

St Mary's



Mystery

2022



“THE PIPE WAS STILL BETWEEN HIS LIPS.”

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We meet on the traditional lands of the Wurundjeri people of the great Kulin nation.
We acknowledge their leaders past present and emerging and offer them our respects.



Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors. They do not purport to reflect the opinions or views of the parish of St Marys, the Anglican Church, or its members.

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Introduction

This special Mystery and Detection edition of *Ave* is such a good read. Thanks to the wonderful people, both parishioners and friends, who contributed their very different stories of mystery and detection. Even if you didn't write one yourself, you can certainly participate in the voting. Just email the office office@stmarys.org.au with My Vote in the Subject line. Write the author of your choice in the body of the email and click the Send button.

The next, more normal, *Ave* is the Easter edition. Contributions are very welcome from all parishioners, seasoned contributors and those who've been too busy or shy before. It could be the thing you take on in Lent. All contributions to Rhondda by the Sunday after Mothering/Refreshment Sunday so that Darrell isn't trying to organise the printing before all those Holy Week and Easter pew sheets.

Just One Word was Uttered...

Around forty years ago, whilst I was on my country rotation as an intern at Bendigo Base Hospital, on this particular Saturday, after finishing my morning ward round, I set off late morning, in my relatively newly acquired 1964 Wolseley, heading for home in Melbourne. I was extremely proud of my purchase, bought at a bargain price in a small country town, between Bendigo and Clunes. It had been lovingly owned for 15 years (since new), by a farmer in central Victoria, and was always parked in their garage. It still had beautiful, creamy white paintwork, wonderful red leather upholstery and a real walnut (albeit veneer) dashboard. It just had around 15,000 miles (24,000 km) “on the clock”, as he had only driven it to take his wife to church on Sundays and to other special social occasions.

About twenty minutes or so out of Bendigo, on the open road surrounded by farmland, travelling south on the McIvor Highway, I noticed that the generator light had come on. Although not particularly knowledgeable about the inner workings of cars, I knew enough to know that this was likely to mean that the fan belt had broken, and if I didn't stop promptly, the car would start over heating as the fan was no longer keeping the radiator cool. I pulled over and lifted up the bonnet and sure enough the fan belt was broken. Of course, this was in the days well before the advent of mobile telephones, so what to do: what everyone else did in those days, I flagged down a suitable passing car. After several which I had deemed unsuitable vehicles passed, I saw a red Holden Commodore approaching, towing a green motor boat, with what looked like a father and son in the front seat, I decided that this looked like a fairly safe option. The driver pulled over and I explained my predicament, and the driver then told me that that he would be going past the nearest RACV garage at Heathcote about 10 minutes' drive away anyway, and that he would be more than happy to drop me off there on his way home. There wasn't a lot of time for detailed conversation, but during this time I gleaned that the driver had taken his two teenage sons water skiing at Lake Eppalock that morning and they were returning home for a late lunch. I was sitting in the back seat with the younger and very taciturn son and I asked him where his family lived. He said “Wandong” and that was the end of our conversation, as we pulled up outside the RACV garage at Heathcote. I thanked the driver profusely for his kindness, and went into the garage to explain to the mechanic about my car's broken fan belt.

There was just a single mechanic working at this garage at the time, and he was busy finishing off fixing a car ready to be collected before he closed the garage for the weekend. The mechanic told me that I would have to wait for 20 minutes or so. As I waited, I went to look for my car keys (which were attached to a very 1970's "Oroton" key wallet that I had been given as a 21st present several years previously, and also attached to this were my Bendigo hospital flat key, my Melbourne house key and various locker keys). I emptied out my very capacious handbag on a nearby bench, and couldn't find my key wallet anywhere! Suddenly I realised that I must have left it on the back seat of the Commodore when I got a lift to the garage.

Initially I thought that I would just have to accept that the keys and key wallet were irretrievably lost. When I mentioned my predicament to the mechanic, he reassured me that he could get the car started without the keys, but that didn't really solve all my problems related to losing this key wallet. Given that I still had some time to wait for the mechanic to finish what he was doing, I got the bright idea that the local police might be able to help me. Thanks to the taciturn son in the back seat, I at least knew that the family lived in Wandong, which in those days was a small hamlet, rather than an urban sprawl satellite suburb of Melbourne as it is today. The mechanic offered the use of the garage telephone and told me that the closest police station was at Kilmore. So I duly called the Kilmore police station. I thought that I was able to provide sufficient detail for them to retrieve my keys on my behalf by describing "a man with two sons driving a red Commodore towing a green motor boat returning from water-skiing with his sons at Lake Eppalock, and on his way back to their home in Wandong, had kindly given me a lift to the RACV garage in Heathcote, as my car had broken down".

However, as I was unable to provide them with either this man's name or his car registration, they said that they couldn't help me. I felt utterly defeated! Then I thought that most small country towns have a General Store, so I looked up the telephone number of the Wandong General Store in the garage "Yellow Pages", and a kindly lady answered the telephone. I repeated my predicament that I had inadvertently left my car keys in a car driven by "a man with 2 sons driving a red Commodore towing a green motor boat returning from water-skiing with his sons at Lake Eppalock and on his way back home in Wandong, had kindly given me a lift to the RACV garage in Heathcote, as my car had broken down". She said that she didn't know of anyone in Wandong fitting that description, but she called out to her husband, repeating what I had just said, and he said "oh yes, that would be Jock Sprokett (not his real name), but it couldn't be him, as he had taken his boys

water-skiing at Lake Eppalock”, and I then added to his wife, that yes, this was the case, but that they were definitely now on their way home! The couple that ran the Wandong General Store quickly picked up on the desperation in my voice, and thankfully gave me the Sprockett family telephone number. I immediately telephoned this number, and I presumed that it was Mrs Sprockett that answered the telephone. I once again explained my predicament. Mrs Sprockett certainly sounded a bit dubious at first as she wasn’t expecting her husband and two sons back from Lake Eppalock for several more hours, but fortunately she soon accepted the situation and we arranged that I would call their number again from the public telephone outside the Wandong General Store when I arrived there, where Mr Sprockett would then come to meet me to return my keys.

Back at the Heathcote Garage the mechanic had finally finished with the car he had been working on and he drove me back to where I had left my car. What followed was quite “educational”. I learnt how to break into cars using a flat woven plastic tape (used on commercial parcels) and how to short circuit the coil to get the car started. I expressed my profound gratitude to the mechanic who promptly set off for home for lunch, and I joyously set off for the Wandong General Store, having finally solved the mystery of the whereabouts of my car keys!

Christine Storey

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A Family Mystery

Idly flicking through a book on writing an interesting family history, my eye was caught by a name, 'Thomas Turner'. I knew this was my Thomas, my great great grandfather, because the example used to illustrate 'enlivening an event with dialogue' was part of a memorial Thomas, a convict, had written to the colonial government in 1824 seeking his ticket of leave. Why should the author of the book know this snippet of my family's history? Perhaps the author was also a descendant. In contacting the author, however, I was told enigmatically, "You'll have to read my book, Breaking the Bank."

A bank robbery in early colonial history? A heinous crime involving my great great grandfather? I immediately succumbed to the temptation and bought her book.

On Sunday 14 September 1828, a brazen bank robbery was committed in Sydney. Thieves broke into the Bank of Australia on Lower George Street, making off with £14,000 in notes and silver and gold coins. Apparently today the value of their theft has modestly been estimated at over \$20 million dollars.

Police called to the bank on the Monday morning found a hole in the 1.5 metre thick floor of the strongroom in the basement of the bank. The corner stone of the room level with the floor had been removed to gain entry. Through the hole the police could see the wall of the drain that carried the excess water from Essex Street and the effluence from Lower George Street, emptying into the harbour at Sydney Cove. In the drain was further evidence of thoroughness in the planning and execution of the robbery: the bricks removed from the drain walls had been laid to provide a causeway along the drain's murky floor; the abandoned tools, a gimlet, a crowbar and two jointers which pulled out the mortar between the bricks; the rubble distributed along the drain walls as the thieves had tunneled through 9 feet of rubble to the floor of the bank; the piece of calico with which they had covered some exposed floorboards of a house along their carefully measured route, to prevent their lantern light being seen; and a number of liquor bottles, evidence of the days the thieves had spent in the drain carrying out their audacious plan.

The bank immediately offered a £100 reward for information which could lead to identifying and convicting the robbers. Governor Darling offered an absolute pardon to anyone providing such information. The bank then offered any informer

free passage to England. The bank also recalled all existing bank notes and offered to exchange them with newly issued notes, hoping to catch the robbers as people were asked to account for the notes in their possession.

The robbers however were busy laundering what they could of their loot through Sydney's disaffected, anti-establishment community. How else could they spend the money without identifying themselves? The notes were in large denominations, an unlikely amount for them to possess. They traded the old notes at a discount. While many people were found to have old bank notes in their possession and were charged, most of the charges were dismissed.

Small stashes of bank notes and coins turned up. One of £140 behind some loose mortar in a public toilet, another of nearly £3000 was discovered under a stone in Darling Harbour; a bundle of notes was also uncovered in Liverpool Street. The bank notes also appeared in other penal settlements, even in Van Dieman's Land.

Two convicts, William Blackstone and George Farrell, were immediate suspects, as they had missed muster on the Sunday evening. Blackstone, an expert blacksmith could have fashioned such specific tools. Despite the lack of evidence they were incarcerated on the hulk, *Phoenix*, in Sydney Harbour. James Dingle, an ex-convict, was also questioned, but released without evidence. Three other convicts, who it later transpired were not involved in the crime, were also incarcerated without evidence.

The breakthrough for the police didn't come until two years later. William Blackstone was an inveterate criminal. Having been released from the *Phoenix* he had committed other crimes, and was again in custody when he was approached by the person in charge of the robbery's investigation, Captain Bunn. After weighing up his alternatives – he was obviously a strong suspect for the robbery the penalty for which was hanging, a co-robber and his receiver had denied him access to his share of the loot, and the reward offers could be his – money, pardon and passage back to England, Blackstone became an informer. He named the 5 men who had committed the robbery: James Dingle, George Farrell, Valentine Rourke, John Creighton and himself and described in detail how and when the crime had been conceived and carried out. He also named their fence for the stolen money, Thomas Woodward.

Of the robbers only Dingle and Farrell were charged, Creighton having drowned in Darling Harbour, perhaps trying to recover his hidden stash of the money, and Rourke, an ex-convict, having taken his portion and sailed back, ironically on the *Midas*, to Ireland. As the trial progressed before three judges of the Supreme

Court, Blackstone's evidence was damning. Yet they were all saved from the death penalty. After many days of legal arguments that Blackstone's evidence could not be relied on because he was a habitual criminal, and that, to offer him a pardon in order to convict others would place power in the hands of criminals in a society largely consisting of criminals or ex-criminals, the Court determined his evidence was admissible. When Woodward's attorney suggested he would appeal any sentence on his client to the King's Council, the Court expediently passed sentences of execution on the three men, but ordered their deaths to be recorded only, sending the men instead to imprisonment.

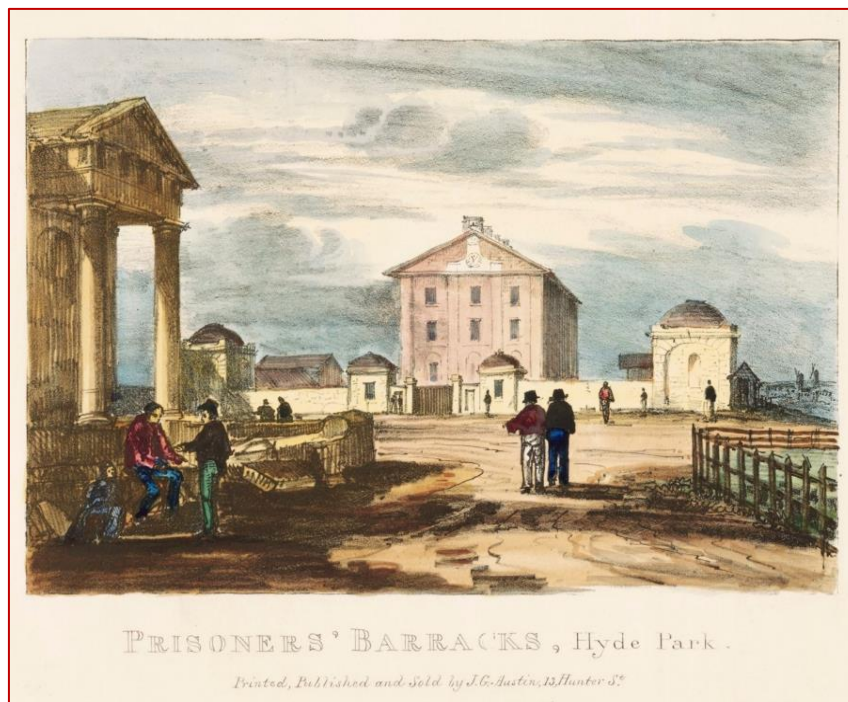
How could this possibly relate to my forebear? Admittedly, aged 16, Thomas had been transported to Sydney 'for the term of his natural life' for stealing a horse with some older men. But, he was the son of a respected artisan family in London. His brother's sculptures were exhibited at the Royal Academy and one is now in Westminster Abbey. In Sydney he had gained the attention and praise of Governor Macquarie for his work on some of Sydney's wonderful colonial buildings – the Macquarie Lighthouse, the Stables at Government House, the Hyde Park Barracks, St James' Church and the Court buildings. Admittedly, by 1828 he had become a malcontent, known to the police for disregarding the restrictions imposed on him as a 'ticket of leave' convict. But, Macquarie had failed to grant his pardon and take him back to England as promised when his governorship ended. And, to rub salt into this wound, many of the men Thomas had trained in stone masonry as an overseer working under Francis Greenway had been granted their pardons.

What was the real evidence for the author of Breaking the Bank to name my Thomas as the mastermind behind the robbery? As one of the best stonemasons in Sydney Thomas had been employed to build the bank's strong room, and had also been the overseer of the gang which constructed the Essex Street drain. Perhaps even then he had been planning the robbery, and had marked the corner stone as the most accessible entry. But, Creighton could also have provided information about the vault as he had laid its stone floor. Perhaps, the author suggests, Thomas was sufficiently astute to wait for 2 years after the bank opened to tell his convict acquaintances of his plan, and let them execute it. If this seems unlikely, the author also suggests he had only fantasised the robbery but had inadvertently divulged its possibility when drunk in one of the many Sydney taverns. Like many others after the robbery Thomas certainly had the old notes in his possession, perhaps his portion of the theft, and was charged. But later he was released without evidence.

Captain Bunn was certain Thomas was involved in some way, but despite his interrogation of Blackstone, could find insufficient evidence to bring him to trial. But Thomas had run foul of Bunn in the past for failing to be in quarters after curfew, resulting in him losing his ticket of leave. This was not restored until 1834, perhaps his particular form of punishment and sentence by the Government. Interestingly, then Magistrate Bunn was among the signatories supporting Thomas' application for restoration of his freedom.

On this conflicting and circumstantial evidence my great great grandfather has been written into one history book as the mastermind behind Australia's first bank robbery.

And what happened to the unrecovered loot? Over the years stories and rumours have suggested possible sites where the gold and silver are buried. Submerged in Darling Harbour? Hidden in Little Sirius Cove? At Mrs Macquarie's Chair, where the then Premier authorised an excavation? In Lavender Bay, as suggested by Treasure Hunters of Australia in 2017? Perhaps someday it will be discovered by some lucky person wandering along one of Sydney's beautiful sandy coves with their metal detector.



The southern portico of St James' (front left) and Hyde Park Barracks.

Alison Smith



True Confessions

The convenor of the spiritual growth and well-being group was outlining the day's task. 'I want you to think of the worst thing you have ever done. I want you to recall all the details and write them down. Tomorrow, if you wish, you may read your account to the rest of the group. After that, I promise you, it will cease to have any hold over you and your body, mind and spirit will be free to move on to another level of growth and well being. Naturally all you say will go no further than this room.'

I'm not a person who makes a habit of joining self-improvement groups. The last time I remember was a writing group in college, which was, coincidentally, the initiating event in the saga of the worst thing I ever did. The elderly enthusiast running that group told us with great relish that there were only four basic settings for narrative fiction: religion, class, sex and mystery. She invited us to construct the most minimal text we could think of containing each of these elements. How we struggled to confine our compositions to half a page, one page, two pages! After half an hour or so she took pity on us and wrote triumphantly on the whiteboard, *'Hell', said the duchess, 'I'm pregnant. Who done it?'*

My mind shifted back twenty years to the college writing group. What its leader could not have known was that there was a girl in the year above us in college always known as the Duchess, not because of the expensive cut of her blond hair and garments, so different from the op shop chic of the rest of us, or her pale blue Austin Healey convertible, but simply because she was, not to mince words, stuck up and not above drawing our attention to her advantages. My own car, courtesy of a motor mechanic father, was a beaten-up Morris. He'd even taught me the rudiments of maintenance and repair so I could look after it myself.

Of course, there was a touch of envy in the nick name Duchess. And if fiction ever became reality and the Duchess were known to be pregnant, that envy would have morphed immediately into malicious enjoyment before, I hoped, some practical sympathy would have kicked in. In those days before Whitlam changed the world, pregnancy before marriage was far too often an occasion of public shame.

Totally caught up in this realisation of the whiteboard elements, I asked myself the question, 'Who could have done it?' In answering this speculation, I was at something of an advantage since the Duchess's room was next to mine and not

entirely soundproof. I hauled up from my willing subconscious subliminally heard romantic whispers from her room, quiet openings of her door and muffled footsteps leaving after hours. The rest was easy. I spied on her, dear reader. I listened in and it was soon evident that she did indeed have a gentleman visitor although I still had no idea of his identity.

Then one night as I listened, the susurrations of love turned into angry words of accusations and counter claims. ‘Aha’, I said to myself, ‘She’s telling him about the baby.’ Her door slammed loudly and cross footsteps echoed along the corridor. I tiptoed in their wake, hoping to identify the man exiting the building. I achieved my aim but how I wish I had not. The Duchess’s lover was none other than the one I secretly loved from a distance.

I returned to my room, checking that no-one else had been disturbed or seen me, stifling my sobs of frustration until I was inside. Forget any aspirational sympathy. I was consumed by self pity and a bitter rage. For the next days. I continued to rant and sob. I missed meals and lectures and tutorials but I didn’t care. She had so much. Why should she also have what should have been mine. I was glad he had abandoned her. What was the best way I could offer him consolation?

Eventually I pulled myself together and, still too red-eyed to face the college dining hall, I grabbed my sun-glasses and went across to the Union for some food. There I received my second horrid shock. The two of them were talking with friends at a table close by. She was waving an engagement ring and talking excitedly about plans to drive to the country the following day to tell each set of parents.

That night, while all the college slept, I once again tiptoed unseen out of college. I went to her car, that enviable pale blue convertible, and tinkered purposefully with the engine. The following night the newspaper headlines read:

HORRIFIC ACCIDENT ON BACKROAD
CAR AND PASSENGERS INCINERATED

I can’t say the ‘accident’ ever weighed overtly on my conscience. The bodies were identified but my name was never mentioned in relation to the affair. For me it was as if it had never happened, as if it were all a fiction engendered by that elemental plot on the whiteboard.

I have been successful in life though I have never married. My hair is well styled. My clothes are from the best Melbourne designers. I own a recent model BMW, especially finished in a fetching shade of pale blue. I should be happy yet why am I here in a group for spiritual growth and well-being, preparing to read a confession to my fellow participants?

It's my turn. I stand in my place in the circle and begin. 'The worst thing I ever did was to be so envious of her success that I stole the essay of a girl in the previous year and submitted it as my own.'

'Well confessed', said the convenor, 'that must have been bothering you for years. Congratulations on your courage and candour. Confession is good for the soul and now, you'll discover, your body, mind and spirit will be liberated to move on to the next stage of your life.'

Amen. Amen.

Rhondda Fahey



Crossed Wires

One morning in 1977, in London on the last day of one of my then-annual visits to Britain, I lifted the telephone in my Regent's Park flat to make a call before leaving to lunch with a friend. Instead of the number I dialed, I found myself listening in to an unusual conversation between two criminals.

One, clearly intellectually superior to his scarcely coherent co-conspirator, reported that 'the Boss' had been following 'X' to the bank every day for a week and had decided that they were to 'do plan B next week'. The stupid one confessed that he could not remember what 'plan B' was, and after some incoherent discussion he requested a 'mee'ing' to renew instructions. The superior reluctantly agreed, adding 'only this time do as the Boss says and don't bring your shooter'. 'I don't like to go out without my shoo'er', was the all-too-sincere reply.

By this time my initial conclusion that I had happened on the soundtrack of an episode of *The Bill* had given way to some apprehension of a real criminal presence. But my attempted announcement, in a bold if slightly quavering voice, that 'this conversation is being officially recorded' remained unheard; and I could only take note of the address in South London proposed for the meeting, by instruction without shooters, 'at the usual time on Saturday', before the conspirators hung up.

Leaving early for lunch, near the British Museum, I decided to call on the way at the Brook Street Police Station to report my experience, scarcely expecting to be taken seriously. To my surprise a clearly competent detective-sergeant took me to an interview room, made extensive notes, and after some calls told me that the address was not one 'known to police' but that they would arrange for it to be watched by a patrol car the following Saturday, to see if any familiar faces appeared. Noticing my obvious surprise, he explained that a similar crossed-wire conversation had been overheard but ignored before the Great Train Robbery, and that 'now we are more careful'.

A year later, back in London and by chance passing the same police station, I went in on impulse and asked by name for the sergeant. He remembered our conversation, and told me that the patrol had reported that no suspicious character had been seen at that address that Saturday. He added glumly, speaking to himself rather than to me: 'They were probably too busy listening to the football on their radio to notice anything'.

Clearly, if the dumb one had indeed turned up with his shooter, he had not been stupid enough to attract attention by accidentally pulling the trigger. But somewhere in my mind remains the thought that I might merely have eavesdropped a broadcast of some BBC police drama that London morning. Perhaps one day I'll hear the repeat.

John Poynter

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Painted into a Corner

‘Rosie Ryan,’ Sergeant Todd Parker said. ‘What on Earth are you doing here?’

‘I might ask you the same question.’

It was early morning, and we were standing in front of a two-storey weatherboard home in a leafy backstreet of Cape Carson. Although the front of the building looked like a demolition site, the garden was something to behold. Bordering the house was an immaculate flower garden, a tidy lawn, with wattles and blue gums surrounding the property. It was one of the loveliest gardens in our little seaside town—and with good reason. The home’s owner, Graham Dell, ran the town’s busiest garden centre.

‘I happen to be a police officer,’ Todd informed me. ‘People ring us when a crime has been committed.’

‘Really?’ I smiled sweetly. ‘I didn’t know that. Being a journalist for the local paper, people ring me too. Besides,’ I added, ‘I happen to know Graham.’

‘Just don’t get in my way.’

I gave the police sergeant a teasing smile. He was a big hulk of a man with a heart of gold. ‘As if I’d do that.’

Todd rolled his eyes. Although I’d helped track down the killer in more than one local murder investigation, he still thought of my amateur sleuthing as interfering, whereas I saw it as *helpful*.

The front of the building was impassable, so we headed around the side to knock at the rear door. The backyard was the same as the front: an immaculate lawn, clad in an unbroken mat of early morning dew, surrounded by an impeccably tidy border and trees.

Graham Dell answered almost immediately. He was a kindly man with a broad, friendly face and soft brown eyes. ‘Thanks for turning up so quickly,’ he said.

‘My pleasure,’ Todd said.

‘Mine too,’ I added.

Todd shot me a look but said nothing. Turning to Graham, he said, ‘You

reported that a painting of your wife was stolen. Was anything else taken?’

‘Not as far as I can tell.’

‘Is the painting worth a lot?’ I asked.

‘About twenty thousand dollars,’ Graham said. ‘It’s by Felix Raben. The value of his art has shot up over the last decade.’

‘And the subject?’

‘My wife, Laura,’ he said. ‘The painting was done only two years before she passed away from cancer. I’d forgotten all about it until I noticed Felix’s name in the paper. I’ve had the painting stored away in the attic. When I brought it out, I thought I could lend it to the local gallery so they could have it on permanent display.’

The Cape Carson Art Centre was small but had a reputation for punching above its weight when it came to good quality work. People came to the gallery from all over the southwest corner of Victoria.

‘Was it kept upstairs?’ Todd asked.

‘Yes.’ Graham pointed to an extension ladder that ran from the lawn to one of the upper windows. ‘That’s where the man got in.’

‘Can you show us?’

We trooped through the house to the upper floor where Penny, Graham’s teenage daughter, was peering out from her bedroom doorway. She looked like her dad with big brown eyes and a mop of black hair. I gave her a smile, and she returned it before disappearing back into her bedroom.

Graham led us to an office at the end of the hallway. The room was airy and light. Although the mantelpiece remained, a gas heater had long since replaced the original fireplace. The delicate statue of an angel sat at each end of the shelf, leaving an empty spot in the middle where the painting had rested.

‘This is where it sat,’ Graham said.

‘Who knew you had the painting?’ I asked.

‘Friends and family,’ Graham said. ‘And the director of the gallery. You might as well include neighbours too. I suppose a lot of people knew we owned it.’

‘Can you tell me your movements last night?’ Todd asked.

‘Penny and I went out shopping,’ Graham said. ‘We stopped by the library to borrow some books. Then we came home. Watched TV for a while. I went to bed at eleven.’

‘And Penny?’ I asked.

‘She turned in around ten. Early to bed and early to rise.’

‘And that’s your ladder leaning against the back window?’

‘Yes.’

‘And where’s it normally kept?’

‘In the garage. The builders have been using it out the front.’

Todd spoke. ‘So someone brought it around the back this morning and used it to climb in the window to steal the painting.’ He rubbed his chin. ‘What security do you have?’

‘If you’re talking about alarms,’ Graham said, ‘there are none. There’s a deadlock on the front and back door. The other windows have pin locks. I check them all each night. Everything was locked up.’

‘But not the window in the hallway,’ Todd pointed out.

Graham hesitated. ‘I’m not as cautious with the upstairs locks,’ he admitted. ‘I mustn’t have checked it.’ He swallowed. ‘I’m a fool. Penny could have been hurt.’

‘I understand she saw the thief?’ Todd said. ‘I’ll need to speak with her.’

‘Me too,’ I added.

Todd gave me a withering look but stayed silent. He’d long since learned that arguing with me rarely got him anywhere. I could be *quite* determined when I wanted.

‘I’ll go and make coffee,’ Graham offered, turning to me. ‘Do you still have caramel flavouring in your coffee, Rosie?’

‘Yes, thanks.’ Graham had only made my coffee twice when I’d visited the café at the garden centre. ‘What an amazing memory you’ve got.’

Todd asked for a black coffee. To me, it was one of life’s greatest mysteries that anyone could drink black coffee without their face imploding.

Graham went downstairs while Todd and I crossed to Penny’s room, where she lay back on her bed, reading her phone.

‘Hello,’ Todd said. ‘Mind if we have a word?’

Nodding, she put down her phone and sat up. I glanced about her room. It was like those of most other teenage girls. Makeup and costume jewellery rubbed shoulders with school textbooks on her desk. Next to a lectern sat a violin case, sheet music, and a pile of clothes on the floor. Posters of various boy bands plastered the walls, but the Jonas Brothers were clearly her favourite.

I knew Penny slightly from an article I’d written about the school orchestra a few months before. She was a good-natured girl with great talent. I sat beside her as the big sergeant pulled out a chair from her desk and settled opposite. ‘Sounds like you’ve had quite a morning,’ he said. ‘Probably not how you wanted to start your day. Can you tell us what you saw?’

‘Well,’ she said nervously. ‘I heard a sound in the hallway. When I went out, I saw a man going out the window.’

‘What time was this?’

‘About seven o’clock.’

‘Can you describe him?’

‘He...he had dark hair.’

‘Long or short?’

‘Uh, short. Pushed back.’

‘Okay. Any facial hair?’

‘No.’

‘Penny,’ I said. ‘What was his face like? Was he good-looking or kind of ugly?’

‘Oh,’ Penny said. ‘Well...to be honest, I’d say he was good-looking. A pointy kind of chin.’

‘I see. And was he tall or short?’

‘Uh, a bit short. Not tall, anyway.’

I nodded thoughtfully as my eyes strayed around the room. ‘Todd,’ I said. ‘Can you ask Graham to make that a big shot of caramel flavour in my coffee? I’ve got a lot on today.’

The tiny frown on Todd’s brow deepened, but he was wise enough to follow my lead. ‘Sure,’ he said, standing. ‘Penny, we’ll get you to complete a statement

later. We might also need you to look at some pictures down at the station.'

The teenager nodded. 'Okay,' she said.

Shooting me a final glance, Todd left, and we heard his footsteps grow quieter as he disappeared downstairs.

'Wow,' I said to Penny. 'You must have felt scared when you saw the criminal.'

She shrugged.

'Must be a big disappointment,' I continued. 'About your mum's painting.'

'Yep.'

'I mean, now it won't be shown at the gallery.' I glanced around the room again. 'Probably Todd will have to do a full investigation, although I know he's already got someone in mind for this. There's a local guy that fits the description you gave. Todd was telling me he's small-time, but this time he'll probably go to jail.'

'But there'll be a court case? Won't there?'

'It'll be open and shut,' I told her. 'The guy's already been in trouble a few times. This time it'll be for the long haul. Probably years.'

Worry showed in Penny's eyes. 'Years?' she said. 'But what if it isn't him?'

'He'll have to prove that.'

'He might not...I mean...maybe he didn't...'

'Penny,' I cut her off. 'Can we talk together as two girls?'

Swallowing, she nodded. 'Okay.'

'Where's the painting?'

'I...what...the man—'

'Penny,' I said gently. 'There was no thief. The man you described is Nick Jonas. His poster is on your wall.'

'But...maybe...'

'Todd's a good cop, but he wouldn't have noticed because his back was to the poster.' I glanced at the singer. 'I've got to say, Penny, you've got good taste. He's a hunk.' I frowned. 'Do girls still use the word hunk these days?'

'Hot,' Penny said.

‘Hot,’ I conceded.

Penny fixed me with her gaze. ‘How did you know I was lying?’

‘No one climbed up or down that ladder this morning,’ I said. ‘There are no footprints in the dew on the grass out the back. Had the man broken in this morning, there’d be a trail leading across the grass to the ladder. So that means the ladder was put up against the wall last night. Probably after your dad went to bed. It also means you made up the story about the robbery and stole the painting.’

Tears spilled from Penny’s eyes as she buried her face in her hands. I patted her shoulder gently. She needed a mother’s love, and I couldn’t give that to her. What I could do was understand why she’d taken the picture. I asked her where it was, and she pointed to the bottom of her wardrobe.

After a moment of searching, I removed a small canvas from the bottom of the wardrobe. Little bigger than a clipboard, it was an incredible piece, a photorealistic representation of an unclad woman. Standing side-on, her head was turned with her eyes gazing over her shoulder at the viewer.

‘This is amazing,’ I said, studying the painting. ‘Why would you—’

‘Because she’s *naked!*’ Penny wailed. ‘Everyone will see her! My mum! With no clothes on!’

She burst into tears again.

Okay, I thought. Now, this is making sense.

‘Penny,’ I said. ‘Let me ask you something. Do you think this is a beautiful painting?’

The teenager smeared away her tears. ‘I suppose.’

‘So do I.’

‘But my friends will laugh! They’ll make fun of her—and me!’

‘Maybe they will, and maybe they won’t,’ I said. ‘If they laugh, then it’s their loss. It means all they see is a naked woman and not a magnificent work of art.’

Penny swallowed. ‘I told Dad I didn’t want people to see it,’ she said. ‘He ignored me.’

‘Then I’ll talk to him,’ I said. ‘He’ll be overjoyed to know the painting’s safe.’ I looked at the artwork again. ‘You must miss your mum.’

‘I do,’ Penny said glumly.

I nodded to the painting. ‘Then this is a great way for your mum to be remembered.’ I looped my arm around her shoulders. ‘Let’s go downstairs and talk to your dad. He’ll forgive you. I know he will.’

Penny’s eyes fixed on the picture. ‘Did you mean what you said?’ she asked. ‘About it being magnificent?’

‘Absolutely.’

‘Okay,’ Penny said, grudgingly. ‘I suppose you’re right.’

‘Good girl.’ I led her to the door. ‘Everyone and everything has its time in the sun and a purpose in life. We don’t always know our purpose, but I do know one thing. The purpose of this painting isn’t to be hidden away; it’s to be *seen*.’

Darrell Pitt



An article from the Crime Pages of

The Roman Jerusalem Tribune

(Date: 19th yr of Emperor Hadrian) {note-1, at end}

discovered by David Keuneman

Loaves and Fishes went Missing

*The Roman Forces of Order in Jerusalem are **re-opening investigations into cold cases**, relating to events of a century ago in Judea and Galilee.*

Upon the orders of our present **Emperor Hadrian**, the **Regional Forces of Order** are re-opening several **cases in and around Judea** which date back to around **one hundred years ago**.

Taking charge of the investigations is a **visiting law officer**. During our **Emperor's foreign travels**, more than a decade ago now {note-2}, he made the acquaintance of that investigator whom he has now **invited here**. She used to exercise her exceptional forensic skills in **Northumbria** – in the north-eastern portion of the far-flung Roman province of **Britannia**. She never failed to get to the bottom of a case; this capacity always to get to the Truth of a matter is reflected in her name, **Inspectrix Vera**.

The **common thread**, in all of the cases which she is investigating here, is their connection to events which were regarded as **Miraculous**. They relate to **one particular local citizen** at the time, and of his claimed ability to perform these miracles. In order to preserve the integrity of current procedures, we shall refer to him simply by the **code-name JC**.

One could wonder why the emperor, all this time afterwards, should be concerned about occurrences which on the face of it caused little harm to any Roman citizen. However, we should note that **at some intervening time, various writers** took it upon themselves to **pen purported accounts** of the events, using them as **political and social incitements**.

These interpretations must now be countered. As we all know, **miracles do not happen, unless by the hands of Roman gods or of Roman emperors.**

Inspectrix Vera has now arrived in **Judea**. Her first case has concerned skulduggery surrounding **supplies of both bread and fish**. Our code-named JC, an approximately thirty-year-old man, had appeared to be peacefully going about his business as an **itinerant preacher**. He used to travel with **supporters, numbering up to twelve men**, who themselves had previously been well-known in a variety of professions and who mostly gave the impression of being well-respected in the community.

Initial reports indicated that the **popularity of the preacher had been increasing rapidly**, which was leaving the support team **totally unprepared for the large number** of people booking in for his speaking events. As a consequence, at one such event **near the sea of Galilee**, the **catering provisions appeared quite inadequate** for the size of the crowd. Despite this, when the preacher **exhorted his team to serve out the food anyway**, the supply of provisions seemed **miraculously never to end**.

However now **severe doubts** arise about the story. New evidence has come to hand that the initial **perceived shortfall** in supplies of fish and bread was **deliberately created as a subterfuge**. It appears that **more than ample supplies** had been **already secreted nearby** and these stores were **surreptitiously brought out as needed**, creating the **impression of a miracle**.

Inspectrix Vera, in a **field trip to the Sea of Galilee** where the mass-feeding took place, discovered a **mosaic floor specifically marked with a loaf and fishes**. There is clear evidence of **underground vaults** beneath, designed specifically for the secret storage of loaves of bread and of fishes.



Loaf and Fishes

on mosaic floor beside
Lake Galilee,

believed to cover the
secret underground
storage vaults designed
to hide these products

{see Note A

at end}

Furthermore Inspectrix Vera has **documentary evidence** that just prior to the speaking event, the preacher took himself off alone for a **short boat trip on the lake**, seemingly in order to collect his thoughts before addressing the impending crowd. The preacher's team, at least four of whom who were **connected to the fishing industry**, certainly would have suggested to him that he **catch fish** whilst out in his boat, in order to provide for the crowd. (The preacher, whilst not a professional fisherman himself, later displayed an uncanny knack of knowing where to drop a net for the best catch.)

When he arrived back to shore the **boat would have been full of fish**, ready for **transfer into the hidden storage vaults**. In addition, Inspectrix Vera has discovered that another member of the support group was a **wealthy man** from his previous career as a **tax-collector**, and so was easily able to **purchase large quantities of bread** at short notice, also to be secreted in the vault.

The arriving crowd was initially given to understand that **only five loaves and two fishes** were on hand to feed them. As soon as disappointment began to be voiced, **replacement supplies** would have been **sneaked out from the vaults**, allowing the claims of **miraculous preacher powers** which were then mysteriously causing the **expansion of the minimal food supplies**. Evidently the uneaten leftovers significantly exceeded even the meagre quantity proffered in the first place.



Outdoor feeding event { see note B}

The result was that the crowd was persuaded of a **“miracle”**, **one of the first in a series of other events** later to be engineered over the next short number of years. It is this **whole sequence of so-called miracles** which **Inspectrix Vera will now investigate**.

It seems, looking back on these occurrences from a century ago, that **the scheme of manufacturing miracles** - then to be performed by JC - was ingeniously **masterminded by one of other members of his team**. This person will also to be referred to by his own **code-name, JI**. He managed to keep himself very much out of the public lime-light; however JI seems over time to have grown tired of the lack of appreciation of his ingenuity from his own peers. This explains the disillusioned JI becoming the **infiltrating mole** in the team who later petulantly ingratiated himself with the state surveillance forces by acting as an **informer against his leader**.

At this later time the itinerant preacher had already been escalating his public appearances, thus beginning to be perceived as a nuisance to public order. The disgruntled JI accepted a substantial **pay-off in silver coins** in return for identifying his leader JC to the Forces of Order, which he did by **feigning tell-tale affection** for him in public, kissing him on the cheek.

Shortly after this **the preacher JC** was arrested for questioning. Forces of Order **wished to contact the informer further**, for information on the preacher and his

group; but they were **not able to find JI** since the culprit team-member had been liquidated, and was **said to have suicided**.



Informer JI assists forces of order to identify his leader JC

One of the other members of their cohort, by the name of Petrus, is seen at the left, wielding a knife to sever the ear of a roman law officer Malchus, thus underlining the potentially dangerous nature of this gang of twelve.

{ note C }

In the years following the case of the Loaves and Fishes and other events, **indecisive leadership from a series of Roman governors**, beginning with Pontius Pilatus, meant that **undisciplined lawlessness continued rife** in the area for decades.

Even some **forty years on** from then, in an attempt to settle the area down, a liberation army was sent from Rome to intervene with strong tactics, including the **Destruction of the Temple** – perceived as a centre for local unrest. But unrest continued to flare up. Only recently **under the present firm command of our glorious Emperor Hadrian** was the region finally and effectively rid of subversion, with **Roman discipline fully imposed**.

Following on, a century or more after the events of the great Loaves and Fishes scam, our dear emperor Hadrian is concerned now to **eliminate all remaining support for dissident groups**.

As we know, **four or more writers have attempted** to glorify those times surrounding the preacher JC by **writing versions of the history**, including of such

events as the saga of the loaves and fishes. However - these four **partisan reports** were themselves already retrospective; the writers were **not personally present** to the events. The purpose of their accounts appears to have been to **create a narrative** in which the **special powers** of the preacher were lauded, and in which he was portrayed as being the **victim of the Roman State**. {note-3}

These quasi-historical accounts themselves anyway contain **inconsistencies and confusion** among themselves. The writers **cannot agree** for instance **about the details of events**. Take for example the very Case of the Loaves and Fishes – the authors even disagree upon whether to present the events as happening **just once, or on two separate occasions**; then they cannot decide whether the number of people fed with Loaves and Fishes was **four thousand or five thousand**.

It was all written as part of a loose **retrospective conspiracy** to prove a **political point**. The narratives are **still circulating in certain quarters**, even during these days of Emperor Hadrian. It is important that they be shown up, and it is even more important that the biased stories **do not continue to circulate for**, let us say, **another two thousand years**.

Inspectrix Vera will take on the other cases of purported miracles, one case each week. Next week she will tackle a transformation of **water into wine** (which, if true, would have transgressed excise regulations).

Now that the cases are with the regional Crime Division of Emperor Hadrian, and are in the hands of Inspectrix Vera, a **public reward is offered for any evidence**, such as surviving parchments, scrolls, documents or other accounts, which can help uncover the true nature of events,

Those old stories of miracles must be laid to rest, once and for all.

Anyone with information should get in touch using the following

Crime-Stoppers numberMCCM-XXXIII-MMM {note-4}



*Emperor
Hadrian*



*Inspectrix
Vera*

Notes

- (1) The year is **136 CE**. Hadrian has by now quelled the Judean rebellions.
- (2) Hadrian visited Britannia in **122 CE**. He had his wall built soon after.
- (3) Accounts by authors named **Matthæus, Marcus, Lucas, Joannes**
- (4) **1800-33-3000 the number for Crime Stoppers**

(A) Loaf and Fishes

Mosaic inlay in the floor at a chapel (said to be 4th century CE).

Situated on the north-western shore of the Sea of Galilee at Tabgha, the supposed site of the event of the loaves and fishes.

(B) Feeding four or five thousand

Lucas Cranach the Elder circa 1520 – described as Feeding the Multitudes

(C) The Betrayal

Giotto (fresco, circa 1303. Scrovegni Chapel, Padua, Italy.)



Questioning the Cassowary

“Yesterday was fine. Today there is rain. Well, every night there’s rain. The rain comes from the brown sea. The clouds come at you, forming lantern like figures of wet which coil like a whip and race each other up the steep hills...

Anthony was conscious of his own style of superciliousness. He worked both to eradicate it and to justify it by rational means. This contradictory, private exercise was an undeclared motif which provided him with introspective evidence of his own complex nature. Nevertheless, neither the contradiction nor the complexity went undetected by those around him.

The ‘just so’ narratives of science, for example, drew the peculiar fire of his generalized indignation against ‘conventional wisdoms’. The circularity of such explanations seemed to him the very essence of failure, and fear...failure of imagination and the fear of those who ‘would be scientists’ but who were unsure of an uncontested place in the ‘club.’ Formative years ‘without Nietzsche...without a Sextus Empiricus... without Rugby’.

‘Implausible’ was his conclusion: just the stock of confabulation that typified the lot of them. The head casque was distinctive, not at all evident in the small set of long standing relatives: emu; rhea; ostrich; kiwi; and moa. ‘What a line! Close as I will see to a clade of warm blooded dinosaurs. A helmet for pushing the undergrowth? Why not admit you haven’t got the faintest?’

This cocksure posturing wilted when he saw the forest in question. More like a lace work of lines, so dense, so spurious, so unmotivated, so profligate that he could not comfortably call them random. In such an intaglio of vegetation, there was an intensity akin to ‘showing off’, a virtuosity of....But this was the edge of an uncomfortable, conceptual void, a brink from which to draw back—the need for a description of degree without any implication of intent.

Of course, you didn’t get such an ‘angle’ for free. There was any number of ratbags using this or that instance of bush, berry, and bird to exemplify ‘purpose’. But Anthony had invested the 20 years it took to think his way out of such vulgar enthusiasms. He sailed on through a clear air which neutralized sentimentalities, any claims of ‘self evidence’. At the fact that others did not share his rarefaction, he didn’t know whether to be annoyed or whether to be glad that this was one more piece of evidence of his own distinctiveness. Ultimately, he decided the

matter was a metaphysical issue: garden variety hubris - what else could motivate his animus (what was its 'existential exchange rate')? So he turned to being vexed, having properly renovated its 'foundations', and having recognised, with gratification, the implicit stance against pathos.

That intaglio of vegetable: the head casque suddenly seemed basic equipment.. 'I wouldn't want to 'bush-bash' my way 20 metres!' How many times, even on the beach, he'd walked the babies, on his back, into branches. Always concentrating on his feet.

The brilliant red and extended powder blue. They surely trump the Mandrill's masque and backside : that pretender to the colour crown. The black flanks were not without surprise also—they were not like most 'feathers'; and in any dash through light, they flicked and flecked with the dark purple of the bush plum. The bird became the fruit it ate; or the fruit changed in order to be dispersed. Or both. It was all somewhat humbling; though 'not a bad experience', a minor form of testimony that he was not over-reaching, not slipping into pride that 'commonly takes out my kind'.

Since the death of Jeremy, he had himself become unsure of what exactly was 'my kind'. There was a tinge of gratefulness about the circumstances. Around here there were so many improbable situations that could have caused the little boy's death. Crocodiles; snakes; spiders; blue-ringed octopus; stingers; sodden trees; even the edges of leaves were dangerous up here. Drowning was positively hum-drum. Children are drowned everywhere; especially in the quasi-keep that passes for homes in Sydney: electric double garage doors; 2 or more metres of brick wall; kitchen like a dance floor; adults standing by, talking, tasting, showing an interest in each other; backyard pool...

Shit...shit...shit...shit...shit...shit...shit... Take a breath. Take a breath. A breath! Take a breath, won't you?... thirty six months and he was still...He knew no word for it.

The freakish becomes a target for community commiserations, some extended neo-conservative apothegm on malignant chance (a sort of rear entry religion—'Remember Boethius when you see a blue sky!') On and on, it is protracted in the newspapers. It gets taken up by syndications, by you-tube, by late night news; so that miserable lives can feel momentary benefaction? Or vindication?...When that church family in Singapore boiled bodies in curry. 'My God, how others live'.

‘But I’m running away from myself, my own purpose, my bulletin. I think that is why Sarah lives back in Sydney...a kind of fatigue. She didn’t blame me. Nor I her. We didn’t share the same need: I had to be with that forest; she wanted to carry his memory away. To Sydney.’

In Sydney you’re lost. Everyone carries a memory. People are full of pride about their private suffering. It’s like being in a secret society which excludes no-one, but in which each adult has been duped into thinking that he or she has been selected for special service...a singular mission...a meaning peculiar to the particularities of their fugitive status as the suffering underground. Normal people cannot go public about such infernal living. A few unlikely freaks can. One needs a few. That is why they are paid so highly—they trade on their subjectivity the way prostitutes must their sexuality. He instantaneously regretted the analogy; even though the sliding from do to must was noted.

Up here, quite the inverse. Everyone here is outlandish...at least all the proprietors, the too proud mandarins of paradise. They are public fugitives! They exude their larrikin pasts and their current buccaneer *modus operandi*. Their pride is of the lost who have fallen on their feet, and hit the ground running. Now they criss-cross the Cape like marsupials on fermented fruit—loners; or in loose liaison, if they find another complementary nutter (who can sweep out the rooms, or make a milkshake). That’s a worry. He reflected that he no longer got that micron of smugness, that intimation that ‘Hey I’m here everyday, where you can only spend your holiday!’...Was he now part of their extended lotus land? But then he thought of the forest people: They can feel the facts—that every tree’s a miracle; that the ground of meaning is contiguity, contact! Being there. Proximity. No attenuating Platonisms.

The cassowary is a ratite, not a common bird... Well, it has never had a sternum for flight. If you watch it walk, it is precise: each step is mid-line, like an equilibrist walking a wire; its resulting slight swagger stabilised by the longest claw on earth.

When he was a little boy, he sensed all this—what the Karam of New Guinea encode: cassowaries are a mixed category, requiring a share of your garden. Sixty...eighty million years of criss-crossing the forest. It’s a warm blooded dinosaur. Its ancestors survived the asteroid in Yucatan!... See, speed counts, with or without wings. It was the nervous system that repelled him, actually. In all birds. He too was a darting pulse of anxiety. Not even a shark wears metaphysics ‘on its sleeve’ like a cassowary. That keeper said he’d rather be netting a croc.

The male hatches the chicks; alone, keeps them in tow; and later kicks them out, turns on them, to find their own patch. A strangeness in that. [Though in line with recent inferences concerning dinosaur hatchlings]. . Quandong fruit—fit to colour the kings of Tyre; more beautiful than the vermillion of the murex shell. Loners in a forest as dense by day as the indigo of night. Why be alone? Like artists shitting out their handiwork, grander than any cathedral: they are cultivating their own perpetuity.

Standing beside such trees, Anthony experienced time like the tactile intimations of water rising around, as steam, or cool, benefactive mist. It filled a plenum; it moved through you as you were unloosed in it: vulnerable, soluble, subtle, eternal. Jeremy had been like a forest fairy around Queen Titania: just for kisses, giggles, and a little feminised group mischief. [He groaned at his Europeanised ‘animations’ – still, there it is, in the very word]. Anthony felt quotidian time increasingly as a destination, something one achieves by reassertion, by taking conscious steps, like stepping off a train at an uncongenial station, one at which people drag their time about like a gravity...yes, that drags you into its accumulating, viscous membrane. It piles up about their busy buildings, even those structures redolent with ghosts. Those with footfalls in tiled hallways, and fireplaces never now used. You have to pull away, free, from such an insinuating plasma. One has to take steps, to stand apart ...Almost as Jeremy is now.

‘Jeremy trailed me everywhere. Or did I hover? Both, together. With the mind of a child, whoever pauses to watch becomes mesmerised...Not all the oil in Iraq counts against one curl from any child’s head.’

But Sarah had been Jeremy’s Titania. She filled out his precise sensibility with a delicacy maintained in the face of dangers that are sensed by a child, and which beguile an adult’s inclination to the future. Any topic of talk was a delight in its own right; not because it went anywhere (although it always did). Yet Anthony was....his nerves, his busy acuity, his singing in flecked sunlight, his watching the moon, as though everything was a portent.

Yesterday was fine. Today there is rain. Well every night there’s rain. The rain comes from the brown sea. The clouds come at you, forming lantern like figures of wet which coil like a whip and race each other up the steep hills.

They always spoke to her; not to me – the people along the river and gorge. And nothing perfunctory, or for politeness. He would see her coming, down the broad

footpaths here in town. There would be her white face (dramatically white, even for Sydney) and five or six children around her, one of them Jeremy, and the others trying to keep her attention. Laughing, competing, shyacking until, from beneath the fig trees that divide the traffic, they would be called by a sharp adult voice. A couple of children would peel off, as if more important business had been signalled. But 2 or 3 would stay, perhaps, to compete for a concluding statement. Heavens knows...It could have been on any topic. Not just the kids, or the women sitting on the benches beneath the tendrils of the fig. Men would start up just the same.

There'd be questions about her sandals, the pattern on her blouse, the way her jet black hair was pulled back, and so on. For her part—she was a woman with almost no repertoire of 'small talk'—Sarah treated every observation as a topic, with motivation deserving of accurate response.

Nor did she expect anything but substance in return. Her own questions were never for the sake of condescending 'good form'. She also managed to stay, always, on the correct side of what was personal. While he sometimes walked away stunned at exchanges she had with others, no one felt entrained into divulging what they would later regret. She conversed; but never gossiped – that was clear.

What surprised Antony about this was the simple incongruity of it. Sarah looked, well...fastidious. As though she took extra care in each detail of her presentation. Even on holidays. She had an unlikely, even overwrought, appearance here in the Cape. Still there was nothing complicated in her style—none of the pixie dust of T.V. presenters. Her artifice was to give no sign of artifice, only of attention to details that were common to us all.

'Even more, now, she keeps her own counsel. That is my impression. At this distance.'

The women, of course, were the source of the pool. It was them who first mentioned it to Sarah; it being a place for women's bathing only.

When you first come on it, it's a shock. Stepping through tortured tree roots, potentially Wagnenian of all things, there is an illuminated bowl of water, as blue as copper sulphate: more like the metallic effulgence of an object of technology, or that pool of olive oil by which Phideas both enlightened and oiled the wood inside the temple at Olympus. [My god! how beautiful, yet how trifling the ingenuity of that European world.] You come closer, and the blue takes on layers

of green, and the green takes on details: of fish with translucent tails; of turtles hanging at 45 degrees between graduated, powdery hues; of sticks bearded with fine green weeds. Each pond rock can be read off.

‘Sydney is turning American’. By this Anthony meant that educated people are becoming more sardonic, more individuated, and more profoundly unsure of themselves. Correspondingly, those with the most carnal ambitions move more typically in a craven pack, hunting together loosely until their mutuality turns, like the formic acid of bull ants, into hot glass, piercing at each contact. Then, so what? with some jostling, a new pack of coagulants forms, and plays out another interregnum of social style.

‘There’s no longer any patrician stronghold to which such brazen operators will defer. They go for broke! So, maybe the debtor’s prison served some purpose. Well, at least we might then afford to transfer the nutters from the prisons to the health care they need.’ He regretted these occasional conceits—the common academic gambit, to turn something implausible on its head and implode the merchants, arrivistes, and more conventional colleagues in the one petard. Racism seared; yet class made you boil. A moment’s reflection made him drop such figures of speech, looking about to ensure that he would not go on public record for such a cheap shot, even in his own thoughts. Anthony has always found irresponsible witticisms and slick formulations an egregious crime against the plausibility of academics. He noted, of course, that his own annoyance was itself founded on such formulations: things that his listeners might write down for future use. These were not what he valued most when he did speak.

And so, he was in the forest: each day, and often into the dark. The dark is challenging. It is a quality, as substantial as a silting effluvium, a palpable presence, nothing like a void. One moves with 80 million years of stability pressing against your forehead, an energy that is both intense and modulated, that is: made diffuse, by its scale and ubiquity. ‘Just carbon and water moving through carbon and water. But I am moving. I am a spark.’ And he was here to be with Jeremy.

The moon created only small spots of sepulchral glow amidst that silent torrent of active trees. Any glow was an additional problem for his night sight—the re-adjustment brought Anthony back to the bandwidth of habitual human-ness. He was in training for better. The forest must have been watching him, in its own ways evaluating his prospects—his movements, his sounds, his isolation, his lethal properties. ‘But in what ways?’ he wondered. ‘If an animal does not flee,

is that because it has a theory of our future co-existence, or because there is no history of violence to bear on the moment?’

The first night that he saw the cassowary, it was the slightest quantum of light shifting on its re-setting eye that engaged his own sight—the merest sign of attention, of discovery, in the bird’s self-report. Anthony had been stock still for more than 10 minutes beside a tree. There was no other way that such proximity might happen without the foreknowledge of the slightly sussurating bird.

‘It stopped in mid-step. Waiting for more reports of my being there. It waited for signs it could construe—my size, perhaps; my purpose? Would it come at me, with its flashing double-kick? Would it bolt, casque down, through the trees...?’ He leaned a few inches closer to the secure, kthonic mass of the tree.

With the paused, deliberative step completed, the head popped up—for visual advantage and to display the imposing grandeur of its extended figure? Six foot of Shao-lin boxer, with scalpels in the blur of flying feet. ‘What an assemblage—a conjury of nerves and gut. World maker in its dropping of seeds. Were your parents’ parents artisans to this sasparilla palm, which is itself a strut to the dome of darkness under which we float - sentient carbon and water in water - and against which I lean and am covered now? Have you made this bounty around you—the berries, cropped and scattered—no less than the grasses of agronomists, only better, longer, managing the indissoluble and the hypertoxic. And why...what is the meaning of the self sufficient isolation?’

Did we all continue as nebulous potential in an effluvium, with weird grades of coalescence, principles of rapport, sparkling ensembles which recruit other ribbons of vestigial connectedness and incipient forms? No more than coagulations, yet sustaining an order beyond any gathering aggregate? Do we all have equal proximity – here, Sydney,...wherever? The slightest shuffling brought him out of his own vertiginous questions.

Out of the gloam, there was, not the hue, but the shining patina of neck feathers. The head-on, dual-focus of the eyes was directed at Anthony, with a snap of apprehension 10 times faster than human resolution. The slight torque in the head casque was discernable, momentarily, after this resetting. Anthony thought of the small asymmetry between hemispheres in a human brain.

The potential of the casque—how it could be put to work—was back on the busy workbench of his thought: perhaps it was now pumping out its ultra-wave, for 3 miles around us...quite outside his bandwidth or range. Anthony was taken,

straightaway, by the number of dialectical transactions the moment was yielding. And their strange, impersonal technicality: ‘Is 3 seconds like 30 seconds to the bird? How thoughtless of me, that observation! What the fuck is a second anyway?’ The dialectic continued. As his thought settled around the attenuated present, a shuddering in the bird brought him back to its head— its lowering only to rise more emphatically.

Anthony sensed it was about to move on. He had come to count for nothing; perhaps the “mixed category” of the Karam—like one’s in laws, deserving of support, and of suspicion. ‘That makes sense: I am another forest isolate with a call on his garden....Or is it a female? Yes. The taller. And a male might have chicks in tow at this time of year’

One clawed and stiffened cable was thrown out as if to follow a line that my line of sight would bisect. The now forward reaching neck and body followed the foot with the equivocal rhythm of a poop deck, on a barque, on a caravelho, correcting itself as the base commits to the flow at the fringe of the oceans. Carbon carried on currents, with its ropes and guys giving, moment by moment, to make the best of resistance, to turn the currents to work; but not to any purpose as such.

Anthony enjoyed the opportunities that most interlocutors provided him for cautioning against teleologically loaded formulations. He was, in fact, a bore on the topic. Most of all because, while he could make his listeners appreciate the problem, he could not offer the usual suite of sparkling alternatives. Unlike his confabulations on other topics, he did not really leave them with a renewed apprehension of previously unnoted conditions of living. What he took to be his specialty! The caravelho of Lisbon suffered the contingencies from port, to wide ocean, to the tide ripped Torres Straits; but there was always a ‘destination’ of sorts. ‘Does a cassowary have a destination? Even on this night of walking....?’

Certain camel like undulations of shadow, differentiated here by the punctiliousness with which each claw was held and then set down, free of the fouling ropes of forest, became further evidence that he was no longer topical with the bird.

But this was the first of regular crossings between them. The cassowary may not have had a singular destination, but it certainly had a map...or a co-ordinate system. And he wondered at its eyes: ‘Do ratites see UV; or heat; like those raptors who can read the trails of piss that cross the ground before the burrow of a rat. Or does it just see very well in little light?’

He recalled the beach on the utter wilds of Prince of Wales island, so much further up, in the Straits—ocean like milky jade, flecked with currents running counter to each other, and an eagle crying overhead like a distressed child. At first, he ran out from under the roof, where he worked on his notes, with his nerves rattled at the uncomprehended source: ‘What child? Whose child? My child?’ He had heard the wings sweep by...but the cry was as of a self-conscious thing under attack. The eagle was, by then, sitting on an exposed branch, about 400 metres at the end of the beach. When Anthony refocussed his eyes to investigate the bird, its whole body jolted at the affront. ‘The bloody thing must have been reading the settings of my eyes—at that distance!’ The instant instantly took on an uncomfortable, personal value: not malignant; certainly not of solidarity; perhaps, potentially, towards either pole.

While the stare of the cassowary was unredeemably wicked, Anthony reviewed the evidence that such interpretation was drawn up, unhelpfully, from a shallow well of Mediterranean prejudice. Before him, in these meetings, was an ensemble so intricate, so much ‘on its own,’ that even if it had had no vestiture of lapis blue, and no epaulets* of musk and red, none of the pomp accompanying its weird commission, it was the very essence of energy spliced with opportunities. It stared and moved with the implicature of times—the great whorl of specific events that was time, even beyond the asteroid of Yucatan. 65 million years of actions like this. Stepping the forest, shitting out its masterworks more thunderous, more febrile, more sustaining than the polyphonies of Bach, or the tableaux of Henry James, or the hieratic sparseness of temple music – the gagaku of Nara. He intoned: ‘all beauty incites to procreation.’ Now, utterly alone—the cassowary perhaps a kilometre away—there was an interlude in which this formulation could be weighed.

It was a plausible proposition, as if the ether pressed against him the shape of a paramour, a form that, though soft, moved ripple like against his hands and face. And the consuming atmosphere of perfume and moisture. He was transported by the intimations of resistance in a current of responsive darkness.

The weight of evidence is still very much against the rumour that Anthony has gone balmy. ‘A good word that’, he thought. ‘Combines the weather, the heat, and the healing’. Ironical, he reflected, that he would have any kind of form against the pot-heads and desperados up here. He was independently wealthy, at least from the conditions of the forest; he was suitably, sensibly turned out (a sure sign, no doubt, of his urban provenance); and he spoke carefully, and without the

assumption of camaraderie (the ebullient tone and the hyperboles of content) that marked an unconvincing matey-ness up north. Only in the address of the first people did the style sound authentic: namely, as if every exchange might engender a lifetime of proximity.

In all matters of a mind, Anthony turned to read his public behaviour. It was something empirical. It cleared the Platonic clutter, on the one hand, and populist bullshit on the other. Two facts, only, drew special attention and may have led to the rumours reaching back to Sydney. The first was simply that he was up here at all. His soulmates down in town lamented at there being so little time for anything (thus, justifying their rare, short, very expensive holidays). Professionals panic at any commitment to relinquishing, or even modulating, work. But residing in a ‘holiday destination’! Of course, they might protest otherwise, especially about the forest and the Daintree river. These did have gravitas around the galleries, courts, broadcasting studios, universities and across all the traders in symbolic goods—the real “white cargo”. But gravitas, kudos, whatever it was, stood no chance against the right to shout to friends across a noisy, wood panelled bar with one’s silk blouse or silk shirt ruffled just enough to count as evidence of natural busy-ness. Or to turn up to the ‘opening’ with enough time for but one (or two) glasses of Margaret River something, before bolting to a taxi, stopping to share 2 telling vignettes of notorious clients or bosses and, of course, to compare one’s failures (only relative, mind you) at parenting. Such was the life blood of hearts which, possibly to a degree greater than the intensity of Londoners, pursued ‘society’. It was a pursuit that no patrician rump suggested was beyond the birthright of any in Sydney. And, while the stage was at a scale that was daunting, it was not unequivocally pre-ordained.

Anthony recalled how small the forest seemed at his first few visits. He concluded it was the result of so few surfaced roads: he was always driving over the same bits of road to get to the same petrol station, or back to the cable punt. From the air, it was a different topography. Within the forest, different again. The figure and ground were reversed. Especially in the dark. As if the titans stood up in twilight. The day seemed somnolent, distended, like a beast digesting, and waiting for the intoxication of shadowed stealth.

The second reason was his running. No one runs up here—by day or night. He was seen at different hours, deep into the night, swooping across sealed roads from one forest trail to another, or down dirt roads. In Sydney, running (or some regular, unrefereed sport) was a class imperative. So it was not the running in

itself. Anthony had been a winger, pretty-near impossible to tackle one-to-one in open space, what with changes of speed, stepping off both feet, and straight pace, he was a handful that had to be bundled over the sidelines by a posse of pursuers (one or two of whom would work in a little something to push his face into the turf or stumble all over his legs with their sprigged boots). ‘All part of the game—legitimate opportunity for the traditional resentment between those whose feet flashed and those who plodded and grappled.’ Who didn’t appreciate a winger in full flight, swerving in from the sideline to stand up an opponent?—leaving him in 2 minds as to where you were going and then just turning it on out to the corner post (to which, geometrically, the defender had the shorter run, though in lower gear)? Well, prop forwards did not like to see wingers with any room to move. ‘And these days, even props have a turn of speed, albeit in a straight line.’ Up North, running in a game of touch football could be understood, at least back in one of the towns south of the river. But that was it. In Sydney, running was an important sign of professional class Methodism (sans theology, of course). But, the circumstances were evidence of a problem, including the loss of Jeremy.

Just as the forest and the cassowary were one extended tissue of procreation, Anthony saw that every meaning he had ever expressed was likewise an extension of his organic nature, much as he was himself, ultimately, a derivation of such forests. Meanings caused him to do things. That was empirical. They had more concrete and profound consequences than the elements of rain, leaf, soil, and sand which poured over him with every ruffle of wind. Consequently, his transactions with Jeremy went on, if not undiminished (‘That would be a madness!’), then at least undeflected by any antiphone of urban demands.

That struggles so earnest, so redolent of the dignity of consequence—simply so hurtful—should be part of an exuberance which poked fun at any idea of intent. This was malignancy of high degree, since its energy was tinged with the specificity of deliberation.

Yesterday was fine. Today there is rain. Well...every night it rains...pours down from leaves in unbroken flows that concede no space for other sounds. It is the water’s turn. With early light, a sombre energy regathers: the pulse of relentless vegetation; intimations of a scale that prehends your being there, yet cannot be put off a beat, that remains outside persuasion, or corruption.

The sticky orange clay is brighter, smarter than the terracottas of Italy. Across your skin, it is a balm of even tan which neutralises all patches of variation. The children come from play, painted, moving with orange limbs and the wash of rain

pools where they have lost their footing, trying to escape, or having fallen backwards in their first move in gripping the sodden trees. They look like figures from another order of being, from an underworld which loves them as they are loved in this, as if they moved between regions, an infernal vault within the earth which they did not fear the way an adult fears.

Clay figures are dancing through the puddles of morning rain. The creeks are a busy rush: splendid, clean, full of oxygen. The forest birds start up, declaring here and there the co-ordinates of their wing-ing. The day is set, as with the 22 trillion mornings back to the last cosmic intervention. And 80 trillion mornings before that—what were they like?—to the greatest loss of the living: the chalky bones of Dover; the foraminifera of the pyramids. And these numbers are not without meaning. They refer. They can be laid out in human terms—in trees; in the metrics of air, ocean, and earth; ...in dollars of debt. He could imagine the mornings. He could imagine sitting them out. Even the minor membranes of breathing, in one's nose or pharynx, can be heard in such quietude: a subtle crackling, as when the ear-drum resets itself against its inner and outer air. How long could one sustain such vapid meditation, less and less certain of where carbon and water began or where it ends? In this vortex of vortices, Jeremy, so small in the meaning of it all; yet the equal of the sum of things past, present, or to come.”

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KOOYOORA

PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS
DIOCESE OF MELBOURNE

The Anglican Diocese in conjunction with St Mary's Anglican Church North Melbourne does not tolerate abuse, harassment or other misconduct within our communities. If any person has concerns about behavior of a church worker, past or present. The Diocese of Melbourne is committed to doing all that is possible to ensure that abuse does not occur. All complaints of abuse are taken very seriously, and we do all we can to lessen harm. We offer respect, pastoral care and ongoing long-term support to anyone who makes a complaint. St Mary's Statement of Commitment to Child Safety is on our noticeboard and can be downloaded from our website www.stmarys.org.au.

PLEASE REPORT ABUSE CALL 1800 135 246

MISSION AND VISION STATEMENT

St Mary's Anglican Church, North Melbourne is an inner-city Christian community that strives to be faithful, inclusive and sacramental.

God inspires us to worship in daily celebration; to be caring, thoughtful and inviting.

In response to God's call, in the next three to five years we aim:

- *To grow substantially in faith and numbers*
- *To create an inter-generational culture that values all age groups - children and adults - equally*
- *To express our faith in active engagement within and beyond our own community*
- *To deploy our property and financial assets in strategic support of the ministry needs of the parish for the long term*
- *To become more open to change as we learn to grow*

