuals who monitored their acts of sleep-deprivation, along with the technology employed. What I lacked was a sense of potential drama. I identified the problem as deriving from the static nature of the wake-a-thons. It would take another two or three weeks before I appreciated that

---

<sup>76</sup> William John Cavendish-Scott-Bentinck (1880-79) was an eccentric aristocrat who had a network of tunnels built under his estate, Welbeck Abbey, in order that his horses and carriage could move about his grounds without being seen.

a crucial obstacle in the development of a narrative involving the wake-a-thons was the fact that Tripp and Gardner had consented to (and quite likely proposed) their participation in the marathons. They had no-one to blame but themselves. The moment I had a protagonist who was held against their will the stakes were raised and a new thread of engagement was generated.

It is not immediately apparent how much monitoring accompanied Tripp and Gardner's marathons. When Dement heard of Gardner's attempt at a world record and decided to drive out to San Diego to join him, the first thing he loaded into his car was an EEG machine<sup>77</sup>. During his wake-a-thon Tripp regularly had his vital signs measured. It was some time before I discovered that Tripp was, in fact, being monitored by at least six professional medical practitioners.<sup>78</sup> Perhaps it suited Tripp's cause to have himself presented as a man attempting to break a world record through sheer grit and determination. Gardner seemed keener to have his trial appear more clinical: in the photographs taken for a local newspaper,<sup>79</sup> Gardner's friends Joe Marciano and Bruce McAllister pose, pens poised over notebooks, as Gardner executes a series of press-ups or has his reflexes tested.

Given the number of professionals in attendance it is possible to perceive Tripp and Gardner's wake-a-thons as scientific experiments in sleep deprivation, clinically monitored and with a view to a contribution to medicine, as well as heroic acts of mental strength and stamina carried out by amateurs. I suspect the public's interest is similarly ambiguous. Tripp's wake-a-thon raised funds for *The March of Dimes* charity at a time when several other DJs had carried out

---

<sup>77</sup> Dement, W. C. (1974) *Some Must Watch While Some Must Sleep* (Stanford University) p9

<sup>78</sup> Ibid. p8

<sup>79</sup> A series of photographs was taken by staff photographer Bob Redding for *The San Diego Union and Evening Tribune* and featured in the *Sleeping and Dreaming* exhibition at the Wellcome Trust.

broadcasting marathons. Gardner claimed to have initiated his wake-a-thon on a whim, as part of a local science fair. Even so, it is reasonable to suggest that both men might also have been encouraged to undertake their marathons by the idea of seeing their names in the record books.

The image of Dement packing an EEG machine before heading off to San Diego stayed with me, as did the discovery, quite late in my reading, that Tripp was regularly escorted from the studio in Times Square to have a medical examination behind closed doors. As my research broadened into other trials and experiments of the period I came across several images of patients in the 1950s and 60s with an EEG cap and electrodes fixed to their skull, or having polygraph tests. In a 1968 Time/Life book titled *The Mind*,<sup>80</sup> published for a general reader (and with C.P. Snow as consulting editor) several pages are devoted to photographs of patients with electrodes pasted to their scalps, undergoing studies in epilepsy and Parkinson's Disease, or their responses to a sequences of flashing lights. The photos are lit in saturated blues and greens and orange. On the pages that follow, a rat in a Perspex box strikes levers beside banks of electric consoles spewing a myriad of coloured cables, and a pair of monkeys cling together; their skulls have been replaced with transparent plastic 'to allow scientists to observe effects of drugs and electric shock on the brain's arteries.'<sup>81</sup>

The juxtaposition of humans and animal experiments would appear to be deliberate; the alarm it generates in the reader typical of the time. I was beginning to circle the notion of the possible malevolent application of 'science' – specifically, how the technology of the 1950s and 60s could be employed in a manner that was far from beneficial to the individual involved.

---

<sup>80</sup> Wilson, J.R. (1968) *The Mind* (Life Science Library) pp182-7

<sup>81</sup> Wilson, J.R. (1968) *The Mind* (Life Science Library) pp186

The image of an individual wearing a skull cap with electrodes trailing from is unnerving. The technology involved is beyond most people's understanding and given the history of this particular technology and how it has been incorporated into common culture one is almost always drawn towards a sinister interpretation of its use. When I came to carry out the EEG trials with Dr Jones the process of having the electrodes attached to my skull induced a certain anxiety. The fear, ridiculous as it sounds, is that the box to which the wires return might draw more than simply a record of electrical activity from the surface of one's skull – might, in fact, be capable of making all manner of readings and, even, delivering something the other way.

This was an area in which I had already expressed an interest. During my residency at the Science Museum I had requested a visit to the storage facility at Blythe House in West Kensington<sup>82</sup> to view their collection of polygraphs. As the name suggests, these machines are simply a means of monitoring a variety of physical responses – eg. blood pressure, pulse, respiration, the sweating of palms – but due to their occasional use as 'lie detectors' the instruments have somewhat negative associations.

The polygraphs I was shown at the Science Museum were early twentieth century models – the British Mackenzie-Lewis polygraph<sup>83</sup> and Gibson's earlier clinical polygraph<sup>84</sup> which, despite its vintage, had the recognizable roll of paper and inked needles attached. As discrete pieces of equipment the machines can appear disappointingly mundane, small enough to be packed up

---

<sup>82</sup> A member of staff at the museum told me that when a new artefact arrived, '... if it's smaller than a washing machine it goes to Blythe House; if it's bigger than a washing machine it goes to Wroughton.' (Wroughton is a converted RAF airfield in Wiltshire, now used as a storage facility and exhibition space for the Science Museum.)

<sup>83</sup> Dr James Mackenzie, a heart surgeon, devised one of the early polygraphs to help detect heart defects.

<sup>84</sup> This monitored both heart rate and respiration rate and was powered by clockwork.

into a binocular case. They become more troubling the moment they are fitted to a person who is to be questioned – an individual who, typically, appears to be strapped to a chair.

I assume that my first experience of polygraphs will have been in TV shows and movies in the 1960s and '70s, imported from the U.S.A. where the polygraph-as-lie-detector is more embedded in common culture.<sup>85</sup> The fact that the veracity of the results from polygraphs has always been called into question seems not to have had a significant impact on its use in criminal cases and even as a contemporary tool for interviewing prospective candidates for employment.

So, I was a year or so into my research before I identified the technology of sleep science and polygraphs as a potentially useful prop – a symbol of power of the clinician over a patient as portrayed in much the same way as electro-convulsive therapy (ECT). Again, at the time my inclination to focus on this territory felt spontaneous and instinctive, whereas soon after I could identify its origins in my teenage TV viewing as well as research I had carried out years before. In retrospect, this point in time can be seen as a significant marker in a shift towards a darker subject matter.

Just as a person in a state of hypnagogia might be said to reveal their own true (unconscious) self, so polygraphs represent a means of ascertaining the truth. Alongside the lie detector the notion of a 'truth drug' has been popular with the military and police forces right through the

---

<sup>85</sup> A U.S. TV show called *The Lie Detector*, presented by Ralph Adams was a popular TV show and ran in various forms from the 1950s through to the present day. Curiously, another popular TV show, *To Tell The Truth*, in which a panel of celebrities attempt to identify an individual with an unusual occupation or experience, featured Randy Gardner on 11.05.64.



twentieth century, from the experimental use of the anesthetic scopolamine in the 1920s,<sup>86</sup> mescaline by the Nazis in Dachau,<sup>87</sup> marijuana,<sup>88</sup> then sodium amytal and sodium pentothal in the '50s and '60s.<sup>89</sup> I read how all the above were employed to depress the central nervous system and reduce inhibitions. One problem, other than the unreliability of the information being delivered was that the drugs tended to put the patient to sleep. According to Dominic Streatfield, the C.I.A. came up with a method of overcoming this, by combining barbiturates with amphetamines such as Benzedrine or Methedrine,<sup>90</sup> the dosage increased or decreased until the individual found themselves in a 'twilight state'. The individual would then be talkative as well as lucid. The only problem was that what they were inclined to say had as much chance of being fantasy as fact. Despite the evidence to the contrary, the use of polygraphs and the search for a 'truth drug' persisted.

I should concede here that just as there is a scepticism about the efficacy of 'truth drugs', at various points in my research I would have difficulty conferring the necessary credence to the individuals monitoring Tripp and Gardner. Certainly, they had at their disposal the latest technology, so that Dement could claim, for example, that on occasion Tripp's brain activity suggested he was dreaming despite his eyes being open. And that, having completed his marathon, Gardner was taken to the laboratory at San Diego Naval Hospital, under the care of Dr Levene Johnson (a Stanford alumnus, Dement is keen to point out) where, at 6.12am (264 hours and 12 minutes after beginning the wake-a-thon) Gardner finally allowed himself to fall asleep.<sup>91</sup> But reading reports of the wake-a-thons and Dement and West's monitoring of Tripp

---

<sup>86</sup> Streatfield, D. (2007) *Brainwash: the secret history of mind control* (Hodder), p20

<sup>87</sup> Streatfield, D. (2007) *Brainwash: the secret history of mind control* (Hodder), p37-8

<sup>88</sup> Ibid. p44.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid p34.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid p51.

<sup>91</sup> Dement, W. C. (1974) *Some Must Watch While Some Must Sleep* (Stanford University) p12

and Gardner, I was sometimes inclined to feel that as the marathons progressed they were simply recording the participants' responses to their predicament with little real knowledge of the possible consequences or lasting effects.

My reading about the McCarthy period paranoia led me to two individuals that I felt might contribute to the narrative, which I felt was in danger of stalling. I first encountered them in Cyndy Herdershot's *Anti-Communism and Popular Culture in mid-century America*.

In *The Age of McCarthyism*, Ellen Schrenker says,

The mystique of American omnipotence and Soviet duplicity that was so central to cold war propaganda it practically required the activities of a Communist spy ring in order to make Moscow's achievement possible.<sup>92</sup>

Matt Cvetic and Herbert Philbrick may well have provided this. Both men had agreed to work with the F.B.I., acting as moles in American Communist Party circles – Cvetic in Pittsburgh and Philbrick in Massachusetts – and just as Tripp and Gardner have come to be presented in tandem, so Cvetic and Philbrick now tend to be referred to as a pair. Both testified before HUAC hearings, named names and enjoyed some small amount of celebrity, Philbrick recounting his story in *I Led Three Lives: Citizen, Communist, Counterspy*, later adapted into a TV series<sup>93</sup>, while Cvetic recounted his experiences through a serialized newspaper column and radio series, also adapted into a feature film, *I was a Communist for the F.B.I.*<sup>94</sup>

---

<sup>92</sup> Schrecker, E. (1994) *The Age of McCarthyism* (Bedford) p32

<sup>93</sup> *I Led 3 Lives* ran from 1953-6 over 117 episodes.

<sup>94</sup> Directed by Gordon Douglas (1951).

I believed that these undercover agents offered useful parallels with Tripp and Gardner. Both parties had ventured into uncharted territories – had, figuratively, ‘gone underground’ before re-emerging into the full glare of the limelight. And as the publications and movies that resulted from their adventures testified, the public had an appetite for it. There was something voyeuristic, prurient even, in the spectacle.

Cvetic and Philbrick have come to be regarded as opposing ‘types’, the former unreliable and grasping (he allegedly hounded the F.B.I. for extra payments), the latter more upstanding and honourable (he volunteered his services to the F.B.I., whereas Cvetic was approached by them). Little effort was required to pair Cvetic and Tripp together as the somewhat seedier, less reliable parties in opposition to the more upstanding Philbrick and Gardner. I devised several narrative outlines that linked the activities of the counterspies with the wake-a-thons. Might the sleep deprivation Tripp and Gardner endured somehow provide them access, not just to an amplified state of hypnagogia, but another plane – another man’s body, perhaps? Might the wake-a-thons somehow represent a psychic portal into a collective unconscious – an underground where they could infiltrate something akin to a Communist spy ring?

Apparently not. For a month or more I persevered with this line of enquiry and would occasionally convince myself I had blocked-out a functioning narrative in which, typically, Tripp and Gardner communed with Cvetic and Philbrick via their sleep-deprived hallucinations. As individuals and as couples Tripp, Gardner, Cvetic and Philbrick had no end of potential, but, despite my willingness to embrace an audacious narrative, every bridge constructed between

the two main parties or attempt at conflation revealed itself as rickety and unreliable the moment I stepped back from it.

Certainly, I was intimidated by the prospect of the research required in grasping the intricacies of Communist spy rings, real or imagined, in post-war America. The U.S. in the 1950s felt like a world quite distant from my own – neither easily reached nor recreated. Yet in my notes I castigate myself for having failed to follow my instincts – of having taken a number of steps in the wrong direction, away from the project's true heat and light. Another concern, more considered, was that a narrative constructed around a series of hallucinations risked leaving the reader feeling deceived and therefore reluctant to invest themselves in future episodes (given that the previous one had transpired to be little more than a dream).

This notion of the authorial 'instinct' as to right or wrong creative choices was brought sharply into focus around this period. Prior to the study I would have claimed instinct and intuition as being the foundation for my creative choices. Decisions regarding, say, a protagonist's age, gender or outstanding characteristics would be made based on a hunch as to what seemed fitting – or of interest – given the circumstances. The path determined by that choice would then be followed up to the point that I sensed it veered away from the territory I wished to explore. But monitoring each creative decision within a research study for later assessment obliged me to be more honest about how many decisions involved intuition and how many were based on plain common sense.

By this point I had spent many months researching the wake-a-thons and a further month or more researching Philbrick and Cvetic as I pursued the rudiments of a narrative. The fact that I

had failed to produce a convincing storyline – or one to which I could commit – was increasingly evident, but my inclination was to claim that I had drifted away from potentially interesting material, rather than objectively assess what the narrative lacked. A different writer might have succeeded in building something tangible from this material, but I was tempted to put the failure down to the unfathomability of intuition – something beyond analysis: a manifestation of fate.

Jake Arnott<sup>95</sup> talks of his creative practice as ‘an attempt to recover a false memory, to reconstruct the details of events that never happened, to somehow pretend that one remembers them.’<sup>96</sup>

For him construction of plot demands an act of self-deception, an apparently unconscious retrieval of a narrative already in existence. The reality – of an endless number of choices standing between the writer and the completion of a novel – may be too much of a burden for many writers, myself included, whereas Robert McKee discusses the necessary choices as evident and entirely conscious.

To plot means to navigate through the dangerous terrain of story and when confronted by a dozen branching possibilities to choose the correct path.<sup>97</sup>

---

<sup>95</sup> British author. Novels include, *The Long Firm*, *He Kills Coppers* and, most recently, *The Fatal Tree*.

<sup>96</sup> Arnott, J. (2017) *I Fear the Sack Every Day from the Best Job I've Ever Had* The Guardian, Saturday 18 February

<sup>97</sup> McKee, R. (1999) *Story* (Methuen) p43

Yet McKee's perspective tends towards the retrospective. Most of us can pinpoint right and wrong choices when a text is complete. One of the writer's primary problems is determining the correct path when they face forward, heading into oblivion.

\*

Reading some of the literature regarding the U.S.'s anxiety about the spread of Communism provided a signpost towards what would become a more useful territory. In *The Naked Communist* Cleon Skousen, an 'ex-F.B.I. agent', likens rank and file Communists to ...

...a regimented breed of Pavlovian men whose minds could be triggered into immediate action by signals from their masters ... a race of men who would no longer depend upon free will, ethics, morals, or conscience for guidance.<sup>98</sup>

It might be read as a more extreme iteration of Wright Mills' concern about the individual's lack of self-determination in which men are reduced, via mind-control, to dormant but dangerous robots, pre-set for action. This could be the premise of an intriguing novel. Sadly, that novel was written in 1959 by Richard Condon. On numerous occasions while considering possible narratives set in the late '50s involving sinister psychic experiments my progress would be blocked by the existence of *The Manchurian Candidate*. The narrative, in its most fundamental form, has such potency that, like the lone cactus in a wilderness, a writer can be so fixated in their desire to avoid it that they drive straight into it. In the novel, a group of U.S. soldiers are brainwashed whilst prisoners of war in Korea and primed to assassinate the American president.

---

<sup>98</sup> Skousen, W.C. (2014) *The Naked Communist* (Ensign Publishing)

Condon's novel fits the period perfectly, built on real fears that American prisoners of war in Korea had been subjected to 'mind control' experiments or given truth drugs in order to have them divulge state secrets. I found that Jolyon West, the psychiatrist who had monitored Tripp during his wake-a-thon, was one of the practitioners who assessed the prisoners of war on their return. Many of the men had signed false statements, confessing involvement in germ warfare. Contrary to popular belief, West found the Korean captors' means of disablement to be quite mundane.

What we found enabled us to rule out drugs, hypnosis or other mysterious trickery. It was just one device used to confuse, bewilder and torment our men until they were ready to confess to anything. That device was prolonged chronic loss of sleep.<sup>99</sup>

Curiously, West would later appear in my research on a third occasion, when he assessed Patricia Hearst following her abduction by (and arrest following her participation with) the Symbionese Liberation Army. This suggests either that my areas of interest closely mirrored West's or a great enthusiasm of the period for expert witnesses plucked from a relatively small pool.

It is conceivable that both these statements have some merit. In the 1972 edition of *Some Must Watch, Whilst Some Must Sleep* William Dement describes West as 'a leading authority on psychosis induced by sleep deprivation'<sup>100</sup> which places him squarely in my research area. In her memoir of her abduction and trial for her part in the Hibernia Bank robbery, Patricia Hearst's description of West is more fulsome:

---

<sup>99</sup> Helmore, E. (1999) *Obituary: Dr Louis Jolyon West* (The Independent) 11 Jan.

<sup>100</sup> Dement, W. C. (1974) *Some Must Watch While Some Must Sleep* (Stanford University) p8.

Chairman of the Department of Psychiatry at UCLA, Director of the Neuropsychiatric Institute, Psychiatrist-in-Chief of UCLA Hospitals, a licenced M.D., Chairman of the Council on Research and Development of the American Psychiatric Association, psychiatric consultant to the Air Force, author of books and studies on prisoners of war, an internationally recognized in his field.<sup>101</sup>

Hearst had good reason to present West's credentials in such extensive detail since he acted as a witness in her defence, explaining her actions as a result of coercion. Hearst claims West spent thirty hours<sup>102</sup> interviewing Hearst following her arrest and in court likened her treatment to that of the prisoners of war he had interviewed on their return from Korea. He preferred the phrase 'coercive persuasion'<sup>103</sup> to the more commonly used 'brain-washing' – a state he frequently described as coming about when an individual had been subjected to 'the three D's: debility, dependency and dread.'<sup>104</sup>

Hearst refers to her experience of becoming an active member of the S.L.A. as 'thought reform'.<sup>105</sup> The second expert witness in Hearst's defence (two further witnesses were provided by the court) was the clinical psychologist, Margaret Singer, who had been a colleague of West's at the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research in Washington and had also interviewed army veterans. In her later career Singer researched cults, assessing members of Charles Manson's 'Family' (as well as Manson himself) and supporting families in their attempts to extract loved

---

<sup>101</sup> Hearst, P.C. (1982) *Every Secret Thing* (Methuen) p 375.

<sup>102</sup> Hearst, P.C. (1982) *Every Secret Thing* (Methuen) p376.

<sup>103</sup> Graebner, W. (2015) *Patty's Got A Gun* (Chicago) p69.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Hearst, P.C. (1982) *Every Secret Thing* (Methuen) p382.



ones from David Koresh's Branch Davidians in Waco, Texas and members of the People's Temple who went on to commit mass suicide in Guyana.

As part of Singer's assessment of Hearst she carried out the following tests: The Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale, the Rhode Sentence Completion Test, The Draw-a-Person Test, the Gough Adjective Checklist, the Murray Thematic Apperception Test (twice), the Sargent Insight Test, the Rorschach Procedure and the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (also twice).<sup>106</sup> Like Hearst's emphatic listing of Jolyon West's various titles the number of tests to which Hearst was subjected could engender suspicion – as if, perversely, the sheer volume of tests applied to Hearst belies a lack of confidence in what they might actually achieve.

I shall write more on the recurrence of psychological testing as a trope in 1970's thrillers but as I drew together possible elements for my narrative such tests and the accompanying technology had growing appeal, and I can now see how my inclination to employ them in my narrative might be said to have replicated their use by West and Singer, by creating what one might see as a veneer of credibility.

In the event, the judge in Hearst's trial instructed the court that neither West nor Singer's testimony were admissible. Despite that – along with the fact that Hearst lost the case and was sentenced to thirty-five years in prison – both West and Singer would repeatedly be called upon to act as expert witnesses.

---

<sup>106</sup> Hearst, P.C. (1982) *Every Secret Thing* (Methuen) p377.

My interest in West and Singer was due to the fact that their practices were experimental, still evolving and had a lack of regulation. Once I began to conceive of a narrative in which the tests and trials were executed without the protagonist's consent the clinicians who oversaw the experiments became significant participants, rather than mere observers of events. The shift gave them liberty to transgress, to act with malevolence. When I came to write the first draft of the novel the main characters who run the clinic – Maguire, Peters and not least Margaret (who bears a striking physical similarity to Singer) – had no need to care how others might perceive their actions, since the clinic barred all outsiders.

\*

### **The Experiment**

Prior to submitting my initial proposal I carried out a general search for psychological studies, comparing the state of hypnagogia with aspects of the creative process and found none that appeared to cover the ground I intended to investigate. Once the research project was underway I carried out a second, more comprehensive review with a similar outcome and contacted several experts in the field, including Prof Margaret Boden (University of Sussex), Prof Andreas Fink (Institute for Psychology, University of Karl-Franzen, Graz) and Dr Anna Abraham (Prof of Psychology at the University of Georgia), none of whom could identify a study comparing the two states.

Many existing studies examined 'creativity' in its broadest definition, with EEG or fMRI scans of writers in studies combining Creative Writing with fine artists, musical performance, etc. Studies focusing specifically on creative writing tended to assess an individual in the act of writing or the more visibly active or physical aspects of the creative process, such as composition or 'brainstorming' on paper.<sup>107</sup> I have long held that the majority of energy a writer expends in the writing of a novel is devoted to seemingly 'inert' work such as rumination, as opposed to the fevered typing or thoughtful scrawling writers are prone to do when personified on screen.

Graham Wallas's 1926 model of creativity<sup>108</sup> identifies four elements in the creative process, namely: preparation, incubation, insight and verification. He acknowledges that he is adding to the model proposed by Hermann von Helmholtz, and psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi would himself extend Wallas's model by adding a further stage in the form of 'elaboration'. In both models Dr Rhiannon Jones and I established that it was the point of illumination or 'insight' that was pertinent to our study, accepting Peter McKellar's caveat to the anecdote of Kekule's epiphany (regarding his 'discovery' of the benzene ring whilst in a reverie) that such insight was only possible since he had already considered the problem in sufficient depth and 'because his mind was stored with the relevant facts from past perceptual experience.'<sup>109</sup>

Dr Jones and I arranged to run the two experiments on separate days, with the first attempting to monitor the state of hypnagogia. In my experience I often become sleepy an hour or so after lunchtime, so I arranged to join Dr Jones in the EEG room of the university's Psychology

---

<sup>107</sup> Shah, Carolin, et al, *Neural correlates of Creative Writing: an fMRI study*

<sup>108</sup> Wallas, G. (1926) *The Art of Thought* (C.A. Watts) p41

<sup>109</sup> McKellar, P. (1957) *Imagination and Thinking* (Cohen and West) p121

Department soon after I had eaten. I made myself comfortable in a chair and Dr Jones placed a skull cap on my head and fitted electrodes to it at the appropriate points in order to pick up the electrical signals in my scalp, with a little gel beneath each electrode to aid conductivity.

In one of our earlier conversations, Dr Jones had advised me that I should consider sleep not in opposition to wakefulness but the two states as different levels of consciousness. Sleep should not be seen as a state of inertia. The brain is active, but the individual is less aware of their surroundings and has a decreased awareness of stimuli. A true lack of consciousness, she told me, would denote the individual either being in a coma or suffering brain death.

The EEG's electrodes measure electrical charge as it is passed between neurons, presented in 'waves' on a graph and measured in frequency and amplitude. The measurement of Hertz ('Hz') signifies one cycle per second. The levels of consciousness, like the supposed stages of creativity, are registered in five different categories, with Gamma waves recorded when an individual is fully-awake and focused (registering at upward of 35 Hz), Beta waves typical of an individual who is wide awake (usually registering at 12- 35 Hz), Alpha waves reflecting someone who is calm and relaxed (8-12 Hz), Theta waves recorded when someone is extremely relaxed or in light sleep (4-8 Hz) and Delta waves evident when someone is in deep, dreamless sleep (0.5-4 Hz).<sup>110</sup>

A sleep cycle typically has a duration of around ninety minutes.<sup>111</sup> The individual slowly descends into deeper sleep. However, after an hour or so they will begin to ascend back through the register, to the point where the electrical activity in their brain is closer to the state

---

<sup>110</sup> Kushida, C.A. *Sleep Deprivation, basic science, physiology and behavior* (Marcel Dekker) pp226-8

<sup>111</sup> Chokroverty, S. (2000) *Clinical Companion to Sleep Disorders Medicine* (Butterworth Heinemann) p1

of light sleeping or even waking when they are likely to have the most vivid dreams and to display rapid eye movement.<sup>112</sup> This is known as REM-sleep or ‘paradoxical sleep’.<sup>113</sup>

The aim was for me to make myself comfortable, close my eyes and attempt to move towards the state of ‘Alpha-Theta’ activity of between 7-8 Hz – in other words, a state of hypnagogia. Dr Jones encouraged me to relax, to let my mind wander and within 10-12 minutes I had achieved our aim.

A few weeks later we replicated the experiment but with the goal of recreating the state of ‘reverie’ in which I will sometimes ‘play’ with ideas. By that I mean an early stage of the creative process in which I explore the different available possibilities but, significantly, do so in such a manner that it is as if the possibilities are being offered up, without judgement, so that, on reflection, they might appear to have emerged spontaneously from my unconscious. Since I would be attempting to encourage moments of illumination or insight I had settled on an idea that had some potential but had also been around long enough to have taken root, or to have ‘incubated’. The idea was for a children’s book and revolved around a girl who decides to walk backwards to school and who spends the next few days doing everything backwards.<sup>114</sup> I already had some sense of possible ways the story might be extended but had yet to find a means of having the different elements interlock or to develop a coherent narrative.

Dr Jones sat me in the chair, fitted the skull cap and electrodes over my head and I prepared to try and slowly induce a state of ‘reverie’. The potential obstacles, as Dr Jones and I saw them,

---

<sup>112</sup> Dement, W.C. *The Promise of Sleep* (Pan) p37

<sup>113</sup> Lavie, P. (1993) *The Enchanted World of Sleep* (Yale University Press) p21

<sup>114</sup> *Ella May Does It Her Way*, illustrated by Andrea Stegmaier has since been published by Quarto books.

were twofold. Firstly, I had to ensure that whilst maintaining a state of 'reverie' and actively playing with ideas I resisted drifting off to sleep. Secondly, Dr Jones and I had to establish a way for me to notify her that I was indeed in a period of 'divergent thinking' – an action that was almost bound to interrupt such a state. There seemed to be no obvious solution that didn't bring its own negative consequences. We finally agreed that, having achieved the necessary state and having explored the ideas, I would inform Dr Jones that I believed I had just spent some time in a manner I recognized as 'divergent thinking' so that she could mark the EEG recording accordingly and later work back from that point to analyze the data.

Inevitably perhaps, as I did my best to settle into a state of reverie, focusing on a particular idea, I was also having to remember that if I did manage to reach the appropriate state I must notify Dr Jones (having spent a reasonable period in that state) that my reverie was complete.

Unfortunately, this created a self-consciousness that actively undermined the state I was trying to achieve. In most experiments of this nature there is a clear distinction between the observer and the observed, but out of necessity in this instance I found myself having to take on some aspect of both roles, to the detriment of the experiment. We tried to lull me back into the appropriate state of reverie on several occasions, without success.

At the time, I was inclined to consider the experiment a failure. As I saw it, one of the research project's best hopes for the creation of 'new knowledge' had rested on a comparison between the two states. This in itself may have been too prescriptive.

The biotechnologist, Craig Venter, has said, 'Ninety-nine percent of your experiments fail for one reason or another.'<sup>115</sup>

More specifically, the writer Robert Pirsig claims,

An experiment is never a failure solely because it fails to achieve predicted results. An experiment is a failure only when it also fails adequately to test the hypothesis in question, when the data it produces don't prove anything one way or another.<sup>116</sup>

In one respect, at least, the experiment was bound to fail due to a lack of foresight regarding 'positionality' – my perspective and participation in relation to the experiment couldn't help but influence the outcome. In Marguerite MacRobert's essay, *Modelling the Creative Writing Process*,<sup>117</sup> she quotes Carol Berkenkotter,

When researchers remove writers from their natural settings ... to examine their thinking process in the laboratory they 'create a context of a powerful sort, often deeply affecting what is being observed'<sup>118</sup>

There is a problem, not only in the experiment, but the perspective as a whole. As Jeri Kroll points out, '... the writer cannot be wholly separated from the researcher.'<sup>119</sup>

---

<sup>115</sup> Craig Venter interviewed on CNN, Science and Health, 21.05.10

<sup>116</sup> Pirsig, R. (1974) *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance: an inquiry into values* (Bodley Head) p102

<sup>117</sup> Chapter 3 in Kroll, J. and Harper, G. (2013) *Research Methods in Creative Writing* (Red Globe Press) p56-77

<sup>118</sup> Berkenkotter, C and Murray, D. (1983) *Decisions and Revisions: The Planning Strategies of a Publishing Writer; and Response of a Laboratory Rat: or, Being Protooled.* Including quote by Janet Emig.

I had accepted that the writer-researcher researches in the process of operating as creative practitioner,<sup>120</sup> but had neglected to comprehensively think through the possible impediments and consequences.

At the time the issue of (and the complications arising from) an individual simultaneously acting as both observer and the observed seemed to produce an insurmountable obstacle across that particular path of inquiry but would lead to one of the most resonant findings of the study when cast in a different light. What I experienced during this second experiment was a self-consciousness that is present to some degree in all aspects of the creative process, which in other realms might be represented as the objective / critical perspective. Conceivably, much of the attraction towards the notion of the writer's 'reverie', or periods of 'divergent thinking' is some associated sense of innate purity, whereby the writer's mind is perceived to be so liberated, their mental processes so close to their unconscious mind that all self-critical restraints have been cast away. But these moments are so fleeting (and so close to the stereotypical 'Eureka' moments of creativity) that to focus on them does little but confirm the idea of a creative individual only truly functioning when struck by inspiration, whereas – as has already been stated – most writing is nowhere near so eventful and consists of states where one's critical faculties need to be fully functioning.

Since my attempt to find a non-fiction project in which to explore my relationship with my (bio-chemist) brother and through my writing residency at the Science Museum I have been keen to challenge the notion of the Arts and Sciences as being in opposition to each other – to identify

---

<sup>119</sup> Kroll, J. and Harper, G. (2013) *Research Methods in Creative Writing* (Red Globe Press) p116

<sup>120</sup> Webb, J. (2015) *Researching Creative Writing* (Creative Writing Studies) p3



the creativity and imagination at work in scientific practice as well as the rigour and methodology necessary in the creative act. Jeri Kroll locates a metaphorical 'Creative Writing Laboratory' in the modern-day university: an experimental research unit, in which '... artistic and scientific practice share instructive similarities.'<sup>121</sup>

This may be, but over the course of my own research project I have come to doubt the wisdom in imposing a scientific framework too literally over the creative process. Does this not perhaps belie a desire to dress the discipline of Creative Writing in the white coat of the laboratory – to have it validated, when in fact the study of Creative Writing is already established as a rigorous discipline in its own right, with no need for such legitimization?

In these terms, it was instructive to pull the focus of the research back from the laboratory. The EEG experience had proved beneficial to the novel in producing a useful perspective as a guinea pig – something that fed directly into the novel – but, more importantly, led me to consider the dual observer/observed conundrum that complicated the EEG experiment and see how it applied to the writer as a whole. As already stated, any practice-based research student might be said to be participating in self-experimentation but given this new perspective there is, I believe, an argument to be made, metaphorically, at least, for any fiction writer to be considered a 'self-experimenter'.

There is a long history of self-experimentation in the sciences. Sir Humphry Davy inhaled nitrous oxide in the 18<sup>th</sup> century; J.S. Haldane placed himself in a decompression chamber to investigate

---

<sup>121</sup> Chapter 5, *The Creative Writing Laboratory and its Pedagogy*. Kroll, J. and Harper, G. (2013) *Research Methods in Creative Writing* (Red Globe Press) p120

decompression sickness in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>122</sup> and in the 1940s the Swiss chemist, Albert Hofmann, took newly-synthesized L.S.D. Clearly, Tripp and Gardner could be described as guinea pigs in their own experiments.

But for the creative writer the laboratory's primary location is in the writer's own mind. It is here that they construct convincing scenarios, breathe life into their characters and draw on their own emotional and motivational reservoirs. Where a passage fails the text is taken apart and reconstructed: the writer is his/her own initial editor. The apparatus constructed for the creation of one novel may not function in the next. Years of the writer's life may be devoted to fictions they fail to complete. For the first-time novelist in particular, there is no agent or editor offering advice or encouragement. The whole enterprise is a series of hypotheses to be tested, not least: is it possible to complete a novel and, if so, will it work?

\*

### **Walking dreamily (ii)**

For Rebecca Solnit, the act of becoming lost may be seen as a positive opportunity and embraced as such. She seems to echo Clare when she states.

---

<sup>122</sup> Haldane wrote an essay on the subject, entitled, *On Being One's Own Rabbit* (1927). In the introduction he says, 'I came into the story with no humanitarian motives. I wanted to find out what happened to a man when you made him more acid or more alkaline.'

... you get lost, in which case the world has become larger than your knowledge of it.<sup>123</sup>

She quotes Keats' reference to his notion of Negative Capability as '... when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts without any irritable reaching after facts and reason.'<sup>124</sup>

Keats is advocating 'drifting'. Solnit goes on to discuss the German philosopher Walter Benjamin, for whom,

... to be lost is to be fully present and to be fully present is to be capable of being in uncertainty and mystery ... one does not get lost but loses oneself, with the implication that it is conscious choice, a chosen surrender, a psychic state achievable through geography.

Through the research project my perspective has shifted, from the subjective – in which I participate in an EEG experiment towards a better appreciation of a particular state of mind ('divergent thinking') occasionally achieved within the creative process – to a more objective, theoretical model in which wrong turnings and apparent dead ends all contribute to the narrative development, with the protagonist acting as proxy for the writer as s/he advances speculatively.

In her essay, *Forward, Wayward*<sup>125</sup>, Katharine Coles emphasizes the 'Importance of Losing Your Way'. When a planned visit in the researcher's busy itinerary is cancelled at the last minute new

---

<sup>123</sup> Solnit, R. (2006) *A Field Guide to Getting Lost* (Canongate) p22.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid p6.

perspectives and alternate opportunities are generated in its stead.<sup>126</sup> The wrong turn, if nothing else, through its very wrongness helps the researcher define the rightness of the alternative route.

I was fortunate at least in that losing my way with the EEG experiments coincided with the emergence of a protagonist in the novel who was a manifestation of a person adrift. She created her physical narrative step by step and we shared a desire for to complete her narrative and, ultimately, to have her revenge.

In most of my novels my protagonist could be said to act as the author's representative – a fictional avatar – as they advance, beyond their knowledge. With this novel I might be said to have constructed, albeit inadvertently, an apparatus that presents that relationship in action.

In the winter of 1705 a young Johann Sebastian Bach walked the 250 miles from Arnstadt to Lubeck in order to study under the organist and musical director Dieterich Buxtehude – a walk followed, three centuries later, by the British writer and broadcaster, Horatio Clare. Bach's original expedition, Clare says, 'was a pilgrimage of sorts ... Perhaps every long distance walk is a pilgrimage, whether the walker is a believer or not.'<sup>127</sup>

The eighteenth century journey would have been a good deal more treacherous than the twenty-first century version. Bach left Arnstadt in part to put behind him a feud he'd had with a

---

<sup>125</sup> The essay is published in *Research Methods in Creative Writing* (edited by Jeri Kroll and Graeme Harper)

<sup>126</sup> This has been my own experience. Interviewing a local woman for my first novel, I soon realized she knew little or nothing about the subject matter I was researching, but having spent an hour or more in her company she happened to mention the behaviour of an eccentric relative that ultimately formed the content of one of the novel's chapters.

<sup>127</sup> Clare, H. (2018) *Something Of His Art: Walking to Lubeck with J.S. Bach* (Little Toller Books) p17

local man and on his journey he carried a rapier on his belt. But Clare proposes that Bach 'never travelled quite alone'.<sup>128</sup> In the margins of his bible, Bach had written, 'Where there is devotional music, God with his grace is always present.'<sup>129</sup>

In her novel, *Wise Blood*, Flannery O'Connor's Hazel Motes is vaguely aware of something more disturbing following him, '... he saw Jesus move from tree to tree in the back of his mind, a wild ragged figure motioning him to turn around ...'<sup>130</sup>

Three hundred years hence Bach is also accompanied by Clare – and by extension, the reader. In my novel, as in most fictions written in the third person, it is the narrator that looks on from up among the branches, as the protagonist stumbles towards their destiny – and through the eyes of the narrator, the reader and writer.

Later in my novel, we discover that whilst incarcerated in the clinic Karen was medicated and deprived of sleep, then presented with footage of another woman making her way through woodland, with the intention of having her predict the other woman's actions. She is 'remote viewing' her. Again, the novel in the research study appears to have produced the clearest insight – that the author of any piece of fiction occupies the same dual positions in a 'remote viewing' experiment: the character who stumbles through the narrative and the observer, endlessly speculating on what choices they will make. The writer's foremost task is to convince him/herself that they are observing an event unfold, rather than be the instigator of the event.

---

<sup>128</sup> Ibid. p20

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> O'Connor, F. (1968) *Wise Blood* (Faber and Faber) p16

The work of French conceptual artist, Sophie Calle, often focuses on something similar, not least in her exhibition, *Suite Venitienne*.<sup>131</sup> She explains how the project came about,

At the end of January 1980 on the streets of Paris I followed a man whom I lost sight of a few minutes later in the crowd ... That very evening, quite by chance, he was introduced to me at an opening. During the course of our conversation he told me he was planning a trip to Venice. I decided to follow him.<sup>132</sup>

For the better part of two weeks Calle followed 'Henri B', photographing him, making notes of his movements in the manner of a private detective, allowing the relative stranger to generate a narrative, with the same apparent arbitrariness as the psychogeographer's journey, but similarly making connections and speculations to fill that narrative out.

For her next show, *La Filature (The Shadow)*, 1981, she instructed her mother to hire a detective to follow her. Her sense of ignorance of being monitored and documented could never match that of Henri B, but Calle wanted to experience both sides of that relationship. As Harriet Baker notes, Calle '... explores what it is to be an observer and to be observed.'<sup>133</sup>

The relationship between author and protagonist shares some of these facets. The author helps their principal character to their feet, clothes and nourishes them and gives them motivation, then sends them out into their fictional terrain. The author observes, remotely. The protagonist is the author's scout, their avatar. At every fork in the path the author leans in. The

---

<sup>131</sup> The exhibition consisted of 55 photographs, 23 panels of text and 3 maps and was first shown in 1979. It was published as a book in 1983 and the exhibition has been revived in various forms.

<sup>132</sup> Calle and Baudrillard 1988 p2

<sup>133</sup> AnOther Magazine, April 23, 2015.

protagonist considers their options. The author observes the decision being made, and continues to watch, to see the possible consequences.

Fiction written in the second person, such as Jay McInerney's novel, *Bright Lights, Big City*<sup>134</sup> or the short stories in Lorrie Moore's collection, *Self Help*,<sup>135</sup> obliges the reader to assume the role of the protagonist. We take instructions from the author and participate in the narrative ourselves. Just as I propose that the writer has the protagonist act as their proxy in the novel's creation, here the reader assumes that role themselves. The reader/protagonist is the observed. They are aware of the author, observing, over their shoulder. But for McInerney, this is no more than an extension of the duality of everyday existence.

*When we talk to ourselves, we don't say, 'I idiot ...' We say, 'You idiot, what are you doing?'*<sup>136</sup>

Even alone, and beyond the construct of a novel, we are both observer and observed.

\*

## **Novel 2: Typhoid Mary, 1970s America**

---

<sup>134</sup> *Bright Lights, Big City* was published in 1984 and caused something of a stir, partly due to its formal audacity and partly due to the narcotic indulgences of the protagonist.

<sup>135</sup> *Self-help* is a collection of short pieces, many written in the second person, with a text that often reads as a series of present tense commands (eg. 'Give him a tight, wiry little smile.' p4 of *How to be An Other Woman*).

<sup>136</sup> Interview with James Naughtie, *Bookclub*, BBC Radio4, 8 December, 2016

In September 2016 I finally accepted that persisting with a Tripp and Gardner narrative was fruitless and began to look for an alternative focus. For some time I had been interested in the Common Cold Unit (C.C.U.)<sup>137</sup> and had once tried to put together a documentary on the place. Something about the institution struck me as peculiarly British. It had been set up in an old military barracks on Salisbury Plain in 1946 and operated through till 1989. Men and women would volunteer to spend ten days there as human guinea pigs, in a bid to help find a cure for the common cold. In return the volunteers were offered three square meals a day, plus accommodation, which may have been an attractive offer in post-war Britain. It was, in part, this civic-mindedness – of helping Britain conquer a common foe – that intrigued me. I suspect I had seen a news item about the institution in my childhood. When I was being interviewed for a possible writer's residency at the Science Museum I happened to mention my interest in the C.C.U. and the deputy director told me that the museum held the C.C.U.'s archive. So once my residency was underway I arranged to view the material (the unit's promotional literature ... furniture from the rooms ... etc) and watched footage of volunteers arriving at the site in a Bedford van, looking round their quarters and being given a virus before spending the next ten days in isolation undergoing a variety of treatments.

This period of isolation – a sort of informal quarantine – seemed to me to have some potential. The volunteers could walk on Salisbury Plain but locals were advised against interacting with them, in order to avoid undermining the study.

The volunteers had something in common with Tripp and Gardner. They were ordinary men and women consenting to a monitored, clinical procedure that appeared to pose no obvious

---

<sup>137</sup> The Common Cold Unit was based at an old military hospital close to Salisbury, as a residential unit for epidemiological research into the common cold.



long-term threat to their health. The participants were housed in bubbles of two or four within which they were all given the same virus and treatment. Meals were delivered to their apartments. They were instructed not to socialize with other cohorts but from reading *Cold Wars* by David Tyrrell,<sup>138</sup> who used to run the clinic, I learned that from time to time a volunteer would fail to comply with the restrictions and fraternize with volunteers in other blocks. During my residency at the museum I developed a narrative in which an individual did just that and in doing so became chronically ill. I saw a way of presenting this fiction as fact. In it, as the writer-in-residence at the Science Museum, I would visit a fictional archive several storeys beneath the West Kensington museum and discover an anomaly – a batch of sensitive files which had been archived in error that referred to a woman whose entry into the C.C.U. had been registered but not her subsequent release.

Around the same time I came across the phenomenon of a ‘Typhoid Mary’ – an individual who is compulsorily quarantined to avoid passing on infection, named after Mary Mallon (1869-1938), a cook in New York City who repeatedly infected the families for whom she worked and after refusing to amend her behaviour spent three decades in confinement.

In that initial piece of fiction, no more than a couple of thousand words in length, I came across documents regarding a woman who, by my calculations, would have then been in her late sixties who was being housed in a secure clinic somewhere in the Welsh borders. In the fiction I contacted the appropriate government department and was given permission to interview her on the understanding that I divulged neither her name nor her specific whereabouts.

---

<sup>138</sup> Tyrrell, D.& Fielder, M. (2002) *Cold Wars: the fight against the common cold* (Oxford University Press)

Via my agent I submitted the story to a literary journal.<sup>139</sup> Towards the end of the residency I considered adapting this idea into a screenplay and applied for development funding. In this secondary stage of development I had an image which seemed to neatly encapsulate the tone of the narrative I had in mind – a bewildered woman, standing barefoot in a country lane in mid-winter, dressed only in a hospital gown.

The longer narrative, as I saw it, would be divided roughly into two halves. In the first we would see her in complete isolation, living in a modern, single storey apartment, whilst being monitored by a team of medical practitioners. But, having grown increasingly suspicious of the circumstances under which she is said to have consented to the arrangement, she escapes and for the second half of the narrative she is pursued across the countryside.

In August 2016, nine months after beginning my PhD, I wrote in my notes, ‘Is it possible to combine wake-a-thon idea with woman on the run script – to make a cracking thriller? In the UK or US?’ Soon after, I met my two main supervisors and proposed replacing the narrative of Tripp and Gardner with my own alleged Typhoid Mary. I explained that the illness from which she suffers could be sleep-related (she can’t sleep ... or sleeps all the time) rather than a chronic infection picked up as a human guinea pig in a drugs trial. This would allow me to continue my research into hypnagogia, but focus on a narrative that had the action and drama lacking in the wake-a-thons.

Developing the Tripp and Gardner narrative I came to appreciate how I was condemning myself to write another novel whose principal preoccupation was the protagonist’s thoughts and

---

<sup>139</sup> Eight years later, the author is still waiting to hear if the piece has been accepted for publication.

emotions. *The Underground Man*, *The Widow's Tale* and *Yuki chan in Bronte Country* (two of which are written in the first person) were all, to varying degrees, exercises in interiority. Like my new protagonist, I wanted to break out and to have things *happen*. My supervisors agreed to the proposed shift in focus, on the understanding that I continue to be conscious of my creative choices as the development of the novel progressed.

As mentioned earlier, part of my concern with setting the novel in the 1950s was that the events fell outside my own lifetime. Bringing events forward, even by ten or fifteen years, meant they now existed within the realm of my own consciousness and, for some reason, this made them more tangible. Curiously, setting my first novel in the late nineteenth century and my second in the 1940s failed to trouble me. I would now suggest that the temporal shift in my current work bestowed upon the narrative some sense of the 'modern', at least in my own mind. As soon as I began to follow this line of enquiry my novel's tone shifted from black and white to colour.

Of equal importance was the fact that my protagonist was now in real and tangible danger. In the initial storyline my main character was told that she was highly infectious and that the treatments she received were for her own benefit. Any feelings of anxiety or paranoia, she heard, were side-effects of the medication. I envisaged her gradually coming around to question this, and her uncertainty as to whether to trust her instincts or the clinicians created a useful tension. I envisaged her having a series of hallucinations throughout the narrative – somewhat akin to those I had considered giving my version of Tripp and Gardner – that broke straight into the narrative, but as the novel took shape these interventions began to diminish, possibly because, as before, I suspected they would undermine the reality for the reader and I hoped that there was now sufficient drama in the primary reality for it not to need

augmentation. When I later gave my protagonist amnesia her alienation was complete. In the first instance the outside world was threateningly unfamiliar due to the amount of time she'd been removed from it, along with the treatment and medication she'd received. But I now had a character with sufficient motivation to be propelled through the landscape and I felt more positive about the novel than I had done since my research began.

So, to distil the evolution of the narrative: a fiction-as-fact short story grew into the outline of a screenplay and was now the basis for a novel. In the past I have been convinced that the seed of an idea would contain within it its own unique D.N.A. which would determine its own inevitable form. All the writer need do, I supposed, is cultivate the idea appropriately and the poem / novel / screenplay will fulfil its destiny. On reflection I see this as another possible example of the need for a writer to reassure him/herself that, once conceived, a natural process will follow. And yet my third novel, *The Widow's Tale*, was originally conceived as a screenplay, my most recent novel, *Kazuko chan in Bronte Country*, was written first as a film script and submitted to production companies before I chose to adapt it into a piece of fiction. Recently, an idea for a short film I submitted to the B.F.I. over twenty years ago was commissioned as a graphic novel. I wonder if the reluctance to accept that an idea may ultimately manifest itself in any number of forms is not perhaps simply an act of self-preservation: the suggestion that an idea develops not as a result of elements inherent within it but due to a series of arbitrary choices inflicted upon it gives the writer a burden he or she may not be able to bear. Better to have those choices buried within the idea itself, or at least in the writer's unconscious than having to be made in cold, broad daylight where self-consciousness threatens to bring the process to a halt.

The 'woman-on-the-run' element of the narrative became increasingly attractive. I could see the potential in a character being pursued by goons across an unfamiliar landscape and trace my fascination with the form back to John Buchan's *The Thirty-nine Steps* and Geoffrey Household's *Rogue Male* – novels I read in my twenties having seen TV or film adaptations of them in my teens.

Though the protagonist is pursued and often in mortal danger, for the reader there is a sense of vicarious liberation and adventure in the genre – a romance in an individual surviving by his/her wits. As I began to explore possible narratives I could see that my protagonist would have to complete a circuit of some sort. That, without yet knowing the circumstances for her having been imprisoned, she would need to exact some revenge. Two of my previous novels have had embedded in them what I might call a secular pilgrimage. In *The Widow's Tale* the protagonist bolts from her home after the death of her husband and takes refuge in North Norfolk, where she had previously had an affair. She visits the shrine town of Little Walsingham, but is some way behind the reader in appreciating that she is following her own Stations of the Cross. In *Kazuko chan in Bronte Country* the protagonist retraces her mother's footsteps in the hope of understanding how she came to take her own life. The sense of these women revisiting a charged location and their hopes of resolution wasn't apparent at the outset but developed as I worked my way through the first draft.

In my first novel, *The Underground Man*, the protagonist has built a system of tunnels beneath his estate. I was close to the end of the first draft before appreciating that this network of tunnels might serve as a labyrinthine representation of his unconscious which he has to navigate in order to work far enough back in his memory to identify the ghost that has been haunting him.

The only novel of mine without a network or circuit buried in it is my second novel, *Five Boys* – curiously, the one novel of mine I feel fails to properly cohere.

It is not that I identify a structure or circuit and build a novel around it. The motif emerges as I write. I am conscious, I think, that a structure of this sort underpins the narrative and that the circuitry must be completed for the whole to be electrified. An ‘on-the-run’ narrative can conceivably be considered as a ‘pilgrimage executed at speed’ since their ultimate destination rarely lacks significance, but while my heroine in *The Widow’s Tale* might take some time to identify herself as a secular pilgrim, the woman in this latest novel is running blind. On several occasions she has the opportunity to break out of the loop, but chooses instead to remain in the vicinity, ultimately tracking her adversary back to his base. She might ultimately find herself at a different clinic to the one where she was imprisoned but it acts as a representation of it.

I originally envisaged the action taking place in the UK – possibly the Welsh borders where the short story and proposed screenplay were set but I soon saw that a woman on the run in rural Herefordshire would not have to run far before encountering other people. I briefly considered having her exist in a reality that runs parallel with our world but again worried that by removing some of the recognizable aspects of our reality would risk undermining the reader’s faith in the world they were being asked to invest themselves in.

I tried basing the narrative in a more northerly country – Sweden, Denmark or Norway – imagining the landscape to be fittingly bleak but also spacious enough to accommodate my action. If my protagonist remained an English-speaker her alienation would be heightened by her not being able to understand whatever people she came across.

I developed several significant scenes – her commandeering a car after first escaping from the clinic ... making her way across a river ... seeking the help of a relative stranger to remove a plastic implant from under her skin – all of which exist in the completed version, though quite different to the originals. I identified this as a common aspect of my development: the laying down of some fundamental stepping stones in order to mark out the narrative's broad trajectory, as well as providing the opportunity to explore the type of event that will form the novel and some sense of a character's behaviour, dialogue and so on.

In the first few months of development on the new narrative I made a concerted effort to visualize the apartment in which my protagonist is confined – to furnish it, thus making it real, but also to explore how she might have spent her time when she was not taking part in the trials, eg. the material she was allowed to read (books and some old magazines, but not newspapers) and what she could listen to (pre-recorded cassettes but no radio). The lay-out of the apartment I had come up with for the short story seemed to function in this new context. But, frustratingly, I found that having Karen (the current name for the protagonist) on the run in a foreign country complicated matters. I had in mind a finale in which she has her revenge on the people who gave the order to imprison her – people who seemed unmovably located in an English-speaking country. I wanted a verbal confrontation at the close to be in English before Karen climbed in a car and drove away. In a country that was not her own it might seem as if the story had yet to be completed. So I finally accepted that the novel should take place in the United States or Canada and that the vast spaces and climate I had in mind would best be served in the North West states of America (Oregon, Washington) or in British Columbia.

Just as the novel's location now swung over to the West so the period in which it was set slowly advanced through the 1960s. I had previously read some texts about Stanley Milgram's 1961 *Obedience to Authority* experiment at Yale, in which volunteers were instructed to administer what they believed to be electric shocks to an individual whom they had been told was a fellow volunteer whenever he answered a question wrong. I now read about the 1971 *Stanford Prison Experiment* led by the psychologist Philip Zimbardo, in which college student volunteers were given roles either as 'prisoners' or 'wardens' in a mock-up prison. The experiment is said to have descended into chaos with the 'prisoners' being mistreated by the 'wardens' and the study forced to close after six of its proposed fourteen days.<sup>140</sup> One might say that both experiments were further, wilder explorations in 'conformity'.<sup>141</sup>

Such experiments, often in quite large in scale and behavioural in their concept, appear to have taken place in the 1960s and early '70s, one feature being their lack of regulatory propriety.

Timothy Leary and Richard Alpert carried out a series of experiments at Harvard using the psychedelic compound psilocybin<sup>142</sup>, administering the drug to students at the Marsh Chapel<sup>143</sup> in Boston, to investigate whether the drug encouraged religious visions, and to inmates at

---

<sup>140</sup> The experiment and its findings have since been widely questioned, most recently in *Debunking the Stanford Prison Experiment* (2019) by Thibault le Texier, published in *American Psychologist*. One criticism is that the participants behaved in a way they felt would please their professor (Zimbardo) and that as an observer he was too subjective in his decisions.

<sup>141</sup> The findings of the *Obedience to Authority* study have also been widely questioned, not least on ethical grounds. Also, that the participants guessed that the demands made of them were false and their responses were often carried out in such a way as to please the overseer, in this case, Stanley Milgram.

<sup>142</sup> Psilocybin is a drug derived from fungus which has a hallucinogenic effect on the patient. Leary and Alpert set up the *Harvard Psilocybin Project* (with the support of, among others, Aldous Huxley) which ran between 1960 and 1962, when their funding was withdrawn due to concerns about the ethics involved in the studies.

<sup>143</sup> The study was overseen by Walter Pahnke as part of Leary and Alpert's *Harvard Psilocybin Project*.



Concord high-security prison<sup>144</sup> in Massachusetts. Leary's claim of a significant drop in reoffending by the inmates treated with the drug later proved to be unsubstantiated.

A culture in which experiments using human guinea pigs taken to extremes seemed appropriate for this narrative. With this novel I saw that, above all else, I wanted my reader to be at the very least unsettled and, on occasion, alarmed. As mentioned above, at this point in the novel's development I was conceiving possible scenarios as a way of creating an overall narrative, but also in search of a workable *tone*. It is an abstract term and, in this context, might be substituted by 'voice' or the 'feel' of the piece. Yet until I have established, with some confidence, an appropriate means of delivering the novel I have found it practically impossible to embark on a first draft.

In the past, in order to help identify an appropriate tone I have read fiction from the period or genre. With my first novel, those texts included H. Rider Haggard's *She*, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and William Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White*, one text leading to another. In so doing I came to appreciate that the story I wanted to tell should take the form of a 'gothic' ghost story or written as a journal. I also read letters and other texts of the period, for some understanding of vocabulary or syntax.

With this project, at this stage in its development, a great deal of the material that seemed to strike the right tone were films: *The Parallax View*<sup>145</sup>, *Three Days of the Condor*<sup>146</sup> and *Marathon*

---

<sup>144</sup> A number of prisoners were given the drug and offered psychotherapy in an attempt to reduce the number of repeat offenders.

<sup>145</sup> 1974, directed by Alan J. Pakula.

<sup>146</sup> 1975, directed by Sydney Pollack.

*Man*<sup>147</sup>. I had seen all three on many occasions, but had not read the novels on which they were based.

The novels were published between 1970-74, covering a similar period to the Watergate scandal (1972-74) which must have helped generate an atmosphere that was receptive for both the books and films. In all three novels the protagonist – handsome, smart, if a little scruffy – finds himself cast into a life-endangering drama. When I had originally intended to set my novel in the late '50s/early '60s I had read some Robert Bloch, Richard Matheson and Charles Beaumont hoping for something that would 'unsettle' me, as mentioned above, but these narratives tended towards the *uncanny* – what might be considered *Twilight Zone*<sup>148</sup> shocks that, sixty years on, could seem tame or even quaint. With the '70s novels the threat was real and visceral, the hero benighted and doing his damndest to penetrate the mystery, in the process revealing a government or powerful corporation going about its sinister business unheeded. The narratives had about them something of Hitchcock's 'wrong man' dramas *The Wrong Man*, *North By Northwest*, *The Thirty-nine Steps*), but repackaged for a more cynical age.

The protagonists all have some loose connection to the conspiracy. In *Marathon Man* Babe's brother works for a secret government agency. In *Six Days of the Condor* Ronald Malcolm works for a government agency himself, though one of a more cerebral and obscure order, cracking codes by poring over works of literature. In *The Parallax View* Malcolm Graham is a reporter but also one of a number of witness to a political assassination who are slowly being eliminated.

---

<sup>147</sup> 1976, directed by John Schlesinger.

<sup>148</sup> The *Twilight Zone* was an American TV drama series, whose scripts had elements of science fiction, the supernatural and horror. Most of the screenplays were written by Rod Sterling, but Ray Bradbury and, indeed, Richard Matheson and Charles Beaumont also wrote episodes.

My hope was that the novels might offer possible options, not just in tone but also structure, dialogue or character. Narratively, *The Parallax View* seemed to lose its way long before the climax when Graham becomes fixated with the wife of one of the victims. *Six Days of the Condor* was engaging, but had long periods when the narrative hardly seemed to progress at all. Its author claimed to have written *Condor* in four months whilst holding down a full-time job<sup>149</sup> William Goldman on the other hand is said to have written *Marathon Man* twice, from start to finish and the qualitative difference between the two texts is evident, with literary flourishes in the latter such as the protagonist Babe having an imaginary dialogue with his hero, the Ethiopian marathon runner, Abebe Bikila, as he is chased barefoot through the city streets. Further, all the characters in *Marathon Man* have inner lives, personal histories and motivations in such a way as to make the other novels seem superficial by comparison.

The endings to all three narratives are downbeat, bloody. Malcolm Graham is murdered, Ronald Malcolm survives but only after confronting the primary assassin and having had the full scale of government corruption revealed to him. Babe kills his adversaries, including the aging Nazi who murdered his brother.

The books had the economy of words and the easy delivery I had anticipated. Curiously, I found in them scenes which mirrored scenes I had already sketched out for my own novel. The narratives are full of tests and trials, whether it is simply Malcolm having to negotiate his way beyond the man at the end of an emergency phone line,<sup>150</sup> or Graham having to undergo a

---

<sup>149</sup> In the introduction to a later edition of the novel, Grady writes, ‘I wrote *Six Days of the Condor* in four months, working a “day job” in the state of Montana and typing my heart out night and weekends, approaching my first novel like the journalist I’d been schooled to be.’ (p10)

<sup>150</sup> Early on in the novel the reader learns that Malcolm was recruited by the C.I.A. after he had answered an exam question in an eccentric and challenging manner.

series of word association sessions and Rorschach-like tests to try and infiltrate the Parallax corporation. In the screen adaptation these tests are upgraded to a more immersive montage of images, slogans and music with a disturbing nationalistic bent, but the object is the same: the apparent by-passing of the conscious mind in order to access the subject's true self.<sup>151</sup>

Babe's interrogation in *Marathon Man* is the most demanding, strapped into a chair and having his teeth drilled by the Nazi-dentist Szell until he surrenders the information that Szell mistakenly believes he possesses. It is a lie detector test taken to its most brutal ends. Some months later I outlined the scene in my novel in which Karen plans to administer a range of drugs to Maguire (including the 'truth drug' sodium pentothal) before appreciating that I had quite likely been drawing on the Babe/Szell scene (either from the book or movie).

So here in fictional form were the malevolent experiments and psychological tests I had been envisaging. I was writing, I discovered, a '70s 'conspiracy thriller' but, just as my Victorian gothic novel was composed a century or more after Rider Haggard or Collins, my conspiracy thriller would be written forty years after Goldman, Grady and Singer.

At this point the project effectively opened up for me, the narrative options suddenly multiplying where they'd previously appeared to diminish. My research now chimed with the ideas I had set out to investigate. Early on in my research I had identified Kesey's participation in LSD trials as of potential interest and now returned to them. It is tempting, retrospectively, to neatly compartmentalize one's progress, but from the chronology of my notes it seems that whilst doing my best to progress in an orderly fashion I would often return to an area of

---

<sup>151</sup> Grady himself was recruited for the Office of Strategic Services (O.S.S.) intelligence agency and drew on his own experience of the peculiar questionnaire and interview for this scene.

research previously parked or abandoned. Consequently, my reading and development tends to be more haphazard than I would have thought.

Kesey was a 'human guinea pig' at Menlo Park Veteran's Hospital, New Jersey, in 1960.<sup>152</sup>

Though he wasn't aware of it at the time, the trial was part of a much broader project – variously referred to as Bluebird, Artichoke but now most commonly known as MK Ultra<sup>153</sup> – exploring amongst other things, whether drugs such as LSD and psilocybin could be administered as 'truth serums' or might somehow heighten the individual's power of perception.

Through my reading I came across three psychiatrists whose work was either directly linked to MK Ultra or covered similar ground: Dr Donald Ewen Cameron At The Allan Memorial Institute in Montreal, Dr Harry Bailey at the Chelmsford Private Hospital in Sydney and Dr William Sargant in London.

From the turn of the century 'sleep treatment' or 'deep sleep therapy (D.S.T.)'<sup>154</sup> had been used to treat psychiatric patients and traumatized soldiers. William Sargant later employed the term 'abreaction' (originally used by Freud and Josef Breuer) to describe the process whereby, through the use of barbiturates, ether or methedrine, a patient is reduced to a 'semi-drunken' state, then encouraged to relive a trauma in order to release suppressed emotions. Sargant was interested in 'mass hysteria': the dance manias of the sixteenth century and the 'acute states of excitement' and 'emotional release' in Brazilian and Balinese rituals, as well as the

---

<sup>152</sup> Kesey worked nights at the hospital after studying Creative Writing at Stanford University. When he heard of the human trials involving LSD he volunteered as a participant.

<sup>153</sup> MK Ultra has a bleak reputation, not least for the scope of their experiments and the fact that the trials were later discovered to be funded by the C.I.A.

<sup>154</sup> Essentially inducing a period of deep sleep for days or weeks at a time – by sodium bromide and, later, barbiturates – on the basis that the patient is given much-needed respite from their anxiety.

fervour in religious services in the southern states of the U.S. (particularly those that might include the handling of snakes). His sessions of 'narcosis' – later, as insulin-induced comas – would last anything up to three months, in which psychiatric patients were sedated, fed anti-depressants and, several times a week, woken to have electro-convulsive therapy (ECT).<sup>155</sup>

In the same period (ie the 1950s onwards) the psychiatrist Dr Ewen Cameron was employing similar practices at the Allan Memorial Institute in Montreal – techniques he referred to as 'depatterning' and 'psychic driving' – giving his patients ECT to clear their mind, before injecting LSD, methamphetamine and, later, sodium amytal.<sup>156</sup> Like Sargant, there was a notion at play of wiping the slate clean before rebuilding the patient's psyche. Cameron would record patients' responses to questions on a reel to reel machine then play the recordings back to them through speakers hidden in pillows. The practice evolved into the use of tape loops – what Cameron referred to as 'auto-psychic driving'<sup>157</sup> – delivered to the patient for up to twenty hours a day. In order to allow several patients to be treated simultaneously headphones were fitted into American Football helmets. One patient was given 'driving messages' for fifty-four consecutive days.

Perhaps most notoriously, between 1963 and 1979 Dr Harry Bailey oversaw a programme of 'deep sleep therapy' at Chelmsford Hospital near Sydney, sedating psychiatric patients and individuals suffering from addiction problems with barbiturates and tranquilizers for up to fourteen days. Patients were restrained, fed by nasogastric tubes and given electric shock treatment. A Royal Commission investigation in 1991 found that female patients would

---

<sup>155</sup> Streatfield, D. (2007) *Brainwash: the secret history of mind control* (Hodder), p247

<sup>156</sup> Collins, A. (1988) *In the Sleep Room* (Lester & Orpen Dennys) p18

<sup>157</sup> Streatfield, D. (2007) *Brainwash: the secret history of mind control* (Hodder), p227

sometimes be taken to Bailey's house at night. Some patients later committed suicide. In all, twenty-six patients died. As a result, sleep therapy was banned in Australia. Bailey committed suicide in 1983.

In all three cases, the patients – some of whom had been admitted suffering from post-natal depression and eating disorders – were unaware of the treatment they would receive and had not given their consent. Some of the projects were funded by the C.I.A.

William Sargant, it transpired, was yet another psychiatrist who had assessed Patricia Hearst prior to her trial, which leads one to wonder if there was a single significant psychiatrist in North America who didn't visit her in 1976, either at the behest of her defence team or out of professional curiosity.

Again, if I hadn't consulted my notes I would be inclined to imagine that my reading about Sargant, Cameron and Bailey all took place during one concentrated period. In fact, my research on the subject fell into two distinct periods – the first when I was beginning to develop the new narrative, now established in North America in the 60s / 70s, then again when I was roughly two-thirds of the way through a complete draft (ie a year or more later). In the first instance I was looking for material that might help in constructing the broad outline of the narrative. When I returned to the subject of 'brain-washing' and 'out of body experiences' (OBEs), etc. I was primarily looking for information that would help provide convincing detail of the experiments the protagonist remembers from the clinic, as well as material that would explain her initial incarceration.

In principle, the work carried out by Sargant, Cameron and Bailey would appear to fit perfectly into my study and developing novel, yet I found I was resistant to incorporating anything directly from the sleep experiments linked to MK Ultra. I found the treatment of the patients disturbing and was concerned that fictionalizing such material risked trivializing it. If I had reservations about taking liberties with events in the life of Randy Gardner then it was quite reasonable that I would want to avoid the induced comas, ECT and marathon tape loops these individuals underwent. In truth, I was also uncertain that I wanted to spend years handling such dark and toxic material.

Having the C.I.A. or the U.S. government behind the incarceration of my protagonist felt like a cliché – another iteration, in effect, of *The Manchurian Candidate*. I had also noticed MK Ultra being referred to in various modern cultural contexts. The organization carrying out the secret experiments in the U.S. TV series, *Stranger Things*<sup>158</sup> is identified as MK Ultra and in *Manhunt: Unabomber*<sup>159</sup> there is a suggestion that an MK Ultra experiment Theodore John Kaczynski is coerced into undertaking as a young man contributes to him becoming a terrorist. At the time I was working on my first draft it seemed as though MK Ultra was the first stop for a 70s Netflix or HBO sci-fi villain. More importantly, generating scenes that replicated those taking part in Montreal, London or Sydney felt too bound to reality. The parameters set in place by such a decision, I felt, would not leave sufficient room for the invention I had in mind.

Around this time I had a meeting with the agent who represents the TV and film rights of my books and I mentioned that I was working on what I hoped would be a thriller. I asked if he had

---

<sup>158</sup> Spielberg-esque sci-fi/horror series, first broadcast on Netflix in 2016; currently in production for fourth season.

<sup>159</sup> Fictionalized account of the F.B.I.'s pursuit of Ted Kaczynski, first broadcast on The Discovery Channel, 2017.



any advice. 'What's the twist?' he asked me. This phrase that at the time had sounded rather glib became a useful corrective. I saw that I had been in danger of constructing a novel with a clear trajectory whereas any thriller worth its salt would pull the rug from under the reader's feet on at least a couple of occasions. If nothing else, this led me towards the idea that (i) the villain should ultimately be revealed as someone with motivations quite contrary to the ones the reader imagines and that (ii) my protagonist should be revealed as not quite as innocent as the reader had been led to believe.

From this point on the composition of the novel was slow but constant. I had developed what I felt was a reasonably sound structure (without necessarily understanding how Karen came to be in the clinic or the particulars of how she would carry out her revenge). Most importantly, I was convinced by my protagonist and her predicament.

My original plan had been for the first third of the narrative to establish Karen in the clinic/apartment: showing her daily routine, the many hours of her alone, interspersed with periods in which she undergoes various trials (on a treadmill, or hooked up to an EEG machine). Over time, and through exchanges with the leading clinician ('Maguire'), Karen would begin to suspect that, far from being quarantined for her own good or for that of society, the clinicians had their own reasons for imprisoning her. She would escape. I explored various ways of her breaking out, but her ability to escape from the clinic seemed to undermine the seriousness with which she was being held, whereas her escaping whilst in transit seemed more plausible. The rest of the novel would consist of her evading capture and slowly developing her resources to the point where the tables are turned. I began to write short samples of text, as a way of exploring the narrative and in order to try out possible tones.

In 2010 I saw Russell Hoban discuss his novel, *Riddley Walker*, with John Mullen.<sup>160</sup> Hoban talked about a novel's composition as 'riding the blinds to unknown destinations. Sometimes I get thrown off the train in the middle of nowhere. Sometimes I get to the Big Rock Candy Mountain.'<sup>161</sup>

Hoban and other writers such as Michele Roberts and Muriel Spark have claimed to embark on the writing of a novel with little idea where the narrative would take them. One imagines they have some sense, at least, of the ground they are hoping to cover or some central theme they wish to explore. All the same, I cannot envisage beginning a writing project that is likely to occupy me for the best part of four or five years without some guarantee of how the narrative would unfold and where it might ultimately land.

However, I wanted this novel to have a sense of momentum to it – a quality quite different to my previous novels which, as I have said, have tended towards self-reflection and interiority. From the earliest stages of development my protagonist had suffered some degree of memory loss. It had been suggested from my reading of various deep sleep treatments but also served the narrative: if she could not recall the circumstances under which she arrived at the clinic she would always be obliged to rely on the clinicians' version of events. Her patchy recall would be explained as a symptom of her illness or a side-effect of a treatment. But in her amnesia I also saw the potential for an existential anxiety in Karen – and a further unsettling of the reader – if her grasp of her own history reached no further back than a week or two.

---

<sup>160</sup> John Mullen interviewed Hoban about *Riddley Walker* at The Guardian, Kings Place, 22.11.10.

<sup>161</sup> Mullen, J. (2010) *The Guardian. The Guardian Book Club: Riddley Walker by Russell Hoban*. 26 November

Thirty years ago I saw a documentary in which Jonathan Miller interviewed Clive Wearing, a musicologist who had contracted herpesviral encephalitis, which prevented him from creating or storing new memories.<sup>162</sup> As a consequence he had the impression of constantly emerging from a coma: if his wife left the room for a minute on her return Wearing would greet her as if they had been kept apart for years. One might propose that we all live in a perpetual state of Nowness, but our ability to cast our minds back in time or to project ourselves forward allows us to generate the necessary space within which to exist.

But in the context of this novel amnesia also provided a mechanism with which to withhold information from the reader, imparting it at a time that suited the narrative. As the novel took shape so the scale of Karen's amnesia grew, obscuring from the protagonist and the reader a much greater period in the clinic as well as her life prior to her incarceration. By limiting her scope I hoped to heighten the tension (Who are these people? Why do they want to kill me?) and to further unsettle the reader.

I had no intention of attempting Hoban's audacious approach to composing 'blind' but in the early stages of the first draft I determined that, once I had established what a scene had to deliver (eg. 'Karen comes to a river and tries to find a way to cross it' or 'Karen comes across a house but the inhabitant turns out to be an adversary') I would endeavour to have the scene develop in such a way as to surprise myself. If at all possible I wanted to avoid any knowledge I had of what happened in the rest of the novel to seep into the telling. In another context a novelist may deliberately foreshadow later events. My intention here was to try and have

---

<sup>162</sup> *Prisoner of Consciousness*, first broadcast on BBC1 in 1986.

events reveal themselves to the reader as they happened, within the confines of my protagonist's limited sphere of consciousness.

Prior to observing the development of this novel I hadn't appreciated that during this period the work generates an accompanying manifesto – a list of strictures with which to aid the narrative's creation, but also perhaps to differentiate a novel from previous work. The parameters might be modest – for instance, that all dialogue in the current novel should be italicized, rather than presented in speech marks and that the attributive 'he said / she said' be reduced to a minimum, free of adverbs – but cumulatively help provide a text with its own distinct shape and voice.

I continued to investigate tone, as well as dialogue – particularly interactions between Karen and Maguire, whose relationship had become the foundation of the narrative – and, out of frustration at my lack of progress and in a bid to explore a scene containing *action*, I wrote the passage in which we see an older man driving a pick-up down a country lane. Coming round a bend he encounters Karen running towards him, barefoot, in a hospital gown. He pulls up. We see that she is being pursued by two men with guns. She steals the pick-up and drives away.

I hadn't intended this to be the opening scene of the novel (though it struck me some time after settling on it as such that it manages to encapsulate the original image I had been employing as a touchstone for the story as a whole). My plan had been to write the scene, revise and edit it, then return to the business of establishing Karen's time in the clinic. But this particular passage, and the scenes I envisaged coming after, had such kinetic charge that within a matter of days I had accepted that the novel should, in fact, begin here, following Karen's escape from the ambulance and that her experiences in the clinic would be told in flashback or as a series of cut-

aways. So, despite all my planning – the organisation of significant moments ... the chronology of her mental and physical state ... etc – a simple exercise in tone and form led me to restructure the narrative completely. Which leads me to ask: is that the sign of a writer less methodical than he imagines? Or simply a pragmatist, willing to embrace a creative opportunity as it emerges?

Early on, I had resolved to write the novel in the third person. Two of my previous novels had been written in the first person and whilst it is an effective means of revealing character and of having the reader fully engage with the protagonist, a first person p.o.v. can also limit perspective and so would not necessarily suit a novel prioritizing plot. I intended to position the narrator close to the protagonist's shoulder and for the reader to be party to her thoughts. As stated above, the assumption was that the amnesia would help unsettle the reader, but I wanted the option of pulling back to accommodate the passing of time or to reveal the vastness of the landscape or to show detail, such as the expertise with which an adversary loads a shotgun.

I had reservations regarding using an American vernacular. I have read contemporary U.S. literature since my teens but foresaw innumerable ways in which I could fail to grasp the intricacies of a very different mode of English. It was reading Tom Wolfe's account of Ken Kesey adventures with LSD in *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, as well as *The Right Stuff*, that assured me of the great range of U.S. voices in published form, with Wolfe's as perhaps at the more urbane and Anglicized end of the scale. Though I was attempting to write a conspiracy thriller set in the 1970s, of the three iconic novels referred to above, only Goldman's *Marathon Man*

somehow managed to avoid sounding dated. Despite the period it seemed appropriate for me to employ a more contemporary voice.

In the previous eighteen months I had read – or at the very least sampled – thirty or more contemporary British and U.S. thrillers without identifying a tone that might convincingly carry the story I had in mind. The two writers whose delivery I’ve found most engaging in my recent reading have been Gillian Flynn (*Gone Girl*, *Sharp Objects*) and Lee Child (*Killing Floor*, *Die Trying*).

Prior to the research project I had read little or no Lee Child, but turned to his Jack Reacher novels not least because the British-born Child (real name James Grant) appears to have mastered the art of writing in a convincing American vernacular. In each novel, the protagonist, Jack Reacher, will tend to find himself in a small town around the time of a significant upset, often involving a murder. Either because he is implicated or via some tangential involvement Reacher then methodically goes about delivering justice and reestablishing order.

Given that his novels are marketed as thrillers his narratives unfold at a surprisingly slow pace and what action there is has long periods of relative calm between them (Child’s motto is, ‘Write the fast stuff slow and the slow stuff fast.’). But the prose has a powerful momentum and Child is happy to put aside grammatical propriety in order to serve a determined sense of purpose in the prose, often dropping the nominative pronoun to maintain the flow (‘Stared bewildered ...’; ‘Dialled his bank from memory ...’<sup>163</sup>), sometimes reducing sentences further (‘Bad news.’<sup>164</sup>), at times to single words (‘Visitors.’<sup>165</sup> or ‘Understandable’.<sup>166</sup>).

---

<sup>163</sup> Child, L. (2011) *Without Fail* (Bantam) p29

<sup>164</sup> Child, L. (2011) *Without Fail* (Bantam) p17

<sup>165</sup> Child, L. (2014) *Never Go Back* (Bantam) p8

Despite Reacher's renowned taciturnity (an in-joke in the novels is the recurrence of the sentence, 'Reacher said nothing.') there is no shortage of dialogue. The vocabulary and syntax are contemporary North American ('He knew the drill.'<sup>167</sup> ... 'It was a smart play ...'<sup>168</sup> 'A top floor walk-up'<sup>169</sup>) but, above all else, it is the easy looseness of delivery that makes it such a pleasurable read.

In 2014, Andy Martin, a lecturer in French literature at the University of Cambridge, approached the author with a request that he might 'shadow' Child as he worked on his twentieth Reacher novel (*Make Me*). Child agreed. In the resulting book, *Reacher Said Nothing*, Martin describes how, on the afternoon of the first day of his latest project Child typed what would become the first two pages of the novel. The opening lines are ...

Moving a guy as big as Keever wasn't easy. It was like trying to wrestle a king-size mattress off a waterbed. So they buried him close to the house. Which made sense anyway.<sup>170</sup>

Like Russell Hoban, Muriel Spark and Michele Roberts, Child claims to have little knowledge of where a narrative will go prior to embarking on it.

Martin asks him who Keever is.

---

<sup>166</sup> Child, L. (2015) *Make Me* (Bantam) p291

<sup>167</sup> Child, L. (2015) *Make Me* (Bantam) p238

<sup>168</sup> Child, L. (2015) *Make Me* (Bantam) p233

<sup>169</sup> Child, L. (2015) *Make Me* (Bantam) p214

<sup>170</sup> Child, L. (2015) *Make Me* (Bantam) p1

'I have no idea at this point,' Child tells him.<sup>171</sup>

Whoever he is, he's big and dead and, by the end of the first paragraph, buried. Child describes the use of the word 'Which' at the beginning of a sentence as 'accelerative'. A contemporary British writer would very likely choose to have that sentence continue from the previous one, worried that the ghost of their secondary school English Language teacher would materialize to point out their grammatical error. But on the other side of the Atlantic Child seems unconcerned – more interested in forward motion. Which he does from the outset. Keever may be dead, but he's moving. The novel continues to move from that point on.

It was never my intention to mimic Child's style or delivery but, more than any other contemporary writer, his books gave me the confidence to strip back my sentences and to silence my own English Language teacher in an attempt to find a tone, at least, that had both impetus and certainty.

\*

## **Conclusion**

This was a practice-based study, in which the primary aim was to research and compose a novel as well as carry out concurrent research illuminating specific aspects of the creative process. I

---

<sup>171</sup> Martin, A. (2015) *Reacher Said Nothing: Lee Child and the making of Make Me* (Bantam) p39



identified the subject matter (sleep science and the U.S. 'wake-a-thons') and a period (the late 1950s), I reviewed appropriate texts before embarking on the above tasks. I also organized a series of experiments, to be carried out at the university's Psychology Department, in which I would record and compare the states of 'hypnagogia' and 'divergent thinking' with myself as the subject, to explore whether the two states might be said to have common values.

The study's focus was a 'psychic space' that, for the writer, allows greater access to the unconscious whilst reducing inhibitions that might be said to impede creativity. The nature of a practice-based study necessitates a constant self-critical eye, but the self-consciousness that I perceived as a disruption to my psychological experiments obliged me to address instead what I identified as the writer's conundrum of being both the observer and the observed.

The novel itself underwent a significant shift during development, from the intended narrative based around the 'wake-a-thons' of the 1950s and '60s to one focusing on a woman on the run in north-west America having been incarcerated as a human guinea pig. The novel was written in a genre – 'the conspiracy thriller' – that was new to me, chosen since it seemed to best accommodate the content as it took shape.

Arguably, shifts of this sort are an inevitable part of the process and should be accepted as such, but a second and equally significant shift in the critical aspect of the research had an even greater impact on the project. Rather than simply fulfil my expectations, the study challenged my assumptions and led to a novel perspective on the creative process.

In his essay on the virtues of walking and the appreciation of nature,<sup>172</sup> Thoreau writes, 'When a traveler asked Wordsworth's servant to show him her master's study, she answered, 'Here is his library, but his study is out of doors.' One of the primary insights of the study, I would propose, is a model of the creative act that contains the same two locations identified by Wordsworth's servant, but with the writer in his/her metaphorical library whilst simultaneously projecting themselves beyond, via a process akin to 'remote viewing', where they advance, generating the narrative through the eyes of their protagonist as they encounter each fork in the narrative path. In this sense, the writer continually switches between the subjective perspective of the character(s) attempting to navigate their way through the labyrinth and the onlooker, who has the option of placing signposts to help them find their way out of the labyrinth or of putting more obstacles in their way.

The notion of 'walking dreamily' was a constant in both the novel I intended to write and the novel I actually wrote. It represents the heightened psychic state that the writer and the protagonist might be said to draw on for their shared journey, but also as a metaphorical plane on which the writer allows themselves to drift, to go beyond their knowledge, to become lost and reap the rewards therein.

I began the study hoping to form a bridge, albeit a modest one, between the disciplines of Science and Humanities<sup>173</sup> but through the research and psychological experiments found the common qualities I had hoped to establish to be based on a false equivalence and that my attempt to bring the two disciplines into closer proximity could be interpreted as an attempt to

---

<sup>172</sup> Thoreau, H.D. (1862), *Walking* (Amazon books), p4

<sup>173</sup> Best represented by C.P. Snow's 1959 Rede Lecture, *The Two Cultures*.

validate the discipline of Creative Writing by assessing it from a 'scientific' perspective, when no such validation was required.

The proposal here is that when constructing a narrative in its simplest form the author necessarily alternates between the consciousness of the floundering protagonist and an authorial omniscience. The awareness of that process and any extra weight given to either party will influence the outcome and how convincing those decisions appear.

As the focus of the study was drawn in a different direction, the original proposal in which two psychic states were compared was never fully realized. That would still make an intriguing line of enquiry. I can also envisage further, more particular studies in the notion of self-consciousness in Creative Writing and the balance between what aids and what restricts the writer.

Regarding the dissemination of this study's findings, I would certainly hope that the novel will be published, in which case a majority of its readers will encounter the primary artefact of my doctorate without identifying it as such. I will direct the more curious and academic reader towards the exegesis of the novel and accompanying critical research. I would also propose that the primary finding of this research study – a model in which the writer 'remote views' their protagonist – may be offered to creative writers and tutors within the discipline as a way of helping the narrative to advance: to face forward whilst envisaging the creative possibilities, as a rebuff to the tendency to consider the creative process retrospectively.

The likelihood of my forming a bridge between Science and the Humanities now appears diminished, but I would not discount the possibility of me embarking on a future project, either within or outside of academia, which necessitates exploring the relationship between them. As a practice, creative writing will always tend towards the interdisciplinary and future projects are likely to incorporate some scientific research. I do question the gains from viewing the discipline of Creative Writing in terms of a 'laboratory' or to import a scientific terminology, whilst appreciating that such views are purely conceptual, just as my findings here are no more than models that may illuminate some part of the creative process.

This study has confirmed that although certain aspects of the creative process will appear accessible to scrutiny, others will remain out of reach. The territory between the two, where the conscious and the unconscious could be said to share each other's company, remains an important area for academic study – a point from which it is possible to explore how the critical and the creative interact.

## Bibliography

- Alexander, S. (1979) *Anyone's Daughter: the life and trials of Patty Hearst* (Weidenfeld and Nicolson)
- Alpert, J. (1981) *Growing Up Underground* (Morrow)
- Andreasen, N. (2006) *The Creative Brain* (Plume)
- Arnold, K. + Vogel, K. (2007) *Sleeping and Dreaming* (Black Dog Publishing)
- Ayers, B. (2001) *Fugitive Days: memoirs of an antiwar activist* (Beacon Press)
- Baker, N. (1986) *The Mezzanine* (Penguin)
- Beaumont, C. (2015), *Perchance to Dream, selected stories* (Penguin Classics)
- Belcher, J and West, D. (1975) *Patty, Tania* (Pyramid)
- Bloch, R. (1959) *Psycho* (Bloomsbury)
- Boden, M. (1990) *The Creative Mind: myths and mechanisms* (Cardinal)
- Brody, B. (1998) *The Ethics of Biomedical Research* (Oxford)
- Browder, L. (2006) *Her Best Shot: women and guns in America* (University of North Carolina Press)
- Buchan, J. (1915) *The Thirty-nine Steps* (Penguin Classics)
- Burrough, B. (2015) *Days of Rage* (Penguin)
- Calle, S. (1984) *L'Hotel* (Idea Books)
- Calle, S. (2015) *Suite Venitienne* (Siglio)
- Cheever, J. (1979) *The Stories of John Cheever* (Vintage)
- Child, L. (1997) *Killing Floor* (Bantam)
- Child, L. (2001) *Echo Burning* (Bantam)
- Child, L. (2002) *Without Fail* (Bantam)
- Child, L. (2007) *Bad Luck and Trouble* (Bantam)
- Child, L. (2010) *61 Hours* (Bantam)
- Child, L. (2012) *A Wanted Man* (Bantam)
- Child, L. (2013) *Never Go Back* (Bantam)
- Child, L. (2015) *Make Me* (Bantam)
- Child, L. (2017) *The Midnight Line* (Bantam)
- Chokroverty, S. (2000) *Clinical Companion to Sleep Disorders Medicine* (Butterworth Heinemann)
- Clare, H. (2018) *Something of his Art: walking to Lubeck with J.S. Bach* (Little Toller)

Collins, A. (1988) *In the Sleep Room* (Lester and Orpen Dennys)

Collins, A. (1859) *The Woman in White* (Penguin Popular Classics)

Condon, R. (1959) *The Manchurian Candidate* (Orion)

Condon, R. (1974) *Winter Kills* (Dell)

Cvetic, M. (1959) *The Big Decision* (The Big Decision)

Dali, S. (1948) *50 Secrets of Magic Craftsmanship* (Courier Corporation)

Dement, W. C. (1999) *The Promise of Sleep* (Pan)

Dement, W. C. (1972) *Some Must Watch While Some Must Sleep* (W.H. Freeman)

Dickens, C. (1860) *Night Walks* (Penguin)

Doctorow, E.L. (1972) *The Book of Daniel* (Picador)

Donaldson, M. (1992) *Human Minds, an exploration* (Penguin)

Drummond, B. (2000) *45* (Abacus)

Eagleman, D (2011) *Incognito: the secret lives of the brain* (Canongate)

Flanagan, O. (2000) *Dreaming Souls* (Oxford)

Flynn, G. (2006) *Sharp Objects* (Penguin)

Flynn, G. (2012) *Gone Girl* (Penguin)

French, M. (1997) *US Economic and Social History Since 1945* (Manchester University Press)

Gibson, J. (1984) *The Nurse's Materia Medica* (Blackwell Scientific Publications)

Gilbert, P. G. (1896) *On the Effects of Loss of Sleep* (University of Iowa)

Goldberg, R.A. (2001) *Enemies Within: the culture of conspiracy in modern America* (Yale University Press)

Goldman, W. (1974) *Marathon Man* (Bloomsbury)

Graebner, W. (2008) *Patty's Got a Gun* (Chicago)

Grady, J. (1974) *Six Days of the Condor* (No Exit Press)

Hadfield, J.A. (1954) *Dreams and Nightmares* (Pelican)

Haggard, H.R. (1886) *She* (Penguin Classics)

Halberstam, D. (1993) *The Fifties* (Fawcett Columbine)

Haldane, J.B.S. (1927) *Possible Worlds and other essays* (Transaction)

Harrison, Y. (1999) *Sleep Talking* (Blandford)

Hearst, P. (1982) *Every Little Thing* (Methuen)

Hendershot, C. (2003) *Anti-communism and Popular Culture in Mid-Century America* (McFarland)

Herzog, W. (1980) *Of Walking in Ice* (Vintage)

Higgs, J. (2006) *I Have America Surrounded* (Friday Books)

Hofstadter, R. (1964) *The Paranoid Style in American Politics* (Vintage)

Holroyd, S. (1976) *Minds Without Boundaries* (Aldus Books)

Hoover, J. (1958) *Masters of Deceit* (Pocket book)

Horne, J. (2006) *Sleepfaring* (Oxford University Press)

Horne, J. (1988) *Why we sleep* (Oxford University Press)

Horowitz, D. (1997) *Radical Son* (Touchstone)

Household, G. (1939) *Rogue Male* (Orion)

Hurston, Z.N. (1935) *Mules and Men* (Harper Perennial)

Huxley, A. (1954) *The Door of Perception* (Harper Perennial)

Jackson, M. & Stegmaier (2019) *Ella May Does It Her Way* (Quarto)

Jackson, M. (2011) *Junior Science* (Faber)

Jackson, M. (1997) *The Underground Man* (Picador)

Jackson, M. (2010) *The Widow's Tale* (Faber and Faber)

Jackson, M. (2016) *Yuki chan in Bronte Country* (Faber and Faber)

Jacobsen, A. (2017) *Phenomena: the secret history of the U.S. government's investigations into extrasensory perception and psychokinesis* (Back Bay Books)

Jenkins, P. (2006) *Decade of Nightmares* (Oxford University Press)

Jones, J. (1981) *Bad Blood: the Tuskegee syphilis experiment* (Free Press)

Jouvet, M. (1993) *The Paradox of Sleep* (MIT)

Kaufmann, S. & J. (Ed.) (2009) *The Psychology of Creative Writing* (Cambridge University Press)

Kerouac, J. (1957) *On the Road* (Penguin)

Kesey, Ken (1962) *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (Picador)

Kety, S. (1967) *Sleep and Altered States of Consciousness* (Williams and Wilkins)

Kinsey, A. (1948/53) *Sexual Behaviour in the Human Male / Female* (Saunders)

Kleitman, N. (1939) *Sleep and Wakefulness* (Chicago University Press)

Koch, C. (2012) *Consciousness: confessions of a romantic reductionist* (MIT)

Koestler, A. (1964) *The Act of Creation* (Pan)

Kroll, J. and Harper, G. (2013) *Research Methods in Creative Writing* (Macmillan)

Krug, S. (1963) *Handbook for the IPAT Anxiety Scale* (Institute for Personality and Ability Testing Campaign, Illinois)

Kushida, K.A. (2005) *Sleep Deprivation: basic science, physiology and behavior* (Marcel Dekker)

Kwint, M and Wingate, R. (2012) *Brains: the mind as matter* (Wellcome Collection)

Lavie, P (1996) *The Enchanted World of Sleep* (Yale University Press)

Leary, T. (1970) *Jail Notes* (New English Library)

Lewis, P. (2013) *The Secret World of Sleep* (Macmillan)

Lockley, S.W., Foster, R.G. (2012) *Sleep: A very short introduction* (Oxford University Press)

Martin, A. (2015) *Reacher Said Nothing: Lee Child and the making of Make Me* (Bantam)

Martin, P. (2002) *Counting Sheep* (Harper Collins)

Matheson, R. (2008) *Button, Button: uncanny stories* (Tor)

Matheson, R. (2002) *Duel* (Tor)

Mavromatis, A. (1987) *Hypnagogia* (Thyrsos)

McCoy, H. (1935) *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* (Serpent's Tale)

McInerney, J. (1984) *Bright Lights, Big City* (Bloomsbury)

McKee, R. (1998) *Story* (Methuen)

McEwen, B, Schmeck, H. (Ed) (1994) *The Hostage Brain* (The Rockefeller University Press)

McKellar, P. (1957) *Imagination and Thinking* (Cohen and West)

McLellan and Avery, P. (1977) *The Voices of Guns* (G.P. Putnam's sons)

Melley, T. (2000) *Empire of Conspiracy: the culture of paranoia in postwar America* (Cornell University Press)

Moore, L. (1985) *Self-help* (Faber and Faber)

Newton, M. (2012) *Age of Assassins: A history of Conspiracy and Political Violence* (Faber and Faber)

O'Conner, F. (1952) *Wise Blood* (Faber and Faber)

Oswald, I. (1974) *Sleep* (Penguin)

Oswald, I. (1962) *Sleeping and Waking* (Elsevier)

Packard, V. (1957) *The Hidden Persuaders* (Penguin)

Papworth, M.H. (1967) *Human Guinea Pigs* (Beacon Press)

Payne, R.E. (2000) *I was a Communist for the FBI: Matt Cvetic* (Penn State Press)

Philbrick, H. (1952) *I Led Three Lives: Citizen, Communist, Counterspy* (Hamish Hamilton)

Pirsig, R.M. (1974) *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (Harpercollins)

Plimpton, G. (1989) *The Writer's Chapbook* (Penguin)

Poincare, H. (1902) *The Foundations of Science* (Createspace)

Randall, D. (2012) *Dreamland: adventures in the strange science of sleep* (W.W. Norton and Co.)



Reid, J.L. (1982) *Lecture Notes on Clinical Pharmacology* (Blackwell Scientific Publications)

Reisman, D. (1961) *The Lonely Crowd* (Yale University Press)

Robinson, E. & Powell, D. (Eds) (1996) *John Clare by himself* (Carcenet Press)

Rolls, G. (2005) *Classic Case Studies in Psychology* (Routledge)

Sacks, O. (2012) *Hallucinations* (Picador)

Santa Fe Institute Working Group (2015) *How Creativity Works in the Brain* (Art Works / National Endowment for the Arts)

Sargant, W. (1957) *Battle for the Mind* (Pan Piper)

Schrecker, E. (1994) *The Age of McCarthyism: a brief history, with documents* (Bedford)

Sebald, W.G. (1995) *The Rings of Saturn* (Harvill)

Seth, A. (2017) *30-second Brain* (Quarto)

Shaw, W. (1994) *Spying in Guruland, inside Britain's cults* (4<sup>th</sup> Estate)

Shelley, M. (1818) *Frankenstein* (Collins Classics)

Sinclair, I. (2005) *Edge of the Orizon* (Hamish Hamilton)

Sinclair, I. (1997) *Lights Out for the Territory* (Granta)

Singer, L (1970) *The Parallax View* (New English Library)

Singer, J. (1975) *Daydreaming and Fantasy* (Oxford University Press)

Skousen, W.C. (1958) *The Naked Communist* (Createspace)

Snow, C.P. (1960) *The Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution* (Cambridge University Press)

Solnit, R. (2017) *A Field Guide to Getting Lost* (Cannongate)

Solnit, R. (2001) *Wanderlust: a history of walking* (Verso)

Sontag S. (1965) *The Imagination of Disaster* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux)

Spears, R. (2007) *American Slang Dictionary* (McGraw Hill)

Streatfield, D. (2006) *Brainwash, the secret history of mind control* (Hodder)

Thoreau, D.H. (1947) *The Portable Thoreau* (Penguin)

Thoreau, D.H. (1862) *Walking* (Amazon books)

Toobin, J. (2016) *American Heiress, The wild saga of the kidnapping, crimes and trial of Patty Hearst* (Anchor Books)

Tone, A. (2009) *The Age of Anxiety: A history of America's Turbulent History with Tranquilizers* (Basic Books)

Turner, P. and Richens, A. (1977) *Clinical Pharmacology* (Churchill Livingstone Medical Text)

Tyrrell, D. & Fielder, M. (2002) *Cold Wars* (Oxford University Press)

Vartanian, O. et al (2013) *The Neuroscience of Creativity* (MIT Press)

Wallas, G. (1926) *The Art of Thought* (Solis Press)

Webb, J. (2015) *Researching Creative Writing* (Frontinus)

Weinstein, H. (1988) *A Father, a Son and the C.I.A.* (James Lorimer and Co.)

Whyte, W.H. (1956) *The Organization Man* (Penguin)

Wilson, J.R. (1964) *The Mind* (Time Life Library)

Wilson, S. (1955) *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (Penguin)

Windt, J.M. (2015) *Dreaming: a conceptual framework for philosophy of mind and empirical research* (MIT)

Wolfe, T. (1979) *The Right Stuff* (Black Swan)

Wolfe, T. (1968) *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (Black Swan)

Wright Mills, C. (1951) *White Collar* (Oxford University Press)

Yates, R. (1961) *Revolutionary Road* (Methuen)

#### **Journals / papers**

Abraham, A. and Windman, S. (2007) The diverse operations and the prospect of applying a cognitive neuroscience perspective. *Methods*, 42, (1), 38-48

Andreasen, N. (2011) A Journey into Chaos: Creativity and the Unconscious. *Mens Sana Monographs*, 9, (1), 42-53

Bargh, J. and Morsella, E. (2008) The Unconscious Mind. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 3, (1), 73-79

Beaty, R. et al (2015) Creative Cognition and Brain Network Dynamics. *Trends in Cognitive Science*, 20, (2), 87-95

Berkenkotter, C. and Murray, D. (1983) The Planning Strategies of a Publishing Writer; and Responses of Laboratory Rat; or Being Protooled. *College Composition and Communication*, 34 (2) 156-172

Deitrich, A. (2004) The Cognitive Neuroscience of Creativity. *Psychonomic Bulletin and Review*, 11, (6), 1011-1026

Deitrich, A. (2007) Who's Afraid of a Cognitive Neuroscience of Creativity? *Methods*, 42, (1), 22-27

- Deitrich, A. and Haider, H.I.(2014) Human creativity, evolutionary algorithms, and predictive representations: the mechanics of thought trials. *Psychonomic Bulletin and Review*, 22, (4), 897-915
- Deitrich, A. and Kanso, R. (2010) A Review of EEG, ERP and Neuroimaging Studies of Creativity and Insight. *Psychological Bulletin*, 136, (5), 822-846
- Fink, A, et al. (2007) Creativity meets neuroscience: experimental tasks for the neuroscientific study of creative thinking. *Methods*, 42, (1), 68-76
- Fink, A. and Benedek, M. (2014) EEG alpha power and creative ideation. *Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Reviews*, 44, 111-123
- Jung, R., Mead, B., Carrasco, J. and Floris, R. (2013) The Structure of Creative Cognition in the Human Brain. *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 7, 330
- Katz, A. (1979) Creativity and the Cerebral Hemispheres. *American Psychologist*, 34, (3), 279-280
- Martindale, C. and Hasenfus, N.(1978) EEG Differences as a Function of Creativity. *Biological Psychology*, 6, (3), 157-167
- Shah, C. et al (2011) Neural correlates of Creative Writing: an fMRI study. *Neural Brain Mapping*, 34, (5), 1088-1101

### **Magazine / newspaper articles**

- Arnott, J. (2017) I fear the sack every day from the best job I've ever had. *The Guardian*, Saturday, 18 February
- Atwood, M. (2020) Caught in time's current. *The Guardian Review*, Saturday, 7 November
- Bartlett, T. (2010) The Stay-awake men. *The New York Times*, Thursday, 22 April
- Gardner, R. (2007) What it feels like to stay awake for eleven days. *Esquire Magazine*, Wednesday, 7 March
- Helmore, E. (1999) Obituary: Dr Louis Jolyon West. *The Independent*, Monday, 11 January
- Hendrix, J. (2015) Herzog takes a walk. *Slate Magazine*, Tuesday, 5 May
- Mullen, J. (2010) The Guardian book club: Riddley Walker by Russell Hoban. *The Guardian*, Friday, 26 November
- Ravo, N. (2001) Peter Tripp, 73, popular disc jockey (obituary). *The New York Times*, Friday 13 February

