

THE REINCARNATION
OF
J. D. SALINGER

John Coby

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For our children's children's children.

J.D.

1

'Why do you think you are here, Jerome?' he said.

'Call me J.D. doc, or Sal, OK?' I said.

He was ugly as sin, Donneville, but you could tell he thought he was king shit, God's gift. His face looked like an old bomb-testing range, like the backside of the moon. Houston, we have a problem. He was tall, maybe six-four, and lean, and he obviously thought he was some kind of cool. But he looked shady like a porn peddler.

'OK, Jerome, why are you here?'

Stupid turd. I am here because my stupid mother sent me here. There were photos of women around his office, no family pictures. The stupid dickmaster flipped his lid at school, big time.

'It's J.D. I said.'

'Does that stand for anything other than the obvious, Jerome?'

He doesn't get it. I should be psychoanalysing *him*; I swear he's a dumb shit. What happened to your face, doc? Walk into a shredder?

'Juvenile delinquent.'

'I see.'

You don't see nothing you big dick.

'I hear that you've been acting rebellious lately.'

You hear? He sat opposite, across this big wide shiny-brown desk, in a huge green-leather throne. He picked up a pipe and began to mess with it. There was a big window looking across Macquarie Street and shelves of books. I noticed Freud. He was a tigger. Thought about doing it with his mother, I kid you not. I was sitting in a square chair on my side. The table wasn't big enough.

'Would you like to tell me what the problem is, Jerome?'

Right now, doc, you're the problem. Your stinking attitude is the problem. Your very existence is the problem. Freud is the problem. What are you doing in my life? Who gave you an invitation?

'I told you, it's J.D.'

'For juvenile delinquent,' he said sarcastically.

'How much are my parents paying you for this?' I asked him straight up. It shocked him a bit. He tried to act cool, but I saw it, like a bullet to his brain. He was sensitive about money.

'Jerome, we are not going to discuss my fee.'

Come *on* mister smartfuckingarse, with your stinking pipe.

'Is there anything you would like to talk about Jer ... er ... J.D.?'

That's better. You aren't as messed up as you look. He started playing with his pipe, scratching the crap out of it and tapping it into a fancy ashtray. Tap, tap, tap. What a bullshit routine. I'm looking straight through you, Donneville, and you can't even tell. I see everything. I'm looking through you and you are looking at your pipe. You haven't looked at *me* since I arrived. Look at me you son of a bitch. *Look at me!* Forget it.

'How long have you been smoking, doc?' I asked. He kept looking at his pipe, not at me, and raised his eyebrows like, what the fuck? 'Has it been long? Because cancer, you know, doc. Ain't you seen the ads? You get gangrene in your lungs and drown in your own fluids ... doc.' I was laughing so hard inside it was killing. I was screwing around with this dick and I wasn't even getting paid for it. You should be paying *me*, Donneville. 'So, what would you like to know, doc?' I figured that I better get some value for my parents' dough and all. But I won't let him in on my secret. No, not that. That's private. He ain't smart enough for that. He doesn't *deserve* to know. Stupid dick.

'Your mother said that they sent you home from school, for being a troublemaker. They said that you talk back to your teachers and that you swore at one of them.'

Yeah, but I never hit any of them, like they hit me. I was minding my own business, walking across the quadrangle, and I happened to pass through the end of a line of juniors not thinking anything about it when old McKerrow screams out, 'into my office, Davidson.' He went on and made a big deal about me walking through a line of kids, honestly it made no difference to anybody, and what really set him off in a fit of anger was when I said, 'they were only juniors, sir.' Well you haven't ever seen anybody go off for no reason like old McKerrow then, I mean he exploded. He locked the door to his office from the inside and proceeded to scream at me. 'You people,' he screamed, 'you people, as soon as you get here you

think that you own the place ... don't you?' 'No sir,' I said. My parents were from Serbia. Dad got our name changed from Davidovich, and don't you worry about it, we got the wog treatment, big time, every day. McKerrow was the P.E. master and he was fit. He always wore tight little shorts and a T-shirt and acted real tough-manly-like all the time. Military sort of. His veins were sticking out of his neck he was screaming so much about you wogs this and you wogs that. I thought he was going to bust a vein. I was just standing there while he was screaming all out of control, building up pressure, when he laid a fist into me, as hard as he could, right into my stomach. The funny thing was that I didn't really feel it. I was a pretty active kid. Thinking about it later I figured that I must have had pretty tough stomach muscles because you wouldn't believe the shocked look on McKerrow's face when I just stood there like nothing had happened. He suddenly changed and became all friendly like, telling me that he hoped that I learnt my lesson and that we should act like men and 'cop our punishments like men, OK?' I said 'OK' and he let me out of his stupid office. After I read *Catcher* I figured that he was some kind of son of a bitch closet flit. Not to mention bloody racist. And he was one of my teachers that I was supposed to respect. Fuck that.

'They don't want to let you think for yourself, doc,' you dumb shit. 'They got some pretty screwed-up ideas and they expect us kids to just accept them,' like we're stupid or something.

'I see.'

He kept saying, I see, but I could tell that he could see fuck all, sweet fuck all. I didn't used to swear like this before I read Salinger. I didn't even used to think like this. I didn't used to think, period. But now I think I see everything. Everything.

'Is there a reason for your cap?'

Well Christalmighty, doc, I must *like* it! I must like *wearing* it, hey?

'You don't recognise it then, doc?'

'Should I?' he said like a real smartarse, like he was making some headway with me, with this condescending tone. You should, you dick. Don't you read anything but tigger books, like Freud? It's Holden's cap, moron.

'Not really. Want me to take it off?'

'It's so red,' he said, 'and you like to wear it backwards like that, with the earflaps down?'

I pulled the cap off my head. I wasn't going to see my parent's dough being wasted on my cap. I placed the cap on my lap and looked straight through him again. He was still playing with his pipe, faking it for everything he was worth. I said,

'Was that about fifty bucks worth of cap talk, doc?'

I swear to God I saw him shudder, but he never looked at me. I was looking straight through him. I could see everything, and everything was fake. I knew then that he was a phoney, just like Freud. It hit me like everything hits me these days.

Old Ignis Donneville was a friend of one of my mother's friends. Old Loretta Burkowitz. I heard her refer to him as Iggy once when she was visiting my mother. Old Iggy, the stud, with his bullshit phoney pipe act. I wondered if he had *Loretta's* picture lying around somewhere in his office.

'I'll ignore that remark,' he said. You snotnosed brat, I reckon he thought. 'So you are having issues with your curriculum?'

Holy Christ almighty. If another person uses that word at me I'm going to ...

'They should ban that word, doc.'

'Which one? Curriculum?'

No you dumb blind shit. 'Er, no, the other one, doc.'

'Ohh, OK.'

He started loading up his pipe with some tobacco from a fancy leather pouch. I just watched him. Shrinks can be scary people. They can put you away if they want to. You have to be careful. Shrinks can make me paranoid, but this one was OK. Old Iggy was nothing but a total phoney, only in it for the dough. I could see that straight away.

'You're not going to smoke that while I'm in here, are you, doc?' He looked straight ahead at the wall. 'Passive smoking, you know.' He placed his pipe on the table. Then I said, 'Got any papers?'

'Papers?' he asked, actually looking at me for the first time. 'What for?'

'Well, I thought I'd roll one and have a smoke with you.' I was so messing with his head.

'Forget it, J.D.' I had him trained. 'How about an example,' he said. 'Give me a point of disagreement with your teachers.'

There's not enough dough in my father's bank account, you crook, although there is a fair bit. He's a jeweller up the top of Broadway where Grace Brother's used to be. We don't live far from there. It is right across from Sydney University where I go to swim in their pool and often eat at their cafeterias, which are always good and cheap. I have more uni friends than high school friends. High school bores me to death because all the teachers take it for granted that we are all stupid. I have to admit it, they are 99 percent right, but I have news for them.

'Do you believe in God, doc?'

'What?'

'Do you believe in God?' Are you deaf as well as stupid?'

'Why?'

'Well, I just thought, doc, that I should know if the guy psychoanalysing me believed in God. Does that make me crazy?' God I was losing respect for this guy fast. He was rapidly descending down to my teacher level.

'No, that doesn't make you crazy. You're not here because anyone thinks you're crazy,' he said picking up his pipe and looking away.

'Was Freud an atheist as well?' I pressed him.

'Look, J.D., what bugs you about your teachers? Would you like to tell me?'

'Go ahead, light your pipe,' I said, 'I don't mind. I was just messing with you before.' I watched him light his pipe and glance at his clock. I was wearing him down so I thought that I would maybe just venture ankle deep into my neurosis, because I knew that that was all that this dick could handle today.

'Evolution, doc.' That's all I said. That's all I wanted to say.

'Ahh, I see.'

Oh God, there he went again with his I see, like a broken record, fifty bucks a pop. I was a gold mine for this jerk. I should have kept my mouth shut. At least we had plenty of dough. It was always there. 'How much do you need, Jerry?' they say, my parents, and they give me whatever I ask for. When I visit the shop to see my dad, just for a chinwag, he likes a chinwag with me cause I'm his only child, and we're pals, when I'm there, he always opens a secret drawer and shows me all the diamonds. And I know that they're shady, but they keep us

comfortable and my dad is too smart for anything to go wrong, he's a real smart guy. He says that I'm a chip off the old block, but he doesn't like it when they kick me out of school. 'Don't draw attention to yourself,' he always tells me, 'be a blender.' In the house, in another secret drawer, there is a shiny, polished-chrome .44 Magnum and two 50-round boxes of jacketed, hollow-point cartridges. He has taught me how to use it out in the bush. Even though I held it out firmly, with both hands, and braced myself, it knocked me right off my feet onto my backside the first time I fired it. My dad laughed and laughed. He never keeps the gun loaded in the house, but he says that the safest way to have it in the house is if I know exactly how to handle it. I have shot it enough times now that I'm pretty good at it. Dad buys a whole box of coconuts and puts them on a tree stump out in the bush. I swear to God you never seen a coconut explode like it does when it gets hit by one of those hollow-point bullets out of the .44 Magnum. Dad told me that I couldn't tell anyone about the gun because it was completely illegal, 'and untraceable,' he said. My dad knew all about guns and shooting people, but he didn't like to talk about *that* very much. I love my father and my mum too, but she goes stupid with worry about me sometimes, for hardly no reason, but that doesn't mean that I love her any less. I had a sister, but she died.

'So, what about evolution bugs you, J.D.?' Donneville asked.

He was worming his way in. I had to watch it.

'How much longer have we got, doc?'

This dick'll cut session ten minutes early if he gets a chance. I'll bet my cap on it. He looked at the clock, turned toward me and declared,

'I suppose that we have made good progress today, J.D. How do you feel about it?'

'Like you're a genius, doc,' you dumb tigger.

'OK, I'll see you in a week and you can tell me about evolution then, OK?'

'Can't wait, doc,' to get another day off from school.

Donneville wrote a brief letter to my mother and one to the dickmaster of my school, earning the dough he was paid, and I got to have a whole day off, except for the hour that I had to sit in the tigger's office and mess with his stupid head.

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Donneville worked in a pretty old building, up on the sixth floor, and the lift made you feel like a survivor when you finally made it down to the street. I reckoned that some other dumb jerk could freefall to his death in it and end up a crushed pile of bones at the bottom of the shaft.

I stepped out into Macquarie Street. It was only ten o'clock and it was Thursday. I had all day. The sun was out and it was mild. I took my cap out of my shoulder bag and pulled it over my head, backwards, earmuffs down. I felt like Holden, but I knew now, I knew it for sure, I was actually J.D. Salinger in another life.

A month ago, I was hanging with my uni friends at the uni and they were all going on about this book they all read. They were all charged and revving and everybody got something different out of it, but they were all redlining, valve bouncing. The book was *Catcher in the Rye*. I am especially good friends with two girls studying social work, they're in their first year and I'm in year eleven in high school. They are both absolute foxes and they love me cause I'm kind of young and naïve, they say, like freshly driven snow, Suzie says. It *never* snows in Sydney. The other one is Samantha. It was Sue who gave me her copy of *Catcher in the Rye*. I read it in two days. It blew my mind and then it opened my eyes. I saw everything, and I understood stuff, like *I* was J.D. Salinger. I kept it on me and took it everywhere and read it over and over. Suzie said I could keep it, but I eventually got my own copy and gave her her copy back. She was really happy that I did that and she kissed me on my cheek. I wanted to turn my head and get kissed on the mouth, but I chickened out. They live in the coolest student flat just across the road from the uni and I can visit them there anytime I want. Lots of other people hang out there and they talk about every kind of stuff none of my dumb school friends even think about. They talk about things I never heard of before, like eastern religions, like Buddhism and Krishna and reincarnation, and stuff like that. Sometimes they try to meditate and they also smoke lots of pot. They don't drink much, though. There's always music, really great music, like this old stuff, like Van Morrison and Santana and J.J.Cale. God I love it there.

I was standing outside Iggy's building not sure if I felt like turning left and walking down to the harbour or turning right and taking a hike up to Hyde Park.

I could watch the chess game for a while, I thought. So I tossed a coin. Heads left, tails right. Tails. I set off with my cap on backwards and my bag over my shoulder. There were cars and people everywhere. A cool breeze was blowing down the street from the park. Opposite the law courts I stopped at an outside café for a coffee and a toasted sandwich. A fat old guy came out, I think it was the owner, to hand me a menu. He was smiling real happy and said,

‘This must be my lucky day, I get to serve a celebrity.’

I looked around. I couldn’t see no celebrities.

‘Where?’ I said.

‘Holden Caulfield,’ he replied, ‘I get to serve Holden Caulfield, the most famous young man in the world.’

‘Ahh, the cap,’ I said. Suddenly I felt real happy. ‘Have you read it?’ I asked.

‘Yes, when I was a student. I now have three children and a beautiful wife. Got caught by the Catcher before I went over the cliff,’ and then he did this thing with a wink and added, ‘and all.’

He really laughed happy as he went away. I thought that he really got it, the meaning I mean, of the Catcher. He brought out my coffee and toasted sandwich and I could see how he looked around, all up and down Macquarie Street and he said, ‘You’re the only one, kid.’

I wish my dumb teachers got it, and the stupid phonies that tell them what to teach and all. I get so frustrated, and angry, sometimes I just want to scream *fuck you out of my life* all up and down the halls. Sometimes I do it and it gets me kicked out and I end up in that dick-phoney-tugger Donneville’s office. But I got him on a leash I’m pretty sure. I know mum wouldn’t send me there under normal circumstances, if it weren’t for that dickmaster at school. She’s just trying to get me through, that’s all, I know. I’m not angry with her, I love her. I know that I’m a crazy bastard, I know it.

The coffee was really hitting the spot. And the toasted sandwich was perfect. Really hit the spot too. I’ve been drinking coffee since I was little, I kid you not. Every Sunday mum makes Turkish coffee, ‘the old way,’ she says. The whole house smells of roasted coffee on Sunday mornings because she roasts the coffee beans herself in a pan on the stove. I swear you couldn’t wake up to a nicer smell. Then she puts the roasted beans into a bronze hand grinder and gives it to

dad to grind the coffee beans up. And the three of us sit around the table in the kitchen and listen to that grinder and dad telling stories from work about some shady diamond or other. 2CH is always playing on the radio. I wish my sister was alive. I really really miss her. Samantha told me that she's my guardian angel now. I cried when she told me that, but now I believe it and it makes me feel better. I think I got a thing for Samantha. She's so beautiful. Just thinking about her makes me blow my lid and all.

I nearly finished the coffee. I was looking up Macquarie Street towards Hyde Park thinking what I was going to do next when I saw it. It was a long way away, way up the street, up near the park, but it stood out like it was the only coloured thing. All of a sudden the whole world was black and white and all. I watched it disappear into the park. I pulled some dough out of my pocket and put it on the table under the saltshaker. Then I got up and walked pretty fast up the street chasing after the red cap.

I didn't see the cap again until I got into the park. I saw the person sitting by the Archibald Fountain. There were other people around, Japanese tourists taking pictures and suits with attaché cases walking like mindless robots. They were all grey. Just the cap and the rainbow in the fountain was colour. I walked over. The person had their head turned away from me. They were wearing a tight pair of blue jeans and a really cool pair of red sneakers and like a paisley shirt that looked like velvet with red and purple and brown patterns in it. It was unbuttoned in the front over an olive-green T-shirt. They had long, light-brown hair. Straight. They were very thin and quite tall, like me. And I just said, I kid you not,

'Holden Caulfield?'

The person turned her head, she was a beautiful girl, saw my red cap on backwards and smiled, and said back to me, I do not lie,

'Why, yes, Holden Caulfield.'

What were the odds? One month ago I read *Catcher in the Rye* in two days, realized I was J.D. Salinger and started to fight back. I figured out what the bastards were up to, and I started fighting back. Now they all think I'm rebellious and want me to see that dick Donneville, the tigger. Fuck. I went all over town looking for the cap until I found it in a disposal store up Parramatta Road. It's like

my uniform and all, but nobody knows that. It says that I'm fighting back, so *back off you shits, just back off!*

'What's your name?' I asked her. She was really cute. I had my cap on backwards, but she had hers on frontwards. It was nearly the same as mine, same design with the earflaps and all, but hers was just a shade more on the orange side, but still super cool.

'Phoebe,' she said real cute like. I swear to God I was already falling in love, I kid you not.

'Get out of here,' I said laughing. 'Like Holden's little sister?' I got a shot of panic all of a sudden like I can't be falling in love with my own little sister.

'Yeah,' she said and laughed looking me up and down. 'You have materialized right out of my imagination, Holden Caulfield,' she said.

'It's Jerry, but lately it's J.D.'

'Jerry? Like in Seinfeld?'

'Jerry, like in Jerome ... Davidson ... J.D.'

'Hello J.D.' she said smiling and held her hand out to shake mine. We shook hands.

'Hello, Phoebe.'

She was so foxalicious and fresh, and so Technicolor, and the rest of the world was all black and white and a million shades of grey. And like in the whole universe, right then, there was just one point of coloured light, shining through, and it was Phoebe and Holden's red cap. The only other colour was the rainbow in the fountain.

'Don't you go to school?' I asked her.

'Sure I go to school, but they told us to stay home today, and tomorrow. Some of the teachers are in big trouble. They have been feeling-up some of the younger girls and it got out and the police are there today. It's a big stink. Half our teachers are stupid lesbians, you know, and they don't even *try* to hide it. It makes me want to vomit just thinking about it. Yuk.'

I laughed, 'Yeah, chunder. What year are you in?' I wanted to know because she looked so young and so cute, but I could see now that she was pretty feisty, not gonna take no stupid fucking crap from no lezzo bitch, no way, thanks to the Catcher I reckon. Fucking bitches have no right.

'Year ten,' she said.

'I'm in eleven,' I said. 'You like school?'

'Not so much since I read *Catcher in the Rye*. That book woke me up. Made me see the crap they were trying to shove into my brain.'

Fucking bitches. Phoebe is such a nice girl and the fucking bitches just want to fuck her up. Fuck them to hell.

'Antolini,' I said.

'Yeah.' She knew exactly what I meant. 'So how come *you're* not at school today, J.D.?'

'Got kicked out. Swore at the teacher. Had an appointment with a shrink. But I'm free now.'

'Cool.'

God I was falling in love. Christ, she's *not* my little sister. Get off that.

'I was thinking maybe later going down the harbour and maybe getting on a ferry, but you know ... *You* got any plans?'

'Yes. I'm going to the art gallery. I want to look at Jackson Pollock.'

Hmm, an arty girl. I liked arty girls. Suzie and Samantha were arty girls and God knows how much I liked *them*.

'Blue Poles,' I said, because I knew that that was the only Jackson Pollock painting in the gallery.

'Yeah. You know Pollock?'

'I know Blue Poles. Saw it on a school excursion. All the kids laughed. Said it looked like vomit.'

'My dad has a big book about Jackson Pollock. It has all his paintings in it. It's one of my favourite books, other than *Catcher in the Rye*, which is my very favourite. My dad is a painter as well.'

'Can I come with you?' I said.

'I want you to come with me, Holden,' she said so nice, so cute, I flipped my lid and all.

'Thanks, Holden,' I said. She turned her cap backwards like mine. It made her look even cuter. '*Handle it, handle it,*' I was thinking to myself. Christ, now I wanted to put my arm around her. I started thinking about Blue Poles. That helped. She had been sitting on the side of the fountain. She rose to her feet. God,

she was so slim and gorgeous, and tall, and her tight jeans were perfect, and her loose purple-velvet shirt with the sleeves rolled up just past her wrists. She wore bangles like a hippy and when she stood there she had a natural rhythm, like a black girl. *'Blue Poles, Blue Poles.'* 'Cool shoes,' I said. They matched her cap. She put her hand into her ethnic shoulder bag and pulled out a pair of aviator-style, reflector sunglasses and put them on. *God*, now she looked like a goddamned movie star. *'Blue Poles, Blue Poles.'* I got *my* shades out, John Lennon style with purple lenses. Mum and dad let me buy them. I wanted to look cooler amongst my uni friends. The freshly driven snow needed some attitude I figured. We set off and walked towards St. Mary's Cathedral. The way to the art gallery took us right past it. I couldn't help myself and I said, 'Those bullshit priests are in a lot of trouble lately.' I looked at her. She had a smile on her face. 'Are you catholic or anything?' I asked her. I didn't want to offend her.

'My mum and dad are into Krishna, but in a very private way, nobody really knows. They're very cool about it.'

'I didn't want to offend you if you were catholic.'

'I'm not offended,' she said smiling at me.

'Yeah, well, them catholics are pretty messed up raping little boys.' I wanted to say fucked up but I was really trying not to swear in front of her because I really liked her and I just didn't think that she deserved to be exposed to my totally over-the-top foul language. 'It's all over the news and happening all over the world.'

'It has been happening for centuries,' she said. She seemed to know all about it. Then she surprised me when she said, 'I wonder if old Salinger knew something about it and wrote *Catcher in the Rye* to sort of warn the kids about the dirty flits. Know what I mean?'

She looked at me, but all I could see were two of my John Lennon faces with Holden Caulfield's caps around them in her reflectors. *The fuckers*, is all I could think, *the dirty fuckers*. 'I know *exactly* what you mean,' I said.

'I think Salinger was a really good person,' she said.

'A magician,' I said. Then I thought about the dirty fucker priests. The bullshit dicks hiding behind their dresses and big churches, all fucking holier than everybody, while secretly raping the little boys, dragging them through the

rye and shoving them over the cliff. *FUCK!* If there's a hell it has to be full to the brim with the kid-fucker priests. That's the *best* reason that I can think of for staying good and out of hell and all.

'Let's walk a little faster,' she said as we walked past the front of St. Mary's Cathedral. She gave it a dirty look and said, 'It's the Church of Antolini.' And then she said, 'It's hard for me to tell *who* they actually worship in there, God or the devil.'

I knew exactly what she meant.

'Flits,' I said. '*Kid-fuckers*,' I thought.

'Phonies,' she agreed as she grabbed my hand and took off, pulling me with her. Holden was no jerk cause she's read *Catcher in the Rye*. Shame all those raped little kids never got a chance to. We slowed up about fifty yards down the road. Phoebe glowed in intense colour. Her red cap was the brightest. Everything else, I mean everything, was a million shades of fucking grey. She kept holding onto my hand. My brain went spinning. I was flipping my lid I kid you not.

We walked to the gallery and went inside.

'It's a window into his mind,' she said as we sat in front of Blue Poles.

'It looks like he threw it into a blender,' I said.

A bunch of school kids on an excursion walked past, all in a line. All you could hear was *gross* and *yuk* and *vomit* and stuff. We both couldn't stop laughing. Kids are so honest.

'He was a bad alcoholic,' she said. 'It's what my dad told me.'

It was taking my mind off wanting to put my arm around her.

'Let's deconstruct it,' she suggested.

'Deconstruct it?' I said. 'How do you deconstruct a painting?'

'Easy,' she said cool as can be. Even her voice had rhythm. God I was falling in love. I love you, Phoebe, I swear I do.

'How?'

'We figure out the last colour he splashed on it and then we mentally take it away. It's the colour with no other colours over it.'

Suddenly Blue Poles was all colours, but everything else was grey, except for Holden of course.

'OK.'

'Then we try to figure out why he chose that colour and why he chose to splash it where he did. That way we can begin to understand him better.'

This girl was smarter than I gave her credit for. She was becoming more foxalicious by the second. I was going to totally flip my lid in a minute if I wasn't careful, I swear to God I was.

'OK, which colour?'

'This isn't easy,' she said.

We were sitting on an upholstered bench seat without any back on it about twelve feet from the picture.

'I think it's making me dizzy,' I said. 'It's making me feel like I am looking into madness.'

'To me it looks like the birth of chaos,' she said all studious like. 'Not post-destruction, or pre-destruction, but right at the moment of destruction, right at the moment of total breakdown into insanity. See, the poles are all getting blown out and everything, all the order is in the moment of exploding into complete mishmash.'

'To me it looks like somebody's brains got splattered all over the canvas.'

'Gross me out,' she said. Then she said, 'You know, I almost feel like I was there when he painted it, sitting in front of it like this.'

'Oh yeah?' I said.

'See if you can tell which colour was put on last,' she said.

I had a bit of a look. 'Is it the poles?' I said.

'Close, I think. But see there, in a couple of places, the cream ...' God I wanted to put my arm around her. I stopped looking at the stupid painting and started looking at her face. Now that *was* a work of art I kid you not. I was so in love it was hurting. 'Are you looking?'

'Sure, the cream.' Pollock was losing me, fast. I was becoming immune to Blue Poles. It wasn't working like before because all I could think of now was putting my arm around her. Suddenly it hit me like a lightning bolt. 'What do you reckon, Holden,' I said, 'if we took away the alcohol?'

She looked away from the picture and glanced at me around the red earflap of her cap and smiled. 'Holden ...' she said.

'Well?'

'Holden ... Pollock was *not* a phoney, come on.'

'Look at the picture and take away the booze,' I repeated. She was smiling the cutest smile. She looked so smart, and sharp, and Holden's cap just set her off.

'OK, I know what you want me to say. I'm not sure that I want to say it, because it might be true, but OK, take away the alcohol,' she looked at the picture again, took her time, even tilted her cute head sideways, then finally said, 'and all I see is a blank canvas.'

'Aha,' I said, 'so it's a phoney.'

'Could be, Holden.'

You know, I could have spewed my usual diarrhoea of swearing about the phoney picture and the phoney artist, but I didn't, seeing as he never fooled the kids. He was a phoney up front, everybody knew it and all, and they all accepted it. A phoney hero, in a phoney world, full of phoney people. So no problem, no abuse, cause the kids were wise to Pollock. You drink too much and you vomit. And the vomit is there for all to see. Walking away from the picture I kept thinking about it.

'You know, Phoebe,' I said as we stepped out of the gallery, 'I'm thinking that Pollock may not be as big a phoney as I first thought.'

'You know,' she said, 'phoney or not, I like the way Blue Poles entertains its space.'

Like some drunk's vomit entertains the footpath, I thought, but I wasn't going to say anything because I was in love.

3

It was round about lunchtime. We were standing on the front steps of the gallery. I had no plans and I was hoping that she'd want to keep hanging out if you know what I mean.

'Where do you live?' I asked trying to not sound too nosy. She really looked amazing in the sun. 'I live not far from Sydney Uni,' I said.

'I'm in Rose Bay, just over the road from the tennis courts and up a side street a little. It's an easy bus ride into town from my place.'

I haven't got much experience with girls you know. Like I've never had a proper girlfriend or anything. I get so nervous and I always chicken out and

never say anything. Suzie and Samantha are my favourite girls. I know that I'm not old enough to be their *boyfriend* or anything but they sure act like they love me cause they're always kissing me and hugging me. And they never wear bras and I can mostly see everything through their T-shirts. Samantha sometimes wears this loose top and when she leans forward I can see right down it. I can see everything and she doesn't mind. I swear to God it blows my lid every time. I get embarrassed cause, you know, downstairs. Once when there were just the three of us there, Suzy walked out of the shower clean naked, I swear to God I could see everything. She stopped and looked at me and laughed. I must have had my mouth open and my eyeballs must have been hanging out cause she said, 'what are *you* looking at?' but she didn't try to hide herself, she just went on and found some clothes and got dressed. I think they think of me like as their little brother or something, but I'm just flipping my lid all the time when they start getting all showy and stuff, know what I mean? Not that I know *that* much about sex and fucking and all. I've never done it. Never even come close. That's not saying that I don't know anything about it, I do, because my mum and dad told me all about it. They sat me down on my eleventh birthday and told me all about sex. My mum said that most people call it fucking. Then she described it to me and I couldn't believe what she was telling me. 'That little doodle there, Jerry, is for more than just piddling,' she said, 'and it does strange things.' And she told me all about vaginas and how girls get pregnant and how everybody that's ever lived got made that way. I couldn't believe what she was telling me. My dad just kept laughing and saying, 'listen to your mother, Jerry.' And then she told me about tugging and how I'd probably become a tugger just like every other boy that's ever lived, and she said that it was all normal and OK and to not worry about it too much. I didn't have a clue what she was talking about then, but I do now. My dad got me worried because he said that mother was mostly right about the tugging, then he warned me, he said, 'boys that do it too much end up going blind and sometimes even completely stupid,' and that I should keep it to a minimum. 'Save it for the girls,' he said. I remember how much they both laughed as they told me that last part. I hope that visiting Suzy and Samantha doesn't make me go blind and stupid cause most of the time they completely make me flip my lid if you know what I mean.

There was something about fucking that I could have told my mother and father, as well, something that they never mentioned. I didn't understand it when it happened, but I understand it now, and it's got nothing to do with girls, know what I mean? But I couldn't tell my parents about it, and anyway, I'm pretty much over it. It upset me, but I was too little to be properly upset. Or maybe I *was* properly upset and that's how I am, upset. Maybe it's the reason why I'm such a rebellious bastard now. Getting sent to shrinks and all.

'Are you hungry?' I said. Phoebe said that she didn't eat much. I told her about the cafeteria at the back of the gallery, but she knew all about it because she'd been there many times with her parents. I suggested that we go there and maybe have some sandwiches. She said that it was a great idea and took my hand again and we went back into the gallery both wearing our caps backwards like Holden. She wanted to pay, but I didn't let her. I think she liked that because she gave me the most foxalicious smile.

After lunch we walked through the Botanic Gardens to the Opera House. She told me how she liked to go there on weekends, to Rollerblade.

'I skate all over the city,' she said.

I couldn't believe it. I told her that I couldn't believe it. 'I've been skating for years,' I said, 'but I mostly hang out uptown around the uni and all. I've got the latest Salomons, and they fly.'

'We must have a skate together,' she said.

I flipped my lid because I was going to get to see her again, but I kept it all inside and tried to stay cool, but I'm not sure how cool I was when I said, 'We must for sure, and soon I hope.'

'I hope so too,' she said. God I wanted to put my arm around her, but I was such a gutless chicken.

We walked around the Opera House and Circular Quay and The Rocks where we sat on the grass right under the Harbour Bridge. We talked and talked. She held my hand. I finally put my arm around her. She didn't mind I kid you not. It felt like we'd been friends for a long long time. We sat there under the giant steel bridge with our red Holden Caulfield caps turned backwards and earflaps down, all in brilliant colour, while everything else was black and white and a million shades of grey.

She asked me, 'Why did you swear at your teacher, J.D.?'

'Ohhh, it's a long story,' I said. 'It all began with a stupid essay about evolution and ended in a big argument with the stupid teacher telling me that I wasn't supposed to think a certain way and calling that kind of thinking homophobic. She failed me on my essay, which was really stupid because I know how good it really was. So I told her to get royally ... you can imagine how the rest of it went.' Fucked is how it went. 'I ended up in the headmaster's' dickmaster's 'office. He started telling me about school policy and political correctness' and all that fucking bullshit 'and all that stuff, and then he phoned my parents. In the end the teachers decided that I needed counselling' fucking brainwashing 'to sort me out. I told them that I didn't appreciate being tagged with any phoney label, but they all ignored me, and my opinion, cause they had the numbers. But let me tell you, Phoebe, I was right in my essay, I was so right, that's why the stupid bitch teacher freaked out the way she did. They are trying to swamp me with numbers. There are more of them, Phoebe, than me, and that's supposed to make *them* right, and *me* wrong, and I'm supposed to shut up.' Well *fuck* them! Like I said to the bitch teacher, *fuck you*, I can think for myself. This is happening everywhere, in all the schools, but the flits *don't* have the numbers, they just make the most noise. You see, they got nothing but time to fuck with everybody cause they're not interested in having kids. So they've got nothing but time to fuck with the rest of the world that's fighting for fucking survival. Mums and dads busting their guts fighting for their kids' survival, know what I mean? And they're trying to fuck their kids up at school. Fucking Antolinis. I don't want to say swearwords in front of Phoebe because I'm in love with her, so I just think them. 'They wanted to send me to somebody but my mother said that we already had a shrink and that that was where I was going to go. She never gave them any choice. She really put her foot down about that. Stupid Goldberg in the office, he's as fruity as a Christmas cake, even said that my essay was *subversive*.' My dad, who was there, was really, really pissed off with the bitch teacher and the dickmaster, and even his flitty prick assistant, I could tell, but he didn't show it to them. You had to know him to see it. 'Serbs don't show their feelings, Jerry,' he told me once, 'and we don't talk much. We just act ... and it's finished.'

'I wouldn't mind reading your essay, J.D.,' Phoebe said.

I told her that I had it on my computer at home and that I would bring a copy next time I saw her.

'Cool,' she said.

'I worked for weeks on it,' I said. 'I'd really appreciate some proper feedback and all.'

'I'd love to. I'm sorry it got you into so much trouble.'

'I just don't like other people doing my thinking for me,' I said. 'I don't tell *them* what to think. I don't put labels on *them* if they think different to me. I just need them to get out of my face, I really do.'

'I know exactly how you feel J.D.' She turned her foxalicious head, looked me straight in the eye through her aviators, and then said, 'J.D. Salinger.'

'Hey, you called me Salinger, like I was him.'

'You *are* him, Holden. I can see that now. You should stick to your guns and never doubt that I'll always take *your* side against them. Fight back J.D., fight back, and *never* stop fighting back.'

There were intense rays of coloured light shining out of her cap, way out into the million shades of grey. She put her head on my shoulder and I put my arm around her. I was fairly sure that there was a pretty good chance that we were in love. At least I knew that *I* was, big time. I really wanted to tell her that I loved her, but I was so much of a gutless chicken and all.

We strolled through the grey all afternoon. She said that she had to be home by dinnertime. Then I remembered that we could get back to Rose Bay easier by taking the Watson's Bay ferry from the Quay.

'We could catch the Watto Bay ferry,' I said.

'Cool,' she said as she hugged me tighter. I was flipping the lid. Love felt so good, like the best thing I ever felt in my whole goddamned life. We rode out of the Quay standing out on the deck of the ferry. The Opera House floated past and all the noise of the city drifted away. There was just the sound of the boat and the seagulls squawking and her angel voice saying, 'Thanks for one of the best days of my life, Holden.'

She got off the ferry in Rose Bay but I stayed on the boat and rode the roundtrip back to Circular Quay where I caught a bus home. We decided on the ferry that I was going to wag a day from school the next day and spend it with

her. I told her that I would bring my essay and my skates. She got all excited and kissed me on the cheek and properly hugged me. She said, 'Thanks, J.D.' just before she jumped off the ferry. We decided that we would meet up at the top of William Street, right under the big Coke sign.

When I got home, my mum had the radio on and the song *Feelings* was playing. I listened to it from my room and cried because that song made me remember how much I fell in love with Phoebe that day.

4

The next day, Friday, I forgot about stupid school. It was like a fucked-up re-education camp anyway, like somewhere in Siberia. You vill think like us, or vee vi'll put a homophobic label on you and send you to a shrink. They want all the little kids to grow up and be like them. Flits. School is actually a hostile environment for kids and I hinted at that in my essay. It's a predator, or maybe a tentacle of an even bigger predator. All species have to fight to survive. *I* have to fight to survive, like in evolution. I really studied this shit. I know what I'm talking about, and the dicks failed me.

I was having another day of freedom with Phoebe. It was her second day off from school while the cops were chasing down all the lesbian bitch teachers that got outed feeling-up all the little schoolgirls and all. Bent pervert bitches. We were meeting up at ten o'clock under the big Coke sign. I brought my skates and my essay and mum gave me plenty of dough. I told her what I was doing and all, and about Phoebe, and she said that it was OK to stay away from school that day. She didn't like that school very much either any more. She said that she'd give me a sick note on Monday and to go out and have a great time. What a great mum she is, and my dad too.

I spotted Holden's cap from a hundred yards away as my bus was coming up William Street. I wore my cap too, turned backwards the way I like to wear it. I jumped off the bus and started to walk towards her. When she saw me she ran over and threw her arms around me and hugged me really tight. I was flipping my lid, got to tell you, cause I was so in love with this girl. She wore the same jeans and red sneakers, and the same shirt over a different T-shirt, light blue this time, and she had on heaps of colourful bangles, all different from the day before.

On her head she wore Holden's cap and on her back she had a backpack, like me, in which she had her skates. I stepped back from her and looked at her and said,

'I think you are the most beautiful girl I've ever seen in my life, Phoebe.'

I don't know where the courage came from. She lit up like the sun with a smile and spun on the spot like a ballerina, sort of showing herself off to me, and said, 'Do you really think so, J.D.?'

'Oh yeah,' I said as I completely blew my lid right off its hinges.

The first thing I did was ask if she had any breakfast. She said that she often missed out on breakfast so I invited her for coffee and something to eat in one of the cafés nearby. She was so happy. I don't think that she'd ever been taken for breakfast by a boy before and I'd never really taken a girl out like that before either.

'I know a place that's cool,' I said, 'over that way.' I pointed up Darlinghurst Road, right though the guts of the Cross. There are more flits in King's Cross than there are fleas on a stray dog, but the way I was feeling right at that moment, if there was a hell, this sure wasn't it, know what I mean?

As we set off she took my hand and let me lead her through all the people. 'This place is so grungy,' she said. We finally made it to El Alamein Fountain and sat down there for a minute. She really loved that fountain. She said that it reminded her of a thistle. I scanned around Fitzroy Gardens, which was a tiny mall-type area that the fountain was in, and noticed some really mangy looking characters. They looked like strung-out junkies. There was a guy sleeping in a cardboard box over in a corner. At least I thought he was sleeping. There was no way of knowing. He might have been dead, but nobody was paying any attention. Maybe nobody notices until the corpses begin to rot and stink the place out. Phoebe was right about this place being grungy.

A gust of breeze blew some fountain spray over us. Phoebe giggled with delight. I said, 'Would you like to have breakfast before we get completely soaked?' and pointed over to The Fountain Café. She was still laughing as we got up and walked over. We sat down and I ordered toasted sandwiches and coffee for us. I was having such a good time. I swear, she was the most foxalicious babe I'd ever seen, and I was soooo in love with her it was actually killing. And Holden's cap and those reflector shades set her right off if you know what I

mean. Suddenly I noticed it again. I noticed how everything was black and white and a million shades of grey, except for Holden and her cap, and the rainbow in the El Alamein Fountain.

As we were munching into our ham, cheese and tomato toasteds, I asked her about her mum and dad. She told me that her dad was an artist, a painter of pictures, and that he was very successful and sought after.

'Daddy sells everything he paints for lots of dough,' she said. 'He does cities. He jumps on a plane and flies to a city and spends a few days there taking millions of photos. Then he comes back, chooses a couple of dozen shots and paints them in his style. He makes enough dough to last us for years. He takes me to his exhibitions, mostly in Paddington, as his personal companion he calls me. I love it and I really love him for taking me. Mummy is a nurse. She specialises in assisting in brain surgery. She is very good, and all the top surgeons in Sydney try to get her on their teams.' I was only half hearing everything Phoebe was saying because I had moments where I completely lost myself in her foxalicious face. She asked me, 'Did you bring your essay?'

'I did,' I said. 'Want to see it?'

'Absolutely,' she said real keen like.

I pulled my essay out of my backpack and placed it on the table next to her coffee. The sun was shining in her eyes so she turned her cap frontwards and then smiled at me really warmly. I was so in love, I swear to God. She read the cover page.

'Evolution by Jerome Davidson. I love it already,' she said. I laughed. She flipped through the pages. 'It's quite long, twelve pages.'

'I could have easily made it twice as long,' I said. 'Most of the other kids made theirs only about two or three pages. That was all they wrote. The teacher just said, write an essay on evolution. She didn't specify anything else. *They* all passed. *I* was the only one in the class that got flunked. She gave me a lousy three out of ten and a big lecture after the class. You know the rest.'

'I see you began with Charles Darwin,' she said.

'Yeah well ...' I said. I didn't say much while she read a bit. I was just happy looking at her. She truly was a fox. Her hair, long and all, the way it blew around

when a breeze came, and Holden's cap, so cool. 'Would you like another coffee?' I asked, 'and another sandwich?'

She looked up from my essay and looked out from under the peak of Holden's cap, through her reflector aviators, and said,

'I'd love another coffee J.D., and I'll go you halves in a sandwich if, you know, you're having another one.' And then she said, 'I really like your glasses.' I checked out my cool, purple John Lennons in her reflectors.

I called over the cute waitress. I find all waitresses cute. What is it with waitresses? I don't know. It's like they're not real. They all look like models and movie stars, but you only ever see them working in restaurants. It's like they dematerialize into another dimension when they finish work. She came over with her little notebook and pen. She was cute, but also a bit feisty. I figured it was from working in the Cross and all, know what I mean? Tough environment. She looked at me and then at Phoebe, who was buried in my essay, and said,

'What gives with the crazy red caps anyway? What's with them earflaps?'

There are only two types of people in this world, those who have read *Catcher in the Rye* and those who haven't.

Phoebe looked up from the essay and smiled as I said, 'Don't you find them fashionable?'

The waitress gave a chuckle, 'Those things? Hardly, but each to his own.' I figured that she must have seen just about everything under the sun working in King's Cross. 'What are you havin?' she asked.

'Ohh, I thought we'd go two more coffees and another ham, cheese and tomato toasted thanks.'

'Just one?'

'Yes please, we're going to go halves.'

'Comin right up,' she said as she walked away.

When she came back with our coffees and sandwich she said, 'You know, them caps of yours are startin to grow on me.'

Phoebe said to her, kidding like, 'Well I'm sorry, but you can't have either of them.' We all laughed.

There was a short pause while Phoebe read some more. I scanned around the Cross and sipped my coffee. I spotted a couple of flits walking by, hand in

hand. I was amazed at how they were as many shades of grey as everything else in King's Cross. After a couple of minutes I asked, 'How's it reading?'

All absorbed in the essay, she answered, 'Good. I'm up to the Galapagos Islands and the finches. You're a great writer, J.D., like a natural.'

'Thanks, but you know, you've got all day to read that thing.'

'OK, I know, I'll just get to the end of this paragraph. It has me really hooked. You are seriously a good writer. I have read a fair bit in my time, and this is talented writing.'

'It must be because I'm the reincarnation of J.D. Salinger,' I said.

'Undoubtedly,' she said.

After breakfast, we walked back the way we came, back down Darlinghurst Road towards William Street.

'Do you want to skate down William Street?' she asked. I knew she meant on the footpath.

'Sure,' I said, 'but how would you like to look at some *real* art first.' She smiled and looked at me suspicious like, probably thinking like I'm having a dig about old Pollock, but I wasn't.

'What kind of art?' she said really curious.

'All time classic,' I said.

'What is the gallery? I don't know any galleries around here, and I know most of them. What kind of classic art?'

'It's not far,' I said. 'Just a few minutes. I don't want to spoil the surprise.'

'I'm pretty fussy about my art, you know, J.D.'

We walked down the left side of William Street. After about a hundred yards, I stopped in front of a showroom. She said, 'Why are we stopping here?' I didn't say anything, I just turned and looked through the window. She looked inside and said all excited and surprised like, 'Cars? Cars? That's the art?'

'Not just any cars, Holden, *Ferraris*.'

'Ahhhh, Ferraaaaaris,' she said all interested all of a sudden.

'And down the road they have Lamborghinis and Maseratis and Lotuses and Bentleys.'

She sat behind the wheel of every top-of-the-range thoroughbred in every showroom. She oohed and aaahed and said, as she caressed each steering

wheel, 'I could easily get used to this.' The young salesmen were tripping over themselves trying to show her all the finer details of each beautiful vehicle. I had no doubts that she was the most foxalicious babe that had *ever* walked through their doors, cap and all. She laughed and giggled, but she also made plenty of smart comments about the graceful lines and perfect proportions and all. After we saw all the cars, she hugged me and thanked me for showing her all the cars and said, 'Those machines truly were classic art, J.D.'

'Which was your favourite?' I asked her.

She looked up into the sky grinning and said, 'Ohhhh, without a doubt the Aventador.' I told her that that was my favourite as well.

We decided to walk down to Hyde Park where we were going to put our skates on.

We skated through the park and I've got to tell you right from the start this girl could skate I kid you not. She could skate forwards, backwards, sideways, on her head I reckon if I asked her. 'I used to do figure skating,' she said as she hooked into a spin. My big trick was jumps. I jumped a few steps and she applauded and said, 'You're a good jumper, Holden.' She looked so cool on her skates that I started flipping my lid again, if you know what I mean.

We took off down Macquarie Street then veered off through a gap between the buildings and rolled into The Domain then on through The Botanic Gardens down towards the Opera House. I asked her if she felt like an ice cream and she said yes, so we sat down at a nice outdoor café and ordered our ice creams.

'Can I read some more of your essay, J.D.?' she said.

I gave her the essay and kicked back. She immediately began reading it.

We sat there eating our ice creams and checking out the view. She read a bit and talked a bit. There were millions of tourists everywhere and the Quay was frantic with boats coming and going. The Bridge dominated the whole scene.

'So you say here, J.D., that evolution follows environment.'

'Yeah.'

'You see the evolutionary process a little different to other people,' she said.

'How do you mean?'

'Well, they think that all life evolved from a single cell. But you don't talk about that. You mainly write about the environment here.'

'Look, forget it, it's boring. Let's skate,' I said.

'This is really interesting.'

'What are you, some kind of Einstein?'

'Some kind,' she replied smiling one of those smiles that completely flipped my lid. She started reading aloud, sort of.

'OK. Say you've got two types of finches on this island. And there are two types of seeds they eat, tough seeds and easy seeds. Are these real seeds?' she asked.

'No,' I said, 'I just made the seeds up and all, like an example.'

'Oh,' she said, 'they're an example, OK, continuing, one type of finch has a tough beak and the other doesn't. Are these real finches or did you make them up as well?'

'Made them up,' I said.

'Is anything real?' she said.

'Not really,' I said, 'it's just an example.'

'Oh,' she said, 'an example. OK.'

I was starting to feel a bit sick in my stomach. I said, 'Let's go skating,' but she said,

'Not yet. Now, continuing, they both survive, that's both types of finches?'

'Yeah.'

'Until there is a big storm that flattens all the easy-seed trees. OK, I can go with that. The finches with the weak beaks starve to death and die out. Ohh, the poor little finches.'

'You're not supposed to feel sorry for them.'

'Oh, sorry, of course, nature is cruel, but I do feel sorry for the poor little finches.'

She looked so cute being funny and all. My essay never sounded so entertaining before. She went on,

'Decades pass and the trade winds and ocean currents carry a new seed, which takes root on the island. This seed isn't real either is it?'

'No.'

'It bears a new type of fruit that is poisonous to 99 percent of the finches on the island. Oh you nasty. One percent, by chance, are immune to the poison. One lousy percent? Why couldn't you have made it five percent? As well, a pest arrives on the island that is deadly to the trees with the tough seeds. Oh my God, a pest even. What are the poor little finches going to eat? The pest decimates all the trees with the tough seeds. Is all this made up?'

'Is that bad?'

'I don't know. Ah, all the finches begin to eat the poisonous seeds, oh no, and 99 percent of them die out. You killed all the finches, you beast.'

'Not all.'

'The one percent that is naturally immune to the poison flourish and in the end there is a healthy population of finches on the island that thrives on the poisonous fruited plants. Oh yeah, like that could happen. And then someone arrives and sees the finches and poisonous trees and says, see how the finches are adapted to the plants on this island. But he doesn't see the process because it is impossible to see the process because the process rubbed itself out. And the last population of finches is no better than the first population, it is just the one that is right for the current environment. Are you sure about this J.D.?'

'Pretty sure, Phoebe,' I said. 'Would you like to go skating now?'

'No, there is more. The environment leads evolution and evolution is not a species evolving into some super species, but simply a species chasing its own survival in an ever-changing environment. That part was good, J.D. So it's more like circles than straight lines. I don't get that. No species evolves into anything. It just dies off into the environment change and what doesn't die off has offspring and continues.' She paused and thought about it for a while.

'I didn't even want to write the stupid essay. It was all *their* stupid idea. Did it make any sense?'

'Oh yes, J.D., it made all the sense in the world. You know, you sound very smart when you get into it. The last part sounded really smart.'

'I told you that I really got into it.'

'Why did they fail you?'

'Ohh, you'll find out if you keep reading. How about a bit more skating? My brain hurts.'

'Now I'm ready,' she said.

We took off towards the Opera House forecourt. I preferred to follow her because I just couldn't get enough of looking at her. She was all colour with her Holden's cap on backwards and all, and she glided like a ballerina from the Bolshoi or something. She was using the tourists as black and white slalom poles. I wasn't the only one that was knocked-for-a-six by her foxination either. Many of the people stopped, totally blown away, and just gawked. Plenty of them took pictures of her as well let me tell you.

We stopped out in front of the Opera House and waved to the people on a passing ferry. I said,

'Phoebe you skate like a ballerina from the Bolshoi Ballet,' and she smiled and said,

'Do you really think so, J.D.?' and then she asked me, 'Have you seen The Bolshoi?' and I said,

'Are you kidding? Does the Pope wear a dress? My mum and dad are total Bolshoi freaks. I've seen every ballet they've done in Sydney since I've been alive, right in *there*.' I pointed into The Opera House.

'Do you have a favourite ballet?' she asked.

'Yeah, I suppose.' I said, 'The Nutcracker, and Giselle.'

'They are both wonderful,' she said. Then she said, 'You know, J.D., I've been thinking about your environment idea and it can be applied to what happened to the American Indians and even the Australian Aborigines. Their environment changed and the die-out began.'

'Sure,' I said.

'The whites, when they arrived, became part of the environment, part of the selecting process for the indigenous species. All the Indians that were not naturally pre-adapted to deal with the environment change died out. The ones that *were* pre-adapted lived and had kids. In the end a new kind of Indian emerged, one that thrived in the new environment.'

'Today's Indian is the same as yesterday's Indian, I reckon, he's just chasing the environment trying to survive like the rest of us.'

'The environment never stops changing,' she said. 'Something new is always coming along.'

'You know, Phoebe, if they asked me to write the essay again I would have got you to write it for me,' I said.

'And I would have gladly done it for you J.D. You know, the environment is absolutely ruthless, nature is ruthless,' she said. 'The word *sentimentality* does not exist in her lexicon.'

'No,' I said, 'she decimates the weak and stupid with gay abandon.'

Phoebe was standing close, leaning against the handrail. I looked into her aviators and smiled.

'What J.D.?' she said all cute like. I took her hand in mine and just couldn't take my eyes off her. '*I love you, Phoebe,*' I thought, but who had the guts to actually say it. There was a really warm feeling and she just smiled at me really affectionately and tightened her hold of my hand and said really quietly like she read my mind or something, 'Me too, J.D.' Flipped my lid I kid you not.

Later, as we skated towards the Quay, she said that she still couldn't work out why I had to see a shrink. 'You'll have to read some more to figure *that* out, Holden,' I said.

It was extremely crowded at Circular Quay and we had to skate very slowly, at walking speed. It meant that we could hold hands, which suited me just fine if you know what I mean. There were buskers everywhere. There were musicians and singers and jugglers and magicians. We watched a guy pull an egg out of a kid's ear I kid you not. We skated over to a kiosk and I bought us a Coke that we shared. As we stood there watching a lady, all painted up in grey, pretend to be a statue, Phoebe said,

'They're fighting, all these buskers, they're fighting for their survival. They're fighting for their food, they're fighting for their shelter, they're fighting for a mate, to have kids, and if they already have kids, they're fighting for *their* survival. They're fighting the best way they know how in the prevailing environment, which is ruthless.' I looked at her. I was blown away by her. I was constantly seeing a new side to her, more of her, and I was so totally impressed I've got to tell you. The way she said it, like she could see something nobody else could see, and I knew that it was Holden's cap that was doing it because it was doing it to me as well. I saw it burst in colour I swear to God. 'It's all about having kids,' she said. As she said that, I thought about all the junkies in Fitzroy Gardens.

'Drugs,' I said, 'they're part of the hostile environment, part of the process of natural selection.'

'Are you thinking about the druggies we saw in King's Cross?' she asked.

'Yes I am,' I said. 'I wrote about drugs in my essay. I don't think that you've got to that part yet.'

'No, I haven't,' she said, 'but I can't wait.'

'Well, the way I'm seeing it is drugs, heavy ones like heroin, are the new wave of naturally selecting agent, like the storm on the island and the poisonous trees. My dad told me that when he was a kid there was no pressure or temptation from drugs. There were different challenges he said. He said to me, Jerry, you will find a nice girl, you will get married and you will have a few nice children, and then your mama and I will be able to sleep peacefully in our graves. It's clear-cut with them. Just make the grandchildren and their lives will be complete.'

'I can truly understand that,' Phoebe said.

I suggested that we skate somewhere quieter and uncongested, so that we could talk better. We skated off towards The Rocks and lay down on a nice patch of grass, along the way, under a giant Morton Bay Fig.

'When I was preparing my essay I talked to my dad about it to see if he had any ideas and he told me this. He said that we have a line of ancestors that goes right back to, you know, Adam, millions of generations ago. Well, each of those ancestors managed to struggle and survive and have kids, otherwise I wouldn't exist. Millions of years of struggle for our family line, he said. Now it's our turn and we owe them, our ancestors, we owe them for our very existence, he told me. Think of it as your ancestral debt and take it seriously, Jerry, he said. There is a responsibility that comes with this debt, the way I see it, son, he said, and it is that you shouldn't squander your life in some stupid way and end the family line.'

'Be the genetic dead end, kind of,' Phoebe said.

'That's right,' I said, 'the genetic dead end of thousands, maybe millions of unbroken generations of my family. And the thought of failing them for some really stupid reason like heroin, I can't think of a dumber reason. Actually I *can* think of a dumber reason.'

'It's happening to so many people,' she said.

'I know. They get hooked and it's over. No life, no family, no kids. Dead with a needle in your arm. Over. Forever. Dead dead dead.'

'Most everybody doesn't realise what the main game *is* on this planet,' she said all serious like. 'It's the *main game* and everything else is secondary and completely irrelevant in comparison. *I* even know that, and I'm only fifteen. The main game is having kids and having them survive to have kids of their own. That's it! That is evolution in a nutshell the way I see it. If you don't make it to the having kids stage you are part of the dying out.' she said.

'Like those finches that weren't pre-adapted?'

'Precisely. It's so clear, J.D.'

'My brain hurts again,' I said. 'Too much thinking gives me like a pressure and all.'

'You poor little boy,' she kidded me. 'Evolution can be a pretty heavy subject when you really get into it. Let's get out of here then.'

'I know a six-step jump I can show you if you like,' I said.

'Sure, but don't expect *me* to take it. I'm not much of a jumper. But I'll watch. I want to read the rest of your essay later. I want to find out why they sent you to a shrink.'

'Yeah sure, no problem,' I said. 'It's right here in my pack.'

We skated off towards the old part of Sydney called The Rocks. Everywhere around the harbour is paved, and the whole place is like a giant skate park. You can really cut loose if you know what I mean. I watched her glide forwards and backwards and cut beautiful cross-step arcs around all the tourists. She looked absolutely free and made the gliding look totally effortless. I couldn't believe my luck. And as well, she had read *Catcher in the Rye* and was on the same wavelength as I was. And we were the only ones we had seen, since we met, that wore Holden's caps. And we never took them off, I swear to God.

Down at The Rocks, where the six steps were, she sat on a wall and watched me take the big jump a few times. She laughed and clapped and I was really lucky that I stuck all my jumps cause I stacked them as often as not, if you know what I mean. I landed them all solid with my styling, foot-drag technique that I like to use. After the jumps I sat next to her on the wall really close like and

looked her in the face. I wanted to tell her how much I loved her, but I just choked on the words every time I wanted to say them. But I think she knew anyway. I told her that I wanted to take her someplace nice for lunch and she said that I didn't have to. I told her that my mum gave me extra dough to take her to lunch. I said that she said, 'always take a nice girl to a nice lunch, Jerry, and always be a gentleman.' And Phoebe said,

'How much did she give you?'

And I told her, 'Oh, a couple of hundred.'

'Jesus Christ, J.D., you're loaded,' she said laughing.

'My mum and dad don't like me to run short,' I said. 'They always say that a Davidson never runs out of cash.' She just laughed and put her arm around my shoulder. 'Feel like pizza?' I asked flipping my lid. 'I know a great little Italian place. Have you been to the Caminetto around in Playfair Street?'

'No,' she said.

'Well then, Holden, it will be my pleasure to take you there.' She giggled with delight. I swear I never saw her look cuter. I swear to God.

We skated through the narrow cobblestone streets in the old part of Sydney. We turned down Playfair Street and rolled up to the Caminetto, which was in a converted old terrace house. It wasn't too busy. We saw a nice empty table outside. I helped her take her backpack off and we sat down under a big umbrella. A fat old waiter, wearing a big white apron, came out pretty fast, all smiling and Italian.

'Whatta we hava here?' he yelled. 'Two Holdens? Eya knowa thata capa. Eya reada the booka when Eya wasa a bambino. Eya *lova* thata booka. Ita change mya lifa.' He looked at both of us and said, 'Eh, eh, Eya thinka somabody ina *lova* here, eh? Eh, Gino,' he yelled out to another waiter that was cleaning up another table, 'Eh Gino, looka, somabody ina *lova* here. Maybe you playa youra mandolino for them a later, eh?'

Phoebe broke out into uncontrollable laughter. After he went away to get the menu she told me that that was the funniest Italian routine she'd ever seen. He came back a minute later.

'A menu fora the lovabirdsa. Eya maka you a special suprema pizza if you lika. Molto delizioso.' He kissed his fingers.

Gino came over and stood there smiling at Phoebe. 'Bella donna, bella donna,' he said. The fat waiter clipped him over the back of the head and said something to him in Italian. Gino gave him a dirty look and went back to cleaning tables.

We ordered one of those supremes, and a couple of Cokes. There was no real view from the Caminetto, but who needed a view when I had the most foxalicious babe in the world to look at, know what I mean? Gino came around again and asked,

'You neva takea thosa capsas off?' We shook our heads. 'Whata booka Vincenzo talka abouta?'

'Catcher in the Rye,' Phoebe said, 'by J.D. Salinger.'

'Anda isa good?'

'Oh yeah, very, very good,' she said.

'Bella donna, mama mia, bella donna,' he repeated to himself as he went back to his work. I couldn't blame him. Who could blame him?

The Cokes arrived and we started drinking them. We were pretty thirsty from all the skating.

'Can I have another look at your essay, J.D.?' she said all cute like.

'Sure,' I said and pulled it out of my pack.

She was reading and I was looking at her when old Vincenzo came out with the pizza.

'Eyesa puta double everythinga. Eyesa knowa thata lova makea you very hongry.' He slapped his huge stomach with both his hands and said, 'Eyesa lova my wifa, Sofia, molto mucho, anda Eyesa geta hongry alla tima. She giva me a six bambinos and a there isa one a more a ina oven. Ha ha ha.' He walked off singing, 'Ciao, ciao, bambina, un bacio ancora ... E poi per sempre ti perdero ...'

God we laughed.

She hoed into the first slice and completely flipped her lid I kid you not.

'This is the *best* pizza I've *ever* had, J.D. Yum,' she said. As she munched on the pizza she chatted about the essay. 'So you really get into the environment thing here. You start talking about critical selection factors.'

'Are you sure you want to read that thing now, Phoebe?' I said.

'J.D., they made you go to a shrink. So critical selection factors are those factors that absolutely prevent a creature from reproducing itself, from breeding the next generation.'

'Yeah.' I said. I was getting pretty bored with the stupid essay I've got to tell you. It had caused me nothing but grief. She just kept pressing on, though.

'So you make a little list here for humans. Disease, wars, disasters, accidents, drugs and homosexuality. Ohh, I think I see where the trouble is coming from, J.D.'

'Actually, Phoebe, homosexuality should be on top of the list. If you are a flit, doesn't really matter how you got to be that way, you are not going to make kids,' I said. 'It's a total done deal in terms of evolution. It's over for you. You've stopped fighting and it's over, you know, in terms of your role in the evolution of the species. You will not make it across that line and have kids.'

'Of course,' she said matter-of-factly. 'If you are a flit, whether you were born like that or became one for whatever reason, you are a genetic dead end of your family line because you will not go on and have children. And you will not go on and struggle to see your children have children. That's obvious. This has to be part of any discussion about human evolution.'

'Seemed pretty obvious to me,' I said, 'but you should have seen the shit hit the fan when they read it at school.'

She had another swig of Coke and grabbed another slice of pizza and took a big bite out of it. With her mouth full she said, 'God I love this pizza, thanks J.D. You know, it's luck, I suppose, whether you are born a flit. Kind of like the roll of the dice. I mean, people get killed in car accidents every day and become genetic dead ends.'

'Or they drown at the beach,' I said.

'It's just luck. Although I can't see how it could possibly be inherited because a flit's parents couldn't possibly have been flits themselves because they, by definition, should never have had children if they had been flits. In fact every flit must be the first in his whole family line of thousands of generations, maybe millions.'

'And the last,' I said.

'Yeah,' she said, 'because they die out.' Then she said 'It's all just bad luck, I think, and really tragic. So many ancestors' struggles ending in nothing.' She had another swig of Coke then said, 'You know, J.D., this is a really great essay. Actually I know a few boys who flipped into a flit because they thought it was cool. I don't think they were at all born like that. I think they just wanted to get more attention and shock people.'

'To tell you the truth, Phoebe, I really don't care. I don't care what they are or how they got to be that way. It isn't my problem. Not my business. I was just saying in my essay that homosexuality is a primary selecting factor in today's environment that prevents humans from reaching the reproduction stage. That is all I was saying.'

'And you know what?'

'What?' I said.

'We are being told at school that it's OK. I think that it's government policy now.'

'Well, they can think what they like, Phoebe, as long as they don't try to lay their stupid trips on me and call me bullshit names if I don't agree with them. I just think that if somebody reckons they have the right to tell me that it's OK to be gay, I have the right to tell them that it isn't. That is my right and no one will ever take that away from me, not even their stupid shrinks.'

'You know, even many heroin addicts manage to have children,' she said.

'Sure, but most don't,' I said. 'Same with soldiers who get killed fighting a completely phoney war.'

'What if a flit makes a girl pregnant?' she asked.

'Then, by definition, he is not a true flit. He's a phoney. I wasn't writing about phoney flits in my essay.'

'Ahh, I see,' she said stuffing the last piece of pizza slice into her mouth. I laughed because she got sauce over her face.

She laughed back, 'What?'

'You have sauce on your face,' I said as I handed her a napkin.

'You really went to the heart of it in your essay, didn't you J.D.?'

'Yeah, well, I wanted to write about the modern environment and how natural selection works today in the evolution of the human species and all.'

'You described today's winners and losers in the main game on the planet, J.D., the game of evolution. And as always, the losers die out, often into complete extinction, and become nature's rejects.'

'Have you finished with the essay?' I asked cause I was really keen to get onto some other topic. Talking about flits really nishes me senseless I've got to tell you.

'Yes, thank you, J.D. I get the gist of it now.' She handed it back to me. I put it back in my backpack.

'So they called it homophobic.' she said.

'Not only that, my teacher,' the stupid fucking lezzo bitch, 'she called *me* homophobic and then went completely berco after I swore at her. She dragged me to the headmaster's office. The fruitcake that works there, stupid Goldberg, even said my essay was *subversive*.'

'Yes, you mentioned that yesterday. You know, J.D., there is a name for people who think like you.'

'A bad name?' I asked.

'Oh, no no no, on the contrary. I think that you are an *evolutionist*.'

'A what?'

'An evolutionist.'

'An evolutionist?'

'That's right,' she said.

'But that word doesn't even exist,' I said.

'Surprise surprise, J.D., but it actually *does* exist,' she said. And then she said, 'What a harrowing experience the whole thing must have been for you. I really feel for you.'

This girl was amazing. She *felt* for me. Who cared about anything else, all the fucking crap, it was all just static, just scratches on one of my parent's vinyl records. Phoebe was the music and *God* I loved her, I swear to God I did. She grinned, blew out her cheeks under those red earflaps and rubbed her non-existent tummy, and said,

'I am so full I could explode.'

A picture of Phoebe exploding passed through my mind. I laughed because I have such a bent sense of humour. Right about then, old Vincenzo showed up,

carrying two silver goblets full of ice cream, accompanied by Gino carrying a mandolin.

‘For a the younga lova, my besta gelato, ona the housa. One a fora the bella, bella donna anda one a for a the ragazzo fortunato. Gino, coma here anda play somathinga nicea for i giovani amanti.’

Gino shuffled over to our table and began strumming. Vincenzo put his arm around him and they both grinned their biggest grin and began singing,

Penso che un sogno cosi non ritorni mal piu

Mi dipingevo le mani e la faccia di blu ...

Phoebe was out of control laughing with delight, I kid you not. Everybody in the restaurant was looking at us and everybody was smiling. Even people in the street came over and joined in with everybody in the whole of the Caminetto and sang the chorus,

Volare, oh oh...

Cantare ohohohoh...

Nel Blu dipinto di blu

Felice di stare lassu

Gino and Vincenzo sang the next verse and everybody joined in with the chorus again. I could see people from up the street coming over and joining in, I swear to God. Phoebe was blushing a little and having a taste of her ice cream. The chef came out and all the staff and everyone got into the singing. They sang all the verses, all four of them, and when it was all over, everybody clapped and cheered and then slowly went back to whatever they were doing before.

‘Maya God a shower you with a plenty of a bambinos,’ Vincenzo said before he went away. Gino went away mumbling,

‘Bella donna ... mama mia.’

I thought that old Vincenzo went pretty easy on us because he only charged us for the pizza. I told him as I was paying that it wasn’t enough, but he just smiled and said,

‘Fora the bella donna.’ Then he said, ‘Don’ta let her slipa through youra fingersa, eh?’

‘I’ll try not to,’ I said and shook his hand and thanked him. Then he surprised me when he said,

'Ciao, Holden a Caulfield.'

I came back to our table and helped Phoebe with her backpack. As we rolled out into the street she said,

'I can show you the way I like to skate to Darling Harbour if you like.'

'Lead the way,' I said.

We skated around Dawes Point, under the Harbour Bridge and around Walsh Bay up Hickson Road and Sussex Street towards Darling Harbour.

We stopped in the middle of Pyrmont Bridge, the old restored bridge that's just a walkway now, and sat on one of the benches. She took off her pack and showed me some cool moves on her skates. All the people stopped to watch. Later, we slalomed down the steep, brick-paved ski run that slopes off the bridge down to the water of Cockle Bay and into the tourist guts of Darling Harbour. We skated through the Chinese gardens and then through Chinatown and eventually ended up in George Street where we stopped at a café and had a coffee and cake.

I asked what she was doing on the weekend, but she said that she had already planned to go away for two days with her father.

'We're flying up to Noosa for the weekend to take some shots,' she said. 'Daddy is teaching me photography and that's what we're going to do up there. Otherwise, J.D., there's nothing I'd rather do than spend the weekend with you.'

I flipped my lid when she said that.

Then she asked me, 'Are you seeing your shrink next Thursday?'

And I said, 'Yeah.'

And she said, 'Well, if you're taking the rest of the day off, I'll skip school next Thursday and meet you in town like yesterday, at the Archibald Fountain in Hyde Park.'

Most of George Street is gentle downhill all the way down to Circular Quay. We cruised it using all the greys for slalom poles.

That night in my bed I lay there not believing how I had the best day of my life, and how I spent it with the most foxalicious babe in the world, I swear to God.

Half way through *Catcher in the Rye* I still didn't get it. I mean I could relate to the kid Caulfield and all, sort of, I mean he was a spoilt rich kid from New York.

Four schools for Christ's sake. Sixty million copies of *Catcher* had been sold. What the fuck for? Half way through the book I couldn't see it. Even three quarters of the way through. I mean he was a virgin, like me, and I completely understood his reaction to the prostitute, completely. I mean I'm sure I would have chickened out like that. But I think he didn't actually chicken out, I think he wanted more than just fucking, he wanted some affection, but the stupid whore couldn't give it to him, and in the end her stupid lift-driver pimp ripped him off for an extra five bucks and beat him up for good measure. My dad would have fixed that prick up good if he caught up with him. He don't take no shit let me tell you, although you'd never know it. 'Always hide your anger, Jerry,' he says, 'just act and it's finished. And never telegraph your moves. The first time they know about it is when it's all over.'

Suzy and Samantha raved about *Catcher*. But they got something completely different from it than I did. They raved about the language, 1940s and all, and I've got to say that I really loved the language as well, flits and dough and such. And they kept on about what a genius Salinger was and how brilliantly constructed the book was and all, but these things didn't really mean much that I could see, certainly not enough to sell sixty million copies.

Apparently it has been most popular with the kids. Right through all the decades and generations. I think it has something to do with the language. I don't mean the swearing, I mean the dumb talk, like a kid who never read a book in his life would talk. So this kid picks up *Catcher in the Rye* and he reads a few lines and thinks, this guy writes the way I talk, and he keeps reading. That's why all the kids went for it I reckon. There *is* bad language in it, but it's nothing compared to today.

I think the book was banned all over the place, like libraries and such. And then all of a sudden the teachers started putting it on the students' reading lists. I'm not at all sure why that happened.

I thought Holden Caulfield's relationship with his parents was half OK and half fucked. I mean the whole book is about how he went to New York to avoid coming home early so his parents wouldn't find out that he flunked right out of his fourth school. Here is where Holden and I are completely different. My mum

and dad are my best friends. They are always on my side, no matter what, no matter who is right or wrong. I'm not sure if Holden Caulfield had that.

My take on the book didn't become crystal until Salinger got to the Antolini part. Clearly Antolini was a flit and his whole marriage to a rich older woman was a phoney front. Antolini had his eye on the young Holden. He lusted after young boys he did. Clearly he was, or at least he wanted to be a kid-fucker, know what I mean? Well old Holden woke up on Antolini's sofa with the dirty prick Antolini caressing his head like the slimy flitty pig that he was. Holden freaked out and cleared out of Antolini's house like a startled rabbit and all. And that's when I got it, the whole goddamned meaning of the book, everything that J.D. Salinger was trying to say.

I remember sitting on a bus next to this older guy recently, and he was reading the paper. There was an article he was reading about a paedophile. The article said that they caught the prick that raped a whole bunch of young boys. He was being held without bail.

'Terrible thing, paedophilia,' the guy sitting next to me said.

'Think he was a homo?' I asked.

The sonofabitch looked at me real angry like and got all defensive, like a fucking intellectual, and snapped back all flitty like, 'Paedophilia and being gay have nothing to do with one another. They are two completely different things.'

I looked at the goddamned prick and said,

'Yeah, like bacon is different to eggs.' He looked at me shocked like a totally fucking confused moron.

Anyway, back to the book. When Holden was talking to his sister, Phoebe, before he went to Antolini's house, he told her that he wanted to be the catcher in the rye. He saw other kids as walking through a field of rye, with no clear vision, and stumbling over a cliff, which represented the loss of innocence, specifically an assault by a paedophile flit kid-fucker. That is how I see it. And Holden wanted to be the catcher, the hero, the knight in shining armour who warns the kids that there is a cliff up ahead and catches them before they go over. Before they become corrupted by an older, usually fucking flitty sonofabitch, predator kid-fucker. A goddamned paedophile, like all those filthy goddamned catholic priests all over the fucking planet and all.

Except it's not Holden Caulfield that wants to be the catcher in the rye, it's J.D. Salinger with his one and only novel. And he writes the novel in a language that will attract young people, and writes a whole lot of shit just to keep them interested all the way to the Antolini moment and Holden's reaction. Holden's normal, healthy reaction. A reaction of disgust at what Antolini really was, a fucking filthy pervert, and Holden says as much. Salinger, as Holden, pretty much calls all flits perverts, that's my take on it. So Salinger is like the big hero, the knight in shining armour that wrote a story to wake kids up to a world that is chock full of perverted kid-fucking deviates. And he showed the kids how to react, the way Holden Caulfield reacted. He cleared out of there and *never* came back. That's my take on the book. Then it hit me like a Mack truck. Out of the blue it hit me. I realised that I was J.D. Salinger in a previous life. I swear to God I did.

When I was a little kid, like real little, I remember having strange dreams, nightmares sort of. I remember running on a beach, and there was a gale blowing, except it wasn't wind, it was bullets, and I remember pieces of my body being blown away by the gale until there was nothing left. And I remember having another dream. I was surrounded by all these high hills. And as I walked closer to the hills I noticed that they were piles and piles of naked dead bodies and their eyes were all staring at me. I would wake up in the middle of the night screaming in a cold sweat and my mum and dad would come running into my room and my mum would pick me up out of my bed and hug and kiss me for hours telling me that everything was all right and that all those things were nothing but horrible dreams. The nightmares slowly went away as I got older.

The strange thing was that as I read *Catcher in the Rye*, something in me remembered writing it. It was very strange because I couldn't really understand it and I didn't know what came next as I read it, if you know what I mean, but I swear to God I got the strongest feeling that it was mine.

Those early nightmares made me slightly disturbed when I was little, at least that's what they tell me. I've forgotten most of it, but I haven't forgotten the most goddamned scary thing that has ever happened to me, I swear to God, in my whole life.

When I was around about nine years old, I had virtually completely got over all my bad dreams and all, and was as normal as a kid gets if you know what

I mean. I had a friend up the street from our place. He was the same age as me and we were best friends, two pals. His name was Mikey Hockley. Mikey was a great kid cause he just loved to muck around all the time. We mucked around together all the time. Sometimes he would come over to my place and we'd muck around with my toys and sometimes I'd go over to his place and muck around with his toys. Life was pretty good as far as I can remember it. One day, old Mikey got a big slot car set for his birthday. It was huge, nearly a hundred feet of track. His dad helped him set it up and they raced cars on it for hours. His dad and some of his grown-up mates liked to muck around with it at night after Mikey went to sleep, Mikey told me. Anyway, this one day I rode my bike over to Mikey's place to muck around with his slot car set. Mum said to be home well before dinner. That usually meant by four o'clock. When I got there, Mikey answered the door. He told me that his mum and dad had to go out for a couple of hours and not to break anything. We started mucking around with his slot cars when somebody knocked on the door. Mikey got up off the floor to answer it. He came back with a really big guy. It was one of his dad's mates. Mikey told him that his dad was out, but the guy came in anyway. He started playing with the slot cars and saying how he liked racing them and how he had been over in the evenings when Mikey was asleep. He kept looking at me funny and asking me all sorts of questions like where I lived and who my parents were. As we were playing with the slot cars he started putting his hand on my head and stroking it, patting it like. I didn't think anything of it. I was trying to ignore the guy and I just talked to Mikey all the time. Mikey wasn't worried about this guy, I now figure, because he knew him pretty good as one of his dad's mates. But I wasn't liking him at all.

All of a sudden the big guy got up off the floor and took my hand and pulled me up onto my feet. His grip around my wrist was so tight it hurt. He said, 'Come with me kid, I want to show you something.' He called me kid all the time, not Jerry. He never knew my name. I said, a bit scared like, 'Where are we going?' but he just said, 'It's OK, kid, I just want to show you something upstairs.' Stupid Mikey just kept racing his stupid slot car not really thinking that anything was wrong. The big guy made me walk up the stairs with him into Mikey's parent's bedroom. 'I just want to show you something kid,' he kept saying, he was

dragging me now because I was resisting a little. He kept tightening his grip on my wrist until it hurt and when I told him it hurt, he told me to, 'Shut up, kid.'

He closed Mikey's parent's bedroom door and threw me on the bed face down. I started crying and when I tried to get up I felt his giant hand in the middle of my back press me down really hard. I heard him start breathing hard and saying crazy things like, 'Welcome to the real world kid,' and stuff. I couldn't see anything cause I had my face buried in the bed. Suddenly I felt him pull my pants down and my undies too. Then he pulled them right off and made me spread my legs. I could hear him start breathing heavier and even grunting. He was sounding like an animal. Then I felt something in my bottom, I wasn't sure what was going on, there was pounding into my bottom and grunting and hurting and pressing me down on my back. I was crying and trying to tell him that he was hurting me but he just kept grunting like a pig and pounding my bottom. I felt something deep inside, and pain. He kept grunting, 'Take that you little bitch, take that you little bitch,' and pounding and pounding on my bottom. I was crying and I couldn't move because he had his big hand pressing me down on the bed, but all of a sudden, trying to fight back, I managed to turn my head to one side. Around about then I realised that I hadn't taken enough notice of this guy and that I couldn't remember his face. He kept pounding my bottom going, 'Fuck eh, bitch, fuck eh.' With my head turned to the side I spotted a small mirror on a bedside table. I saw his face, plain as dog's balls, reflected in that small mirror. He was too busy pounding my bottom and hurting the Christ out of me to notice that I was watching his face. He was ugly as sin and had a scar on his left cheek. He was sweating and pounding and heaving and going, 'Fuck yeah, fuck yeah,' and the bed was squeaking and bouncing and everything was fucked to hell let me tell you. I went quiet after a while. I stopped crying and I stopped resisting. 'Good bitch,' he said, 'see, it ain't *that* bad, kid.' Then he gave an almighty shove and he grunted extra hard a few times and I felt all this warm goo all over my bottom. He kept pressing me down as he calmed down and said, 'Don't you turn around, kid, or I'll kill you right here and now,' and then he said that if I told my mum and dad he would kill them as well and then he would find me and kill me. He scared the crap out of me saying those things.

I stayed lying on the bed like he told me. He never ever noticed that I saw his face in the mirror on the side table. That face is tattooed on my brain. I see it every time I close my eyes. I will never forget it as long as I live, I swear to God. 'You were a fucking good little bitch, kid,' he said as he opened the bedroom door and left. I felt numb all over. Like shocked. I didn't cry, I just put my undies back on, and my pants, and went downstairs where Mikey was still playing with his slot cars. The big guy was gone. I said to Mikey that I had to go home. When I got home I went straight to my room and went to sleep. I acted normal at dinnertime and nobody noticed that there was anything strange about anything. I went straight to bed after dinner. In the morning, after I had my shower, I noticed some dried blood in my undies, so instead of putting them in the dirty washing basket I threw them away in the rubbish bin.

I think there should be just one penalty for kid-fuckers. A bullet in the head. There should be no other penalty. No prisoners.

That is why I love *Catcher in the Rye* so much. That is why I am J.D. Salinger. That is why I am Holden Caulfield. That is why I am J.D.

I went over the cliff, but many kids won't cause the Catcher will save them. That is *my* take on the book. Everybody has a different take, but that is *my* take. OK?

6

I struggled through the weekend. All I could think about was Phoebe, but she was a million miles away, taking pictures. How come time can travel at such different speeds? On Thursday and Friday it flashed by at the speed of light, I swear to God, but on the weekend everything was moving in ultra slow motion.

I went for a long skate through some of the places I'd been with Phoebe. I didn't go up to the Cross because I just didn't feel like it. Mainly I hung around the harbour and killed time as best I could. I felt a hundred years old by Sunday night.

Monday I went to school. Things had calmed down a bit and I could see that the teachers were trying to put me out of their minds. I think they got themselves all worked up and now they were trying to get over it. Like Mikey's dad used to do. He used to scream his head off at Mikey's mum, while I was there playing with Mikey, and then he'd smash the door as he took off someplace, and Mikey's

mum would run upstairs crying. When he came back later, he was all calm and all trying to be nice and being sorry, and this was all happening while I was there playing with Mikey. That's how my teachers looked, like Mikey's dad when he came back all sorry. They even talked nice to me. What the fuck? These people wanted to send me to fucking counselling. Anyway, it made life easier at school.

I ground through Monday and Tuesday fairly OK. On Wednesday our careers class was going on an excursion. Careers was actually one of my favourite classes. Old Malthouse was the teacher. Everybody liked old Malthouse. That's because there was nothing phoney about him. He called a spade a spade and you could see that he was really interested in our futures.

Malthouse's whole thing was to go out into the world and see the careers in action with our own eyes.

'You've got to see it with your own eyes,' he kept saying to us, 'that way you'll understand it.'

So we always went on an excursion somewhere, once a month. I think that old Malthouse had a gutful of school himself, and of all the phoney bastard teachers he had to work with. He couldn't wait to clear out and you could see it on his face the way he just cheered up as soon as we were out of the gate. He'd have a bit of a dig at some of the other teachers sometimes, and then he'd say,

'Don't you go blabbing, this is just between you and me.'

He called our dickmaster, Wally, cause his name was Wallace, and his fruitcake office assistant, Golly, cause his name was Goldberg. So it was Wally and Golly in the head office at school. And all us kids laughed our brains out, I swear to God. Old Malthouse was such a funny bastard.

They never found out where the term Wally and Golly came from because none of the kids ever told, but it was going around the school like a flu epidemic and everybody laughed their heads off I kid you not. Golly was such a fruit and all the kids talked about how he always arrived at school every day in old Wally's car and how they always left together. Us kids weren't as dumb as the stupid dick teachers liked to make out. But old Malthouse never made us feel stupid.

And Wally and Golly, pretending as hard as they could that they weren't a couple of fruity flits, were the joke of the school and they didn't even know it. We all knew that it was Wally and his little fruit Golly that were behind the *It's OK to*

be Gay campaign going around the school. We all knew where it was coming from, and it was the biggest joke amongst us kids. The dumb pricks and bitches had no idea how totally stupid they all looked to us. They thought that we were just little dumbshits and that we would swallow whatever they fed us. Well, 'fuck that!' went all the kids, 'fuck that!' But we all went along letting them think that we went along with all their flitty bullshit. *Catcher in the Rye* really made everything much clearer for me after I read it, it really did. And the bent pervert bastard teachers expected us to respect them. Yeah, right! We came to school to learn English and Maths and stuff, not who it's OK to fuck. They're in like some kind of fucked-up bubble, our teachers, crapping on in some foreign language. God I get angry sometimes. I swear to God my dad would kill these pricks if he knew what they were up to.

Old Malthouse, though, was cool. We could tell that he was on our side and that he really cared about us, and our future. We really liked old Malthouse and couldn't wait for the next excursion. I remember the first ever careers excursion I ever went on with old Malthouse. I swear to God I'll never forget it, nor will any of the other kids who went, either, I reckon.

'Today I'll show you the type of career you can expect to have if you turn out to be a slacker,' he told us I kid you not. He didn't say anything else. First he took us into the middle of town, early in the morning, and showed us all the bums in Hyde Park. 'This will be you if you get it wrong,' he told us. 'Those benches get mighty uncomfortable at night, trust me,' he said, and it sent shivers of fear through us thinking that *we* could end up complete homeless losers sleeping out in the park at night if we rebelled too much. Old Malthouse knew how to get our attention. But he wasn't through with us yet. He then took us up to King's Cross and we went walking around. He showed us some unconscious alcoholics lying in a gutter. One of them had a pretty badly busted-up face with scabs and all. 'Don't respect the booze enough,' old Malthouse said, 'and this is your future.' I swear to God he was scaring us shitless I do. But he wasn't finished with us yet. He turned down a dirty side street with stinking garbage everywhere and really scary looking people lurking in the shadows. We all bundled tighter together for protection, thinking that old Malthouse had lost his marbles taking us kids to this totally grossed-out place. Then he turned into an even darker

alley, all ghostly and hellish like. He looked up the alley. 'There,' he said, 'come on, walk up slowly.' We walked up slowly, all cringing like, and saw two boys, looking only a few years older than us, sitting in the corner looking half unconscious. There was another one that was lying on the ground asleep, or maybe he was dead. Junkies, I thought. There were needles everywhere and the whole place reeked of shit. We watched one of the boys shoot up with a needle. He didn't even realise that we were there watching. 'Heroin, kids,' old Malthouse said, 'the end of the line.' Then he led us out of there and back into the main street without even looking back. 'These will be *your* careers if you treat life like a joke,' he told us. I will never forget that. I swear to God old Malthouse knew how to get his point across, I swear to God.

From there he took us to the emergency department of St. Vincent's Hospital where we watched them wheel in an unconscious junkie kid that looked younger than we were. It looked like old Malthouse was friends with a nurse in that hospital because she greeted us all friendly like and told us that some weeks as many as half a dozen kids die right in her arms. We saw her wipe away a couple of tears as she told us that part. All us kids were starting to feel like the day was getting pretty heavy, if you know what I mean, but we were definitely getting the message and all.

The last stop on Malthouse's tour of a thousand horrors was the local Mission where we saw every kind of derelict waiting outside. 'They're waiting for a free feed,' Malthouse told us. 'Their kind of career gets you a free feed at the Mission,' he said sarcastically. 'Make life a joke and you can avail yourselves of the Mission's culinary delights as well,' he said. 'Booze and drugs, they're waiting to suck you right in, good and proper, but never forget this,' he told us making a special emphasis of it like a summary of the whole day, 'it is *your* life and it is *your right* to say *NO*. It is your right to say no to *anything* and *everything*.' We knew exactly what anything and everything meant. But the thing he said that really stuck was, 'You think what you saw today looked like hell, well let me tell you bunch of juveniles, there ain't no hell like knowing that you've wasted your life.' We *really* loved old Malthouse, all of us kids did, I kid you not.

Nobody could work out why old Malthouse thought that any of us kids would ever want to become a copper. I suppose he figured that a copper is still a

better career than a junkie or a wino. He organised a visit to the Darlinghurst Police Station for our Wednesday careers excursion. Old Malthouse must have figured he was a real comedian when he told us on Tuesday to have a bloody good shower and to wear all freshly washed clothes because there might be sniffer dogs lurking around the station. And he said,

‘Definitely leave your mary-jew-wanna at home that you might be thinking of bringing along, because I’m onto you bunch of doobie brothers and I wouldn’t put it past you to try something smart like bringing along a couple of jujus if you get my drift. Those sniffer dogs will go for your pocket and anything else that might be near there, like the old family jewels for example, and them kaynines won’t let go until the coppers pour a bucket of cold water over them. By then the only career option you’ll have left is a soprano in the Vienna Boy’s Choir.’

I swear to God he nearly killed us with that story, we laughed so hard. Jesus he was a great teacher, seriously.

So off we went to the old Darlinghurst Police Station, which just happened to be right in the middle of Sydney’s crime and drug district, I kid you not. Darlinghurst was also the centre of Sydney’s gay community and home to the annual Sydney Mardi Gras. Hoo-fucking-ray. Malthouse had the most twisted sense of humour, I think. He couldn’t have picked a better police station to swear us off ever wanting to become a copper than bloody Darlinghurst, I swear to God. Maybe that was the idea all along. Who Knows?

We all piled into a public bus and rode into town where we got off and then walked half way up Oxford Street where we turned off towards Goulburn Street to where the police station was. Old Malthouse made a big point of telling us that the use of the word *pig* was strictly forbidden during the whole of our visit to the station. Old Ross Murray thought he would be funny and asked,

‘Is it OK to snort, sir?’

‘Only if you want to lick the blackboard clean for the rest of the year, Murray,’ was Malthouse’s comeback. Everybody cracked up.

A nice young lady constable greeted us when we got there. Maria Trevato was what it said on her badge. Some of the boys got a bit cheeky whispering sexual inuendos, but old Malthouse sorted them out pretty quick by snarling

something at them about having them fixed and using delicate parts of their anatomies for Christmas ornaments next Christmas. All the girls cracked up.

We started getting the tour. We were dragged through corridors and past offices and rooms and I've got to tell you the truth, I didn't hear a word that was being said because there was no way that I was ever going to end up a bloody copper. I was being bored out of my brain, hanging right at the back of the group when I spotted this huge gorilla, he must have been six two and seriously broad across the shoulders, huge muscles, and I froze in shock, total shock. I got like instant chills of huge fear all over my body. My legs started giving way. I felt myself go into an instant cold sweat. My first thought was to hide someplace or at least turn my head so he couldn't see me, but he came right over and looked me straight in the face and said,

'Enjoying the tour, kid?'

I looked him straight in the eyes and couldn't believe that he was looking at me like he'd never seen me before. He just laughed and carried on chatting up all us kids. I recognised that face instantly. I saw it clear as day every time I closed my eyes. The scar ... the scar made it a slam dunk. This was the bastard prick that raped me when I was nine. And now he was a fucking copper. He moved in amongst our group and got all chatty like, all palsy. I stepped back against a wall, kind of right at the back edge of the group and watched him with total disbelief that he completely didn't recognise me. *'I am sixteen now,'* I thought to myself, *'so I suppose that I must look different enough for him to not recognise my face. Or maybe he never even properly looked at it in the first place. Maybe the prick was too interested in the other end,'* I thought. My shock and fear started to calm down but my anger started to take its place. Then I remembered what my dad always said. 'Never show your anger, Jerry.' So I started acting. I first wanted to find out his name. He had his huge back to me so I had to shuffle around to get a look at his front. The first thing I spotted was that he was a sergeant because I saw three stripes on his sleeve. As I moved further around, he turned slightly and suddenly looked at me real suspicious like. I nearly crapped my pants. He focussed right on my face and it was almost like I was reading his mind, he was thinking, *'Have I ever seen that kid before?'* or maybe, *'What's that kid sneaking around the group like that for?'* I don't know what the fucker was thinking, but it was something, I

knew that much. I was shitting my pants and breaking into a sweat again and my legs were going back to jelly when he suddenly got distracted by old Nigel Palmer, stringbean everybody called him. Nigel was the tallest boy in our class and the best looking. He actually looked a bit like a girl in his facial features, real cute all the girls thought. Actually, he got *all* the girls; he was a bit of a Romeo if you know what I mean. Well, the sarge got a good look at old Nige and started a big conversation with him. I was so relieved that he stopped looking at me because I was really ready to fill my jocks if you get my drift. I moved around the wall a bit more and he gave me another very brief suspicious glance then got back into a very palsy conversation with old Nige. A couple more steps around and I spotted his badge on his huge chest. It said Sergeant Allan Baxtre. I thought, *'What the fuck kind of name is Baxtre?'*

By then the group was splitting up a bit because of the tight space in the corridors and all, and the sarge asked Nige and a couple of other boys if they wanted to check out his office. I asked if I could come along. He looked at me a little weird like again, then said, 'the more the merrier.' As I followed the boys along the corridor I saw him really turn the friendly charm on Nige who was so totally too stupid to have any idea what was going on. But I knew.

When we got to his office the first thing I noticed plastered on his wall was a poster for the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras. It said on the poster that the Mardi Gras was going to be on next Saturday night. I held my tongue cause I was waiting for the right moment to say something. All my fear was gone now. This kid-fucker couldn't place me. He had plenty of good looks at me, but nothing positive registered. I knew that now. I was onto him and he didn't even know who I was. Even today he just called me kid. He still didn't know my name. My fear was going away and the cold sweats and the old bowels were calming down again. Anger and disgust were taking over.

'Don't show your anger, Jerry. Serbs never show anger, they just act.' I kept hearing my dad's words over and over as I played through my mind the brutal rape that that sonofabitch prick pig copper inflicted on me. I remembered how he hurt me and how I bled afterwards and how I was too scared to show the blood to my mum because she'd ask me questions and I would have had to tell her and the kid-fucker copper threatened to kill my parents if I told. I was getting

so fucking angry as I remembered everything, so fucking angry, but I was a good actor, my dad would have been proud of me.

After a few minutes, I asked the sarge,
'Are you patrolling the Mardi Gras, sir?'

He snapped his head around and cut me with a sharp stare, then he softened and smiled,

'Sure, kid, everybody in the station is.'

'How come you've got the poster in your office, sir,' I said.

He looked at me a bit like I was a little snot-nosed smartarse and I could tell that he wanted to get all intimidating and all with me, you know, the way coppers like to do, but he held back and smiled and just said,

'The force has got a reachout going out to the gay and lesbian community. We are embracing the festivities this year, along with everybody else,' he said.

He sounded so fake and so bullshit I can't tell you.

'Where will *you* be, sir?' I asked.

He looked at me with a, *what the fuck is it with this kid?* look and said,

'I will be stationed at the top of Oxford Street, right at the entrance to Taylor Square.'

He turned away from me, a bit short tempered you could notice it, back to old Nige, when I hit him with another one. I was getting a bit under this dick's skin. Getting under someone's skin is one of my specialities.

'Will you be armed, sir?' I asked.

He snapped his head around again with a definitely angry look on his face, but he quickly got his act together and smiled a completely phoney smile.

'We will all be armed,' he said all dick like. 'We are always armed.'

'*Toy pistols I bet,*' I thought to myself.

7

After the tour of the police station was over, old Malthouse set us free to find our own way home. As I stepped out of the police station a whole new type of shock overcame me. Maybe shock isn't the right word. Madness or obsession might be better words, mixed up with a truckload of rage. And this cocktail of toxic emotions wasn't going to go away anytime soon let me tell you. This storm was setting in for keeps. I knew I had to chill. I couldn't let myself get out of

control. I had to cool my anger and work out exactly what I was going to do. In the meantime I was going home.

As I rode the bus home, every tiny detail of the rape, and that bastard Baxtre's face, kept replaying themselves inside my head. It had all been gone out of my head and then I ran into the goddamned sonofabitch again. It took me years to get over it and now it was all back like it never went away, only now it was worse, heaps worse. Now I knew who the prick was and where he worked.

By the time I got off the bus a strange icy calm began to overtake me. An, *I can see you but you don't even know I'm watching* kind of calm. I couldn't believe the way I was feeling. It was, sort of, powerful, detached, focussed, like a predator stalking its prey. I couldn't believe how I was feeling. I had never ever felt like that, ever before, I kid you not. It was almost like, I dare not say it but it's true, it was almost like super evil, like really nasty bad if you know what I mean.

'Bullshit,' I said and laughed. 'Bullshit,' I said again and got myself out of that whole little mental trip that I had got myself into. By the time I got home I was back to as normal in the head as I could possibly get. I said hello to my mum and asked how her day was. When she asked me how the excursion went, I told her that it was very enlightening but that I doubted that I would ever want to become a copper.

'Well, that's nice, Jerry,' she said. 'Don't you worry, you'll figure out what you want to be, all in good time, and if you don't, you can always help your dad in the jewellery business.'

I went to my room, lay on my bed and worked on keeping the scenes of my rape out of my head by thinking about Phoebe, who I was going to see the next day, right after I was through with that dick Donneville. Thoughts about Phoebe were like a fresh breeze in my mind, if you know what I mean, like they blew away all the smoke from the fucking fires of rage that were now constantly pressing in on me and threatening to completely consume me. Jesus Christ, who would have thought that the stupid excursion to the fucking cop shop would have thrown me off my kilter so much? Nobody could have seen something like that coming I reckon. Anyway, it was too late now. I was back in the shit, mentally speaking, and the only thing that kept me from drowning in it was thinking about Phoebe.

8

'How are you feeling today, Jerome?'

How do you think I'm feeling, Donneville? I have to sit here and look at all the impact craters in your face. How do you think I feel?

'OK, doc, but it's J.D., remember?'

'Oh that's right,' he said with a smug smirk on his face. 'J.D. for juvenile delinquent I think was what you said.'

This moron was having a field day.

'You're pretty sharp remembering something like that, doc,' you dumb prick.

'Do you remember what we were talking about last time, Jer ... er, J.D.?'

'I believe it was about how much my parents were paying you, doc,' for this crap.

'No no no, J.D., not that.' Ha ha ha, the smug prick was losing his cool already. 'We began to talk about evolution. Do you remember?' He asked me with this condescending voice like I was some simple idiot.

'Oh ... yeah,' I said really regretting that I'd ever brought that up. The sonofabitch remembered. I was thinking of ways I could distract him when he really surprised me by pulling a folder out of a drawer. He slapped it on top of his huge desk and opened it. He read the heading, 'Evolution by Jerome Davidson,' then looked at me like he had some fucking evidence to a murder or something. Where the fuck did you get that from you prick? That is private. Who gave it to you?

'You got my essay, doc?'

'Affirmative, Jerome. It gives us a much deeper insight into your ... er ... condition.'

'Who gave you my essay, doc? If you don't mind me asking.'

'I can't see what difference it makes if I tell you,' he said. 'It was your headmaster, Mr. Wallace. I've been in correspondence with him since I saw you last, Jerome, all in a good cause, all in a good cause. Everybody just wants to help you, you can rest assured of that fact.'

Holy Christ Almighty. I've seen the goddamned *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest*. I've seen what happened to old Jack Nicholson after they carved out half of

his brain. Do you think I don't know what the fuck you're up to, you dumbshit tigger prick?

'Thank you, doc. I feel *very* restfully assured.'

I was checking if he swallowed it. I think he did, but not completely. The sonofabitch.

'Your teachers seem to think that you have a very *skewed* understanding of the evolutionary process.'

'Yes, doc, I believe that you might be right about that. That's good money my dad is spending on you, doc.'

'What are you telling me, Jerome?'

'What I'm saying, doc, is that I feel that you are doing a great job. I feel that you are helping me already because I've been feeling a lot better since I've been seeing you,' you complete bullshit phoney prick.

'Let *me* be the judge of whether you are feeling better or not, Jerome. That's what I'm being paid for.' He cheesed a smirky grin.

'Why don't you light up your pipe, doc. I don't mind, I swear to God. Are these pictures around your office of your girlfriends, doc?' I said a bit smartarsy. I knew they weren't cause I overheard mum's friend, old Loretta Burkowitz, say to mum during the week, while they were talking about old Iggy Donneville,

'Iggy's as queer as a straight banana, but he doesn't like to advertise it. But *everybody* knows. Didn't *you* know?'

Asking him about the pictures really hit one of his buttons, I could tell. He went for his pipe and started scratching the shit out of it. I saw that he was working on recomposing himself. When he finally got it together he started loading up his pipe and he asked me,

'So how do you get homosexuality mixed up with evolution, Jerome?'

'Does that make me crazy, doc?' I asked.

He looked up from his pipe at me with an intimidating stare and said,

'That is precisely what we are trying to find out here, Jerome.'

Holy cow, this moron thought he was on some kind of roll, like he had some kind of power over me. He hadn't met my dad yet. I wondered how he'd go pulling that sort of bullshit with him. Actually, I had a pretty good idea.

'So are you sure you want to talk about this stuff, doc?' I said. 'Wouldn't you rather we talk about girls and stuff like that? Cause,' I looked at all the girl pictures in his office, and then at him, and I winked, 'cause I can tell, doc, that you're quite a bit of a studmeister around the old foxadelios,' you bullshit sonofabitch phoney fruitcake.

'No, Jerome, tell me about evolution and what it has to do with being gay.'

'Well, there you go, doc,' I said pretending to be all stirred up, 'hijacking a whole good word out of the English language. There are already plenty of other good words that perfectly describe what you are talking about. Why hijack a perfectly good word?'

'Which word? Evolution?'

'No, doc,' you dumb bastard, 'the other one.' He lit his pipe. 'Hope you don't get lung cancer, doc,' I said kind of smartarsy again.

'Evolution, Jerome,' he said a bit irritated.

'OK, doc, but remember that you asked for it.'

He waved his pipe like telling me to get on with it.

'OK, doc, the way I understand it, your two homos, that live together and all, and there isn't anything wrong with that, doc,' an episode of Seinfeld suddenly flashed through my mind, 'if they're the real deal, not a couple of phoneys, well they aren't planning on having any kids, you see, doc. And that's OK. Nothing wrong with that if you know what I mean. Except that it plays into the overall equation of human evolution, you see, because having kids is the main game in human evolution. It's what the whole struggle is all about, doc. Everything else is just a sideshow. In evolution, doc, producing the next generation is the *main game*, and homos have made a decision to bail out of the game and sit it out in the bleachers, if you get my drift, doc.' I was warming up and he was getting really edgy, I could see that. But I kept going because the sonofabitch asked for it. 'Well, the biggest problem about the homos sitting it out in the bleachers, doc, is that they keep sticking their noses into the game and messing with it. It's like the jerks in the bleachers are chucking full cans of beer at the players on the field, trying to take them out if you get my drift. That's what's happening at school, doc. You see? Get it, doc?'

The stupid dick wasn't getting anything. He was working on ways to get *me* out of the main game. Lots of luck, craterface. He was thinking up adjectives to describe my psychosis, I could see it in his eyes. Well he didn't know the half of it. If he knew all of it he would have shat his pants where he sat, he would.

'That was the most disturbing and homophobic description of evolution I've ever heard in my life, Jerome,' he said all passionate like.

'There's another one of those hijacked words, doc.'

'What? Disturbing?'

God you're a dumb shit. 'Er, no, doc, the other one.'

He glared at me like I blasphemed against his god or something.

'Homophobic?' he squealed with his voice breaking into falsetto like a pig.

'That's the one, doc. That word is hijacked, and it's a con job.'

'A *con* job?'

'Yeah, doc. A phobia is supposed to be some kind of disease, like a neurosis, doc, so when you use that word at somebody you're telling them that they are sick. That isn't fair, doc. It's a con job. Like a flimflam. Anyway, doc, I prefer to think of myself as an evolutionist.' I thought I'd hit him with Phoebe's word.

'A what?' he said all stupid like.

'An evolutionist, doc.'

'That word doesn't even exist. You just made it up. You can't just go around making words up, Jerome.'

'What, doc? Like the way you made up that word homophobic?'

I kind of eased the last question to the phoney sonofabitch tigger. I didn't want him to think that I was a total smartarse and all.

He looked angry now. I was getting under that flitty skin of his like a fucking parasite. He looked at me really intimidating like, like really trying to scare me, like I should know that my destiny lay totally in his hands. The stupid prick. He didn't have any idea about my family and how tight and strong we were. I wasn't just me, I was a part of my family and when he threatened me, he threatened all of us, but he was too completely stupid to know that. My dad always said, 'We are a family, and if someone hurts one of us, he hurts all of us. And there is a price that has to be paid for something like that, there is always a price.'

'I'd be careful what I go saying around the place, Jerome. I have to write everything in my report, you know.'

What the fuck? Was this guy a Nazi? Actually I knew that he was a Jew. It's time to change hands, you tigger. 'Sorry, doc,' I said thinking that this dick is like the worst actor in the world. I knew that he was only in it for the dough. I *knew* that. This prick sold out the day he was born. I knew that he was going to start thinking about next week's paycheque from my dad pretty soon. I was waiting for him to start backpedalling any second. 'That's why I'm here, doc,' I said all bullshit like, 'so that you can help straighten me out.' The dumb tigger swallowed *that* all the way up to the reel.

'I'm glad that you feel that way, Jerome. It shows a positive attitude for your rehabilitation.'

'Thanks, doc. And doc?' We were only forty minutes into the hour and I decided to bet my Holden's cap that he'd cut early again and rip my dad off for twenty minutes of session time.'

'Yes, Jerome?'

'Do you think, doc, that maybe we should end on a positive note?'

He looked at his clock and said,

'Good idea, Jerome. We have made some really good progress today. I am going to write you up a script and I'd like you to take your medication every day until I see you next week, OK?'

'Sure, doc, whatever you say. I am in your hands. I feel better already.' I pulled my wallet out of my shoulder bag. 'Oh, and here's dad's cheque for this week, doc. No need for a receipt, he said.'

Donneville grabbed the cheque like a slimy old Shylock and said, 'Thank your father for me, Jerome. I'll be seeing you next week. And don't forget to take your meds, OK?'

'Sure, doc,' you dick.

I couldn't get out of his office fast enough. That moron Donneville was the most phoney bastard I ever met in my whole life. I threw away his bullshit prescription first chance I got. I saw the movie and I knew what the drugs were *really* for. Dough and more dough. The fuckers have no morals.

As I came down in the suicide lift I thought about the essay and how it ended up with Donneville. That dickmaster Wallace gave it to him without even letting me know. He really did. But I wasn't about to waste my time thinking about those jerks. They didn't deserve one more second of my brain time. Not another second.

9

I stepped out into Macquarie Street outside Donneville's building. I pulled my Holden's cap out of my shoulder bag and put it on my head backwards the way I like to wear it. It was cloudy out and threatening rain. Traffic was everywhere and people darted this way and that like zombie robots. There was no need to toss any coins today cause I knew exactly where I was going. This was my lucky day cause I was spending it with Phoebe. She took the day off from school just to be with me.

I took off up Macquarie Street towards Hyde Park. I walked pretty quick, if you know what I mean, because I was keen as mustard to see her and all. I was pretty sure that she was going to show up, but there was still a small part of me that was a bit nervous and all about the possibility that something might have come up or something.

As I walked past that café I had breakfast at the last time I was there, the fat old guy, who I thought might have been the owner and all, came out and called out to me,

'Hey, Holden Caulfield, how are you today?'

'Good,' I said to the fat old guy.

'Come in and have some breakfast,' he said waving me in.

'Can't,' I said, 'got to meet a friend. Might come back.'

I just kept walking because all I could think about was Phoebe's excruciatingly foxalicious face and that slendericious waist that I just wanted to have my arm around. As I crossed the road and entered Hyde Park I spotted it straight away. Holden's red cap stood out in bright red against a totally dull grey. She was sitting by the fountain, just like the first time. My eyes laid upon her like upon a heavenly vision, I swear to God. I was flipping my lid. She spotted me and got to her feet and stood there all ice cool, looking like a movie star. I couldn't believe my eyes, I swear to God I couldn't. It felt like I just smashed out of hell

and fell right into heaven. Like old Donneville was the fucking devil himself and Phoebe was a beautiful angel. That's what it felt like.

She was wearing the same red sneakers and tight, slightly flared blue jeans, and the purple-velvet shirt, unbuttoned, hanging loose over a faded-yellow T-shirt this time. She had her ethnic-style bag over one shoulder and she wore Holden's cap on backwards over her aviator reflectors. I swear to God she was a totally heavenly vision and when she smiled the whole universe flipped its lid, I kid you not. It was killing. I walked up to her, shaking my head.

'Hello, Holden Caulfield,' she said smiling a huge smile.

'Hello, Holden Caulfield,' I said. 'You are a bona fide heavenly vision.'

She spun on the spot like a ballerina, and her hair and shirt and shoulder bag all swung out with centrifugal force and all, and she said,

'Do you really think so, J.D.?'

'Does the pope wear a dress?' I replied. She really laughed at that joke.

When she stopped spinning she stepped up close to me and gave me the biggest hug, even bigger than what Suzie or Samantha give me, or even my mum even. Women seem to *like* hugging me. I must be one goddamned lucky sonofabitch I must.

'How long have you been waiting,' I said.

'Not long,' she said.

'Have you had any breakfast?' I asked her.

'Of course not,' she replied all smirky like. 'I was meeting my friend, J.D. Salinger, who is always loaded with dough, and I figured that I'd much prefer letting him take me to breakfast. So I skipped it this morning. Was I smart to do it, J.D.?'

'You were a proper genius, Phoebe, and I happen to know just the place.'

'I suppose that you've brought another couple of hundred today,' she said.

'Oh, I brought plenty more than that, Phoebe. I came prepared today.' I said it not thinking anything big deal about it cause our house was always rolling in dough. It was always lying around all over the place, wads of it. She giggled all happy like. I said, 'There is a nice café just down Macquarie Street,' and pointed towards it. 'It isn't far.' She flipped my lid as she took my hand and said,

'Well, let's go then, Holden, because I'm absolutely famished.'

When we got to the café, the fat old guy came out all happy and smiles and all. He paused for a second before he went into his welcoming routine because when he got a proper look at Phoebe, the words all gridlocked in his throat. Her absolute foxalation completely derailed the old sonofabitch and all that managed to come out of his mouth, I swear to God, were like gasps for air or something. He gave me that quick *you-lucky-sonofabitch* look that guys give to each other, when one of them is with a foxalicious babe, before he got himself breathing again, and talking and all.

‘What a surprise,’ he said, ‘I have *two* Holden Caulfields as guests today. This is truly my lucky day.’ Then he bowed deeply to Phoebe and said, ‘And I would like to give the lovely young lady a *very* special welcome to my humble café.’

She giggled away all happy and cute like. And all of a sudden it hit me, like lightning out of the blue, it hit me and I realised that all I wanted to do was make her happy. I wanted to make that my mission in life, because, I swear to God, I was so crazy in love with her it was killing.

We sat down outside even though it was threatening to rain.

‘Georgie,’ the fat old guy yelled out to a young waiter, ‘umbrella.’

Georgie came out all obedient like and opened up a huge umbrella that completely covered our table.

‘Now it can rain all it wants to,’ said the fat old guy all jovial like.

‘Coffee and toasteds?’ I said to Phoebe.

‘Sounds just fine J.D.’ she smiled.

‘A couple of black coffees, thank you, and a couple of ham cheese and tomato toasted sandwiches please,’ I said all polite like.

The fat old guy had a couple more palpitations checking out Phoebe then said all congenial like,

‘I make Holden Caulfield, and his *beauuuutiful* friend, the best toasted sandwiches in all of Sydney.’ Then he danced off into the café happy as can be.

‘How was your weekend?’ I asked.

‘Actually it was really fantastic,’ she said. ‘I really liked Noosa and daddy introduced me to the old fashioned way of doing photography.’

‘What, like with film and all?’ I said.

'Yes. It's wonderful. It's so intimate compared to digital. There is so much to know. Daddy has been shooting with film most of his life. He even has a proper darkroom at home. Have you ever seen the film *Blow-Up*?'

'No,' I said. I was surprised because I thought that I was quite a movie connoisseur and all. 'I haven't even heard of that one.'

'Well, it's one of mummy and daddy's favourites. One of mine as well. We have a DVD of it. It came out in 1966, but I personally find it still totally avant-garde today. It was directed by Michelangelo Antonioni. Have you heard of him?'

'Er, no, I don't think so.' I said.

'The young David Hemmings played a cool London fashion photographer who discovers a murder in one of his photographs. There are many very immersing scenes-in-red in his darkroom as he blows up a photograph over and over and discovers a body lying behind a bush. Seen from today's perspective, looking through the time tunnel, the movie is like a homage to black and white film photography, like a passionate romance of it.' Phoebe was on a roll. It all sounded like music to me. 'One of the models that acted in the movie was Veruschka von Lehndorff. She is my favourite model of all time. She was so beautiful. Daddy pointed her out to me and showed me her Internet site, *Veruschka.net*, which has the most creative photography of any girl I've ever seen. So expressive. She wears this makeup all over her body that completely melds her into the most amazing backgrounds. Like an alien with a chameleon suit on. I can see why they chose her for the movie. She is such an artist.'

'You've done it now, Phoebe,' I said. 'Now I *have* to see this movie.'

'Without a doubt,' she said. 'Maybe if you come over and visit us at home I could play it for you.'

'That would be really cool,' I said completely flipping my lid.

It started to rain. There was no wind and the rain was gentle and peacemaking. It made me feel like we were two bugs snug-in-a-rug under that umbrella. The fat old guy came out with the coffees and toasteds.

'It's starting to rain,' he said as he put our breakfast on the table. 'Lucky there is no wind.' Then he looked at Phoebe, bowed and asked, 'Is the lovely young lady OK with everything?'

Phoebe giggled and nodded her head. After the fat old guy backed away, bowing, and went back into the café, Phoebe said,

'Thanks for breakfast J.D. This is really nice. I've been looking forward to this all week.' She put her hand on mine really affectionate like. I totally flipped my lid I swear to God. Then she said,

'You know they've got the trailer of *Blow-Up* on the DVD and the narrator says one of the coolest lines I've ever heard.'

'Oh yeah?'

'Yeah. He says, *Sometimes, reality is the strangest fantasy of all*. How cool is that?'

That sent chills down my spine. I wasn't completely sure why.

We sipped our coffees and munched on our sandwiches. I couldn't take my eyes off her she was such a fox. It was killing. The rain was gently falling and we were the only ones sitting outside. Everything was now a boring monotonal grey. There was no colour anywhere except where Phoebe was. It was like she radiated an aura of colour in a grey universe. The brightest thing was her red Holden's cap on backwards. So cool, I kid you not.

The next time the fat old guy came out to check if we were OK he had Georgie do a tap dance next to him holding an umbrella over him to keep him dry. He walked up to Phoebe and bowed and asked,

'Did Holden tell you about my family?'

'No he didn't,' she said smiling. Then she looked at me and said, all funny like, 'Why didn't you tell me about the nice man's family, Holden?' The fat old guy, still bowing, looked at me like, you know, *like yeah, why didn't you?* and then pulled a wallet out of his back pocket. The wallet was curved in the shape of his butt, European style, and was overflowing with dough when he opened it. Mainly fifties and hundreds that I could see. He pulled a photo out and showed it to Phoebe.

'My three beautiful girls,' he said proud and all. 'And in a little way, just a little way, I have to thank Salinger and his book, because I was a crazy son of a b ... er ... son of a gun when I was a young man. I could have easily gone over ...' He looked at us both with our red caps on backwards, looking like we had materialized out of some other dimension into his life straight out of the book

and his imagination. 'I could have easily gone over the cliff,' he went on, 'but the Catcher caught me like I told Holden the last time he was here. You see?'

'I absolutely understand,' Phoebe said all mature like. *My* take on his story was that he nearly flipped into a flit when he was a young guy, but that reading Catcher somehow stopped him. That was *my* take on it. Then Phoebe said, looking at the photo, 'I think that your daughters are the most beautiful girls I've ever seen.'

The fat old guy was all smiles and super proud and all, and he showed me the photo as well. Well, I learnt something about old Phoebe right then. I figured that she was probably destined for a diplomatic post in some completely pain-in-the-arse country like North Korea or something because when I looked at the photo of the fat old guy's daughters I barely managed to hold back my cringe they were so butt-ugly. An episode of Seinfeld flashed through my head for a second. After the fat old guy left I thought about making a joke about the photo, but I decided to hold my tongue because I didn't want Phoebe to think that I was some kind of shallow sonofabitch. So I let it slide and all. But in my mind I could hear old Phoebe going into raptures telling old Kim-kong-bling, or whatever the fuck his name is, what a fabulous haircut he had. *Best I've ever seen, Prez, honest.* If I was suffering from a terminal disease, and didn't mind getting eaten alive by dogs, and wasn't such a gutless bastard, I'd ask him for the size of his soup bowl.

As we got back into our own conversation, after the fat old guy left, Phoebe told me how her dad snapped some iconic sunset shots of Noosa.

'And he got some really great ones of Hastings Street. That's the main street with all the shops and restaurants. There are a couple of galleries there that are clamouring to show his paintings and they want to sell his prints as well. It's all good business for daddy. He is such a good painter. His technique is quite hypnotic. People just can't get enough of looking at his pictures. Besides appreciating the aesthetic, they keep trying to work out how the hell he paints them.'

'He's not anything like old Pollock is he?' I asked. 'You don't go around *deconstructing* them or anything?'

She laughed, 'No J.D. If you see them, I promise that you'll be able to keep your lunch down.'

I swear to God I was so happy. I was feeling almost like another person. Phoebe's colourlight was blowing this huge black cloud just enough off me that I could see something. But I felt it just under the surface, this simmering fucking volcano, this ice-cool determination that knew exactly what it wanted to do, what it needed to do, to satisfy a raging, raging hunger. Like some wild animal penned inside a razor-wire cage that just wants to rip everything apart and get out, not caring about damage to its own flesh anymore, oh no, it had gone way beyond that point a long time ago. And the first thing it wants to do is rip to pieces the thing that stole away its freedom in the first place. Lacerate the crap out of it. Rip the shit out of it. Get completely savage with it. *FUCKING BLOW ITS BRAINS OUT! AAAAAAAGH!!!!*

But all *that* shit was happening on the inside cause I was a really great actor and all, cause my dad taught me how to be one, if you get my drift. 'Never show your anger, Jerry,' he always said.

'Would you care for another coffee and sandwich, or maybe something else?' I asked her.

'Well, J.D., I don't know. Are you trying to turn me into a fatty-boom-bah or something?'

'Au contraire mademoiselle,' that was all the French I knew, 'only an *insane* person would want to do something like that.'

'Well, I might save myself for lunch then, and just perhaps have another coffee, if, you know, you're having another one as well.'

God she was so cute when she talked. And the way she phrased everything, like she was all the time playing a little game, to, you know, make it all more fun, more memorable. I swear to God I was so in love with her it was killing me stupid.

'I will definitely have another coffee, Phoebe, and what else is there to do that's better than *this* right now? It's just so miserable raining, and it's so nice and cosy under this big umbrella.'

'I so agree, J.D., and the company ain't bad either. Worth stealing a day from school for.' She squeezed my hand. I Flipped my lid I did. Then out of the blue, just making conversation I figured, she asked me, 'Do you have any pet hates, J.D.?'

The question kind of caught me by surprise cause it came out of left field and all. I had a think, then said,

'Well, yeah, I suppose, Phoebe. I guess I really hate people that are ugly on the inside trying to look good on the outside.'

She laughed,

'Oh you really are J.D. Salinger, J.D., and Holden to boot. I hate phonies too, that is *my* pet hate as well. What a coincidence.'

I didn't think it was such a coincidence.

Old Georgie came shuffling around the table, to have another close-up look at Phoebe I reckoned, so I asked him if we could have another couple of coffees. He smiled at Phoebe and backed away very similar to his boss, saying,

'Two blacks coming right up.'

'We're going to need a couple of umbrellas if it keeps raining like this,' I said.

'Or we could just let ourselves get wet,' she said.

'I can't let you get wet,' I said. 'I feel kind of responsible for you. To keep you dry, you know. I mean, if you caught a cold and all, it would all be my fault.'

She laughed and seemed all pleased that I was being protective of her. Then she said,

'That is so nice, J.D., but I'm not a kid anymore. I'm fifteen.'

'Yeah, well, fifteen or fifty, I am still not going to let you catch pneumonia.'

God, I was sliding back into that old kid sister routine. 'OK,' I thought to myself, '*she is not your kid sister and she can get totally drenched for all you care, but she is not your kid sister.*'

Georgie brought our coffees out cheeing like a split coconut at Phoebe. He put them on our table and bowed as he backed away and left. I don't think that the goddamned sonofabitch even saw me that time.

'Got any favourite movies?' she asked me, leaning forward all foxalicious like, holding her coffee up to her mouth with both hands, with both elbows on the table, tight focussed on my face through her movie star reflector aviators. Easy question I thought.

'I'm pretty much a sucker for anything by old Stanley Kubrick,' I said. Then I said, 'I also don't mind anything directed by old Clint Eastwood either. What about you?'

'American directors?' she asked. I could see she was loving this conversation.

'Yeah, OK,' I said cause I wasn't that up on any of the others.

'Well, I hate to be the obvious, but I never miss any of Woody Allen's stuff. I think he is the most European of all the American directors, *and* he writes all his own screenplays. Also I like Alfred Hitchcock, who was actually English, but you know. Grace Kelly in *Rear Window* absolutely knocks me out. She was so beautiful.'

'I liked *Small Time Crooks*,' I said. 'The way success made them phoney.'

'Yes, yes,' she said, 'Allen often deals with some kind of phoniness. It's like a thread running through his whole body of work. Like in *Match Point*, for example. Except that Allen points out in *Match Point* that sometimes luck can have a hand in it, and that sometimes a person can get away with being phoney.'

'Yeah sure,' I said, 'but the movie left me feeling that the phoney guy might have got away with it, but only for a while and that it wouldn't be long before his whole charade came crashing down, maybe only on the inside, as he tried to deal with it psychologically.'

'That guy really creeped me out,' she said. 'I thought he was marvellously played by Jonathan Rhys Meyers. Good actor.'

'I didn't mind Scarlett Johansson,' I said all pretty downbeat like, cause Scarlett Johansson is one of the most totally foxalicious babes on the screen that completely blows my lid every time I see her, I swear to God!

'Most boys like her,' she said with a knowing smile like she could see right through my phoney act. 'Everything about her is voluptuous,' she said, 'like a triple cone with cream and a cherry on top.'

I burst out laughing so hard that I spat out a mouthful of coffee, luckily not over her, and nearly choked to death, she was so funny. She grinned and grinned. When I finally calmed down enough, I said,

'Boy, Phoebe, you really understand guys, don't you?'

'Mummy told me all about you boys,' she said, 'and don't think that I wasn't shocked. But I've recovered.'

'Oh good,' I said laughing. 'It is all so shocking.'

She squeezed my hand again and looked really warmly at me. I knew it was because she appreciated that I stayed a gentleman about it.

Mum always told me, 'Always be a gentleman around girls, Jerry, and never swear and absolutely never say or even insinuate anything dirty or sexual. That kind of talk is just for the boys. And never talk to other boys about girls that you know because it is extremely disrespectful. Always be a gentleman and they'll always love you.'

'I've seen *Rear Window*,' I said, 'and I thought that old Woody kind of borrowed the idea in his *Manhattan Murder Mystery*.'

'I absolutely agree. Maybe he was paying a bit of a homage to Hitchcock.'

'Although I reckon that old Grace Kelly had it all over old Dianne Keaton if you know what I mean.'

'I'm sure most men would agree with you, J.D. And what was your favourite Kubrick movie?'

'Well,' I said, 'even though it's starting to look a bit old, *2001: A Space Odyssey* for sure. It came out in 1968, which puts it in with movies like *The Graduate*, *Bonnie and Clyde* and *The Odd Couple*. We can only imagine how blown out the audiences were when they saw it in those days.'

'He never won anything for it,' she said. 'Nothing. I think he only got nominated for best director. Nobody can even remember who won. It just goes to show you how out of tune those Academy Award people really are. Possibly the greatest movie ever made passed right under their radar.'

'So here we are again,' I said. 'History has shown them up to be nothing more than a bunch of phonies pretending to be movie hotshots, but in truth they were just phonies.'

'Did you know that many people think that NASA got Kubrick to do all the shots of all the moon landings? People are saying that they never even went, that they faked the whole thing. Have you heard that, J.D.?'

'I have, Phoebe. It freaks me out to think that there could be such evil people on this planet. They made a movie about it called, *Capricorn One*, except that one is about a Mars hoax not a Moon hoax. I liked *Dr. Strangelove*.'

'Oh, yes,' she said. 'The best Peter Sellers other than *The Party*.'

'Oh, *The Party*. I laughed so much the first time I saw that movie that I nearly threw up. I could barely breathe for laughing. The opening scene with the bugler has got to be one of the funniest openings to any movie ever made.'

Phoebe started laughing her head off just remembering that scene. 'Peter Sellers, ha ha ha, was a genius,' she said between the laughs. 'That opening scene was even funnier than the one in *It's a Mad Mad Mad World*,' she said.

'Oh yeah,' I said laughing, 'with old Jimmy Durante. Remember how he said, *If you move me I'll break into little pieces*.'

We both broke up into completely uncontrollable laughter. The fat old guy must have seen us cracking up cause he came out bowing at Phoebe and said,

'Is everything OK with you two Caulfields?'

We stopped laughing for a second, looked at him, then looked back at each other and completely broke up in hysterical laughter again. Phoebe tried to be polite and all, and tried to explain when she could get a breath in,

'Sorry, ha ha ha, sorry, we're not laughing at you, ha ha ha, we're laughing at, ha ha ha, the movies, ha ha ha, we are laughing at the movies.'

As I calmed down a bit I asked the fat old guy for the check. He backed away, smiling, probably thinking that we were a couple of proper nutcases. Then Phoebe remembered something. She said,

'You know, J.D., old Holden Caulfield absolutely hated movies.'

'Oh yeah, that's right,' I said. 'How about that.'

It was still raining as we got up. We said goodbye to the fat old guy and Georgie and sprinted off down the street towards the nearest awning. Phoebe squealed with delight as we jumped over a couple of puddles. She held tightly onto my hand as we ran from awning to awning towards Centrepoint where we were going to look for umbrellas.

We got to the arcades and started looking for umbrellas. I said that we wanted just a couple of ordinary umbrellas, but Phoebe surprised me when she suggested that we should just get one big one.

'It will be more snug and all,' she said looking at me with her cute smile and all. Then she said, 'Maybe if we got one of those big golf umbrellas.'

'Oh, good idea,' I said.

So we started wandering through the rat burrows of Centrepoint looking for a golf umbrella. We came to a shop with a whole bunch of umbrellas out in front. There was one stand there with these really quality-looking golf umbrellas. There were all sorts of colours.

'Why don't you choose a colour, Phoebe,' I said.

She smiled her foxalicious smile at me and started to rummage through the umbrellas.

'This one,' she said, 'I like this one.'

She chose a really nice deep-blue colour. I went to open it to check it out properly, but she stopped me, saying,

'Don't open it in here, J.D., because it's bad luck to open an umbrella indoors.'

We were in an underground shopping arcade so I figured that that was indoors enough, so I smiled at her and thanked her for warning me. I paid the lady in the shop for the umbrella. As we left, Phoebe said how she really looked forward to walking through the rain under it with me. When we got back outside into Castlereagh Street it was still raining so we opened the umbrella, which really looked the coolest blue, and walked off under it. Phoebe locked her arm really tight around mine and snuggled up really close to me as we walked. I just flipped my lid when she said,

'Now do you see why I wanted you to get just one umbrella?'

I love you Phoebe, I love you more than life itself, was what I wanted to tell her, but I was such a gutless wonder about it, I can't tell you.

I had no idea where to go so we just started strolling down Castlereagh Street towards Martin Place checking out all the shop windows along the way.

'I know a great place in the rain,' she said.

'Oh yeah? Where?'

'I want it to be a surprise, but I *will* tell you that it's in the Botanic Gardens, that's all I'll tell you.' She tightened her arm around mine all affectionate like. I looked at her face and she looked so happy and all, and I knew that that was all I ever wanted in life, her happiness, I swear to God.

When we got to Martin Place we turned right and walked up to Macquarie Street, which we crossed and headed off into the Domain.

'What kind of music do you like, J.D.?' she asked me as we walked.

'God, Phoebe, that is pretty tough. There is so much music. Let me see. It keeps changing all the time, you know.'

She took her arm out from under my arm and wrapped it around my waist, more affectionate like. I thought that I was going to blow a valve or a gasket or something, I kid you not.

'Well,' I said, 'right at the moment, and you'll probably think, you know, what a dork, but right at the moment I'm kind of a bit into the old Donovan.'

'I love Donovan,' she said.

'Well, right at the moment, meeting you and all,' I looked at her shining face, 'my favourite song is *Catch The Wind*.'

'Oh God that's beautiful, J.D., I swear to God that's so beautiful. Any others?'

'Christ, Phoebe, this is like the bloody Spanish Inquisition.' She squeezed my waist. I put my arm around hers. I thought about it for a while then said,

'Well, some uni friends of mine got me into old Van Morrison. My favourite songs of his are *Astral Weeks* and *Sweet Thing*. Corny eh?'

'On the contrary, J.D.' she said. 'You have very good taste in music. I know Morrison's music very well, and sometimes I love it so much that I even feel like I've been at some of his recording sessions. I love everything about Van Morrison.'

'Wow,' I said, 'what a coincidence.' But I kind of knew it wasn't a coincidence, like the Holden's caps we were wearing on backwards weren't a coincidence. 'What about you, Phoebe, what do you like?'

'Well,' she said, 'I'm a bit of a sucker for Don McLean's *Vincent*, what with being into art and everything.'

'Wow,' I said, 'I like that song.'

'It's strange,' she said, 'because that song makes me feel like I knew Vincent Van Gogh, like I was his friend when he was alive. Don't you think that that is very strange, J.D.?'

'I don't know, Phoebe, lots of things seem strange. Sometimes I'm almost sure that it was me that wrote *Catcher in the Rye*. That *really* feels strange.'

'I know exactly what you mean, J.D., exactly.'

We were walking on wet grass in the gentle rain. The buildings of the city were behind us now and we were surrounded by nothing but the wide-open expanse of the Domain. As well, there were no people around anywhere. I figured because of the rain and all. And all of a sudden like, it felt like we were the only people on the whole planet. Maybe even the only people in the whole fucking universe. That's what it felt like all of a sudden. And when I looked up I saw the deep blue of the giant umbrella, and I felt so much the squeeze of her loving arm around my waist. And I loved her then, right at that moment, I swear to God I loved her so much, and I really felt like I wanted it to last forever. I really felt it so strong that I felt that I didn't even care if I had to die to make it last forever, it was so the most perfecticious feeling of my life that I ever felt. And do you think I had the guts to say something? *'Pigs will fly and dogs will meow first, you gutless chicken,'* I thought.

'Anything else you like?' I asked her.

'Have you heard of Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee?' she said.

'Get out of here, Phoebe,' I said really reacting to what she said.

'What?' she said like all innocent like.

'Get out of here I said ... OK, OK, let me guess the song.' I paused for a moment, for dramatic effect, then said, 'People Get Ready?'

'Oh my God, J.D., you must be a total psychic. How did you know I was going to say that song?'

'Well, Phoebe, it wasn't more than a couple of nights ago, when I was visiting my uni friends, that we spent half the night rocking away to just that one song over and over. They had a few smokes. I had, you know, a couple of puffs that was all, they always give me a couple of puffs, and then everybody in the whole place went completely mental rocking away to Sonny and Brownie singing *People Get Ready* over and over and over. It felt like one of them Baptist revivals,

I kid you not. Like I really got high on that night. And now that's the exact song you mention.'

'Hmmm,' she said, 'how strange. But I really love that song. Sometimes I feel like I was there when they recorded it.'

'I told my uni friends, Samantha and Suzie, about you.' I said. 'I even described you to them and told them about how you like to wear your Holden Caulfield cap around. They said to say hello and they invited you to come to visit sometime if you ever, you know, felt like it or something. They're a bit older but they're OK and all. Nothing bad ever happens there.'

'I am not a very social person actually,' she said. 'But you never know, you know. Who knows?' She said it a little bit sad like, that I couldn't understand.

'Sure,' I said.

The rain started falling heavier, but we were all right because of the big blue umbrella.

'What other music do you like, J.D.?' she asked.

'I don't mind a bit of the old Bob Dylan,' I said.

'You do like the older stuff, don't you?' she said.

'Well, yeah. Sometimes I see myself as a bit of a musical expeditionary, you know, taking expeditions into the past, into the history of music, and you know, Phoebe, the further back I go, the more interesting it gets and all.'

'How interesting,' she said.

'Yeah. I've got this Dylan song rattling around my brain lately. Like an empty garbage can rolling down a hill with a brick in it.'

'You paint a vivid image, J.D.'

'It's called *Things Have Changed*. Have you heard of it?'

'Oh yes, I know it very well,' she said in a bit more quiet voice.

'Right at the moment it really kills me that song,' I said.

She didn't say anything else any more, for a while, she just really hugged my waist really hard again and we walked like that for a while, with our arms around each other, across the wet grass, all alone, just us.

All of a sudden I said, pointing at a pyramid in amongst a bunch of bushes,

'The pyramid?'

She cheesed the most foxalicious grin and said, 'Yeah, it's insane in the rain. And usually there's nobody there on days like that.'

'That's the surprise?' I said.

'Yeah. Are you surprised?' she said.

'Oh yeah. I'm speechless with surprise.' She knew I was Seinfeld kidding.

'Are you *totally* without speech?' she said really funny like.

'Totally. Absolutely no speech,' I said.

We both laughed ourselves stupid I swear to God we did. Old Seinfeld always cracks me up.

'It's the Pyramid Glasshouse,' she said as we walked up to it.

'I knew about it, but I've never been in it,' I said.

'It's amazing, but you have to get it all to yourself otherwise it doesn't work.'

'Oh, really?' I said. 'You mean like pyramid power, the Egyptians and all that crap?'

'It's not crap you know. It's real. But I reckon that if there are other people in it, all the vibrations get all messed up.'

'Oh, the vibrations,' I said, thinking, you know, that I would walk into a cage of starving lions if she asked me to. Then I noticed this weirdacious garden arrangement that totally freaked me out, I kid you not. It was all along one side of the pyramid. There were letters, about six feet high, made out of, kind of, flowering bushes that were only about a foot high. They spelled out two words with a plus sign between them. The words were SEX+DEATH.

'Holy cow, Phoebe, what the hell is it with the flower arrangement?'

'Beats me, J.D., but it sure is weird. Want to go inside?'

'Were those words there the last time you were here?' I asked.

'They're always here. I have no idea why.'

Sex and death. It must have been some goddamned big joke. Some totally stupid deranged dick must have done it. He had to be a total prick. I didn't say too much about it because I didn't want to talk to Phoebe about sex, or death, because you know what mum said, and I loved Phoebe too much to get into that sort of shit with her if you know what I mean.

'Come on J.D.,' she said opening the door, 'I don't think there is anyone in there.'

We stepped inside. She led the way holding my hand.

The first thing I noticed, besides all the tropical plants and all, was the warmth and humidity inside the place. We took our Holden caps off cause it was just too goddamned humid in there. I just froze for a second and just stared at her totally foxalicious face. I swear to God, sometimes it shone with like all this light and all. She smiled at me all cute like and said,

'What, Holden?'

'Nothing,' I said. Then I said, it must have come out in a half-dazed, zombied-out sort of way if you know what I mean, I said, 'You're so beautiful, Phoebe.'

She smiled at me all cute and affectionate like and said, 'No, Holden, it is *you* that is beautiful.' Then she held my hand and said, 'See, there are stairs, and there is a landing up there, like a viewing platform, and it's in just the right spot where all the power comes into a focus.'

I could feel my heart pounding inside my chest I was loving her so much. I just wanted to tell her, but who had the guts? I was such a gutless sonofabitch I was.

We climbed up the stairs to the landing, which I could see now was right in the middle of the whole pyramid. She sat down there and I sat down opposite her. We sat facing each other. She took off her reflector aviators and put them in her bag. So I took off my John Lennons and put them into my bag. We were looking straight at each other sitting down with our legs crossed and all. She took my hands in hers and cheesed a cutatious smile. Flipped my lid again. Outside, the rain was falling.

'I don't feel anything,' I said. 'Am I supposed to feel anything?'

'You don't feel it in the ordinary sense,' she said. 'It is more like how you feel things in dreams.'

'Really? Dreams?' I said.

'Yeah,' she said and looked at me all warm and affectionate like. Sometimes I swear that I got flashes where I saw a really wise lady in that perfect kid's face

of hers. Just something about her. But God I loved her. Then, I have no fucking idea what got me to say it, I said,

‘Do you believe in God, Phoebe?’

She looked really deep into my eyes, like all the way into my soul, I kid you not, and said, ‘See, Holden, *that’s* the power.’ Then she said, ‘You know, I’m probably too young to have any proper idea about God, I mean, I know what I feel, and what mummy and daddy believe in, they really love Krishna and they believe in Karma and reincarnation and stuff like that, and I know what all that is, and daddy always asks his big question, he says it’s *the* big question.’

‘What’s the big question?’ I asked.

‘Does life exist inside the universe or does the universe exist inside life?’ she said.

‘Holy cow,’ I said, ‘I’d have to think about that and all.’

‘Well, I’m not sure that there *is* an answer,’ she said. ‘I’m not sure that there is supposed to be an answer.’

‘What? You mean it’s a question that isn’t supposed to have an answer?’

‘Precisely, Holden. No answer. Like the question, *what is God?*’

‘Ohh,’ I said, ‘I see. There is no answer. The answer doesn’t even exist.’

‘For all we know, Holden, everything, all our lives, and the world and everything that happens, could be just a dream in God’s mind.’

‘Well, shhh,’ I said, ‘please don’t anybody wake God up because I *never* want Him to wake up from *this* dream.’

‘*Ohh, what a killer line,*’ I thought. I don’t know where I found the guts and all. I figured that I must have picked up a shitload of pyramid power to drop a killer line like that.

All of a sudden she put her hands around my neck and gently pulled me towards her. She closed her eyes and I could see those luscious lips coming my way with their cute little foxalicious smile and she gave me this most perfect indescribable kiss right on the lips. It totally flipped my lid, I mean *totally*. Nobody had ever kissed me like that before, ever. The whole pyramid started spinning like one of them rides at Luna Park. Those weren’t just the most fixalicious *looking* lips, they were the most foxalicious *tasting* as well, I kid you not.

As she backed away I realised that I forgot to breathe. I started breathing like I'd just run the marathon. She was just looking at me and smiling and I must have looked all shocked and confused and all, like a total dork. The pyramid was still spinning and I felt all lightheaded and like in a bubble of light or something, when all of a sudden like, the power of the fucking pyramid must have really kicked in because I just came out and said,

'Phoebe, I really love you, you know, really I do.' Oh my God! I said the *I love you* line. Another episode of Seinfeld flashed through my brain. But it turned out all OK because she reassured me back real quick that she loved me too and that she'd never felt so happy since she met me. Then she kissed me again and I completely flipped my lid and blew all the gaskets all at the same time, I swear to God I did.

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I took her to lunch at the Botanic Gardens Restaurant. We walked through the pouring rain snuggled under the big blue umbrella with our arms tight around each other. We had to wait for a few minutes for a table, but she didn't mind. She said,

'I don't mind waiting, J.D., cause I've got nowhere to go and the rest of my life to get there.'

I loved the cute smile that came with that quip. I swear to God I'll never forget it. We both had our Holden caps on backwards. They gave us a really nice table outside under the awning amongst all the garden plants and all. And everything was a million shades of grey except for Phoebe, the love of my life, and her red cap.

After lunch we walked around the harbour and talked about everything under the sun. We were like two best friends. And she never stopped hugging me and every now and then she kissed me and told me that she loved me in a way that absolutely left no doubt in my mind that she did, I swear to God.

Around about sunset we took the Watson's Bay ferry to Rose Bay. On the ferry we talked about when we would see each other again. She looked really sad that the day was coming to an end. She even said,

'I wish this day could last forever, Holden.'

And I said, 'For me it does, Phoebe.' And I couldn't understand why she cried when I said that.

Just as the ferry was coming in to Rose Bay wharf, I asked if I could see her on Saturday, but she said that she couldn't because she had something on with her mum and dad. Then she said, and she was crying when she said it, I couldn't understand why, I figured because she was sad because we were about to part, she pointed at a park bench about a hundred yards away and said,

'Why don't we meet on that bench on Sunday morning, nine o'clock, J.D.'

She was crying. She threw her arms around me and gave me the biggest, most loving kiss out of all of them, right on the lips I kid you not, and the biggest hug, and then she backed away and looked deep into my eyes, like right into my soul again and smiled through her tears and said,

'Till we meet again, J. D. Salinger,'

She began walking away, and I was going to stay on the ferry, but at the last second I jumped off just as it was leaving. I called out to her,

'Phoebe.'

She turned around and I could see that she was really crying, and when she saw me she ran over and threw herself into my arms and hugged and kissed me. And I said,

'I can catch the next ferry, Phoebe. Can we sit on that bench over there, the one you pointed out, and sit together just for a little while more?'

And she said it again, that line of hers, still a bit crying,

'Sure, Holden, I've got nowhere to go and eternity to get there.'

She smiled through her tears the cutest smile you could ever imagine I kid you not. And I looked deeply into her eyes and I don't know where I got the courage, maybe it was residual from the pyramid, and I said to her holding her little hands in mine, I said,

'Phoebe, I know that this might sound like seriously dorky, but really, Phoebe, I love you so much and I really, really want to marry you, you know. I mean it doesn't have to be tomorrow. I mean I can wait. I know it sounds really ...' She stopped me in my tracks and said,

'I *will* marry you J.D. I accept your proposal. I love you too and I'll marry you on Sunday, or the day after, or whenever you like because I do love you as much as it is possible to love anybody. OK?'

I couldn't believe my ears. We were engaged. I gave a loud *yahoo* and people turned and looked at me, but I didn't care because I was going to get married to the most foxalicious babe in the world.

We talked some more but I was so spun out that I can't even remember what it was all about. Soon the ferry came and I had to go. She kissed me again and started crying again, and again said,

'Till we meet again, J.D. Salinger.'

I watched her red cap slowly get further and further away until it finally completely disappeared in the grey. I took the ferry back to the city. From there I caught a bus back home. When I got home I went straight to my room and lay on my bed trying to keep every moment I spent with Phoebe as alive in my fucked-up mind as I could.

12

Friday turned out to be arsehole Friday. Every arsehole in the whole fucking universe seemed to be on my case, I kid you not. By lunchtime my perfect Phoebe bubble had completely caved in, crushed by the pressure of an ocean of arseholes. By Friday night I was completely fucked. I was drowning in the same old ocean of shit I was drowning in after I saw that goddamned kid-fucker Baxtre and before Phoebe came along. And it was all thanks to fucking *arsehole Friday*.

When I closed my eyes, try as hard as I could to see Phoebe's foxalitious face, all I got was that fucking gorilla prick, Baxtre. His ugly face had like taken up residence in my brain again. I was back to when I was a little kid, when that fucking rapist's face kept giving me nightmares and I used to wake up in bed covered in sweat and my own urine and all. I swear to God it was like drowning in hell, in a fucking nightmare if you know what I mean.

I didn't sleep too good all night Friday. I kept waking up with Baxtre pounding my bottom for all it was worth, screaming, 'take that you little bitch'. Fucking Baxtre. If I hadn't seen him at the goddamned police station, everything would have been OK. I was virtually completely over the whole nightmare fucking rape thing and all, completely over it, and I managed to do it without

even telling anyone about it. Sure I was a bit '*problematic*' for a while, but who could blame me. Fuck. And my mum and dad, the way they stuck by me, with a *fuck you* attitude to all the pricks and cunts in school. I was a Davidson and nobody messed with one of us. All the grief they put on me cut close, but it never actually touched me, cause they were too gutless, cause my dad intimidated the shit out of them. Like when that sonofabitch McKerrow's nice shiny new Volvo blew up in the school car park just at the same time as the dick was having me sitting for like eternity outside his fucking office. Boom! and all his office windows all blew in. Bits of Volvo rained down all over the goddamned school for like half an hour. The explosion broke every window on the car park side of the school. McKerrow so shat himself that he virtually instantly disappeared from school and never showed up again. Word went around that he got a transfer, but nobody ever found out to where. A couple of people said that he went to England.

Dad never took no shit from anyone. McKerrow was lucky he got away with his life. Everybody at school talked about the Volvo blowing up. The coppers crawled all over the school like a swarm of cockroaches and all, but they were too dumb to figure anything out. Nothing ever came out of it. The teachers really backed off hassling me for a while after that, I kid you not.

I got up on Saturday morning a bit tired because I didn't get much sleep the night before. The first thing I thought when I woke up was how I wished that I could see Phoebe that day. But it wasn't to be. It fucking wasn't to be. My head was full of shit I kid you not, and rage. There was all this rage just under the surface. I could feel it, and it wanted to absolutely explode like a fucking out of control volcano or something.

I came down to the kitchen where my mum made me some nice breakfast.

'Good morning, Jerry,' she said. 'How is my favourite son this morning?'

She always said that, like a joke, trying always to cheer me up and all, and we have this little routine, like I say, 'But I am your *only* son, mum,' and she says, 'Yes, but you are still my favourite.'

You see? *That* is how people are meant to love each other. Just like that.

'What are you doing today, Jerry?' she asked.

I said that I wasn't sure and she said that she and my dad were visiting the Gavriloviches that night. They were really good friends with the Gavriloviches and my dad had some business interests with old Tito Gavrilovich, but I never really knew any details about that cause that was one of the things that dad kept me kind of really sheltered from. But old Tito's wife Zikica was a really nice lady and really good friends with my mum. The thing about my parents visiting the Gavriloviches was that I usually didn't go. I usually stayed at home because dad always said that it was better that way. I knew what he meant and I never disobeyed him. It's just how it was if you get my drift.

I told my mum that I wasn't sure what I was going to do. I said that maybe I might visit my uni friends, which was what I was thinking. The girls often have the best Saturday nights with lots of uni students dropping in. It never fails to lift me out of whatever mental shitbucket I might be in at the time. So that was what I was thinking at breakfast.

'What about that nice girl you told me about, Jerry, what was her name?'

'Phoebe, mum.'

'That's right, what about her? Maybe you can see her tonight.'

'I wanted to, mum, but she has to do something with her parents. But we actually plan to see each other tomorrow.' I decided not to mention the engagement at all. I was pretty sure that my parents would have completely flipped out if I told them, if you know what I mean, so I didn't even mention it.

'Oh, that's so nice, Jerry. Now tell me, is she nice?'

'Mum, she is the most beautiful girl I've ever seen in my life, I kid you not.'

'Get away, Jerry, get away. I'm so excited for you. When do we get to meet her, eh?'

'I don't know. Soon, I hope. You'll blow your mind when you see her, I swear to God, mum.'

'I'm blowing my mind just from you telling me about her, Jerry. Make sure that you've got enough money for whatever it is you decide to do tonight, OK?'

'OK, mum.'

'More toast?'

'Yes please, mum.'

She was the best mum, I swear to God. Like she knew how to be a friend, know what I mean?

After breakfast I called Suzy just to see what the uni girls were doing that night. Unfortunately she told me that both her and Samantha were visiting their parents over the weekend. I still had no plans and nothing to do. I went back to my room and dropped on my bed. I closed my eyes and saw that prick Baxtre's face again. I swore. I lay there thinking about this and that. What I really wanted to think about was Phoebe and the great day we had together. But fucking Baxtre kept getting in the way. He like kept intruding, uninvited, and it was getting worse, like it wasn't getting better, like it was never going to get better, like it was never going to go away. I was drowning in the shit, no doubts about it, and I spent most of the day thinking about how I could get myself out of it. Dad always taught me, 'Davidsons never quit, never give up. We fight back and fix the sons of bitches. We fix them for good, Jerry, and we end it.'

My parents left the house at about five o'clock. By then I was mad Jack Torrance and I was feeling extremely unstable. Old Stanley would have been very proud of the inside of my brain. Unstable is only a relative term, though, a comparison to a completely fucked-up world full of fucking liars, thieves and deviates, and they're all masquerading as regular people. It's one big masquerade. One big goddamned phoney show. To tell you the truth, I suddenly felt *very* stable, possibly more stable than I ever felt in my whole life, if you know what I mean. It was mainly when I closed my eyes and wanted to see Phoebe's face, but instead saw that kid-fucker Baxtre's face, that I tottered slightly. Ooh, I said tottered. I can't remember ever saying tottered before. It must have been some fucking leftover pyramid power, maybe, sucking the word in from some outer reaches of the goddamned universe.

Suddenly I remembered something else that made me feel power. I jumped out of my bed and went to my parent's room. I opened dad's secret drawer and looked at the shiny, chrome .44 Magnum, one of the most powerful handguns on the planet. I picked it up out of the drawer, along with a box of cartridges, and brought it into my room.

I remembered how the gun was used by old Clint Eastwood in all those *Dirty Harry* movies and how he described to someone that the Magnum *was the*

most powerful handgun in the world and will blow your head clean off. I remembered how in *Sudden Impact* old Dirty Harry uses the all-time bestacious line out of any movie, *Go ahead, punk, make my day.* 'Oh yeah,' I said to myself as I caressed the weapon like it was a woman or something. I was feeling myself becoming a crazy sonofabitch, but I liked it.

I opened the box of cartridges. They were special hollow-point bullets. My dad chose them special I kid you not. He told me all about them when he was teaching me how to shoot the gun.

'A hollow-point bullet is an expanding bullet,' he told me. 'It is intended to expand when it enters a target in order to decrease penetration and disrupt more tissue as it travels through the target.'

He told me that the old hollow point is great if you just want to hurt your target and you don't want the bullet coming out the other side and taking out an unintended bystander.

'The bullet opens up like a mushroom, Jerry, as soon as it hits something.'

He showed me with the coconuts.

'You see, Jerry, how the slug doesn't go far from the coconut. See how it's all opened up like a mushroom, see that, Jerry?' he said as he showed me.

When we shot at the coconuts, I swear to God, they exploded like there was a hand grenade inside them.

'Your .44 Magnum and hollow-point cartridge are a pretty lethal weapon, Jerry. If you shot it at some bastard's head, the top of it would blow clean off.'

Then he said,

'It's probably a teensy-bit overkill if you know what I mean, Jerry, but sometimes just killing someone isn't enough. If the bastard was a real sonofabitch to you, you are gonna want a little more satisfaction than just killing them. That's where the old .44 Magnum comes in real handy. It satisfies like no other gun, you can trust me on that one, son.'

I kid you not that's what my father told me. I also took note at that point that my dad owned no other guns. As a bit of a finale to my lesson, he told me,

'After you blew the sonofabitch's brains out, Jerry, the slug would probably still be in there, somewhere down in the brain soup, between the two eyeballs, because of the excellence of the hollow-point design.'

My dad taught me the .44 Magnum like a plumber would teach his son how to fix a leaky tap, if you get my drift. I can disintegrate a coconut from twenty yards every time now, thanks to my dad. And I don't end up sitting on my arse from the kickback either.

As I loaded six slugs into the chambers of the barrel I thought about Phoebe's pyramid power and how you only felt it in dreams and all, and then I thought about the power of the .44 Magnum. This was power I could feel I kid you not. I could feel it pumping through my whole body and all, and it wasn't some airy-fairy power either, it was the real deal, I swear to God. They should have built a giant .44 Magnum in the Botanic Gardens if they wanted power, that's what they should have done. And then all the flitty sonsofbitches could have called the fucking thing art.

I grabbed my shoulder bag and put it over my shoulder. I was still wearing my pyjamas. I'd been wearing my pyjamas all day. My shoulder bag was black leather, really cool and all. I tried it for size for the .44 Magnum. It fit perfect. You couldn't tell that the gun was even in there. I checked myself out in the mirror, turning this way and that and all, and there was no way of telling that there was a gun in my bag.

I had never been anywhere by myself with the .44 Magnum. Always I was with my dad and always he carried it and only gave it to me when he was ready to let me shoot it. I had a think and all, and I fantasized about walking around with the gun in my bag and nobody knowing that I had it all loaded and all. Just the thought of it gave me a high. Nobody'd know and my dad would never find out because I'd be back before he came home. When my parents visit the Gavriloviches they never come home before two in the morning, sometimes three. Well I figured that I would be back way before then and all. I checked myself out in the mirror again. There was absolutely no way of knowing that I had the gun in my bag, no way.

I decided to go out. I decided to take the .44 Magnum, *the satisfier*, for a romantic stroll around town. That was what I decided.

I rummaged through my clothes. I took off my pyjamas and underpants and looked at myself in the mirror. '*Blank canvas*,' I thought to myself. I put on a clean pair of black undies. '*Good so far*,' I thought. I found my black T-shirt, the one that

had a white cross printed on the front of it and the words *Ride Independent Trucks* printed around the cross. That was one of my favourite T-shirts and it already had a few small holes in it I wore it so much and all. Then I put on my black Wranglers. Over the T-shirt I put on my black denim shirt, which I let hang loose unbuttoned. I put on a pair of black socks and my pair of black DCs. I checked myself out in the mirror. 'Cool,' I thought. *Just one thing missing.* I grabbed my red Holden Caulfield cap and put it on my head backwards, the way I liked it. I looked in the mirror. 'Cool.' I put on my John Lennon purple shades and slipped the shoulder bag over my shoulder. I looked in the mirror. 'Wow, I am walking death,' I thought to myself as I caressed *the satisfier* in my bag. I was about to step out of my bedroom, but I had this irritating feeling that I had forgotten something. Oh yes, some dough, I was going to need some dough. I grabbed a couple of hundred, but the feeling didn't go away. What else? I scanned my room to see if I could see what I might have forgotten. Then I saw it. It was the missing thing. I grabbed my copy of *Catcher in the Rye* and stuffed it down the back pocket of my jeans. Now I was ready. This was going to be fun.

I stepped out of the house into the street. Straight away I felt seriously self-conscious and paranoid that everybody could tell that I had a loaded .44 Magnum in my bag. I looked around but nobody was taking any notice. I walked to the bus stop. There was a guy there. He was carrying a bottle wrapped in a paper bag and he looked drunk.

'Where you goin, kid?' he asked me all slurring his speech and all.

'Oh, just into town,' I said.

'You ain't one of them poofers, are ya, kid?' He laughed a semi-coughing smoker's laugh. 'You ain't goin to that Maarty Graah poofter party are ya, kid?'

I ignored the dick, but he gave me an idea. I saw my bus coming.

'Eh, poofter boy, why won't ya say somethin, poofter boy, fuckin fairy.'

I could have blown that dick's brains out if I wanted to, but I knew that he was just pissed out of his mind and that he had heaps bigger problems than me. Anyway, I was out for a good time.

I rode the bus all the way to Town Hall. I can't tell you how high I was getting, knowing that I *packed heat*, completely illegal and all, and nobody was suspecting anything I kid you not. Another thing I was finding was that the more

people there were around me the more I felt the power. It must have been what really strong drugs must have felt like cause I was really feeling the power coming from my bag and it was voltaging all through my body I swear to God. It felt so good and I wanted more of it. I knew that I needed a fucking bigger crowd. I knew that that was what I needed.

So I figured that the biggest crowd that night was going to be at the Mardi Gras, so that was where I decided to go. Me and *the satisfier*, crushing through a mob ocean full of fucking flits should do the trick, I reckoned.

I walked up Park Street and crossed Elizabeth Street. Then I set off across the southern half of Hyde Park. Already I was seeing every kind of costume. Talk about nuns with fishnet stockings and very flitty guys wearing these little tight pants, showing out their dicks and balls and stuff. By the time I got to *The Pool Of Reflections* in front of the *War Memorial* I felt like I was in flit city. It was like blundering into an ants' nest or something. My dad always said about war memorials and all,

'Military madness, Jerry. But always honour the war dead, son, cause the poor sons of bitches have earned it.'

There were millions of people milling around everywhere. Everyone was all happy and totally out-there flitty as anybody can get. It was like one big party. There were all these floats and laughing and music, and so many people and none of them even suspected that death walked amongst them. God I was feeling the power, I kid you not.

Things began moving and I could see that the parade was just beginning and all. I noticed these guys dressed as nuns holding up signs that said, *Jesus is Gay*. 'What the fuck,' I thought, 'how would they know?' Then I thought about these guys' mission in life.

There must have been a lot of bald ostriches around cause all their feathers were there. I swear to God I'd never seen so many goddamned ostrich feathers in one place.

Everything was pretty wild and the whole big party was starting to move like a river up Oxford Street towards Taylor Square. Either side of the big parade were millions of people who came to watch. They were mostly standing behind barricades about a hundred deep and were screaming and cheering for all they

were worth I kid you not. I started moving up Oxford Street through all the crowd trying not to push and shove too much but still trying to make headway towards Taylor Square cause all of a sudden I got it into my head that I wanted to get a good look at old Baxtre one more time.

I pushed on through the throngs of people that were cheering behind the barriers. And on the other side of the barriers, every fifteen feet or so, there was a copper standing there, looking like a fucking Nazi storm trooper, making sure that nothing got out of hand. And out in the middle of Oxford Street were all the happy, dancing gays and lesbians all celebrating and dancing and beating drums and all. My problem was that I just couldn't see what they were all so fucking happy about letting all their dicks and balls and tits hang out like that. To me the whole fucking thing looked like a death march. It was a goddamned funeral is what it was, and all I could see was a million shades of grey and not one pixel of colour anywhere.

I kept pushing on up Oxford Street. I was looking for Baxtre. I was getting kind of really single minded about it now if you want to know the truth. I was moving pretty good, pretty much keeping up with the parade. There was mayhem and noise and everything was crazy and noisy and all mixed up and whirling around when I spotted him. He was standing just on the other side of the barrier looking at all the dicks and tits and he was obviously having a pretty good time it looked like if you know what I mean. He was bopping away on the spot. I moved up right behind him and put my hand inside my bag. I felt the .44 Magnum in my hand. John Lennon's song, *Happiness is a Warm Gun*, passed through my mind.

I was feeling the power now, oh yeah, I swear to God I was. I was looking at the back of the head of the prick that stole my life away and he didn't even know it. All around me was complete insanity all going crazy like inside some kind of psychotic washing machine stuck on the spin cycle. Everything was nuts except for the inside of my head. All of a sudden I felt calmer than I ever felt before in my whole life. My brain wasn't even thinking. It was tranquil like the inside of that pyramid I suddenly realised. Suddenly Phoebe's pyramid trip all made sense. I was feeling it now and I finally understood it. I wished she were there so that I could have told her about it. It was like the inside of that pyramid was

inside my head and everything went into like ultra slow motion, if you know what I mean.

I looked at the funeral parade of clowns. There was a gap between one float that just passed and the next one. There were people everywhere. I could see four cops on my side and half a dozen of them on the other. I noticed two TV cameras up on special scaffoldings. One was opposite on the other side of the street and the other one was on my side. They were flat out getting the whole show for all the people at home and all. I cocked the hammer of the .44 Mangnum in my shoulder bag and wrapped my right hand tightly around the grip. With my left hand I pressed the red Holden cap firmly down on my head and stepped around a spectator in front of me. Before he got the chance to complain, I bent down and slid under the barrier right behind Baxtre. It was Baxtre's job to prevent people from jumping the barriers, but today the dicks and tits distracted his attention just enough to cause him to make the second-biggest mistake of his life.

The slow motion slowed down into hyper slow motion. I could *really* feel the pyramid kicking in now. My mind was tranquil like I'd just spent twenty years growing vegetables and making candles in a fucking ashram. I stepped out right in front of Baxtre, faced him direct, and asked him,

'You wanna see my dick, Baxtre?'

He looked surprised and shocked in that first nanosecond. The only thing that came out of his mouth was,

'Wha....?'

In the next few microseconds, before he could say any more, all at the same time like my dad taught me, I calmly pulled the .44 Magnum out of my shoulder bag, took a solid stance with my left foot slightly in front of the right, placed my left hand under my right for support, slid my first finger of my right hand inside the trigger guard, brought *the satisfier* up to Baxtre's eye level and from about a foot away, I pulled the trigger.

The .44 Magnum exploded in a flash of flame both out of the barrel as well as out of the sides of the cylinder. The bullet hit Baxtre right between the eyes and caused the top of his head to explode like he had a grenade for a brain. I saw a huge pink cloud of what looked like mince from the butcher explode out of the

top of Baxtre's head. It looked like a pink cloud expanding into grey space. Then I saw Baxtre's eyes stare straight into my eyes with a, *what the fuck just happened?* look. He still didn't realize that the top of his head was gone. The old hollow-point bullet did its job pretty good, I thought, but not perfect because it looked like there must have been some small bit of brain left in the bomb crater on top of his head because it looked like that tiny bit of remaining grey matter was still ticking over. I was looking at him straight in the eyes, cause there was nothing else to look at, and I could swear to God that the goddamned sonofabitch kid-fucker was still thinking. It was like I could read his mind. He was trying to work out which of the kids that he fucked over the years *I* was. His eyes looked like one of those poker machines, except instead of oranges, apples and cherries going around on the wheels, it was little boys' faces. Little *raped* boys' faces. And he was trying to match one of those faces with my face. I was still holding the gun up to what was left of his head and I swear to God I was going to pull that trigger again if he even peeped one little word, the prick. But that wasn't necessary because in the next nanosecond he just rag-dolled to the asphalt, dead as a fucking doornail.

I stood there, looking down at him, feeling the satisfaction, when I heard the screaming start. I looked up and saw all these spectators behind the barricades absolutely covered with Baxtre's brains and blood and gore. It looked like a right proper horror movie and all, I kid you not. The worst screamers were the goddamned women. Everybody started panicking and stampeding like a herd of buffalo in one of them goddamned cowboy movies. Then I heard somebody scream,

'Look out, he's got a gun!'

'*A genius at the Mardi Gras,*' I thought. Life was full of surprises. Then I heard other people scream at the absolute top of their voices,

'The kid in the red cap, he's got the gun!'

I turned around and saw that I had thrown a huge spanner into all the gaiety. The big floats stopped and I saw every single person near me try to back away with the most horrified look on their faces. I wanted to tell them all that I wasn't going to hurt anybody, but I never got the chance. The next thing that happened was that I heard somebody call out,

'Drop the gun!'

Well I had no idea who said it so I turned around, with the gun still in my hand and my finger still on the trigger, trying to see who it was that was talking to me. The next thing that happened was that I heard all these, what sounded like fireworks going off. Hundreds of them I kid you not. All of a sudden it sounded like goddamned Chinese New Year in old Chinatown. I felt something kind of flick my left hand. I looked at it and noticed that the middle finger of my left hand was gone. '*Shit,*' I thought, '*where did my finger go?*' Then something hit my left shoulder and caused me to spin around. As I was spinning I saw all these people who were in the parade dropping to the ground like flies. I was now facing the opposite side of the street when I saw her. The first thing I saw was her red Holden Caulfield cap on backwards. I screamed out at the top of my voice,

'Phoeeeebeeee!'

She started running out into the street towards me in this strange ultra slow motion style. She was wearing the same red sneakers and blue jeans, but the shirt she had on seemed to be made out of millions of gold strands all glistening in the light I kid you not. And the T-shirt she wore underneath seemed to be made out of gleaming, silver chainmail, I swear to God. In her right hand she carried a brilliant silver sword that seemed to shine in its own light. It was about three feet long and the golden cross-guard and pommel on either end of the grip looked like they were encrusted in every type of jewel. She yelled out to me as she ran across the street towards me,

'I've got your back, J.D.'

Then she started to swing that sword at everyone and anyone that got in its way like goddamned Maria Sharapova swinging her tennis racquet around I kid you not. The fireworks kept going off and I could see gays and lesbians and spectators and even a couple of coppers fall to the ground like rag dolls. Everyone that Phoebe pointed her sword at collapsed in a heap. I felt something belt into my side. Then I felt something slam into my chest and then my head. I felt myself falling backwards, but instead of hitting the ground I fell into Phoebe's arms.

Everything went really peaceful as I lay there with my head cradled in her lap and I thought that I saw a wing of some sort, made of some kind of light,

poking out from behind her back if you get my drift. And her face shone like it always used to, all full of colour and all. And I remember telling her how much I loved her and I remember how she told me that she loved me too and how she would love me forever. And she was crying as she told me all those nice things and I watched her tears turn into diamonds and fall all over me, I swear to God.

In the end all I could make out was just us, me and Phoebe, and I somehow knew, I swear to God I just knew, that we were going to be together forever. God I loved that girl. I loved her more than anything I ever loved in my whole life. That's all I can remember.

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TELEVISION

1

We break into our regular program to report that there has been a shooting during the annual Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras. Reports are sketchy, however it is believed that there was a gunman and that a number of people have been shot while the parade was in progress in Oxford Street. A crime scene has been established and a whole block of Oxford Street, west of Taylor Square, and Taylor Square itself, has been cordoned off by the authorities. Everyone has been cleared out of the area and it is impossible at this stage to get a clear picture of what has happened because all media have been excluded until the police determine if there were other shooters in the area and whether it might have been a terrorist attack. No group has yet claimed responsibility for the shooting. It is believed that the shooter died at the scene from multiple bullet wounds. It is uncertain at this stage how many people have been shot and if anyone else is deceased. As soon as we learn more we will bring it to you. We now return you back to *The Biggest Loser*.

2

We now cross to our Eye-in-the-sky for this exclusive report. Are you there, Kent?

I am here Jacki and we are hovering right above Taylor Square and, I have to say, it looks like the aftermath of a war zone down there. Whoa, whoa, the ABC chopper, Ace, the ABC chopper. Christ, that was close. Er, sorry, Jacki. It's crawling with choppers up here. Everybody and his pooch is trying to get a shot of what is happening down there on the ground. OK, OK, we're just manoeuvring around and then we'll try to get you that live shot. In the meantime it appears pretty clear that a whole block of Oxford Street is in total lockdown. People seem to have scattered in both directions away from the scene. They seem to have just left all the floats and a plethora of decorations where they were when the shooting started and just ran away from the carnage. I can see thousands milling around on the western side of the barricades in Oxford Street. They all look like penned-in cattle trapped by the buildings and police vehicles. The police have formed a roadblock at the end of Oxford Street and I don't think that they're letting anyone out. There is also a huge crowd on the eastern side of the police

barriers, east of Taylor Square. They appear to be penned in by the police as well. I'm not sure what the authorities are doing. Maybe they are looking for terrorists and they don't want anyone to get away. There must be at least a few thousand there. The only people moving inside the cordoned-off area appear to be ... here we go ... are you getting the picture now, Jacki? Over.

Yes, clear as a bell, Kent. Thank you.

It's a shocking scene down there, Jacki. There seem to be hundreds of heavily armed paramilitary police in the cordoned-off area and dozens of emergency vehicles of all types. As you can see on your screens, it is a sea of flashing lights.

What are those orange rectangles, Kent? Are they bodies?

Your guess is as good as mine, Jacki, but if they are covered-up bodies, there are at least a couple of dozen of them scattered all over Oxford Street. It looks like a massacre down there, Jacki, a bloody massacre. We can see a break in the barriers where ambulances are coming and going. My guess is that they're taking most of the wounded to St. Vincent's Hospital, which is just a couple of blocks away. There are people lying bleeding on the ground everywhere, Jacki, and now I can see doctors in their white coats getting out of the ambulances and running over. I can see doctors running down the street from the hospital, Jacki. They must have heard about the shootings and just taken off. I can see them tending to many of the injured where they lie.

We have to watch it up here, Jacki, because it's dark and every bloody chopper in the city wants a piece of the same airspace.

Try to hang in there, Kent, and keep giving us those great pictures.

Will do, Jackie, will do. There might be as many as fifty people injured or dead down there, Jacki. I doubt that just one shooter could have done all this, especially with the huge police presence. There must have been multiple shooters. Some of them could still be hiding in the surrounding buildings, is my guess, Jacki. This thing isn't over by a long shot. It's developing the odour of a carefully planned terrorist attack, if you ask me, Jacki ... OH MY GOD NOOOOO!!! NOOOO! OHHH ... MY ... GOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOD!!!

What happened, Kent? Get the camera on it ...

Back up, Ace, fucking back up, oh no, OH MY GOD! Jacki. We've just had a midair right in front of us ... we've been hit by something, I think it was a piece of rotor blade, Jackie ... we're still flying ... are we still flying, Ace? ... We're still flying, Jacki ... oh my God, the ABC and the SBS choppers have had a midair right in front of us and I'm watching them spiralling down, Jackie ...

We're not getting any pictures, Kent, can you give us some pictures.

OK, how's that? Ricky fell on his face when we got hit by the flying debris, but he's up and shooting now ... are you getting the shots?

We got them now, oh my GOD Kent ... OH MY GOD!!!

OK, I'm witnessing ... the choppers have just crashed into the ground and exploded ... OH MY GOD ... one crashed into the middle of the crowd just west of the cordoned ... OH MY GOD NO!!! ... The other one just crashed and exploded east of Taylor Square barricades dead centre of the crowd, Jacki... God help us ... the people, Jacki, the humanity, they were all penned in like cattle, they had nowhere to go, and the helicopters spiralled out of the sky and exploded right in the middle of all the people, Jacki, oh my GOD ... there were two huge explosions ... oh my GOD ... I can see dozens, no, hundreds of people on fire, running on fire, Jacky ... this is the biggest ... this is indescribable ... oh the mass of humanity ... oh ... and now they're stampeding, everyone is panicking and stampeding ... the buildings are catching fire Jacki, the buildings JACKI, either side of the explosions, THEY'RE ALL CATCHING FIRE, JACKI ... and all the floats ... everything is burning, Jacki, everything is on fire, GOD HELP US, GOD HELP US huh huh huh OH MY GOD, JACKI, PEOPLE ARE BURNING, HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE ARE ON FIRE, JACKI ... THE HUMANITY ... AND ALL THE BUILDINGS, JACKI, OXFORD STREET IS AN INFERNO ... JACKIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIII ...

3

It has now been three days since the Oxford Street disaster has happened. It began with a senseless, crazed killing by a lone gunman. After three days, smoke still rises from the ashes of what was once *The Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras*. The tragedy has devastated the whole global gay and lesbian community. Someone from almost every country in the world died three nights ago. Services will be held for the dead on the same day all around the globe. That day, which is still in the planning stages and will be announced as soon as a decision is made,

will be called, forever more, *Global Rainbow Day*. SBS will bring you a 24-hour live coverage of the services around the globe, beginning with the first *Rainbow Service* at *The Pool Of Reflection* in Hyde Park. Protests by the military have been thoroughly denounced as homophobic and highly offensive, as well as, it was adjudicated, illegal. The ashes of the dead will be sprinkled in the pool at the end of the ceremony.

The injunction preventing SBS from televising the recording of the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras still stands. SBS is thus unable to transmit the program in full until further notice. The Police authorities have claimed that the recorded material constitutes evidence in a homicide and have confiscated it until further notice stating that to show the recordings publicly would be highly prejudicial to the case. SBS intends to appeal against the injunction.

Now to the dead. As of last correspondence with the authorities the count is twenty dead and twenty-three injured in the initial shootings. In the subsequent helicopter disaster there were one thousand nine hundred and forty-seven incinerated or crushed to death in the panicked stampede. There were about another three thousand that sustained a whole spectrum of injuries. As we all know, Hyde Park was converted into one giant outdoor hospital with the military providing tents and the majority of the other infrastructure required for such a large disaster.

The Premier declared Oxford Street a disaster area, releasing emergency funds, which were desperately needed for relief operations. He said that the Oxford Street disaster gave the state authorities a great opportunity to fine-tune their response techniques in the event of future calamities.

Now to the footage. After intense negotiations with authorities, SBS has managed to acquire fifty-two seconds of footage of the original shooter. Now, before we show the footage, we are required, as per our agreement with the state police and the coroner, to request that any person who recognises the shooter, and had seen him any time up to two weeks prior to the massacre, to get in contact with the Special Task Force, Darlinghurst Police, and submit their information for possible future evidence. SBS was instructed to say that to withhold such information could be construed in the future as aiding and abetting in a felony and the offenders could be charged under federal law. The

authorities would like SBS to convey to the public that they are searching for the motive that triggered the individual-in-question into action. The Police would also like to convey to the public that, regrettably, all of the eyewitnesses to the shootings were either incinerated in the infernos or crushed to death in the subsequent panicked stampede.

You will notice that the footage released for transmission has no sound. That is because the authorities deemed the transmission of the soundtrack to be prejudicial to the case. Video technicians at SBS, some of the best in the world I might add, have performed a closely detailed forensic analysis of the footage allowed us, and have unearthed some intriguing detail, which may or may not be of relevance to the shooting or the character of the individual. I might say, if I may, that some of the results of our forensic analysis may be quite revelatory. I will say no more about it now because I do not want to spoil the show. I might also add that the footage you are about to see is an SBS exclusive and is being aired for the first time anywhere in the world tonight.

It is our intent to first play the footage through at normal speed. We will then review the film at different speeds and use digital enhancement techniques in our detailed analysis. I must warn viewers that the footage is of an extremely graphic nature. It is absolutely essential that children under the age of fifteen do not watch. That is why we are playing it so late at night. The scene depicts two men being fatally wounded. One suffers a catastrophic head wound while the other receives three shots to the body and one to the head. The footage allowed us by the authorities is all in tight zoom with only the shooter and his victim in the frame. The officers that fired the four shots that disabled and ultimately killed the shooter are not visible in this footage. As a matter of interest, the footage was shot by a camera that was located directly across the street from the incident and elevated ten feet on a scaffolded platform. It is considered fortuitous that the cameraman instinctively zoomed in on the shooter as soon as he slipped under the barricade. The cameraman stated that it was the bright red cap on the shooter's head that initially caught his attention.

We will first roll the footage through at normal speed without comment. Then we will play it in slow motion and provide a running commentary as we do so.

We apologise for the graphic nature of the footage. OK, let's roll it.

Now, let's roll it again in slomo.

We see the shooter slip under the barrier right behind his victim, who is a police sergeant on duty. We see the shooter step right in front of the victim. Although we cannot see the shooter's mouth we believe that he says something to his victim and the victim utters something very brief in return. We see the shooter withdraw a concealed firearm from his shoulder bag, bring it up to the officer's head, firmly holding it in both hands, and without delay pull the trigger, inflicting a catastrophic head wound to the officer who almost immediately falls dead to the ground. We then see the shooter look into the spectators, then half turn and look semi-across the street. Suddenly he looks at his left hand and notices that his middle finger has been shot off, it is assumed by one of the other officers on duty. The shooter then appears to get hit in the left shoulder, which causes him to spin around and face the camera. He then appears to recognise someone on the other side of the street. He appears to call out their name. We believe that our forensic team knows what that name was. He is then hit in the side, then the chest and finally in the head, causing him to drop backwards onto the road, it is assumed either dead or not far from it. That is where the footage ends.

We apologise again for the graphic nature of the footage, however in view of the extreme carnage that this one incident triggered we believe that we are justified in showing it.

Now, the first and most important fact that emerges out of the footage is that the shooter only fired one shot. Twenty additional people, made up of marchers, spectators and two other police officers, died from bullet wounds sustained during a frenetic period of gunfire lasting not much more than roughly twenty seconds. We at SBS believe that possibly as many as a dozen firearms were involved in these shootings.

Our weapons expert identified the handgun in the shooter's hands as a .44 Magnum. He also surmised that the bullet used was of a hollow-point design due to the extremely explosive nature of officer's head wound.

Our forensic team uncovered some very interesting evidence in the video.

One - The red cap worn by the shooter will be very familiar to anyone that has ever read *Catcher in the Rye* written by the reclusive author, J. D. Salinger.

Two - Using digital enhancement we can see that there is a Penguin copy of *Catcher in the Rye* in the back pocket of the shooter. Fortuitously, the back of the shooter's shirt was stuck behind it. The top of the book is red. Although the police have not released any information regarding the shooter, as of yet, SBS believes that when they do, they will confirm that the shooter carried *Catcher in the Rye* to a premeditated murder. The significance of this is that this has happened before. Mark David Chapman, who shot John Lennon, was found with the book in his possession when he committed the crime. John Hinckley, Jr. who shot, but did not kill, US President Ronald Reagan had the book in his hotel room. And Robert John Bardo carried the book when he murdered Rebecca Schaeffer in her apartment in Hollywood. Conspiracy theorists also associate Lee Harvey Oswald, the man widely believed to have assassinated John F. Kennedy, with the novel. And now we have one more. We are unable to give you his name because it has not yet been released.

We do know the deceased officer's name, however, because with digital enhancement we can read it off the nametag pinned to his chest. It is Sergeant Allan Baxtre, and we wish to send our condolences to all his family and friends.

Finally we have consulted a lip reader to tell us what the shooter calls out to someone he sees in the crowd across the street. Clearly, as you can see in this ultra-slow-motion segment, the shooter recognizes a person in the crowd. This person is never seen. So who was he calling out to? We believe that we have a name through the expertise of our lip reader. Now, watch his mouth as we play the segment back a few times. Now say, Phoe...be, Phoe...be, Phoebe. We believe that the shooter called out to a woman and that her name was Phoebe. We also believe, by the look in his eyes, that they made eye contact. Who is this mystery woman? What role did she have to play in the shootings? And could there have been some kind of conspiracy? So far we do not know anything because we have found no one who can remember seeing her.

If you believe that you might know who this Phoebe was, please get in touch with us through our SBS links.

That is where we will wind up tonight's report. We will continue our investigations and will bring you further developments as soon as they come to hand. Good evening.

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DRAGAN

1

'I swear to God I'm getting too old for this shit,' I said to Lanza.

'They'll need a frontend loader to dump all them ashes in the goddamned pool of reflections,' he said.

'You should have more respect for the dead,' I said.

'Yeah, Dragan, like the dead got respect for me.'

'Anyway,' I said, 'I think that they're gonna have a symbolic sprinkling.'

'You want another coffee?' Lanza asked me.

'Naah. I gotta go see the old man of the shooter kid. Did you know that they changed their name to Davidson from Davidovich?'

'No kidding? Sounds Serbian.'

'It is,' I said.

'Mafia?' Lanza trigged.

'Oh yeah, the worst kind.'

'Mafia kid, eh. Be careful, Dragan.'

'Yeah, I know. I'm just gonna have a nice polite jawbone with the guy. Ask if he knows where the kid got the gun. I reckon that he'd still be doing it tough cause the kid was his only son.'

'Like he'll tell ya.'

'Yeah, I know. Anyway I'm outa here. Might catch you later.'

My work is about as twisted as the people I get to investigate. I've been on this case for eighteen months now. It was all hush hush, an internal investigation into one of our own. It came all the way from the top and I was ordered to proceed with total discretion and secrecy. I was ordered to only report to the Chief. Nobody else in the force even knew that I was on the case.

About eighteen months ago two victims gave evidence directly to the Chief, personally and in secret, incriminating Sergeant Allan Baxtre. They claimed that they suffered extreme sexual abuse from Baxtre when they were young children. They were both boys and one of them was only seven when the offences occurred. When the Chief told me the details it turned my stomach.

The Chief's idea was to run surveillance on Baxtre after hours, and gather evidence, and try to save the two victims the trauma of a trial. The Chief figured that they'd been through enough as it was. So he put me on the case.

I'd been tracking Baxtre and working up a pretty good dossier on the bastard. He was a huge man, one of the biggest on the force. And if that didn't scare you enough he had one of those faces that just screamed violence at you. And he had perfected that look in his eyes, that really frightening intimidating look that says that just under this thin veneer of skin is a bomb ready to unleash a huge storm of violence on you. It was a brave or stupid person that looked him directly in the eye.

It didn't take me long to figure out why he was so big. He was a gym junkie. I found out that he was a serious abuser of anabolic steroids as well as a dealer. I already had him for that offence, but I wanted to nail him for the paedophilia. I was quite surprised when I found out that he was a raving queen because he kept that completely hidden from his colleagues at work. He acted completely straight, really manly.

His gym boyfriends had a nickname for him. They called him Anabolic Al. The thought of this gorilla ravaging himself on tiny little boys made my flesh crawl. Although I do not as a rule allow myself to get any personal feelings in a case, I've got to admit that I had developed quite a raging hate for this ratbastard. I hated him so much that I was even contemplating putting a slug through his head myself. But as it turned out, the kid saved me the trouble.

So now all of a sudden I was off the Baxtre case and on the Davidson case. My immediate task was to try to find out where the kid got the gun, as if I didn't know.

Most of your regular Mafiosos, like the Italians and Russkies, prefer to pack heat that they can reasonably well conceal when they carry it around. Not so the Serbs. When you cross one of them they like to put a hole in you that the sun can shine through. And it don't make no difference anyway because your body will never see the light of day, cause that's the other one of the Serbs' traits, the bodies are never found, unless they want them to be found. Their preferred method of making a body disappear is to have it eaten by some type of ravenous beast. I remember once, a couple of years ago, when one morning they found a

foot, a head, and a bunch of bones in the lion enclosure of Taronga Zoo. That person went missing the day before. We all knew that it was a signature Serb Mafia hit except the bastard they took out didn't deserve to live. Everybody was after him. The Serbian boys just saved us a lot of trouble in the end. In general, when it comes to the Serbian Mafia, they never take out anyone that didn't deserve getting taken out in the first place. The other thing about the Serbs is that they keep very low key. They don't peacock around the place and make a huge amount of noise. You don't even know they're around. They do their crooked business very very discretely. But if you cross one of them, you are dead. And the favourite instrument of death for a Serb Mafioso is a .44 Magnum, like the one that the kid that blew Baxtre's brains out all over Oxford Street had.

So I already knew where the kid got the gun, but I also knew that I was never gonna be able to prove it because, like your typical Mafia piece, it was completely untraceable. So this was going to be more like a social visit with no disrespect to a grieving father. You don't get to be in this game for thirty years by being disrespectful to the wrong people at the wrong time.

I walked into his tiny jewellery shop around mid-morning. The little bell on top of the door clinked as I came in. The inside of the shop looked really old fashioned, like back from the fifties. There was a glass counter with some antique looking jewellery. The place looked more like a pawnshop. It wasn't hard to figure out that this business couldn't support a family of mice, much less people. He came out of the back and smiled at me. He looked placid and was very polite.

'Hello. How can I help you?' he said.

'Good morning, Mr. Davidson. I'm Detective Dragan from Darlinghurst Police. Sorry to barge in on you like ...'

'No no no, it's OK. I've been expecting someone, detective ...'

'Just Dragan is OK.'

'I've been expecting you, Dragan.'

'I figured you might have been. Er, sincere condolences Mr. Davidson ...'

'Please, call me Vincent.'

'Really sorry about your loss, er, Vincent, and could you please pass on the whole station's condolences to your wife as well. It can't be easy.'

I couldn't have been any more respectful to Vito Corleone himself. His kid killed one of our officers and I was wishing *him* condolences. I did genuinely feel sorry for him, though, because I had my suspicions about what was at the heart of the shooting. I was still a long way from telling the kid's father though. There was no way of knowing how he would react.

'No it isn't easy,' he replied with genuine sadness. 'And thank you, I will pass on your message, although I am sure that there is another reason for your visit.'

'Yeah, sorry,' I said.

'Why don't we step into my workshop, Dragan,' he suggested, 'and I'll make us a couple of coffees.' He just sounded really sad.

'Thank you,' I said.

'Dragan, that is an unusual name,' he said.

'Belgian parents,' I explained.

'Black and one?' he asked.

'Yes, perfect, Vincent, thank you.'

We sat down on a couple of old chairs. His workshop was obviously where he spent most of his time.

'I suppose that you know why I'm here,' I said as politely as I could.

'I think so,' he said.

'Er, Vincent, if you could shed any light on how your son got his hands on a .44 Magnum?'

His face slumped into total despair when I mentioned the gun. You didn't have to be Einstein to work out that the gun was his and that he was having huge regrets about it.

'I wish I could help you,' he said heavy-hearted.

'So do I,' I said.

'I'm sorry that I can't be of more assistance. Would you like to search my shop? It's OK, just be careful not to break anything if you don't mind.'

'That won't be necessary, Vincent.'

'It is impossible to describe how much I loved my son,' he said. 'My wife is devastated.'

I started to get the feeling like I wanted to leave.

'You know, Dragan, if you like you are welcome to come over to the house for dinner tonight and meet Nadia, my wife. I'm afraid that it won't be very much fun, but she is cooking sarma tonight. Her sarma is so good that you'll even want to eat your fingers afterwards.'

I couldn't believe that he was asking me to dinner despite how he was feeling. He continued,

'You may, if you wish, search the house while you are there. My wife will probably ask if you can be careful about it and not break anything.'

'I don't want to search your house, Vincent. I don't know if I should come so soon after ...' He cut me off mid sentence.

'Any time after six will be OK. We will look forward to seeing you.'

As I walked out of his shop I couldn't believe how I genuinely got a liking to the guy.

It was ten past six when I rang the front door bell. Vincent opened the door and welcomed me into their comfortable but modest house. The house was saturated with the sweet aroma of cooking.

'Come into the kitchen,' he said, 'I'll make you a spritzer.'

I followed him through the neatly decorated house. My heart sank as I spotted photos of their son everywhere. Nadia greeted me warmly. She was dressed all in black and looked pale and gaunt. Her eyes were all vacant and red from crying. She was trying as hard as possible to be a good hostess. I noticed that she was a very beautiful, slim, dark-haired woman, aged perhaps around forty was my guess, but it was difficult to tell because of her mourning. They sat me down at the kitchen table. She spooned some sauce from the sarma and asked me to taste it.

'Is it salty enough?' she asked.

I tasted it. 'It's perfect,' I said. From the moment I walked in through the door they treated me like an old friend.

They tried to smile, but couldn't. Vincent poured some red wine into a tall glass, through a spout out of an actual wooden barrel, and topped it up with genuine mineral water imported from Serbia, and handed it to me.

I decided to sit at the table and say as little as possible. This couple had just lost their only child and they were devastated. I wasn't even sure anymore why I

was even there. I had definitely decided to completely forget about the gun. Technically, the case was already solved. The murderer of Sergeant Baxtre was lying in a freezer at St. Vincent's Hospital with a finger missing and four bullet holes in him. But something else was giving me an almighty itch that just wasn't going to go away until it got scratched. Who the hell was Phoebe? Who the hell was this mystery woman, or girl, that nobody remembered seeing? But *he* saw her. I have watched *all* the footage, everything, all the stuff that nobody is *ever* going to see. And the kid, Jerome, definitely saw a woman across the other side of the street, and he screamed *Phoeeebeee* at the top of his voice just before he got plugged full of holes.

Now, just to set you straight, the reason the footage will never surface into the light of day is this. Everyone on the inside has pretty much Einsteined that the slugs inside the twenty corpses lying in the street after all the shooting stopped came out of cop pistols. Other than Jerome, the cops were the only other people there packing heat. When viewing the video it became pretty clear that the boys-in-blue did most of their firing from the hip, John Wayne style. That sort of gunplay can get mighty addictive and it's hard to stop once you've started. Unfortunately you eventually run out of bullets and that's when the fun stops. One hundred and twenty rounds were fired and only five hit their target. The rest killed twenty other people, including two cops, and left twenty-three more bleeding all over fucking Oxford Street. Nobody knows who shot who, and the force intends to keep it that way. The footage is going to disappear. Basically, the force looks after its own first, and everybody else can go and get fucked. Nobody knows what I have just let you in on. Inside the force only the Chief knows, and a few of us more senior officers. There's lots of new ways we do things, but there are some things that still get done the old fashioned way. I don't think that *that* will ever change.

After dinner we sat around the table. The conversation was very downbeat. Nadia cried a lot and kept wiping her eyes. Vincent poured me a slivovitz. Really gingerly I asked,

'Do you mind if we talk about Jerome? We don't have to if it is too difficult.'

They looked at each other. Vincent put his arm around his wife and consoled her. Then he looked at me and nodded. And Nadia said,

'No, we don't mind. It's OK.'

'We're just trying to establish a reason for his actions,' I said.

'We understand,' said Vincent. 'We would like to know what happened as well.'

So I asked the first question.

'Did Jerome have a girlfriend?'

Nadia immediately responded, 'Yes. He just met a lovely girl. He saw her, I think, three times before ... you know ...'

'That's OK, that's OK,' I said. 'And he told you about her?'

'Oh yes,' Nadia said. 'We were very close with Jerry. We told each other everything.' She started crying again. Vincent consoled her. I felt a bit like a real bastard, but I was a copper and sometimes I had to do this kind of shit.

'Did he tell you her name?' I asked.

'Yes,' Nadia said. 'Her name was Phoebe. She was fifteen and she was very beautiful, Jerry told me.'

'*Bingo*,' I thought. 'Did he tell you where she lived?'

'No, he never mentioned that.'

'Did he have any other close friends?'

'Jerry was a very quiet boy,' Nadia began, 'except for lately when he ran into some trouble at school. He was provoked and he reacted. Anybody would have reacted. He liked his university friends. We live so close to the university and he liked to go there. There were two girls that he was very good friends with, a Suzy and a Samantha, he told me. We never met them and I don't know where they live, but they sounded nice and they sounded like they were very good friends to Jerry.'

She began to cry again. Vincent looked at me so I backed off and shut up for a while. He cuddled his wife then topped up my glass with slivovitz. It was like drinking nitro methane. I could feel the burn all the way down to my arsehole.

After about ten minutes, Nadia calmed down and asked me to go on, so I did.

'Er, this Phoebe,' I said, 'you said he saw her three times.'

'Yes,' said Nadia. 'The last time was the Thursday before ... you know. I think they met and spent the day together in the city. It was after his

appointment with Dr. Donneville. The times before that were the Friday the week before and the Thursday, which was the day they met, er, after another appointment with Dr. Donneville.'

'And they spent both days in the city, you think?'

'Well, yes, that's what Jerry said. He wore his crazy red cap and he told me that that was how he noticed Phoebe, because she was wearing the same cap. He seemed so happy after he met her, Dragan.'

'Thank you so much, Nadia, and Vincent, you have really helped I think. We now know where he was with the mysterious Phoebe, and when. This Dr. Donneville, who is he?'

'He was Jerry's psychiatrist,' Vincent said with a mangled scowl on his face. 'Jerry was seeing him because of the trouble at school.'

'I see,' I said. Then Vincent asked me,

'Do you have any idea why our son shot that man?'

I could have told them my suspicions, but I thought that these people have suffered enough. I was pretty sure that young Jerome must have been one of Baxtre's victims and that the kid decided to take the law into his own hands. But I could never be 100 percent sure. And how do you tell the parents that their little boy got savagely raped by a total animal, sometime in his early youth, and that he was so scared of the fucking prick that he kept it a secret. I don't know how you tell a mum and dad that, especially just after their kid died. And anyway, what good would it do in the end? Baxtre was dead now, and so was the kid, and it was all over.

'I'm sorry,' I said, 'but I have no idea as of yet.'

Then the mother asked me gravely,

'When will I be able to bury my son?'

I answered her like the cold-hearted bastard that I was,

'When the coroner is finished with his enquiry, I'm afraid.'

'How long will that be?' the father asked.

'Your guess is as good as mine,' I said hating my own guts. I decided that I had enough of this shit. I couldn't take any more so I got up to leave. I shook their hands and thanked them. Finally I said,

'Again, I am truly sorry for your loss. And thank you very much for dinner. It was delicious.'

They both looked at the floor for a few moments, with their arms around each other, then Nadia began to cry again. Vincent said,

'I'll see you out, Dragan.'

2

The next day I took a trip out to the University. I thought that I'd try to track down Suzy and Samantha. As it turned out my first shot at using a somewhat less than subtle technique worked like a charm. I went to the biggest cafeteria for lunch and I got the guy behind the counter to page Suzie and Samantha, friends of Jerome, over the P.A. Two minutes later, we were all sitting together at one of the big tables. The girls, although clearly very attractive, looked wasted and pale from obvious extended bouts of crying. As soon as I mentioned Jerome they broke down again. I could see that the university cafeteria wasn't going to be a good place to ask these girls the questions I wanted to ask. So I asked if there was some other place where we could do this and they said that I could come over to their place that night and ask them my questions there. They also said that they could cook me dinner if I liked, and I said that that wasn't necessary, but they said that they were going to knock something up anyway, so I said,

'OK, why not.'

They lived in a typically cluttered-up, messy student flat. You could cut the grief with a knife. I saw heaps of CDs and a player and I imagined the parties that went on in this place, but the atmosphere that night was seriously glum. They offered me a beer and I took it. I sat at the tiny table and watched them fuss at the stove all miserable. I didn't say much. They made spag-bol and we all had some in a bowl with pickles. Nobody talked while we ate.

After dinner, and after they washed up and gave me another beer, we all sat down on a ratty old lounge and started to talk. They brought over a box of Kleenex. I asked,

'What was Jerome like?'

'He was the sweetest boy we knew,' Suzie said, sniffing.

'He was always so quiet and sweet,' Samantha said blowing her nose into a tissue.

'Did he mention a Phoebe?' I asked.

'Oh yes,' Suzy said a bit more upbeat. 'He talked about her a lot the last time we saw him.'

'What did he say?' I asked. 'Did he describe her?'

'Oh yes,' said Samantha, 'in quite a great deal of detail.'

'He certainly was smitten with her,' said Suzie.

'Oh yes, she certainly rang *his* bell,' said Samantha.

'She must have been gorgeous,' said Suzy.

I broke in with another question.

'How did he describe her?'

The girls looked at each other and Suzy said,

'Well she was young, fifteen I think Jerome said, and tall ...'

'And thin ...' Samantha added.

'With long straight hair.'

'And she wore red sneakers and blue jeans.'

'And a purple velvet shirt, open over a T-shirt.'

'And don't forget the cap, the red Holden Caulfield cap.'

'The *what* cap?' I said.

'The Holden Caulfield cap, like in *Catcher in the Rye*.'

'The what?' I said. I was showing my ignorance. I've just never been a reader. Magazines were more my style. The girls looked at each other and then at me. They were a lot more polite than they needed to be. Suzie explained,

'*Catcher in the Rye* is one of the most famous and widely read novels in the whole history of the world. Holden Caulfield is the protagonist. He wears a red hunting cap everywhere, you know, one of those ones with the earflaps and all. Jerome owned one. He bought it after he read my copy of *Catcher*.'

'Oh yeah,' I said, 'he wore it when he shot Baxtre.'

Both girls gasped in shock and dove for the Kleenex box. After they blew their noses and settled down a bit, Samantha continued,

'Well, the way he met Phoebe was that he saw her in Hyde Park, by the fountain, wearing the same red Holden's cap.'

'He was wearing *his* cap at the time,' Suzy explained.

'So what you are saying is that they were both connected by this book and that they both recognised it in each other because of the caps?'

'That is exactly what happened,' said Suzy. 'That's what got Jerome to walk up to her and say hello.'

'I see,' I said. 'And you say that she was fifteen?'

'Yes, that's what Jerome said.'

'Well she must have gone to a school,' I said. 'Did he mention what school she went to?'

'No,' said Suzy.

'But he did tell us that she had the day off because the police were investigating some teachers for touching-up some of the younger school girls. I think that the school was closed for two days, the Thursday when he met her and the day after when Jerome took the day off to be with her,' said Samantha.

'He told us everything,' said Suzie sobbing into a handful of tissues. 'God I loved him.'

'Me too,' said Samantha crying.

'He was such a quiet boy. He hardly said anything.'

'We were completely shocked when we heard that he shot someone.'

'It was completely out of character for him.'

'Yeah, because he was the nicest boy we ever knew.'

The girls both completely broke down into a crying fit. I finished my beer and thanked them for their help. They were a total mess by the time I left.

3

I was really getting places. I now knew Phoebe's age, what she wore and what attracted Jerome to her. The biggest news was that I knew that her school had recently been investigated for some kind of sexual abuse of the young students by the goddamned teachers. I figured that it should be a snap to find out that information. So next morning I cruised into the station figuring that I was going to have this Phoebe mystery nailed in a matter of minutes.

I couldn't have been more wrong. My rhapsody turned into one mongrel black dog, mixed with a solid dose of intrigue. I checked the records and there had been no investigations into any kind of sexual abuse, in any schools in the

whole fucking Sydney basin, on the aforementioned Thursday and Friday. Somebody was spinning a huge yarn. It might have been Suzy and Samantha, but I doubted that, or it might have been Jerome, very likely, or it might have been Phoebe. I was beginning to smell a very pungent rat. The idea that Phoebe might have been fabricating the sexual abuse story was becoming more and more unlikely by the second because it was increasingly looking like old gorgeous, tall, thin, perfect Phoebe didn't even exist. It was all pointing towards young, .44-Magnum Jerry, with the school problem, and the psychiatrist, and I'll bet a year's pay no fucking girlfriend except the one he conjured up in his head. Phoebe was starting to look like one of those imaginary girlfriends that guys who *have* no girlfriends have. I felt sorry for the kid and I really felt sorry for his parents. I started trying to figure out how I was going to break the news to his mother and father, and the two university girls.

4

My theory that young Jerome was completely crackers was only reinforced with the passage of time. As the days passed, witnesses started coming into the station. All of them remembered one thing mainly, Jerome's red cap. Everyone said how stupid it looked on him. I organised their testimony in chronological order, based on time. First it was the people that saw him on the first Thursday, the day he was supposed to have met the mythical Phoebe.

First cab off the rank was a short, fat, Greek café proprietor, Yiannis Papas, who ran a café in Macquarie Street. He said that Jerome stopped twice at his café for breakfast. The first time was on that first Thursday just after he finished with his shrink and just before he was supposed to have met Phoebe. The second time was one week later. On that second Thursday he said that he called out to him as he walked past heading towards Hyde Park, about ten in the morning. He said that he invited him to come in and have some breakfast, but the kid said that he couldn't and that he might be back later. Old Yiannis said that the kid was back within half an hour and that he chose to sit outside in the rain under an umbrella. He remembered that the kid had two coffees and a toasted sandwich for breakfast. When I asked Yiannis if there was anyone else with him he told me that he was on his own. He said, 'The kid was really quiet. He mainly kept to himself.'

The next person of significance was a waitress who worked at The Fountain Café in King's Cross. I knew the establishment well, and as well I was reasonably well acquainted with that particular waitress. I knew that there'd be no bullshit in her evidence. She remembered clearly seeing the red cap on Friday morning a week before the shooting. She remembered how she made a comment about it. When I asked her if anyone was with Jerome she said that he was alone and that he was a particularly quiet and reserved sort of boy.

The next witness was a young salesman from the Ferrari dealership in William Street. He remembered the red cap on that Friday as well, and he also swore that the kid was on his own.

Next there was a jolly fat old waiter, from The Caminetto Restaurant in The Rocks, named Vincenzo Gattellari. He said that Jerome came in to his restaurant for lunch on the Friday. He said that he was wearing his rollerblades and red cap. That was why he remembered him. He said that the kid sat quietly outside in the corner and ate his pizza and had his Coke. When asked if there was anyone with him, Vincenzo said that the kid was alone. He said that Gino, another waiter at the restaurant, could corroborate his story, but I said that that would not be necessary.

The next witness was a lady that worked in an umbrella shop down in Centrepont arcade. She remembered the red cap as Jerome dropped in. She said that he chose and bought a blue golf umbrella. She said that he was a very polite and quiet young man. She also said that there was no one else with him.

Similar evidence came from a waitress from the Botanic Gardens Restaurant.

So there it was. Case closed. Young Jerry was completely off his tree and I doubt that anything that old Donneville, the shrink, might have given him could have helped much. After the whole Phoebe mystery was solved I reduced the chances of Jerome having been one of Baxtre's victims down to fifty fifty. Jerome might have been walking on old terra firma but his head was in cloud cuckoo land with the fairies. I decided to give it a couple of days, just to give myself time to choose my words carefully, before I told Vincent and Nadia, and Suzy and Samantha, that Phoebe wasn't real. Then once I did that, I figured my desk was

clear and I might get to take a couple of weeks off up the Gold Coast. How wrong could a guy be?

5

As it turned out I remained in a serious state of procrastination. I just couldn't summon up the motivation to go and see Vincent and tell him that his kid was a psycho. One time I got as far as the front door of his shop and piked it thinking that I preferred not to get fed to a bunch of pigs, one limb at a time.

Then this crazy show came on TV, this special about Jerome Davidson and what motivated him to kill. I knew nothing about it. Usually the force gets wind of programs about cases that we've recently been involved in. They managed to keep this one completely under the radar. They talked about all sorts of shit like the murder of John Lennon and the attempted assassination of Ronald Reagan, and they linked the crimes with that book, *Catcher in the Rye*.

It was all pretty sensational crap the way these TV people like to do it. They made a big deal of the fact that Jerome was found with the book in his back pocket and that he was dressed in all black. Apparently that fitted somebody's psychological profile of a homicidal psychopath.

The show went through a heap of crap mainly concentrating on Jerome and almost completely ignoring all the other deaths. I could see that what these TV bastards were doing was constructing a post-mortem character assassination of the kid. I'd seen it happen before, usually associated with some political agenda.

An ad came on so I went and got myself a beer. When I sat down again they began to talk about an essay that Jerome wrote for his high school biology class. Apparently it was about evolution. Now they never read the essay. They never even read portions of the essay. They just quoted one sentence. At least they *said* that they quoted it, but you could never be sure about it cause those TV scumbags are lower than a snake's asshole. They'd sell their own goddamned mother for a story.

'Homosexuality is a critical selection factor in human evolution.'

There were gasps that came from the audience. How dare he! The affront! The offence! That was the general vibe. Then they mentioned Jerome's biology teacher and actually brought her out. She was one pain-in-the-arse bitch let me tell you. After one minute I was wondering how come Jerome didn't blow her

brains out instead. Well, she was being egged along pretty good by the presenter, and like the stupid bitch that she was, she went into great detail describing what a dysfunctional, rude, violent and particularly homophobic person Jerome Davidson actually was. You could see that she was a heavily politicised rugmuncher by the way she was carrying on. I hated her instantly. She raved on about how she recommended to have him expelled from school and that he shouldn't return until he had been re-educated. Her word, not mine. I gathered that that was how he ended up at the shrinks. I was already beginning to feel sorry for the kid. The strange thing was that everybody in the show was on her side. There was no one there defending him. I suppose they just saw him as a cold-blooded killer, and now they were doing a proper hatchet job on a dead guy.

Next the headmaster, Wallace, came on with his assistant. Suspect duo those two. Anyway, they went on in pretty much the same vein as the biology bitch. Homophobia this and homophobia that, and counselling and re-education. They completely took Jerome apart. They kind of went into some kind of euphoric frenzy bagging the kid and actually had to be actively stopped by the presenter.

The coup de grace of the evening was old Donneville, the shrink, all puffed up full of his own importance, smoking an unlit pipe.

'Jerome Davidson was an advanced psychotic,' he said. 'His psychosis more than likely stemmed from his inordinate hate of gay and lesbian people. Hostility and discrimination against homosexual individuals are well-established facts. One psychoanalytic explanation is that anxiety about the possibility of being or becoming a homosexual may be a major factor in homophobia. Homophobia is the result of repressed homosexual urges, or a form of latent homosexuality. Studies have indicated that individuals who score in the homophobic range and admit negative affect toward homosexuality demonstrate significant sexual arousal to male homosexual erotic stimuli.'

The headmaster butted in,

'This is what we are now trying to teach the kids in primary school.'

The shrink looked at him sideways, like, get out of my spotlight, mate. He then said,

'Mr. Wallace is correct. The earlier that homophobia is diagnosed, the more successfully it can be treated. In the future we would like to begin testing all primary school children by giving them homosexual erotic stimuli. Any homophobia detected at such an early age can easily be dealt with by utilising such techniques as counselling and electronic aversion therapy.'

'Like in the movie *Clockwork Orange*?' asked the presenter.

'Precisely,' said the shrink.

The presenter then asked the shrink,

'So in summary, doctor, are you saying that homophobia is actually a symptom of latent and repressed homosexuality?'

'That is correct,' said the shrink.

'And that Jerome Davidson was actually totally gay?'

'Absolutely as queer as a straight banana,' said the shrink.

'So he may not have been as bad as we thought,' said the headmaster.

'He was a horror,' said the biology teacher. 'He swore at me, repeatedly calling me a lezzo bitch, and he used the F word over and over again.'

'And is it your assertion, doctor, that this pathological homophobia of Davidson's was clearly demonstrated in his essay on evolution?' asked the presenter.

'Clearly,' said the shrink sticking his pipe in his mouth and looking regal.

'And his decision to kill?'

'I believe,' said the shrink, 'that his homicidal tendencies arose from his psychosis, which in turn arose from his homophobia.'

'So if you are homophobic,' said the presenter, 'you will more than likely end up killing someone? Like in that movie, *American Beauty*.'

'More than likely, if you don't get appropriate treatment on time.'

'What kind of treatment is being considered by the profession, doctor?'

'Currently we favour electronic brain stimulation. A couple of thousand volts usually therapies the homophobia out of anyone. However if that should fail, if for example our machines are unable to generate enough voltage, I can see no other alternative but frontal lobotomy.'

Everyone on the stage grinned from ear to ear. I checked the station. It was a bloody government station. My taxes were paying for this shit. Anyway, the

show ended with dead Jerome and his family name being totally humiliated and disgraced. I could have almost predicted what was going to happen next, but I let that slide. Instead I waited a few more days to pass, then I went and visited Vincent in his shop.

6

The little bell rang as I stepped into Vincent's shop. I was nervous as hell. I could hear his voice echoing inside my brain, going, 'my pigs will be very interested in the fact that you called my son a psycho.' I needed a stiff drink, a bit of the old Dutch courage. Then I thought to myself, '*You're supposed to be a tough cop. Yeah, but these Serbs are like goddamned white pointers, you don't even see them until half of you is already gone. Sometimes you never even see them at all.*' I was thinking all this crap as Vincent walked out through the back door. He smiled a little and welcomed me as politely as the last time.

'Hello, Dragan. This time I *wasn't* expecting you.' Maybe he wasn't, maybe he was.

'Hi, Vincent,' I said. 'Apologies for coming unannounced like this. I can come back if it's inconvenient.' If maybe you're working on some heisted jewellery, or perhaps bagging the odd arm or leg or something.

'You are always welcome in my shop, Dragan. Do you have time for coffee?'

'Sure, a coffee would really hit the spot.'

'Come in and take a load off.' He ushered me into the back room and closed the door. I sat on the same chair that I sat on the last time I was there. He took a brown tin off a shelf. It had Vittoria Coffee printed on the side of it. He popped the top and stuck the tin under my nose.

'Smell that,' he said.

I smelt the sweetest roasted coffee imaginable.

'Ooh, that *does* smell good, Vincent,' I said.

'Nadia roasted the beans fresh this morning,' he said. Then he said, 'How would you like me to make you Turkish coffee the old fashioned way?'

'Please don't go to any trouble on my behalf, Vincent,' I said thinking how Serbs do lots of things the old fashioned way.

'Nonsense, it will be my pleasure. This is how we drink coffee at home. Nadia is the real expert. No one can make it like her. Jerry has been drinking it for years as well.'

I looked down. I didn't want to look into his eyes when he mentioned his son. Like I was feeling some kind of respect maybe, or fear, I wasn't exactly sure. He mentioned Jerry's name without any show of emotion whatsoever. The last time I was there, every time he mentioned Jerry it was with extreme sadness and dejection, but not today. Today it was a very matter-of-fact mention of Jerry's name, as if nothing had ever happened. Like, if you were trying to read what was going on inside Vincent's mind, you couldn't, because he wasn't giving any clues. That worried me a bit. I wondered if he had seen the TV show in which that moron shrink and those teachers completely humiliated his deceased son. If he had seen it he certainly wasn't showing it. In the end I didn't think that he had, because *if* he had, I reckoned that he would have probably been raging with anger and completely unapproachable. But old Vincent was as calm as an autumn afternoon. I was sure that there was no way that he saw the show and I certainly wasn't going to be the one to tell him about it. I had enough on my plate as it was.

He took the brown tin and poured some coffee beans into a brass grinder. He closed the tin, placed it back on the shelf and sat down on the other chair. He then began to turn the handle on top of the grinder.

'It only takes about five minutes,' he said.

I couldn't believe that he was making me a cup of coffee from scratch. Back at the station I was used to watered-down Nescafe in a dirty cup. As he ground he spoke.

'Poor Nadia, she has been through hell. I have been thinking about taking her for a small holiday. To get away from everything for a few days.'

'I have been feeling the same way, Vincent,' I said. 'I was thinking about a break up on the Gold Coast with the wife.' Two weeks of lying around a pool, wifey by my side, drinking screwdrivers and daiquiris.

When he finished grinding the coffee beans he placed the grinder on his workbench next to a tiny single-burner, butane stove. He then took a small,

beautifully ornate, copper pot with a long wooden handle from a shelf and placed it on the burner.

'This is called an ibrik,' he said.

He poured the ground coffee into the ibrik. He then spooned a couple of generous teaspoons of sugar in there as well. Then he said,

'Coffee should be as black as hell, as strong as death, and as sweet as love.'

I figured that he was an expert in all of them departments.

He then took a bottle of distilled water from a shelf and poured some of it into the ibrik. Then he lit the flame with an old-fashioned, gold, flip-top, spirit, cigarette lighter.

'I'm having my coffee made by goddamned Cecil B. DeMille,' I thought.

'This is the critical part,' he said, 'bringing it to the boil. You can't take your eyes off it.'

I gawked intrigued. It was like watching an alchemist turning lead into gold. He brought it to the boil and quickly lifted it off the flame. Then he put it back down and brought it to the boil again, and again lifted it quickly off. He did that three times then took it off the flame. He then grabbed the bottle of distilled water and carefully poured a tiny bit of the cold water into the coffee.

'This is my wife's trick,' he said. 'It helps settle the grinds.'

'I see,' I said.

The smell of the brewed coffee in the workshop was overpoweringly sweet. It delighted the senses. He brought out two small cups, about the size of large espresso cups, and poured the coffee into them. It was, I swear to God, the best goddamned coffee that I had ever tasted.

As we sipped the coffee, he asked,

'And what brings you here this time, Dragan?'

Suddenly I felt my nuts shrink into two tiny little marbles and crawl up into my abdominal cavity yelping like two pups in a dog pound.

'Er, Vincent,' I said, 'er, this isn't really *that* significant. It doesn't make any *real* difference to anything. I mean, the case is all sewn up and all ...'

'It's all right, Dragan, I know that your heart is in the right place. I wouldn't have made you my best coffee if I thought it wasn't. What is the news?'

'I just don't want it upsetting you too much, Vincent, but I feel that maybe you ought to know, with all due respect.' I kiss your hand Don Corleone.

'Shoot. Fire away, Dragan,' he said. Unfortunate use of terms I thought.

'Well, you see, Vincent ... er ... over the last, er, week or so ... er ... we have had all these witnesses come into the station who reckoned that they saw Jerome on the two Thursdays and the Friday in question. People like a café owner and a waiter from an Italian restaurant. Er, there was also a waitress and a lady from an umbrella shop. They all gave statements that they remembered Jerome because of his red cap.'

'Yes, well he told us that he spent those days in the city showing his new friend a good time. He mentioned a café and an Italian restaurant, the Caminetto, I believe. We have all been there. What is so strange, Dragan?'

'Er, this is just the witnesses, mind you, Vincent, and it's as bizarre for me as it is going to be for you ...'

'Relax, Dragan, will you. What's the dope?'

'OK, all the witnesses only saw Jerome. They don't remember any girl with him. That's all I came here to report and I apologise if it has upset you. I know that you are still grieving and that it wasn't very tactful of me to come here and tell you this at this time, but I just thought that you deserved to be in the picture, that's all.' Please don't feed me to the pigs.

'It's OK, Dragan. Take a breath.'

Vincent seemed all right. He thought for a moment then said,

'Jerry always obeyed us, and he never lied. Something doesn't fit.'

'It's just what the people said, Vincent,' I said.

'Yeah, I know. Relax, OK? I'm not blaming you for anything. I appreciate you coming over and telling me, but something doesn't fit. I'll tell Nadia tonight and see what she has to say about it. Jerry talked plenty more about the girl to his mother than to me, so she might know something.'

Then Vincent suddenly changed topics.

'You said something about going on a holiday to the Gold Coast with your wife, Dragan.'

I must admit that I was quite surprised by the sudden change of tack in Vincent's conversation. I could feel my apprehension begin to subside. I answered,

'As a matter of fact I've been wanting to get away for months, but the work just hasn't let up. Even the Chief has been telling me to take a break. Why?'

'Well, nothing really, except that, as I mentioned, I want to take Nadia away for a week or so just to unwind a bit, you know?'

'Oh yeah, sure.'

'And I was thinking, Dragan, that if you and, I am sure, your lovely wife are going up, perhaps we could synchronise our holidays and plan a dinner together with the wives while we were up there. I was just thinking, that's all. If it doesn't suit ...'

'It sounds great, Vincent,' I said straight away. I was not going to tell one of the most feared underworld figures in the whole fucking city that I didn't feel like having dinner with him. I might be simple, but I'm not stupid. 'Count us in, Vincent,' I said enthusiastically. 'Where do you like to stay?'

'We like The Marriott. How about you?'

'You must be psychic, Vincent. That is my favourite.'

The truth was that I had never even seen The Marriott, much less stayed in the joint, but I wasn't going to suggest our little Miami Beach roach retreat, that we always stayed in, to old Vincent. Oh no, not when *he* wanted to go to The Marriott. We had some spare cash saved up so I wasn't going to quibble about the money. I decided that I was going to give the wifey a holiday that she'd remember for the rest of her life and bugger the expense. And we were going to have a nice dinner with Vincent and his lovely wife Nadia. To tell you the truth, I was really starting to warm to the old Vincent I was. I figured that as long as you don't cross the guy, he's one of the best blokes in the world.

We decided to not pick the week right then because I had to line it up with the Chief, but I said that I'd drop into his shop in a couple of days and work out the week. I told him that the week after next should be fine more than likely.

We finished the coffees and I got up to leave. He shook my hand and patted me on the shoulder and said how he looked forward to meeting my wife and having dinner with us up in Queensland. I left really pleased with myself because

I managed to convey some particularly unpalatable information to him and I survived. Not only that, but I made even better friends with the guy and drank possibly the best goddamned cup of coffee that I ever drank in my life.

7

Two days later, I clinked the doorbell as I entered the jewellery shop. I suggested to Vincent the dates that the wifey and I could be up at The Marriott. I went for a Monday to Friday package because it was on special. Half price. Vincent said that the dates were perfect and he said that he and Nadia would like to invite us as their guests for dinner at Fellini's Italian Restaurant on the Wednesday night, seven o'clock. I thought, *'Bloody bewdy.'*

The wifey and I drove up the coast on the Saturday. We stopped in Coffs Harbour and stayed in a roadside motel overnight. We drove the rest of the way on the Sunday. Part of our deal with The Marriott was a late check-in on Sunday night.

This place was *swank city* let me tell you. And I'm not kidding when I say that the wifey went completely nuts over it. Our favourite things were the buffet breakfasts and knocking down beers around the pool. That thing I said before about screwdrivers and daiquiris, well that wasn't true. I just like the sound of it when I say it. Basically I'm just your average, run-of-the-mill, Fosters guy. The wifey likes her shandy.

Even though we spent most of the time out of our room, we never saw old Vincent and his wife. We kept an eye out for them, but we never saw them. We figured that we must have been just missing them all the time. It *was* a big place. After a couple of days I was starting to wonder if they were even there. Also I was starting to wonder if our dinner date was still even on.

Well, the wifey and I were having such a good time that I figured, who gives a fuck. I figured, we'll just dress up and go on Wednesday night, and if they're there, they're there, and if they're not there, then they're not there. Simple. I figured that if they weren't there, then we'd come back to the Marriott and have a bite at the buffet bar. Couldn't let the wifey starve.

Wednesday night the wifey got all dressed up in her nicest dress. I told her, 'You still got it, baby,' and tried to give her, you know, a bit of a slap and tickle, but she told me to stop it because I was messing up her makeup. She loves it

when I get a bit frisky. That's what she calls it. Ten to seven we picked up a cab to Fellini's. To tell you the truth, by then I wasn't even expecting old Vincent to be there cause we hadn't bumped into him, or his wife, even once since we'd arrived at The Marriott.

It just goes to show you how wrong a bloke can be. When we got to the front door of the swanky joint, an all dappered-up waiter greeted us. When I told him that we were guests of Mr. Vincent Davidson he got all formal with us and ushered us in like we were royalty. As we walked through the place I swear we must have both had our jaws hanging cause this place was swank on steroids. It was right on the edge of the water. There were million-dollar yachts moored just outside and the lighting in the place made it look like something out of a Stanley Kubrick movie.

I spotted Vincent and his wife sitting at an outside table overlooking the water. He rose to his feet and politely welcomed us at the table. He sat down only after the wifey and I sat down first. He was real polite as usual. Everybody introduced themselves to everybody else. It looked like the ladies were going to get on pretty good. I thought about the wifey's dress, which was a bit on the bright side, cause poor old Nadia was still wearing black. But I figured that it was too late, and anyway, they didn't seem to mind. I said to Vincent,

'We thought that maybe you didn't make it, Vincent, because we never saw you anywhere.'

And he said,

'That was exactly what I thought about you. We must have kept just missing each other.'

Vincent ordered a bottle of wine and the waiter was just pouring it out when my phone rang. I pulled it out of my pocket and had a look. It was bloody Mario, my partner at work. I was surprised that he was calling me because I gave him strict instructions not to call, especially on Wednesday night. I figured that it must have been important so I got up, excused myself, and stepped away from the table and out of earshot.

'What the fuck you callin me tonight for, Lanza?' I whispered down the phone.

'You won't believe where I've just been,' he said.

'It better be important. I'm having dinner with Davidson.'

'Handy for him,' Lanza said all smug like.

'Why?' I said.

'Guess what went down less than two hours ago.'

'I swear, Lanza, if this is about that Fifi bird, I will personally ...'

'It's not about her.'

'I haven't got time for this bullshit, Mario. I'm having dinner with the goddamned Davidsons.'

'Remember the shrink?'

'Shrink? What shrink?'

'The one that was on TV the other night. The kid's shrink.'

'You mean Donneville, that prick?'

'That's the guy.'

'What about him?'

'We found him splattered like a ripe tomato all over the fucking footpath in Macquarie Street.'

'No shit?'

'No shit. He took a flying leap out of his sixth-floor window and pancaked all over the fucking footpath.'

'I get the picture, Lanza.'

'Not completely, Dragan. It turned out after they scraped him up off the pavement they found a pancaked poodle underneath him.' Lanza laughed. 'Some old bag was walking her poodle along the street when the shrink splattered right on top of it. Other witnesses said that the old bag screamed her guts out for a few minutes before she keeled over and carked it, right next to Donneville's body, still hanging to the end of the mutt's leash.'

'Holy Christ, Lanza. You been up there in his office?'

'Oh yeah. That's just where I've come from. We checked everything out. The homicide boys were up there, but they said that they found nothing conclusive. They couldn't even tell if the shrink took a flying leap through his window or whether somebody threw him out.'

'So they haven't figured out if it was suicide or murder.'

'Nah. Not even close, Dragan. It *could* have been a murder though, I reckon. When I was up there I found a back way out, down the fire escape. I checked it out and it came out in a side alley. If somebody threw the shrink out the window, I reckon he could have easily slipped away without being noticed, especially since everybody's attention would have been on the old bag screaming her guts out like a fucking siren.

'No evidence, eh?' I said.

'None, Dragan. Clean as a whistle. I think they're gonna call it a suicide. The homicide boys got enough on their plate to be chasing a fucking red herring.'

'OK, Lanza, thanks for the dope. I'll be back Monday. We'll have a good talk then, OK?'

'Yeah sure, Dragan. Hey, you be nice to that wifey of yours, you hear?'

'Yeah well, and you try and leave yourself alone for a day, eh Lanza?'

'Fuck you too, Dragan.'

I clicked the phone off but kept it to my ear pretending that I was still talking. I glanced over at Vincent and spotted that he was looking at me. I knew that he knew *exactly* what the call was about. It dawned on me that he must have planned this moment. He was the fucking architect. I looked away real fast. My brain all of a sudden felt like the inside of a spin dryer. Panic was hitting me like a dozen bad oysters. All of a sudden everything got super clear. This dinner, this holiday on the Gold Coast, all this friendliness was for Vincent's alibi. And I was the patsy witness. Fuck. I was shitting my pants as I was still pretending to be talking to Lanza. At least I had old Vincent fooled on that one, for the time being. It gave me time to think. I knew that I had to get my head straight real quick. I knew that if I made the wrong move, said the wrong thing, it could be *me* doing the Superman act out of some window. I had to stay cool.

The first instinct was to get back to the table and say to everybody, 'Guess who just jumped out their office window.' I was sure that Davidson thought that I would be stupid enough to do that. But I was thinking, '*I haven't been in this game for thirty years by being stupid.*' I calmed myself and I thought to myself,

'You never got the call about the shrink. It was about something else, something dumb like a misplaced file or something. Donneville never happened. Cool down. Smile. The world is a wonderful place and you and the wifey are on

holidays and having dinner, and Davidson is paying, so you're gonna enjoy yourself, OK?'

I knew that Davidson knew what the call was all about, and I knew that he would really appreciate me being cool about it. And he was. I could see it in his eyes. I could see him thinking, *'Shame you're a cop, Dragan, cause we could really use a cool head like yours.'*

As we ate dinner and everybody, especially the wives, was getting on like a house on fire, I was thinking about how old Vincent pulled off the hit.

Obviously he got somebody else to do it, somebody who had no connection with that prick Donneville. Somebody who had no motive, unlike old Vincent who had all the motive in the world, and more than likely somebody who owed Vincent a favour.

The way it works amongst the old Mafiosos is that there are two ways to incur debt. One is cash, and the other is favours. Favours are taken very seriously. It's kind of like an honour system. When somebody does you a favour, they will remind you that you owe them, and that maybe sometime in the future you may be called on to repay the favour. It could be anything. If a favour is not repaid, it is considered to be worse than welching on a cash debt. The old Mafioso saying is, *'Cash is just business, but a favour is personal.'*

I figured that old Vincent had favours, which were owed to him, stacked up to the ceiling. I figured that he could have called on any one of a dozen guys to take care of the *Donneville business* for him. And each of those guys was a pro that knew their racket. It wasn't called the underworld for nothing. I was thinking all this shit as I was stuffing linguini marinara into my face.

'Thanks for a great night, Vincent,' I said as I took another sip of the best wine I'd ever tasted. *'I didn't know that wine this good existed.'*

'Nothing is too good for a friend, Dragan,' Vincent said as he topped up my glass.

I noticed how well the wifey and Nadia were getting along. The wifey was really cheering her up after her tragedy. Old Vincent noticed it as well. I could tell from the smile of appreciation that he gave me.

All in all, not counting the fact that my dinner companion murdered someone while I was having dinner with him, it was one of the best nights the wifey and I ever had.

8

In the morning, about eight o'clock, the wifey and I bumped into old Vincent and Nadia at the buffet breakfast. I got a twinge of suspicion because they supposedly had been there all week, and we had the buffet breakfast every morning, but we never saw them there. We loaded up our plates, as you do at a buffet breakfast, and sat down with the Davidsons. I was just starting to hoe into the bacon when, you wouldn't believe it, fucking the phone goes off in my pocket. *'Fucking Lanza,'* I thought. I thought that he wanted to ask me about how I handled the Donneville thing with Davidson. I told him not to call. I pulled the phone out of my pocket and looked at it. It *was* Lanza. A thought passed through my mind about putting rat poison in his coffee when I got back. I looked at everyone, smiled and apologised. They all seemed to be too preoccupied with their meal to really care so I got up and walked away out of earshot.

'What the fuck, Lanza?' I shouted down the phone, whispering.

'I hope you haven't had your breakfast yet, Dragan.'

'Lanza, I'm going to poison your coffee when I get back, and then I am going to enjoy watching you slowly choke to death.'

'Jest, Dragan, jest, but I've got something that will put you off your bacon and eggs for the rest of your life.'

'What? Something new? This isn't about that prick Donneville?'

'Pancake boy? Oh noooo. Not even about the poodle, *or* the old bag.'

'Come on, Lanza, you sick fuck.'

'OK, OK. Do you remember who else was on that TV show? The one where they crapped all over the Davidson kid.'

'Yeah,' I said. 'How could I forget. There was the rugmuncher bitch and the two fairies, the headmaster and the other spaghetti-in-the-wind fruit. They were all the kid's teachers. They were total arseholes. Has something happened to them as well?'

'You could say that.'

'Will you stop fucking around, Lanza. I'm having fucking breakfast with Davidson!'

I glanced over at Davidson and noticed that he was paying attention to me. I faked a complete calm so as not to telegraph what I was talking about.

'Handy for him,' Lanza said.

'Lanza!' I said as threatening as I could.

'OK. Do you know about the shark nets off Bondi Beach, Dragan?'

'Yeah?' I said. All of a sudden I got a bad feeling about where this conversation was heading.

'Well, every morning the shark net boys check the net for, you know, sharks and stuff, and any damage there might be to the nets.'

'Yeah?'

'Well, this morning, while they were checking the nets as usual, guess what they found. I'll bet that you never guess.'

'I swear to God, Lanza ...'

'They found three sets of arms tied by the wrists to the outside of the nets.'

'Jesus H. Christ, you are fucking bullshitting me, Lanza.'

'I swear to God, Dragan.'

I had a gut feeling about what Lanza was going to say next, but I kept a cool face cause Davidson was watching.

'OK, now get this, Dragan. Just in case we weren't able to identify who the fuck the arms belonged to, some goddamned genius decided to put nametags around their wrists. Can you believe that? The names on the tags were the shooter kid's three teachers, Dragan. Nobody knew that the fuckers were even missing. And next to the arms, Dragan, were these drums tied to the outside of the nets with holes punched in them.'

It was almost impossible for me to keep a straight face, but I had to, cause Davidson was watching me. Lanza went on.

'We think the teachers got abducted on their way home from work. We found their cars abandoned on the side of the road. The homicide boys think that they were tied to the outside of the shark nets sometime during last night. They think that they were left dangling in the water there with more than likely their mouths taped up so nobody could hear them screaming as the sharks hoed in.'

They think that whoever's done this filled the drums full of maybe pig's blood or something and tied them next to the teachers. They then punched some holes in them with a pickaxe to let the blood out, to attract the sharks. Can you fucking believe it, Dragan?'

'Holy shit, Lanza. This really *is* going to put me off my bacon and eggs. So what do they reckon happened next?'

'They reckon that the sharks probably ate them alive, Dragan, heads and all. All that was left were their arms, which were tied together by the wrists to the top of the net.'

'Unbelievable.'

'Serbian Mafia, Dragan. This is like a signature hit. These teacher pricks really upset them. They had no idea who they were messing with.'

'They're gonna have to promote you up to Captain, Lanza, you're such a goddamned genius. So did anybody see anything?'

'Nothing. Nobody saw or heard anything. They don't even know what time of night they took them out there.'

'They must have used a boat. Did anyone see a boat?'

'Nobody saw or heard any boats. It was a dark night, Dragan, and it's like as if a ghost tied them out there to that shark net. Homicide has come up with sweet fuck all, if you don't count the arms. Nice alibi old Davidson's got, and a top-shelf witness to boot.'

'Fuck you Lanza. Get off my phone. I'll talk to you on Monday.' I switched off but kept the phone to my ear. I just needed another minute.

I looked at Davidson chomping peacefully on his toast and knew that he'd already got the call telling him about the successful hit. Four people within twelve hours. He really looked satisfied and it wasn't the buffet breakfast. Oddly enough, even though what Lanza told me today was a thousand times more horrific than what he told me yesterday, I felt a thousand times calmer. I figured that I must have acclimatized to Vincent's style of doing business. Low key and no fuss, with a bucket load of satisfaction.

Of course, even though Davidson had the biggest motive tying him to all the deaths, he was in the clear because he had a perfect alibi. He was on holidays with one of the most senior detectives in the country.

As I sat back down with everyone, the wifey said,

'I thought you told them not to call you this week, dear.'

'I did, hon, but they keep losing their damn files. I swear, it's the most disorganised station in the force.' I looked at Vincent and Nadia and said, 'I'm so sorry. I am so rude just walking off like that all the time. But they're like a bunch of kids in there when I'm not around.' I was loading on the bullshit pretty thick. Old Vincent could see right through it. Later, as we were walking out, he said to me quietly and privately,

'I owe you a favour, Dragan. Anytime you need something done, anything, come to me.'

We looked each other in the eye. Everything was understood. There was nothing that wasn't understood.

9

A month after all the school teachers got eaten by the sharks and the shrink got scraped off the pavement they released Jerome's body for burial. To tell you the truth, I wasn't looking forward to it. I hate fucking funerals. For me, once they're dead, they're dead. I can't see any point in making a big fuss about it cause they're not there anymore, see? All the funeral shit is just for the living and I don't think that I'll ever understand it. I'd swap my funeral for never having to go to a funeral in a heartbeat. Call me a soulless bastard, but that's how I feel.

Anyway, the wifey and I, out of respect for old Vincent and Nadia, dressed up in black and rocked on down to the funeral where they were going to bury the kid. It was a dark goddamned day. Right on cue it started fucking raining. We arrived pretty early and were standing around waiting under our black umbrellas. Everybody was standing under black umbrellas. I noticed Suzy and Samantha standing there, all in black, looking really mournful. Suddenly a long procession of incredibly long, black, stretch-limos started rolling into the cemetery through the sandstone and wrought iron gate. Everything was quiet and sad. The Orthodox Priest stood at the end of the coffin, which was suspended over the grave hole. He was clearly waiting for a signal from Vincent. The limos rolled slowly up the gravel path making that sound that wheels over gravel make. The wifey and I were standing right at the back of the small group. Thirteen limos rolled up the gravel path and parked in one big line. One by one,

the limo doors opened. First the chauffer got out of each one with an umbrella. Each chauffer opened their umbrella, opened a limo door and held the umbrella up for his boss who stepped out of the limo and took the umbrella off him. It was like a choreographed ballet with all the thirteen bosses doing the same thing the same way. Even though they wore dark glasses and clothes, I recognised them as the thirteen big bosses of the city's underworld. Clearly they were there to pay their respects to one of their own.

Nadia was completely covered in black. She wore a black veil. The thought crossed my warped mind that she looked like the bride of death. Vincent held a large umbrella over both of them. He waited patiently. Every man there wore very dark sunglasses. Many wore a black hat. Er, I didn't own a hat. Who the fuck owns a hat these days?

Everyone just stood there like black statues. I remembered why I hated funerals so much. It was all so much bullshit. I mean the kid was *dead* for Christ's sake. I kept glancing at Vincent, which was the priest's affliction as well. I guessed that Vincent was waiting because he wanted to be sure that everybody was there. Everybody was patient like saints, except for me who wanted to yell out, *come on Vincent, let's get this shindig rolling*. God I was a cold bastard. That's what happens to you in my line of work. I've seen more corpses than an old King's Cross whore's had tricks. And you can trust me when I tell you that it doesn't pay to get too emotional about it. Lucky there weren't any mind readers in the bunch standing around me cause if there were I reckon that *I* would have been feeding the sharks off Bondi Beach that night.

You had to hand it to Vincent, though, he *was* a creative sonofabitch. Maybe they should have an awards night for the most creative hit. And the winner is, drumroll please, Vincent Davidson with the shark technique. Give him the statue please. Now for the best alibi award. Open the envelope please. Oh my God, what a surprise, the award goes to Vincent Davidson with his classic Gold Coast flimflam. What really clinched it for him was the dumb-shit witness.

Christ I was getting bored. This was starting to feel like a bad case of constipation. Oh *come on Vincent, let's get this show on the road!*

Suddenly Vincent nodded at the priest and the priest nodded back. Hooray, Vincent, about goddamned time.

As it turned out, however, my elation was somewhat premature. Suddenly Vincent held up his finger to the priest, stopping him in his tracks. Everyone was watching Vincent. He looked down the gravel path towards the gate. It looked like he saw someone else arriving. Everyone there looked down the gravel path towards the gate as well. What happened next completely blew my mind. Actually it did more than that. It completely changed my life.

Walking through the sandstone and wrought iron gate, in the rain, was a young girl. She couldn't have been more than fourteen or fifteen. Even from a distance she looked tall and very slim, and she walked with a natural rhythm, like a black girl does. She carried a large, blue umbrella, like one of those golf umbrellas. Everyone just stood there frozen like statues, all focussed on the girl.

As she walked along the gravel path I could see that she wore red sneakers and blue jeans. On her head she wore one of those red caps that they were talking about, I can't remember the name of the character from the book, and a really flashy pair of aviator-style reflector sunglasses. She had long straight hair. I mean this kid looked cool. She looked like a goddamned movie star. As she got closer I noticed that everything all of a sudden lost its colour. I mean, it was a grey day, but there was still colour. Not anymore though. The only colour was her, and it was beaming. It was like as if she was sucking all the colour out of the whole universe into herself.

As she got closer I could make out her shirt. She wore her shirt unbuttoned hanging loose over like a T-shirt. It looked like the shirt was made out of gold thread or something. Strands maybe. And I could see jewels glisten in it every now and then. I looked around at the other people and they were all tranced out looking at her, like completely blown out of their minds. Under her shirt she wore, and I kid you not, it looked like real chainmail, fine chainmail made of finely woven polished silver wire. There were jewels in that as well. It was like a chainmail T-shirt, like a T-shirt made of metal for Christ's sake. It hung loose and moved like it wasn't uncomfortable at all.

She shone in bright colour, the blue umbrella, the red cap and sneakers, all of her. She was almost like making her own light, and everything else was black and white and a million shades of grey. And as she walked up to the group I noticed that she wore the red hunting cap on backwards with the stupid earflaps

down. To each his own, I reckoned, but you wouldn't catch me with that thing on, backwards or frontwards, or any ways.

Then it hit me how beautiful she was. I mean her face looked like the face of an angel. I wasn't sure if I'd ever seen such a stunning girl before, and I've seen my share.

Nobody moved. The whole black and white with a million shades of grey universe was frozen in a standstill. The girl moved amongst all the black statues and umbrellas and walked up to Nadia. We all saw her lift Nadia's veil and kiss her on the cheek. At that moment Nadia turned from black and white into colour.

I started thinking that I was maybe hallucinating. I couldn't tell what all the bosses were looking at because their Aristotle Onassis sunglasses completely blocked out their eyes.

Then I saw the girl place her right hand on Nadia's belly and whisper something in her ear. Nadia began to cry openly. I saw tears begin to stream from Vincent's eyes. I had never seen *that* before. The girl kissed Nadia again, this time on her other cheek, then she walked over to the coffin. She bent down on one knee and placed her hand on top of the coffin. I could see that she was saying a few last words. Then she removed the crazy red cap from her head and placed it on top of the coffin. She rose again and turned to Nadia and Vincent. Even though she was wearing her reflectors, I could see that she was openly crying. She then turned towards the gravel path and started to walk away. Everyone watched her. The rain was falling gently and her blue umbrella glowed in colour like a single beam of sunlight was shining on it as she walked off into the grey. When she got to the sandstone and wrought iron gate she turned the corner and disappeared. In the most bizarre way, everything all of a sudden got its colour back like somebody turned the colour up on a TV set or something.

To this day I can't believe what I saw with my own eyes. I knew what I saw and what everybody else saw as well. There was no explaining it. We knew it was Phoebe. There was no denying that fact. Suzy and Samantha's description of her made sure of that. And to this day I'm still blown away by what a gorgeous kid she was.

After the priest said his stuff and they threw bits of dirt on the coffin, Nadia came over and thanked the wifey and me for coming. Then she said,

'I knew that Jerry never lied to us.'

I had a brief thought about all those supposed witnesses, like the café guy and the waiter and the umbrella lady, and it seemed like for some reason they all decided to give false evidence. But that seemed too ludicrous to even contemplate. Fucking as ludicrous as contemplating parallel universes if you get my drift.

In the end I just decided to stick the whole goddamned thing into the unsolved drawer of my mind, kind of like the way I stuck all the revenge killings into the unsolved drawer of my desk.

10

The last time I saw Vincent was in the city. It was a couple of months after the funeral. He looked really happy, the happiest I'd ever seen him. He invited me for a coffee at a café and I said,

'Sure, why not.'

We sat and talked about everything except what went down a few months before. As we talked I was thinking how a person could really get to like a guy like Vincent, there was no denying that fact, but if you crossed him, sayonara.

Anyway, as we chatted he told me some big news. It was the news that was making him so happy. He told me that Nadia was pregnant with twins. He said,

'Remember that little holiday on the Gold Coast?'

.....

SUZY

1

We were so completely shocked, Samantha and I were, when we saw the TV pictures of our friend Jerry shooting the policeman in the head. And the graphic way they showed it all in close up and in slow motion, and over and over and over again. It was quite disgusting the way the policeman's head exploded like that. And the way they killed Jerry, it broke our hearts.

We loved Jerry. He was like our little brother. He was so cute. He loved to visit and hang out. He was always so quiet and shy, and reserved. We really thought that his shooting of the policeman was totally out of character.

I thought I noticed quite a change in him after he read my copy of *Catcher in the Rye*. I wasn't surprised though. Everybody gets changed in some way. They get *affected*. But everybody gets changed differently. Everybody I know, that has read *Catcher*, had got a different take on it from the take I got. But they were all affected by it, charged up. The book has a power that is undeniable, but at the same time mysterious. It's impossible for me to put my finger on it, on the precise *thing* that actually does it, does the transformation in the reader. But there is no doubting that it is hugely powerful. With Jerry, for example, he went out and bought a Holden Caulfield cap almost immediately after he finished the book. Not long after that, he started getting into trouble at school. I'm pretty sure that *Catcher in the Rye* was the catalyst for Jerry's newfound rebellion, because that is what it does to people, it finds their voice for them, and they start to *resist*.

There can be no denying that Samantha and I found Jerry very attractive. How we wished that he had been a couple of years older. We could see that he was going to grow up into a totally knockout-gorgeous young Adonis. We used to have sexual fantasies about him at night when he wasn't there. God we got worked up. Anyway, we made a decision. We decided that for his seventeenth birthday we were going to, both of us together, pop his cherry. I can't tell you how disappointed we were that we never got the chance.

Jerry's death ripped our hearts out. The funeral really finished the job, though. Those black limos that rolled up and the seriously scary Mafia types that got out of them really blew our minds. I whispered to Samantha,

'Who was Jerry mixed up with anyway?'

She looked at me and shrugged her shoulders. And the way Phoebe arrived looking so gorgeous and everything. I must have started hallucinating with grief because I was seeing everything in black and white except for that young angel. The way she came, did her thing and left, was soooo cool.

All in all, I just wanted to say how much we loved Jerry, how much we loved having him around, and how much we miss him now. He will always have a place in our hearts.

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NADIA

1

Losing my son broke my heart. I loved my Jerry more than life itself. He was the most honest, affectionate boy. He never lied and never raised his voice, and he always obeyed his father.

I knew that what the detective said about the girl Phoebe not being real could not have been true because Jerry never made things up. He never lied. She proved that I was right when she came to the funeral. I *told* Vincent that she would come. I told him to wait, and thank God he did. He told me that maybe she wouldn't come because of what all the witnesses said. But I said,

'Wait Vincent, wait, hold back the priest because she *will* come.'

I knew it in my heart because I knew she was real because Jerry never lied. He was a good boy.

She came up to me and gently lifted my veil. Then she kissed my cheek and whispered, crying,

'I loved your son more than my own life. He was the most wonderful boy. I will never forget him and I will never stop loving him. You have been a wonderful mother. I am sorry for the loss of your son, and your daughter, Vesna, before.'

I have no idea how Phoebe knew about Vesna. She died when she was two years old and Jerry was only four. We were all devastated. I don't think that Jerry would have told Phoebe about Vesna because he never spoke to anyone other than his family about her. So I have no idea how she knew. Then she said things that to this day mystify me and make me think that she was a gift from God, an angel. She put her hand on my tummy, looked into my eyes through her mirror glasses and whispered,

'Jerry and Vesna wish to return to you and Vincent. They are waiting.'

Then she rubbed my tummy in little circles and said,

'You are pregnant with your children, Nadia. I must leave now, but remember, my love for your son will never die.'

Then she kissed my other cheek, let my veil down again and walked over to the grave. There she removed her red cap and placed it on top of the coffin.

Vincent instructed them to leave the cap where it was when they lowered the coffin into the ground.

Two weeks later, I found out that I was pregnant with twins.

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PHOEBE

1

There were thirty seconds to go.

I was sitting by the Archibald Fountain in Hyde Park. The boy would say hello in thirty seconds. I had been thinking about J.D. and how much I loved him, and how proud of him I was. I shed a tear for him as I sat there by the fountain in the same spot I was sitting when I first met him. I was wearing my red Holden Caulfield cap, on backwards the way I like it. It was the uniform of *the resistance*. I was also wearing my favourite red sneakers and the same clothes I wore when J.D. came up and said hello to me that first time. By my side was my skateboard.

There were ten seconds to go.

There were many men I've loved, and still do. Vincent and Jackson and Van and Woody and Jerome, and many many more, but there were none that I loved as much as I loved J.D.

Time was up.

As I sat there by the side of the fountain, looking towards St. Mary's Cathedral, I heard a young boy's voice ask me,

'Holden Caulfield?'

I turned and looked at the boy. He looked about fifteen years old, the same age as me. He was slightly shorter than J.D. was, maybe five-six, and he was slightly plump, but not overly so. He wore a black T-shirt over a pair of baggy, knee-length, black-denim shorts, and a pair of black DCs on his feet. A pair of dark sunnies covered his eyes and on his head he wore a bright-red Holden Caulfield cap, on backwards of course, all cool like. Hanging from his right hand was his skateboard. Printed on his T-shirt was, *Bring Me The Horizon*. I smiled and replied,

'Why yes, Holden Caulfield.'

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THE REINCARNATION
OF
J. D. SALINGER

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By

John Coby

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