Volume Two – Exegesis

*My Hideous Progeny: Kazuo Ishiguro's Never Let Me Go as an evolution of Mary Shelley's Frankenstein analysed through the lifecycle of the scientifically created human monster.*

An exegesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Evelyn Tsitas

B.Ed  Grad Dip (Media, Communications and Information Technology Law)

School of Creative Media
Portfolio of Design and Social Context

RMIT University
March 2008
Declaration

I certify that:

- Except where due acknowledgement is made, the work is mine alone;
- The work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award;
- The content of the thesis is the result of the work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program;
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Signed……………………………………………………….Evelyn Tsitas, March 2008
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Research Question:

Is Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* an evolution of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and thus a Gothic horror novel?
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The following people provided editorial assistance with the exegesis: Alison Goodman (senior supervisor), Dr Adam Casey (second supervisor), Dr Ron Gallagher and Antoni Jach.
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This exegesis considers Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *Never Let Me Go* as a contemporary Gothic text which utilises the scientifically created human monster. Through investigating the device of the literary scientifically created human monster, originating with the creature in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, I have noted a lifecycle which is unique to these literary monsters. This exegesis explores the monster's lifecycle looking at the replicants in Ridley Scott's movie *Blade Runner*, the clones in *Never Let Me Go*, and Frankenstein's creature. In discussions of Gothic literature and the contemporary Gothic, this exegesis considers what happens when science takes over from the maternal. In doing so, I consider the reasons why *Never Let Me Go* is a reworking and evolution of the Gothic horror novel and Ishiguro's monster-clones are scientifically created human monsters.
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INTRODUCTION

Literary monsters fulfill many roles. They scare, shock and blur the distinction between human and other. Literary monsters can take many forms, such as the Chimera of ancient legend, but I am interested in a particular type of monster first developed by Mary Shelley in her 1818 novel *Frankenstein:* an artificially created human which gave rise to questions about human identity. Shelley captured the zeitgeist of the early nineteenth century when scientific discovery gave rise to the fear that we play God with nature at our own peril. Her scientist, Dr Victor Frankenstein, bypassed the laws of nature and role of woman as creator of life when he animated a creature made from the body parts of the dead.

I have coined the term *the scientifically created human monster* to define a literary monster that is not a spontaneous mutation or figment of mythology, neither is it an animal-human hybrid or a human-machine cyborg. Rather, it has been purposefully created by science from human genetic material and has human physiognomy and intelligence.

Sometimes identifying such a monster is straightforward. Mary Shelley's creature was hideous beyond belief. It is much harder when they are the replicants from Philip K. Dick's 1968 novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* and Ridley Scott's subsequent 1982 movie adaptation *Blade Runner,* who require an empathy test to detect their origins. It is almost impossible to expose the clones from Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go,* who are so perfectly human one has to know what they are to detect they are monsters.

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3 All references to this film are drawn from *Blade Runner,* DVD, directed by Ridley Scott (USA: Warner Bros Pictures, 1982).
In exploring the human monster in these works, I have identified significant patterns in the way these monsters are depicted in fiction. I have discovered they have a unique lifecycle that sets them apart from humans. It is this lifecycle that I will explore by examining the clones in Ishiguro’s novel, *Never Let Me Go*, and the replicants in Dick’s novel and Scott’s film against Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, which introduced the human monster 190 years ago. In doing so, I will show that *Never Let Me Go* is an evolution of *Frankenstein* and thus a Gothic horror novel.

In examining science, genetics and popular culture, Jon Turney writes that the *Frankenstein* story is “too deeply embedded in our culture now not to leave its traces or raise echoes whenever we discuss our attitude to science and scientists.” He believes that as the products of biological manipulation become ubiquitous, there is every reason for the grip of the story to strengthen. It is not difficult, then, to create strong parallels between *Frankenstein*, *Blade Runner* and *Never Let Me Go*.

While I will be drawing on some examples in Dick’s book, for the purposes of this exegesis, I will be predominantly referencing *Blade Runner* as a Gothic film when I analyse the replicants. In the transfer from the book to the screen, Scott has created a Gothic environment that conveys a sense of darkness that fitted into my Gothic exploration. He also took Dick’s replicant and turned it from a cyborg into a human monster, providing an alternative definition of an Android that is more complex and human-like than Dick’s “Andys”.

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Link Between Exegesis And Creative Project

My creative project is a Gothic horror novel which investigates the fictional possibility of reincarnation after organ donation. *The Isis Club* explores a love so intense and a desire for a child so great that it transcends the biological barrier that separates the living from the dead. My protagonist, Xanthe Kraikos, seeks to find her dead lover’s soul in the hope that she can have his posthumous child. *The Isis Club* is a retelling of the 3000 year old ancient Egyptian Isis myth. After a serious car accident, Xanthe wakes from a coma to discover her partner’s estranged wife has turned off his life support and donated his organs. Literally believing that he lives on in others, she tracks down those who have his organs and briefly resurrects his soul with the help of a necromancer she discovered at the Isis Club.

While writing the novel, I explored the Gothic horror novel, and researched body ownership, asking such questions as: who owns our bodies when we die, and if we have a soul, does it die with us or can it be transplanted along with our organs?

The theme of raising a body from the dead put me on the path to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Her story about Victor Frankenstein, a scientist who creates a unique human monster made from the body parts of the dead and then abandons it to a hostile world with tragic consequences, had an obvious modern interpretation in *Blade Runner*, with bounty hunter Rick Deckard sent to kill a group of replicants (Leon, Roy, Zhora and Pris) who have escaped off-world colonies to find their creator and prolong their short life spans. As I investigated organ donation for the background of my novel, I was struck by the similarities of both stories to Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*, which is about children born to be live organ donors. All had artificially constructed humans who had been created for a specific purpose and in each case the monsters suffered because of
their perceived inhumanity. Yet these monsters seemed, in the end, more human than those who wanted to destroy them.

My research into this exegesis has helped me create the monster in my own novel and shown me how other writers have handled the complex challenge of writing from a monster's perspective. In *Frankenstein*, Shelley powerfully gives the creature a voice and Ishiguro writes from a clone's point of view with quiet pathos. In *Blade Runner*, Scott provides replicant leader Roy Batty with a complex inner life that is in sharp contrast to the film's emotionally cold hero Deckard. By being privilege to the monster’s inner thoughts, the reader feels the turmoil and bewilderment of the monster's predicament.

Although my protagonist Xanthe is not a scientifically created human monster, she is on a collision course with one when Egyptologist Seth Barker receives her dead lover’s heart in a transplant operation. My monster Seth is loosely based on the mythological Set of the Ancient Egyptian Isis Myth, who kills and dismembers his brother King Osiris and usurps his throne. In *The Isis Club*, Seth kills the other recipients of Lawrence's organs in order to stop his own organ rejection. In his mind, gathering these organs and keeping them in canopic jars will increase his life force.

At the same time as writing *The Isis Club*, I began analysing and writing academic papers on the issue of organ and body ownership and its relationship to the human soul. While these topics are no longer used in this final version of my exegesis, I presented papers on Gothic horror, the literary monster and body ownership at the Australasian Bioethics Conferences in 2006\(^6\) and 2007\(^7\). In 2007 I gave a paper on body ownership.

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\(^7\) Evelyn Tsitas, “Without Fear or Favour? The Role Of The Media In Perpetuating And Exposing Sources Of Exclusion From Health Care” (paper presented to the Australasian Bioethics Association and Australian & New...
piracy in literature at the AntiTHESIS symposium "Rum, Sodomy and the Lash" at the School of Creative Studies, University of Melbourne.\(^8\) I also published an academic paper that discussed the role of the creative arts in the bioethics debates.\(^9\)

As I reflect on the process, it seems that my research into literary monsters has helped me define ways to explain the violent trajectory of Seth Barker, the antagonist in \textit{The Isis Club}. After Seth receives a transplanted heart, he becomes a scientifically created human monster and adopts the unique lifecycle which ends at the conclusion of the novel with his early and painful death. With my research into the Gothic and contemporary Gothic genre, I realised that I was indeed writing a Gothic novel and not a horror or science fiction novel.

While my creative project and exegesis have diverged into different (although related) areas, my investigation has proved useful in understanding contemporary Gothic fiction’s commitment to exploring the aesthetics of fear.

\textbf{Literature Review}

\textit{Frankenstein} was the first Gothic horror novel to introduce the scientifically created human monster. However, rather than becoming the precedent for a canon of work exploring this theme, the genre moved quickly on to the werewolf, vampire, cannibal, slasher and psychopath. Critic Barbara Creed calls these "transformative monsters" and says: "In horror, transformation is represented as a regressive process in

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which the animal world takes over from civilised, human domain as man regresses into an uncanny beast, familiar yet unfamiliar."\(^{10}\)

In the twentieth century, the interest in the scientifically created human monster gave way to the human-machine, with robots and human simulacrum. In this exegesis, I will not focus on the cyborg or the transformative monster, but on the scientifically created human in fiction which utilises genetic engineering for its construction. Both the clones in *Never Let Me Go*, and the replicants in *Blade Runner* are human rather than cyborgs, and Victor Frankenstein's creature was brought to life from the body parts of dead humans. The monsters I will investigate are flesh and blood creatures created by man using scientific knowledge. The result is the monsters sharing a unique lifecycle in which their suffering and premature death is guaranteed.

While Shelley's *Frankenstein* has been the subject of exhaustive literary study as a Gothic novel, and comparisons have been made between *Frankenstein* and Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*,\(^1\) Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* has not, as far as I have found, been analysed as a novel of either Gothic horror or a study of human monsters. As *Never Let Me Go* is a recent novel, there have been a limited number of literary theorists writing about it. The important critical books on Ishiguro's work are all dated before he wrote and released *Never Let Me Go*,\(^2\) and these critique his work from a mostly postcolonial perspective. Book reviews on the internet have noted *Never Let Me Go* is "part mystery, part Gothic Horror, and part sci-fi in its exploration of humanness", while Gail Caldwell from the *Boston Globe* called it "an exercise in Gothic gloom".\(^3\) Michiko Katutani, from

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\(^{10}\) Barbara Creed, *Phallic Panic: Film, Horror and the Primal Uncanny* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2005), xiii.


the *New York Times Book Review* labelled *Never Let Me Go* "A Gothic tour de force", but my searches have not revealed any scholarly book, paper or dissertation referring to *Never Let Me Go* as a Gothic horror.

In a session for a *Guardian Review* Book Club event, Ishiguro spoke with UCL Professor of English, John Mullan, and said that while having characters who were clones began as a plot device to explore young people facing up to mortality, he quickly realised that the questions it raised were not futurist ones but ancient ones, such as do you have a soul, and if you have been created, do you have an obligation to fulfill the reasons you have been made? Ishiguro told the audience that he wanted to explore what is it that makes a human a human, and he didn't want to write a book about a strange world, rather he wanted a distorted mirror of our own experiences.

*Never Let Me Go* can be described as a Gothic text by its use of many of the devices of the Gothic genre including doubles, monsters, obsession with the body, entrapment and the way it provokes unease. While I do not dispute the value of reading Dick's novel and Scott's adaptation as science fiction, I suggest both works also display many Gothic conventions. In *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* Dick displays a Gothic interest in decayed buildings, haunted spaces, and use of doubles. Dick also blurs the lines between categories of animal, cyborg, and human which can be read as Gothic in the way the transgression of these boundaries provokes unease and horror. Scott's *Blade Runner* draws some of its most structurally significant tropes from among the conventions of the Gothic tradition, in particular the doppelganger or "doubles" who are the Replicants. This Gothic device represents an extreme moment when two

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16 I will give a definition of Gothic literature later in this introduction.
characters think, act, and feel so much alike they can no longer be distinguished from each other, notably during the climactic fight scene between Roy and Deckard at the Bradbury Building, when both manipulate their injured hands so they can kill each other.

In *Charles Dickens in Cyberspace: The Afterlife of the Nineteenth Century in Post Modern Culture*, Jay Clayton points out that by bringing Mary Shelley's story of the creation of an artificial human into the era of genetic engineering and new reproductive technologies, *Blade Runner* succeeds in "crystallizing some of the fears, uncertainties and desires that surround the coming of the postmodern." His view that Frankenstein's creature is the precursor to cyborgs and clones fits with my analysis of *Never Let Me Go* as an evolution of *Frankenstein*. Support for my argument that Blade Runner is a Gothic film also comes from *A Routledge Literary Sourcebook on Mary Shelley's Frankenstein*. Timothy Morton calls *Blade Runner* "an extended allusion to Frankenstein", and says the film fully appreciates what makes *Frankenstein* disturbing: "This is not the creature's difference from, but its similarity to human beings."

The brilliance of *Blade Runner* and of *Frankenstein*, is not so much to point out that artificial life and intelligence are possible, but that human life already is this artificial intelligence.

Therefore, rather than analyse the replicants using the theories of Donna J. Haraway and her "Manifesto for Cyborgs", I have instead read *Blade Runner* as a

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20 ibid., 76.
Gothic film about human monsters rather than cyborgs, and so have turned my critical attention to Gothic theorists.

As there is an abundance of academic discussions about Mary Shelley as a Gothic novelist and analysis of *Frankenstein*'s monster, I have narrowed my research to investigation of her work as explored by feminist literary critics. Those critics who have, within the past two decades, explored the Gothic as female, and focused on the monstrous body, have proved most relevant.

Renowned gender theorist Judith Halberstam, who argues in her work *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* that the emergence of the monster within Gothic fiction marks a peculiarly modern emphasis upon the horror of particular kinds of bodies, has been important in my understanding of the monster's emerging sexuality. For Halberstam, the monster's status as a sexual outlaw and social pariah in *Frankenstein* are mutually dependent. Halbertsam says the Gothic monster represents many answers to questions of who must be removed from the community at large. In *Blade Runner*, this removal is literal, for the replicants are declared illegal on Earth, which can be seen as their place of creation or "motherland". They are outcasts, not allowed home or they will be killed if discovered. In *Never Let Me Go*, the clones are separated from society so they can be exploited as spare parts factories without upsetting the "normals" (non-clones), who use them to prolong their lives.

I have also found useful Mellor's psychoanalytic perspective in her book *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters*. She addresses the many ways in which the novel, and at the heart of it, the monster, portrays the consequences of the failure of the

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23 Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, 42.
24 ibid., 5.
family, and the damage wrought when the mother (or a nurturing parental love) is absent.\textsuperscript{25}

In \textit{Never Let Me Go} and \textit{Blade Runner} we are constantly confronted with doubles (clones and replicants), repressed and triggered memories (a hallmark of Ishiguro's works)\textsuperscript{26} and photographs (essential to the replicants' implanted memories). These all provide an uneasy feeling which can be attributed to the Gothic use of the "uncanny". In Sigmund Freud's famous 1919 paper "\textit{Das Unheimlich}" ("The Uncanny")\textsuperscript{27} the origins of the word uncanny come from the German "\textit{unheimlich}" which literally means "unhomely". Here Freud analyses the ways in which seemingly ordinary things can have an eerie and ominous inner life, and the reason things are frightening because they are new and unfamiliar. I will draw on Freud's theory of the uncanny when exploring the reason the clones and replicants invoke horror in others even though they do not look horrific.

While there has been much written about literary monsters, I have not discovered any investigation into their unique lifecycle, and this is my original contribution to the field of study.

\textbf{Gothic Horror}

While the natural breeding ground for monsters may be assumed to be science fiction, the scientifically created human monster in fact resides in Gothic fiction, a genre that has been defined according to its interest in transgression and decay and its

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\textsuperscript{26} Peter Childs, \textit{Contemporary Novelists: British Fiction Since 1970} (Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005),129.
\end{flushright}
commitment to exploring the aesthetics of fear. Lucie Armitt points out that critics widely regarded *Frankenstein* as an early example of cross-fertilisation between the Gothic romance and science fiction, and the roots of the science fiction genre are within the Gothic tradition.

The Gothic novel began to emerge in the eighteenth century when the forces of industrialisation were transforming the structures of society and the very idea of what it meant to be human against the groundswell of rapid technological change. According to Gothic theorist David Punter, discoveries in the sciences only served to aggravate a sense of alienation and further disturb notions of human identity.

There is a strong parallel between the last half of the eighteenth century with its technological changes, and the early twenty first century, where huge advances have occurred in the process of cloning alongside rapidly improving surgical techniques for organ donation and stem cell technology. This is the setting for my novel, *The Isis Club*, which takes its title from a group of people who feel that they were cheated of mourning a "good death" because they were coerced into consenting to their loved one's organ donations. What does it mean to die? When does death happen? The concept of death has changed radically since Mary Shelley's time. This is the age of brain death and with this concept comes many unresolved issues about grief and the ability to say goodbye which I explore in my novel.

Victor Frankenstein's grave-robbing incidents anchor Shelley's story in the medical realities of its day, and his use of electricity to bring the creature to life mirrored

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experiments in electrical treatment (also known as Galvanism). Likewise, the clones depicted in *Blade Runner* and *Never Let Me Go* are part of the scientific landscape of their time. Both cloning and stem cell research were made possible by advances in IVF that took place in the 1970s, and by 2005, when *Never Let Me Go* was released, sheep, cows, pigs, goats, mice, rabbits, horses, rats, a cat and a mule had all been cloned by nuclear transfer.

Just as in Mary Shelley’s age, there is now an enormous debate in society about what these technological leaps have meant for humanity. Every time a boundary is pushed with reproductive technologies, moral panic is waged in the popular press. The scientific advances which create and prolong life also cause a deep angst about the future of the human race. What will happen if women over fifty give birth to children as a result of IVF and donor eggs? Will we still be human if we are fitted out with transgenic pig hearts? This prospect of the end of the human race through scientific, rather than divine intervention, is one that fictions such as the Gothic confront. The power of Gothic fiction stems from the manner in which it helps us address and disguise some of our most important desires, quandaries, and sources of anxiety, from the internal and mental to the widely social and cultural.

*Frankenstein*, *Never Let Me Go* and *Blade Runner* explore what happens when science takes over from the role of the maternal. What are the responsibilities of creating a new species? Is that species human if it is created from the building blocks of humans? All scientifically created human monsters seek out their makers to find answers to these questions. However, as replicant Roy Batty observes in *Blade Runner*: “It is not an easy thing to meet your maker.” Jay Clayton observes that this is a canny pun: “since

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the idea of meeting his maker refers as much to Roy's impending death as to facing proof of his artificial origin."35

The Structure Of The Exegesis

I have set this exegesis out in three chapters that chronicle the defining events in the scientifically created human monster's life in the novels *Frankenstein* and *Never Let Me Go*, with reference also to the replicants in *Blade Runner*. From this analysis I will distil the reasons why *Never Let Me Go* is a reworking and evolution of the Gothic horror novel and Ishiguro's monster-clones are scientifically created human monsters (hereafter called "the monster").

In the body of this exegesis, I will refer to Shelley's monster as "the creature", Ishiguro's monster-clones as "the clones" and *Blade Runner's* monsters as "replicants" as I determine the boundaries of what makes them both human and "other". In doing this, I will be examining Halberstam and Mellor's theories against my evidence in the following chapters:

In chapter one, I will consider the monster's inhuman provenance, its rejection by its creator and why people are repulsed by them. It is here the evolution of the monster begins. As monsters become indistinguishable from humans visually - as in the case of the clones and the replicants - other ways must be found to contain them from society.

In chapter two, I will discuss the monster's emerging independence and its realisation that it is a monster. I will explore how the search for identity - on the part of the monsters - takes the form of a search for role models both in real life and in literature. I will also examine how monsters define themselves in terms of sexuality and in their quest for a mate.

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35 Clayton, "*Frankenstein's Futurity*", 90.
Finally, in chapter three, I will investigate how monsters must have shortened lifespans and early, sacrificial deaths.

In my Conclusion, I will summarise my argument that Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* is an evolution of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and thus a Gothic horror novel, and come to a conclusion about how the insights gained by the analysis relate to my project. By documenting the lifecycle of the scientifically created human monster, I hope to show that humanity has a responsibility not to turn its back on the consequences of its own technology and scientific research.
CHAPTER ONE: My Hideous Progeny

In this chapter, I will explore the beginning of the life cycle of the scientifically created human monster in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go*, and Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*.

For the purposes of this exegesis, I have determined that this first stage encompasses the monster's birth and its rejection by its creator and society.

**Motherless**

*Frankenstein* draws on the long tradition linking monstrosity with maternal aberration and I contend that the first crucial element of the scientifically created human monster is its inhuman conception and birth. In *Frankenstein*, the creature's designation as monster goes back to the mortuary graveyard, where Dr Victor Frankenstein "collected bones from charnel-houses and disturbed, with profane fingers, the tremendous secrets of the human frame." While the creature is the result of Frankenstein's desire to create a new species who would "bless" him as its creator and source, he is instantly repelled by the ugly creature, and then frightened by it. Like a fearful parent rejecting a deformed child, he turns away from his creation: "Now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart."

For Jenny Newman, being motherless, as much as the artificiality of the monster's birth, is crucial. She points out that mothers are scarce in *Frankenstein*: Victor,

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37 Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 55.
38 *ibid.*, 58.
Elizabeth, Justine, Safie, Agatha and Felix are all motherless. So if there is no mother, how is Victor Frankenstein's creature born? Director Kenneth Branagh, who claimed his movie *Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein* was the most accurate film depiction of her novel, has noted that the lack of specific information Shelley provides about the creation process leaves filmmakers free to imagine it in all sorts of ways: "In the earlier *Frankenstein* films, of course, you had that great Gothic laboratory and the body being hauled up into the storm...It creates the sense of epic struggle." Shelley’s actual description reveals little about the scientific process, concentrating instead on Victor Frankenstein’s lonely endeavour to animate the dead:

> It was on a dreary night of November, that I beheld the accomplishment of my toils. With an anxiety that almost amounted to agony, I collected the instruments of life around me, that I might infuse a spark of being into the lifeless thing that lay at my feet. It was already one in the morning; the rain pattered dismally against the panes, and my candle nearly burnt out, when, by the glimmer of the half-extinguished light, I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open; it breathed hard, and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs.

Mellor says that from a feminist perspective, *Frankenstein* is a book that explores a man trying to have a baby without a woman. As such, the novel is profoundly concerned with natural, as opposed to unnatural, modes of production and reproduction. Victor Frankenstein uses science to create life without women. What is

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41 ibid., 310.
42 Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 58.
significant is that an inhuman birth is essential in the generation of the scientifically
created human monster.

The replicants have no flesh and blood mother and find this deeply traumatising
(a question about his feelings for his mother results in Leon’s murder of Deckard’s
colleague in the opening scene of Blade Runner). Mary Ann Doane contends that in
Blade Runner, the terror of motherless reproduction associated with technology, and
represented by the replicants, is located as an anxiety about the loss of history, certainty
and knowledge. Just as the creature has no mother and no history, the replicants have
no past. Crucially, we are told the Nexus 6 replicants have been implanted with artificial
memories and the photos of these fake mothers are treasured. Leon risks going back to
his apartment even though hunted by Deckard, a "Blade Runner", to retrieve his
"precious photos".

Deckard’s love interest Rachael, initially refusing to believe she is a replicant,
tries to prove to Deckard she is as human as he is by showing him a photograph: "Look,
it's me with my mother." These anxieties about the maternal are precisely because none
of them has a mother; like Victor Frankenstein’s creature and Ishiguro’s clones, they are
born of an inhuman provenance.

Ishiguro’s clones are also motherless. Although they are denied a biological
identity, the clones have a social identity forged through a childhood at Hailsham, which
the other monsters lack. By giving them an idyllic time at Hailsham, Ishiguro has
provided his clones with something very human: a childhood despite their inhuman
provenance. This is part of the monster’s evolution, because it provides a sense of
belonging and a past, and is what sustains the clones. Miss Emily tells the clones what

44 Mary Ann Doane, “Technophilia: Technology, representation, and the feminine”, in The Gendered Cyborg: A
Reader, ed. Gill Kirkup, Linda Janes, Kathryn Woodward and Fiona Hovenden, 115 (London and New York:
Routledge, 2000).
45 Newman, “Mary and the monster”, 94.
Hailsham meant: "We sheltered you during those years, and we gave you your childhoods."\(^{46}\)

**Inhuman Provenance**

While Dr Victor Frankenstein creates his monster from the parts of dead bodies, Ishiguro's clones are constructed from those outside society. In this modern-day version of Frankenstein's creature, Ishiguro turns to modern science to create his monsters. While IVF technology decoupled reproduction from the sexual act, cloning goes one step further by obviating the need for the coming together of egg and sperm and taking us from the paradigm of sexual reproduction to the paradigm of twins.\(^{47}\) In *Never Let Me Go*, Ishiguro uses the Gothic motif of the double by creating a world of clones. The double (also referred to as the "Doppleganger") constitutes a recurrent trope in Gothic and horror literature, ultimately coming from the anthropological belief in the innate duality in man.\(^{48}\)

This is mirrored in *Blade Runner*'s replicants who are constructed of genetically engineered material. Replicants appear to be "born" fully adult, as Deckard is shown footage of the Nexus 6 fugitives at their "incept" dates, with artificial caulds over their heads. On their first trip to find their maker, the Nexus 6 replicants, led by Roy Batty, go to Eye World, where they interrogate Chew, an eye designer for the Tyrell Corporation, who designed the Nexus 6 eyes. He is draped with the ganglia of artificial eyes as he freezes to death in the sub-zero lab, emphasising that the replicants are, like the creature, built like a jigsaw from various body parts. In contrast, Ishiguro's clones are the reverse of the biological jigsaw used to create an artificial human in *Frankenstein* and

\(^{46}\) Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, 245.

\(^{47}\) Klotzko, *A Clone Of Your Own?*, 110.

*Blade Runner.* The clones are apparently born, or at least come to Hailsham as six year olds. They grow up and then donate their organs. They are slowly deconstructed, until they "complete", Ishiguro's disturbing euphemism for their sacrificial death and the novel's term for dying after an organ donation.

**Rejection By Society**

The creature in *Frankenstein* is "born" a physically grown man, but with an infant's understanding of the world. Despite his inhuman appearance and birth, the monster must have his primary physiological needs met after being abandoned by Victor, who, terrified of "the miserable monster" whom he had created, runs away. The creature is left to fend for himself in the forest near Ingolstadt, where his inherent human senses are awakened and he recognises food, water, shelter. He discovers that everyone he meets is terrified of him because of his monstrous appearance. He is utterly alone.

In the evolution of the monster we see both the replicants and the clones surrounded by a community of "monsters" the same as themselves. Even though they are rejected by society, at least they have each other. The clones stick together and the Nexus 6 replicants stay close.

For Ishiguro's clones, a closeted life at the Hailsham boarding house shelters them until adolescence. But while nurturing them, it also serves a function for society by keeping them away from view. A Hailsham guardian explains to Kathy H:

The world didn't want to be reminded how the donation programme really worked. They didn't want to think about you students, or about the conditions you

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were brought up in. In other words, my dears, they wanted you back in the shadows.\textsuperscript{51}

Like the creature and the clones, the replicants are also rejected by society. Used as slaves in the off-world colonies, they were declared illegal on Earth after a bloody mutiny by a Nexus 6 combat team. Derided as "skin jobs", replicants can be killed as soon as they are identified as not human. This isn't called killing, but "retirement". Doane argues that in \textit{Blade Runner}, the replicants are objects of fear because they present the humans with the specter of a motherless reproduction. Certainly, they are feared because they are "more human than human", and special Blade Runner units have orders to shoot to kill upon detection. The replicants are rejected by society in the most violent manner: advertisements for off-world colonies tout the advantages of "genetically engineered human replicants for your needs": in other words, slaves.

Central to the monster's rejection is the fact that they are viewed as less than human, and therefore disposable. In its evolution, the monster is used by society as a slave or biological repository and allowed contact with humans only as it serves a purpose for humans, otherwise, like Victor Frankenstein's creature, it is cast out.

\textbf{Hideous Wretch}

As soon as he is born, Victor Frankenstein is disgusted with the appearance of the creature he spent so long making. Gazing at the creature as he comes to life, Frankenstein describes what he has made:

\begin{quote}
His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of pearly whiteness; but these
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{51} Ishiguro, \textit{Never Let Me Go}, 242.
luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same color as the dun-white sockets in which they were set, his shrunken complexion and straight black lips.  

The creature is ugly, hideous and monstrous in his appearance. It is not just his maker and other people who find him revolting; the monster is horrified by his own appearance when he first glimpses it in a transparent pool. The monster’s increasing self-awareness represents a growing knowledge of his own monstrousness. Halberstam states that the horror within Frankenstein is dependent upon the monster’s actual hideous physical aspect, his status as anomaly and his essential foreignness. Halberstam maintains:

If the Gothic novel produces an easy answer to the question of what threatens national security and prosperity (the monster), the Gothic monster represents many answers to the question of who must be removed from the community at large.

The first life cycle of the monster answers Halberstam by stating: those who must be removed from the community are those who look like monsters. But why then do the replicants and clones need to be removed, when they are indistinguishable from humans? Is it just because, along with the creature, they share an inhuman provenance?

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52 Shelley, Frankenstein, 58.
53 ibid.,116-117.
54 Halberstam, Skin Shows, 8.
55 ibid., 5.
The Unheimlich Clones And Replicants

In an evolution of the scientifically created human monster, Ishiguro's clones do not look monstrous. In *Never Let Me Go* they look no different to anyone else, yet they are instinctively feared by those who know what they are. Their journey is one of discovering that they are reviled and feared and cannot live among the general community.

While we never get a description of what any clone looks like, beyond Kathy H growing her hair long once she is at the Cottages, we can assume they look like normal people. They are cloned from live humans, and if people do not know what they are, they pass unnoticed, unlike Frankenstein's creature, whose mere appearance is enough to terrify.

Why, then, are the clones disturbing to those who know what they are? Kathy H recalls the mysterious Madame who visited Hailsham several times a year to take away the students' best art work:

> I can see it now, the shudder she seemed to be repressing, the real dread that one of us would accidentally brush against her [...] she was afraid of us in the same way someone might be afraid of spiders. 

The German word *unheimlich*, meaning "uncanny", is one much used in the criticism of Gothic writing, and derives from Freud's essay on "The Uncanny". Freud states that "an uncanny effect is often and easily produced when the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced, as when something that we have hitherto regarded as

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imaginary appears before us in reality, or when a symbol takes over the full functions of the thing it symbolises, and so on.”

Ishiguro's clones confirm Freud's essay on "The Uncanny" in many aspects: the uncanniness they represent is entirely psychological, rather than supernatural in origin. They are familiar yet foreign at the same time, which makes them uncomfortably strange to those who know they are clones. After a visit to an art gallery in Norfolk where the owner discusses the art work with them, Ruth makes the observation that they were well treated only because the woman didn't know what they were.

Do you think she'd have talked to us like that if she'd known what we really were? What do you think she'd have said if we'd asked her? 'Excuse me, but do you think your friend was ever a clone model?' She'd have thrown us out.

It can be interpreted, then, that the clones, by the nature of their inhuman provenance, rather than their appearance, are "unheimlich". According to Freud, "the double" was originally an insurance against death, with the "immortal" soul being the first "double" of the body. However, once this has been surmounted, the "double" reverses its aspect and becomes the uncanny harbinger of death.

*Blade Runner*'s replicants also fit into this category: they are doubles of humans, genetically engineered to simulate humans in everything, excepting emotional response. They are so human they are only terminated if they are detected by a Blade Runner, and this can necessitate the elaborate Voight-Kamph test designed to evoke an empathy response. It takes Deckard much longer than usual to detect that Rachael is a replicant and he is surprised to discover she is not aware that she is not human. He asks Tyrell: "How can it not know what it is?" Deckard is referring to the replicant as *unheimlich* – "it"

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58 Freud, "The Uncanny," 246.
60 Freud, "The Uncanny," 245.
or "other". *Blade Runner* makes it clear that human physical appearance alone doesn't make an individual a human being. But the problem with the V-K test is that it contains a major internal flaw: many human adults never develop emotional maturity and this is explored in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* when Rachael says she long feared failing the V-K test because of her upbringing on a space ship, where she learnt about human interaction from a tape library. Dick's novel offers compelling "proof" that replicants are not human as they cannot fuse with Mercer, a quasi-religious figure who appears when a human grips the handles of the empathy box. Replicants are therefore judged to be lacking in empathy: the touchstone of the "authentic" person.

In *Blade Runner*, when Rachael challenges Deckard by asking him: "Have you ever retired a human by mistake?" she points to the essence of why seemingly normal looking replicants are feared, just as the hideous creature is feared; because even though they look human, replicants are in fact *unheimlich* doubles of humans. Halberstam claims that "the monster is always a master of disguise and his impermanence and fleeting sense of reality precisely marks him as monstrous." By not being able to tell if someone is really human, we are forced to question if we are in fact unique. Thus the clones, just like the replicants, allow Ishiguro to combine a scathing critique of the politics of incorporation with the psychological complexities of trying to decide who qualifies as an "authentic" human.

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62 ibid., 26.
63 Dick, *Do Androids Dream?*, 45.
66 Hayles, *How We Become Posthuman*, 162.
Summary

In this chapter I have shown how the scientifically created human monster has an inhuman provenance and is rejected by society. Victor Frankenstein's creature is visually monstrous and therefore terrifying. However, in the evolution of the scientifically created human monster, the clones and replicants appear normal and only those who know of their provenance are scared and revolted by them. This first stage of the lifecycle propels the monster into a crisis of identity.
CHAPTER TWO: Identity

In this chapter I will explore the second stage of the lifecycle of the scientifically created human monster, which I will call the monster’s search for identity. As part of its maturity, the monster explores its sexuality and capacity for love.

Search For Role Models

The most disturbing thing about the monster for the reader is not its appearance, but the fact that, for its entire monstrosity, it has feelings just like a human.67

Driven by constant rejection, the creature in Frankenstein finally finds refuge in a woodshed at the De Lacey family’s cottage. In the absence of his own parent or family or indeed a social group, the creature can only learn by observation. Because his monstrous appearance is so terrifying, this must be a clandestine education, and the creature comes to understand human speech, emotion, and history by watching the De Laceys as he hides.

Learning language plays an enormous role in the creature’s development. By hearing and watching the De Laceys, he learns to speak and read. With the acquirement of literacy, the creature is able to turn to role models in books, and he becomes fixated on fictional characters in his search for identity. Consuming Milton’s Paradise Lost, the creature compares his plight to Milton’s Satan. But Satan at least had his companions, and the creature reflects that his plight is that he is utterly alone.

This emerging self awareness drives the creature to seek acceptance from the De Lacey family. Longing for acceptance into their community, he secretly performs

domestic tasks such as chopping the wood, mimicking the family life he cannot have. Mellor suggests this is his attempt to achieve a reunion with both the natural and human order by domesticating fire.\(^{68}\) Chopping wood, and thereby controlling fire, is in contrast to the creature’s first experience with a still-smouldering flame in the forest and reveals the dual nature of fire. The creature discovers, excitedly, that it creates light in the darkness of the night, but also that it harms him when he touches it. The fire is another of Shelley’s references to the promethean fire of knowledge and also foreshadows the creature’s eventual death on a funeral pyre on the polar ice.

Once he feels he is sufficiently civilized through education, the creature approaches the blind De Lacey patriarch in the hope that he can “see” past his hideous appearance to the man within. Encouragingly, De Lacey tells him:

> I am blind and cannot judge of your countenance, but there is something in your words which persuades me that you are sincere. I am poor and an exile, but it will afford me true pleasure to be in any way serviceable to a human creature.\(^{69}\)

Shelley shows us that appearances are superficial and that what lies beneath the monster’s hideous “skin” is a human sensitivity. In this pivotal scene between De Lacey and the creature, the gap between monster and man narrows. But when the rest of the De Lacey family return to the cottage, they are terrified, faint, attack him and run away. Abandoning the cottage, the De Lacey’s break the only link the creature has with the outside world. Mellor says that because there is no longer a possibility that the De Lacey family will include the creature around their hearth or within the circle of civilization, the

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\(^{68}\) Mellor, *Mary Shelley: Her Life*, 78.

\(^{69}\) Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 136.
creature in despair reverts to raw nature in burning the cottage. Fire now becomes the Promethean flame of knowledge which can destroy.

The saying, appearance is skin deep, is taken literally in Blade Runner, where the replicants are called "skin jobs" by Deckard’s boss. The reverse of the creature, they are monstrous because of what they are inside and not what they are on the surface. As soon as they are created, the Nexus 6 replicants are shipped off-world, and only return illegally. On Earth they secretly observe humans, like the creature in the woodshed. Leon goes undercover in the Tyrell Corporation while Zhora works as an exotic dancer at Taffy’s bar. All the while, they are hiding their true identities and learning how to blend in with humans.

After Hailsham, Kathy H, Ruth and Tommy move to the Cottages where they have a period of about two years to enjoy life and gain independence away from the institution before they sign up to become donors or carers. The Cottages, the remains of an old farm, are on the outskirts of a country town and are managed by a caretaker who keeps his distance from them, revolted by their Unheimlich nature. Whether by design or not, Ishiguro gives this place of observation and refuge the same name as the De Lacey cottage.

For the clones, the Cottages are a chance to take day trips to town to observe "normals "(non-clones) in action. Unlike the creature, they do not arouse fear in the casual observer as they look "normal" and are therefore able to mix superficially within a community. In Norfolk they end up gazing in windows at office workers and wistfully wondering what they will do with their lives. It is Ruth’s dream to be an office worker, but Kathy H tells her: "It’s daft to assume you'll have the same sort of life as your model." Still, the clones can’t help but be mesmerised by the daydream of an ordinary life, and

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70 Mellor, Mary Shelley: Her Life, 78-79.
71 Ishiguro, Never Let Me Go, 152.
like Frankenstein’s creature, they longingly look in from the outside at what appears a vision of an ideal domestic (or in this case, corporate) world.

At the Cottages, Kathy H, Tommy and Ruth meet clones who come from other boarding schools and find they are envied and seen as privileged because of their time at Hailsham. Unlike the others, they have been given a final essay to help with the transition from school to the wider world. Kathy H’s chosen topic is Victorian novels, and I find it significant that Ishiguro has her reading George Eliot’s *Daniel Deronda*, a Gothic novel about fate and destiny and the search for a mother.

In my investigation it has become clear that scientifically created human monsters are obsessed with finding their mothers. The clones look for the people they were cloned from, the replicants treasure the implanted artificial memories of mothers they never really had, while the creature searches for Victor Frankenstein, who as his sole creator, is both mother and father to him. Kathy H develops an obsession with pornographic magazines, confused about her strong sexual desires. In her search for identity, she wonders if her mother was involved in pornography and that is where her own obsession comes from:

I thought if I find her picture, in one of those magazines, it'll at least explain it. I wouldn't want to go and find her or anything. It would just, you know, kind of explain why I am the way I am.\(^2\)

Photos also have a strong significance in *Blade Runner* as they are part of the artificially constructed memories that are implanted in the replicants. Tyrell explains that giving replicants a past cushions their emotions so “we can control them better”. Rachael presents Deckard with a photograph to prove she is human, while Leon hides photographs among his clothes as proof of the life he claims to have lived. These photos

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\(^2\) *ibid.*, 166.
represent to the replicants that they are truly human. Although the Nexus 6 replicants which Deckard hunts are merciless killers, they possess a growing desire for fully human experience. Roy, a "combat model", quotes two lines from William Blake's epic poem *America, A Prophecy*. His language, like the creature's insightful and thoughtful eloquence when meeting Victor Frankenstein, employs poetic and philosophical language to elicit our understanding of their plight. It is clear that Roy has become much more than a mere "combat model".

**Meeting Your Maker**

When the creature confronts Frankenstein at Montanvert, it is to ask for his creator to make him a mate. He has realised there is no place for him in any community, and all he can hope for is someone of his own kind to love. While beseeching Victor to make him a companion, his eloquent demands also contain the angry child's accusations to a wayward parent:

> You must create a female for me, with whom I can live in the interchange of those sympathies necessary for my being. This you alone can do; and I demand it of you as a right which you must not refuse to concede.

While Victor curses the creature as a demon, the creature responds in an articulate and thoughtful manner. Despite his inhuman provenance, his banishment from society and his hideous appearance, his demands are well thought out and reasonable, so much so that Victor agrees to the task.

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74 Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 147.
In contrast, when replicant Roy Batty goes to the Mayan-style pyramid structure that is the Tyrell Corporation headquarters to meet his maker, Eldon Tyrell, it is to demand more time. Just as the clones in *Never Let Me Go* seek a deferment for their organ donations so they have some quality time with their mates, the replicants want their life extended beyond the programmed four years. Roy tells Tyrell: "I want more life, fucker", but is told this isn't possible. It is fitting then that Roy kills his maker, the inadequate father who failed to give him a proper human longevity, with a "kiss of death" by pushing his thumbs into Tyrell's eyes. Clayton calls this scene in *Blade Runner* "the interplay of vulnerability and power evoked by the possession of eyes," indeed, when Roy kills the eye maker Chew, he tells him: "If only you could see what I have seen with your eyes." On one hand the eyes are physical and the property of the Tyrell Corporation, on the other hand, they reflect the mind of the replicant. The replicants kill all those who are complicit in the system which creates replicants as slaves, so they can manufacture no more. Even though Tyrell is their maker, genetic designer J.F Sebastian seals his fate when he tells Roy and Pris: "There's some of me in you". Sebastian must die and he realises this when he sees Roy killing Tyrell.

**Confronting The Guardians**

A crucial part of any quest for identity is knowing one's parents. Like the creature, the clones are compelled to seek them out, yet unlike him, they do not know of their genetic origin and can only speculate from whom they were cloned. The clones have only first names and initials - Kathy H, the protagonist, and her close friends, Tommy and Ruth –

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and this reinforces the fact that the clones are not part of any blood family and have no continuity.

As their conception and birth, via cloning, is institutionalised and not localised to one particular scientist, they must turn to the only parent figures they have known: their Hailsham guardians. Ostensibly to find out whether they can get a deferral from donating because they are in love, Kathy H and Tommy track down Madame and question her about the meaning of their lives.

There is a strong emphasis placed on creativity at Hailsham, and Tommy is mocked and ostracised because his art work isn't deemed worthy. The competitive nature of the clones' creativity is exacerbated by the periodic visits to the school by the mysterious Madame, who chooses the best work to take away. The reason is never revealed to the students, who speculate it is destined for a special gallery. Kathy H and Tommy finally put the theory to Madame that she collected their artwork so she would know if they were really in love, as their work would reveal their inner selves.

Why did we do all of that work in the first place? If we're just going to give donations anyway, then die, why all those lessons? Why all those books and discussions?\(^\text{77}\)

The clones and the reader are never given a satisfactory answer. Although Madame and Miss Emily prided themselves on Hailsham's humane approach to producing educated and cultured clones, they admit that while they showed the world it was possible for them to grow to be "as sensitive and intelligent as any ordinary human being"\(^\text{78}\) given the right environment, that didn't change the clones' status in society.

Tommy, who had such a hard time at Hailsham because he wasn't creative, continues to

\(^{77}\) Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, 237.

\(^{78}\) ibid., 239.
draw his imaginary animals even after he learns that there will be no "deferral" or delay in starting organ donations. This is part of the evolution of the monster, for despite the fact that society has decided that the clones did not have souls, and therefore there was no cruelty in keeping them alive and using them as needed, the clones display a free will and creativity of their own.

**We Shall Be Monsters**

Sexuality is crucial to the monster's identity. One of the ways that human beings define themselves is in terms of their sexuality and in their quest for a mate. As Jenny Newman observes, it is the monster's nascent sexuality in *Frankenstein* that provokes the novel's major crisis. The monster wants a mate and rebels when Victor fails to equip him with one. Shelley recognises the creature has sexual needs, as revealed in the creature's demands of Victor:

> What I ask of you is reasonable and moderate; I demand a creature of another sex, but as hideous as myself; the gratification is small, but it is all that I can receive, and it shall content me. It is true, we shall be monsters, cut off from all the world; but on that account we shall be more attached to one another.

Although Victor Frankenstein is swayed by the creature's reasoned and passionate argument, he tells himself hypothetical horror stories about the possible consequences of creating a female companion. The most compelling reason he finds not to complete the female creature, is that the monster must not be allowed to reproduce.

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79 Newman, "Mary and the monster", 92.
One of the first results of those sympathies for which the daemon thirsted would be children, and a race of devils would be propagated upon the earth, who might make the very existence of the species of man a condition precarious and full of terror.\textsuperscript{81}

It is not a refusal to let the creature have a sexual life that stops Frankenstein from bringing the female creature to life. It is the very idea of the creature reproducing himself through intercourse that so terrifies him. Mellor says that \textit{Frankenstein} is a novel profoundly concerned with natural as opposed to unnatural modes of production,\textsuperscript{82} and here we have Victor Frankenstein drawing away from the concept of the creature's ability to reproduce naturally. Why is that? Mellor speculates that \textit{Frankenstein} reveals the most powerfully felt anxieties about pregnancy, the birth process and its consequences.\textsuperscript{83} I suggest this is not only illustrated by the creature's non-sexual birth, but in the hatred \textit{Frankenstein} has for the "unborn" female creature he destroys.

Just as the clones in \textit{Never Let Me Go} must watch as their friends are slowly killed after donating vital organs, so too must the creature watch as his mate is destroyed. Mellor notes that the destruction of the female is implicit in Frankenstein's usurpation of the natural mode of human reproduction. By stealing the female's control over reproduction, he has eliminated the female's primary biological function and source of cultural power.\textsuperscript{84}

\textsuperscript{81} ibid., 170-171.
\textsuperscript{82} Mellor, \textit{Mary Shelley: Her Life}, 40.
\textsuperscript{83} ibid., 41.
\textsuperscript{84} ibid., 125.
Sex And The Clones

Unlike the creature, the clones can satisfy their sexual urges, but are told they must only have sex with each other. At Hailsham, they are given comprehensive "sex lectures" and warned they were to be "extremely careful about having sex in the outside world, especially with people who weren't students, because out there, sex meant all sorts of things." Punter notes that Gothic novelists persist in trying to come to grips with sexuality’s alternative forms - incest, sexual violence, rape - and in questioning the absolute nature of sexual roles. In its exploration of sexuality, Never Let Me Go is a very modern novel, its sexual mores informed by the advent of reliable female birth control. Clones can have sex but no children, and the novel's title is taken from a song called "Never Let Me Go" that Kathy H imagines to be about an infertile woman's miracle baby. In Shelley's era, sex and reproduction went hand in hand, but in the England of the 1990s, when Ishiguro sets his novel, sex can be simply recreational. Thus Frankenstein's creature must be denied a mate from the outset, while the clones can experience their sexuality quite early in their adolescence.

The fact that no scientifically created human monster is allowed to procreate is significant, because it points to the fact that they are not allowed a full human life of freedom of choice. As products, they are manufactured and are therefore viewed as commodities, ones that are not afforded the privilege of procreation. To reproduce would be to take their production outside the manufacturing processes designated for them: the creature is "owned" in effect by Victor Frankenstein, who will not allow him to mate. The clones and replicants are slaves who must give their bodies to society. The end result is

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85 Ishiguro, Never Let Me Go, 76.
the same. The monster must not be allowed to reproduce because its expendability is assumed.

In my novel, *The Isis Club*, I have placed Xanthe, who is desperate to get pregnant, on a collision course with Seth, who wants to take her with him into death so he can have a mate in the afterlife. Not having succeeded in getting pregnant to any of the other recipients of her lover's organs, Xanthe must make the decision to sleep with Seth knowing he is a killer, but who has her lover's precious heart. When she becomes pregnant at the end of the novel, the penultimate chapter has her agonise about her choice. Can she have a monster's child? But being a monster, Seth can't have children, for monsters are made/created not born. Xanthe discovers that Seth is infertile from his extensive drug regime, and the baby is in fact the necromancer's, a man she has fallen in love with. It is only when she gives up the pursuit of her dead lover that Xanthe can reproduce.

**Basic Pleasure Model**

In Dick's novel, the fact that Androids cannot have children is made explicit and while this is not explored in *Blade Runner*, it can be assumed this is also the case for replicants as they only have a four year life span. Likewise, in *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* copulation with an Android on earth or on the colony worlds is absolutely against the law. The *Blade Runner* replicants, however, are not limited to having sex with other replicants: Pris is a "basic pleasure model, standard item for military clubs in outer colonies" and Zhora is an exotic dancer at Taffy's bar. But when it comes to love, they mate with their own. Pris and Roy are lovers and when he discovers

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87 Dick, *Do Androids Dream?*, 168.
88 *ibid.*, 206.
her dead in the Bradbury Building, Roy poignantly lets out the long, lonely howl of the wolf before seeking his revenge against Deckard. This is a clear parallel with the creature’s reaction as he watches Victor Frankenstein destroy the female creature.

Summary

As the creature, the replicants and the clones realise what they are, there is a heightened need to discover if there is a role for them over and above their status as scientific experiment, slaves and body part providers respectively. As I have shown in this chapter, this takes the form of a search for identity which sees the monsters spending time observing people and seeking out their makers. Pivotal in their search for identity is exploring their sexuality as they realise they can only mate or find true love with other monsters.
CHAPTER THREE: An Early Death

The scientifically created human monster's life is short and marked by pain and violence. They realise they are monstrous and must live outside society, feared and hated by all. The creature has been rejected by society and has no chance of a life with a mate, so when his creator dies, this is his last link with the world, and he kills himself. The clones live with the certainty of a shortened lifespan because of organ donations, while the replicants know they only have a "fail safe" programmed four year life span.

Swept Into The Sea

The final defining stage of the scientifically created human monster is its death. The monster must die young for its short lifecycle is a consequence of its artificial creation. Its unnatural genesis is mirrored by an unnatural end. The monster's death is also marked by violence. This may be systematic, institutionalised violence in the case of the clones, who are slowly murdered until they "complete" or the creature's leap from Walton's ship, to certain death on the Arctic ice.

The creature is created three years before Victor Frankenstein starts to make the female creature\(^89\) and his probable life span is no more than four years. He has had no childhood, thrust into the world and abandoned by Frankenstein as soon as he is "born" His short life is a search for the meaning of his existence and at the root of all this is Victor Frankenstein, the man who made him and is the only one who can make him a mate. The creature is the result of Frankenstein's overarching scientific endeavour, a

\(^89\) Shelley, *Frankenstein*, 170.
project that consumes the scientist’s adult life and results in the death of everyone close to him. Thus Victor Frankenstein and the creature are permanently entwined as doubles.

The mutual dependence of the creature and his creator is played out at the end of the novel with their mutual deaths. Even as Frankenstein pursues the creature across the frozen Arctic, the roles of hunter and hunted keep reversing, with the creature making sure there are supplies for his maker along the way. Newman says this mutual dependency in life and death prevents Frankenstein and the creature from killing each other, and when the maker dies, Newman says the monster can only disappear from view to commit suttee on the polar snows. Just before he jumps from the ship, the creature says:

I shall ascend my funeral pile triumphantly, and exult in the agony of the torturing flames. The light of that conflagration will fade away; my ashes will be swept into the sea by the winds. My spirit will sleep in peace; or if it thinks, it will not surely think thus. Farewell.

Halberstam maintains that narrative resolution in Gothic fiction usually resolves boundary disputes by the end of the novel by killing off the monster and restoring law and order. Supporting Halberstam's theory, the creator and the creature are mutually dependent and therefore both must die. This is mirrored in Blade Runner, where Roy kills Tyrell after he finds that his own life cannot be extended.

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90 Newman, “Mary and the monster”, 87-88.
91 Shelley, Frankenstein, 225.
92 Halberstam, Skin Shows, 36.
To Complete

For the clones in *Never Let Me Go*, life is short and painful. They most probably die in their early twenties when they "complete". Kathy H is an anomaly in that she has lived to thirty-one years of age without donating any of her organs. The clones get two years grace in the Cottages after boarding school, where they can pursue an adult life and relationships with each other away from society before they submit to either donations or a life as a carer. An outspoken teacher, Miss Lucy, tells the clones at Hailsham:

> Your lives are set out for you. You'll become adults, then before you're old, before you're even middle aged, you'll start to donate your vital organs. That's what each of you was created to do [...] You were brought into this world for a purpose, and your futures, all of them, have been decided.\(^{93}\)

The clones must be sacrificed and they acknowledge their destiny. In the contemporary Gothic, Punter notes what is absent is possibility. There is no escape of choice, of the notion that things might be different. Punter says in the modern Gothic, we are in the world of the pure drive, and it is this primal world which much of the "new Gothic" tries to recount, even at the unavoidable expense of active extension.\(^{94}\) Kazuo Ishiguro has said that despite criticism that he chose to let the clones accept their fate and not rebel against being organ donors, he didn't want to write a heroic "escape from oppression" story. Supporting my theory that *Never Let Me Go* is a Gothic novel, Ishiguro says that he was trying to shadow the human condition and face up to the knowledge that we are mortal and will die:

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\(^{93}\) Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*, 73.

\(^{94}\) Punter, *The Literature of Terror*, 158.
In our lives we don't try to escape our destiny. Our fate is exactly the same as the clones but our lives are longer.\textsuperscript{95}

In \textit{Never Let Me Go}, a modern retelling of the scientifically created human monster, we have Kathy H willingly going to her destiny. Because of her status as an outsider, her death and those of the other monster-clones is justified by society. Miss Emily tells Kathy H and Tommy when they confront her about the deferrals:

How can you ask a world that has come to regard cancer as curable, how can you ask such a world to put away that cure, to go back to the dark days? There was no going back. However uncomfortable people were about your existence, their overwhelming concern was that their own children, their spouses, their parents, their friends, did not die from cancer, motor neuron disease, heart disease.\textsuperscript{96}

Why don't the clones rebel at being used as live organ donors? I suggest it is because they have been trained to accept authority and have been "educated" at Hailsham to embrace their fate. At Hailsham the power of the group reigns supreme and students are very careful to watch each other and make sure they conform to the group in every way possible. Hailsham is like an old fashioned orphanage in that the clones have no parents or family, and the guardians watch over them. Even after they leave for the cottages, the clones observe social rituals such as buying each other birthday cards,\textsuperscript{97} for they belong to each other, and this bond gives them an identity and a buffer from the outside world.

\textsuperscript{95} Mullan, "Kazuo Ishiguro talks".
\textsuperscript{96} Ishiguro, \textit{Never Let Me Go}, 240.
\textsuperscript{97} ibid., 143.
It is this sense of belonging that gives clones their strength and is also their greatest weakness. For in never pursuing their own unique identity or place in the world apart from that which is offered to them - donor or carer - they are rendered into spare parts factories for the "normals". At Hailsham the students are not told of the pain they will endure after donations, but even when Kathy H and the others realise the full extent of being a live organ donor, their response is not to rage against the system and refuse to participate, but hatch a romantic plan to ask for a deferral from the donations if they can prove they are really in love. What is surprising is that even after they are told that deferrals are only a myth, the clones choose to accept their fate. Critic William Patrick Day explains that the protagonist in the Gothic Fantasy is "victimized, isolated, in a sado-masochistic relationship both to the other and to itself."98 In such a definition of the Gothic protagonist, it is quite acceptable for Kathy H not to fight against her fate.

In the modern day evolution of Frankenstein's creature, the clones in Never Let Me Go are deconstructed when they begin to donate, until, finally, they "complete". Halberstam says it is the propensity for the monster to deconstruct at any time, to always be in the process of decomposition, that makes it/him/her a fugitive from identity and a model for the Gothic reader.99

Indeed, Halberstam's theory, read in relation to my thesis that the clones are being deconstructed via live organ donation, defines the final evolution of the scientifically created human monster. That is, the clones are Frankenstein's creature in reverse: the creature is made up from the parts of the dead, while the clones are sliced away piece by piece, their organs going to the dying so they may live in return for the clone's death. Ironically, the "normal" people who are transplanted with the clones' organs have become more like Frankenstein's creature, as like jigsaws they become

99 Halberstam, Skin Shows, 37.
constructed from the (walking) dead. At the end of the novel, Kathy H offers herself up for donation, thereby joining the creature in killing herself. No doubt she would be incinerated as body waste, up in flames just as the creature imagines his funeral pyre.

Here, in a defining Gothic moment, Ishiguro can be seen to take his reference from an earlier Gothic period that predates *Frankenstein* with his central heroine Kathy: “a young woman who is simultaneously persecuted victim and courageous heroine”.100

**More Life**

Like the clones, the replicants have a short life. Because the genetic designers thought replicants might be able to develop their own emotional responses after a few years, and the inference being they could become fully human, they built in a fail safe device of a four year life span. Not only is Roy obsessed with what it is to be human, he is obsessed with having a life on par with human life. Deckard wonders at the beginning of the movie why the replicants return to Earth when they know they will be hunted down – the reason is to find Tyrell and demand "more life", as if a replicant might become human by living longer.101 But having more life isn't a guarantee of being more human. Clayton says that by personalising the creator/creature drama and charging Tyrell rather than corporate society with the guilt of betraying his replicant "children", *Blade Runner* follows Shelley's novel rather than the political critique it elsewhere maintains.102

It isn't just the four year life span that Replicants have to contend with. They can be "retired" at any time by a Blade Runner if they are discovered on Earth and indeed, it is only Roy who dies a "natural death". Pris and Zhora are killed by Deckard, while Leon is shot by fellow Nexus 6 replicant Rachael to save Deckard. At the end of his short life,

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102 Clayton, "*Frankenstein's Futurity*", 99.
Roy ironically becomes the human he has always wanted to be when he saves Deckard from falling off the Bradbury Building after their climactic fight sequence. This act of selfless compassion is linked to his understanding and final acceptance of his mortality, which makes him, in the end, human. Yet in his last moments, Roy mourns the loss of his memories more than the loss of life:

I've seen things you people wouldn't believe. Attack ships on fire off the shoulder of Orion. I watched c-beams glitter in the dark near the Tanhauser Gate. All those moments will be lost in time, like tears...in rain. Time to die.

This poignant speech emphasises how memory, whether real or implanted, may be pivotal for the definition of humanity. Although Replicants know the exact day they will die, they stand in a human relationship with death, for like humans, they are mortal. At the end of his life, Roy realises he has lived authentically: he has let every moment burn brightly and at the end acknowledges that those moments will pass. By choosing to save Deckard's life at the end of the movie, even though Deckard killed his lover and would no doubt have killed him, Roy chooses to be a life giver rather than the combat model he was programmed to be. It is this choice, rather than being granted more life, that truly makes Roy more than a monster. Like Ishiguro’s clone Tommy, who draws despite there being no reason to explore his creativity, this exploration of free will defines an evolution of the monster.

How a monster decides to live their life and die, despite the boundaries placed upon them because of their method of production, is what makes them human. When Deckard and Rachael escape at the end of the movie, they know they will be pursued, and they know Rachael probably has a termination date, but they choose to embrace life

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104 Mulhall, *On Film*, 41.
anyway. As Deckard's colleague Gaff utters in the last line in the film: "It's too bad she won't live, but then again, who does?"

Summary

All scientifically created human monster have shortened life spans, and in that time-span search for the meaning of their existence. If they were created for a purpose, must they also die to fulfill their destiny? Frankenstein's creature decides to die on the Arctic ice when he realises his maker is dead and he is alone in the world. Ishiguro's clones accept that they must be sacrificed, and in a modern retelling of the scientifically created human monster, they are deconstructed until they die, the reversal of the creature made from the pieces of dead bodies. The replicants in Blade Runner frantically search for an extension to their four year life span, yet when Roy Batty saves Deckard's life just before his own ends, he becomes truly human.
CONCLUSION

While researching the literary scientifically created human monster, I realised that in analysing the monster's lifecycle, I had in fact ironically found a blueprint for what it means to be human. Since Mary Shelley wrote *Frankenstein*, the scientifically created human monster has now become indistinguishable from human beings in *Never Let Me Go* and *Blade Runner*. Timothy Morton says that: "humans, in their very humanity, are replicants; beings whose core is artificial, just the sum of memories."\(^{105}\) It should be noted that I am not making a claim for the artificiality of humans; however, I do believe that my investigation into the monster's lifecycle has raised questions of what it means to be human. In order to explore this further, it would require a much broader survey of the full range of literary scientifically created human monsters, including the animal-human hybrid and the human-cyborg, than is possible within the scope of this study. I hope this may prove fruitful material for further inquiry.

My aim in this exegesis has been to explore the lifecycle of one form of scientifically created human monster by looking at three Gothic texts. In doing so, I have discovered that the monster still arouses fear in others and is doomed to a short life of pain. While *Blade Runner* is a modern version of *Frankenstein*, *Never Let Me Go* is an evolution of the scientifically created human monster. Ishiguro is not simply retelling *Frankenstein*, as so many writers and filmmakers have done. As Ishiguro reveals in the novel's conclusion, it is society that is to blame for the monster's fate, not science. The cause of the modern-day monster's tragedy is a selfish society that has found the secret to prolonging life by cloning humans and using them as live organ donors.

The full title of Shelley's work is *Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus*, and in using the Promethean motif for her novel, Shelley casts a warning about the role of

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science in usurping the natural laws of nature and procreation. *Never Let Me Go* also questions how far society will go in achieving its desires in an era when reproductive technology, stem cell experimentation and therapeutic cloning are realities. Ishiguro’s monsters are clones bred to be passive organ donors until they die. *Blade Runner’s* replicants are superior in strength and agility and at least equal in intelligence to the genetic engineers who created them, yet they must live as slaves.

**Insights Gained By Analysis To My Project**

My creative project also contains an evolution of Mary Shelley’s monster and thus, like Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*, is a modern Gothic novel. In *The Isis Club*, once Seth receives a transplanted heart, he adopts the monster’s unique lifecycle which ends at the conclusion of the novel with his early and painful death. While Seth doesn’t look like a monster, he is different from ordinary humans and those who know what he is view him as “*unheimlich*”. Seth searches for his new identity, seeking out evidence of his donor’s life as he looks for new role models. Seth wants a life with his new heart’s lover, but instead must succumb to an early death. As I argued in my paper at the 2007 Australasian Bioethics Conference,\(^\text{106}\) there is a media conspiracy of silence in revealing the negative stories about organ transplants. An exception is American author Amy Silverstein’s *Sick Girl*, an unflinching memoir of a heart transplant.\(^\text{107}\) My novel *The Isis Club* is an evolution of *Frankenstein* because, like Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go*, I am placing the blame for the creation of the monster not on science or a singular scientist, but on society as a whole. It is society’s desire for longevity above all else that has turned Seth into a scientifically created human monster.

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\(^{106}\) Tsitas, “Without Fear or Favour?”

With my research into the Gothic and contemporary Gothic genre, I realised that I was indeed writing a Gothic novel and not a horror or science fiction one. My research and creative project are important to the field because the issues of body ownership and what it means to be human are central to the debate on bioethics. In this age of stem cell research, cloning, organ donation and xeno transplantation, fiction can make an important contribution to the current cultural and intellectual debates concerning bioethics. In this way, research for my novel *The Isis Club* contributes to the broader social debate about organ donation, consent and end of life issues.

The insights gained exploring Gothic horror and Halbertsam and Mellor's theories about monsters in general, and Mary Shelley's creature in particular, have been useful in that they have allowed me to look closely at literary scientifically created human monsters and develop a theory about their life cycle. This in turn has allowed me to appreciate exactly how a literary monster is positioned and what it is that makes it an outsider. As I have found, the line between monster and human is blurred no matter how vigilantly humans try to police the boundaries.

In this exegesis I have attempted to show that *Never Let Me Go* is an evolution of *Frankenstein*, by advancing the concept of the scientifically created human monster. By comparing *Blade Runner*’s replicants to the creature and the clones, I have shown there is a unique lifecycle that scientifically created human monsters share. In an evolution of the monster, Ishiguro gave his clones a childhood, and a real sense of time and place and memories. Despite their predicament, they have a sense of belonging and family, even if it is not a biological one.

Both Shelley and Ishiguro have given a powerful voice to the monster, and have revealed who is to blame for the misery of its creation. Shelley showed us that the real monster wasn't the creature, but Dr Victor Frankenstein, the monster maker himself. Ridley Scott also blamed Tyrell for creating and exploiting the replicants for his own
commercial gain, a move that enabled him to surround himself with the finest things money could buy. Ishiguro points the finger at the latest perpetrator: a society hooked on artificial reproduction and artificially prolonging life with experimental stem cell technology. One thing that remains constant is science asserting authority over nature.

Now we have the secrets to life, we must ask ourselves how to make use of them, for as these literary scientifically created human monsters warn us, there are terrible consequences for humanity in running away from its hideous progeny.
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**Film**


Transcription of the 1982 theatrical release.

Volume One – Creative Project

THE ISIS CLUB

A novel submitted in fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts

Evelyn Tsitas
B.Ed Grad Dip (Media, Communications and Information Technology Law)

School of Creative Media
Portfolio of Design and Social Context
RMIT University
March 2008
**Declaration**

I certify that:

- Except where due acknowledgement is made, the work is mine alone;
- The work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award;
- The content of the novel is the result of the work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program;
- Any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged.

Signed..............................................................................................Evelyn Tsitas, March 2008
*The Isis Club* is a novel of about 95,000 words. In order to meet the word limit requirement for the degree of Master of Arts Creative Writing, only Part One - the first half of the novel - has been submitted.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The following people provided editorial assistance with the exegesis: Alison Goodman (senior supervisor), Dr Adam Casey (second supervisor) and Antoni Jach. Chapters from this novel were also presented to participants in the RMIT University Creative Writing course workshops.
When Mary Shelley, the creator of Frankenstein, died in 1851 her husband's heart was found amongst her belongings. It was reported to be wrapped in one of the sheets of Adonais – Percy Bysshe Shelley's famous elegy to Keats.

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The breath whose might I have invoked in song
Descends on me; my spirit's bark is driven
Far from the shore, far from the trembling throng
Whose sails were never to the tempest given;
The massy earth and spher'd skies are riven!
I am borne darkly, fearfully, afar;
Whilst, burning through the inmost veil of Heaven,
The soul of Adonais, like a star,
Beacons from the abode where the Eternal are.

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CHAPTER ONE
The Archibald Prize

Being in a five star hotel still took my breath away. I felt like a child who had been given an early Christmas present. The first thing I did was push back the translucent curtains and gasp at the Sydney Harbour Bridge and the expanse of cerulean blue water that glowed in the afternoon sun.

I couldn't have painted a better panorama and immediately thought of those 1920s Grace Cossington Smith paintings of the bridge, half-finished, its mammoth pylons dominating the landscape and the delicate spider frame beginning its soaring arch.

"I thought it was wasteful spending so much on a room with a view, but I have to say I could get used to this," I said.

Lawrence emerged from the bathroom.

"I'm over room service and expensive toiletries. It's no fun when it's just work." He nuzzled my neck, nibbled my earlobe and deliciously ran his hands across my back, dancing his fingers down to the curve of my bum. "However, when it's about play…"

I turned around and pulled Lawrence hard against me, greedily feeling his well toned body. It is no wonder art students are made to draw naked bodies over and over, until they can feel the muscles and skeleton beneath their fingers as soon as they pick up a pencil. The body is a temple when it looked this good.
"That's right, you're my toy boy," I cooed, nibbling his earlobe. Lawrence groaned slightly and pushed his body against mine.

"Aren't I a bit old?"

"Forty is the new thirty, haven't you heard?"

I pulled him forcefully towards me and first kissed the bead and then his chest and worked my way up to his neck and covered his face with fluttering kisses. I could feel his interest stir immediately and he cupped my face with his hands and worked his tongue between my lips, a deep kiss that increased with urgency. His hands moved to my breasts caressed my nipples and I let out a soft moan as he slid his leg between mine and spread them gently apart.

I pushed myself into him, reassured by his erection throbbing near my thigh. No matter how much he said he loved me, I still envied Freya's claim on his name and the large diamond ring she still wore like a badge of honour on her finger.

He tugged at my top, fingers tangling in the velvet and lace. I helped him ease it over my head, and he sighed with pleasure as he cupped my breasts and felt their weight, draping my long dark hair across my torso.

"Lady Godiva," he whispered voice thick with lust. "I want you so badly."

We fell onto the luxurious mohair throw rug artfully arranged at the end of the enormous bed. My senses battled with two overwhelming sensations, Lawrence's tongue making its steady progress down my body and the embrace of a five star bed; even the sheets felt expensive and the pillows deep and soft.
Lawrence eased up my skirt and discovered my surprise - instead of pantyhose I wore silk stockings and lace suspenders. H softly groaned with pleasure as he dived down and grabbed them with his teeth.

I drifted off into another dimension as his tongue went to work between my legs. For an instant, all anxiety peeled away - the fear of losing the Archibald and equally the fear of winning - which I couldn't explain to anyone. To win would change the way I was perceived and the price would be my freedom. I painted what I liked without worrying about public opinion or meeting my mortgage. That's the great thing about having no assets. I could do as I damn well pleased.

"Mmm...feels so good," I muttered. I pulled impatiently on the waistband of his pants and eased my hands down inside to grip him. I was warm and ready.

At that exact moment, the doorbell rang.

"What?" I mumbled confused. "Who's that?"

"Ignore them," said Lawrence hoarsely, as his fingers tugged and pulled at the unfamiliar suspender fastenings.

The bell rang again. "Room service."

Lawrence struggled to get up. "Room service interruptus."

I dragged the throw rug over myself and waited as Lawrence answered the door.

"I've got it, thanks mate."

"Wow! Lawrence Griffon? Can I have your autograph?"
"No worries."

I heard the door close, then Lawrence carried in an enormous bunch of flowers: a riot of scarlet red banksias, acid yellow wattle, and long delicate stems of Kangaroo paw. A delicate, earthy smell filled the room.

"You have an admirer. I may have to kill him."

"Who are they from?" I sprang up from the bed and read the card out loud. *I have every confidence you can pull off an Archie legend. Roxanne.*

"My agent is beside herself with the thought that my stock might actually be on the rise."

"See, what did I tell you," said Lawrence. "You’re set to be another Davida Allen or Brett Whiteley. Mind you the subject is everything so I guess I have to take credit as well."

"Arrogant prick," I chased him around the room, before we fell on the bed in hysterical laughter. I pulled his shirt off, then his pants and straddled him while I kissed and licked his smooth skin, from his strong jaw down to the base of his neck and then further still, to his bare chest. Lawrence smelt of the expensive aftershave he got Duty Free on his many overseas trips, while I existed in a subtle cloud of patchouli oil. I used it to mask the lingering whiff of paint and linseed oil in the same way my grandfather had rubbed his hands with lemon after a day in the fish shop.

My hands were worker’s hands as well - the white half moons of my fingernails were more often than not etched with smudges of yellow ochre or raw
umber and my skin sadly flaky from being constantly rubbed clean with
turpentine. Even strands of my hair were coated in traces of my oil paint, little
flecks of rose madder or viridian. It could take months to peel the layers of a
painting from my body and sometimes strands of my hair got caught in the thick
impasto of my canvases. I wondered if years from now a DNA expert would
identify my work by the little fragments of my body lodged inside.

Lawrence discarded what was left of his clothes and started on mine, his
fingers leaving the echo of tracer fire over my skin. My anxiety faded as his
mouth probed and opened me up. When at last he was inside me, I felt
victorious: *You are mine, you are mine.*

We giggled as we waited for the lift, dressed in our awards finery.
Lawrence, resplendent in his tuxedo, looked more handsome than ever, in the
way that evening dress transformed men into Gods.

"You look like a Hollywood actress," said Lawrence. My bump wasn't yet
showing, though now I was fifteen weeks pregnant, I expected to lose my waist at
any second. I had reluctantly let out my custom made corset which had given me
an hourglass shape. There was something so confining and yet liberating about
being laced up, perhaps the way my breasts rose and my spine straightened, or
the grip of the hard spiral steel rods against my skin before they began to flex
slightly.

"Guess the colour?" It was a game I liked to play.
"It's brown, right? No it's green."

"Wrong. It is prussian blue with alizarin crimson starbursts."

"Xanthe my love, everyone else would say it's a blue dress with red highlights."

"I take colour seriously."

Lawrence quickly looked to check we were alone in the corridor and then ran his hand lightly over my breasts. "I'm a form man, myself. Now I would describe this dress not by its colour, but its shape. It's a tight fitting number with an interesting neckline which displays your ample breasts like ripe fruit on a platter."

"No wonder you get paid to talk."

The lift arrived and we entered, suddenly seeing ourselves reflected on three sides by ornate mirrors.

"What handsome parents we'll make," said Lawrence as he patted my tummy affectionately. "Ernest, now there's a good name. Or even plain Hemingway."

"Too old fashioned." I pulled a face. "How about Sienna?"

"Too celebrity baby, I think. I mean, why name an Aussie child Dakota or Indiana? Why not something local like Leongatha or Koo-wee-rup?"

"I meant Sienna after the colour, not the Italian city."
"Don't you think that's a rather insensitive choice for the child of a colour blind man? I think we should stick to writers; much better. What about Chandler? Nero, Ellery or Innes?"

"Nero?"

"After Nero Wolfe, the sophisticated New York sleuth."

"How will it go down in the playground?" The ultrasound indicated it was a boy. I was in a quandary about the amniocentesis which would have told us the gender definitively and ruled out Down Syndrome. My age was against me but the obstetrician said the scans and blood tests indicated I had no higher risk of a baby with Down Syndrome than a thirty year old. Was it worth the possibility of miscarriage to have a more invasive test? So I pinned my Filahta to everything I wore, and I prayed a lot.

"Okay then what about Conan?" suggested Lawrence. "That sounds tough."

"After Conan the Barbarian?" I asked. "Or that American talk show guy with red hair?"

"You twit, for Arthur Conan Doyle who created Sherlock Holmes," Lawrence laughed.

The lights on Sydney Harbour bathed the black water with a shimmering carpet. Half the crowd at the Art Gallery of New South Wales had unashamedly moved away from the paintings to admire the view. Sydney turned everyone into
a voyeur, a slut for a slice of the water. And why not? The Harbour was all seductive, even at night. Melbourne simply couldn't compare, preferring to reveal its delights in subtle interior displays of style. Melbourne was secret alleys and lanes and arcades, bars decked with old velvet couches and chandeliers that you had to find by word of mouth. Sydney was all surface glamour and Leagues clubs, loud and brash and superficial. I was a Melbourne girl through and through but when in Rome –

I looked out of the expansive windows and pretended to take a sip of champagne. Despite the anticipation of "my big night", I was awkward at mingling with strangers and making small talk.

Lawrence came over every few minutes to whisper baby names in my ear. First, it was Nobel Peace Prize winners and then he started on the Booker Prize recipients.

"You think it would be weird if we have a boy called Kazuo? Salman? VS?"

"VS?"

"VS Naipaul, 1971, for In a Free State."

"You should go on one of those quiz shows."

"I tried, they voted me off," he laughed and winked at me.

"That's what this is like - Artistic Survivor. Couldn't they have notified us by email? I feel like I am going to vomit again." Was it morning sickness or nerves?
"I've got it - we need to go for Australian artists names. Who is that woman you like who painted the bridge while it was being made?" asked Lawrence.

"Grace Cossington Smith."

"Yep, can see it now; Cossington Kraikos Griffon."

"It sounds like a construction company."

I was right in hating award ceremonies. Waiting for the announcement was like being five again and squashed up in a cupboard playing hide and seek, secretly wanting your older brother to walk past you but also giddy with delicious anticipation that you'll be discovered.

"Nervous?" asked a tubby man in a badly fitting pin stripe suit that had gone shiny with age.

He gulped his champagne and introduced himself as Maurice Hardy, from one of the newspapers, I smiled sweetly. Lawrence had drilled me in the ways of the media.

"Of course," I said evenly. "This is the biggest night of my career. Why wouldn't I be nervous?"

"Your painting is the hot favourite," said Hardy, as he shoved a small digital recorder in my face.

"People like paintings of famous people."
"You mean they love the spectacle of artists arguing with each other over who should have won the Archibald and whether the winning entry qualifies as a painting or not, or even whether it qualifies as a portrait or not."

"It's part of the show," I agreed.

"And your work has stirred up more than the usual controversy," said Hardy.

I was about to answer with a sharp retort when I remembered Lawrence's caution: Journalists are shameless. They will steal your life and grab your quotes with the callousness of a hit and run driver. And then, when you see yourself exposed in print or on the television, they abandon you. I took his advice: look both ways before answering.

"Because entries have to be completed in the last twelve months, a painting of Lawrence Griffon will naturally focus on current events as he's a journalist," I replied carefully.

"But would you call yours a political work?" challenged Hardy.

"Art and politics go hand in hand. Just think of Picasso's famous Guernica, which was painted as a response to the German bombing of the Spanish town."

Hardy looked at me and grinned. "And do art and love go hand in hand?"

I gulped. "What do you mean?" I asked. I wondered how Hardy knew. We had been careful to wait until Lawrence's divorce papers came through before announcing our relationship – and my pregnancy – to the media. Besides, Lawrence wanted to tell Jasmine first.
"Oh, I have my sources, and it seems to me this is another case of Bob Hawke and Blanche D'Alpuget," Hardy said. He was referring of course to the former Australian Labor Prime Minister who had an affair with his biographer – and then dumped his wife and married her.

"Is it because both Lawrence and I vote for the Labor Party?"

"You know what I mean," Hardy said.

This time, I grinned. If I said nothing, then nothing could be attributed to me. I had been taught by the best.

Satisfied he wasn't going to be able to get me to talk, Hardy slunk away, heading for the artist who had painted a borderline pornographic work featuring the hot new reality dance star. Lawrence laughed when I told him. Hardy apparently had a reputation as a moral panic merchant.

"We are telling the world tomorrow, anyway," Lawrence said. "First thing we do after the ceremony is phone Jasmine. Then tomorrow morning, I will call a few friends, and then it will be public. No more need to be discreet."

"Good, because the way this dress is feeling, I am going to burst out of it at any second. I don't think this baby is going to let me be discreet for much longer."

A group of ageing women with perfect hair, whose necks were considerably older than their faces, were jostling to get to his side, and we moved closer to the stage.

"Got your speech ready?" Lawrence asked.
I shook my head. It had felt like a red rag to the Evil Eye to prepare an acceptance speech, even though Lawrence begged me to let him write it. As it was, I could barely focus as a man in an elegantly cut Zegna suit stood in front of a microphone and started the official proceedings.

"Since it began in 1921, The Archibald prize has produced a succession of controversial paintings," the host announced to the packed crowd who clutched their wine glasses and infuriatingly kept up their small talk.

"It's fair to say that the public, used to being alienated by abstract art, flock to see representations of people they actually recognise; the well-known, the obscure, the infamous. The Archibald rules are that the portraits should be painted from life and generally of someone in the public eye. This year that honour goes to Melbourne artist Xanthe Kraikos for her incisive political portrait of journalist Lawrence Griffon in Afghanistan."

Me? Did he say my name?

My face burned red and I went cold and clammy and hot and sweaty at the same time. Perhaps I had misheard.

"Xanthe, it's you darling," Lawrence whispered in my ear. "You have to go up on stage."

The air seemed to get sucked from around me as applause exploded and cameras flashed and Lawrence kissed me. I moved slowly through the sea of people towards the podium as I listened to my work being analysed.
"Kraikos' heroic central figure has a sculptural quality resonant of the Renaissance artist's work and note how the sparse, flinty landscape of war-torn Afghanistan bears the gentle echo of Andrea Mantegna's early works."

Lawrence had brought over the photos he'd taken on his last assignment, when a friend of his was shot as they went deep into the Khyber Pass. He'd collected some blood stained dirt in an empty water bottle to sprinkle on his mate's plaque back home at the Springvale Necropolis.

"This is a masterful painting that, while highly developed in technique and showing considerable command of manipulation of perspective, also embraces the zeitgeist and questions the role of the media in world events."

I stood awkwardly on the stage and twisted the Evil Eye bead around my wrist. It seemed odd to just stand there while someone gushed about your work: the very work that had been made in the isolation of a studio, where I had been alone with my thoughts and my muse.

"Please put your hands together for this year's Archibald Prize winning artist – Xanthe Kraikos."

As I approached the microphone, I felt like I was going to vomit. Then I saw Lawrence give me the thumbs up sign and it gave me some inner strength.

"Thank you ladies and gentlemen and Archibald Prize judges," I began.

"This is an incredible honour and I guess now I can put artist on my passport as a profession. I always felt a fraud doing that. Who was I to call myself an artist just because I went to art school? Then there are other days when I
think I'm a genius and that's equally scary, because producing art is simply about doing art, about making the marks on the canvas and showing up in front of the easel every day."

As I spoke, I realised that with each word, people's chatter dropped away and they looked at me with expectation. As an artist, you stand in the background and let your work do the talking. For an instant, I felt how it must be for Lawrence with an adoring audience hanging on every word.

"There are a lot of people in the world who don't get to do that. They don't get to make art because they are dying of hunger or being bombed or because they are locked up in detention centers. So I consider myself really lucky and hope that my work can in some way participate in a debate about our humanity."

By the time I finished I was in full character mode. Small talk was easy as everyone wanted a piece of me and gallery owners thrust business cards into my hand. I posed for photos with Lawrence in front of the painting, and briefly wondered if Freya would cut them out of the paper tomorrow and throw darts at my face.

Later, as the crowd thinned out, Maurice Hardy cornered me near the portrait of the naked reality TV starlet.

"You only won because you're the darling of the intellectual elite," he said.

"Is that what you're writing for tomorrow's paper?"

"No, I'll get someone else to say it for me. It adds weight to the argument. Anyway, everyone thinks this painting should have won."
We looked up at the nude which had been carefully posed to highlight a very thorough Brazilian Wax.

"Now reality television, that's what's relevant," said Hardy, with feeling.

"You're probably right," I grinned, "but I won."

The rain fell on us hard and heavy, momentarily disorienting me. It had been months since its touch on my skin and longer still since it delivered itself with such urgency that my clothes clung like a wet shroud. My dress was soaked through in the time it took to run the length of the Gallery’s sandstone steps and into the waiting limo. Half way down, an enormous boom of thunder clapped nearby and a searing streak of lightening broke through and sliced the sky in half before it plunged into the Harbour. As we drove off, the car screeched and skidded slightly - water had spread out over the road like linseed oil on a clean palette, coating everything with a slick glaze.

"My talented lover," said Lawrence, his wet hand rubbing my cheek. "I rather like being immortalized in history. Up there with depictions of Christ in medieval paintings!"

"Stop taking the piss," I laughed.

"I'm not - I'm slightly envious. I've always wanted to write a book but I get caught up in telling other people's stories. But you've done it. You've created something that will outlive us all."

"My mother is still cutting out job ads for me."
"Promise me you'll never play it safe, okay?"

I snuggled into him, and saw the world outside flash past. Those poor people, I thought, here I am, snug in a limousine and there they are, soaked to the skin and huddled under shop awnings.

"I love you," I whispered into his ear. "I'll love you forever."

"Forever," he said as he reached inside his jacket and pulled out a small box. "I'll love you forever and beyond."

Lawrence opened the lid and revealed a glorious ring nestled inside. All of a sudden I was a twenty year old with rose coloured glasses rather than a forty year old with streaks of rose madder in her hair. I stifled the urge to giggle and jump up and down on the seat.

"This is incredibly clichéd and corny and like the money shot of a Mills and Boon romance, but this time, I wanted to do it properly," said Lawrence. "Xanthe, will you marry me?"

I threw my arms around him. This time, there were no doubts."Yes."

Lawrence hugged me tight. "Do we have to spit or something?"

I shook my head. I was spitting so much these days I wondered if I had Obsessive Compulsive Disorder.

"Do you like the ring?" he asked, almost shyly, like a gawky adolescent presenting his first girlfriend with a butterfly necklace chosen from the Sunday craft market. "The circular shape of the wedding ring has symbolized undying, unending love since the days of the early Egyptians. And you wear it on the
fourth finger of the left hand because that is where the Egyptians believed a special vein ran directly to the heart."

"Does it?"

"Not at all, which is a strange lapse in basic anatomy considering how many people they sucked dry and mummified."

I turned the ring over in my hand and marvelled at the elaborate detail and the varied stones embedded in the carved white gold surface.

I thought of the dreary little diamond and yellow gold ring my first husband had given me all those years ago, which was as constricting and traditional as Leon. One day I took it off and left it on the kitchen table with a note that said: "I'm dying here." I stopped being an art teacher, I stopped being married, I stopped being acceptable. My father didn't speak to me for three years. My mother told me I'd be alone forever and no decent man would have me. My brother said I was going to end up a childless parasite; a spinster of the worst order.

"I went to a designer who takes on commissions for commemorative jewellery," said Lawrence. His face shone with the delight of having presented me with something unique. "She had little white paper parcels with stones inside and we turned them over and chose. They looked incredible, so much more interesting than plain old diamonds. I chose topaz for your birthstone and the peridot because the ancient Egyptians believed that it was blessed by the gods."
"It's as green and luminous as Absinthe," I said, letting the light bounce off the stone as I moved the ring. "You know the French painter Toulouse Lautrec invented a potent cocktail containing half Absinthe and half Cognac. He called it earthquake."

"I thought peridot was brown, for your eyes." We both laughed.

"What's this one?" I touched a dazzling stone that was a deep violet blue, more intense than any sapphire I'd ever seen. "Blue for the colour of your eyes?"

"I'm not that vain, Xanthe. I chose tanzanite for its rarity. It's more precious than diamonds because there's only one place in the world it's found and that's the base of Tanzania's Mount Kilimanjaro. And you know what? It was only discovered by people outside the local Masai tribes about forty years ago. So it's your happy birthday stone as well."

"That's so romantic!" I laughed. Lawrence had given me dazzling diamond earrings for my fortieth birthday, and had flown us to a new wilderness hotel situated on a secluded sand dune close to the boundary of the Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park. We walked around a quiet gorge at the base of the great monolith and watched it turn deep red in the sunset. I think that was the weekend we conceived our baby.

"Ah, but the best is to come," Lawrence pointed to the diamond flashing in the centre. "Behold the universal Morse code of engagement rings. I chose a pink Australian diamond because it's so rare; like you."
Lawrence took my hand and held it up to slip the ring over my finger, but before he did he tilted it on an angle towards me.

"I had the jeweller inscribe a message inside, so you can wear my intentions pressed against your flesh like a secret." His voice rose dramatically.

I whispered the words: "Who so loves believes the impossible."

"It's from Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh,*" said Lawrence.

"That's so beautiful." Lawrence knew my passion for the Victorian era writers, artists and poets. I felt that I could have happily lived amongst the Pre-Raphaelites.

"Well, EBB was a better wordsmith than me and as long as you attribute your sources, it isn't plagiarism."

Lawrence pushed the ring firmly down my finger and my flesh embraced it as if it was an old friend. I held my hand out and watched the street lights flash across the surface and light up the stones like the dance of the celestial Aurora Borealis. Pouring rain had smeared the world outside into one brilliant hypnotic Fauve painting with colors running into an exuberant whole. Even the sound of the wipers pushing back the torrent on the windscreen was like a distant memory.

Suddenly, a bright light pierced the car. It bounced off the peridot in my ring, making it glow like a bottle of green chartreuse. I looked out the window. Through the sheet of rain, I could see a semi trailer swerving and shuddering as it bore down towards us, headlights blazing.

"Holy mother!" screamed the limo driver.
Time froze. I tried to grab Lawrence but before I could even touch his hand
the thunderous sound of sliding wheels filled the air. The limo driver braked so
hard we were thrown sharp into our seatbelts, and the car spun around, twisting
like a Dervish on the wet road as the metal safety barrier loomed.

I wrapped my arms around my stomach, and curled to lower my head. I
had to protect our baby.

The semi hit us so hard the thin metal membrane around us buckled. The
limo was pushed along the road until it hit the barrier. The airbags exploded to life
but I could see the driver's face was already ripped from his skull. Mangled flesh
and blood sprayed into the air and warm liquid and pieces of skin hit my face. I hit
the side of the car. I saw Lawrence, his head tuned back to front like an owl. I
tasted blood in my mouth and coughed so it spluttered thick from my lips.

When I opened my eyes, the car had ground to a stop and the windscreen
glass had shattered. I was coated with the transparent pieces as if buried in ice
and the pain was searing. It felt as if a million little sharp knives were being stuck
into my skin again and again, each cut burning deep inside my flesh.

I heard a gutteral animal sound, as if a cat had been set on fire or a dog
disembowelled. And I realised it was my scream, and that my body was
convulsing with pain so extreme, it was as if my very blood had been set alight.
Deep inside me, my flesh was being pulled apart. It burned and twisted as if
unseen hands were wrenching away my life, and the life that had been growing
inside me. Then everything went black.
As I opened my eyes again, there was pain in every part of my body. Instinctively I reached for my face which was smooth and intact. Yet as I pulled my hands away I saw they were coated with blood. Was it mine?

Where was Lawrence?

I felt an ominous pull deep inside me: the heavy, dragging pelvic throb that signalled the onset of my period. I pushed my hands protectively onto my stomach. It felt warm and wet. I looked down and saw the blood had soaked through my dress.

The smell of petrol made me want to retch and the rain that poured in from the jagged skin of the car roof soaked my face and formed a river that washed the taste of iron and oil into my mouth. I looked up and saw Lawrence, his head twisted around so he looked like an Egyptian carving in profile. But he wasn't bleeding.

"Lawrence?" My voice barely formed a whisper.

"She's conscious."

Two men in cadmium yellow jackets appeared at my side in the bright glow of floodlight. I felt their hands on me, each touch sending an excruciating jolt through my body.

I tried to reach for Lawrence as I was lifted from the car, but my arms were held firmly by my rescuers. Still, I fought to stop the hands prodding my stomach and from the depths yelled "baby!"
I was surprised how loud the siren seemed inside the ambulance as it hurtled through the streets. Was Lawrence in another ambulance? Why couldn't we travel together? Were they still trying to get him out? When I tried to ask the man holding my hand, the words did not come, only a rush of warm liquid. I closed my eyes as the world slithered past and a sense of peace descended.

"She's losing a lot of blood."

"I'm not getting a fetal heartbeat."

I felt something cold in my veins. And then nothing.

In my dream, I unfold myself from the car, run around and prise open the door where Lawrence is wedged, head snapped backwards. I turn his head around and we walk away together, stepping over the pieces of twisted metal and broken glass.

"If the baby is a boy, we should name him Mercury after the God of Messengers. Quite befitting for the child of a journalist," he says.

"No way! If it's for the God of Messengers, then we go with the original Greek name Hermes, not some Roman rip off."

"I'm not naming my son after a scarf!"

We both laugh.

Then I heard voices, were they real or imagined? The ambulance door slammed shut behind and people ran alongside me as I was through a corridor, blinding light shining on my face.

"Get her to theatre!"
I felt as if I was flying. Maybe it was Hermes coming for me. Zeus often sends him to deliver dreams or to travel with a mortal to help keep them safe. I felt the lightest touch on my face and I looked up to the light. Hermes takes my hand but I shake my head and ask him, instead, to find Lawrence for me.

*Who so loves believes the impossible…*

But then Hermes is gone and I am alone. And I can't see Lawrence anywhere.

I was slowly aware of voices and as I struggled to open my eyes, I heard the beeping of a machine. Someone close to my ear asked me to respond.

"Xanthe."

I turned my head to the voice, opening my mouth. Nothing came out. The pain returned and it was sharp and biting and it made me want to tug at the needle digging deep into my flesh on the back of my hand.

"Xanthe, can you hear me?"

I nodded.

"Xanthe, you have been in a car accident and you have been unconscious. You lost a lot of blood. Do you remember the accident?"

I nodded again.

"Lawrence…?" I ask.

"He sustained a head injury."

"See him –"
"You need to rest while we bring your temperature up. Don't worry about your friend, his wife is with him and we have him on a ventilator to assist his breathing."

I started to scream.

"Is the pain bad again? We can give you something for that."

I shook my head violently but saw the syringe, and then felt the room dissolve.

I awoke in hospital, a monitor beeping to one side, a nurse hovering around me. I couldn't focus on anything. Did the crash injure my eyes? Was I going blind?

Why was I thinking about my eyes when the pain in my pelvis made me shudder with dread?

"The baby —" I started to say.

The nurse slowly came into focus as she moved close to me, and I realised I had been wearing my contact lenses and someone must have taken them out after the accident. I saw her smile so gently I knew it was bad news.

"You'll be able to get pregnant again."

My baby gone! I grabbed the nurse's arm. "No! You're wrong, my baby…" I couldn't hold back the tears and she patted me as I sobbed. Lawrence was at my side when I had the initial ultrasound to check the baby was okay despite my age. Even though the image on the screen was tiny, a strong heart beat pulsated and the technician said it looked like a boy. I had already grown to love him. I had
imagined the clothes I would buy our son and the things we would do together. I was going to set up a table in his room and do water colors rather than oils, so he wouldn’t be hit by the strong smell of paint. We’d go down to the water together from our Docklands apartment and watch the boats. The only thing Lawrence and I hadn’t agreed on was the baby’s name.

"Lawrence?" I needed him, needed to mourn our baby with him. We had to name our son and say prayers for him so his spirit would be at peace.

"His wife is with him," said the nurse.

"No, you don't understand, I am his partner. He was getting divorced. We were going to be married," I said.

"I'll get the doctor."

I tried to stay calm as the doctor told me what had happened. The accident had caused a brain stem injury but Lawrence was alive. I demanded to see him.

"He's on a ventilator while we consider the options," he said. "You have to understand that in a severe accident such as this, there isn't much hope."

"Where there is life, there is hope," I said. "Lawrence did many stories about cases like this. People do wake up. They come back to us. I need to see him, I don't want him to be alone."

The doctor looked at me evenly. "His wife has been with him while you were in the coma. She flew straight up from Melbourne."

"I don't want to see her," I warned. They said that I could see Lawrence alone.
They eased me into a wheelchair, a drip painfully snaking into my hand, and took me to see Lawrence.

He looked like he was asleep.

The next thing I noticed were the tubes coming from his mouth, out of everywhere, really, like coiled plastic snakes circling his body. The sound of machines had replaced breathing.

"We are waiting on the results of a brain test to see if there are any life signs left," said a nurse.

I touched Lawrence's hand. It was warm.

"He is alive," I said.

"Machines are keeping him alive right now."

I looked down at my hand on his. Why was I alive and not Lawrence? How come I survived the accident and not him? Then I felt that warm hand again – no, he was alive. I had kissed relatives in their coffin and knew the cold emptiness of a dead body. Lawrence was not dead.

"Do you believe in miracles?" I asked. "Do you believe in God?"

"Xanthe, I have to tell you that although Lawrence looks like he is just asleep, once brain death sets in, irreversible loss of all brain functions takes place."

I shook my head. "He isn't dead." In fact, he looked serene - a neo-classical figure like Jacques-Louis David's painting *The Death of Marat*.

As I spoke, the pain in my chest became worse. It was a tight, constricting pressure that left me gasping. I wasn't sure what was happening, but
I was sure I felt Lawrence pressing my hand. Was he trying to pull me towards him?

I doubled up in pain and slumped in the wheelchair. I don't remember anything after that.

How ridiculous that there was anything to worry about. Lawrence smiled at me and poured some more wine.

"What are you drawing?" he asked.

We were in a magnificent restored hotel in Castlemaine in country Victoria, on a romantic weekend away. The owners acknowledged Lawrence but didn't make a fuss – they get famous people here all the time. We settled down in a room with an open fire place and French Empire bedroom furniture, Lawrence reads while I sketch him.

He looks at the piece of paper I am drawing on and reads out:

"All I need is the string to find you
come back from the maze with a length of hope."

"That's odd," he said. "I thought you were drawing me?"

I had been. But my lines were now words. I'd been dreaming about my father for some reason, the stories he told me at night when I was a child, about playing with his brother high up in the Greek village, throwing bullet shells at the unexploded bombs. He told me the story of Odysses, tales of one eyed monsters, long journeys and endless war. There was a myth about a maze and a ball of string. There was a Greek myth for everything, come to think of it.
"What does it mean?" asked Lawrence.

"It means I will always try to find you," I said.

Lawrence kissed me gently on the cheek. "Xanthe, I'm not going anywhere."

"Xanthe? Xanthe? Can you hear me?"

I struggled to open my eyes. I can feel the sketch book under my fingers, but instead it is the rough linen sheet of the hospital bed.

"Lawrence?" I asked. I wondered how long I had been unconscious for this time.

"His sister is here."

I looked out to the end of the bed and saw a dark shape. I needed my glasses. I always kept a pair in my handbag when I had my contacts in. Hadn't anyone looked in my bag?

"Gretel?" I asked. "I can't see you."

She came over and kissed me on the forehead. I saw then that her face was bloated and red from crying and her eyes puffed into tiny slits. What was Gretel doing here? How long had I been unconscious? She must have come to see Lawrence and if she was crying that meant something was wrong.

"Gretel? Is Lawrence still in a coma? I saw him, they said they were going to do tests."

"Oh, Xanthe," blurted Gretel. She shook as she sat next to me.
"They said he was on a ventilator," I explained. "He needs me by his side, to talk to him and wake him up. I went to him, but I passed out again from the pain."

Gretel said nothing. She rocked back and forth on the chair.

"Gretel, I need to see Lawrence," I was angry at her now.

"Xanthe – I'm sorry…"

"The doctors told me," I said, abruptly. "They said he had a head injury. He's still in a coma, isn't he?"

Gretel buried her head in her hands and sobbed.

"People wake up from that," I told her, reassuring myself. I remembered television shows about it. "One day they open their eyes and wonder who the old person smiling at them is, and someone tells them it's their wife and twenty years have passed. Medical science can do anything."

Why wasn't Gretel saying anything?

"I don't care how bad he looks, I need to see Lawrence."

"Xanthe, he died."

I stared at her and started to shake. It wasn't true.

"I don't believe you. The doctors said he was on a ventilator I saw him. I felt him."

"Xanthe I'm telling you the truth."

"But he was alive. He was warm – his hands were warm."

"Xanthe, I'm so sorry. It's true."

It couldn't be true.
"I want to see Lawrence," I turned for the buzzer and instantly regretted it, the stabbing pain in my pelvis making me groan. "I need to tell him about the baby. Why are you keeping him from me?"

Gretel bent over me and gently wiped the tears from my face and smoothed my skin with her fingertips, speaking to me in a voice hoarse from crying. "I wanted to leave him on the ventilator, until you were out of the coma. But they said his organs were beginning to deteriorate."

"I don't understand." Why was she talking about his organs?

"Xanthe, he was brain dead."

"What does that mean? He was either alive or dead."

"They said he was an empty shell, a vegetable. It broke my heart to see him laying there, his chest rising and falling as the machine pumped air into him. He looked so peaceful, so perfect. Apart from his head, there wasn't a mark on him."

"How did he die?" I demanded, a cold chill running through me.

"Freya had the machines turned off."

"She murdered Lawrence!" I yelled.

"Freya agreed to organ donation."

"She had his body cut up?" The image filled me with horror.

"Xanthe love, the doctors said he saved at least five people, maybe more," Gretel sat down as her body started to shake and her hands trembled: "Two kidneys, a liver, heart and lungs and his corneas."
I looked at Gretel as she said it, her blue eyes just like Lawrence's. In fact, Gretel looked so like Lawrence it was painful. Would the baby have looked like her? Like Lawrence? Would it have inherited their azure eyes, Slavic cheekbones, pale skin and blond hair?

Gretel pulled out a large handkerchief from her pocket and blew her nose.
"Xanthe, he gave the gift of life."

"No, he didn't," I yelled so loudly that she jumped back in fright. "Freya decided. Lawrence never mentioned organ donation. Never."

"Maybe to her – " Gretel stumbled over the words. She wouldn't look me in the eye. It wasn't true, I knew it.

"Lawrence believed in reincarnation. He'd had a photo taken with the Dalai Lama. He'd spent months in a retreat in Tibet."

"Xanthe, perhaps that was just for a story. You know Lawrence would do anything for a story."

"Freya killed him. She wanted to destroy us."

Gretel shook her head. "Xanthe, you were the best thing to happen to Lawrence, but he died. It's a tragedy but the doctors said he'll live on in other people. That should be a comfort."

"He would never have consented to organ donation. I know it." I shuddered at the thought. The Greek Orthodox Church refused to sanction organ donation. The body must be whole if the soul was to go to heaven. Now Lawrence's soul was in limbo, in the membrane between life and death, a place
where his spirit would never be able to comfort our baby, who was all alone on
the other side.

As I grew stronger, the world poured in through the hospital walls. I
watched with revulsion the news reports about Freya Griffon's selfless act in
turning off my Lawrence's life support.

She was on all the news programs, and even Lawrence's show Truth
Seekers did an interview with her. She played the grieving widow so well, you
could almost believe she was living with Lawrence when he died, that he never
moved into his penthouse apartment in the Docklands, where my toothbrush lay
next to his in the bathroom. Well, they could send in a forensic team if they liked.
Check for Freya's DNA amongst Lawrence's life. They would find none. She was
not his love. I was.

But I quickly realised that no-one knew I existed.

Freya Griffon had single handedly become the public face of organ
donation. I watched as she gave a press conference, Jasmine by her side. The
awkward teenager had golden hair. Freya wore black and reporters spoke of her
being "courageous". I should have expected as much from someone who had her
own public relations firm.

But what about me? I was the one in mourning. I was the one whose body
had been ripped apart while pregnant with Lawrence's baby.
I had his engagement ring on my finger. The proof he wanted to marry me and divorce her. *Who so loves believes the impossible.* "I'm the widow!" I yelled at the television.

A week later, I was discharged from hospital, and flew back to Melbourne, where my agent and friend Roxanne swept me into her arms and took me to her converted warehouse in the gentrified inner northern suburb of Northcote.

"Stay here as long as you want," she said.

But there was no sanctuary. Everywhere I turned endless news stories about Lawrence’s life and death leaked into my world, until these constructed pieces of him fragmented him in my mind and I began to wonder if he had ever been real, or I had simply assembled him from news footage.

It was as if my sorrow could not be real because he wasn’t real; simply a figment of the media. If everyone knew of him, how could I know him and *know of* him as only a lover could? My grief poisoned by his celebrity.

I could not get rid of the anguish and it flowed through my veins and bubbled to the surface. At night my skin was aflame with misery and it lay with me and curled into my dreams where it fucked me as I tried to sleep.

I could be the mistress of this endless darkness for years.

I called Gretel and told her I was ready. I needed to see where Lawrence was buried. "I need to chant over his grave and follow the rituals of my faith," I
explained. "If Lawrence's soul is to ascend to Elysium then I need to help him cross the river Styx."

She let out a small gasp and mumbled, "Lawrence was an atheist."

"I have enough faith for both of us. Even though I'm not a priest and I can't kiss his body before it's lowered into the grave, I want to chant the *Trisagion* and pour the mixture of wine and oil and make the sign of the Holy Trinity as I sprinkle earth over his grave."

Gretel didn't answer me.

"Where did she bury him?" I couldn't bring myself to say Freya's name aloud.

"Xanthe, she –"

"I need to do this special prayer ceremony at the burial site. You can join me for a mercy meal at *Marios* afterwards."

I heard a sob escaping from her, soft and trembling.

"Freya had him cremated. There's nothing left, not even a plaque in a cemetery."

I fell to my knees. *No, not cremation. Of all things not that.* Greeks do not believe in cremation and atheists must travel to Bulgaria, Germany or Turkey to turn their loved ones to ash. There is comfort in the rituals of death in my church. And even though Lawrence wasn't Greek, I wanted to carry out the traditions, like my mother did for her mother and I will do for her.

"Now Lawrence is truly lost to me forever," I cried.
Trying to reassure me, Gretel told me she had received a letter from someone who had received Lawrence’s kidney. "They said they had been given their life back, think about that. Lawrence's death wasn't pointless."

"Yes it was!" I shouted down the phone. "He wasn't a spare parts factory! Now I won't be able to be buried beside him, and my soul can't be united with his, because it has been lost in the fire. Freya claimed him totally in his death."

"I'm sorry Xanthe, there's nothing I can do," said Gretel, hanging up the phone.

I had been denied so much: the open coffin, so I could kiss Lawrence's cold lips, the burial, so I could commit his body to the ground, the grave; so I could get the priest to sprinkle the little bottle of wine and oil I would have lovingly prepared.

I have nothing: an empty womb, an empty heart, no one to bury. Unless, of course, Gretel is right and Lawrence lives on in other people. I turned the ring on my finger and whispered: who so loves believes the impossible…
CHAPTER THREE

The Transplant

The night the call came, Seth Barker was trying to read a book, legs up on the table, to alleviate the gentle throbbing in his feet. It was a side effect of the medication that kept his decaying heart from unfurling into a putrid mass inside his chest.

The heart, he knew, was the size and shape of a clenched fist, but his was so rotten it could barely punch out the rhythm needed to keep the blood circulating throughout his body. The oxygen tube snaking its way from a sturdy cylinder pushed life into him. He slowly turned a page with his blue tinged fingers.

The noise was annoying. *Beep. Beep. Beep.* It was the microwave. Amber was cooking dinner. Now that sex was just a memory, he was no longer interested in the young student. She bored him but he hadn't the energy to push her aside like the others. He hated it when she fussied and remembered anniversaries and birthdays and chose special presents. What did she want in return? Nothing's for nothing, was his favorite motto.


The book fell from Seth's hand and he stared at it lying on the floor. It was *The Temple at Deir el-Bahari,* published in 1894. First edition hardback, a rare gem, procured from his blackmarket contact Ned Egan.

Seth reached down, but didn't have the vigour to pick up the heavy book. He spent his days in a wheelchair with his oxygen bottle hoisted on the back, and
rashes up and down his body, as if even his own skin was trying to peel itself from its dying host.

"Amber!" he called. "I need you!"

She came running, a damp tea towel in her hand, her long blonde hair arranged in hastily assembled pigtails which made her look even younger than her twenty three years. He had snatched her from a Graduate Egyptology workshop, eager and willing. As a guest lecturer, the usual academic rules of sexual conduct didn't apply. It made him nostalgic, however, for the good old days when campus affairs were a rite of passage for all concerned.

"I dropped the book," Seth pointed.

"What's that noise?" Amber asked.


"It's the pager!" she squealed.

Seth took a moment to register.


Even though he knew the call could come at any time, and he had been waiting for it for three years, Seth hadn't dared to hope his name would come up. The minute his doctor looked at his x-ray and shook his head and said "Cardiomyopathy", there was only one way out of his hell. He needed someone else's heart inside his body.

At first, he had ignored the growing evidence, but when he could no longer walk along the corridors at the University of Melbourne without getting breathless he knew he was living on borrowed time. Even when he was sitting down, blood
pooled in his heart’s cavities, leaving him with low blood pressure and bouts of fainting that could strike at any time. Once most unfortunately, when he was riding a camel around the Pyramid of Menkaura at Giza.

Still, he had got used to the sluggish feeling, then the feeling of dying. How long had it been since he felt as if the red blood cells were being carried swiftly around the network of his veins? That oxygen was pushing through the river inside him?

Amber was on the phone. "We'll be right there."

She smiled at Seth. "They have a potential donor. They’re flying it in. They want you in the hospital straight away so they can put you on the cardiac monitor and prep you for surgery."

So it had finally happened.

Somewhere, a family had made a decision to switch off life support from a man who was breathing, warm but brain dead. Seth knew his future lay in such tragedy: a human sacrifice in return for his life. In a medical ceremony, a man had been laid out for him, swabbed with antiseptic before the shriek of a saw sounded and surgeons gained access by cutting open the skin over his ribcage and sawing through the sternum. He imagined how they had spread apart his donor's ribcage in order to get the prize organ and lift it from the cavity.

Now, all that was left was for the doctors to pack the heart in ice, place it in the cradle of an esky and send it by courier it to Seth's surgeons. Then, in a mirror operation, the process would be reversed, and it would be Seth himself who was sliced open.
Whose heart was he being summoned to? Who would he have to live with until the end of his days?

Seth Barker awoke in the intensive care unit feeling like his chest had been cracked open and his heart had been snatched from its resting place. He knew what the surgeons had seen once they were inside: no glistening jewel of a pump, but an obscenely grotesque lump swelled twice its size to compensate for its faulty ventricle.

Seth knew it was the curse of the intelligent to go through life acutely aware of every shade of their mortality. As he entered a conscious state, he could feel each pain and knew the reason his body ached. His legs had been cut open and his veins harvested to use as bypass vessels to stitch on to the coronary arteries.

He could, he imagined, sense the weight of the surgeon's hand imprinted on his back where they flipped him over to gain access to the back of his heart. He had been put on a heart-lung machine while his old heart was virtually stopped. How long had they been working like that? Did the junior surgeon get cramp from holding his body like a dead weight?

Dead: that's what he had been, officially, without a heart in his chest cavity. They probably had to scoop out the decaying matter with their fingers to allow access for the new organ. The prize he had waited so long for, while his lips turned blue and his breath laboured and he was reduced to sitting in a chair barely able to raise his hand to the computer while he waited for the phone call.
In the recovery room, he opened his eyes and felt the tubes sticking down his throat. His surgeon patted him on the shoulder and gave him the thumbs up. Dr Greg Moore’s blue scrubs were wet under the armpits.

"Seven and a half hours, Seth. It went like a dream. You’ve got a new heart pumping like a work horse."

Seth followed Moore around the room with his eyes, the only thing he was able to move. The morphine didn’t seem to be having any effect and it was as if he was being hacked open with a chainsaw.

He blinked his eyes frantically.

"I’ve upped the morphine. You’ve been out for ten hours since the operation, and are only just starting to come around. Give it time."

Time was something Seth once thought he had used up. But now, as he felt the surprising sensation of warmth back in his fingers, he realised that he had been given a new clock.

It was as if he had hitched a ride with Ra the Ancient Egyptian sun god.

He blinked at Dr Moore painfully and lifted his two fingers in a victory sign.

Three days later, Seth was back in the ward, sitting up in the heavy silk dressing gown he had bought in the Khan el-Khalili bazaar in Cairo. Open on his hospital bed was the latest journal article about the identification of Akhenaton’s mummy, and the possibility that Nefertiti ruled after him as the pharaoh Smenkaure. For the first time in years his head was clear, yet he had more interest chatting to the attractive nurse than in academic articles.
"I'd kill for a beer," he said. He peered at the name tag pinned to her uniform. "Nurse – Sophie Angelos?"

Her firm young breasts filled the ugly floral print with promise.

She concentrated on wrapping the blood pressure sleeve on his arm, but laughed at his high spirits.

"You're recovering remarkably fast," she said.

Her fingers on his skin, a light touch, seemed to reignite something inside.

"I feel like a man half my age. My donor must have been a young man." It wasn't just conversation. He wanted to know who shared his rising and falling, the minutes of his day and the passage of the sun across the sky.

"I can't say," Nurse Angelos was firm and professional. "It's illegal under the Human Tissue Act to identify a donor."

"Well, then, how about rustling up a coffee?" He was flirting now and it felt good, reminding him of the days when he'd pluck the prettiest students from the tutorials and take them back to his antiquity filled terrace house in Parkville and seduce them with his brilliance.

She blushed. "I don't think I'll be able to smuggle a Starbucks into Intensive Care."

"Okay then, thick Turkish coffee with a little Baqlawa on the side."

"That's an unusual request. However, you're down for broth, followed by white foods." She laughed and smoothed down her top.
Seth noted the little gold cross dangling from a chain around her neck, swinging tantalisingly close to a hint of cleavage showing through her uniform, and tried a different approach.

"God spoke to me last night."

"He did for sure; you've come out of surgery very well." She sat on the edge of the hospital bed now, crossing her legs and jotting notes in his chart. He wanted her. The thought came to him suddenly and despite the fresh incision on his chest, he imagined pushing her back onto the bed and wrenching up her top, and sucking greedily on her nipples before sliding into her. He realised that in the years leading up to the transplant, his sex drive had diminished with each labored breath. Now he was erotically charged, and the thought of a woman began consuming him as it had before his illness sucked away his libido and made his cock limp and flaccid.

"No, I mean he touched my face and told me that I was going to do something amazing," said Seth, lying.

"You're on some powerful drugs at the moment."

"I feel great," he replied, touching her lightly on the arm. "And I'd really like the Turkish coffee."

Sophie winked at him and smiled. "You are going to get me into trouble."

Seth laughed. Despite being fifty five years old, he knew he still managed to cut a dashing figure; tall and lean with skin bronzed from archeological digs under the Egyptian sun. His hair was still thick and hung in silver waves around his chiselled face.
"No, Miss Angelos, it is you who are going to get me into trouble."

Seth noticed the colour in his hands first. Before the transplant, they were bluish, an oddly alien consequence of the cyanosis caused by inadequate oxygen in the blood. Now, his hands looked pink. Plump and soft, his skin seemed firmer, even his nails had a gloss to them.

Dr Moore laughed when he held them up as evidence.

"Seth, I don't need to look at your hands. I've seen your new heart beating hard and strong when I connected it up."

'It's not my heart."

"It is now."

"What did you do with my old heart?"

"It turned to slop once I started pulling it from your body. It was only the medication that was holding it together while you waited for the transplant."

Seth imagined his heart barely contained in his chest, as unformed as a convenience store semi-frozen drink. What did it mean to have a heart so foul? From the time of the Ancient Egyptians, the heart had been seen as an "inner book" containing a person's thoughts, feelings and memories. His heart had been taken out, and along with it part of who he was.

He remembered his last trip to Egypt, excavating statues built to house the souls of a scribe of divine books. Inside the wooden figures lived the scribe's Ka or life force. He had touched the brittle wood and felt a connection with the man who had prepared documents for the temples. And now part of that experience
was consigned to the hazardous waste bin, part of his Ka thrown away. What did he have inside him now? Whose heart was it that beat strongly and made his cock hard at the mere sight of a pretty nurse? Whose Ka did he have now?

As he lay in the hospital bed at night, Seth felt an unfamiliar rhythm inside him, one that pumped to a new beat. He could visualise it in his mind, the atrioventricular valve, atrium and ventricle all pulsating inside his chest, the pulmonary arteries connected inside him with the slippery black thread that held his new heart tight.

Already he felt like a stranger in his own body. What was the sum of us, he wondered? The way we buttered our bread? The words we whispered in our lover's ear? A preference for beer or wine? The choice of television program? Each was a part of the internal road map that we learned to navigate by memory. But if the map changed? If the compass inside shifted? Then what?

Dr Moore told him his heart would never feel quite right, but it would work perfectly. "You'll be fine, just remember to take the immunosuppressants at strict intervals as you've been instructed."

"Otherwise the heart will turn on me," said Seth. "That I understand."

Soon after the operation, the memories started. First, they were all about her: the woman, the one. He couldn't see what she looked like, but her long dark hair fell over his face as she straddled him when they made love. He could feel the softness of her olive skin and hear her laughter.
"I'm having a lot of vivid flashbacks," he told the psychiatrist who had been sent to his bedside. She was a surprisingly young looking woman who wore severe glasses as if to give herself an air of authority.

"That could be a side effect of the Corticosteroids you are taking to take to suppress the inflammation," she said. "Strong memories, a sense of déjà vu, they're all part of the steroid package."

"But they are not my memories."

Seth knew he wasn't just the same man with a new heart, but a man whose new heart was starting to invade every part of his being.

When Seth was well enough to have visitors, his PhD students came, one by one and slightly puffed and sweaty from riding their bikes. He was in demand as a supervisor, even if the past year he'd trailed an oxygen bottle on wheels around.

They sat there, one after the other, awkward and slightly disinterested, preoccupied with their own response to his operation.

"Will you be able to read my paper for the Egyptology conference?"

"Does this mean you'll make it to Cairo for the next dig?"

"Are you going to be presenting in Barcelona next year?"

"What's it like riding on a camel?"

"I saw this video of a hotel balcony on the Nile, posted on YouTube."
"What hotel?" Seth looked up from reading a newspaper. Since the transplant, he'd started to take a keen interest in current affairs and demanded to be provided with the *Herald Sun*, *The Australian* and *The Age* each morning.

"I don't know. Someone took it with their phone camera and you could see the swimming pool right next to the Nile. It was like being there."

Seth stared out of the hospital window, watching the afternoon sun and drifting clouds shift the shadows across the city buildings. For the past three years, his entire life had been on hold. He couldn't commit to conferences, expeditions, travel or relationships. Now the flood of life was washing over him like the Nile breaking its banks.

"You're wasting your time," he told each doctorate student in turn.

"You think I should switch departments?"

"Why consume other people's reality rather than climb mountains yourselves?"

"Is that a metaphor?"

By the second week, Seth demanded fries and a rare steak, so blue with its own blood it sat in a violence of scarlet juice and cut as easily as a wedge of butter left on the kitchen bench.

"I thought you were a vegan?" Dr Moore said, slightly amused during his daily check up.

"Was. The operative word. I crave meat now. Thick slabs of it. " 
"A sign of improvement, health wise. Your energy is returning and your body craves foods rich in protein."

"The heart wants what it wants."

"Good for you. The physiotherapist is coming tomorrow. We'll see how the rest of your body is responding."

"I'd kill for a beer."

"Sounds normal to me."

"I used to hate beer."

"I used to hate reality television and then I got hooked when my kids started watching Survivor. Our tastes can change."

"But there are other things I've noticed, like —"

"Seth, you've been waiting for someone to die so you can have some quality of life. You can't expect to go through that and be the same person."

Seth nodded his head. "Since the surgery, there are times I don't recognise myself."

"Seth, you're worrying too much. The operation was a success. You'll adjust to the medication. Everyone does."

"I feel like there is someone else inside me."

"You're still the same man, just with a new heart. There is a new engine driving your body and expensive drugs pushing chemicals around in laps."

"The other day, I was proof reading my manuscript, and I saw an obvious error and picked up my pen to correct it. I noticed I instinctively went to put it in my left hand," said Seth.
"So?" Dr Moore finished writing in Seth's folder and put his Mont Blanc pen in his suit pocket.

"Despite being right handed."

"Seth, you've been through a lot. Major surgery, medication –"

"Was my donor left handed?"

"You know I can't tell you that."

"Can you tell me anything about the donor?"

"No. You know the rules and the reason they are there."

"I need something!" Seth threw a glass across the room so it smashed on the floor.

There was a short, tight silence, then Dr Moore said; "You threw that with your left hand." He took a small penlight from his pocket and shone it in Seth's eyes.

"What's wrong with me?" asked Seth.

"Nothing that can't be explained by the medication, but to put your mind at rest, I can tell you that your heart came from a forty year old man who died in a car accident."

"Was he from Melbourne?"

"The heart can come from anywhere in the country, as long as we can get it within a five hour window from the donor's body to the recipient's," Dr Moore said patiently. "Just because you're in a hospital in Melbourne doesn't mean the donor died in Melbourne. The data base places the organs with the best match on the day in terms of blood group, size and other medical factors."
"So it’s chance? Fate then, that I got this heart?"

"Seth, you were simply lucky your number came up."

"Egyptology has taught me there is more to death than we might imagine. It has taught me to respect death and the journey to the other side," Seth said.

"You came through the operation. You won. Now go home and live your life and dig up mummies or whatever it is you do. Our work is finished here."

But Seth wasn’t so sure.

Amber came to see him, laden with the magazines Seth requested: BRW, *Time* and *The Monthly*. When he was sick, Seth fantasised that once he was better he wouldn’t leave the house for a week while he consumed her body every way he could. Now, however, he looked at her dispassionately and was struck by how little he cared about her seeing him in a hospital gown.

"You’re looking a lot better," she said, giving his hand a squeeze.

"I’m watching too much television." Alarmingly, he was newly addicted to news and current affairs.

"I can’t wait to have you back," she squeezed his hand and ruffled his hair.

"You’re looking really good, you know that? Even your hair has become blond again."

"Nonsense, I had dark hair before it went grey."

Amber chewed her bottom lip. "Well, it’s blond now."

Seth ignored her as he concentrated on the news bulletin.
"Who is that?" he demanded. The face was as symmetrical and beautiful as the polished limestone statue of Ramesses II.

"It's the television reporter who was killed in a car accident," said Amber. "Lawrence Griffon."

"Never heard of him," said Seth. But the name made the hair stand up on his arms.

"He presented the show *Truth Seekers*. They travel the world's hot spots and come back with stories. He won an award for a report on Afghanistan after the Americans bombed the mountains looking for bin Laden."

Seth shook his head. "I loathe current affair shows. It's simply news pornography and does nothing to enhance our knowledge about what's going on in the world."

Amber sighed and pointed to the slender woman with red hair and luminous pale skin being interviewed on television: "His wife donated his organs. I watched it while you were in surgery. It's an amazing coincidence, don't you think?"

"What is?"

"He's killed and his organs are donated the same time as you get a new heart."

Seth held his breath. It all made sense: the obsession with news, the nightmares about war zones, the children with their faces half blown away, and the stench of death closing in like a black breasted buzzard.
Amber continued: "Lawrence Griffon was killed the night his portrait won the Archibald Prize, how about that? One of the Creative Writing students reckons it's like Oscar Wilde's story *The Picture of Dorian Grey."

"But in Wilde's story it is the painting which got older. In Griffon's case, he died and the painting remains forever young."

"Oh, yeah." Amber giggled at her ignorance. "Anyway, maybe you have his heart?"

There on the screen was the man of his heart. Of that Seth had no doubt. In fact, his heart skipped a beat just watching and listening. He had him inside his chest. Lawrence Griffon was now part of him. And if that was true, then Amber with her nose ring and pigtails had no place in his life. Seth leaned back against his pillows and asked her to leave as he needed to sleep.

If he had Lawrence Griffon's heart in his body, then he had his dreams as well, and the longing for the woman he fucked in those dreams. He wanted her, not Amber. *The heart wants what it wants.*
CHAPTER FOUR

Baby Hunger

After leaving the safe confines of Roxanne's warehouse, I wasn't sure where to go; either my studio in the rough and tumble bohemian sector of Fitzroy, or the penthouse eyrie I had shared with Lawrence. In the end, the choice was made for me. The key wouldn't fit into the Docklands apartment door and a sheepish representative from the Body Corporate handed me the card of a storage company. He admitted that "Mr Griffon's widow" was clearing the place out so she could sell the property.

The practical side of life wasn't one I worried about. I usually drifted by thinking it would resolve itself, but walking down to the storage area in the building's basement and seeing all my things stacked neatly in boxes in a steel cage reduced me to tears. The young man in his cheap dark suit glanced around anxiously before asking if he could call a removal van for me.

I shook my head. "Burn the lot, or take it to the tip. I don't want any of it." When a gypsy dies, all their possessions are destroyed and their caravan burned. A door had closed on one part of my life. I was no longer the person who lived here with Lawrence. I did not belong in this new and sparkling place.

At least in my studio I felt safe. After I fled my marriage and sold the suburban brick veneer I'd owned with Leon, I scraped enough together to buy a
decrepit shop in Brunswick Street that had been owned by someone from my father's village in Greece. Until he retired, Demetrios continued to use the shop front for his tailor's business, while I had the upstairs rooms as my studio. Back then, no-one predicted the area would take off as a trendy tourist mecca with shops crammed with designer labels and funky cafes.

I thank my parents for having a strong migrant work ethic and demanding I buy real estate despite my status as a single woman. Over the years their foresight enabled me the freedom to paint what I liked and charge increasingly high rents for the shop below as a way of maintaining cash flow. If I had blown my divorce settlement on trips overseas and clothes, as I had wanted, I would now be a poor middle-aged woman.

It felt reassuring to be back on my home turf, where everyone from the street buskers to the guy in the halal kebab shop knew me. I needed people to acknowledge my existence because everywhere I looked, I was faced with the fact that I was written out of Lawrence's history. Not just me, but our baby as well. What I hadn't counted on was the death notices in the newspapers. Each one offering their condolences to Freya as Lawrence's bereaved wife: "Our deepest sympathy to Freya and family", "Freya, our thoughts and sympathies are with you at this difficult time", "Lawrence, you were a man with so many talents and a huge generosity, dedicated husband to Freya and devoted father to Jasmine."

I wanted to scream out loud – they weren't together. They were going to get divorced. They'd each had numerous affairs and had in fact separated for
eighteen months when Jasmine was a small child. So much for the dream marriage everyone was eulogising.

Roxanne rang to tell me that one of my political paintings of Villawood Detention Centre – which sparked a caustic reaction in the media when it was exhibited at a World Refugee Day exhibition – had just sold at auction for $165,000.

"Honey, you now rank among Australia's fifty most collectable artists. Predictions are your next show will sell out before opening."

"I can't think about a new show. I'm in mourning."

"Xanthe, this is your chance to prove to the world that you were more than Lawrence's portrait artist." Roxanne sounded sincere, but I wondered whether she was thinking about the publicity.

"I don't think I can paint my grief for public display," I said.

"Yes you can," Roxanne insisted. I heard her draw back on a cigarette then launch into a passionate speech.

"Xanthe, I am your agent and I have to tell you that right now, you're as hot as you are ever going to get. You have national recognition from a broader audience because of the Archibald. You spent a career refusing to compromise. Don't waste your chance at real money now. That's not all - think of how much coverage your grief paintings will get in the media. Let's see how much exposure you'll get painting your side of the Lawrence love story. Freya doesn't have copyright on his life, after all."
I saw Freya’s taunting face in my mind - Freya the widow on television, Freya the face of organ donation, Freya my lover’s murderer. Freya my enemy.

"I'll do it," I said. "I'll paint a memento mori. Bleak. Funereal, with symbolic motifs of death used in Victorian times."

"What does 'memento mori' mean?"

"Remember that you will die."

"Very Gothic," said Roxanne. "I'll use that theme for the publicity and issue black arm bands with the media release."

Once I had committed to the exhibition, I went through the process of sifting through my past with Lawrence, of collecting ideas and images of who he was and what we meant to each other. I had a little box of photos I kept, Polaroids I'd taken of Lawrence on my bed, of him drunk with my red Spanish scarf around his neck, of us in the bathroom together, our bodies fused as one flesh. I pushed my hands through these secret snippets of time together and spent hours running my hands over the contours of his face, tracing over and over again in case I forgot his cheekbones or the way his mouth rose up in a smile. I covered the studio in all the sketches I had made of him – his face, his body, his hands, his eyes. In between the drawings I put up photographs, and newspaper cuttings. Everywhere I looked, there were images of my love.

I found the last photo of the two of us which was taken the night I told Lawrence I was pregnant. I stuck it at the corner of a blank canvas.

As I reached for a brush, it fluttered to the floor.
Holding it in my hands, it seemed Lawrence was looking directly at me, as if to tell me something. I felt a cold breeze over my skin and all the little hairs stood up on my arm. Was Lawrence trying to reach me from beyond the grave?

The thought gave me such a shock that that I dropped the photo again. When I picked it up, my fingers brushed something cool and hard underneath. It was a button. I held it up to the light and turned it over. It was a beautiful, textured mother of pearl button that came from one of Lawrence's hand made shirts – the ones he had made at Turner & Ashton in Sydney. Perhaps I had ripped it off him in a moment of passion.

Was this a sign? According to gypsies, after a person dies, their soul retraces its steps for an entire year. Was Lawrence now coming back to the studio where we had spent so much time together? Was he asking me to contact me?

I had no idea how to do that. Although my mother believed she would meet her brother again and that his soul existed somewhere else, she never tried to make contact with him in the afterlife. No doubt this was because my yaiyai was a staunch member of the Greek Orthodox Church, and didn't believe in reincarnation: "You have only one life, one death and one Day of Judgment," she would say, and cross herself. She swore in Greek when she discovered a ouija board in my bedroom, which I had constructed for a game at my pre-teen slumber party.

I now pondered how to raise Lawrence's spirit from the other side. I needed a spell. I remembered that Gretel had given me one of those elaborately
packaged women's spell handbooks for my birthday, after I had half jokingly told her I needed an exorcist to get Freya out of my life. I found the copy on the bookshelf next to Germaine Greer's tome *The Obstacle Race*, which had been a 21st birthday present. I opened *The Wicked Way With Wicca* and was assaulted by the heavy bergamot scent of the aromatherapy "spell candle". Prising out the book, which was covered in purple velvet, I dislodged an accompanying package of glitter that swirled to the floor.

The book promised "simply sensational spells for love and power". What spell would help me? The book had nothing on raising the dead, but I found one called "bring my lover back", which seemed appropriate. I needed orange essence, a pink candle and a cocktail stick, a mirror and a photograph or drawing of my love.

Luckily, I had them all on hand, except for the pink candle, but I improvised by painting the bergamot candle the right color.

The stumbling block came when it said the spell had to be conducted on Friday, the day sacred to Aphrodite, goddess of love, and on a waxing moon for maximum power. I couldn't wait that long, but found a sub clause in the index which indicated a lock of hair could boost the spell's power.

Even magic needed DNA.

I remembered the lock of hair I snipped to match a shade needed for the portrait. Lawrence joked I had better clip a piece from under the ones artfully streaked with blonde highlights. "No need for everyone to think I am vain." He constantly chaffed at the impositions of television, but accepted them as his
passport to a large audience. Lawrence maintained you could either keep your scruples or take the harder road and convert the masses.

At first, I disagreed with him – after all, didn’t I only play to a small, adoring crowd of believers? But as I watched Lawrence’s television show, I came to realise he was right. So, he had to use fake tan and put golden streaks in his hair – he still held big corporations and smug governments accountable for unsavory truths, and brought them home to the suburban heartland.

I read the book of spells again and began by inscribing Lawrence's name on the candle, then on the piece of paper my name. I braided the two together with the red, green and white ribbons and poured some orange essence in a silver bowl and set it alight. As the little flame burned, I imagined Lawrence's face and the two of us together again and chanted the magic quatrain: "to see your eyes again, my love, to imagine us together again, to have you at my side again, my love, forever and ever again. Aphrodite bless us and make my request be heard."

The candle blew out and darkness enveloped me. I felt the brush of a cold hand on my face. I thought I smelled Lawrence’s distinctive aftershave.

"Skorda!” I yelled as I spat and jumped away, crossing myself for good measure against the Evil Eye. What was I doing? I ran to the light and turned it on, half expecting to see Lawrence walk through the door.

The room looked normal but I checked behind the doors. That's when I started to feel ridiculous. But what else could I do? Freya had taken everything
away and I didn't even get the chance to perform the comforting rituals over Lawrence's coffin. At least I was doing something now.

I took a swig of Metaxa and felt the brandy burn my throat. It warmed me and gave me a shot of bravery.

To seal the spell's power, I stuck Lawrence's photograph on the antique gilded mirror near my bed. I kissed it softly as I would an Ikon on his coffin: his blue eyes, long nose, the wide cheekbones, large mouth and soft lips. I kissed until I could feel his flesh under my fingers, and taste his salty tongue on my lips.

I lit the candle again and turned off the light.

"Give me a sign," I called out. I watched the comforting flicker of the flame, and held my hands to its beguiling dance. Nothing happened and I started swaying, chanting in tongues as I had heard at funerals, where the wailing rolled into a frenzied cacophony of strange but beautiful sounds that seemed to have echoes in a distant Romany past.

The candle blew out.

I willed myself to sit still and adjust my eyes to the darkness. "Lawrence?" I called out. "Are you there?"

There was silence. I concentrated on my breathing, deep breaths in and out that I learned at yoga. If Lawrence was here, I had nothing to fear – he wasn't going to hurt me. I remembered how we'd tumbled onto this very floor when we were making love, our sweaty bodies coiled together. I waited but nothing happened, except I started to get a cramp in my leg. Finally, I eased myself up and turned on the light, stretching my arms which had been held in a rigid yoga
pose. In doing so, my sleeve brushed a photo frame on a chest of drawers, which fell to the floor and shattered. I carefully picked it up, extracting a picture of Lawrence and his daughter Jasmine from the shards of glass.

This was the sign. Lawrence was directing me to Jasmine.

Methodist Ladies College was in a good location for public transport, which was fortunate as I don't drive. It always amused Lawrence, but as I explained, what did I need a car for? I lived and worked in Fitzroy and could walk into the city in fifteen minutes. And if I wanted to go to the beach I'd hop on a tram to St Kilda. Even the wealthy inner eastern suburbs like Kew were easily accessible by tram, which is how I found myself sitting in the tram stop opposite the schools' imposing gates.

I'd gone to Northcote High School myself, and smirked when Lawrence told me Jasmine had been ensconced in the elite girl's school since the age of three. But as I watched the girls pour out of the gates at 3.30 pm, confident and glowing with the world at their feet, I felt envious.

I scanned the crowd, knowing Jasmine's face so well from the awkward television appearances she'd made alongside Freya. I also had the photo of Jasmine and Lawrence with me to help with the identification.

My heart was pounding as if I was looking for Lawrence himself. I guess I was in a way. Jasmine was a little piece of him, his only genetic link to another generation.
I stifled a sob, suddenly doubled over with pain. Jasmine would have been my baby's sister. I had lost the thing I most wanted in the world besides Lawrence – our baby.

"Are you all right?"

I looked up and saw an elderly woman neatly dressed in a knit suit with pearls around her ageing throat. "Can I help you?"

I shook my head and thanked her and hurried off to the sudden swell of school girls crowding around the tram stop. I'd dressed as conservatively as I could, given my wardrobe. But I still attracted glances from the crowd. I'd opted for a long black skirt that wasn't velvet but thick ribbed wool, and my yaiyai's best moiré silk scarf knotted at the neck. I had a black beret pulled on an angle, my hair coiled to one side, and a slick of siren red lipstick.

One tall and lean teenager, her checked uniform hitched up high to reveal a flash of taut thighs, nodded approvingly at my vintage 1940s belted black and white check jacket which I had picked up in Greville Street back in the early 1980s, when that area of Prahran had style credibility.

"Cool – is it real?" she asked.

"Yes," I said, as I looked past her for a glimpse of Jasmine. "But I'm not as old as the jacket."

She laughed and pulled out her phone and snapped me and pushed back into the throng before I could protest at being digitally captured. I'd probably warrant a mention on her Facebook page.
I was wondering if Jasmine would also approve of the way I dressed when she suddenly appeared. It was like an electric current through my heart. As she turned around, laughing at what a friend has said, the angle of her face was exactly Lawrence.

*When we first met.* I remembered him looking at me in the same way as I was about to say goodbye. He shook his head and laughed and said "don't think you're simply going to walk out of my life".

We'd exchanged business cards at the art gallery opening. Well, rather, Lawrence gave me his card and I'd written my name and phone number on the back of his hand.

"Don't you have a card?" he asked.

"Roxanne takes care of everything."

"She sounds very efficient."

Afterwards, Roxanne warned that I was playing with fire: Lawrence was married and his wife was a regular in the social pages.

As I followed Jasmine down Glenferrie Road, where trams trundled past filled with private school boys jostling in packs for the private school girls, even the way she walked reminded me of Lawrence.

*On our first date*, he took me to Vue de Monde, the city's most outrageously expensive and unbelievably divine French restaurant. I had only ever walked past and glimpsed the luxurious interior in the magnificent Normanby Chambers building.
If Lawrence wanted to overwhelm me with his style, taste and how much a top television presenter earned, he had well and truly got me hooked from the first bite of the house made linguini and soft quail eggs and crayfish. He ordered wine I had never even heard of - a bottle of *Michelot Clos St Felix* from Burgundy. I couldn't even pronounce it and felt guilty for choosing an imported over local brand. Lawrence simply laughed and told me that I had to broaden my horizons, and that the world wouldn't end if I had a sip of expensive French wine. I didn't like to admit that after a sip of the famed wine, I still preferred a full bodied Cabernet from the Clare Valley.

Over dinner, where each course came out with a flourish more elaborate than the last – down to kiwi fruit slices presented as glazed lollipops between courses - Lawrence told me about covering America's attack on Iraq in 2003 and how outraged he was that the media worldwide were so skillfully "managed" by the US Army.

"You know what Senator Johnson described as being the first casualty of war back in 1917?" he asked.

"Children?"

"No, the truth. And that's why, when I was offered my own show, I said fine, on one condition, I want to be out there, covering from the front line, and I don't want to be embedded with anyone. A free agent. That's why the show is called *Truth Seekers.*"
"Can television ever reveal the truth?" I was drunk on French wine and opulence. And slightly intimidated. Not by Lawrence's money, but by the power that he attributed to the press.

"You're right, because in the end, all media is controlled by the proprietors. That is why you, Xanthe, are the real truth seeker. You and every artist, you're not embedded in any culture, you can comment at will."

"And watch as no one bothers to listen." The room glowed and the wine made me feel flushed and giddy.

Lawrence shook his head. He had the same earnest look on his face I now saw on Jasmine, as she spoke with her friend.

"Xanthe," Lawrence said. "You are special because you use your talent to tell the world the truth behind the news headlines and the humanity behind the statistics. I dips my lid to you." He held up his glass and saluted me.

"Dips my lid? What does that mean?"

"An old Australian expression meaning I raise my hat to you. Don't you love that language? All part of the R and VT of life."

"Okay – now what does that mean? It sounds like a car engine."


And that was the point I fell in love with Lawrence. It wasn’t the starched white linen tablecloths, the gentle hum of seduction and flattery of an expensive
restaurant, or even the damn fine French wine. It was Lawrence reaching out to me with his heart and touching mine.

_Lawrence, who has your heart now? I hope they are taking good care of it._

I kept my distance and followed Jasmine to a video store, where she greeted the middle aged man behind the counter with a smile and a wave then disappeared around the back.

Luckily, there was a sale on so the shop was busy, and I rifled through the DVDs, alongside a couple of school girls. A mother admonished her son for wiping his snot over the cover of _The Wiggles_ and he scowled at her before she hoisted him up on her hip and kissed his soft plump cheek.

Jasmine reemerged wearing the store's garish magenta polo shirt with a bulky logo emblazoned on the front. I crept closer, hiding behind the Sci Fi section as I watched her. She looked so much like Lawrence it hurt. The same strong nose and jaw, the wide almost Slavic cheekbones he'd inherited from his Russian grandfather, and those intense blue eyes, the blue of the Aegean Sea.

I wondered who my baby would have looked like. How much of me would there be in him? Would he have inherited my olive skin and dark hair, or resemble Jasmine, with blue eyes, blond hair and strong jaw? _Our baby._ I whispered it to myself. Our baby would have been Jasmine’s little brother.

I wanted to go up to her and introduce myself. But I stopped myself. She looked so young and vulnerable. Speaking to her now would be horribly selfish. How could I do such a cruel thing to Lawrence’s child? She was once going to be
my step daughter, and I had wanted to embrace her into my heart. Now Lawrence and the baby were dead, I had no connection to Jasmine at all. There was no reason to ever see her again. I was a stranger.

"Can I help you?"

I dropped the *Farscape* DVD on the floor. The man in the purple polo shirt picked it up.

"We've got a three for one special on weekly rentals. If you get an overnight one as well you get a free recycle bag and go into our draw for the Werner Herzog box set."

"Sorry, I forgot my card," I mumbled, bolting for the door.

I sat numbly on the tram going back home. Jasmine would never be my step daughter. She would never be the half sister of my child. Freya had Lawrence's daughter and she had taken Lawrence from me.

I held the photo of Lawrence and Jasmine in my hand. What had he been trying to tell me? I couldn't be in Jasmine's life.

"Lawrence, I don't understand," I whispered.

I scanned the people on the tram, wondering if any of them had a piece of Lawrence inside them. I had read about women who gave up a child for adoption, and how they always looked for a child who might be their flesh and blood, calculating the years so that the child in the crowd was always the age of the one they had lost.
That's what I did now - because somewhere, Lawrence was alive in other people. The recipients of his organs were seeing the world through his eyes, feeling emotions with his heart and breathing through his lungs.

But like a relinquishing mother, I had no claim on them. I didn't even know how to contact them and ask if they felt Lawrence's spirit inside them.

As part of the research for my Memento Mori exhibition, I went to Federation Square and the Ian Potter Centre for Australian Art to see *Black in Fashion: Mourning to Night*, a celebration of the heritage of black, from nineteenth mourning dress to the little black dress. Listening to Eartha Kitt, Nick Cave, Ladytron and Visage, I immersed myself in the luxury of woe as influenced by Queen Victoria's public grief after the death of Prince Albert - black crepe clothing, jet jewellery and memorial hair brooches. At least widow's weeds gave status to despair.

I envied those Victorian widows who could layer themselves in stiff fabrics that were so opaque even the shimmer of the sun was snuffed out when they walked down the street. I knew the black heart it mirrored, the bottomless well of emptiness, the sheer numbing pallor of longing for a touch that would never be felt again.

At the Gallery’s Crossbar Café, I sipped tea and watched a group of thirty something mothers chatting about the latest exhibition and balancing chubby babies on their knees as they shared cake. There was something vaguely *Stepford Wives* about them – they were all blonde, gently middle class and
earnest and wore a uniform of cross-over tops, interesting necklaces and expensive jeans and boots. Their three wheel prams jammed the floor space and they merrily breastfed and demanded bottles heated up and looked settled in for the afternoon.

I stumbled out, unable to stand seeing one more fat-cheeked cherub. Books: that was what I needed, art books. My refuge has always been in images and words. Libraries and art galleries and bookshops were sacred places for me. The National Gallery bookshop kindly provided seats for worshippers: usually those too poor to buy the gorgeous art books and catalogues. Even opening the pages, thick and heavy with promise, made me happier. I listened to the spine submit to my fingers and sniffed the aroma of thick paper. Then a child's cry interrupted my thoughts.

"I don't want to go. No never."

I looked up. A blond boy, perhaps five years old, was stamping his feet and clutching a well worn stuffed tiger under one arm and a brand new set of paints in the other hand.

"I want them! I want them! Why can't I have them?"

"Joseph, no."

I looked over and saw another boy, obviously his older brother, admonishing him. But young Joseph wasn't having any of it.

"I want to do some drawing."

"Mummy said you've got lots of pencils at home."
"I'm getting the paints!" Joseph stood his ground and put his hands on his hips and pouted. He looked like a mini Mick Jagger and I longed to pick him up and hug him. I could see myself in him, with his steely determination and love of beautiful art materials. I had coveted a full set of Derwent pencils for my eighth birthday, but never got them. I would look longingly at a school friend's Magenta pencil, knowing it would never be mine. Instead, I had a perfunctory, generic brand that was all my parents could afford. Maybe that's why I never denied myself beautiful things and my studio overflowed with objects I had fallen in love with.

"Joseph, put those down now." An exasperated woman my age, dressed in tailored pants and a neatly fitted checked jacket, charged over and tried to rip the paints from the little boy's hand.

"Come on, daddy is waiting."

"No. I want the paints."

"I said no."

"Mum," whined the older boy. "I'm going to miss the Discovery Channel show on alien abductions."

"Come on Joseph."

"No."

"Right, if you don't come now, you'll have a toy confiscated," threatened the mother.

"I don't care," yelled Joseph at the top of his voice. "I want to paint."
"If you think I'm going to let you make a mess of the house —" The woman grabbed the little boy roughly by the arm and pulled him. I was half way up from my seat, ready to say something, when a man in a neat jumper and beige pants came into the shop.

"What's taking so long? We're going to get a ticket if you don't get a move on."

The older boy grabbed the paints and rushed to put them back to the stand where they'd come from and little Joseph cried and held out his arm.

"I want the paints — "

I watched as he was dragged from the store and as they went out the door, I realised Joseph had dropped his stuffed tiger. I scooped it up and ran out of the shop.

"Excuse me," I called out to the family, who by now were trying to pull the hysterical Joseph by both arms along to the lifts. "He dropped his toy."

The woman turned to me, and as she did the little boy looked up and saw what I had in my hand. All of a sudden he stopped screaming and the biggest smile lit up his face. His little hands reached out to me.

I now realised why childless women felt compelled to snatch babies from prams and toddlers from playgrounds. If I could take little Joseph home, I would let him play with all the paints his heart desired. There would be no bedtime, no baths, no homework, and no bossy older brother. We would be free spirits, just the two of us.
My little boy – for in my heart I was sure our baby had been a boy, even though it was too early for the scans to pick up gender - would have looked just like Joseph: the same big blue eyes, feisty temperament, passion and artistic streak.

That's when it hit me so hard my heart almost stopped beating.

That was what I had lost. Not a fat faced baby in a pram, not the coffee mornings with the other new mothers, but a child, my flesh and blood, someone that Lawrence and I had not only created but would have raised together. Someone we could teach to appreciate art and feel compassion and make the world a better place. We had lost the child of our love, of our hearts and of our souls.

We had lost our little boy.

And I had lost my family.

"Say thank you to the nice lady, Joey," said the woman.

Joseph snuggled his face into the well worn tiger. "Thank you," he mumbled shyly.

"You're welcome," I said, as I choked back tears. The lift doors opened and the four of them entered. Within a heartbeat they were all discussing what they were going to have for dinner, and I was left on the other side as the lift doors closed.

Three days later, Gretel phoned me. Her voice was thick from crying and she had to gasp to get out the words in little hiccups.
"I received another letter from one the recipients," she said.

I paused for a moment. I didn't know if I wanted to hear what they said.

"All right," I said, bracing myself.

"It's from the person who got his liver," said Gretel. "Apparently they had been healthy until a sudden illness caused their liver to fail. It says here they didn't have long to live."

She read it aloud:

"I can't tell you what this operation has meant to me although I know I am alive because the person you loved has died. There isn't a day that I don't think about them inside me and it is almost as if I can feel them and sense their dreams. My doctors tell me this is a side effect of the medication I must take for life, but it feels more than that. I wanted to tell you that I honour this gift every second. How can I thank you enough? If it wasn't for the generous, selfless gift from my donor family I would not be here to help my young daughter, whom we adopted from China. I will be eternally grateful to you."

I tried to imagine who had received Lawrence's liver. It sounded like a man and someone that Lawrence would admire. In fact, it seemed as if Lawrence was happy in his new body. The recipient said they had been having Lawrence's dreams – perhaps they were of me?

Then I remembered the story Lawrence told me about the scientists who had discovered trait transfer.

"Lawrence told me he interviewed doctors who believed that the soul of a person could be transplanted along with a donor organ," I said.
Gretel suddenly voiced what I had been thinking.

"You see, Xanthe, I told you Lawrence lives on in other people. A part of him is in this person and helping to bring up this child. Just think of that," she said.

"Did they sign their name to the letter?" I asked. "Is there an address?"

I wanted to see this recipient and ask them about their dreams. I wanted to look them in the eye and see my love. I wanted to hold them, kiss them, tell them I loved them. I wanted to be with Lawrence again. If they had part of Lawrence in them, they were, by extension, Lawrence.

"No, it's anonymous. Apparently there are strict rules about disclosure. I already asked," said Gretel.

"So how do I find them? To talk to them about the dreams they have been having? They must be Lawrence’s dreams, after all," I said.

"Xanthe, you can't meet them. It's enough that we know that they are alive because of Lawrence's gift."

"No, it isn't," I said. "Who made these rules and why?"

"Xanthe, you have to move on," Gretel's voice was firm. "You are still young. There will be other opportunities for you to find love."

"I believe that there is a perfect person for each of us, a soul mate, and that Lawrence was my soul mate," I said. "He made me feel like my true self."

There was a pause. "Xanthe – maybe it just wasn't meant to be," said Gretel.
I started crying. The hot tears coated my face and ran into my mouth. "I will never believe that. What we had was special, precious. It can't be gone just because he is dead, I don't believe that."

It was too much for Gretel and she made a hurried excuse and hung up. I sat there with the phone in my hand, staring out the window until it grew dark outside.

How could I ever love anyone else after Lawrence? My love didn't die just because he was dead. It was too real, too strong and powerful to be simply taken away. I could not let death – or Freya – claim victory.

Besides, there was a lingering hint of gypsy in me, which had nothing to do with my flamboyant and unconventional dress sense. I believed the dead lived among us and their spirits haunted us. Lawrence's death was unnatural and senseless and I felt his soul to be angry and restless. Life for the dead should continue on another level, but there is no way Lawrence was able to ascend to that space, not after what happened to him.

If what Gretel said was true – that Lawrence lived on in other people – then I had to find them. I had to find him, to save him, to recreate what we had lost. For if Lawrence was inside the donor recipients, if his spirit lived on in them, then maybe they could help me bridge the space between life and death. They kept his spark alive inside their bodies, and their bodies in turn could give me a spark of life.

I gasped when I thought through what this meant. Could it be true? Might this be a way to get back what had been taken from me? I put down the phone
and went to a painting of Lawrence that I had half finished. I touched his face, feeling the cold wet paint under my fingers.

"The recipients can give me Lawrence's baby," I said aloud. A door slammed shut and the lights flickered. Outside, a storm was gathering force and dark clouds hung over the tall and elegant terraced shops along Brunswick Street. But this wasn't the cause of the disruption. Lawrence had heard me. He was trying to send me a message. His spirit was near and I could sense he agreed with what I said. There was a way back to him after all.

It had been six weeks since the accident. Six weeks since the miscarriage. And still there was no sign of my period. I went to the local doctor who assured me that the body took time to heal. There was the option of taking Provera to bring on my cycle, or if I was really worried, I could see a specialist – an obstetrician who dealt with fertility problems and "women of my age".

I smarted at the sting in those words. I didn't feel forty. I didn't even look forty. Plenty of women I knew and read about in magazines had children at my age, and older. In fact, in the centuries before reliable birth control, women had given birth to children in their forties and even fifties. More to the point, my yaiyai had given birth to my uncle Mikailis when she was forty five and she'd outlived him. She had not only breastfed him, but two of the other babies in the village when an illness swept through and threatened their mothers. Out of a deep love and respect for her kindness, they called her "paramana" or second mother until the day she died.
Still, I demanded to see the specialist. I wanted to have a baby. Not just any baby – Lawrence’s baby. In my mind, a plan was hatching, one that was bursting from a little seed of an idea and which I nurtured every day. I kept turning it over and over, chanting to myself "the recipients can give me Lawrence’s baby." The more I said it, the less strange it seemed, until, finally, it was a perfectly reasonable idea.

Dr Mendoza’s offices were located in the Epworth Hospital in inner city Richmond. As soon as I saw the original artworks in the waiting room – bright paintings of women and children by local female artists – I felt at ease. The fact that the other women flipping through magazines were all about my age, or even older, was reassuring. I had been told Dr Mendoza was a guru in complex pregnancies and something of a Goddess when it came to helping older women conceive.

She smiled warmly and chatted about the Archibald prize to take my mind off the internal examination. While I was relieved to put my clothes back on, I hoped she wouldn’t judge me when she knew what I wanted.

"Is it too late to get pregnant again?" I asked.

She shook her head. "You are only forty, Xanthe. When I started studying, the term we used for any mother over thirty was 'elderly primigravida'. Flattering, isn’t it? But I had my first child at thirty eight. I wasn’t ready until then."

Dr Mendoza handed me a silver framed photo of three children, a daughter and twin sons. "Although I got pregnant easily the first time, I had the
boys when I was forty-two, after two years of IVF. There is always a chance that delaying having children will mean complications, but throughout history there have always been plenty of late life babies."

I told her about my grandmother and she nodded. "There is a lot of hysteria about women not being able to have children after the age of forty, fed in part by the media. The truth is that the number of women having babies in their forties has doubled in the past decade," she reassured me.

"In fact, I have a friend who is also now in her late forties, who was so convinced that women over forty were all infertile that she was quite bewildered when she came back from a romantic holiday in Italy with her husband and found she was putting on weight. She had no idea she could get pregnant."

"I was pregnant," I said through my tears. "My partner died in the car accident."

I told her how it felt when the semi trailer hit us. How I was flung into the side airbag so hard that something ruptured and the little seed of life that we created broke free and spun out of control inside my shaking body. How I had bled from between my legs and from my mouth and nose and my crushed ribs had nearly speared my lung. It was only the fact that the pregnancy hormones were already relaxing my muscles that my spine was able to withstand the impact as the truck swerved out of control and ploughed into us.

Dr Mendoza put down the photo and squeezed my hand. She handed me a box of tissues.
"You want to have another baby. Of course, that's understandable. The
drive to reproduce is what keeps the human race going, and you don't turn off
that desire because of how old you are. Tell me, Xanthe, did you lobby to have
your partner's sperm saved after the accident?"

I shook my head. "He was cremated before I got out of the coma."

Dr Mendoza nodded. "I am so sorry. Can I ask – are you in a new
relationship? Is that why you have come to see me?"

"No, I want to have a baby but there is no one else in my life. I am alone."

"There are other options available to you," Dr Mendoza said. "You want a
baby but understandably are not a new relationship. I would classify you in this
situation as 'socially infertile', which allows you the use of IVF as a single
woman."

I thought of Lawrence and the way we got pregnant. I was not socially
infertile.

Dr Mendoza continued: "There is the option of donor sperm. I would
recommend trying artificial insemination first and if that doesn't work after two or
three cycles, I suggest we move straight to IVF."

"But I got pregnant naturally before." In my head I screamed – I don't want
donor sperm – I want Lawrence's baby.

"Yes, of course, but I assume you were having regular intercourse, which
makes all the difference."

"But IVF seems like such a huge step," I hated even saying the words. It
was like admitting there was no way to get naturally pregnant.
"If you start now, the outcomes are still good. In fact, you have every chance of a favourable outcome for a few years yet, but I do have to warn you that you can't wait forever. While there is reasonable success using assisted reproductive technology for women in their early forties, after forty four it gets harder."

"But my grandmother had a baby when she was forty five," I protested.

Dr Mendoza nodded. "Although pregnancies will occur from the mid forties, we advise women in this age group to consider other options, like egg donation and adoption, as the rates of success with IVF fall from below three per cent per cycle at age forty four years, to well below one per cent within one to two years."

"I remember my mother putting the fear of God into my about getting pregnant when I was growing up. I always thought you could get pregnant until menopause," I said.

"Alas, recent studies have revealed that the actual end of natural fertility is closer to the forty-fifth year of life," said Dr Mendoza. "The problem is that the desire to have a child stays with us much longer than that."

It seemed insane to even articulate what I was thinking. I twisted the engagement ring around and around my finger, thinking of what Lawrence had inscribed inside: *who so loves believes the impossible*. "My partner's organs were donated and his sister read me a letter from someone who received his liver. They said they could feel Lawrence's spirit inside them. Do you think that is true?"
"Organ donation is a life altering experience. I'm sure that they believed it."

Dr Mendoza looked at me closely, suddenly catching on.

"But is it really true? Is Lawrence's soul really inside them?" I asked.

"Would it be possible to get pregnant with his baby that way?"

"Oh, Xanthe," Dr Mendoza shook her head sadly. "Only in science fiction movies, I am afraid. You probably need to talk to someone else about this."

"Another fertility specialist?" I asked. I wondered if there was someone who dealt in such things.

Dr Mendoza quickly wrote a referral on a piece of paper and handed it to me. "This is the name of a very good psychiatrist who also deals in grief counseling. You may find it very useful to speak to her."

"I'm not crazy," I protested. I held the paper as if it was coated in anthrax powder.

"I'm not saying that, but you are at a very vulnerable time in your life," Dr Mendoza said.

"So what am I to do?" I twisted my amber worry beads around my fingers.

Dr Mendoza handed me a bundle of pamphlets about reproductive technology.

"Every woman has her own story and it needs to be respected. I see too much heartache from women who have waited for the right man and he has never come along, or been in a relationship with a man who doesn't want children and then find they are forty and there isn't so much time left. Xanthe, my advice to you is that if you want a baby, you have to do everything you can to
have one. IVF and donor sperm might be your answer, or another relationship might be what you need. But the main thing is to give your self time to heal."

She patted my shoulder reassuringly as I left. "When you feel ready to pursue things further, come and see me, okay?"

On the way out, I walked past pregnant women rubbing their stomachs in the waiting room, and a photograph honour board of Dr Mendoza, in blue surgical scrubs, holding baby after baby and smiling next to exhausted but satisfied older women. I put the brochures and the referral in my bag. I wondered how many of those babies born to older women were the result of long term relationships, natural conceptions, IVF, donor sperm or even donor eggs.

I thought of the letter from the liver recipient that Gretel had read to me. Somewhere, out there, around Australia, were people with pieces of Lawrence inside them. If, as the recipient claimed, they could feel Lawrence's soul inside them, then surely I could meet them and also connect with Lawrence's spirit. It wasn't a crazy idea. Lawrence after all had interviewed a doctor who believed that the soul could be transplanted via the donor's organs.

A tram trundled down Bridge Road as the glass sliding doors in the hospital's foyer silently slid open. A poster for Truth Seekers with Lawrence's face covered the side of the tram, all the way up to the roof. From the decal deep near his eyes, a little boy looked out of the window, directly at me.

It felt like a sign. I had to find Lawrence. But how was I going to do that?
CHAPTER FIVE

The Heart Wakes

Once at home, nothing seemed the same. Seth went through his cupboards and threw out the food that now disgusted him: muesli, soy milk, tofu and non dairy cream cheese. In its place he bought dark roasted coffee beans, thick hummous and baba ghanoush, a bag of shelled pistachios, salty Greek feta cheese and glossy Kalamata olives. He filled his freezer with meat, so much so that it looked as if he'd slaughtered an animal over the weekend and packed it in to ward off a long and cold winter.

Seth put his classical CD collection in a box and consigned Liszt, Mozart and Bach to the attic. He spent an afternoon at Readings Books in Lygon Street, where he purchased music by Elvis Costello, the Rolling Stones and The Who.

There was a resonance now and a rhythm to the days that were not his. When he went to bed, he could feel the blood pumping through his veins, he could hear his heart beat, he could feel the back of his neck tighten against the cotton fabric. His body twitched and shuddered, sweat soaked the sheets. When he was awake, he sensed a presence beside him, like someone watching him.

There were obvious reminders that he wasn't alone, such as the scar on his chest and the pills that he swallowed. Then there were shadows and whispers and a glimpse every time he went past a mirror of someone else staring out at him.
Seth was consumed with documenting his recovery. He started writing a book that his publisher was sure had a market. His Egyptian journals had sold well, coupled with his impressionistic photographs. Now he turned the camera on himself. Stripped naked, he stood in front of a white wall and took photographs of bruises and scar tissue. He wrote about his thoughts as he came out of surgery. He kept trying to articulate the memories of pain and near death. How had he really felt? How could you explain nuances of agony? There was the necessity to pin these down, as if they were the signposts on this uncharted journey, or a brilliant butterfly to be trapped on a board.

Harder still to record was Seth’s gradual loss of himself. It was as if the new heart was taking away his very soul. Dr Moore said the heart was simply a muscle but Seth and his heart had been through fifty five years together and now it was gone. Was it the general anesthetic that had destroyed so many of those memories he had held dear? Why was the image of the Pyramid against the blue Egyptian sky now like a grainy photo in his mind? Were all the things that had made him now buried deep inside somewhere, waiting to be uncovered? Or, were Lawrence Griffon’s memories struggling to the surface?

After fruitless searching through Factiva and other databases for information on heart transplant surgery and borrowed memories, he took a punt and logged onto YouTube. One of his students had bemoaned the fact that he was behind in his thesis because he spent all day watching TV show videos set to underground garage band music and time lapse sequences of the Aurora Borealis lights flickering their eerie neon glow over Alaska.
That was how Seth came to watch a video on the internet of open heart surgery and heart transplants.

He placed his hand on his scar as he watched a rib bone cracked open with sharp pliers and flesh sliced and pulled apart to reveal the pulsating heart within. The quickening muscle was life itself, pushing and pulling to its internal memory. No wonder the ancient Egyptians worshipped the organ and held it sacred in mummification – it was the life source of the body just as the Ethiopian headwaters of the Nile carried the monsoonal rains that gave life to the Delta.

It seemed to Seth that the transplant process was much like the embalming one. Just as his chest has been washed with antiseptic by the surgeon, the Ancient Egyptians would wash the body to symbolise its rebirth into a new life. The salty natron killed bacteria just as the modern chemicals that covered his chest. His chest had been opened in the same way the embalmers would open the body, pulling out the organs through a neat slit at the side.

How would Seth be judged now his heart was in a biohazard waste bin?

Would he be judged by Lawrence Griffon's heart?

Amber was crying in the hall, her bags at her feet.

"I could take care of you, make sure you take your medication," she sobbed. Through the fabric of his shirt she traced the scar snaking down his chest with her chewed fingernails.

"I don't need your pity or concern." He pulled away from her.
"But I love you!" cried Amber. She unselfconsciously flung her arms around Seth and his heart pounded as if he'd been running. He'd noticed that his heart was responding to a rhythm that had nothing to do with his activities. If he walked in the morning, it would pound at night, as if it had no idea what he was doing.

"You have a second chance of life now and I want to share it with you."

"Man's love is of man's life a thing apart; 'tis woman's whole existence," Seth quoted, kissing her on the forehead.

Amber pursed her face in concentration. "Shakespeare?" she asked, in a tiny, hopeful voice.

Seth shook his head and sighed. "Byron."

He pushed her out of the door just in time. Already the nausea that enveloped him after he swallowed the anti-rejection tablets was driving him to the floor, where he curled sweating and panting until the tide receded.

Seth now understood that his new life was coming at a cost. Since recovering from the post-operative phase, he'd been trying to get used to the crucial immunosuppressant medication that he had to take regularly, twice a day or his heart would fail. As he swallowed each tablet, he counted the risks. The ciclosporin A and tacrolimus together with corticosteroids and the azathioprine meant that drug toxicity was almost inevitable. It was a sneaky little side effect that Dr Moore breezily explained at his regular checkup.

"What else should I know?" asked Seth. "If you don't tell me the truth, I'll just look it up on the internet."
Dr Moore shook his head. "Okay, you want the truth? There is no such thing as a second chance at life, of being cured. This is a chance of palliative care. A chance to live some sort of life. That's the best we've got, Seth."

"What risks?"

Dr Moore explained: "Five years after transplantation, about a third of patients have abnormal renal function, a third have transplant coronary artery disease, and a fifth have experienced malignancy. Those are the bald facts. Some people live relatively normal lives but you have to take the tablets at strict intervals otherwise your body will attack your new heart."

"So what can I do to stay alive?"

"It's up to your new heart now. You've done all you can, I've done all I can. It's no longer in our control."

Seth screamed in anger. "Everything is in our control!"

"Perhaps, except the two big things: life and death. It's hubris to think we can affect those outcomes."

"I don't believe that. Surely I can control this new heart instead of it controlling me."

"It's not controlling you, Seth, it's keeping you alive." Dr Moore eyed him, concerned.

"Then why am I having dreams and memories that aren't my own?"

"Flashbacks? Nightmares? Recollections? These are all symptoms of post traumatic stress disorder. It's a distinct possibility as a result of severe trauma when you are in danger of being killed or maimed. Or dying."
"I don't have mental illness."

"Expert advice could be invaluable, especially if you start to numb the pain by using drugs or alcohol."

Seth laughed. "You think I'd drink myself to death just when I have another chance at life?"

As he lay in the crisp white sheets of his mahogany sleigh bed at night and masturbated, Seth felt his new heart beating so loud in his chest he was worried it might explode through his ribs. Then when he slept, the dreams would start, but all he could remember when he woke shortly afterwards was a dark house, stairs, a mirror with no face.

The problem was that the images of his heart's wife had nothing in common with his dreams. He watched Freya Griffon on the television, talking about why Australians should support organ donation. She was tall, slender, small breasted and pale, a ghost with a halo of red hair. He guessed she was in her mid forties, with lines already forming around her eyes.

But his erotically charged dreams were of a different woman altogether. He could feel the weight of her heavy breasts under his hands when he awoke, and smell the musky scent of exotic oil on his pillowcase.

Then, just when he thought he knew his heart's secrets, the dreams switched again and it was Freya who straddled him when he fell asleep. So his heart loved more than one woman, and that meant he and his new heart had a
lot in common. So he cut out photos of Freya Griffon from the magazines and pinned them to the notice board in his study.

Her delicate body, flame red hair, those small firm breasts, her porcelain skin and deep green eyes were surely what he ached for, this heart inside him. He knew then he must have her to be whole again. He knew then what he needed. He needed her; he needed Freya Griffon at his side. He knew whose heart was in his chest, and what it wanted, even if the hospital wouldn't tell him.

_The heart wants what it wants._
CHAPTER SIX
The Business Card

If I wanted to, I could hire someone to spy on my teenager, follow my spouse, find dirt for a child custody battle or detail my employee's every move. But no one I contacted could help me find a kidney.

Some private investigators laughed at me, one or two called me crazy.

Then I saw an advertisement on the Internet. Searching for a Past Life?

I followed the sandwich board on the street through to a flight of stairs. Belle Lamia Investigations & Associates was located above Poseidon Cruise Adventures in Richmond, next to Acropolis Cakes that sold sweet Greek pastries that oozed crushed nuts and syrup.

I'd never been inside a PI's office before but Belle Lamia was obviously a fan of Raymond Chandler novels, as her frosted glass door had a gold leaf stenciled outline of a fedora hat and sunglasses.

I was expecting venetian blinds, a bottle of whiskey on the table and a broad with a hard hitting, rough talking no nonsense manner. Instead I got a middle aged woman in a badly fitting business suit.

"Let me see if I got this right the first time," said Belle, offering me a cut glass bowl full of shiny mints. "You want me to locate a kidney?"

I guessed she was in her fifties and under her red jacket with padded shoulders straight from the 1980s, Belle looked like she'd enjoyed more than a couple of tempting pastries on her lunch break. Perhaps she was once beautiful,
but now it seemed a sad joke to carry around a name like Belle. I noted the bank of computers around her desk and a hive of electronic equipment on an adjoining table. Searching for missing people was obviously no longer an aerobic activity.

"I'm actually looking for more than just a kidney," I explained "From what I've been able to find out, I need to locate two kidneys, a heart, the lungs, a liver and the eyes."

"This is all from the same person? Who is deceased, is that correct?"

"That's right," I nodded.

"They were part of the organ donation program?"

"Not willingly."

"And what are you going to do with the organs once we've found them?"

I squirmed in my chair. I knew what I was going to say would make me sound ridiculous. Like an extra from The X Files.

"I just want to see if any of the donor recipients remember me."

"Do they know you?"

"Of course not, but they have a piece of the man I loved inside them."

As I said this out loud, I realised it sounded too strange. The look Belle gave me was one of pity and compassion mixed with a tiny part of revulsion. It washed over her face like a passing cloud. As an artist, I was attuned to shifting changes.

"I don't want to hurt anyone," I added.

"I'm sorry Ms Kraikos, but we specialize in surveillance for covert industrial investigations and information gathering, electronic debugging, background
checks and due diligence. We do some missing persons as well, but not the sort of thing you're requesting."

"Don't organs count as missing persons? It's a part of a person, after all."

"We are members of the Australian Investigators Association and the Australian Institute of Professional Intelligence Officers. What you're asking is highly irregular."

"But how different is this to spying on people working for $30,000 a year and busting them for making a phone call to the doctor on company time? How do you make the moral distinction?"

"Ms Kraikos, the Privacy Act expressly forbids me to pursue the line of inquiry you're asking. Can I presume it was your lover's wife who signed the release forms for his organs to be donated?"

"Yes, but they were separated. Lawrence and I were planning to get married – this is my engagement ring." I held out my hand so she could see the ring.

"It's a beautiful ring."

"It's inscribed inside, it says: *Who so loves believes the impossible*. Well, I believe. I believe it is possible Lawrence's soul is in someone else. I just need to find them."

Belle drummed her fingers on the desk. "No doubt the doctors and people who run the organ donor program have told you this is just fantasy and wish fulfillment?" she said.
Her bluntness startled me into tears. Belle came out from behind her desk and handed me a box of tissues.

"I was pregnant with our child and I lost everything in that car accident," I sobbed, "When I woke from the coma I found out Freya had Lawrence's life support turned off and all his organs donated. Then she had his body cremated. There's nothing left of him."

"Except the love you have in your heart and the memories of your time together," Belle said gently.

"But that's not enough! I need to say goodbye."

Belle patted me reassuringly on the shoulder. "I don't usually turn down jobs, but I have to say that you would be better off talking to someone. A lot of people use private investigators when they should be seeing a counsellor. Surveillance isn't always the best thing."

"I've got nowhere else to go. I don't know what to do, except find the people who have a part of Lawrence inside them and see if they remember me. I just want to say goodbye; to hold him one last time." I was pleading now. Who else could I turn to?

"I'm really sorry, but I just can't help you."

"But your advertisement says Searching for a Past Life!"

Belle looked at me for a moment and then went over to her desk and opened up a drawer. I don't know what I was expecting but she brought a box over and opened it. Inside there were a variety of Greek pastries.
"Go on, have one. You look like you haven't eaten in a while. Grief can do that but low blood sugar also messes with your head."

I declined.

"I won't help you until you eat something. No one can think clearly on an empty stomach."

I chose a wedge of halva, and nibbled. Its thick almond paste stuck to the roof of my mouth like peanut butter and Belle swiftly placed a cold glass of water in my hand.

When I finished the halva, she handed me a business card.

"It's called the Isis Club," Belle said. "And it brings together people who are searching just like you; searching for wholeness. If this is what you want, then the Isis Club is the beginning."

I held the card in my trembling hands. Beneath the embossed butterfly there was a line from a poem.

"There's only a phone number," I said, flipping the card over. "No address."

"The Isis Club is very private." Belle handed me the cake box again: "Try the galaktoboureko."

I took a slice of the filo pastry, oozing with custard and syrup. Belle watched as I took a bite.

"Whatever you do, don't call the Isis Club until you are absolutely sure you want to search. There is nowhere to go after that call. Once you decide to take that step, you are on your own, down a dark tunnel of uncertainty. Be careful."
I clutched the card, a shiver running down my spine.

"I'm ready now," I said, my voice wavering slightly.

"No, you're not. I can tell. Think about it. The people you are searching for have been changed, Xanthe. Damaged. They have faced death and come back and even though they have a new organ keeping them alive, they are not who they were. We can't know what it means to confront death and where that takes you unless we have done it."

Belle Lamia said this with such conviction that I wondered what she had faced. "Have you been to the darkness and back?" I asked.

"My husband made the journey and even though he returned, it was lonely around him. He just wasn't there any more, mentally. We talked but I couldn't get inside his head anymore. His recovery in fact drove us further apart."

"Are the people in the Isis Club ones who have been to the edge and back?" I asked, not wanting to use the word 'death' in case I taunted fate.

"There are two sorts of people in the world," said Belle as she showed me to the door. "Ones who haven't faced death or lost someone, and those that have. Beware of those who have gone further and found what you are looking for, because they are truly different."

"Different – how?" I asked.

"Damaged," she repeated. As she closed the door she nodded to me.

"Just remember, once you call that number, there is no going back."

On the tram going home, I looked at the card Belle gave me. I thought of Lawrence: cut up, fragmented, stitched up for a funeral I wasn’t even invited to,
and then incinerated and cast away like the dust into the wind. But here at last there was a way for me to get back to him. *The Isis Club.*

My brother Tassos came around to the studio with a big tray of home made *keftedes* and a pot of *giouvesti* that our mother had sent over. I noted there was no traditional present for the grieving. If I had been Lawrence’s legal wife, I could have expected wheat with pomegranate, cinnamon, cloves and almonds. Greek food and the Orthodox religion are intertwined, especially when it came to the big three – birth, life and death. At christenings, it is our tradition to crack a pomegranate on the floor for the child as a symbol of life and renewal. I would not have that, either.

Tassos hugged me, then sighed as he opened the fridge and discovered the rotting food inside. Without talking, he found some plastic bags under the sink and proceeded to scoop out the liquefying vegetables from the crisper drawer, and sniff each jar and bottle in turn. By the time he wiped the surfaces down with bicarbonate and vinegar, the fridge looked brand new. Clean and empty except for the meatballs and lamb stew.

"You need to go shopping." Tassos had lived at home until he married, of course, and our mother had always doted on him and done everything she could to smooth over the corners in his life. Now he had Despina to cook for him, and she dutifully made her own *baklava*, using fresh honey, *magiritsa*, a lamb soup with an egg and lemon sauce, and the sweet bread *tsoureki* at Easter. I was
amazed Tassos knew how to go to the supermarket, much less criticise my shopping abilities.

"I've been eating out," I said defensively. In actual fact, I hadn't been eating, and had lost so much weight my clothes hung on me. Even my breasts were getting smaller. I was becoming a different person.

"It's a waste of money. You'll use up your entire prize."

"Well, Roxanne says she's got me a big exhibition in a few months, she's getting excited about her commission so I wouldn't worry.

"I suppose she'd know." There was no hiding the disgust in his voice. He blamed Roxanne for "leading me astray", even though I'd fallen willingly into her arms after my flight from Leon and the suburbs.

Tassos surveyed the recent canvases propped up around the walls. Disembodied limbs and owl's heads twisted backwards on human torsos. A severed head glistening like a leg of ham on a silver platter, a macabre Dutch inspired still life.

"Do you like them?" I asked, cleaning out my paint brushes. It was a comforting ritual, to carefully ease out the oil paint from the pig hair and gently coat the bristles with a smear of linseed oil.

"We're worried about you." It was a non committal answer.

"Because you don't like what I'm painting?"

"Xanthe, we all liked Lawrence, you know we did, but he was married."

There was a brutal emphasis on this last word that made me gasp.
"The disapproving older brother." No matter how old we get we played the same games, fell into the same old patterns as if it was just yesterday he nicked my record, and I stole his favorite poster.

Tassos looked at me, seeing for the first time how much weight I had lost.

"How are you feeling?"

"My body has healed, if that's what you mean." I couldn't look him in the eye.

"Are you coming to Con's Name Day next weekend?"

"Have you come to invite me?"

"Everyone would like to see you. They're all proud of the fact that you won the Archibald Prize." That I could imagine. The Greek community in Melbourne was large but it stuck together. They saw me as one of theirs and they liked that I was a success.

"Really? All is forgiven now that I won the Archibald? I don't remember anyone being supportive when I left Leon and teaching to become an artist in the first place."

"You flaunted Roxanne in front of them." Tassos couldn't hide the revulsion in his voice or the disapproval.

"So what's worse? Being a lesbian or being the mistress of a married man? Or is the second preferable because now he's at least dead?"

"I don't know why you're so aggressive."

"I didn't get to bury him!" I burst out crying and stood there, unable to move, the tears pouring hot and fresh down my face.
Awkwardly Tassos tried to comfort me, finally giving me a hug before pulling away and locating a box of tissues. He handed me a great fistful to blow my nose.

"I'm sorry, Xanthe, but you know, you weren't his wife."

I threw the brandy at him, the fragments of glass shattering over the floorboards like the ice dropping from a window ledge that winter I'd spent in Thessaloniki.

Tassos ducked in time, just like when we were kids.

"I hope that wasn't crystal."

Greeks like to smash things so it wasn't such a dramatic gesture on my part. My dad used to smash glasses at a party when a beautiful girl would dance the *zeibekiko* or the *hasapiko*.

"That bitch he was divorcing had Lawrence carved up and then she cremated him!"

Silently, Tassos went to the cupboard and got out a broom and swept up the broken glass, then he poured me a stiff shot of Metaxa.

"I wanted you to hear it from me first, okay? If you come to the Name Day, then everyone will be talking about it and I didn't want you to think that —"

"What?"

"Despina's pregnant."

I couldn't even say *chronia polla*. How dare he have a child! Tassos was eight years older than me. *He* had been to university, *he* had travelled overseas,
he had worked hard in his career and found his wife and renovated his house and there he was, nearly fifty and about to become a father for the first time.

Tassos put his hand on my shoulder and gave it a reassuring squeeze.

"Look, I was the one who stood by you when Leon had that affair, wasn't I? You were right to leave him, but you've been making bad choices ever since."

"I loved Lawrence!"

"He was married."

"I was pregnant! I lost his baby in the car accident!"

Tassos paused. Perhaps his impending fatherhood had prompted some sensitivity.

"Oh Xanthe, I'm sorry. But maybe it was for the best."

"What are you talking about?"

"If you had the baby it would never have known its father. Plus, it would have been a bastard."

"All you care about is how much shame I bring to the family!" I screamed.

"How do you think Dad would cope with it? You didn't even bother coming to the hospital after his last stroke!"

"He doesn't recognise me anymore."

"That's because you never see him."

"When I left Leon, dad told me I was dead to him. That's what he said. His exact words. I was dead to him."

"He's a traditional man. He was humiliated when you moved in with Roxanne and walked around High Street kissing and fondling each other."
"Other parents cope."

"Well, he's not like them, so get over it!"

"You can talk! The golden haired boy who didn’t even leave home till he was forty five! Who had his mother wash and cook for him and his Babu give him money for the car repayments! You had to get our great aunt to find you a suitable wife, you’re so pathetic. Oh, you’re a major success, aren't you?"

"You're a bitch, you know that?" Tassos kicked the cupboard door hard and a jar of sugar fell to the floor, spilling on the worn lino. "You got exactly what you deserved!"

As he slammed the door and left, I realised I wouldn’t get to be the child’s koumbara. I reached for the bottle of Metaxa and drank straight from its long neck, the brandy burning a slow flame down my gullet. I put on some K.D.Lang and sang along to a depressing Leonard Cohen cover, picking up a sharp piece of glass from the floor and holding it up to the light so a rainbow glinted off the sides and bounced off the walls.

It had frustrated me that Lawrence couldn’t see the full spectrum of the colours of the rainbow, and one night we argued about the inclusion of indigo, which he said wasn’t really there.

"Just because you can't see indigo doesn't mean it doesn't exist. Everyone says indigo is one of the colours of the rainbow," I told him. "Explain that."

"I interviewed a scientist once who said that indigo was only included in the colour line up of rainbows because of the different religious connotations of the numbers six and seven at the time of Isaac Newton's work on light."
"That's nonsense! You're just saying that because you can't see the difference between the various blue colours in the visual spectrum."

"I can live with that."

"Live without a range of blues! But there is a world of difference between persian blue, prussian blue, ultramarine and cerulean and even International Klein Blue."

"International Klein Blue? You're joking."

"No, really, it was developed by a French artist Yves Klein who –"

I could still feel his lips on mine as he kissed me, and said all he needed to know was that my eyes were brown and he wanted to stare into them for the rest of his life.

"You know, if we have a son, there's a fifty per cent chance he'll be colour blind, in which case, he'll have to be a reporter rather than an artist."

"I can live with that."

I staggered to the bathroom with the piece of glass and ran the hot water. To begin with, I only wanted to see if I could feel pain, because every other emotion seemed dead inside me. So I cut with small, delicate movements and watched the blood rise up and fill the space. It felt good, as if all the darkness and the anger and the loss were pouring out from the wounds.

Then I cut deeper, so the blood flowed fast, and I swapped hands, going from one arm to the next, slashing my skin with determination. At some point I must have fallen to the cool tiled floor. I watched the blood pool around my body
and I felt calm and at peace with the world. I closed my eyes and imagined I’d find Lawrence out there in the spirit world.

The phone woke me up. It took a minute to orient myself. I eased up from the bathroom floor and looked around for my glasses. Then I realised they were on my face, but I couldn't see through the lenses because of the bloody fingerprints over them.

I heard Roxanne’s voice on the answering machine.

"Xanthe, I've been trying all morning. What's going on? Are you there? Pick up."

I heard her pause for breath. Then resume with anger in her voice.

"Xanthe! Are you still asleep? You have an hour before the reporter from Vogue arrives. They're doing an initial profile and look around your studio, and then they'll come back and set up the photos."

I lay on the floor and tried to move my arms and saw with growing horror what I had done to myself. As I tried to sit up, the empty Metaxa bottle rolled around near my feet.

"Xanthe!"

My legs kept buckling from under me. My arms hurt, boy did they hurt. As I moved the air hit the lacerated skin and I gasped in pain.

"Right Xanthe, I'm coming over. You need to make a good impression. Ditch the velvet jacket, okay? You want to look slightly bohemian, not like an extra from the Addams Family."
Then she hung up and I managed to stagger into the shower, where I sat under the stream of hot water and watched as the congealed blood on my skin washed down the drain.

I felt stupid, and worse, realised that if I had actually killed myself, it would have been for nothing. I didn't find Lawrence last night; if his spirit was anywhere it was trapped in this world, in someone else's body.

I had to find that body.

But more than that, I needed to replace what I had lost: Lawrence's baby. If his organs had given someone else a new chance of life, then they could give me a baby. And part of Lawrence's soul would be in that baby because part of his body was what was keeping the recipient alive.

I wrapped the dressing gown around my still wet body and searched through my purse for the card Belle Lamia had given me.

When I turned the embossed butterfly side over to find the phone number, I carefully read the words underneath: *butterflies are souls of the dead, waiting to pass through purgatory.*

"I am coming," I said. I held Lawrence's photo and whispered, "wait for me."
CHAPTER SEVEN

The Isis Club

The lamp near the front door cast a warm glow. I was glad I'd wrapped the turquoise pashmina around me before I left. I could feel winter creep past my velvet coat.

Although I was in Melbourne, I felt like I was in another country. Canterbury was one of the city's wealthiest suburbs and the taxi had taken me past enormous high brick fences, before turning down a long winding street crammed with expensive houses of indifferent taste and careless attention to style. What I hated more than wealth with no taste was wealth with no taste and pretensions of grandeur.

"Kylie Minogue lives in this street," the Sudanese taxi driver informed me. "You have rich friends, huh?"

I laughed. "Not any more."

I found myself outside a veritable fondue of nouveau French Chateau, which had been built next to a neo-Palladian villa and opposite a mock Tudor mansion. This was the address of The Isis Club, this month, at least. I was told briefly on the phone that meetings were held at different locations, "for privacy".

I had to get in the driveway first, easier said than done, and I walked up and down the darkened street, wishing I hadn't sent the taxi away so soon. Where on earth was the gate? I waited at the driveway only to realise that I needed the visitor's entrance, but when I got there, the wrought iron door was
locked and I couldn't find a buzzer. I walked up and down until I found another
gate near the street corner and buzzed in desperation.

"Yes?" answered a disembodied voice.

"I'm Xanthe Kraikos; I'm here for the meeting."

"We were expecting you. Push the gate when you hear the click."

I waited, pushed and entered. The sound of a fountain in the courtyard
was one I hadn’t heard in a long time in this drought cycle. Even autumn hadn't
brought the rains this year. A small sign announced "bore water in usage" which
explained the lush gardens.

The enormous panelled door had a verdigris bronze gargoyle as a
knocker. A tall athletic blonde woman who had a lot of time at the solarium
welcomed me in.

"My name is Sara and I’m the hostess tonight."

I followed Sara into the front room, her long cream linen skirt whirling
around high leather boots like fields of wheat swaying in a summer's breeze. I
could tell by the pearls around her neck that they would dissolve in vinegar
without a trace, the perfect cordial for Cleopatra.

I felt hopelessly bohemian as I caught sight of myself in a large, lavishly
carved gilt mirror. My rapid weight loss had emphasised my high cheekbones
and full lips, which I invariably coated with deep red lipstick. My skin was a pale
olive, and my thick straight dark hair had been pulled to one side with an antique
marquise hairpin. My jewellery, rather than discreet, was a mass of Ethiopian
glass beads and precious turquoise glass coils that Lawrence had brought back
from Herat, twined around my neck. My black velvet coat, with a deep v-neck, emphasized my substantial cleavage, and my skirt was short and tight. Terrific for Brunswick Street, but now as I stood awkwardly in this grotesque palace, with its large Ned Kelly oil paintings by Sidney Nolan and endless oak parquetry floors, I felt hopelessly out of place.

The warmth of central heating rushed at me and I eased off my pashmina. There were about twenty people in the front room; all well dressed and chatting in low voices in little tight groups. I took a deep breath: I found it hard to mingle in a room full of strangers.

"Would you like a glass of wine?" asked Sara and I nodded a little too eagerly as I watched people sip beautiful goblets of the palest yellow or vermillion red. Though I suspected the valium that Gretel had given me to "take away the edge" and alcohol was not a good mix, I was keen to have something to calm my nerves.

My eye was caught by something which didn't seem to belong. It was a small glass box on the mantle piece holding a small skull, an old clock and a cast of a small baby's feet. I moved closer and took off my glasses.

"Grotesque, isn't it?"

I jumped back in surprise and I looked up to see a man in his forties, with a handsome but rumpled face, smiling at me with one eyebrow raised. He was wearing a pin stripe suit and vivid cerise tie. His dark hair curled around his face and I noticed a flash of a delicate tattoo edging from his shirt sleeve.
"Not really, considering what it is," I said. "An example of Memento mori. Paintings of the inevitability of death were very popular in the seventeenth century."

"Mors venit velociter quae neminem veretur" he said, in what sounded like in effortless Latin.

"What does that mean?"

"Death comes quickly and respects no one," he said. "Which is why I guess you are here."

The man had an edgy quality that seemed out of place among the crowd. I felt at ease next to him. Without trying to stare, I moved a little closer to get a look at his cufflinks. They were little skulls set with diamonds.

"This is my first meeting," I admitted. "I'm not really sure what to expect."

"You picked a winner then. It should be especially interesting tonight."

"Why is that?"

"A special guest speaker has been smuggled in from one of the intensive care units."

Before I could ask him more, Sara appeared with a glass of wine, glared at the man I was speaking to and led me through to an informal living space. It had a large fireplace, polished wooden floor and enormous leather sofa. The wide screen television was bigger than the one down at my local pub.

A large alcove jutted into the paved courtyard and hanging from the polished timber roof was a wrought iron light that looked like a space pod, with
yellow hand blown glass at its base. It cast a mellow hue on the massive oak table underneath.

An old man sat in the corner and extended his hand as we were introduced. Frank must have been seventy years old, and though elegant he looked his age. He had sunspots and his nose was a bit lopsided where some flesh had been removed.

"New members are often emotional, so if you feel the urge to cry, don't be ashamed," said Frank. "We are an informal group. We gather to support each other and exchange information."

"I'm not sure you can help me," I said.

"Everyone feels that when they first arrive," Frank tilted his head to the side and I saw a large hearing aid behind his ear. It let out a soft whistle.

"Remember nothing you feel is ridiculous," Sara smiled. "Let me introduce you to the others."

We went into the landscaped garden, which boasted a tennis court nestled at the side and a large pool that glowed with underwater lights. Neat little privet hedges had been expertly clipped and the sandstone paving was the color of melted honey. Was this Sara's house? She was younger than me, how on earth could she afford to live in such a house? Lawrence was right; Australia was full of very wealthy people if you knew where to look.

"It's a lovely house," I said to Sara.

"We like to think of it as a lovely home," she replied, and ushered me into a fold of people talking quietly.
"This is Xanthe," she said. "It's her first time here."

Sara moved away as I was quizzed on how long I had been "looking" and whether I had received any information from the hospital about the recipients yet.

"I know there is all this right to privacy nonsense, but I feel as the next of kin, we have a right to know where those organs end up," said one man who said his name was Jeff. "You know, in New Zealand the Organ Donor service is not listed in any phone book. But you can find the numbers for the British Secret Service, the American Secret Service and the CIA," he added.

"It's an all too familiar story," said a woman who quickly who introduced herself as Grace. "Doctors are only too quick to talk about brain death. You know that medical term was only invented after they started doing organ transplants?"

I was shocked. I had no idea. "I thought dead was dead."

"Oh no, your heart can still be pumping but they'll want your organs. This is despite how frequently people awaken from supposed comas and permanent vegetative states."

There was a murmur of agreement. I was not alone after all in my experience.

"It's worse in France," said another woman, pushing her ugly plastic glasses up her nose. "There every body is a potential organ donor. They'll have your brother's liver before you can say goodbye."

"It's true," said Grace. "Why do you think all the ground breaking work happens in the top Parisian hospitals?"
"What sort of work?" I asked. "You mean more than heart and lungs and stuff?"

Grace laughed bitterly.

"You read about the face transplant, didn't you? Imagine meeting someone with your loved one's face. What they don't tell you is that the woman who got the face now has kidney failure because of the anti-rejection drugs."

Jeff interrupted. "You know, in Spain, the intensive care doctors are also the organ donor procurers, and their results get written up in the newspaper each month. You see, the Catholic Church is behind organ donation there, and they push it hard. Doctors need to meet their quotas like they are parking ticket inspectors or real estate agents on commission.

"Meanwhile, in Missouri they are considering legislation to allow death-row inmates to donate bone marrow or a kidney and have their sentences reduced to life in prison without parole."

Grace nodded. "Of course, in Australia it's different. Here people have to sign up as organ donors or someone has to be willing to sign their organs away after an accident. You know why there is a shortage of organ donors?"

I shook my head.

"Because air bags have made cars too safe," Grace said, "it used to be young men on wet nights with too much to drink. They were the choice cuts. Bang! Into a tree! A head injury and a healthy heart. But now, doctors can't afford to be so fussy: they take spare parts where ever they can, scooping it out of
second class corpses, weighing up slightly damaged goods as better than none at all."

"So much for the Gift of Life, right?"

A deep voice behind me made me turn around. It was the man who had commented on the Memento Mori in the front room.

"With organ donation, it's what they don't tell you that is interesting," he said. "For instance, they never tell families how they get the organs out of a body. You want to know what happens?" he looked at me intently.

I nodded. I wanted to hear everything.

"First, they scrub the patient's chest and the anterior abdominal wall. Although they drape the patient they don't administer intravenous anesthesia. The surgeon then makes a long midline incision here – " The man pointed to my chest and moved his finger up and down close to my body. "From the sternal notch to the pubic bone and the organs are removed in the order agreed on by the procurement teams. A sternal saw is needed to divide the sternum midline and then a retractor is inserted into the chest so the team can view the heart. That's gotta hurt if you can still feel even the slightest pain, right?"

"Are you a doctor?" I searched his face. His language belied his strong hands and his face was tanned and rugged, the sort of face that worked outdoors, not the face used to peering over bodies in an operating theatre.

"Nah, not me. I find – things."

"An archaeologist?"

"No, the stuff I find isn't buried in the ground."
Sara called out to me and hurried over, insisting I come inside.

"The presentation is about to start."

She turned me away from the man.

"Every story will break your heart," he muttered, as he followed us.

The wine and valium mingled in my blood stream and made me light headed and slightly nauseous. I steadied myself against the sturdy leather couch in the back room and felt my body heat rise. Everyone watched in anticipation as Frank started the proceedings.

"Thank you all for your attendance tonight. It's not always easy to get a gathering together and as you know we do not use email after the incident in the United Kingdom last year."

There was general murmur of agreement and a few people mumbled to one another, shaking their heads.

Frank started: "We all know why we are here and what we are looking for. According to the *Ars moriendi*, written in the fifteenth century, there are many things we need to do to have a good death.

"We are all here at the Isis Club because someone close to us has been taken from us in a shocking manner before we have had the chance to say goodbye. Life support is a misnomer in this day and age. It is simply an apparatus to preserve spare parts to be used in organ transplant surgery, nothing more."

I stifled a sob and nodded.
"The Isis Club was founded on the belief that one person’s tragedy should not be turned into a benefit for a stranger just because technology allows it.

"As much as you have heard that organ donation is an act of kindness and a gift of life, there are those who fervently believe that organ transplants are metaphysically bad for both the donor and recipient.

"We need to die well, all of us, and that means dying whole. Our souls need to make the transition from gross material earthly body to the astral body and the ethereal soul. Our soul and body are connected through a silver umbilical cord that once severed leaves us in limbo."

That’s what happened to Lawrence. He was adrift. I sensed his soul was unhappy and needed to find me. I felt him in my dreams, as if he was reaching out from somewhere.

"Our severed bodies and our severed souls need to be reunited before we can find peace. That is what we are doing here tonight. Searching for the pieces of our loved ones. And make no mistake, the authorities do not make it easy for us. Indeed, they do everything in their power to stop us."

I remembered how the hospital had refused to even talk to me. For a start, they said, I was not "next of kin" although I had been pregnant with Lawrence’s baby. They said Freya was the legal wife and Jasmine his surviving child.

"And what is at stake here? Not 'patient confidentiality’ as they profess, but the need for multinational drug companies to peddle their cancer causing immunosuppressant drugs! It’s all just a pharmacological conspiracy."
"Have you any idea the toxicity of the cocktail of immunosuppressive drugs we need to give patients after the organ transfer? These are powerful chemical agents that cause the human body not to produce antibodies that normally fight off foreign material in the body. The production of these antibodies needs to be suppressed in order to permit the acceptance of a donor organ by the recipient's body. These drugs cause cancer. Not if but when”.

I gasped. Lawrence's death had been in vain! If only Freya had left the machines on, let nature and medicine do their work, there might have been a chance he would come back to me. Now his organs were simply rotting away in someone else's body, hooked up to a dying host and flooded with toxic drugs.

"Anti rejection drugs always cause cancer," Frank continued. "Organ donation is a lie. It's not a gift of life, but a gift of a few more pain filled years and who benefits? Drug companies!"

There was a hearty round of applause. My brain was a thumping fog and my arms hurt. But I felt optimistic.

Frank held up his hand to bring the applause to an end.

"Tonight I am delighted to have a special guest, Dr Bernard Johansen, who has spoken to the Death Rights Commission about the controversial Cardiac Death rule introduced to New South Wales hospitals."

Dr Johansen was tall and slender like Lawrence, and his long straight hair was fashioned in the style of a Byronesque poet.

"I am not going to say which hospital I am with, due to the confidentiality concerns I am sure you appreciate," he said. "I work extensively in the area of
bio-ethics, especially in the area of end of life decision-making, and what I have
to say comes from personal experience and concerns, not any government or
committee process.

"The ethical basis for withdrawing life-sustaining treatment with the
expectation of immediate death remains contentious in critical care facilities.

"Those of you here tonight who have experienced first hand the coercion
of the medical profession to get you or your family to sign an organ donation
release should know that many critical care doctors and nurses are conflicted
about these activities."

I was dizzy with the affirmation that I had been seeking. Everyone had
been telling me that Lawrence's death was a Gift of Life. Here at last was
someone who said otherwise, and he was someone whose opinion could be
respected. He wore a large wedding ring on his finger, and he looked
conservative and professional, not like some kind of kook.

The doctor continued:

"We have to acknowledge that there is a problem in defining death and
that there are additional challenges posed by the use of technology in critical
care facilities.

"What I have to tell you is going to upset many of you." He looked around
the room.

I didn't think I could be upset any more but I gripped the couch.

"When are you dead enough to have things done to you? When are you
dead enough for the undertaker? The answer is that death is a slow process. It is
not the flat line of the movies. We do not suddenly die. Our hearts do not just stop. There is a gradual process of the body shutting down and that is a grey zone that we as doctors are being asked to cut into, literally.

"We don't have a checklist like we do for brain death. Although patients must be declared dead before organs can come out; when we are talking about cardiac death we have to remove the organs rapidly."

Grace raised her hand and cleared her throat. "Dr Johansen, when are you dead enough to have your warm organs taken from you after a tube is pulled from your body? I think we'd all like the answer to that question."

Dr Johansen paused before he replied. "I take it you are referring to Cardiac Brain Death?"

Carol nodded. "I've heard it's going to be introduced to Victoria. I'm sacred, I really am. There seems to be a government push to get clinical and hospital support for transplants when people simply do not want to donate their organs. And what's wrong with that? I wasn't put on this planet simply so I could supply someone else with a spare part!"

There was a round of applause and Dr Johansen waited until it had stopped before he answered.

"I can't talk about policy," he said. "I can tell you that the Cardiac Death rule that's the new code of practice in New South Wales is something that a lot of medics, myself included, do not feel comfortable with."
"Cardiac Brain Death allows for nearly fifteen more organ donors a year because we can get them quickly by removing the road blocks to death." He shifted uncomfortably, glancing at the door as if expecting someone to come in.

"Doctors don't usually listen to nurses, but I believe it is time we do, as they are the ones in the front line of end of life issues, and they are saying they are sick of being pressured into helping a system that coerces families to quickly surrender people up for organ donation.

"The problem is, we're not trained how to do this. There aren't many guidelines about how to run a family conference after a traumatic accident. In fact, in intensive care we don't really know when someone will die. It's all guess work."

"So you can't tell when someone is dead, that's the bottom line?" said Grace.

"Death is no longer a simple thing. Even using the Glasgow Coma scale, we are not always right. We can't predict accurately who will die," Dr Johansen replied.

I stifled a sob. If that was true, then Lawrence should have been kept on the ventilator until I was able to see him and talk to him. I could have reached him; they say that coma patients respond to things like their partner's voice and familiar music. I would have played him The Who and sang "people try to put us down…"

Then I heard Dr Johansen deliver the final blow.
"I carried out my own study in the intensive care unit, and what I observed was that while fifty percent died straight away after treatment was withdrawn, the remainder survived from between two hours and fifty eight days," he said. "And one went home from hospital to lead a normal life."

There was an audible gasp in the room.

*Did that mean Lawrence might have come back?*

I could not contain my tears. They made me double over with pain and emptiness. So she had killed Lawrence – with a hospital that was more than willing to offer its consent to withdraw treatment so it could have his organs.

I ran out of the room.

I grabbed a glass of wine and poured it down my throat. If Freya was here, I would have stabbed the glass in her face.

"Heavy stuff, isn't it?" It was the man in the suit with the skull cufflinks. "Are you all right?"

I shrugged. My hands were still shaking.

"It all makes such sense, so why haven't I read about it in the papers?"

"Oh, you don't want to believe only what's talked about in the media."

"That's what Lawrence said. Are you a journalist?"

"I find things, remember?" he handed me a card and I peered at it.

"JD Howard, Private Investigator," he said helpfully.

I held my hand out. "Xanthe Kraikos."

"You're an artist, am I right?"
"How do you know that?"

"Oh, I'm a private investigator, like it says on the card. I spot clues, like, the streaks of paint in your hair and under your fingernails," he gently took my hand in his and turned it over. "Yellow ochre."

"You're very good."

He laughed. "I confess, I cheated. I saw you on TV. You won the Archibald Prize. Very impressive."

I saw Sara scowling at us from across the room, and then whisper something to her husband who shook his head.

"I don't think Sara likes you," I said.

"Feeling is mutual, I assure you."

"Do you mind me asking why?"

"She doesn't like my – methods."

"Which are?"

"Unusual. However, I get results. I can help you, if you want."

"How do you know I'm looking for help?"

"You wouldn't be here otherwise. Is it your lover? Wife got in the way of an end of life issue?"

Tears stung my eyes. "How did you know?"

"It's a common story. People fight as much over a dead body as a living one, believe me. I've seen it all - lovers and wives, husbands and lovers, estranged parents and children, siblings and parents. Did you know rock star
Keith Richards mixed his father's ashes with cocaine and snorted it as revenge for a miserable childhood? The dance of death is as old as time."

"Do you believe that I can find my lover?"

He eyed me, considering. "It has long been thought that our memories, in fact the very essence of who we are, lies in the brain," he said. "But that's not the case. Memories are stored throughout the body: in our blood, in our organs, in our tissues. In many cultures, not western of course, there is a belief that the spirit resides in the organs."

"You mean Lawrence could still be alive?"

"His soul is. You know, when doctors transplant a heart, they connect it up and there is a moment when it has to jump into action and start beating. It's quite amazing to watch. Doctors refer to it as muscular memory. So if our memories are throughout our bodies, then what about our soul? Have you heard of organ donor trait transfer?"

I shook my head.

"It was first noticed by Israeli doctors. Apparently, the heart can retain the reverberations of energy fields throughout the body, right from the smallest cells."

Howard took my hand gently. "That's lovely. Is it an engagement ring?"

I nodded, biting back the tears. "Lawrence designed it for me."

"Then it's highly significant. Imagine, the image of that ring, all your memories together, those pieces of Lawrence's soul somehow are absorbed by organ donor recipients after transplants."

"Would the recipients recognise the ring?"
"Trait memories are buried deep in the sub layer of the psyche. What I do is bring them to the surface."

"But where are the memories stored?" I twisted the ring around my finger.

Who so loves believes the impossible.

Howard touched my ring. "The heart carries all the information and memories stored by a human body in its lifetime. But these cellular memories can also be transplanted in other organs as well."

"How do these memories surface?" I asked.

"There are lots of reported cases of donor recipients suddenly developing a taste for beer and chips after the transplant, only to find they now had the liver of a soccer fanatic, or an illiterate couch potato surprising his wife by reading Donne and writing poetry."

I turned his card over, feeling like I was about to step off an abyss. "Could you help me locate the organ donor recipients?" I finally asked.

Howard nodded. "Come and see me."
CHAPTER EIGHT

The Heart Wants What It Wants

Carefully, Seth Barker went around the hotel room and arranged the objects. First, from a 1950s Louis Vuitton suitcase that had been his mother's, he extracted the clothes. A blue faience beaded fish net dress - a replica he had copied from the original in the museum of Biblical Archaeology in Dublin - and a pair of delicately beaded sandals.

He had specified a woman with Freya Griffon's long red hair, but didn't think they'd get the clothing right, no matter how he described it.

Out of the suitcase he took two long necked bottles carved from Egyptian alabaster, filled with wine infused with blue water lily and mandrake extract. He had commissioned a potter in Eltham to make them, based on photographs he'd taken in Cairo. Now he stroked their cool, smooth necks, which resembled the stem and flower of the revered Egyptian plant. The blue water lily – it only revealed its secrets when carefully prepared.

Seth always amazed his students with tales of Ancient Egyptian sex rituals and debauchery; the drunker the participants got the better. Not just drunk, either. Drug use was considered essential in communication with the gods.

"Talk to me, tell me about her," Seth touched his heart. But the voice inside was silent, for now. Since coming out of hospital and experimenting with
cannabis, Seth had discovered the dreams and memories from his new heart were strongest when he was under the influence of psychoactive substances.

But that wasn't enough. The Ancient Egyptians knew that drugs were only part of the formula - sex, alcohol and music were needed to communicate with the next level. It was like jumping off the edge of a diving board: that moment when you were suspended in the air was when you were most free.

And that freefall into oblivion and back could not be achieved by sitting in a library or a church sober and well rested.

Seth sneered at the tame little \( E \) tablets his students took and their marathon rave sessions.

"You want to talk to the gods?" he asked them, showing them slides of the Goddess Isis lowering herself onto Osiris' phallus. "Don't mess with chemicals made in someone's backyard." He told them of his potion made from blue water lily extract and mandrake root: he added fifty grams of dried root to twenty litres of liquid and cinnamon sticks to improve the taste, and then mixed it with wine and blue water lily extract.

"Mandragora officinarum," he told his students, "From the nightshade family. Also called Witches Drink. Thieves Root, Mad Apple, Love Apple and Satan's Apple. It will send you to the other side.

"Yes, it can be poisonous; mandrake has magical properties and its shape, so oddly human, is thought to have the power to evoke the dark spirits. The wisdom was that you couldn't pull a mandrake root from the ground without going mad from its devil scream as it was wrenched from the dirt."
But he didn’t need a black dog to sniff the mandrake out, or an invisible cloak to stop the devil pulling his soul from his throat as he took it from the earth. He got his supplies from an alchemist in Collingwood, who traded as a traditional Chinese Medicine specialist. The back room of the shop, carefully hidden from the health authorities, was a treasure trove of bottles and scales, burners and boxes, arsenic and mandrake. The alchemist imported from Cairo; none of the Australian blue water lilies had psychoactive properties.

It was expensive, as each flower only opened for three days a year and it was the open flowers that were required for the potion. But then, what price could you put on stepping through the portal into a mind space occupied one thousand years ago?

Seth had been worried about getting an erection after the transplant and the doctors warned him about the dangers of Viagra even though he now had a strong healthy heart inside him. So he had gone to Collingwood for his blue water lily and mandrake extract, and that had worked with Amber.

Mindful of the fact that loud music would bring hotel management, Seth had programmed two iPods with the thumping, rhythmic, mesmerising music needed to reach the higher plane. Massive Attack's *Mezzanine* – he inserted his earphones and clicked onto the first track *Angel* and smiled at the neat convergence of title, motive and music.

"You are my angel, come from way above, to bring me love…"

He placed the leather anatomy kit on the bedside table and untied the rough cords that bound it together, checking the knives and instruments inside.
All were sharp and gleaming. After a moment's consideration, he placed them inside the bedside table drawer, first taking out the Gideon's Bible and tossing it in the wardrobe on top of the spare blanket.

A twinge in his chest caused him to take a sharp intake of breath. Feeling giddy, he sat down on the bed and unbuttoned his perfectly ironed shirt, pushing aside the leather neck sheath that concealed his Bowie dagger knife. Gingerly, he ran his hand down the scar on his chest.

"Soon you'll have what you want," he told his heart.

In the bathroom, he checked his eyes in the mirror and sighed at the yellow tinge. A few drops of the special solution given to him by the alchemist made everything come back into sharp focus, but he knew that the only thing that would help was sex.

Seth smoothed out the newspaper cutting again, tracing his finger around Freya Griffon's sharp cheekbones and prominent jaw. He had been specific about the sort of woman he wanted, but felt it was giving away his hand to actually fax a photo of Freya Griffon to the escort agency.

Since the transplant, the warmth in his fingers had become second nature and the regime of drugs - the cyclosporine, azathioprine, and corticosteroid - merely an annoying process. Seth had bought a watch with a timer that sounded whenever he was close to needing his tablets. Sometimes, he had been able to block out the other man in his head for a few hours only to have the intruder within come back at the sound of the watch's alarm.
Out of the small bar fridge, Seth took a bag of ripe figs he’d bought at the market, and a head of iceberg lettuce. His students laughed when he told them the Ancient Egyptians considered lettuce an aphrodisiac. Black figs were used by Ancient Egyptian physicians to cure impotency, and as he arranged the figs on a plate with a lettuce leaf serving as cup for each, he hoped they’d do the trick. It was so tempting to order Viagra on-line, and bypass the medical system, but if he lost this heart, then what?

There was a knock on the door. Seth had chosen the hotel because it was anonymous and clean, tucked away in one of Melbourne’s main city streets and favoured by small conferences and interstate business people.

He opened the door.

She was perfect. Exactly what he had ordered.

"Hi, you are expecting me," she said. She had long red hair, pale skin, and was tall, as tall as him and slender as a column of water.

Seth was relieved to see she’d dressed as conservatively as he’d requested, with a long elegant black trench coat and a hint of leather boots underneath; the escort agency reassured him all its in-call girls could pass unnoticed in any hotel foyer. "Sir, nothing would surprise them, but your choice will be discreet."

She smiled and walked confidently in the room.

"What's the smell?"

Seth pointed to the oil burner: "Sandalwood, Frankincense and Juniper," he said. "The Ancient Egyptians burnt them as offerings to the gods."
"Nice."

He walked over to her and ran his fingers through her hair, to check if it was a wig. He told the agency he’d throw her out if it was a wig. He liked to play rough and didn’t want something like a head of dark hair showing when he was fucking her. But her hair was real.

She walked to the bed and put down her handbag and unbelted the coat. She was wearing a crisp white blouse and a straight skirt that grazed the knees. Seth was pleased to see that his request for small breasts had been met.

“Standard service includes massage, head and sex. I don’t kiss."

Seth held up the beaded net dress. "I want you to wear this."

The whore looked at it doubtfully. "That will be extra."

"You can change in the bathroom."

"Can you put a robe on for when I come out?"

"Sure."

Seth had used escorts often enough during conferences to know the routine and he respected the women who checked a client’s health out beforehand. He was lying on the bed when Freya came out, the long fishnet dress hanging from satin straps.

"You like?" Freya did a 365 degree turn in the dress and Seth furrowed his brow.

"Something wrong?"

"The ancient Egyptians shaved their pubic hair. It was a means of preventing lice."
"If you wanted a Brazilian you had to specify."

"I'll shave you."

"No way. I am not doing that." She looked at the door and stood firm.

"You think I'm a sicko?" he asked.

"I don't care what you are as long as you keep this nice, all right? I'm a person too, I'm doing a job. If you treat me well, then we will both have a nicer time."

"I really want you to be clean."

But she'd noticed the movement under his dressing gown and her hand was already clamped over his cock. "Hey, big fella, why not skip the shaving and let's get straight onto the bed?"

"I said I'd pay extra if you let me shave you."

She sighed. "Oh, all right. But you'd better be gentle."

He had her push the dress up around her waist as he applied the shaving cream in a great fluffy mound over her pubic hair. He was surprised she had a ginger bush and ran his fingers through the curls as he spread the cream. Then he pulled the bone handled knife from the leather sheath around his neck.

"What the fuck!" She pushed him away and made for the bathroom door.

"I said be gentle, not use a knife!"

"Relax; it's an old fashioned shaving razor. And I've been trained how to use this properly."
Seth ran his hands over the bone handle and pressed the steel edge of the blade against her flesh.

"No!" she said. She was angry now.

"You want to shave me first? I don't mind. Then you can trust me, right?"

She grabbed the knife and the can of shaving cream. "Fine, just remember; don't try anything because I've got the knife now."

Seth closed his eyes as she deftly shaved his balls, but disappointingly, no matter how she stroked his cock, it remained limp.

"There, all done." she patted him dry. "You can do me now, but be careful."

The blade glinted in the bathroom, and it was so sharp that all Seth had to do was turn it to a precise angle and glide it across her pubic hair. He worked slowly, methodically, delicately shaving the hair from her mound of Venus and down to her labia. With his face close to her stomach, he could feel her breathe tightly, as though scared that any sudden movement would result in being injured.

He parted her legs and continued with the blade, scraping away the red curls that clung to her pink flesh. The feel of her plump smooth skin under his sun-worn fingers made him think of peeling peaches under the shade of the large leaves of a Sycamore fig tree near the Nile. He lent in close and sniffed deeply, inhaling a musty scent that transported him into the cool air-starved labyrinth of a Pharaoh's tomb.
The knife was an extension of his hand and Seth marvelled at how cool its handle was and how the sharp metal heated up as he pressed it against her skin.

He was disappointed he didn't feel the flicker of desire while he was shaving her, but he reminded himself that magic was conjured in stages.

"I need to paint you."

"This isn't some Goldfinger fetish is it?" her voice was jaded and she made sure Seth knew he was being tiresome. "I've seen that James Bond movie. It's lethal to cover someone with paint."

"Actually, that's an urban myth. But I'm not going to cover you in gold paint, just your breasts and thighs, with hieroglyphics."

"With what?"

"Have some wine first."

She looked at him suspiciously. "No."

"Look, I'll have some as well."

Seth drank first from the emerald green goblets he'd brought with him, in a specially padded case. The light bounced off them and flared a little pattern of light across the wall.

Reluctantly she took the glass. "Tastes like its gone off," she said.

"But not bad, is it?"

She giggled as it began to take effect. "Like cider."

Seth watched as her eyes rolled to the back of her head as the blue water lily grasped hold of her. Then he placed the earplugs in her ear and turned the
iPod on. After a few minutes he saw her body relax and she curled on the mattress like a kitten, smiling. Well and truly drugged.

Seth reached over for the oils and started working them into her body, first with long strokes over her legs, moving up slowly from her ankles to her knees, then her thighs, massaging them apart as his hands kept moving up as he painted her with magical symbols.

"I hope this washes off," she murmured.

"It's not henna." He had mixed his blood with the paste.

She looked down at the hieroglyphics.

"What does it mean?"

"It's a message to the spirit world."

"I've seen stuff in my life but you're weird."

Confident the time was right, Seth grabbed her wrists tightly. She yelled and spat at him as she tried to pull away. "You fuck! Get off me you fucking loser!"

"No. I want you lying down."

"Let go of me!"

"You killed me!" he cried, as she blurred in front of his eyes. The voice that came out of his mouth wasn't his. It was another man's. It was Lawrence.

"You had no right! I might have lived!" said Lawrence.

"Sick bastard!" she yelled.

Lawrence's anger rose up inside him.
"You stole my life!" Seth was so shocked that Lawrence was taking over his body that he loosened his grip. The whore got her strength back and struggled.

"Get off me!" she squirmed under him, trying to turn and move off the bed. "This is enough of your psycho games." Her eyes were wide and pupils large and dilated from the mandrake.

He realised that Lawrence thought the whore really was Freya, with her flame red hair. Quickly, before his heart learned the truth, Seth opened the bedside table drawer and clasped the knife in his hand. The beta blockers he was taking for his blood pressure meant his hand never wavered, not for a second, as he held the sharp Victorian surgical instrument.

"The knife is a symbol of protection and retribution in Ancient Egypt. I've pressed my hands into the hieroglyphs myself. The guardians of the gates of the underworld protected themselves with knives."

She started to scream and Seth clamped his hand over her mouth.

"I'll pay extra if you let me caress you with the knife."

She tossed her head back and forth as he ran the knife gently over her face, then down her neck and across her breasts, grazing her nipples with the sharp point of surgical steel.

"I won't hurt you, I promise." Seth ran the knife across her face. Freya froze in fear. "It feels like the kiss of the Isis Butterfly. Did you know embalmers first extracted the brain through the nose?"

She barely breathed as the knife caressed her nostril.
"The perfect mummy should be as light as a blown egg and as hard as a statue. When you look at the body of a small child preserved that way, with a hole in its abdomen where they took out the organs, you cannot help be touched by the fierce belief the Ancient Egyptians had in the afterlife."

Seth pulled himself slightly up from her and balancing on one hand, he held the knife against his chest and ran it down his scar. "But you know what they did with the heart? They left it in the body because it contained the Ka, the soul."

He felt the pain between his legs first, as she brought her knee up hard against his cock. He gasped and she squirmed from under him and kicked him in the chest as she scrambled off the bed.

Seth let out a guttural howl of pain and doubled up as she grabbed her coat and bag and the money he had left as payment on the bedside table.

"Help me," Seth pleaded, "my heart!" It felt as if a great weight was crushing him. He struggled for breath, each mouthful snatched as if he was being slowly submerged under water.

"Fuck you!"

"Ambulance!" he managed to gasp, clutching his chest. His heart was turning against him. Burning pains ran down his arm.

"I hope you die!" she spat in his face.

Seth knew the terrible pressure in his chest was Lawrence's heart ripping itself from the very muscles of his body. It was going to burst open and smash into a thousand pieces, and his blood would spiral through his body like a full pressure hose. It would coat the hotel walls in a thick spray of crimson death. He
couldn’t even sit up to use the phone. Sweat rolled off his face and into his eyes, as he gasped. Each time his chest barely filled with air and what he did manage to swallow tasted like fire.

She slammed the door.

When he awoke in hospital, Dr Moore told him his immune system had attacked his new heart and he was lucky a passing porter had heard his screams from the hotel corridor and called an ambulance.

"I've been taking my immunosuppressants religiously," Seth said.

"The first blood test came back with a question mark. We need to do a heart echocardiogram and a biopsy to test for rejection. This transplant might not be working for you."

"You're not taking this heart away from me. It's mine now."

"We tried the best match we could through tissue typing, so that the donor heart was as similar as possible to your own, but we can never perfectly match tissue antigens," Dr Moore explained. "Shortness of breath and exertion can bring on an episode if the underlying rejection is already there."

Seth thought about the hotel room. He was anxious about his alabaster jars and oils and especially about the wine, although he imagined one sniff and the hotel cleaners would pour it down the sink. He knew hotel management was used to everything from deflated blow up dolls left in the bathroom to all manner of bodily fluids on the mattress. But what about his Victorian anatomy kit?
"We found traces of many different psychoactive chemicals in your bloodstream when we did the toxicology report," said Dr Moore. His tone was grave and disapproving.

"I was having a party."

"I asked you to take things easy."

"If I live as a cripple, I might as well be dead."

"You're pushing it. Drugs, booze, hotel parties – the hotel said a woman came to your room," Dr Moore raised his eyebrows.

"You said I could resume normal sexual activity."

"Well, what I meant was –"

"That is normal for me."

"Seth, the drugs weaken your immune system and it's very difficult to deal with infection and rejection at the same time."

"I practice safe sex, if that's what you're worried about."

"The fact is that you can expect the immunosuppressants to do several things – some impair kidney function, others increase cholesterol levels and some cause your bones to become as soft as an old woman's."

"So much for the Gift of Life." Seth Barker knew he was dying all over again. He had known this for many years, but each time death had been snatched away by technology. But now, even with the new heart, he could feel the oxygen leave his blood and the fatigue creep back. He chanted: The heart is a muscle, the heart is a muscle, and repeated it over and over. It didn't do any good.
There were no exercises for the heart. Seth was still dying.

"It is a gift, but a temporary one," said Dr Moore. "The trouble is that you don't have many chances with your new heart. If you had a kidney and it turned on you, you could receive dialysis. Even a new liver would have a chance of regenerating if it started to fail. But the heart – once it stops pumping, the engine runs out of petrol. It stalls and then it dies."

"I have been having these dreams...."

"That's understandable. Mood swings, irritability or even euphoria have been cited with immunosuppressant therapy. Sometimes the psychological effects are severe enough for us to recommend medication to counteract its side effects."

"Medication to counter the medication?" Seth was incredulous. He felt like a rat on a treadmill and there was no getting off.

"It might be necessary. Let's wait until after the tests. If we are dealing with rejection, we'll need to get you onto the transplant list again as soon as possible."

"I'm keeping this heart!" The certainty of it surged through him, pumping faster than adrenaline. He would not let this voice inside of him go; he would not give up these memories.

"Then we'll have to increase the medication to stop the rejection," said Dr Moore.

"But I want this new heart," Seth said, stupid from the painkillers.

"No, Seth, it's to stop the heart rejecting you."
Why had the new heart turned on him? Seth took each twinge as a sign. The new heart was unhappy. It didn't want to be alone.

He told this to Dr Moore, who laughed.

"The heart is an organ, a muscle. It has no feelings or memories. It was given to you as a spare part to replace your old one. Be grateful and live a good life, that's what you can do to honour the memory of the donor."

Seth shook his head. "You're wrong. I've stood in the tombs of Pharaoh's and read the hieroglyphs on the walls. The soul can't cross to the other side until all the rituals are complete."

"There is a new light therapy that has helped in early stage rejection that I want you to try. It's called photophoresis and uses light to destroy blood cells that cause rejection," Dr Moore explained. He pulled out a pen and drew a diagram for Seth.

"The blood is pumped from the patient's body and then the white blood cells are treated with ultraviolet light and a chemical that makes the cells very sensitive to the light. Then the blood is returned to the patient's body."

_Returned to the body._

That's when Seth realised what was wrong. He needed to be whole again; he needed all of Lawrence's organs returned to him. It wasn't enough to have Lawrence’s heart in his body; the natural order had been disturbed. He needed to gather up all of Lawrence's organs again, and like the goddess Isis, who wrapped Osiris' dismembered body in her gently beating wings, place them around his body to be reincarnated.
It was the only way to be strong again.

His heart had rejected the fake Freya. He had to get the real one and have her by his side. And just like the Ancient Egyptian embalmers, he needed everything else that had been taken from Lawrence – his kidneys, his lungs, his liver and corneas. He had to find them all and take them back.

"You have to sign a consent form for the treatment, Seth." Dr Moore handed him the clipboard and pen.

Seth signed and pushed it back.

Lawrence Griffon.
CHAPTER NINE

The Necromancer

I hadn't been to West Melbourne, on the city fringe, for years and checked JD Howard's business card again as the taxi driver drove up and down the street, cursing under his breath. It was late afternoon, and the sun was casting long shadows as it flared through the sides of the buildings.

"Are you sure, it is a house? Business? All factories here." He thumped his hand on the steering wheel and I squinted against the sun and craned my neck to see a number on one of the buildings.

We'd driven past the railway lines and container yards, the Coode Island petrochemical plant and the shipping docks. When Howard said his office was in an industrial area, he wasn't kidding.

"Maybe if we went back over the bridge?" I suggested.

The driver shrugged and turned the car around. He assured me the only thing around the Dudley Street Bridge was a brothel and carefully asked if that's what I wanted.

"They have lots of Asian women there." He smiled.

"I'm actually looking for a private investigator's office."

He shrugged and suggested I either head back into the city or get out here and search on foot. "I never see it from the car."

I agreed. I was in the right street, in the right suburb. How hard could it be to find Howard's office? As the taxi drove away I confidently walked up to a
building where I thought I saw a sign, only to realise it was locked and actually a knitwear designer outlet. Now what?

My footsteps echoed as I searched for the number. I was now outside a brothel, a once grand terrace house slathered in too many layers of flat black paint that had peeled off in great handfuls. I walked on, past old red brick factories and tiny worker's cottages. The street numbers seemed to dance and skip with a maddening randomness and smashed glass littered the gutters.

I walked up and back until I was in tears. I pressed buzzers on doors that no one answered and I ventured up back lanes in the hope they might lead to another entrance I'd overlooked. I took my phone out to call Howard and realised that despite Roxanne's continual urging about coming to terms with technology, I had failed to enter the number and now had to fumble around in my bag for his card.

"Hey baby!"

I turned with a start. I wasn't alone after all. A pack of young men leered a few blocks behind me, gesturing and thrusting their hips. I quickly looked away, taking in only a blur of gesturing machismo.

*Walk fast,* I hissed to myself, quickening my pace. I peered at the card and my phone as I went, trying my best to punch the number in. I was used to living in the inner city. Fitzroy was pure Caravaggio; a chiaroscuro contrast of gentrification and public housing. Porsche Boxsters outside slick townhouses and deros in the gutter. I didn't scare easily.
"Bitch! Yo! Fuckin' bi-tch!" The pack yelled and laughed, and picked up their pace.

I walked fast but confident, shoulders back and chin defiantly forward. Although I felt uneasy, I wouldn't let them sense fear. It was the same with dogs. A pack always goes after the weakest prey and brings them down to feast together. I tried Howard's number but must have got the number wrong as it wouldn't connect.

Clank!

A crumpled empty can of soft drink flew past my head and brushed my hair before landing near the street. There were howls of laughter and more jeering.

I was a victim in waiting and that wasn't a good feeling. I looked around for signs of life – people in the street, passing cars, a door ajar, even a light on. But I was alone with the pack.

"Talking to you bitch!"

I glanced back and realised that I was in trouble: six blokes to one Xanthe. It was the moment when you can imagine being ripped apart and left for dead in a back lane.

I ran now and my heels shifted from side to side on the uneven sidewalk. I was sure the group was only a block from me, their howling carried fast with the wind. I ran around a corner, hoping to see someone, anyone, but the streets were deserted.
I wanted to scream out Lawrence's name, I wanted him to find me, to save me.

"Whore! Come here!"

They were closer now, and I didn't know where to run. Deserted terrace houses and empty factories filled block after block, so instead I hid. I caught sight of a broken fence and pushed myself into the side path, scraping my bandaged arms as I wedged in tight behind an overflowing bin.

Shit! I cursed myself as my arms throbbed. Why had I been so stupid and cut myself? The other night I had wanted to set myself free and simply drain away in a pool of blood, but now, as I hid in fear, I wanted more than anything to live. It was a surge of life that seemed to power up through the fog of the valium and into my brain, shaking me and forcing me to admit the truth. I wanted to live. I wanted to fight. I did not want to die.

Or at least, not to have it end like this.

"Yo! Bi-tch! Where are ya?"

Some of them started howling. I felt like I was under water, so far under I couldn't see sunlight.

"Come to daddy!" one cried and they shrieked in laughter.

Where was JD Howard? I angled his business card to catch the fading light and concentrated hard on sending a text and entering his number correctly. For a few minutes the panic subsided. I checked my watch – five minutes since I heard the pack. Was it safe to come out now? I'd been breathing little nips in fear
and felt giddy and nauseous. The stench of the rotting rubbish was overwhelming and fat blowflies and mosquitoes that circled in frenzied glee.

Cautiously, I emerged from my hiding place, abandoning hope of finding Howard. If I could get back to a main road and get a taxi, I'd be happy.

One block, two blocks, I could see the main street ahead. I hobbled forward, my heels bending sideways as I pushed my body faster. The cold wind hit my face and I could feel rain start to fall, those big fat drops that signified a downpour.

"There she is!"

I looked sideways to the noise and saw them, the wolves with teeth bared, chests pumping as they raced towards me. Dressed in jeans and hoodies, I couldn't see their faces, but their eyes seemed to glow from the shadows.

I ran; my heart heavy as I pushed my body. I wasn't used to more than yoga and pilates and I was quickly out of breath.

And then I clipped a crack and hit the concrete, instinctively pushing my hands forward; even so my knee caught the force of the impact. The pain was instant and every nerve screamed as the skin lifted and curled and sucked in the dirt and shards of glass.

"Get up, get up NOW!" I urged myself.

But I couldn't. The air escaped faster from my lungs than I could breathe.

And then large hands caught me and pulled me up and I lashed out, grabbing handfuls of a thick coat.

"It's me, Xanthe. Get up!"
It was Howard, but I was still feeling the frenzy of the fight. He dragged me to his car and threw me in as I screamed. The side window nearly shattered under the weight of someone throwing a rock. I turned in fear to see a contorted angry face, eyes wide with a huge tongue licking the glass.

The car rocked as the pack pushed their bodies against it. Howard pressed hard on the accelerator, and we reversed, throwing me into the dashboard and ignoring the young man who had crawled over the bonnet. I saw him fly into the gutter as we sped off.

Howard drove fast at first, away from the danger and down the street, then back up side streets until the empty shops and houses looked familiar again, and I realised we’d been circling where the taxi dropped me off.

"I told you my place was next to Ladyfingers," said Howard. "How could you get lost?"

"You don't have a sign up, or a number on the building."

"I like privacy."

"Not good for business, I should imagine."

"You've got it wrong. I don't deal in street trade, and my customers rely on discretion."

Howard drove past the brothel and round the corner, parking the car in a space that said "tow-away zone". By now it was raining heavily and I followed him past industrial sized bins, a stray cat and broken bottles to a darkened alcove near a heavy steel door. Howard placed the palm of his hand on a sensor pad and it scanned a light over before beeping and releasing the door.
"Neat trick, huh?" He winked at me.

Unlike Belle Lamia's office, there was no gold lettering on Howard's glass door. Instead the steel had what looked like crowbar marks on one side and in holes in the upper right hand corner that looked suspiciously like bullet holes. If this was an indication of what he was keeping out, then it wasn't any wonder Howard didn't want people to know where he worked.

"You could do with a cleaning lady," I said, as I followed him inside and he turned on the lights.

I didn't say it to be rude – it was more a sign of recognition. Here was someone else who lived in their office. I spotted the tail end of a floral sheet hanging from the under seat of a couch, and a box of breakfast cereal near the coffee machine.

Howard thrust a glass into my hand.

"Laphroaig," he said. "If you're going to fall, make it a velvet landing."

The smoky vapor curled its way to my senses and by the second sip a warm fire glowed inside me. I kept drinking; big greedy gulps.

"Thanks for coming to my rescue."

"I do a side line in damsels in distress."

Howard unscrewed the cap of the Laphroaig again and I held out my empty glass. My gums sparkled as I swished the whiskey around my teeth and I was content to let the blissful warmth numb me as I took sip after sip.

I pointed to the eye chart on the wall.

"I saw that diagram at the Isis Club."
"They say the eye is the window to the soul," said Howard. "Why do you think rock stars and celebrities wear sunglasses all the time?"

"Flash bulb irritation?" I knew I was being a smart arse, but I missed the banter I had with Lawrence. These were the types of wisecracks we'd traded all the time.

"Because while they court fame, they don't want to let the public have access to here." Howard pointed to my heart.

"You think the soul lies in the heart?"

"The Ancient Egyptians did. They kept the heart in the body when they were mummifying someone."

"Not the brain?"

"They didn't think much of brains, apparently. Sucked them out via the nostrils and fed them to the temple cats."

"Do you believe in reincarnation, JD Howard?"

"I want to believe in a lot of things."

"I have a friend who hangs out with people who worship the Dalai Lama and he's a reincarnation, isn't he? How do the Tibetans find out they've chosen the right Dalai Lama reincarnation; a game of Twenty Questions?" I waved the glass and the whiskey slopped over my hand and ran into my bandages and I let out a little scream. "Oh – no!"

"You're bleeding."
Howard pushed my sleeves back and saw the bandages. Fresh blood seeped through and mingled with putrid brown stains from where I'd fallen and hidden near the refuse.

"If you believe in reincarnation, you should know that suicides don't get to come back from the dead."

"I'm Greek Orthodox," I said. "And they only bury suicides if they can be proven to be insane when they took their own lives."

I think I counted as being over the edge when I attacked myself with a shard of glass. At least I hope so.

"Felo De Se," said Howard, as he unwrapped the bandages. "It's an archaic legal definition meaning self-murderer. If you were judged to be sane when you killed yourself, you were considered a felon of yourself and forfeited your worldly goods to the crown. Oh, and you were also buried at the crossroads with a stake through your body."

Howard looked at my arms and then at my face. "But you didn't really want to die, did you? You would have cut yourself deeper and also, I probably shouldn't be telling you this, but if you want to slash your wrists and bleed to death, you've cut yourself in the wrong direction. Come on, let's clean you up."

He sat me on a chair and wheeled me over to the sink, where he shone an office lamp onto my arms. As he leaned over and bumped into my knee, I screamed out in pain. He looked down and saw my other injury.

Howard lifted up my skirt before I could stop him.
"That's a bad wound. Hmm. Don't think it needs stitches but I want to clean it out," he ripped my stocking and I yelled at him.

"Hey! Those were expensive."

"Yeah? They were torn anyway."

He rummaged around the cupboard above the sink for first aid supplies and then washed out the cut, exposing the ridges and crevices in all their glory. Flaps of fleshy skin hung on the sides of the crater, and shiny shards of glass glinted under the office lamp.

Howard pulled a flap of skin back, already a grayish colour, and inspected underneath.

"Not quite the cavity wound category, but close. This is going to take some time to heal."

I didn't think I could stand to look but it occurred to me that whoever had Lawrence's organs would have a scar from the incision, so I peered down as Howard held up some cotton gauze and a bottle of peroxide.

"This might hurt."

"Then don't do it."

But he plunged it into the wound. I yelped at the sharp pain that kept rolling on in pulsing waves.

Next Howard approached me with a pair of silver tipped tweezers. I tried to get out of the chair, but he pushed me back.
"The glass needs to come out or the sharp edges will continue to lacerate the tissue in there. If it is close to nerves or blood vessels, it could cause some problems."

"You sound like a doctor."

"Just first aid."

"You were a medic? St John's Ambulance officer?"

Howard didn't answer me but set about plucking the little pieces of glass from the red crater. I whimpered like a child and he spoke to me in the calm, soothing tone of a parent. I wondered if he had children, if he'd washed their skinned knees after they'd fallen off their bikes. I looked closely at his hands and saw the ghost of a wedding ring on his finger. So maybe he was like me; alone.

"I can't seem to reach this piece – damn," Howard bent down next to my leg, so my knee was almost level with his chest, and leant in closer, his strong arm against my thigh. I couldn't help but compare him to Lawrence – Howard wasn't as tall and he was a solid man, with thick curly hair and brown eyes. Lawrence had been a tall, lean runner who obsessed about his health. I could imagine Howard kicking back with a cold beer and a large pizza.

"Got it!" he held up the tweezers with a jagged piece of glass clenched tight. But still he continued – next squeezing in a few drops of vivid bronze Betadine into the pool of red "for germs" and then applying a special dressing that the packet claimed helped "wet wound healing."

And once he'd finished my knee, he dressed the cuts on my arms, finally wrapping me up in clean bandages so my arms resembled an Egyptian mummy.
"You're well stocked for a detective. I was under the impression that most of the investigative work these days took place in virtual reality."

"It depends on what you’re looking for." His fingers lingered for a moment on my skin as he smoothed the bandage into place.

"I want to find my fiancé, Lawrence Griffon."

I got up from the chair and hobbled over to the window. It was still raining and I traced the drops down the cold glass. The rain was such a novelty and so infrequent that when it came, the smell of the ground as it opened up permeated the air.

"It was also raining that night. The police told me more accidents happen when it's wet because all the oil sits on the road and creates a slippery surface. A truck lost control near the intersection and slammed into us."

"I saw the story on the news," said Howard. "You were lucky you survived."

"Everything I valued died in that accident. Lawrence's wife turned off his life support and donated his organs and had him cremated before I got out of the coma. And I lost our baby."

Lawrence came over to me and handed me another drink. "I'm sorry."

"I need to find him."

"If I agree to help you, I see the project through to the end. I can't leave jobs like this half finished."

"Jobs like what?"

"Necromancy isn't an exact science."
"What exactly do you do?"

"I locate the souls of those who have been denied a chance at reincarnation because they've been transplanted into someone else. It's like being in limbo inside another body."

Did I believe all this? But I had to, if I was going to find Lawrence.

"But how do you find them?"

Howard picked up a traditional Russian babushka doll from the desk and asked me to open the top to reveal the smaller nesting doll inside.

"Everything that happens to you is indelibly encoded into your brain. These are called engrams, or memory trace. It's like the memory creates a permanent change in the brain."

"But how does that apply to something like a kidney?" I cradled the smaller babushka doll in my hand.

Howard placed his hands over mine and eased up the top of the babushka doll. Another smaller one was revealed inside.

"Take it a step further and see that the engrams encode not just in our brain but throughout our body, right into our very cells. Neuropeptides, or brain proteins, have been discovered in all body tissues. Emotions and memories are stored in the body, in every cell we have. And they get transplanted into the other person."

"So the body remembers things, not just the mind?"
Howard nodded. "It's called cellular memory or trait transfer. Just like the babushka doll, there are multiple layers to get through; who we are on the outside, and on the inside, then on the inside of those organs in our body."

As he spoke, Howard placed all the babushka dolls in a row, from biggest to the smallest. "We are in fact just walking memories; of emotions, of genetic code, of a thousand wars a thousand years ago and of love and that began before our ancestors emerged from the cave."

"So you can find the trace of Lawrence inside his organ donor recipient, by connecting with his memories?"

"That's part of what I do."

"What's the other part?"

"I wake him up for you. That's what necromancy is all about."

I wondered if the babushka dolls belonged to Howard's wife. Maybe he had a daughter who played with them. Or maybe he just bought them from the market to illustrate his obscure profession. I could imagine lining them up on my child's bed side table, talking about how I'd found their father inside another person.

"Then find him for me. Because I want to have Lawrence's baby. "

Howard raised his eyebrow at me.

"No matter who he is inside, I want him and I'll make him want me," I said firmly.

"And what if he's inside a woman?"
I just stared at Howard in disbelief. "That hadn't even occurred to me. I just assumed a man's organs would go into a man."

"Robert Altman had the heart of a young woman transplanted into him ten years before he finally died," Howard explained. "But don't worry. Sex really does affect the success of a transplant and if possible doctors try to avoid putting female organs into male patients."

"Some sort of sex discrimination thing?"

"Nature's very own. Some transplant experts say that a woman's higher estrogen levels make her organs more prone to rejection. Men have a 22 percent higher rejection rate when the kidney comes from a female donor."

"So I can get pregnant with Lawrence's child?"

"Time's not on your side."

"I've only just turned forty!"

He held up his hands to ward off my indignation. "What I meant was that organ failure is very common among transplant recipients. How long ago did Lawrence die?"

"Three months." I knew every day, every second off by heart. I had two deaths to mark the occasion, and I did it by counting the moons and the bleeds that passed. Lawrence's death and our baby's would always be connected.

"We need to work quickly. Memories start to surface soon after the patient recovers from transplant surgery, depending on how strong the will of the organ donor. I charge standard rates and expenses. I work whatever hours necessary to close the case."
"You're hired," I stood up and asked Howard to call me a taxi, but as I shuffled across the room to get my handbag, I felt everything spin around me. My feet buckled under me and I hit the floor. Perhaps I shouldn't have had the whiskey after all. As the adrenaline rush from the chase had worn off, I'd been growing increasingly tired, but pushed it aside. Now, however, I felt both warm and light as if I could float away.

Howard lifted me up and carried me to the couch.

"Did you have a fall while you were being chased? Did you hit your head?"

He produced a small torch from his pocket with a key ring attached and shone it into my eyes. I wondered if he was checking for concussion or searching for my soul.

"I think it's the tablets, for my nerves, and the whiskey."

Howard got my handbag and started searching through it despite my protest.

"Valium? 50 milligrams per tablet? I'm surprised you're still standing. Hell, I wouldn't have given you whiskey if I knew you were drugged."

I watched in horror as Howard emptied the pills into the waste paper bin. My precious little pills, the ones that filed the edges off the grief and sandpapered the longing back to the point where I could function.

I eased myself off the couch and hobbled over to him and grabbed the bottle from his hand. All the pills were gone and I bent down on my good knee and searched through the bin.

"I'm not helping a zombie."
"I don't want your help!" I stuffed as many pills as I could into my pockets and headed to the door as fast as I could, but Howard blocked the way.

"Nothing is worth taking your life."

"I'm not going to overdose."

"Look at you – those tablets are going to get you into trouble one way or another. You can't dull your brain with tranquilisers. If you are in pain it means you're alive and that's a good sign."

"You have no idea!" I screamed. "You have no idea what it's like to lose someone and not even know they've been carved up and placed inside someone else!"

Howard's jaw twitched and he raised his hand to my face and I flinched. But he didn't hit me.

"I've been where you are. I don't want to see someone else go down as well."

The room continued to slowly rotate. All the sounds seemed to rush to my head and tiny pricks of lights cascaded down from the corners of my eyes. The throbbing started near my left eye.

"My head –" I spluttered. "Migraine."

I felt Howard's strong arms support me as he pressed me firmly onto a couch and pushed me down until my head rested against the cool leather, and then his hands on my legs as he gently placed a pillow under my knees. He took off his jacket, and I felt its heavy wool weight embrace my body.

"Tomorrow," I said, struggling to complete the thought. "Tomorrow –"
In my dreams, I saw a knife slicing through Lawrence's skin, the blood appearing from under the blade, in a long straight line. Then his skin peeled away, exposing flesh then the muscles wrapped around bone. And then hands pulling the organs from his body, from where they rested hidden under bone.

I asked them if they gave Lawrence a general anesthetic so he wouldn't feel it when they lifted out his kidneys and placed them in the waiting polystyrene boxes, cooled down and ready to go. The ultimate takeaway.

Howard wasn't in the office when I woke the next morning, but he had thoughtfully placed a cut glass carafe of water next to my handbag, and I gratefully gulped down two glasses of water. Thankfully, the pain had evaporated but my tongue felt furry and my throat tight and I walked around until I found the bathroom, knocked, and when there was no reply, went inside. Everything was neat and clean and sparse. One toothbrush, no hairdryer, a large can of Old Spice shaving cream and a razor. Unable to resist, I opened all the bathroom cupboards to look for clues – who was JD Howard? Who had he searched for? There was nothing unusual there, just the evidence of a man who lived alone.

I splashed water on my face and rummaged through my handbag for my emergency makeup supply. I found some concealer for the dark circles under my eyes and lipstick, which I smeared into my cheeks to take away some of the sallow pallor. I squeezed some of Howard's toothpaste onto my finger and noticed that he was the sort of person who meticulously folded the tube from the bottom and carefully rolled up the used end. I was a squish it in the middle
woman, reserving my energy for getting the last bit of pigment from a tube of paint.

When I emerged from the bathroom, Howard still hadn't returned. I looked at my watch – 9.30 am. Maybe he'd gone out on another job. I quickly moved to his desk and went through the drawers, not sure of what I was looking for but hoping to find something, anything, that might tell me about this mysterious man.

Most of the drawers were locked. His bookshelves were filled with Raymond Chandler novels and I laughed at a title called *Poodle Springs*. I picked up the *Oxford Book of Spy Stories* and flipped through and then saw a shelf devoted to the *Ellery Queen Magazine*. Well, I guess they were work related – my bookshelves were filled with *Art Monthly* and coveted hardback books by David Hockney that I'd begged over the years from friends for birthday presents.

Howard even had old Pan paperback copies of Ian Fleming's James Bond novels. They were yellow with age and a small envelope fell out as I read the inscription on the back of the front page. "Remembering Gabriel". I winced as I bent down to pick it up and felt something soft and bulky inside. Three light brown curls, the sort one kept from a baby's first haircut. I put it back and went to the kettle, where I found the note taped to the jar of instant coffee.

_I have a lead on the kidney. Meet me ASAP at this address JD._
CHAPTER TEN

The Kidney

Would meeting the kidney recipient be like meeting Lawrence in my dreams? When I slept, I could still feel Lawrence in my arms, and my body wrapped around him. It was home, like I was whole again.

The taxi driver peered out of the car window and watched as I got into Howard's black four wheel drive instead of going into a house. I felt like a prostitute about to do kerb side service.

"This is weird," I said to Howard.

He had two take away cups of coffee in the dashboard cup-holders and handed me one. "It should still be warm," he said. "When you get a lead, it's best to grab it by the balls. I've been here a few hours and done a tour of the neighbourhood, got the low down on the recipient," he said.

"How did you do that?"

"I asked questions."

I suppose it might have seemed obvious to other people, but I spent my days looking at what lay underneath the surface. What people had to say rarely interested me; as a portrait artist it was their shifting expressions, the way their eyes opened wide or mouths turn down in a grimace that caught my attention. Arms crossed and breasts thrust out, legs casually spread apart or hands linked behind the back. Perhaps a foot tapping in time to a secret rhythm, fingers
twirling strands of hair; these were all the actions that revealed more about a person to me than what they said.

What was one of Lawrence’s favourite sayings? "Words can lie, but we betray ourselves by our actions." He would interpret people's body language as often as what they told him.

I looked across at Howard, whose first name I didn't even know. He was the sort of man who looked you straight in the eye when he spoke, giving you his full attention. He wasn't traditionally good looking like Lawrence, but he exuded a rough magnetism that was confident and very masculine.

"Are you ready for this?" asked Howard. "You say you want to know, but I have to warn you, the process can be unsettling."

"I've already been to hell. This can't be worse."

"What I have discovered is that people rarely encounter real hell. And they are always surprised to find that no matter what pain and loss they have endured, more can be delivered."

"That sounds like something you hear in church."

"No, in church they tell you there is redemption and ever lasting life; a heaven for believers. Well, there's not."

Howard's hands were clenched on the steering wheel. I thought of the baby's hair in the book.

"Did you lose you someone - close?"

Howard's jaw tightened. "Drink your coffee. It will go cold."
I was sorry I had opened my mouth. This is why I was better with images. Other people could interpret what I saw. When I had to put it in a sentence, I ended up being cruel or clumsy or both.

"What do I say to the recipient?"

Howard reached over to the glove compartment and pulled out a piece of paper.

"Here's a list of questions that might help you determine if the kidney recipient is who you're looking for. First, you've got to establish identity and memory. Once you've made a positive identification, it's up to you how to proceed."

I scanned down the questions: They were surprising.

"Smell? Taste? Not what we did last Christmas?"

"Memory is textural. You can never be sure what will jolt a recipient back to the source. The touch of your hand, your laughter, maybe the colour you're wearing. You've got to connect on a primitive level first, before you start with what you did last Christmas."

"Like the taste of a small cake to bring back memories of the past."

The instant I said it I regretted it. Roxanne always told me I had too much education and it put people off. She would have said "don't bring Proust into the conversation, you idiot!" *No one likes a smart arse.* I had been able to say things like that to Lawrence. His passion for knowledge was insatiable. His highest disdain was for what he called "the stupid people", most often directed at those who didn't think, just shopped.
"À la recherche du temps perdu—known in English as *In Search of Lost Time*, by Marcel Proust." Howard smiled at my surprise. "I bet you didn't expect me to know that?"

For once I was at loss for anything to say.

"I like to read," he shrugged. "Anything except the biographies of the rich, famous or those successful at sport."

I laughed. "That's what Lawrence used to say! He hated having to read what he called "ghost written dross" by footballers or swimmers before he interviewed them. It drove him mad that Australians worshipped them and not –"

"Thinkers," said Howard.

"Exactly!"

"No one likes a thinker," he said, flashing me a smile. "They're dangerous. According to my information, Dario Marlotti likes to settle down with a cup of tea in front of the television about now. So it's a good time to approach him. He'll be relaxed, caught off guard."

I nibbled a fingernail and looked at the house. As the taxi driver had gleefully informed me, a great deal of money had been spent on the little terrace houses in Albert Park, evidence of which could be seen in the designer gardens. Dario’s front garden however was a clean slate of concrete with a solitary fig tree proudly pruned at the front fence, and draped with heavy net. Just like my *Yaiyai’s*.

"So I just go in and say who I am?"

Howard shook his head and pulled out a gold cross from his pocket.
"You need a cover. You can’t just walk in – this will help."

"A cross?"

"I’ve done the R & D on the recipient; he’s Catholic. You say you’re from the hospital's pastoral care team, who offer post-operative support through companionship, listening, prayer, spiritual support and sacramental ministry."

"I can't give the sacrament!" I made the sign of the cross.

"Are you a believer?"

"In what?" I wondered if this was an Isis Club test.

"In God. Do you believe in God?"

"Yes," I replied defensively. People usually made fun of the religious symbolism in my art work, but the Greek Orthodox faith was very important to me culturally. I wasn't sure I actually believed in God, but preferred to hedge my bets. I certainly respected the church and dyed hard boiled eggs red each Easter as was the Greek custom.

"Good, it will make your cover easier." Howard pushed the cross into my hand and then reached over to the back seat and retrieved a plastic bag. Inside were the ugliest pair of shoes I'd ever seen: synthetic lace up with a low wedge rubber sole.

"I'm going to pretend to be a nun?"

"Sister Rosa, I think." He opened the glove box and got out a priest’s dog collar, which he put around his neck. "And I'm Brother Paul."

"Do you often pretend to be other people?"
"Whatever it takes," said Howard as he shrugged his shoulders and adjusted the collar in the rear vision mirror. "You know why Egyptians preserved the bodies of the dead?"

"Not exactly." I tied the shoelaces up.

"If the body was damaged or destroyed then continued existence after death was affected," Howard explained. "That's why they mummified the bodies. You can't be reborn in the after life if your body is incomplete."

There was something in the way he spoke, in the way his voice wavered as he said "loved ones" that made me wonder if he had ever been on a personal quest for someone's soul. I wanted to ask but I hardly knew this man, and didn't want to push him away. He was my only hope of finding Lawrence.

We got out of the car and adjusted our props. I twiddled with the cross and looked at Dario's house.

"What if Dario doesn't buy the religious approach, what if he doesn't believe he's got a second chance of life and should pray for thanks?" I asked.

"Trust me, it's what they all think," said Howard.

I stood close to Howard as he rang the door bell. He smelt like a forest in spring, green and woodsy. Lawrence never wore aftershave as he said it was effeminate. Howard's fingers brushed mine as the door opened and he pushed me slightly forward.
"Good morning. I'm Father Paul from Our Holy Redeemer and this is Sister Rosa. As part of the donor program, our parish offers follow up spiritual support. We were wondering if we could speak to Mr Dario Marlotti."

I don't know why I was surprised by how easily Howard lied. As a private investigator, he did it for a living. I fingered my cross nervously.

The woman was about thirty years old and wearing some sort of uniform. I peered at the embroidered writing above her ample bust; United Pathology. She said she was Dario's daughter.

"I'm so glad you came. I rang last week and the woman I spoke to wasn't very helpful. She said it was the medication."

"Someone from the church?" I asked.

"No, the hospital."

Howard started to say something when a deep voice called out from the midst of the drone of the television.

"Sophie! Who's at the door?"

"Someone to see you, dad."

'I'm busy! Kerri-Anne is on."

Sophie sighed and shook her head. As she ushered us in to the living room, I reflected that there was a certain style adopted by immigrants that transcended country of origin. I could have been in my Yaiyai’s home, with the plastic furniture protectors and neat little crocheted doily’s on the 1960s splayed coffee table. Of course, it was furniture that was now snapped up as terribly retro and hip by those in the inner suburbs, but I knew better. Dario would have
proudly bought it when he was newly married and his wife would have spent the years lovingly polishing it every day.

Dario was watching television. There was a picture of Our Lady on top of the big old set, and I tried to suppress a giggle – I'd done a series of paintings appropriating religious iconography into pop culture a few years ago. It was a big hit with the gay scene. *Our Lady Full of Grace Please Find Us A Parking Space.*

"Dad, there's someone from the church to see you."

He grunted a greeting, but didn't turn around. He was mesmerised by the effervescent Kerri-Anne Kennerley interviewing someone about pedigree dogs as a couple of labradoodles sniffed each other's bums.

I studied the holder of Lawrence's kidney. Dario was compact, with skin tanned from a life time's manual labour, I guessed. He looked about sixty years old and his dark hair was threaded with silver flecks.

The enormity of what I had to do came over me like a wave of nausea. I had to sleep with this man – if I wanted Lawrence's baby, I had to have sex with Dario. I went back a few steps so I could have another look, until Howard coughed loudly and motioned me to the kitchen.

Sophie already had the kettle boiled, and she chewed her bottom lip and tried to tell us what she feared had happened.

"I'm scared, I really am and I don't know what to do. I know he needs the tablets but maybe the doctors are right and they're what are making him act strange."

"Has he been having bad dreams?" asked Howard.
Sophie nodded. "The last two weeks, screaming about the war. I don't understand it. They said maybe it was what he's been watching on television, because that's all he does now."

"Maybe he's tired?" suggested Howard. "He's happy just to relax in front of the box." He sipped the tea and helped himself to another chocolate cream biscuit. Lawrence never ate biscuits. He said the camera added at least three kilos.

"I thought so too," Sophie said. "But he doesn't even watch the old favourites. He's obsessed with the news, stuff on the ABC he was never interested in before. And morning television with all those silly interviews, even the cooking segments. It's like he's a totally different person."

"Is there anything else?" asked Howard.

"Like what?" She cracked her knuckles.

"Has your father had any physical changes that you've noticed since the transplant?"

She nodded. "He's started getting his colours muddled up. The doctors say its nothing to worry about, but dad was a sign-writer. He'd never mix up red and blue or green and red."

_He's become colour blind._ I heard Howard ask another question, but by then I was already in the next room, offering Dario a biscuit.

On the coffee table there was a half-full economy sized bottle of antiseptic hand cleanser, the sort that you don't need to wash off. But there was no other
sign that Dario had recently had major surgery, or that he had a part of my love inside him.

"I like this show," I said as I sat down next to Dario. "But I prefer Oprah."

"She's good, but I think we should support our local talent," said Dario. He pushed the plate of biscuits aside. Just like Lawrence would. "Kerri-Anne has a new website. Have you seen it?"

I shook my head. This had to be Lawrence guiding Dario.

"Your daughter tells me you like gardening."

Dario shrugged. "The drought has gone on for too long, and everything is dying. These days I prefer the internet."

"Your daughter says you've been having bad dreams." I tried to recall Howard's briefing on the standard Catholic hospital pastoral care program. "As part of the follow up from your surgery, Father Paul and I would like to offer you spiritual support as well as prayer."

Dario picked up the remote control and turned the television off. I looked into his deep brown eyes and wondered if Lawrence could see me looking at him.

"Can you give me a prayer to make them go away?" Dario asked. "I see houses exploding and hear gun fire. There are children without legs and pregnant women hiding in basements. The doctors say it's the medication, but maybe it is God punishing me."

"Why would he punish you?" I asked.

"Once, when I was a boy, I stole something."

"Dad!" Sophie appeared at the door way. "You never told me this."
"I stole a book from the library. The Famous Five. I can see the red cover, the picture of a cliff face and a boat. I wanted it and I hid it under my jumper and took it home. Napier only had a small library."

"Oh dad," said Sophie. "You grew up in Naples, not Napier. You've never even been to New Zealand."

I dropped my cup on the tiled floor. It smashed into tiny pieces and little gold flecked shards of porcelain lay jagged in the light.

Sophie busied herself cleaning it up, and I sat and listened as Howard asked Dario if he remembered reading the book. Could he name the characters? Did he know where the Famous Five lived? Did he know who wrote the book?

But Dario had no idea. Like the nightmares of burning children. It wasn't his memory. It was Lawrence's.

Howard approached Sophie in the kitchen as she hooked the Dustbuster back on the inside of the laundry door.

"It's as I expected, I'm afraid."

Sophie clamped her hand to her mouth and stared at us. "Rejection? The doctors said the first three months was the crucial stage."

"It's not rejection exactly. It's what we call trait transfer. The kidney donor's past is coming back to your father."

"He's possessed!" cried Sophie, staggering to the table as she began to fall. Howard caught her around the waist and pulled out a chair for her.
"What Brother Paul is saying is that we need to help your dad resolve problems he might be having so the kidney doesn't reject him," I said in my best imitation of a nun's voice.

"Isn't it the other way around?" asked Sophie, looking confused. "Isn't dad's body rejecting the organ?"

Howard's voice was soothing. "Don't worry. Sister Rosa and I are here to help. We'd like to offer a special version of the Sacrament of the Sick, so Christ can strengthen your father who is affected by this illness."

Sophie nodded and burst into tears and covered her mouth with her hands to stifle her cries. Howard comforted her, patted her on the back and recited what sounded like a prayer.

"The Spirit helps us in our weakness, for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words."

"Amen," said Sophie and I repeated in an echo along with her.

There was something I had to know, before Howard went any further. "Sophie – why did your father need a transplant?" I asked. Was her father a worthy recipient or not?

"He had something called polycystic kidney disease. He'd been on dialysis for the last six years. He kept having tumors grow in his kidneys. The doctor's don't know why it happened. They think he was born with it," she said.

"It's a common reason for a transplant," said Howard. I wondered if this was a lie as well.
"I wanted to donate a kidney, but he wouldn't let me. He wanted me to get married and have babies."

"But his condition got worse?" I asked.

Sophie nodded. "I made them tissue type me anyway, but I wasn't a match. So dad went on the waiting list and then when we got the call it was like God was speaking to us. But now I wonder. If he had stayed on dialysis – maybe the nightmares would never have happened. Maybe he'd still be my dad."

I looked through the doorway to where Dario was sitting in front of the television. If he had Lawrence inside him, then this is the way he'd try and connect with the world. He was forcing Dario to assume his habits, his interests.

"I want to try to contact the place inside your father where those nightmares are coming from," said Howard. "But I need your permission."


Following Howard's instructions, we darkened the house and lit the black candles he'd brought in his battered leather Gladstone bag. I got worried. I knew black candles were associated with Devil Worship. Would Sophie and her father accept what was happening? Howard said it was necessary for us all to get into "the zone" and he had begun by chanting in a foreign language – Latin? – and burning incense.

Luckily, as Roman Catholics, Dario and Sophie were immediately accepting of rituals, and even let him place a teaspoon of powder on their tongues.
"Crushed mandrake," he whispered to me and slipped a priest's robe over his head and then chanted:

"The Lord bless you and keep you:
The Lord make His face shine upon you,
And be gracious to you;
The Lord lift up His countenance upon you
And give you peace.

May the grace of the Holy Spirit give comfort to Dario Marlotti who is sick."

We all held hands and said "amen" and then Howard got out a bottle of emerald green liquor Absinthe. I'd tried this bespoke brand in Paris. It wasn't the usual sort of Czech rubbish that was passed off as authentic. This was the real thing, made in one of the original French distilleries by a chemist with a love of the fin-de-siecle, Van Gogh and Rimbaud.

"I didn't think you could import this stuff," I said in an undertone as I watched him set up the slotted silver spoons over the wide mouthed glasses he'd brought along in an ultramarine velvet case. He left nothing to chance, obviously.

"I have a special import license," he said. "And friends in customs." He winked and asked me to get the matches ready.

Dario stared wide eyed as Howard lit the sugar cubes one by one and the blue flame flared with a hiss. As the melted sugar dripped through, Dario sat down, transfixed.
"Finally, the water," said Howard, as he dribbled a small amount of cold water over the sugar in each glass. The liquid promptly bloomed into a cloudy haze. "Louching," he said. "The best ones do this."

We all had a sip, the aniseed taste a familiar friend on my tongue, not unlike ouzo. Dario nodded and drank faster than the rest of us, but I could already feel the alcohol pass its warm way down my throat just as the wormwood curled into my brain.

"Do you like it?" asked Howard.

"Tastes like Galliano," said Dario.

"Unlike other drinks, Absinthe has a special herb in it called wormwood that opens up the mind. About half of the content of wormwood is a chemical called thujone, which is a bit like cannabis."

"Better than Galliano," said Dario smiling.

I picked up the bottle and read the wormwood content. It wasn't going to take long for us to be under its influence as this particular brand was so high it was illegal to sell it in France, let alone export it anywhere. How had Howard got hold of it? The room began to spin and blur, and the warm sensation in my throat became a slow burn.

I felt oddly sleepy yet more wide awake than ever. When I smoked hash I got stupid, unable to form a sentence properly and get it out of my mouth without already feeling I had said it before and was watching it float word by word into the air. But sipping the bitter sweet aniseed liquid, I felt calm and sharp.

"Is this safe?" asked Sophie, who took another sip, and another.
I saw swirls of yellow haystacks and a dark sky ablaze with stars. Joy and loneliness, thick pigment applied with aching skill and wild abandon. "Lord be praised, it won't do any harm," I lied.

I watched Dario and wondered what would happen next. He smiled at me and I reached out to hold his hand. It was warm and calloused, a lifetime's manual labor imprinted on the skin: worker's hands, honest hands.

"Of course, overdose on wormwood can cause convulsions, seizures, paralysis, brain damage, renal failure and death," said Howard.

"But Dario can't ruin Lawrence's kidney!" I blurted out.

"Lawrence?" said Dario. "I have Lawrence's kidney?"

He pulled up his top and showed me the scar. A thin red line against his olive skin. I reached out tentatively then traced the wound with my finger. Inside, under the flesh, a part of Lawrence. Had the black surgical thread dissolved yet, passing into his blood to wash away the evidence?

"Who is Lawrence?" Dario asked, then he grasped my hand. "I know who you are." Somehow he changed in my eyes, and I saw not Dario, but Lawrence.

I nodded. Sophie was lying on the floor, not moving. And Howard was chanting, words I couldn't understand. His hands were on Dario's head, firmly grasping him. The glasses were empty, and I don't know how much we had drunk.

"Lawrence?" I asked. I felt Dario's face, trying to feel Lawrence beneath his skin. He was hot to touch, his face flushed. We swayed as Howard chanted and I felt myself drift out of the kitchen and into another dimension.
"I never had a chance to say goodbye," I cried, hot tears stinging my eyes. "I woke up and you were gone."

Dario nodded but the words that came out of his mouth were not in his voice. And then Lawrence was speaking to me, and I looked into Dario's eyes and they were blue. Azure blue.

"I want to make our baby again." I said, "Make love to me."

I closed my eyes as I felt his hands on my top, unbuttoning and caressing at the same time. He felt like Lawrence, smooth hands, and when he kissed me, deep and longing, he tasted like Lawrence. But I kept thinking, he wasn't Lawrence, this is another man touching me, and he feels like another man. Unfamiliar, illicit, as if I was being unfaithful. And yet, as he started to kiss me, as he whispered my name, he was Lawrence, little by little, he was my love. Would the spell be broken if I opened my eyes?

Dario pulled me to the ground, "you're gorgeous," he said, his voice hoarse. He helped me undo his pants and his hands found their way into my bra, touching me lightly. He worked his way down to my waist and moved his fingers deftly under the elastic of my knickers, as I groaned and moved against the soft caress of his touch.

As his hand pressed against me I realised I was wet and impatient. There was just one thing I wanted from Dario, and that was Lawrence's soul.

I pushed his hands off me and flipped him over, straddling him as I unzipped his pants and grabbed his cock. I hoped this wouldn't take long.
The hot breath on my neck made me realise Howard was close and strangely I didn't feel self conscious. Too much Absinthe and mandrake to care and I quickly slipped Dario's cock inside me and watched his head roll back in ecstasy. He reached up to grab my breasts but I pushed his hands away… I didn't want anymore of him touching me than was necessary and as I felt him climax I realised that I had been briefly fantasising about Howard touching my nipples.

"Now! Yes!" cried Dario and when he went still, I climbed off and felt the trail of semen ooze down my thigh.

And the candles were almost burnt to their ends. And outside, it was dark.

"Lawrence?" I said. But there was only silence.

"Time to go," Howard had already packed up the candles. He helped me with my clothes.

The cold air outside jolted me awake. As I tried to focus, the car door slammed and Howard bent over me, his hair smelling of musk. I realised he was doing my seat belt up. I couldn't speak for sometime, as we drove towards the city. It felt like the skyscrapers would tumble on top of me while the street lights blazed into my retinas.

"It wasn't right," I said. "I couldn't hold on to Lawrence's spirit long enough."
"I said it doesn't always happen the first time," said Howard. "Some memories linger, sometimes more than that. But at least we know that Lawrence can reach out to you from inside the recipients."

The sound of the car on the road magnified in my head. The words hard to release from my mouth. But I felt victorious. I had cheated Freya; I had found some part of Lawrence. Beyond the grave and through the ashes of his body. I had reached out and seen a part of him that had not transcended.

"One time, I thought I found someone," Howard said, pushing a CD into the slot. It was medieval church music, a billowing concoction of chants broken only by a boy’s voice soaring high above in purity and grace.

"Who?" I asked.

"Someone I killed."

Howard kept his eyes fixed ahead. I could find nothing to say. We drove in silence, heading back to his office.

"What's this?" The music was haunting. It filled me with sadness and hope.


"I'd picked you for rockabilly."

"Well, it just goes to show."

"Now what?"

"We try the next one. The cornea recipient, if you want to. He's a nineteen year old train spotter who lives with his mum in Cape Otway on the Great Ocean Road. I can arrange it for the usual fee plus expenses."
I thought of myself reflected in Lawrence’s eyes. I thought of all he had seen, of the way he saw me. How could the recipient not be altered in his view of the world with Lawrence's sight? But a nineteen year old? He was still a teenager. Then again, maybe a young virile body could sustain Lawrence long enough for me to take him to bed and conceive our child. As I recalled, young men had plenty of sexual stamina.

"When can I meet him?"
CHAPTER ELEVEN

The Heart Turns

Seth sat in the city bar and sipped on his Bloody Mary. It was six o'clock on a Friday night and the place had quickly filled with office workers eager to cement their flirtations with colleagues over a drink or two. Men in business suits and gold rings flashing against tanned skin chattered with young women poured into tight skirts. They giggled as they got drunk. They all annoyed Seth.

"Is this seat taken?" A short woman with long red hair hovered near his shoulder. Seth immediately sized her up: her small breasts were highlighted in a jersey wrap dress and she had a slim figure with boyish hips. She was perhaps fifty years old and dressed conservatively except for an interesting pair of scarab earrings and a gold Ankh around her neck.

"I'm sorry. I'm actually waiting for someone."

Although Seth had other plans, an attractive woman who was interested in Egyptology always made him consider the possibilities. And now with his new heart and new life in his cock –

"Yes, I know. It's actually me you're planning to meet."

Seth blinked. No, it couldn't be – but the hands, he looked at the hands. Yes, they were large and now he saw the woman's throat had a hint of an Adam's Apple and her voice was perhaps deeper than usual.

"You were expecting Ned Egan. I'm Nuala Egan." She smiled and sat down next to Seth, her dress brushing against his leg.
"Ned’s sister?" asked Seth hopefully.

Nuala laughed. "I had a sex change about six months ago."

"I had no idea –" Seth felt awkward. He didn't like to be out of the loop when information was concerned. But then, he reasoned, did it matter what Nuala wore or what was under her clothes? He had the heart of another man in his chest, after all.

"Seth. I'm glad you called. Most of my old clients have accepted the change and the new ones, well, I don't bother explaining. You hadn't called with any jobs for awhile, so I thought you'd heard on the grapevine and dropped me from your list."

"I've been very ill. Now I'm a new man."

"And I'm a new woman," joked Nuala. "We should have a drink then."

Seth relaxed. It was still the same old Ned, except in a skirt. What was that saying? Friends with benefits? Maybe – he wondered if Ned had gone all the way with the operation. He’d heard most male to female sex change operations went the whole hog, whereas it was rarely attempted the other way around: easier to dig a hole than build a skyscraper, after all.

"What will it be, Nuala? A gin and tonic?"

"I'd kill for a beer."

They both laughed. Seth let Nuala tell him about a new shipment of papyrus scrolls she’d managed to obtain. Nuala tracked down antiquities smuggled into Australia and was always a step ahead of the police. She’d found him a little scarab amulet, with a carnelian sun disc on its head; a tiny green djed
pillar slipped through a mummy's wrappings and still containing the power to give
strength in the afterlife.

As they drank and turned the conversation to football, Seth fantasised
about luring Nuala into his bed. She made a good looking woman; it was
amazing what hormones, make up and surgery could achieve.

Seth reasoned the ancient Egyptians were pretty accommodating when it
came to 'the third gender'. They wrote of hermaphrodites, eunuchs, androgynous
and asexual beings as being permanent gender categories. Nuala would have
been accepted as one of that caste. Although a woman's status in Ancient Egypt
depended on her fertility, the goddess Nephthys was barren and that didn't stop
her conceiving a child with her husband's brother.

But business first, pleasure, if he was to have any with Nuala, was to
come second. "I need you to find something for me – well, a few things,
actually." Seth said.

"More Shabti?"

"Have you heard of the Isis Club?"

"Is it a strip joint?" Nuala laughed and winked. "I'm joking, mate, all right?
Maybe I've heard a rumor or two. Walls have mice and mice have ears. And
when you trade in antiquities, well, it's a certain sort of person who will spend
$3000 on an ancient Egyptian statue of Osiris rather than a plasma screen TV."

"You've got an Osiris? In good condition?"

"Museum cleaned and mounted. A perfect example of the God of Death
and the Lord of the Underworld. If you're interested, I can halve the price and
claim it as a postal problem. I'm shipping this baby from the UK through my net site *Khet That!*

Nuala handed him a business card. "Diversification. The internet has killed a lot of investigating work. If you want the Osiris —"

"Authenticity?"

"I hold no responsibility for any underworld curses the Osiris may still have, but apart from a certificate from our man in Cairo, I can't give you anything. I don't have access to radiocarbon dating methods."

Seth ripped up the business card and plopped it in Nuala's beer.

"Fool, radiocarbon dating is never used for stone or faience, only for organic materials."

"Okay, but you can't blame me for trying. A girl has to make a living. Okay, let's get serious. I can help you, whatever you need."

Seth looked at Nuala. He wondered, just because Nuala had altered the body underneath, could she alter her smell, her taste, the hardness of her skin and the angles of her body? Things could be added or taken away, a surgery scar here or there, but the chromosomes stayed the same. The hands remained unchanged: big male hands with dainty pink nail polish to soften the image.

He pushed in close, so he could feel the slight rise of Nuala's breasts against his chest. But this time, he eliminated the space between them for privacy, not intimidation or lust.

"I'm not looking for one person, just one person's organs. In six different people."
"Organ donation?" Nuala looked nervously around the room.

"It's all in there. The transplants were done two months ago. A liver, two kidneys, two corneas – I assume they are going to the same person – and a set of lungs."

"That only makes five. What about the heart?"

"I know the location of the heart. It's the other organs I need. Just get me the names and addresses of the recipients."

"Why don't you go directly through the Isis Club?" asked Nuala.

"I don't want to get involved," said Seth in a tone that brokered no argument. Seth had once given a lecture at the Isis Club and got the member’s measure: bleeding heart parapsychologists and necromancers who played with the souls of the dead for their own sentimental reasons. Seth wanted the organs to take away, not to cherish a memory. The Isis Club wouldn't give him what he wanted. His heart was turning, and the only way it could be stopped was by finding Lawrence's other organs and placing them in canopic jars as offerings to the gods: Duamutef the jackal, Qebehsenuef the falcon, Hapy the baboon and Imsety the man who guarded the liver. Once he had the organs, the canopic jars and the spells carved on them would give magical protection to the organs inside.

Nuala bit her bottom lip as she contemplated the job. "Well, okay then. The rate is $200 a day, plus expenses. I'm cheaper than a necromancer, but I obviously don't offer the same service."

"I'm not looking to raise the dead. I just want the recipients."
Seth also wanted to go home. He hated cold and anonymous places like this, where tired old men and women with more to lose than him were now replacing the office workers. They were huddled over drinks and listening to remixes of Abba. Some swayed to the music, others stared at their fingernails. Still, he had chosen it because he was unlikely to run into anyone from the university, opera or the Luxor Society.

Suddenly, the alarm on Seth's phone went off, a jarring jangle of Vivaldi's Rites of Spring. Seth excused himself and dug into his pocket, extracting a silver pill box with delicate art nouveau carving. He had bought it at Kosminsky's when his most recent book was launched. It had coincided with a further deterioration in his condition and Seth reasoned that if he must swallow the tablets, at least he could do it in style.

"HIV?" asked Nuala quietly.

"Cortisone, immunosuppressant."

"You've had a transplant?" Her eyes lit up. "You want to find the others, right?"

Seth nodded, uneasy about giving too much away. He should have realised Nuala was smart enough to make the connection.

"Look, I'll find the recipients for you, okay? I don't want to know anything else. Whatever you do with the information is your business. But my fee has doubled."
Was that a faint numbness down his arm? Seth had been working out, trying to regain strength. But now every twinge was a call from death, blowing softly in his face.

They stared at each other, like in the old days, man to man willing the other to look away or give in first. Seth was damned if he was going to lose to a woman, even if she used to be a man. But a sharp pain in his chest decided the outcome.

"Fine. I'll pay double," he said. Seth was annoyed but there wasn't much he could do. How much time did he have left before Lawrence Griffon's heart turned on him completely? Despite the dress and lipstick, Nuala still had balls when it came to doing business. Seth felt the flutter of an erection as he imagined fucking Nuala. If she hadn't had a complete gender reassignment it would be two for the price of one. He'd get his money's worth that way.

They shook hands to seal the deal. Nuala's grip was as strong as a man's despite the nail polish.

"If any of this gets traced back to me, you'll find Interpol knocking on your door, enquiring about some trinkets from the Middle Kingdom that found their way to Melbourne," warned Seth.

Nuala smiled tightly. Seth could see a look of fear in her eyes. He had the upper hand again and left whistling the old Abba tune playing in the bar. The Winner Takes It All.
CHAPTER TWELVE

My Lover's Eyes

The endless suburbs unfolded into a parched dry expanse of brown, a brutal reminder that despite intermittent rain during winter, Australia was still in the grip of a long drought. Not that it meant much in Fitzroy, where I didn't even have a pot plant to nurture. Now I could see life drying up around me. Overhead, flocks of screeching white cockatoos flashed across the deep blue sky and improbably ugly modern houses dotted farms.

I had been born in Melbourne, but I'd rarely stepped outside the city. I could have been visiting another country. Everything was so foreign to me.

We drove for hours. Howard didn't like to stop for breaks. My eyes grew heavy and as I was falling asleep, something came crashing down on the windscreen. The car swerved violently.

"Bloody hell!" said Howard.

The sudden impact of a black crow on the windscreen pushed the car sideways. I screamed as a truck coming down the next lane flashed its headlights. The bird's head was forced backwards and blood splattered the glass. I was back in the limousine again, with Lawrence, on the night my world dissolved into blood and rain. I started panting and gripped the seat, anticipating a collision.

But Howard pulled the wheel hard and wrenched it from its path towards the truck and brought us back onto the right side of the road. We said nothing for
a second as a chorus of men and women sang a French dirge and a lone church bell rang. Howard was a Francophile with a strange collection of soundtracks: this one was *Queen Margot*.

The bird was wedged near the bonnet. The sight of it reminded me of Lawrence with his head bent backwards. I started screaming and Howard drove on as a semi trailer and a car with an old caravan on the back passed us. Finally, he veered into the nearest truck stop, near a large gum tree, and held me tightly until I calmed down.

We got out and looked at the bird. Without saying anything Howard went to the boot and came back wearing surgical gloves and picked up the lifeless thing with a plastic bag. He had some disinfectant in a bottle which he sloshed on the windscreen and then wiped clean with a wad of paper towel.

"You're very organised," I said. Why did he have surgical gloves? I had a bundle in my bag, but I used them for painting. Lawrence warned me about the cadmium poisoning and said the glorious colours I spread on canvases could also be my death warrant. He nagged me into adopting safer work practices such as wearing surgical gloves and a mask when I ground colours or worked with cerulean blue which was made with cobalt. I tended to be dismissive of their perils. Even zinc white or titanium white carried a California health warning for lead content, but I'd never met an artist who would so much as wash their hands before eating a sandwich while working with those paints.

Last night, Howard had shown me the chart of the surface of the eye that was like a perverse Wheel of Fortune, with sections for every part of the body;
brain, trachea, uterus, liver, heart. He said that by looking at the eyes of a transplant recipient, he could tell whether there was a struggle between the life force of the donor trying to get out and the determination of the recipient trying to keep the organ inside.

"That's the essence of the Isis Club," explained Howard. "The understanding that the soul isn't lost at death but its path to reincarnation is affected by the donation process."

"That's why we're in such a hurry?" I had asked.

"The trail quickly goes cold in any investigation," Howard said, "but no one knows where the soul lies. It's like a psychic CSI episode - Scientists have no idea. They measure the body before and after death and calibrate the difference in grams. Only artists and poets have come close."

I thought of his tender words now, as he scraped the remains of the dead crow off the windscreen. He seemed so dependable, a man used to making decisions and finding solutions. He had told me that he had been in the Merchant Navy before joining the police force, and yet there was something about him that seemed too strange for such conservative professions.

"Why do you keep surgical gloves in the car?" I asked.

"Old habits."

"Like what?"

"Collection of evidence. Can't corrupt the scene with your DNA. You know, like in CSI."

This time, the joke was stale.
We didn’t stop until we had reached Lorne, where the long strip of coffee shops and restaurants and sightseers made me feel comfortable again. Howard and I sat in the Arab Cafe sipping strong lattes and eating toasted cheese and ham sandwiches. It was always good being around people. The sound of milk being frothed was comforting.

I settled in with an old copy of *Epicure* but Howard took it from my hands.

"Let's talk about the cornea recipient. His name is Cameron Waller."

"Do I play the nun again?" I asked.

"No, he's not religious. His mum is a school teacher and his dad pissed off when he realised his son had an inherited degenerative condition that was making him go blind."

"What does he do?" Sleeping with Dario was one thing, but a teenager? It made me uneasy.

"He's a model train fanatic and sells hand made train parts on the Internet. Apparently he wanted to be a photographer, which is pretty ironic, considering he's going blind."

"But he has Lawrence's eyes."

"I got the reports back from the hospital. It's not looking good. He's already had one episode of rejection."

I sipped my coffee. What was Lawrence trying to tell me? Why couldn't he live inside someone else's body?

"So I'm going to be a train collector?"
"No, your cover is a journalist interviewing him for a magazine article. He's expecting us. Have you thought about what are you going to do if this teenager turns out to be the one?"

I heard the judgment in his voice and bristled. "I wasn't aware it was any of your business."

"Well, it's just that he's very young," said Howard as if answering my thought.

"It's not as if I would be seducing a child." Actually, not far off the voice in my head taunted me.

"You have no idea do you? The effect you have on men. You'll break his heart."

I laughed. "I'm middle aged! I'm probably older than his mother. I just want him for one night. There are plenty of hotels around here. I just want to get pregnant, I don't want a relationship. He won't know what's happened."

"A child deserves a father."

"My love will be enough," I said defensively. "I'll be mother and father."

The house was a surprise. It was an A Frame of the sort that had been popular in the 1970s, and its steep sides – probably to avoid the roof being crushed by a heavy European snow fall – looked faintly ridiculous in the Australian bush.

I rehearsed over and over in my head what I planned to say, but when Cameron opened the door, I was at a loss for words.
He had Lawrence’s blue eyes.

"We’re from the paper," said Howard, behind me. He held up a card which I saw had an emblem on it and was stamped International Press Agency. "We’re here to do a story on your model train set."

"Yeah, cool."

I expected to see his mother peering anxiously from the corner, but Cameron said she was out all evening doing parent-teacher interviews. Howard didn't look surprised. I guessed he’d done his research and planned it this way.

A dog reared up from where it had been lying near the fireplace, suddenly barking and snapping at me.

"Jazz! Come on, mate. Hey, sorry about this," Cameron tried to grab the Rottweiler's collar but was thrown back onto the floor with the force of the struggling dog. I stood frozen while Howard took the collar and told the dog to sit in a stern voice. It obeyed him immediately.

"I worked a lot with rottys," he explained.

"In newspapers?" asked Cameron as he got up from the ground. "Wow, cool."

I don’t know what Lawrence was like at nineteen. But I imagined more talkative than Cameron. Lawrence had charmed his way into a cadetship when he left school and by the time he was twenty two, he was already editing a small country newspaper. Cameron looked like he should be in front of an XBOX control. He was tall, like Lawrence, but reed thin, with a plaid shirt opened over a
Def Leppard T Shirt and a pair of jeans that looked too big. As he showed us through the house to the converted garage where his model train set was installed, I compared him to Howard. One was a man, the other still a half-child. I felt the moist readiness between my legs. Cameron had Lawrence’s eyes, I reminded myself.

"Amazing," said Howard as Cameron opened the door. I admit I was surprised as well. The train track had been laid out on three large doors propped up on trestles, all connected by a vast fibreglass and paper mache mountain system. I looked closer and saw that Cameron had fashioned little houses and villages, although not European ones as I had seen in shops, but good Aussie houses with deep verandahs and water tanks.

"You've done an incredible job," I said honestly. "It's such fine detail on the houses – and even on the people around the towns – I can see expressions on their faces."

Cameron puffed up with pride. "Yeah, thanks. I had some problems with my eyes and couldn't see anything further away than this –" he placed his hand a few centimetres in front of his face. "So mum suggested we do the train set."

"How long have you been creating this set up?" asked Howard. He pulled a notebook from his coat pocket and looked just like the journalists who had interviewed me. I wondered what I was supposed to contribute.

Cameron happily showed us his collection, telling us how many rivets were on the side of a particular tender.
"Do you know there were one hundred and thirty three Hornby train models released in 1988?" Cameron told us. "That was the year I was born and my granddad got me a few pieces for my christening. That's how I started my collection."

I thought back to 1988. What was I doing then? I was studying painting at RMIT University, although back then it wasn't a University, just an Institute of Technology. In fact, it started out life next to the State Library as the Working Man's College – a fact of which I was reminded every time I tried to locate the ladies toilets in the old Gossard factory Building.

I was dating a La Trobe University cinema studies student and we spent all our time at the Valhalla Cinema in Richmond. That was where I saw Bertolucci’s film *The Last Emperor*. In 1988, it had won all those Academy Awards. I'd seen it because I was passionate about Tibet. Ironically, it was a film about the belief in reincarnation.

In 1988 I had the world at my feet. I was so young I wouldn't have even thought about having a baby. I was a student in op shop clothes and Madonna inspired footless tights, living off cheap falafel rolls. That was the year Cameron was born.

How could I do this? Seduce someone who was born in a year I remember so well as an adult?

An alarm sounded on Cameron's phone. He hauled it out of his pocket and switched it off.
"Sorry, I've got to take my tablets," he said. "I had an operation on my eyes two months ago."

"What sort of operation?" I asked. I hoped I didn't sound too eager.

"Cornea transplant. Actually, it's a graft, a bit of skin, not the whole eye. I had this thing I was born with, called keratoconus, and I was just about blind."

"How do you feel now?" I asked him.

"Oh, great I guess. I mean, when they took the bandages off and I could see properly it was awesome. Except for the colours."

My heart skipped a beat.

"What do you mean?" I kept my hands behind my back, massaging my knuckles. I wanted to touch him. Touch his soft skin and feel Lawrence under my fingertips.

"I can't see colours. Not all colours, just, well, I get things mixed up. Like red and green. The doctors say it's the medication. But before, when I could hardly see anything, at least I could see colours."

"Did the doctors say it's going to get better?" asked Howard.

"I hope so," Cameron mumbled as he left the room.

We followed him up to the kitchen, decorated in earth tones with sunflower tiles inset amongst the rows of oatmeal and mission brown. His immunosuppressants had been put out for him in sturdy Tupperware pill containers.
"Mum freaks when she has to buy the tablets each month," Cameron said. "We've had to cut back on takeaways and stuff."

Howard diverted Cameron's attention while I slipped a mandrake tablet into the pile. I hoped Howard was right and this was safer on a young body than the Absinthe. Still, I felt guilty.

"How much do the tablets cost?" I asked.

"I think its $10,000 a month."

"Do you get a rebate?" I asked incredulously. How could people afford to buy these drugs? The Isis Club was right; the real winners of the transplant scheme were the drug companies.

Cameron shrugged. "Dunno."

I discreetly popped a mandrake tablet into my mouth and I reached out under the kitchen bench and put one in Howard's hand. My fingers on his skin seemed to tingle.

We waited. Cameron offered to show us a DVD a mate had made of his train set up decorated for Christmas, and set to music. As the tablet started to work on me, all I could do was watch Cameron with a growing intensity.

All my sexual life I had chosen men a little older than me. Lawrence had been two years older than me, even Leon – the husband I had discarded long ago - was five years older and had the heavy air of a man about him when he was twenty three. But Cameron seemed more like the beautiful boys that graced western art: the pubescent figures prancing on horseback or sporting wings. I
remembered the lithe Eros over Piccadilly Circus when I did my obligatory tour of London. Then the Caravaggio paintings I loved; impish boys with their genitals bared. But I enjoyed these pictures as an artist. I had never cared for their unformed bodies.

When I thought of a man taking me in his arms it was exactly that – a man. I watched Cameron lying on the couch, his shirt slightly lifted up as he sprawled back into the leather, his skin, pale and his chest narrow. But Howard, who sat nearby, had filled out his flesh through years of gym work, and, I fancied, chasing criminals and steadying himself on a ship. When he pulled up the sleeves of his jumper, women’s eyes lingered that little bit longer on his strong muscles and his tanned skin.

Cameron was milk white and slender and fragile. A lamb stumbling to its feet.

"You want a snack?" asked Cameron and he gazed into my eyes. Howard said the mandrake could give you the munchies, like hash. Before I could answer, Cameron got up and headed to the fridge, where he pulled out some cheese and salsa. I watched while he expertly made nachos and marvelled at how he barely looked at what he was doing.

Well, I guess he had been nearly blind until Lawrence gave him sight. I hovered close by, hoping he would say something to alert me to the fact that Lawrence knew I was there.

"You’re pretty confident around the kitchen," I observed.

Cameron shrugged. "Yeah, well mum is busy at school and everything."
At what point did I find myself fantasising about fucking Cameron rather than feeling revulsion at what I had to do? I blamed it on the mandrake and my hormones. I was peaking and the moon was in the phase that called me and stirred the longing in my groin.

I brushed my hand over Cameron's as he passed me the bowl of nachos and he blushed. I bent down to expose a flash of my ample cleavage and when he dropped the television control I knew I'd had an effect on him.

"It's time," whispered Howard in my ear. "That is, if you're done flirting with him."

"I'm not --" But of course, I was. Howard pulled me into the kitchen.

"We need to work fast before his mother comes home." He took out his mini maglight torch from his pocket and flashed it into my eyes. "You're ready. He must be done as well."

I didn't think we'd have any rituals this time, without the Absinthe, but I was wrong. Howard's leather backpack contained the familiar black candles.

"Cool. Goth stuff," murmured Cameron, his pupils wide and dark as he watched Howard light each one. After a few minutes, Cameron looked up at me, and in Lawrence's voice said, "I can see you, Xanthe!"

He stepped back in shock and fell over the coffee table, hitting the side of his face. I scooped him up and held him to me, but he didn't seem to be hurt. Howard gave me a small bottle with the silver top unscrewed and ordered me to make Cameron drink some. Cameron shook his head violently, so I took a swig
myself and held the sweet liquid in my mouth. It tasted like marzipan and I bent down and kissed Cameron deeply, pushing the elixir into his willing mouth.

He opened his eyes – Lawrence’s blue eyes – and smiled at me. "Cool."

I laughed as he jumped up and said we needed music. He sprang around the room like a kitten after a loose thread of wool, dashing from one end of the room to the other until he found the remote control.

A Wolfmother song blasted around us. I knew the band as Lawrence had interviewed them and brought home their CD which he hailed as "an echo of Black Sabbath" against a sea of bland pop and rap.

"I'll tell you all the story about the joker and the thief of the night..." sang Cameron.

I got up and danced with him to the driving beat of the music, singing along "I said the joker is a wanted man!"

He was Dionysus, the dancing god, the long haired figure clad in animal skins, the teasing boy who used sex as play. I moved my hands around my body, in a slow, suggestive Greek folk dance that only the women of my father’s village are allowed to do. As I brushed my hands over my breasts, Cameron, mesmerised, danced closer to me and the air grew heavy and damp. Our bodies collided and my arms were suddenly around him, pulling him closer as the music pulsated around us.

As I wrenched off his top, I stopped seeing the white skin and the boyish thinness. It was tall and slender Lawrence in front of me and when our lips met he tasted the same, honey and bread and the tang of salsa. Cameron's lips were
full and heavy with excitement, and as I caressed his delicate throat I felt the conflicting strength and delicacy of his body. I looked towards Howard and instead of staring into the candles he was chanting and looking directly at me.

"Baryolos, Lagoz atha cabyolas, Samahac et famyolas, Harrahya…"

I felt like Howard was part of my wild lust as well, although he didn't move from his kneeling position. Apart from the intensity of his gaze, he didn't acknowledge what I was doing.

I turned to look into Cameron's languid blue eyes hooded with desire, and gasped as he pulled me close, his cock hard through his rough jeans. He smelt clean but musty, not aftershave, because his skin was so soft I didn't imagine he shaved, but the smell of oils or incense.

I wanted to feel him inside me. "Lawrence," I groaned.

My mouth moved to his neck which I covered with soft butterfly kisses – The Isis Butterfly – I thought wildly. He wore a thick silver necklace around his throat, with a shiny disc. I looked closer at it and saw with a start it was a Medical Alert badge that his concerned mother must have bought him.

"Lawrence?" I asked. Cameron nodded

A shiver went through me. A soft cloud of thick smoke from the candles surrounded Howard. Downstairs, the dog howled. I remembered now: Howard had tied it up with some rope he had in his bag. *I worked with a lot of rottys.* He tied him up with a knot I saw only once before, in a remote Greek village near Thessaloniki. Instead of snapping, the dog dropped obediently to his feet, whimpering as the bindings were fastened. The Greek word *katadesmoi* literally
means bindings. But they are curses, as sure as you'd write the name of the spell against a person on a piece of wood and place it near the cemetery.

Howard chanted:

"Enter here, Lawrence's ka – we implore thee to cometh forth. Hail, thou crusher of bones who cometh forth... Hail thou Lord of two horns, who cometh forth..."

Cameron greedily pulled off my clothes and a loud moan escaped as he rubbed his eager body against mine.

"May the blood of Isis and the strength of Isis be mighty to protect you and guard you from him that would do unto you anything you abominate."

I drew back in shock as tears of blood rolled down Cameron's face. But he smiled and said my name. "Xanthe," in a voice deeper than before.

"Lawrence?"

"I'm here." It was Lawrence's voice, from Cameron's mouth.

"I didn't think I'd find you again," I whispered in his ear.

"Be careful. He can see you when he sleeps," he said. It was Lawrence, It was his voice!

"What do you mean?" I asked.

I heard Howard say something. I looked up and he shook his head, and pointed at his watch. The time was running out. I stifled a sob and wrapped myself around the body that was unmistakably Cameron. Now he felt like Lawrence, he really did, and he had my lover's eyes and he wanted me.
The music vibrated around my body, and Lawrence-Cameron sang along in between grabbing mouthfuls of my breasts. "I'll tell you all the story about the joker –"

Then his hands were under my top, tangled in the lace, like Lawrence always got tangled and I laughed and I undid the buttons slowly, the way it always drove him wild, one button after the other revealing olive skin and finally my nipple. I wanted Lawrence to speak to me; I wanted to tell him so many things.

I turned around and saw Howard staring at me. Watching as Lawrence-Cameron's mouth greedily sucked my nipples. It was as though his mouth was on me as well, and the thought made me wet with desire and a groan escaped my lips. Could I fuck this teenager in front of Howard? It somehow seemed more intimate than with Dario, and I felt self conscious.

But I wanted Lawrence's baby. And the moon was in the right phase and my body was liquid and warm and inviting and I pushed Lawrence-Cameron onto the couch and manoeuvred myself on top of him and he eagerly pushed up my skirt.

I wasn't drunk, I wasn't sober either. I was somewhere else, somewhere the mandrake root had taken me and the black smoke and Howard chanting.

"I am Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow
I have the power to be born a second time."

"The ring?" I asked Lawrence-Cameron, as I hooked my fingers into the top of his jeans. His cock was there, thrust up and ready, waiting for me and
springing from his pants. He was as I remembered the young loves of my student
days, bursting with impatience and ardor, low on skills but high on testosterone
and recovery.

"What does the ring say?" I insisted holding my hand in front of his eyes.

Howard had asked me, what is the one thing that Lawrence would know
and no one else, and I showed him the engagement ring and what was inscribed
inside.

"What?" groaned Cameron, his cock poised and eager.

"The ring, you inscribed it with a poem," I gasped as his eager fingers
found their way inside my knickers, and felt me warm and waiting. Little moaning
sounds came from my throat, and I whimpered as his cock twitched against my
skin.

"Who so loves believes the impossible," he said and the tears of blood
covered my hands as I kissed him.

He was naked now, under me, and his body could have been carved by
Praxiteles, all marble and devoid of marks, as cool and as smooth as a sculpture.

I grabbed his cock and felt that the foreskin was already rolled back. I was
pleased he was not circumcised – they were the genitals of a beautiful boy-man
god in western art. I mounted him like the sphinx, the monster that would eat him
up and cover him with her wings. I wanted to envelop Cameron and devour him
on the spot.

Oh graceful, joyous boy! I felt young again, and in a flash of insight,
realised why old men bed young women. Youth is the sweetest drug and
Cameron moved inside me with quick and urgent thrusts. The blood from his eyes covered my breasts. When he screamed in climax, it was in pain as much as pleasure. As he threw himself backwards, I didn't see Cameron, but St Sebastian, exposed and vulnerable. I expected to see arrows protruding from his flesh. As he lay on the dark leather couch, his body looked stark and exposed in chiaroscuro.

"Lawrence!

"I can't stay."

I eased myself up from him but he was breathing, his chest rising rapidly up and down.

The dog started barking ferociously and car lights penetrated the smoke.

"We'd better get out of here," said Howard.

I had forgotten he was there and when I turned to his voice I saw he had already packed his things away. I stood up, and felt the trail of semen running down my leg, thick and copious. There was no time to clean myself and I staggered to the coffee table, fumbling around for my glasses.

Howard gently pushed the frames into my face. And then he did my buttons up quickly, and pulled my coat around me.

The cold night air made me gasp. Howard shone the tiny maglight ahead and we left via the backdoor. He’d parked the car away from the main vantage points and by the time we saw the light going on upstairs, we were already far enough away for the shimmer to be a mere pinprick on the night sky.
We drove for about twenty minutes into the rainforest and it was pitch dark, the headlights briefly illuminating the giant tree ferns. Abruptly, Howard pulled the car over to the side of the road.

"I'm too smashed, I can't drive anymore."

I was pleased I was not the only one out of control. I thought of Howard's eyes on me as I fucked Cameron, and how I imagined Howard's lips on my nipples.

"By dawn the Mandrake will have worn off and we can head back to Melbourne," said Howard. "Okay?"

I nodded, and shivered. Howard took off his coat and draped it over me.

We woke to the raucous sound of birds and I glanced at my watch – we'd been asleep for about nine hours. The weak daylight broke through the tall trees and the car was so cold we could see our breath. Silently, we started back to Melbourne.

By the time Howard pulled into a truck stop outside Geelong, I was desperate to use the toilet.

In the cold room, with goose bumps on my skin as I hitched up my skirt, I finally wiped the residue from my flesh and cleaned myself up. When I looked in the mirror, I looked normal. There was no lingering afterglow on my face. Apart from the hope that tiny cells were multiplying and dividing deep inside my body, and that the essence of Lawrence was among the DNA, there was no reason to suspect I was anything other than exhausted after a long drive.
I was desperate for a strong coffee and made straight for the counter, but before I caught the waitress’s eye, I saw the television report. Howard was watching it as well, along with a group of truck drivers and an older couple in matching biker outfits.

"Police say that the murder took place sometime after six o’clock last night and were shocked and sickened by the savagery. The victims eyes had been gouged out of his head in what some are already speculating is a ritual killing. Cameron’s mother said he was being interviewed for a magazine but police say they are unable to trace the journalist who allegedly came to the house. The search continues as ...."

I didn’t hear any more. I just watched the images. The A frame House, A school photo of a smiling Cameron, his mother crying with an older woman’s arms around her, police tape over the front door.

And deep inside me was the last piece of Cameron that existed.

I looked at Howard, who crushed his coffee cup with one hand and tossed it into the bin.

What had I done?

END OF PART ONE