
Nothing of Substance

For when the ceremony begins.

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The Chapter that's about a restaurant (and the dawn of the sentimental mercenary)

So, Elliot is taking Lauren out for dinner at the so-so Mexican cantina that opened last summer on Bear Street. I'm not entirely clear whether he's doing this because he likes Lauren, or because her name is close enough to his boss Laura's to somehow have confused him momentarily. Or perhaps because it is so rare that an actual real live girl is wanting to spend some one on one time with him outside the context of work or an arbitrary drunken conversation in a pub that he feels obliged to add 'dating' to the list of behaviours that populate his life-space. This could well be a positive thing in the quest to make him feel more like a fully-rounded human being.

You may misunderstand from this that I don't like Lauren, or that perhaps I don't think she's attractive, or have some other rusty axe to grind in reference to the date. It's a reasonable surmise on your part, but way off target. I am just plain surprised that Elliot has managed to plan a normal Friday night activity like a conversation with a girl over food pursuant of some kind of bigger picture. Whether that picture is a lifetime of love and companionship, speedily regretted drunk kissing and fumbling in the doorway of a Tesco Metro at 3am or just mutually consensual completely alienating sex, it just seems surprising that Elliot is going on a date. Elliot doesn't do dates? Dates don't do Elliot?

I imagine Elliot inviting Lauren back to his flat. This is before I even scope out the complex ebb and flow of the date itself that would need to provide the criteria for her decision on this wildly contentious proposal. Let's be clear, Elliot's flat is on a knife edge between scarily cool and just plain fucking scary. Artefacts and ephemera of the *de facto* hip worlds of music and art and general boho right-now on-it yes-ness butt up against the nasty facts of a man who can't really properly take care of himself in the modern world. The location is the kicker, a finger-print scan glazed entrance door off the side of a street populated with design studios and post-production houses. 'Yes', Lauren is thinking, 'Elliot is a self-contained wow-machine, self-deprecating about his actual level of success, because look right here, he's larging it with the big-dogs, all that self-conscious crap that was starting to grate on me back when the tostadas arrived with their supporting cast of Patron tequila shots, that was just humility' she thinks.

The big 'fuck-you' will arrive when they top the stairs and open the door to be greeted by a couple of bin bags, maybe worse and enter into the stark domain of the foolish. Sure, Elliot does have shelves full of cool art books. He has tactically placed current editions of tiny print-run high-end magazines 'curated' by people you have kind of heard of but simply know are living a cooler life than you. Then there's the assorted objèts. A couple of very nice semi-valuable paintings by artists he knows, a weird sculpture he annoyingly refers to as an 'assemblage' buy some American nutcase called Kris Kuksi who sticks together all kinds of menacing detritus into disturbing sculptural form. But even in low lighting, it will be hard to cover for the fact the whole flat occupies space that could probably be better used as a good sized walk-in wardrobe and that despite this level of pressure on the natural resource that is living space, Elliot is fundamentally a slob. From here, whether Lauren is parachuting back into the world of immediate regrets, or just on the platform, ticket in hand, awaiting the bullet

train to regret-central really depends on how many of those grimace inducing Patron tequilas Elliot has managed have delivered to the table.

The great thing about the whole deal is that I don't really need to speculate about any of it as I have arranged to meet Ray and Kelsey at the bar in the same restaurant. Now this may start to sound like I need to step off and let Elliot just get on with his own life without my needing to derive some kind of vicarious thrill by clinging to his exploits, whether they are great or doomed. Perhaps it begins to seem like I am maybe secretly in love with Elliot and dress up my need to monitor his activities so closely with ironic disapproval? And while there is no doubt a kind of fraternal – paternal – who know what - real genuine love at work here between us, I guess the truth is, if anything, Elliot and I are kind of at war with one another too.

Let's be clear, Lauren is a pretty and intelligent girl with a sort of quirky own-style that makes her seem like she is not dependent on the same general approval ratings as others. Just because I had never even looked at her with an iota of intention in the two years I have known her meant nothing when Elliot asked her out to dinner. His invitation being the secret ingredient that unlocked her previously overlooked desirability, the MSG in the noodles, the habanero in the table sauce. The threat of him un-bottling his own chef's special sauce moving the kaleidoscope sufficiently for me to suddenly become very interested in the whole thing. The fact she said yes pushed the tempo to a point where my curiosity is very definitely piqued.

Another fantastic dimension of the planned evening is that I don't even have to worry about looking like I am snooping or that perhaps I have turned up at Jah-Taqua! pseudo-coincidentally. Elliot chose the place specifically because I had mentioned I was headed there ten-minutes before he spoke to Lauren. Initially I thought this was because he either liked the idea of some friendly air-cover if the conversation was stalling before the chips and salsa were done or perhaps just to make him look like he was the kind of wild guy that just bumps into people he know wherever he goes. The truth he admitted was that as soon as he had uttered the words "let's have dinner", and Lauren had thrown the curveball of saying, 'yes', actually looking pretty enthusiastic about the whole thing rather than like she couldn't think of a plausible excuse, he promptly forgot the name of every restaurant in London, grabbing the name of the new Mexican place from some loose neural connection, like a baby repeating the last word it heard.

Lauren was pleased with the suggestion, provoking the standard set of comments about people she knew that had been there, online reviews she had read, or at least online reviews she had ignored in amongst the fucking tsunami of undifferentiated shit one has to keep up with in the attempt to be informed about what is current. Elliot pleased with himself, lying that he thought the place was "better than average", knowing he'd have to ask me where the fuck it even was located.

The other thing about the evening is that I am meeting Ray and Kelsey because I think they have some fresh information on the identity of the journalist known only as Rayon. I was

convinced when I visited them at work in their lair at ‘On 1 Records’, they were being evasive about the whole subject – like they knew a little more but weren’t sharing. Well tequila is a great leveller in the secrets game. Watch out motherfuckers, Torquemada is coming to your fucking pueblo.

The enigmatic Rayon, a preacher, a cultural commentator, a legend, a mystery. The stories abound, he’s a cool-shark, a trend-hunter, he lives in the shadows where cynicism meets the passion for a kind of truth, where misanthropy and existential gloom spark against the unkillable desire for the new, for excitement. Whatever the mythology, the guy has hidden behind the pseudonym for so long, it’s hard to really believe he even exists. Or if he is a she? Or a single person? Elliot and I have kicked around the various possibilities for so long. Is Rayon actually a cult organisation of people who are devoted to being there first before the inevitable arrival of the crowd means it’s time to leave the party, writing up the details only once they know they are moving on to virgin territory? There’s too much first hand classified information for one head to hold in those articles? Too many connections needed for someone to remain underground so long.

We need to uncover the truth. Like some crap detectives in the relentless churn of long-format TV shows moving from one pointless procedural story-line to another. Only in our case, the objective isn’t to nail some serial killer that keeps people’s balls in his fridge, or some improbable drug goofs that pile money up in their neighbours septic tank. In our case we want to find our way into the future. Well the future of music at least. Our motives aren’t really related to any higher good, to any utopian dream about the place of art in our culture. We just want to win for a change. We want to be first to the table and get a share of the action.

My phone rings and it’s Lauren. She sounds happy which immediately makes me act like I am one perpetual positivity bomb.

“Hey, It’s me, Lauren, it’s a beautiful day, what are you doing?”

“Yep, beautiful, I’m just, you know, soaking up the street scene out here – waiting for you to call”.

“Ha, sure, I’ve never called you before”, she laughs, complimented all the same that I’m kind of flirting with her.

“So my date with Elliot”, she says, reminding me that her happy demeanour may well be related to the whole Elliot thing, deflating any good mood and making me come over a little sly suddenly.

“I was hoping you could give me some advice”, Lauren continues.

“Advice”, I say thinking this could be an opportunity to really have some fun, “I am practically the citizens fucking advice bureau when it comes to Elliot, ask away”.

“The C.F.A.B.”, she says quizzically?

“The what”?

“The citizens ‘Fucking’ advice bureau, the C.F.A.B.”?

“Yeah, right, exactly, Google it and you’ll see my face, I’m like the chief operating officer. What do you need to know about my oldest friend”?

At this point I am hoping that she is going to ask me some insane questions about Elliot's preferences in terms of either clothing, in which case I am going to say that he has only ever dated girls with serious old-skool goth tendencies or an extreme black metal look before, or that she's going to ask about his preferences in the bedroom, in which case I am going to fill her head with some seriously warped ideas.

Sadly none of the above transpires and she admits that, "The Mexican place Elliot mentioned, the place that you two seemed to know so well"?

"Well the truth is, it's kind of embarrassing really, I only pretended to know it, thinking I could look it up later, but now I can't remember what it was called and I really don't want to call Elliot as he'll think I'm an idiot for saying I knew so much about it and I don't want to start off on the wrong foot and..."

It's too funny. Does anyone actually ever know what they are talking about?

For a moment I am sorely tempted to give her a totally different restaurant to go to, tell her that it was a Mexican-Thai fusion place in Crawley and give her the location of a Domino's Pizza place. But I don't, both because I'm not a complete bastard and also because I see the night out as a wider plan. The real goal being to get a lead on Rayon's real identity from Kelsey or Ray. If Elliot gets some romantic benefit out of the whole thing too, well, I'd be a pretty poor friend if I stood in his way.

"It's that place on Bear Street, Jah Taqua!, yeah, I don't know if I'm saying it right either, but it's pretty nice, authentic not Tex-mex crap. Really great fresh corn tortillas made out back and they play deep spaced-out dub-reggae all night long, it's better than it sounds from the awful name", and suddenly I find myself embellishing for Elliot's benefit, "Elliot introduced me to the place a while ago", I tell her, "back when it just opened, before it got popular", and I stop myself adding, "I think he knows the chef", or some other nonsense that I know he won't be able to cover on the night.

"Thanks, that's great. I am really looking forward to it", she says, "I hope you don't think I'm an idiot calling you for the restaurant name like this? After all, Elliot just always seems so switched on, so tuned in to what's going on"?

"Yeah, that's Elliot", I say, "always dialled right in", thinking of the last time I saw him and he was trying to chop out a line on the top of his microwave with an Argos loyalty card. There wasn't a microwave burger in there at the time, but there may as well have been for any credibility the scene brought him.

"OK, well I guess I'll see you there", Lauren says, "You're coming too right, with some other friends of Elliot's"?

Friends of Elliot? Ray would probably struggle to remember Elliot's name and Kelsey once tried to punch Elliot at a house party for reasons I can't even remember, but it's time to be nice, so I say, "Yeah, I'll see you there Lauren, Burritos, Jah-Shaka and tequila, it'll be great".

“Ok, well thanks, bye then, see you on Friday”, she signs off, but she doesn’t hang-up and I can still hear street noise and I’m hoping I’ll overhear something interesting, something useful that I might freak her out by knowing at some later date, but after a couple of minutes of the sound of the inside of her bag I hang up.

“Jah Taqua!”, I say to myself.

Flores Blancos

Rose gave a Lilly
Of some misty valley polka-dotted
With shadows in sets of six
Bearing loss, white roses.
They were his favorite, my Grandfather
You could see his snowflake head
Bobbing behind green walls of his garden
I would run the trodden paths
Of grass
And dirt
Eating moras in dozens
Teeth stained with purple blood
And questions, painted
On a box, white roses on top.
Tough leather gloves tender
To the touch, earthless.
I once saw
On a deep red wall
Will the ladies send you flowers once you die?
I'm not sure,
At least men will
The archangel always present
My light, with a K
Once upon a time I planned to withhold
My breath forever, but the candle's infant flame
Matured, I pray it never goes out,
But I hope they're white roses.

Transcriptions of Voice Recordings – 01

What is my photography about? I don't know. I'd like to say that it's about me. But I don't know that it is. I suppose it is, as much as any art is about the artist. Erm, it's not really about the world. I suppose, hmm. It is in that it's photographs of things in the world (I don't what else it could be). It's, it's not really about anything as such, there's no theme, there's no direction at anything. I suppose, other than trying to make pictures that look like the things that I've seen before, the photographs that I've seen before, imitating the things that I admire, to a certain extent, but I recognise that's kind of fruitless. It's. I suppose in a way it's about the, y'know, the wonderful, marvelousness of the world, in that these things are there to be marvelled at. Kind of like, I've seen this, and it's pretty cool, or pretty interesting, or exciting or beautiful or ugly or weird or whatever. These things are there. But that seems to negate the possibility of it being anything else really. I don't know, I don't know what it's about.

In as much as the work is of the world, in the world, part of the world, is it... If, I'm. I'm, as far as I can tell, I'm in the world, photography is in the world, as a space between me and every... not a space, but an act, a thing, an object, between me and the rest of the world, and, as far as I'm aware, these things exist, and I exist, and can be, discovered, uncovered, not necessarily known or made sensible or understandable, perhaps the opposite, perhaps photography removes us from the world, it certainly isn't, to me, it isn't a process of getting to know the world, because it's an incredibly narrow way of engaging with the world. It's necessarily narrow, and shuttered and small and concentrated on, largely on irrelevant details. So how can it get to know anything? It can't get to know anything, really, other than what things look like when viewed through a camera. So it must, it must, remove us from the world, in some sense. So if it's removing me from the world. If it's a barrier between me and my experience of the world, what is it doing? Is it, what is it doing? It's maybe a way of drawing a little of something out of the world; a very specific thing, whatever that might be, a very specific thing out of me. To make something else that can be considered or reflected upon or given to other people. It might merely be a token of being alive. As much as a song or a poem or a hug or a hand shake or a present, or anything, can be a token or an affirmation of being alive. Fuckin, y'know, Cartesian thinking might be an affirmation of being alive if you're clever enough to think about it. Is photography just another offshoot...

Photography, if it is an offshoot, of Cartesian thinking, is an affirmation of existence, what, why, why do I do it? It certainly doesn't seem like it's a necessary thing to do. But then most art isn't really a necessary thing, I don't think. I suppose what I'm looking for is a reason, a reason for me doing it. Why do I take photographs? More than why anybody takes photographs, to remember things. I don't think I've ever tried to take photographs to remember anything. Certainly not the experience whatever experience I was having or who I was with when I was taking the photograph. It's always been an attempt to make pictures. But I suppose, I could make pictures without taking photographs. There must be something that photography enables me to do, or view, feel, or to express that I either don't recognise or don't know or don't understand or cannot put into words. As much as photography isn't a tool for understanding the world, it feels like a connection to the world. It feels like a way of removing my self from my own isolation and to engage with the world. Not necessarily in a

social sense, in fact, I don't like engaging with other people for the most part. Or I struggle to engage with other people, my shyness and lack of confidence and fear preclude me from enjoying, for the large part, enjoying the company of other people. So photography doesn't enable me to do that, it doesn't make me more garrulous or interested in other people or able to engage with them or sympathise with them or anything of that nature. Erm, it allows me to form a relationship with the world, to feel that I actually am in the world. Perhaps it's only a tool for me to conceptualise excitement or a purpose, maybe. It's a connection, it's a connection.

So this, if photography is a, which I think it is, is a way for me to connect with the world, it's a way for me to feel enjoyment in just being alive and being there and looking at things and thinking about things. It's a way of allowing myself to enjoy life and I think being a very visual person, thinking visually, appreciating and understanding things, I only really seem to be able to do through visual means. I can't understand or intellectualise or conceptualise things without it being a visual thing in my mind. Whether other people work like that, I don't know, and I don't think I necessarily need to consider. But being a very visual person, my enjoyment, my sense of wonder, my concept of beauty and amazement, - I feel like I'm getting into some really contrived and horrible arty bullshit, that art is all about beauty. It isn't – but there is something about imagery, images, pictures, visual stimulus that has a beautiful, sometimes beatific element to it. It isn't spiritual, it isn't sublime, it isn't a higher power, or proof of anything other than me, us, we, the world exist and can be amazing. And that's not to say ugly or vulgar or violent or anything like that, I think a beautiful image is beautiful regardless of the meaning of the content or the interpretation of the content. Photography is for me, a way to, just solidify, document, concretise, the fact that I exist, that I have seen things in a certain way and can – I feel like I'm repeating myself, I feel like I'm dredging up the things that I've tried to say about photography, things that I've been saying for years and years now, and maybe I'm not thinking about this in any new way at all, maybe I'm not thinking about this very deeply, but it does feel that photography is a method of recording what I see and sharing it.

1.

He does not look back
I want to go to him
Bare and bruised
Smile
but am caught between twisted cotton
Etiolated by my sadness
In this light

While the Strange Light Rages

February 2000: a stray dog trots up and down the quayside. A scruffy Jack Russell with wiry white fur, tail docked, cheerfully trading his doggy cuteness for scraps of burger and sandwich. He wags his stump and yips, swallows without chewing; accepts a pat on the flank here, a ruffle of ears there. He seems perky and good natured. I suspect he's not been lost for long; he's too trusting, too friendly. Over time hunger and isolation will turn him gnarled and skittish. Base instinct will kick in and he will metamorphose from lovable mutt into psychodingo. The mutt heads my way with a half-human smile, his long spam tongue flopping from the side of his mouth. As he gets close to me he stops dead, closes his yap and sniffs the air. He turns and trots away.

There are street artists on the quayside. A man in a beret sketches caricatures of tourists who already look like living caricatures—cartoon faced, limbs inflated. There's a living statue, a Sacred Heart Jesus, standing on a beer crate scaring passing kids with a wink or a twitch. An Aboriginal man called Martin Kadigal stands on a step ladder lecturing an alternative history of this place—his people's story—to anyone who could be bothered to listen. No one does. He's talking about the Harbour Bridge, that great Australian icon, ugly and utilitarian: "that ain't Australia," Martin raises a sinewy finger towards the bridge, "that's Birmingham, England." His accusing tone is calm and deliberate. His geography is a bit off though, but I know what he means. Aboriginal peoples are strangers in their own land. The Iora tribes (of which Martin is a member), who inhabited what is now Sydney pre 1788, were the first to interact with the European invaders; two cultures so diametrically opposed doomed never to coexist—just like Native Americans and the Inuit of Arctic Canada, creeping civilisation choked them. There could never be any common ground. Robert Hughes summed it up when he said of the Iora, and I'm paraphrasing here, that they had no money, no property or any other visible means of exchange, not even the barest rudiment of the idea of capital; no outside trade, no farming, no houses, no clothes, no pottery or metal, no division between leisure and labour, the Iora failed most of the conventional tests of white Georgian culture. It was all depressingly inevitable; it's nature, red in 'truth' and 'law'. It's evolution, baby!

The steel used to build the Harbour Bridge, while certainly British, was actually produced just outside Wolverhampton, in Bilston, in the west of the English Midlands. It was shipped in sections twelve thousand miles and assembled on site—colonialism flat-packed.

People wander up and down the quayside. A few tourists mill around wearily taking photos; others sit on benches or lean, elbows on railings, watching a ferry dock. The ferry passengers spill up a ramp, onto the wharf, and disperse under the train station which, like Zoo Bahnhof, is elevated above a wide pavement creating a covered walkway in which a row of small shops ply their trades: camera shop, second hand book store, foreign exchange kiosk, and a musky smelling boutique pedalling pseudo mystic paraphernalia where, only last week I lifted a pack of Sandalwood joss sticks. I don't even like Sandalwood.

The white concrete exterior of the station building reflects the fierce heat of the midsummer sun, ultra bright, hyper real; the light here is strange. It has, apparently, to do with the angle at which sunlight hits this part of the globe. The sky in northern Europe never gets this blue; it never seems to arc so high, never seems so dangerously deep. Yet from

beneath this sunshine veneer seeps a tangible air of hostility, you can almost smell it. There's dourness in the people around me, a sun-starched gloom pervades: scowling faces, spiky demeanours and sideways glances.

Martin Kadigal believes that everything has a spirit. And that this spirit, in people, animals, plants, ocean and earth, is the very essence of existence. Martin believes that if the Iora were to leave or disappear from their homeland, what is now called the Sydney Basin, then its spirit will die; and without a spirit the land can no longer have a physical existence and would pass into dream. This might seem fanciful, or it might seem strangely familiar, either way, it's easy to see Martin's point of view. To believe that one's identity is somehow bound up with a particular land is perhaps a universal idea. Is this why transportation was seen by the Georgian establishment of the late 1780s as such a damning punishment? Not only was the idea of banishment to a continent so far away that it belonged to the realm of myth so powerful, the grotesque injustice (convicts were mainly petty criminals) of being separated from one's 'tribe', from one's land, never to return, must have held for most of those first transported convicts a deep psychological horror. It seems that the remaining few Iora, and white Australians with convict heritage, share something in common; both sets of ancestors were cruelly alienated from their homeland, with many dying as a consequence, of Smallpox or starvation; the convicts on the brutal voyage from England; the Iora soon after the First Fleet arrived.

Standing on Alfred Street at the station entrance I twist a cigarette into my sun-chapped lips. Man it's hot; the air feels viscous; it's difficult to breathe. The flag poles that line Alfred and Pitt begin slowly to bend and sway; I steady myself against a litter bin. As I squint and blink the poles seem to lean and bow gracefully. The sound of metal slapping and scraping at the poles is unbearable, like nails on slate. In the distance an unseen bird makes a slow *pip, pip, pip* sound, but is drowned out suddenly by another hidden creature, its monotonous, guttural, *yakayakaya* signalling a simian herd, up on their hind legs, to cross an asphalt river, through the sun bleached bones of the city, and then on across the vast suburban plane. Martin Kadigal stands like an anthracite statue poised, naked chest and arms ochre-striped, spear and woomera raised head height, in front of the AXA Gateway Plaza. The AXA building is like a giant black diamond, so smooth and still that if Martin were to launch his spear it would simply plop into one of the myriad black glass panels sending ripples out across its eastern face. In the plaza's watery reflection I see the Harbour Bridge pop its rivets, twist and writhe. Its deck folds down and crashes into the sharky waters. The great arch tugs at its pylons, granite and concrete smash into the harbour. The bridge, like Optimus Prime, stretches out its vast arched arms, Jesus style, and sets off on its highway legs, wading across the harbour, around the North Shore, past Manly, and then out to sea, back to its roots, to Bilston; gooin wum, ay it!

The topography of a city tends to get filtered by its citizens. I mean, the details of a home town exist only in peripheral vision; things only really get noticed if they are new or are re-framed by development or are suddenly no longer there. Residents of a town or city become desensitised, numbed by the banality of the everyday. I think it was Arthur Machin who said that all you need to do is scratch the surface to reveal the eternal mysteries, the eternal beauty, hidden beneath the crust of commonplace things; that underneath the paving

stones lies the beach. That's a nice idea. But what if beneath the crust of common place things lies something all together more insidious? Lately, my perception has become skewed, infected by an environment that is both familiar *and* alien, like an antipodean mirror image: same language, same culture, same head of state. Like a doppelganger, the same, but inherently other—an evil twin; the mad sibling in the attic; a Boo Radley nation. In spite of its seemingly exotic fauna and flora, and its geographic remoteness, in spite of its 'sunshine lifestyle' and the Aussie fucking dream (whatever the hell that means), Sydney is like any European town or city. It could be Berlin, Birmingham or Bilston.

On the corner of Alfred and Pitt there's an overpriced pizza joint. A man wearing a ragged denim jacket, a size too small, strides up and down the pavement outside proselytizing at the lunch-timers sitting on the patio. The ragged man's skin is tough and grubby. His feet are bare and dirt black, his beard is stiff with filth. The people on the patio throw him the occasional sideways glance, but they don't see him; they just sit nonchalant in the hot shade of drooping parasols.

The ragged man looks old and dusty, yet he moves with the strength and fluidity of a young man. His oration is coarse and vital; white flecks speckle his straw beard as he spits gibberish. He breaks into a one legged spin, arms outstretched, his head tilted back, and he hops round and round shouting at the sky, cursing the sun with evangelistic verve: *Burning! Burning! Burning!* He rants, *the sun will not burn me—I am the final obstacle against which it has ragged and charred—rrrrages and chaaars!* He collapses to the pavement and begins to twitch. He starts convulsing hard. His body seems to leave the ground with each sharp spasm, hanging momentarily in the viscous air, as though under water, or somehow outside of common time.

The ragged man's masterful performance is cut short by a police car that pulls lazily to the curb. He quickly picks himself up and melts into the crowd. The cops stay in their air-coned cruiser; their presence and reputation enough to keep the peace.

The cool steel and white tile of the station's interior is a stark contrast to the sun-bleached concrete outside. From the ceiling hang two fat air conditioning ducts, like serpents frozen in motion. They follow the lines and contours in the roof; disappear over ticket barriers, above escalators to the platforms where double-deckers glide in and out. The station echoes and reverberates with heels on marble mosaic. A disembodied voice booms out place names that conjure images of frontier expansion, great patriarchs and progress: Redfern, Reuter, Macquarie, Bismarck, Macarthur and Heuss. Monitors flicker, directing the lost, reassuring the unsure. The wailing whoop of a busker's sax hangs lush in the artificial air while the low hum of muted conversation knits the whole cacophony together.

I buy a ticket from a blonde woman with grey roots. She sits behind a Perspex screen, chatting with an unseen colleague somewhere in the back. I see her name badge, *Rita*. Rita's bright blue uniform shirt and her painted smile highlight her pallid complexion. She has that sheen, that waxy pallor, of a serious drinker—looks sixty odd, probably only in her forties. She's like a fairground fortune teller; heavy gold earrings stretch her lobes; a sov' on each finger; a tangle of gold chains disappear down her ample, dusty cleavage. I tell Rita where I

want to go and her voice rasps through a hidden speaker in the counter, *six twenny*. I cross her palm with silver.

I'm carried up a squeaky escalator beneath the belly of one of the fat tin serpents and arrive on a narrow island in a sea of rails and cables. The platform is empty, I am alone. Marooned. One end of the long station opens out into bright sunlight. Rising heat distorts the rails; they wobble and slink as though submerged in a geothermal lagoon. At the other end of the station the rails disappear into blackness. A tunnel leads down beneath the city. Trains push voltaic air, like giant pistons, through kilometres of ophidian darkness; the smell of hot rubber hangs static.

Traffic filters off the Harbour Bridge onto the expressway overhead. The *clunk clunk* of vehicles speeding over manhole and drain covers sounds corporeal and menacing, like a slow, irregular heart beat. The asphalt river flows from the North Shore, over the bridge and on to Kingsford Smith, to the Eastern 'burbs and beyond. A salty breeze blows through the station cooling the sweat on my face. The sickly smell of fish and diesel fumes rises from the quay below as a ferry revs up ready to move its cargo of souls across the harbour to Manly or Mossman or Neutral Bay.

An illuminated sign suspended above the platform reads *six minutes* to go. People start to fill the platform. They come up the escalator, a few come by lift and some walk up steps from the Quay—*four minutes*. The ragged man is standing at the platform's edge watching seagulls flap noisily between steel girders high up in the roof—*two minutes*. He turns his face to the floor, muttering, rocking from side to side on the balls of his filthy feet—*one minute*. The platform's crowded now. Nobody takes any notice as the ragged man's muttering becomes audible over the chatter on the platform—*zero*. Pushing through visible heat the grey face of a train comes into view. The crowd buzzes with anticipation. The tin-can double-decker moves quickly along the platform to find its mark. The ragged man shuffles forward, to the edge of the platform. He's head is still bowed, muttering, praying. My stomach knots and my heart speeds. The train reaches the ragged man but instead of being hit, or falling beneath the wheels, he stands steady, his face no more than an inch from the passing carriages; he doesn't flinch; he doesn't even blink.

I step onto the train and head down the narrow steps to the lower deck. The cool metallic air has a whiff of PVC. I find a window seat with my back to the engine. The doors shut awkwardly and the platform begins to move past, at eye level. The whirl of the electric motor moves up in pitch and the train accelerates into a sudden damp blackness that presses hard against the windows threatening to burst in and flood the carriage. The carriage lights are dim and yellow, their jaundice glow infecting ever surface with a sickly sheen. I'm tired. But when I close my eyes sleep does not come. I feel as though I'm on a bungee cord that is stretched at full length, elasticity and gravity in perfect equilibrium. The sensation of being neither in motion nor at rest is worse when I close my eyes. I long for that recoil—constantly anticipated, but never coming. It's like being somewhere *and* nowhere, two equal and opposite forces cancelling each other out, like an aeroplane flying north into a southerly head wind that's blowing at exactly the same speed; flying without moving, the aircraft hangs stationary, solitary, helpless in a turbulent sky.

After only a few moments the train pulls in to *Museum* station. It looks mock old, tiled cream and maroon like a 1930s tube station. A grimy clock hangs Janus faced from the low arched ceiling. Illustrated advertising posters run the length of the platform: Colman's Mustard, Bird's Custard, Guinness. The train doors stutter open and warm air wafts into the carriage. People step on and off the train. Somewhere in the distance I can hear the ragged man shouting and accusing, spitting and cursing.

It's been nearly a year. At first I travelled with vigour and purpose, up the eastern seaboard, branching out, across the country, all cardinal points. The sense of adventure, of living on my wits, the excitement of being 'lost' as far from home as it is practically possible to get, was what drove me. But it wasn't long before the dislocation of my self-imposed exile became disorientating and I began to flounder, like a moth in moonless twilight. My sense of self began to erode. I began to fade. Once detailed travel plans became nothing more than drift; drifting through the dark spirit of the land; adrift on a psychic tide that oozes across the centuries, the weight of collective conscience tangible. The cruelty and brutality on which this nation is built (on which all nations are built) is barely two or three generations in the past. Unlike the USA—the obvious comparison, with its troublesome indigenoussness peoples—Australia is a country that has grown up fast, and like a child forced by circumstance to grow up quickly carries with it, perhaps subconsciously, psychological damage and emotional 'baggage' that manifests in its adult personality. Funny isn't it, how in Australia they use the same word for *fury* and *party*.

Home land, ritual land, with its myth and lore, serves to cohere, and without its land a tribe or clan begins to dissolve, it becomes merely a notion, its people fragmented, assimilated, its culture becoming increasingly nebulous, until the only physical proof of its existence is, like Martin Kadigal, the scattered few who tell its story to the wind.

The platform begins to move again and the train plunges into sudden darkness. Flashes illuminate the tunnel wall as electricity arcs from the traction line. I glimpse sooted cables and junction boxes, streaking shadows and spectres. My reflection flashes in the window; my beard is stiff with filth, my skin is weathered; my denim jacket feels tight over my sunburned shoulders; my bare feet are dirt black and callused.

The train emerges suddenly from the tunnel. Wicked sunlight blasts into the carriage, igniting the sallow air, setting me ablaze with the weird light of day.

Manifestos

A photograph is as much a removal as it is an addition.

Each and every photograph is the revelation of a single secret (whether these secrets would exist were it not for the acts that produce them is unclear).

Equally, it is the physical signification of the revelation of a secret that I cannot tell you.

Photography is an indication of the potential in one's life.

Regardless of the impositions or rules forced upon me, nothing, short of physical violence, can prevent me from realising my unique position in the world when I pay attention to my eyes (the rest of my body is often open to question). And, after all, that is really nothing more than an extension of a thinking mind.

This is me, I saw this.

3.

Like lovers they walked
Deep in jaded twilight
As past shadows loomed, in soft silhouette
Hansel let out rope, coiled from Gretel's neck
Binding them
Marking their path
She looked back at the slack her eyes wet
and for what felt like forever
They were falling
Suspended in time
Caught,
in a fairytale

Burgers

Live well for less,
Saving you money every day.
Every Little Helps,
That's why mums' go to Iceland.

Like Brands Only Cheaper, Just do it.
Good with food, I'm lovin' it.

Have it your way,
Because you're worth it.
It gives you wings, The future's bright
Power to you.

Live less well,
When Every little helps you less
That's why mums' go bright
"Do it!", "I'm lovin' it", "have it!"

And power to you,
With food only like brand's wings.
Because you're worth it your way,
It gives you cheaper good,
Just the future's money every day.

Every Little Helps

4.

The girl looks up
To bleed under the skin at your touch
A holy blush
of submission
Pleasure through contrition
Passion seduces reason
over kitchen tables

Blue eyes lie
We have known better summers
than this
You have been
A better man

Unnecessary Tedious and Expensive Paperwork Limited

(AGM – Minutes)

The bored meeting minutes of the board of directors of Unnecessary, Tedious and Expensive Paperwork Limited (the Company) held at some generic flatpack furnished office in the middle of nowhere on 11th of December (my fucking birthday!)

Quorum

The chairman of the meeting, Duncan Bore, stated that a quorum was present and declared the meeting open. Several attendants were heard to mutter under their breath ‘woop-de-fucking-do,’ and ‘that’s so amazeballs.’

Duty to Promote Interest in the Company

Although all directors acknowledged their responsibility to take interest in the promotion of the company, they also acknowledged that they did what they did for money, and not because they had any “interest” in it.

Particulars

1). I was asked to begin proceedings by making my yearly projections. I said I was only here for the coffee and cakes and wished to be left alone.

2). Simon Yawn asked if the company already met the exemption currently in place and if there was any benefits in this. He was asked to be more specific. He shrugged like a teenager trying to act like an adult.

3). Duncan Bore replied that the company can decide if it wishes to take advantage of these new levels of exemptions when they are introduced. Then he roared in Mr. Yawn’s face: ‘GROW UP! TIME AND TIDE WAIT FOR NO MAN!’ No one was quite sure why he had chosen these words.

4.) Hilary Dull asked if we could from now on file all documents separately. Duncan Bore confirmed that we can, but all documents have to be registered before they become effective, or he’ll get cross and phone the police on you. He stood up on his chair and shouted: “I TAKE NO PRISONERS!” He became dizzy and had to go outside for air.

5.) Hilary Dull said she believed this to be a waste of time and will have no benefit for our company and that we should reconsider. Then she asked who else watched soap operas because she did and she believed they were just like ‘real life.’

6.) Duncan Bore welcomed the feedback and said he would think about this point in greater detail if he could only manage to stay awake.

7.) Simon Yawn added that while web filing uses Adobe, there were other more exciting software companies competing in the market, who he believes offer better solutions. Duncan Bore said that was fighting talk and asked him to step outside.

8.) Hilary Dull asked what would happen if the service was down and different departments could not file their accounts on time. Simon Yawn shrugged and said: 'Who cares? It's just part of the deal.' Then he sparked up a cigarette in an attempt to look cool, but was asked to leave because smoking is illegal inside the building.

9.) Duncan Bore asked if it was possible for the company to take advantage of this. Simon Yawn shouted in through an open window that it is very difficult to tell yet, but he was very excited about it. He was heard to whoop before coming back inside.

10.) Duncan Bore said he wished the company could go back to using good old fashioned paper filing. I drifted off momentarily and missed the rest of his point. I'm sure it was boring.

11.) Simon Yawn said he believed that when filing documents we should ask not only for the date of registration to be shown, but also the date of receipt. This would be particularly useful when it comes to late filings because it is the date of receipt that is relevant when it comes to whether a Late Filing Penalty (LFP) will apply or not. Mr. Yawn said that this was the ONLY thing he believed in, not the monarchy, not the church, and certainly not True Love. And he'd laugh at anyone who wasted their time with such nonsense. Then he spat up in the air and caught it again in his mouth.

- i) This has been looked at previously, but Mr. Yawn was warned again this year not to use questions as an opportunity to turn the event into the *Simon Yawn Show*, or act out the cool tough guy persona he carries around in his head, but leaves the rest of the world unimpressed and full of pity. He huffed in the corner for the rest of the day.

12.) Dr. Ernest Bore Msc Bsc said he had attended an event earlier in the year where it had been said that accounts could only be signed in black ink and asked if this was correct. He pulled a hurt expression when everyone laughed at him and stuffed his face with Cadbury's Roses to keep from crying. He fell over walking out of the room and everyone laughed again, some of them for the first time in years.

- i) Dr. Bore was heard to shout at a traffic warden who had given him a ticket, *'this is the worst day of my life. I won't be back next year.'*
- ii) I also hope to not be back next year – the coffee was cold, the cake was dry and no one wished me a happy birthday. I made a birthday wish myself and at the risk of it not coming true it's that by this time next year the company has gone bust and every tedious fucker mentioned above is homeless and working in Burger King.
- iii) I have no illusions that my birthday wish will come true. Just like those childhood wishes that mum and dad would stay together, my school bully would get his arse kicked, or I'd grow up to be a rockstar.

There being no further business the meeting was brought to a close, and everyone fucked off home (hopefully to find they'd been burgled or their other half had ran off with someone and left them with massive debts, or both).

Signed Unhappy Bastard Date 11/12/Every Year Of My Adult Life

Wasted Kisses

All lay there
I miss her
My midnight
Yesterday's dream
I am You to the end

2.

Looking for answers in paperbacks on Jesus
This space between us
My dreams in your notebook
Our sighs caught in the curtains,
of quiet rooms
Long since paid for

The Days Seem Shorter Now

An army of children
Your hold on me
A land of dust
You still my heart
I'm falling

Untitled

the moon
hangs on an empty canvas
a sky-blue painter's canvas –

the background already complete
and it's as though
I decide

what's up there –
the illusory polychrome of
white-grey clouds

tossed across the sky-scape –
if I didn't want them
they wouldn't be there –

the moon, skewed –
frost-white, achromatic-grey
cradled

by larger shapes:
low-lying *stratus fractus* –
is more visible

despite its exact shade –
the perimeter
is cutting, unchanging

and clouds, manipulating
reshaping themselves
are leaving –

the moon, tilted
is a plastic-protractor
on a Silvine-orange

squared-maths
school-exercise-book –
period one: lesson one

Monday-morning –
forty-five degrees
across to the left –

the artist's observable universe –
a sun, a star
blinding the onlooker

and reappearing
under closed eyelids
as a bright-black circle

amongst an even blacker
emptier
induced blindness –

the two share
this backdrop
even if

sometimes they seem
not to be there:
they simply are there –

and silken mists gather
the moon
is sunken –

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