



Heart of Bone

Guy Lane

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I Want My Doctor Back

There is a new temp hovering in the hallway, too embarrassed or scared to come into the office. She's holding a pile of documents meant for Rebecca's desk, but today Rebecca is not feeling kind towards this or any other new girl. There's too much going on inside her head.

The emails are coming thick and fast this morning. Do this, they demand, do that. Turn your attention to this triviality. Look at me. Look at me.

Rebecca thinks a common thought, "With my skills, what the hell am I doing here?" She could be doing so many other things, like having an intense love affair with an angular man in an exotic city. Or being drunk on vodka, tucked up in the corner of the

bathroom of a luxury hotel, swaddled in white towels and bathrobes. Or standing on the platform of a railway station trying not to jump in front of an oncoming train. Anything but this.

Rebecca is forty-three and she has ‘the look’. It is professional and tough. She knows how to play the game. She wears enough foundation to hide the depth of her freckles, but not so much as to look like she is wearing foundation. She is hidden but appears to have nothing to hide. A shock of curly, ginger hair surrounds her face. She’s a lioness with a mane and she’ll eat your intestines raw if you mess with her.

The desk phone rings. The noise makes her jump. “This call had better be a good one,” she thinks. She translates ‘the look’ into an intonation

and answers with a single word,
“Rebecca.”

There is a man on the phone. He sounds anxious. He says, “Rebecca, my name is Dr. Thomas Lamb. I am the President of Greenfield Hospital in Maryland, Virginia. I want to speak with Mr. Gilly Clay.”

“Mr. Clay is unavailable, I am afraid,” says Rebecca, in a well-rehearsed tone, “may I help you?”

“I don’t know. Can you help me?”

“Lamb,” thinks Rebecca, “you are close to being eaten. I will tear you apart with my lioness teeth and leave your carcass for the hyenas. Do not mess with me!”

“I don’t know,” says Rebecca, “can I help you?”

“Yes, you can help me,” says the

Doctor, “you can release Doctor Terry Bloomfield from that ridiculous contract.”

“Terry Bloomfield’s contract?” asks Rebecca, suddenly baffled.

At this stage, the temp steps boldly into the room with her armful of documents. She drops them on Rebecca’s desk, saying, “Doctors’ Contracts.” Then she scurries back into the hallway and out of sight.

Rebecca feels as though she should apologize for having brushed the new girl off, but the temp is gone before she can respond.

“That’s Doctor Terry Bloomfield,” snaps the angry man from Maryland.

“*Uh-huh*,” says Rebecca.

“I have emailed you the details of this abomination,” says Lamb.

“*Uh-huh*,” says Rebecca, now simultaneously flipping through the doctor contracts and running her eye down a list of unopened emails on her computer monitor and listening to the man moaning at her.

“In Bloomfield’s absence, we now have a queue in oncology a mile long. That’s a lot of people suffering. As if you’d care.”

“*Uh-huh*,” says Rebecca.”

“Do you know what we did when we found out that Bloomfield was leaving with a week’s notice?”

Rebecca’s eyes and brain are starting to hurt from the strain that now involves a fourth task: answering the doctor with more than a grunt. Her eyes flick from the computer monitor to the documents.

“*Ummm*, no,” she says, hoping her answer will suffice to keep him talking.

“We went to recruit someone with Bloomfield’s experience at short notice only to find that there is a great vortex swallowing up oncologists all over the country.”

“What do you actually want?” Rebecca suddenly asks.

“I want my Doctor back.”

“Dr.?”

“Doctor Terry Bloomfield! How many times do I have to say it?”

“Okay, hold on,” she says.

“Bloomfield. Bloomfield. Bloomfield,” she thinks. Come on girl. Faster. Faster. She abandons the email search and concentrates on the contracts that the temp put on her desk. She scans the cover pages, one by one. Doctor this,

doctor that, doctor the other from this hospital or that medical research institute, from all over the world. The best cancer specialists on the planet, now on permanent standby in case Rebecca's boss, Gilly Clay, farts blood or decides he doesn't like the smell of his own shit.

“Or the taste of it,” thinks Rebecca. Instantly, she starts to laugh. She quickly muffles the noise with her hand.

Then something very strange; in amongst the pile of contracts is a photo of a young boy. The picture stops Rebecca in her tracks. She raises the picture and stares at it, her mouth hanging open while the angry hospital boss continues to rant in her ear. The boy is about eight years old. It looks like a school photo. He has intelligent

eyes, seemingly wise beyond his years.

Rebecca's head spins and her vision blurs. The boy in the photo falls out of focus. What's happening to her? Her heart is pounding. She puts down the picture of the boy, perplexed, confused.

The monotonous noise from the earpiece says, "I have emailed you a detailed explanation of the suffering that is being caused as a result of Bloomfield..."

Bloomfield. Bloomfield. That damn word again. Then Rebecca sees it written on one of the contracts. It is a document of about ten pages, stapled top left. She flips open the pages and scans the words quickly finding that Bloomfield is on permanent standby for a five-year term for some obscene life-changing salary. If he breaks the

contract he is ruined for life. She signed a contract like this one herself. It had ‘step out of line and you are ruined for life’ writ large.

“What do you actually want?” Rebecca says, eventually.

“I want you to release our Doctor from his contract and send him back here where he can do some good for real people.”

“Is that it?” she thinks. That is simply not going to happen. No one escapes one of Gilly Clay’s employment contracts unless they jump off a tall building or fall under a train. Perry Lamb from Maryland immediately descends from important-urgent to an annoying distraction.

This frees Rebecca to turn her attention back to the photo of the boy.

She holds it in front of her and becomes hypnotized. Seconds tick by as her eyes play over the image, taking in all of the fine details. It's a private school and he's wearing a finely tailored blazer. His hair is cut perfectly.

The sound of Perry Lamb winding-up breaks Rebecca's trance. He completes his rant with the words, "Well f**k you, reptile keeper," and slams the phone down.

Rebecca becomes aware of a small light flashing in the periphery of her vision from the other side of the room. She replaces the phone on its cradle and finds herself staring across the room at the blinking light on the Xerox machine. Flicking her eyes to the computer monitor, she sees the email from the Doctor right there. She strikes

the keyboard, sending the email to the printer.

As she sits listening to the print running off, Rebecca feels a wave of exhaustion and sadness come over her. She feels perplexed and alone and desperate to get away from the desk. She takes the image of the boy to the photocopier machine and runs off a color copy. Then she places the original photo in her desk drawer and rolls the photocopy of the boy and the printed email from Perry Lamb. She puts these into her handbag and departs the office.

In the hallway, Rebecca looks around to ensure that the annoying new girl isn't watching her. She checks her watch, "Shit," then moves quickly along the corridor, to the safety of the ladies toilet; her sanctuary.

Two SIM Cards

The ladies toilet is immaculate. Italian marble and down-lights with an orange tint. The weight of the stone surfaces and the dimmed light makes the air feel heavy and still, like a cave. It is cool in here. Safe. Quiet.

Rebecca enters the cubicle at the far end and places her bag in the spot where it has been many times before. She hikes up her skirt, sits on the toilet and instantly lets out a long sigh and goes completely motionless. An immense catharsis washes over her as the pressure on her waistline eases. Morning piss is the highlight of the day. Pity it only lasts a few seconds.

“Maybe I should drink more water,” Rebecca thinks. She chuckles. It’s a common joke this time of the day. She

reaches down to her bag and sees the email from the angry hospital man and the photo of the boy. Her fingers naturally move towards the photo, but a pang of anxiety comes over her.

She seizes the letter from the hospital and scans it quickly. It is addressed to Gilly. It looks tightly written and legally checked. It says that Bloomfield's departure has caused untold human suffering. As a result of the cancer specialist no longer being at his post, his former patients are forced to travel long distances to find alternative care. On it goes, but there is nothing that requires her attention. She'll flick it onto legal. They'll have a laugh at it and file it under 'D' for 'Dream-on Doctor'.

"What is the point?" Rebecca asks out loud. Gilly will never read it. He will

never even know that it existed. She certainly won't be bringing it up. The last thing she needs to do is attract the ire of the reptile.

She folds the email and leans forward to replace it in her purse. In the same motion, she retrieves the folded photocopy of the picture of the boy. She straightens up and unfurls the picture.

He's a pretty boy. Bright eyes. Olive skin. There is something about his eyebrows or the way the skin is shaped around the bridge of his nose that is so familiar. The picture of the boy blurs as tears well in her eyes.

"Why?" she asks, "what are you doing here?"

She turns the picture over, as though there might be some clue on the reverse

of the photocopied page. It doesn't make sense. "What does Gilly want with you?"

Rebecca becomes present to her anxiety and the reddening of her face and she nervously checks her watch, "Fuck."

She folds the picture of the boy and pushes it into her bag. Then she kicks off her right shoe, lifts up the inner sole and retrieves a SIM card hidden in a recess.

She removes the back of her phone, counting down seconds in her head as she swaps SIM cards. She has counted to twenty-six by the time the phone reboots and she can check for text messages.

She grips the phone tightly between her hands to arrest the electronic beep

noise as the text downloads. There is just one and it is from 'Jo'.

That's not his real name. The text message reads: "hi bee baby. Arrive new york seven pm. see you at crosbys at 8.30? latest draft manuscript here: IP: 121.226.67.6 bye"

Rebecca smiles and releases a long sigh. "Bee baby," she says, cautious not to let her voice rise too loud. She texts a reply: "cu@830 bee"

"Bee," she thinks, smiling. That's what Snowden calls her. Bee, like the insect. Bee for Rebecca. It was from the first time they spoke. It was a bad line and she woke him. He was asking her to repeat her name and she spelled it out R-E-B-E-C-C-A. And he couldn't hear properly and he asked: "Is that 'B' for Rebecca?" It was so cute.

She watches as the phone indicates her text is sent then pulls the battery out replaces the SIM card and reboots. She puts the secret SIM card back in her shoe.

Back in the hallway, Rebecca checks her watch and feels the normal nagging panic, “Shit.” She swoops back to her office, grabs the pile of Doctor Contracts off the desk and walks with them to the boardroom.

A Lamentation of Oncologists

Standing outside the door of the boardroom is a young nurse in a white uniform. As Rebecca approaches with the contracts, she says, “I don’t think that you want to go inside there.”

Rebecca pulls the door ajar just enough to see inside. Seated around the large boardroom table are eleven doctors. They are all men, with ages ranging from mid-forties to late-sixties. They are distinguished looking, immaculately presented. And they are all angry.

“What’s the collective noun for oncologists?” asks the nurse.

Rebecca recognizes her and asks, “You’re Judy, aren’t you?”

“Yeah. And you are Rebecca,”

“That’s right.”

“I guess I’ve seen you around.”

“I did your medical. How long ago was that?”

“Four years, I guess,” says Rebecca.

“That long? You’re still here?”

“You too.”

“Hmmm,” the young nurse says, with gravitas.

“A group of oncologists is known as a gaggle, maybe?” Rebecca suggests.

“A mob?” asks Judy.

“A pack, maybe?”

“A lamentation,” says the nurse.

“Lamentation?” Rebecca asks.

“That’s swans, I think?” Judy says, “are they swanning around in there?”

“No. But there is plenty of lamenting, that’s for sure.”

Judy chuckles, “That’s it, then.”

Rebecca passes a smile and then steps into the board room and steels herself for the exchange. “Gentlemen,” she says, “my name is Rebecca Parry. I am Gilly Clay’s Personal Assistant.”

“Rebecca,” says one of the men, immediately moving towards her, “would you tell me what in the name of hell is going on. I personally signed a five-year contract to be a personal physician to a Mr. Gilly only to find out that there are ten of us.

“Actually, there are eleven, Dr?”

“Bloomfield,” he says.

“That would be right,” thinks Rebecca. Bloomfield the troublemaker. Bloomfield with the whiney ex-boss.

“If you would take your seat, please Terry,” Rebecca says, firmly, indicating the direction with her hand. Bloomfield

is disarmed by being addressed by his first name and he takes his seat, shaking his head and muttering.

Rebecca calls out the name from the top contract on the pile and when the respective oncologist raises his hand, she delivers the printed copy of the contract to the table in front of him.

“What are we doing here?” asks Bloomfield.

“We are waiting on a presentation from Mr. Gilly Clay.”

“He brought us here for a f**king powerpoint?” moans Bloomfield.

Rebecca finishes delivering the contracts and says, “Let me check on Mr. Clay’s progress.”

She steps outside the boardroom into the hall intending to slump against a wall and put her face in her hands.

Instead, she sees moving towards her, Gilly Clay, her boss. He is mid-seventies and wears an expression that looks hard done by and mean-spirited. He is gaunt with a receded hairline and leather patches on his face. His eyes look like black holes that swallow up whatever he sees.

Behind him is a medical team, dressed in white. There are six in all, four nurses including Judy and two orderlies. One of the orderlies follows up, pushing a trolley along the hallway.

“Good morning, Gilly,” Rebecca says, pulling open the door to the boardroom, “your oncologists are here.”

Gilly steps inside without acknowledging her. She holds the door open as the medical entourage files in after him. “That’s seventeen in his full-

time care”, she thinks, shaking her head, “including eleven of the best oncologists in the world.”

Judy is the last to enter the room, dwelling for a moment in the doorway.

“What’s happening?” Rebecca asks.

“Mr. Clay is having his first inspection.”

“In the boardroom?”

Judy sniggers, quietly. “Apparently, so.”

Gilly turns to Rebecca and says curtly, “Close the door”.

Having him look at her directly causes Rebecca a pang of anxiety. She closes the door as instructed, her heart racing. She rests her back against the wall and draws her hand over her face, feeling her heart pounding and adrenalin coursing through her

body. Gilly Clay just spoke to her. She feels nauseous and just wants to curl up

in a ball. Instead, she returns to her office and re-joins the battle with the emails.

After a while, she notices that the door that adjoins the boardroom has an old fashioned keyhole. She peers through the hole and can just make out what is going on in the other room. She starts chuckling mischievously, then retrieves her smartphone and opens the app that activates the camera.

Pulling a chair next to the door, she angles the camera lens on the phone against the keyhole and watches the proceedings on the screen of the phone. It is quite bizarre.

Inside the boardroom, Gilly is wearing a hospital robe. He is bending over the boardroom table with his ass exposed. Bloomfield is wearing pale blue latex

gloves and is delving inside Gilly's anus with a finger.

Meanwhile, the other overpaid oncologists are either queued behind him, waiting their turn, or arguing over something that lies in a metal dish on the trolley.

Gilly looks ridiculous and pale and he can't keep still. Rather than allowing the specialists to work calmly, he is barking instructions at them, telling them how to do their jobs. The Doctors themselves seem to be walking on eggshells, trying not to raise the ire of their new boss.

Gilly turns his head to look in Rebecca's direction and she freezes, feeling like her stomach has risen into her mouth. She then becomes present to her finger that is threatening to press

the record button on the phone camera. A flush of anxiety washes over her and she lowers the camera and looks around the room.

Maybe there are security cameras watching her. She scans the corners of the ceiling furtively, thinking that they may have filmed what was shown on the screen of her camera. In that way, she would be responsible for creating a video record of Gilly's ass inspection. Angst and laughter bottle up in her simultaneously and Rebecca returns to her desk and covers her mouth with her hand.

Gilly's Stool

Later, Judy knocks and enters Rebecca's office. She's holding a small white box that is branded with logos and words printed on it.

"Hi Judy," says Rebecca, warmly, "how was that?"

"Something new for the resume," she quips.

"And how is Gilly?"

"His bum will be sore for a little while," Judy says lightly.

"Well that's good, I guess." Rebecca looks at the box that Judy is holding.

"Present for me?"

"Sort of. I wish I didn't have to do this, but I am following direct instruction from Mr. Clay."

"Okay. So this is going to be awful, I guess."

“He wants you to deliver this,” says Judy. She indicates the white box.

“Sure, what is it?” Rebecca reaches out for the box and observes that Judy is reluctant to hand it to her.

“It’s a stool sample,” Judy says, looking at the floor.

“Stool “as in...?”

“*Umm.*”

“Right,” says Rebecca, suddenly tense, “stool as in turd.”

“Yes.”

“So there’s a bit of Gilly’s breakfast in that box,” asks Rebecca, rhetorically.

“Maybe last night’s dinner.”

“And where is it going?”

“There is a laboratory across the city. The address is on the side here.”

“*Uhuh...*” says Rebecca, stuck for words.

“I suggested that one of the orderlies take it, but Gilly insisted I bring it to you,” Judy says. She goes to place the box on the edge of Rebecca’s desk but thinks better of it looks around for somewhere else to put it.

“It’s okay there, I guess,” says Rebecca, looking nervously at the box. “It won’t leak, will it?”

“It’s in a sealed bag,” says Judy. She places it on the desk and makes an awkward smile.

“Well then,” says Rebecca, theatrically, “let me at it.”

“Thanks,” says Judy. She takes a step backward, says “Sorry,” and then departs.

Rebecca looks at the box, shaking her head gravely, thinking it through. She pushes her chair away from the desk to

put some distance between herself and the creature from the depths of Gilly's ass.

Then she picks up the phone and dials the number Lucy, the head of Human Resources. It diverts to an international number.

Finally, Lucy answers, groggily.

"Lucy. It's Rebecca Parry."

"Beccy?"

"Are you okay?" Rebecca asks.

"Yeah, just--"

"I think that I woke you. What time is it?"

"Do you really want me to find out? I'll have to open my eyes again."

"No, it's okay. Where are you?"

"In bed."

"I mean where?"

"Moscow. And you have ten seconds

before I leave Moscow.”

“Where are you going?”

“Back to sleep.”

“Okay, I’ll be quick. He wants me to transfer a piece of his shit across the city.”

“Shit, as in?”

“Feces. Poo. Stool. Turd. Crap,” says Rebecca.

“Okay, I get it. That’s horrible.”

“Tell me about it. It’s in a box on my desk.”

“What colour is it?”

“What colour is it?” asks Rebecca, perplexed, “you mean the box or the poo?”

“Just kidding,” says Lucy, laughing.

“I just want someone to take it off my desk.”

“How about this,” says Lucy.

“Imagine if you were hijacked by the paparazzi and they got a photo of it and that found its way to the front page of Bloomberg or the Times.”

“What a great idea.” Rebecca says,
“What would be the headline?”

“The Shit’s shit,” says Suzy.

Rebecca laughs aloud, then catches herself, putting her hand over her mouth.

Suzy continues, “Mr. Clay’s Clay.”

“Stop it, you are hurting me.”

“It is a serious point,” says Lucy,
“Traveling with Mr. Clay’s poo in your bag could be a major security and PR issue for the firm,” she says. “I don’t think that it is appropriate for you to do it.”

“Wow. You are creative.”

“Can I go back to sleep now?”

“Thanks, Sister. Owe you one.”

Rebecca puts down the phone feeling empowered. She puts a call through to the Head of Executive Security. “Tim,” she says, “I need two security guards here, right now.” Then she puts down the phone and sits back, wondering whether there will be a blowback for crying wolf.

Within a few minutes, there is a rap at her door and Tim enters her office followed by two burly guards in uniforms. She is relieved to see that they are carrying side arms.

“Thank god, you are here,” Rebecca says, feigning panic.

“Everything okay?” Tim scans the room for danger.

“It’s there.” Rebecca points at the box. “Gilly took a shit in that box and it

needs to get to a lab. He wants me to take it, but PR says that if something happens, and press get hold of it.”

Tim makes a loud chortle. “Yeah, the shit would hit the fan. Don’t worry. I’ll sort it.” He picks up the box and hands it to one of the guards.

Rebecca smiles as the three men depart her office. She shifts her chair closer to her desk and says, with finality, “Sorted.”

Dinner with Snowden

Rebecca shuts down her computer and departs the office at 8 pm. In the lobby of the building, she retrieves from her handbag a pair of lightly tinted sunglasses. She threads the arms through the thick mane so that they sit snug against her head. Then she raises the collar of her jacket.

With that final movement, she disappears from view. Her hair is visible, her clothes are visible, but ‘she’ is not.

Rebecca steps through the revolving doors and onto the pavement and begins the walk to Crosby’s Restaurant. She takes an indirect route, making sure that she passes through three places where the crowds are very tight. Periodically, she stops, rests against a

wall, lowers her glasses to look around to see if she is being followed.

This is her routine for meeting Snowdon. She has never trained in espionage, but she has seen enough movies to know that if someone was following her they would, at least, know that she thought she was being followed. For what that was worth.

Finally at the restaurant, she enters, relieved to be off the street. It is dimly lit. The tables have white table clothes with red squares. Over each table is an ornate luminaire with four fabric lampshades and burgundy tassels.

The queue is backed up at the Maître d' station and Rebecca moves her weight from one foot to the other, impatiently. She sees Snowdon. He doesn't get up, just rests in his seat, like

an artist appreciating a landscape before he paints it. He is tall and thin, but in his suit jacket, he looks solid.

Snowdon raises his finger to his face and draws a line down his cheek indicating for Rebecca to lower her glasses. She complies, and looks directly at him, feeling a new drug course through her veins. It is as if she has laid eyes on the final member of her own species at mating season.

Finally, the Maître d' asks her name and then escorts her to the table. Her eyes are locked on Snowdon's as they come closer. Snowdon steps up and embraces her. He puts one arm around her back and with his free hand he pushes the back of her head so that her face nestles against his chest. She is immobilized there, feeling as though

she were flooded with opiates. They break the embrace and make a single, short, open-mouthed kiss.

They sit and Snowdon takes her hand, raising it to his cheek. “You have the look, tonight,” he says.

“You have the look.”

“Your fiery mane.”

“It’s your cheek bones. Your boyish face.”

“Did I tell you that I love you?” asks Snowdon.

Rebecca answers with a smile and a blush. Her skin tone moves a little closer to the colour of her hair.

“I got a claret,” he says, raising a bottle. He pours wine into Rebecca’s glass then hands it to her. She takes the glass by the stem and swirls the liquid inside and takes a sniff. Snowdon raises

his glass and the subtlest ‘chink’ noise is heard as the wine glasses touch.

“I have loved you since the day I googled you,” she says.

“I like it when you google me,” says Snowden. He leans back in his seat and places a napkin on his lap then leans back towards her again.

“I google your porn hub,” says Rebecca. She places her finger on his lower lip and draws it down to reveal the shiny pink on the insides.

“What did you google?”

“Huh?”

“What did you google that night, to find me?” asks Snowden. He captures her hand in his, opens it and examines the soft flesh of her palm.

“Ethics. Corporate ethics. Something like that.”

“What did you find first?”

“One of your papers. The Psychology of Power, maybe.”

“Probably,” says Snowdon, “that googles well, that one.”

“Then I found your website. And I got all steamed up over your photo.”

“Which photo?”

“There was tapestry on the wallpaper behind you.”

“Oh, that one. That was in a pub in Paddington.”

“I saw that photo and I wanted you right then.”

“How did you want me?”

“I wanted to Mount Snowdon.”

Snowdon leans back in his seat as he laughs aloud. “I like it when you say that.”

“Then I rang you,” Rebecca says.

“I remember. It was three a.m.”

“Not where I was,” says Rebecca, smiling. “You sounded *prete a couche*.”

“That’s French for what exactly?”

“Ready for bed.”

“I was already in bed.”

“Ready for sex, then.”

“I am like that now.”

“*Hmmm*. You were all groggy and saying what’s your name? How do you spell that? And I thought, how cute. I’ve got him, already.”

“That’s right and you said B for Rebecca.”

“No. That’s what you said.”

“I remember thinking, I have a crazy woman on the line.”

“And you know what I was thinking?”

“What?”

“I was thinking, I am going to swallow

you within the month.”

“And you did that.”

“Yes,” says Rebecca, proudly.

“You’re a Cougar.”

“*Hmmm*. No. I don’t think so.”

“No?” asks Snowdon.

“You are too old to be a cub.”

“A MILF, then.”

“I don’t know what a MILF is.”

“A mother I’d like to fuck.”

Rebecca looks at her hands, suddenly disconnected from her surroundings. She recalls the photo of the young boy and imagines a scene in which Gilly and the boy are facing one another. A wave of nausea comes over her. She sits back and averts her eyes from Snowdon. She wants to put her glasses back on and disappear.

“Are you okay, Bee?” Snowdon

reaches across the table and clasps a hand over forearm.

Rebecca looks up into Snowdon's eyes and becomes aware of her pounding heart. She wears a flustered look.

"Are you okay, baby?" he asks gently.

The waiter appears with a water jug. Rebecca and Snowdon sit back while their glasses are filled. Rebecca drinks half the glass and anxiously motions for it to be refilled.

"Would you care to order?" asks the waiter.

"Do you want me to order for you?" asks Snowdon.

Rebecca nods, sending her red mane rocking back and forward.

"Just two Osso Bucco, that's all," says Snowdon and the waiter moves away promptly. Then he says, "That was

really clumsy of me, I am sorry. It was very crass.”

“It wasn’t you,” she says quietly, “it was me and today combined.”

“Something happened today?”
Snowdon asks.

Rebecca sighs and shakes her head. The moment has passed and now she feels funny for having clammed up. That emotional response cost her about a minute of her time with Snowdon.

“Something strange today,” she says, coming back to her normal frame of mind. “I had this pile of contracts on my desk and in amongst them was a photo of a young boy.”

“Who was he?”

“I don’t know. It doesn’t make any sense.”

“How are things with Gilly?”

“Horrible, as usual. He had these specialists examine him in the board room.” Rebecca starts to laugh and puts her hand to her mouth to constrain it. She glances around the room almost as if she were checking she wasn’t to be overheard.

“He was wearing a hospital gown, bending over the board room table. He is so paranoid about this thing in his bum that he has eleven oncologists on standby.”

“Standby for the day?”

“No. Permanently. He has them on five-year contracts.”

“Who are they?”

“Imagine a list of the world’s best cancer specialists. The ones at the top.”

“Can they still practice?”

“Hardly. They have to go where he

goes.”

“That’s grotesque,” says Snowdon, visibly annoyed.

“Anyway, if you strip the bespoke suit away from Gilly Clay’s body, there is something underneath that resembles a starved rat. He’s a scrawny little thing, wincing every time the doctors examined his ass. In the boardroom of all places. Anyway, I wasn’t going to get away with just having a laugh, he landed a stool sample on my desk with instructions that I personally deliver it to a lab.”

“Did you?”

“No, I found a way out.”

“Thank God.”

“It wasn’t God. It was Lucy. Her idea.”

“Lucy, from H.R.?””

“Yeah.”

There is a pause for a little while. Snowden shakes his head gently the way that he does when he is trying to figure out how to get Rebecca out of her job. That’s not something that he can easily talk about.

“Did you get to see the manuscript?” he asks, at length.

Rebecca takes a sip of her wine and places the glass back on the table. She notices the translucent smudge of lipstick on the side. She thinks that if someone matched the DNA from her saliva with Snowden’s fingerprints, they would have evidence of them having been together.

“I saw the I.P. address that you texted me,” she says as she removes the lipstick from the side of the glass with

her thumb.

“You couldn’t check it?”

“I can’t, baby,” she says, exasperated.

“I want to read it. You know I do. But I can’t risk them finding that the PA to Gilly Clay accesses literature like that through a direct I.P. address. Christ, I have to swap SIM cards just to talk to you.”

“I know that. I had in mind that you’d use a proxy server.”

“Tom, baby. Listen to me.” Rebecca takes his hands imploringly. “You write about power, but you don’t understand the way it affects people. It’s like a skin disease. It is ever-present, everywhere.”

“I know. I know. I am sorry.”

“But tell me about it. Is it complete?”

“Second draft is nearly done.”

“Has the publisher seen it yet?”

“They’ve seen the first draft. They’re just waiting on me to finish tweaking it.”

“It’s finished isn’t it?” asks Rebecca, excitedly. “It’s finished and you’re just hedging from letting them launch it because you are...”

“What?” asks Snowdon, suddenly serious.

“You are human, Tom. You’re anxious.”

Snowdon looks at his hands. “You read me like a book.”

“Yeah, but I can’t read your book. The published one.”

“Okay. I’ll approve its release.”

“Really?” Rebecca asks excitedly. “Tomorrow?”

“Tomorrow,” he says, non-committedly.

“First thing, promise.”

“Okay. First thing.”

“Did you settle on the title?”

Snowdon sits up in his chair and moves his hands as if representing the curtain on a stage opening up. Then he says dramatically, “Power Elite and Planet Earth.” He watches for her reaction.

“Hmmm,” says Rebecca, chewing it over.

“No?”

“Not no, just...”

“Just not yes,” says Snowdon.

“It’s very seventies.”

“It’s inspired by Mills, 1956.”

“Maybe something more contemporary?”

“Okay,” says Snowdon, thinking it through, “What about Superclass and

Planet Earth.”

“Planet Earth is a bit seventies as well, isn’t it.”

“I suppose so.”

“So, what is the contemporary version?”

“Sustainability, I guess.”

“So...”

“Sustainability and the Superclass,” says Snowden. Then he gets it, “Hey, there’s a title.”

Rebecca sits back, smiling contentedly.

“Sustainability and the Superclass. That’s awesome.”

“It’s crisp. It’s contemporary. To the point,” she says.

“Why didn’t I see that?”

“You just needed the fog to lift.”

“My lovely fog lifter.”

I didn’t lift it,” says Rebecca, rolling

her palm upwards to meet Snowdon's hand sliding across the table towards her. "I was just there with you when it lifted."

Sustainability and the Superclass

“So are you going to tell me about it?” Rebecca asks, holding a cup of coffee after the main meal is over.

“You already know about the book.”

“Just give me one of your overviews.”

“Okay, then,” Snowden adjusts himself so that his forearms are resting on the table. Rebecca can almost hear the sound of his brain reformatting thousands of words into an overview suited to a conversation in a restaurant.

He says, “So I study the global business elite who run the world so badly. I like the term the Superclass, although I am using it a bit out of context.”

“How so?”

“Superclass was named by Rothkopf to describe mass-influencers including

artists, religious and government figures and the like, not just the business elite.”

“It’s got a ring to it.”

“Yeah. That’s why I use it. So, I study a subset of the Superclass – the western business elite. They are not a club or a family, but a statistical category of people. So they have commonalities in that they are business executives, and they have lots of power, wealth and influence. But they come to be this way through many different journeys.”

Rebecca sips her coffee and rests back in her seat. “It’s good. Keep going.”

“They can go anywhere, anytime,” Snowden says, “The range of their private jets allows them to move across continents without touching down to refuel. For them, distance is meaningless. They put their head down

to sleep and in that time they have traveled from Moscow to New York.

“And they don’t get stuck in queues or get delayed at customs. Everywhere they go, doors are opened for them. And this is part of the disconnect, you see. They never have to change a flat tire or unblock a drain. They have disconnected from the experience that 99.99% of humanity feel. In some ways, they are a sub-species. Not sub- as in lesser, but sub- as in distinctive. *Homo wealthicus*, maybe.”

Rebecca laughs. “I like that.”

“And because they are so disconnected from humanity, they really have no idea how their decisions play out on the ground. They could be causing starvation or wars.”

“They are aren’t they?” asks Rebecca.

“Well yes, that’s right, sometimes. Either by directly supporting, or not ameliorating, the conditions that lead to starvation and wars. Or by financing it. They have no conception of the suffering that comes from their decisions.”

“They live in a bubble,” Rebecca says.

“That’s right. But here’s the thing, Rebecca, we all live in a bubble, a bubble of gas that clings to the surface of the planet within which all the living systems on Earth exist. And the decisions that are made by this global elite are destroying the biosphere. It’s dying from all the coal that they insist on digging up and all the oil that gets spilled and burned, all the nuclear waste, all the forests and fisheries wiped out. The science says that they have brought

the world to a point of ecological collapse.”

“Don’t they understand that if the planet dies, they will die too?”

“They think that they are all powerful, that they can survive anything. In their gilded, climate controlled mini-biospheres. Maybe they will come to repopulate the world once all the little people have perished.”

“Imagine that. The world full of Gilly Clays.”

“And they follow a plan. Sure they bicker and argue about the spoils, but ultimately, they all act in concert. It’s no coincidence that we are still digging up coal despite the planet being bathed in sunlight. They won’t permit any shift until it suits them. Until making a change benefits them. There are billions

of dollars invested in fossil fuel infrastructure and they are loathed to write off. Sweat the asset, they call it. Business as usual until you can't.

“And it's not possible to communicate environmental science to these people. They're trained law, banking, finance and commerce. They don't understand ecology or atmospheric chemistry or Long Future sustainability. They view these things as plots against their business interests.

“I used to think of them as super-human. But that's not right. The opposite is true. They are humans who have been enhanced with wealth, power, technology and opportunity. But the result is that they shrink as humans. Their empathy, caring, and understanding shrivels up to nothing.”

“Oh, heck,” says Rebecca, suddenly clutching her stomach.

“What’s the matter? Are you okay?”

“I think I am going to throw up.”

“What is it? The wine?”

“No,” she laughs. “It’s your story. It’s so confronting. It sounds like Gilly Clay’s autobiography.”

“You can leave him,” mutters Snowdon, looking at the tablecloth.

“I can’t leave him,” Rebecca protests, exasperated. “You talk about these people in the abstract. You have researched them from literature and you’ve had them on your couch, asking indirect questions, probing around for your truths. But you are not exposed to them.”

Snowdon looks at his hands forlornly. They are having this conversation again.

“I live with it, day in, day out,” Rebecca explains, “I inhale the air he has exhaled. I smell his body odours. I had his turd on my desk, for God’s sake.” She laughs aloud. “Do you think he cares how I feel to be put in a position like that? His heart has ossified, Tom. He has a heart of bone.”

Snowdon lowers his eyes to the tablecloth. He doesn’t like to hear that tone in Rebecca’s voice. It is as if he has failed her and made her angry.

He stretches across the table and takes Rebecca’s hands in his. “How would he do that?” Snowdon asks.

“Do what?”

“How would he crucify you if you broke your contract?”

“He wouldn’t really do anything,” she says. “It would just slip out in a meeting

with one of his lawyers. He'd say: my PA skipped on her contract, sort it out."

"That's it?"

"That's the power, Snowdon. That's how it is executed. Next thing I would be facing a lawsuit with damages that would ruin me financially. Just like that."

Rebecca watches Snowdon nodding silently, looking at his hands. She waits for him to raise his eyes, then cocks a smile. "Do you want to get out of here?"

Coitus Interruptus

They take a taxi to Snowdon's hotel. Immediately inside his room, Snowdon pushes Rebecca gently against the wall and kisses her. His hand moves against her skirt and takes hold of the fabric and raises it, allowing his fingertips to push against her crotch. She has been ready for him since she saw him in the restaurant. A wave of pleasure surges through her as his fingers rolls against her.

Snowdon's mouth is against her throat and she squeezes him through his pants. He grinds against her thigh. It is hurried and overwhelming and it can't be stopped.

Suddenly, from Rebecca purse comes an ominous noise, like the sound that resonates from a cathedral to signify the

end of the world. It's the ringtone that is programmed into all the executive staff phones: Gilly Clay is calling.

"Fuck," Rebecca says, suddenly alert. "It's him."

She grips her hand onto Snowdon's, immobilizing him. "Stop baby, stop."

The phone rings again.

"It's him!"

Snowdon nuzzles his face dreamily against Rebecca's cheek and mutters, "Don't take it."

Rebecca starts panting, heavily, searching for the phone in her pant's pocket. She raises the phone to see the button that she has to press to take the call. "I have to," she gasps.

Snowdon goes to remove his hand from her crotch, but she grips him tightly in place. "Don't move. Don't

move.” She stiffens, mentally checking everything is in place before she takes the call.

“*Sbbb*,” she tells Snowdon, psyching herself into hearing Gilly Clay’s voice. She presses the button and says, “Gilly,” with a very deliberate tone. She grimaces, word came out wrong. She can hear her heart pounding and wonders whether the noise will give her away.

There is a long pause. It is far too long. Something is wrong. The guillotine blade is rising. Eventually, Gilly asks, “Where are you?”

“You just got me in the ladies,” she says disingenuously. Then she thinks, “That was clever. I didn’t disclose the location.”

“Wash your hands,” Gilly growls.

Rebecca recognizes this as humour,
“That was next.”

There is a long and terrifying pause.
The longer the pause, the more likely
he’ll ask a question that she won’t want
to answer truthfully. Snowdon moves
against her and she stiffens, pressing his
hand harder against her body, hoping to
convey to him that he should stay
perfectly still and silent.

“Can I do something?” she asks.

“Go to the airport.”

“The airport?”

“Someone is coming in.”

“Now?”

“Here’s Tommy,” says Gilly. She hears
the sound of the phone being passed to
someone else.

“Tommy? Who the fuck is Tommy?”
she thinks. She met a Tommy once. She

didn't meet him, she saw him sweep through the offices. He was working with Gilly on some project. Something secret.

"Rebecca?" Tommy asks. The voice is impassive, demanding.

"Yes."

"Flight from London touches down at 11.35 pm. Montgomery Earle is aboard. Get him here immediately. I'll text you the details."

Rebecca is silent, thinking it through. Who is this man? Why is she being sent to the airport? Why can't Montgomery Earle get a fucking taxi?

"Understand?" the man's voice is irritable.

"*Uh-uh.*"

The line goes dead and Rebecca lowers the phone to her side, stunned.

“Baby,” whispers Snowdon in her ear. She feels him grind against her thigh and can feel his fingers pressed against her crotch, held there by her own hand. His fingers feel odd, like a piece of wood.

“Sweetie,” he murmurs.

She pulls his hand away, her heart racing. How many seconds have passed since she was instructed to go to the airport?

Rebecca move Snowdon’s hand close to her face then she leans forward and kisses his mouth. She places her forehead against his forehead and holds it there, breathing deeply for some seconds. In her mind, she is apologizing for what she is about to do, but she has no capacity to speak it. Then she takes a step aside, pulls open the door, and

runs the length of the hall towards the elevator.

In the Limo

On the street, Rebecca runs from the hotel, looking for a landmark she recognises. She looks around for a street sign, an intersection to direct the limo towards. There is none apparent, so she walks another few blocks, deeper into the rabbit hole. Finally, she sees a pole with two street signs at right angles. She calls the limo, conscious of how much time she has lost.

The limo driver is a young lad called Jimmy. She tells him the intersection details and listens as he looks it up and confirms that he knows how to get there. Then she pulls off her shoe and changes the SIM card to call Snowdon. She paces on the street corner listening to the ringing of Snowdon's phone.

“Please baby, pick up. Please honey,”

she mutters anxiously, stomping her foot on the concrete. The phone rings out. She dials again. Again it rings out. She tries one more time, grimacing at every ring tone. She imagines him standing in the hallway of the hotel room, cursing at her as he looks at her name on his phone, while it rings.

She tries a fourth time, this time anxiously checking her watch, cognizant that she has been off the air for minutes now. Then she gives up, rips the battery off the phone and replaces the SIM card for the work one.

Eventually, the limo pulls up and she steps inside the back seat. She checks her watch, grimaces, then looks out the window for something to make it better. She grips her face in her hands and stays like that while her breathing

re-establishes.

Finally, she comes to terms with her situation, realizing that there was nothing she could have done. She could have explained to Snowdon how vital it was that she acted instantly. But how long would that have taken? Maybe she should have quickly blown him in the hallway; at least his evening would have had a happy ending. Rebecca laughs aloud at the thought and becomes aware of the tight confines of the limousine. She looks around for a minibar, finds the ingredients for a vodka-orange and mixes herself a drink.

“Montgomery Earle,” she says aloud, shaking her head, ruefully. “Why can’t you get a fucking limo yourself?”

Rebecca slumps back in the seat with the drink in her hand. She looks to her

side, watches the buildings whip past, and gains a sense of where she is in the city and how long before she gets to the airport. Minutes pass and Rebecca gets curious about her mission. She activates the intercom to the driver.

“Jimmy?”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

“We are going to the airport to pick up Montgomery Earle.”

“I don’t know Ma’am. You just said to go to International Arrivals.”

“Have you ever heard of Montgomery Earle?”

“No, Ma’am.”

“I have to pick up this guy and I don’t know what he looks like.”

“You need a sign, Ma’am.”

“A sign.”

“I’ll make you one.”

“Really?”

“I have some cardboard in the boot and a marker pen.”

“I like you, Jimmy.”

“Thank you, Ma’am. I have always liked you, too.”

This comment causes Rebecca some confusion. She doesn’t recall ever having met Tim before. Besides his eyes visible in the rear vision mirror she doesn’t even know what he looks like. She rests back in her seat feeling both warmed and confused by Jimmy’s statement.

Montgomery Earle

Twenty minutes later, Rebecca is standing at international arrivals with a piece of cardboard on which are written a long string of letters spelling out the words: Montgomery Earle. She waggles the sign at every adult male that she sees, desperately hoping that he is not a blood relative of Gilly.

An entire jumbo's worth of passengers pass by her, the crowd thins, and still no one has approached her. Finally, she is all but alone and the last two people in the arrivals hall are a British Airways air hostess holding the hand of a young boy.

Rebecca recognizes the boy from the photo on her desk. She is stunned and finds herself just staring at the boy. A tumble of emotions washes through

her, anxiety, sadness, confusion. She becomes detached from her senses. She feels herself walking towards the air hostess and saying, “Hi. I’m Rebecca Parry. I’ve been sent to collect Montgomery.”

“Hi Rebecca,” she hears, the flight attendant say, “can show me some I.D?”

Rebecca observes her hand moving into her purse and retrieving a driver’s license and then signing the documents presented by the hostess. The autopilot doesn’t end until she is resting on her haunches looking into the face of the child.

The boy is silent, tired from the long flight. She takes his hands in hers and looks him over. What a beautiful child.

Rebecca hears her own breathing, and

she feels terror rising. The terror comes from the inevitable question that burns so hot that she doesn't even want to form it, let alone ask it. What does Gilly want with the child?

Then she hears another sound and it snaps out of her trance. It is the rounded, warm and pleasant sound of her own voice talking in an appropriate tone to the child, "Hello Montgomery."

"People keep calling me Montgomery," he says.

"What would you rather be called?"

"I'd like to be called my real name, Monty."

"It says Montgomery on the air ticket."

"That's because they changed it last year."

"Really? Well, you will always be

Monty to me,” says Rebecca.

“Who are you?” the boy asks.

“I am Rebecca. People call me Bee.”

“Bee? Why do they call you Bee?”

“Because Rebecca has a ‘B’.

“How many?” asks Monty.

“How many what?”

“How many ‘Bs’?”

“How many ‘Bs’ does Rebecca have?”

she laughs, “Just one. And a few
‘Cs’.”

“Why don’t they call you ‘C’ then?”

“I have been called a ‘C’ a few times,”
says Rebecca, wittily and then instantly
regrets it. What is she thinking? She
knows how to speak around children.

“Someone else gave me the name.”

Monty mulls this over. Eventually, he
seems to resolve that it is okay.

“So, tell me something, Monty.”

“Okay.”

“I am taking you to Gilly. Is that right?”

“Yes,” he says, plainly.

Rebecca’s heart sinks and she realizes just how vulnerable she was to that answer and how capriciously she asked the question. “We should go now.”

She retrieves Monty’s suitcase and extends her hand. Monty allows her to maneuver him through the airport terminal. By the time they reach the limo, the turmoil inside Rebecca’s head is reaching a breaking point. Who is this boy? Where are his parents? Why had she been sent to pick him up? Who was going to care for him? What was Gilly doing with him? Where did Montgomery Earle fit into her life?

As they approach the limo and she

notices his reaction to the long, black and immaculately clean car.

“Have you ever been in a limo before?” she asks.

“What’s a limo?” Monty replies.

“A limousine. The big black car.”

“I’ve never been in some of these,” says Monty.

Jimmy opens the door for them and says, “Good evening, Master Earle.

“Hello,” says Monty and steps inside the cabin.

Rebecca follows him inside and helps affix his seat belt. “So Monty, where have you come from?”

“From England,” he says plainly.

“And you are coming to visit Gilly?”

“Yes.”

Rebecca grimaces; she has just wasted to two questions and has learned no

more than she already knew. She forms some more questions as she sits in the darkened cabin. What should she ask? How could she get Monty to tell her something that would explain why he is here. Like, why did they change his name, for example? And who are they? She stewes on this until she hears a tiny sigh and looks over to see that Monty has fallen asleep in the leather seats.

She reaches over and places a hand over his shoe. As the limo moves through the streets, she counts down the seconds until she has to hand him over to Gilly. Her face feels tight and hot. It is as if her entire head has turned into a single lacrimal gland ready to burst into tears. She holds it back, following a simple rule: never show weakness in front of Gilly Clay.

Letting Monty Go

Eventually, the limo arrives in the basement of the office building and Jimmy pulls open the passenger side door. Rebecca has steeled herself for the exchange as best she can, and wakes Monty by gently shaking the foot that she has held gripped in her hand for the whole journey.

She steps with Monty and his bag into the elevator and looks at him in the reflective surfaces. Her chest is tight, but she is stoic and determined to keep it together.

Monty yawns and looks up at her reflection. His face opens in a wide smile and he looks up at her and takes hold of her hand. The feel of his skin touching hers flushes her with relief and she eases a long sigh. She cannot

know what will happen next, but she resolves to be strong.

The elevator doors slide open and she walks with Monty down the plush hallway to Gilly's section of the building. Her chest is tight, feeling like she is moving along a hospital corridor, terrified of the imminent surgery.

As Rebecca approaches the final door, she lets go of Monty's hand. She rests on her haunches and looks directly into his eyes. "I hope that we can see each other again, sometime."

"I'd like that," says Monty.

"If you ever need anything, just ask for me. Rebecca Parry."

She watches Monty nod. Then she stands, raps on the door and enters. Tommy moves rapidly towards her. She recognizes him now, definitely, the guy

she had seen before, but still has no idea of his role.

“Hello, Montgomery,” says Tommy, brusquely and he takes the boy’s hand and his bag from Rebecca. Then he walks Monty towards where Gilly is standing.

Rebecca watches as Gilly lowers himself on one knee, places his hands on Monty’s shoulders and looking into the boys face. Rebecca is unable to gauge Monty’s reaction to this as Tommy bundles her out the door and slams it in her face.

Rebecca stands in the hallway, feeling like the bottom has fallen out of her world. A great emptiness engulfs her and starves her of air. She finds herself numbly walking towards the elevators and pressing the down button.

As she waits for the elevator, she pieces together bits of overheard conversation and it all falls into place. She knows who Tommy is, now. He's a specialist in Succession Planning. And that explains what Monty is doing here. He has been drafted in as the heir to Gilly Clays business empire and by necessity, his defective moral compass.

Rebecca departs the elevator on the floor where her office is located. She sweeps along the hallway and into the ladies lavatory to the cubicle at the end, the only safe place in the building.

Tears pour from her as she lowers the toilet lid and sits with her face in her hands. The feeling is all consuming.

She tries to cry it out and to hold it back at the same time and she finds herself choking and coughing.

Eventually, she sits up, exhausted and dizzy. She leans back against the wall breathing heavily. Where is Snowdon to hold her in his long, lean arms now she needs him most?

Instinctively, she pulls off her shoe and retrieves the SIM card. Snowdon's phone rings out and the answering machine activates. Rebecca listens to the recorded words that she has heard so many times, feeling as though she has lost both her boyfriend and a child on the same night.

"Gilly had me go to the airport to pick up the little boy," she weeps into the phone as soon as the beep noise ends. "I don't know where your hotel is. Please call me. Please."

Then she lets her body go limp. She slips onto the pristine marble tiles, curls

up in a ball and weeps herself to sleep.

Relocate to London

The next morning, Rebecca is at her workstation feeling light-headed and exhausted. She has been unable to get through to Snowden and fears that it may be weeks before they can reconnect. She checks the morning emails and finds that Gilly's entourage is being relocated.

A relocation is a common event and the email signals the beginning of a sleek process that wraps up Gilly's core support team and ships them seamlessly to another city. This time, it's London. "Relocation is a pain in the ass," thinks Rebecca, "but London is good."

She looks up when she hears Gilly's voice from the corridor. His intonation is marginally less terse than normal, today. She sees Monty standing in the

doorway looking in at her. She breaks a smile, feeling all her worry and angst wash away. Then Gilly appears, standing behind Monty, towering over him ominously.

“This is Rebecca,” says Gilly. “She’s one of my Personal Assistants for the time being. This is Master Montgomery Earle. He’ll be working with us from now on.” Then in a moment, they are both gone as Gilly ushers Monty along the corridor.

Rebecca watches the empty corridor, surprised by the exchange. She thinks back to the last time that Gilly actually used her name. How long ago was that? A few minutes later, Monty reappears. He glances around, seeming to check that he is alone with her.

“I don’t understand,” the little boys

says.

“What?”

“They fly me all the way from England. And next thing we are flying back to England. It seems like a big waste of...” Monty is unable to complete his sentence.

“Jet fuel,” says Rebecca.

“Do jets have fuel?” asks Monty.

“Lots of it.”

Monty shakes his head, confused. He glances momentarily up the hallway, smiles at Rebecca, then departs.

Later that day, Tim from security pays a visit. He takes a seat in front of Rebecca’s desk and briefs her about the flight arrangements. She is informed that she will be flying in one of the private jets with three of the new doctors.

“I don’t want to be on the plane with Dr. Bloomfield,” she tells him.

“Okay,” says Tim, writing a note, “we’ll sort that for you.”

“How is the little boy traveling?” she asks.

“Master Earl is traveling alone with Gilly.”

“Master Earle?” asks Rebecca, surprised.

“You didn’t see the memo?” asks Tim.

“I must have missed that one.”

“The boy is to be referred to as Master Earl.”

Rebecca snorts. “How are you going with that?” she asks.

“I just follow orders, Bec. I follow orders. I serve my time. Then I’m free.”

“That’s a good life-plan. Can you tell me anything about so-called Master

Earle?”

Tim looks around to the door into the corridor and sees that it is open. He adjusts his tone accordingly. Leaning forward and lowering his voice, he says, quietly, “Master Earle is an orphan. He had a wealthy benefactor who put him through private school so he could learn to speak all proper, like. And now he’s here with us.”

“What for?”

“He’s in line for the throne.”

Rebecca becomes glum and she sadly nods her head, her worst fears confirmed. Rebecca asks, “How does that work? That he went from his benefactor to us?”

Tim sits back and taps his pen on his pad, “Can’t say,” he says.

“Can’t say or don’t know?” asks

Rebecca.

“The point is,” says Tim, standing, “You should be nice to Master Earle. He could be your boss, one day.”

Rebecca watches Tim go, not sure what to make of the news. Then she rests back in her chair and contemplates the logistics of getting out of her hotel and to the airport.

Typically, she would seek to clear the morning emails as soon as possible, but today she is too distracted to concentrate on them. So she shuts down her computer and returns to her hotel. Back in her private space, she swaps SIMs and sees that she has missed a call from Snowden. She rings him straight back and he answers.

“Oh, Tom,” she gasps at the sound of his voice, “I am so sorry to do that to

you.”

“It’s okay, Rebecca,” he says, “I understand.”

“I must have called you ten times.”

“I left my jacket in the restaurant last night. My phone was in the pocket. Are you okay?”

“I am now. Where are you?”

“Downtown in a coffee shop. You?”

“I’m packing. They’re shipping us to London. Did you tell them?”

“I did. I emailed the publishers first thing this morning.”

“Oh, good work, Tom. Good on you.”

“Thanks for last night. I really needed that push.”

“Oh baby, will I get to see you?”

“What time’s your flight?”

“I have to check out and take a cab at

four.”

“I could be there in twenty minutes.”

“In a cab?”

“No, I’ll walk.”

“That would give us twenty minutes together,” she says light-heartedly.

“What would we do?”

“Huh! I am already walking.”

“Okay. That’s twenty minutes to pack. Can she do it?”

Rebecca puts down the phone and heaves a sigh. She looks around the clothes and cosmetics, shoes and bags. She has been in this room for over six weeks. “There will have to be some sacrifices,” she thinks. Then she gets to work.

By the time an hour has passed, Rebecca has packed her bags, shagged Snowdon, kissed her goodbyes,

checked out of the hotel and caught a taxi.

She sits in the back of a cab on the way to the airport, feeling exceptionally calm and at peace with the world. In her hands is a small box that Snowden had passed to her in the last few seconds that they were together. She opens the box to see a memory stick. On its surface, written in immaculate, fine pen-ink are the words: Sustainability and the Superclass. He must have sweated over that for ages to get it so perfect. She what it is, it's a copy of his book with its new title. It's a sweet gift and a white elephant.

She eyes the stick suspiciously. Snowden is well meaning, she thinks, but he never really understands how Gilly would react to finding a document

like this in her presence. She weighs it up and feels confident that Snowdon would understand her position. She thinks that she might just leave the stick in the taxi, but that comes with the chance that the cabbie will find it and try to return it. diligently get it back to her. So she opens the window of the taxi and drops the memory stick onto the street.

Fire the Waiter

At the airport, Rebecca checks in and finds a seat on the Gulfstream jet at the front of the cabin. This gives her more privacy as she has her back to the grumpy oncologists and others on the flight.

Halfway across the Atlantic, she checks her phone and finds that she has missed an incoming text message. Drowsily, she peers at the words. It is from Gilly and it reads: “you will be dining with Master Earle and me tonight.”

Rebecca grunts and feels her energy drain away. She has only once dined with Gilly. It was in the first week of her employ and it was awful. Then she thinks that the invitation will allow her to spend time with Monty. This makes

her smile. Then she thinks that with Gilly present she probably won't be able to relax, and maybe not even communicate with the boy.

The rest of the flight passes in a blur with Rebecca feeling a tight knot in her stomach. She checks into her hotel and has just enough time to get to the restaurant for the allotted time.

She is shown to the table as Gilly and Monty are being fussed over by the waiters. "I'm not early," Rebecca thinks, "but am I late?"

Monty looks up towards her, smiling. She wants to smile back but is distracted by the waiter seating her. She sits and is about to say hello, but she is interrupted by Gilly addressing Monty.

"I don't make a point of dining with the help. But tonight I have asked

Rebecca to join us so that she can be familiarized with our procedures.”

“Thank you,” says Rebecca, instinctively, and then immediately regrets it. She looks to Monty and gives him a little grin and he smiles back.

Then she looks to Gilly who is observing her with a vacuum-like stare.

Rebecca averts her eyes, glancing around the restaurant, wondering what on Earth she is doing at the table. She is rescued by a fat Italian man. The restaurant owner comes over to the table and slaps Gilly on the shoulder.

“Gilmo!” he says, enthusiastically.

Gilly turns and becomes unusually animated, shaking the fat Italian’s hand, behaving almost like a human being who is reunited with a friend. Rebecca finds this most strange. It is almost like

Gilly has a friend. Imagine that.
Someone actually likes him!

“You need to come out back,” says the rotund restaurateur, “I’ll show you the new thing.” He winks conspiratorially.

“Okay, okay, I’ll come with you,” Gilly says. He stands, leans towards Rebecca and growls, “Don’t get close to the boy.”

Rebecca stares ahead, stunned by the words. Finally, she looks up to see Gilly moving into the kitchen area with Roberto. She is on her own with Monty, at last. When she looks towards him, the young boy is looking at her with his pretty face held in an expectant smile.

“How are you going kiddo?” Rebecca asks, winking.

“I’m okay, I guess.”

“We are not to get close. You know that, don’t you?”

“Why would he say that?”

“I don’t know. But no jokes about parrots. Okay?”

“Do you know a joke about a parrot?” asks Monty, intrigued.

“A few. But I’m not allowed to tell them,” Rebecca leans in and whispers, “not tonight. Not around you know who.”

“Who?”

“Mr. Clay.”

“He’s such a tight-ass,” Monty grumbles.

Rebecca laughs, remembering the incident in the board room, the first exploratory probe from eleven nervous oncologists. “He’ll loosen up,” she says, smirking.

“Some other time, though?” Monty asks, eagerly, “I mean the parrot jokes.”

“Sure. But not until you learn Game Face.”

“What’s Game Face?” Monty is intrigued.

“Like this.” Rebecca fixes her face with professional gravitas.

Monty starts to laugh. “Why would you do that?”

“Sometimes you need to stop smiling in a hurry.”

“Like when?”

“Like when someone really grumpy turns up,” Rebecca nods towards the kitchen door. “You want to try?”

“Okay,” Monty says, excitedly. “Say when.”

“When I say ‘go’. Ready. Set. Go.”

Monty pulls a Game Face but it is not

convincing. It looks like he is acting.

Rebecca shakes her head and says,
“That won’t do. Watch again.”

She draws a finger down her cheek and her grin instantly disappears. Rather than looking like she is sad, she just no longer looks happy.

“It’s very subtle,” she says. “It’s flat. Neutral. You want to try again?”

“Okay,” says Monty. “Say when.”

“Okay. Ready?”

“Yep.”

“Ready. Set. Game Face,” says Rebecca.

Monty drops his smile and becomes quite expressionless. He does an excellent job except that he only holds it for a few seconds until he beams a smile again and starts laughing.

“I like Game Face,” he says.

“It’s good, isn’t it? You did well that time. but you need to keep it up. You can’t just let it go after a second.”

“Okay,” says Monty, “Tell me when.”

Rebecca glances up to see that Gilly is approaching the table. She winks at Monty and then says, “Game Face.”

She observes Monty’s smile melt away. He looks up at her and she sees an emptiness in his eyes. It makes her sad to see the boy’s natural emotions flattened out, but also gives her a sense of hope. He has a new tool to help him survive Gilly Clay.

Gilly takes his seat and says, “I’m having the *Osso Bucco*. What are you having, boy?”

“I’d like to have a pasta,” says Monty.

“No. You’ll have a meat dish.”

Rebecca sees Monty floundering and

she offers, “The veal looks good. You might like to have the veal, Master Earle? And I’ll have the chicken.”

“You don’t tell him what to eat,” says Gilly. “Do you want the veal, Montgomery?”

“If is an appropriate choice, Mr. Clay”

Hearing this dialogue, Rebecca’s heart sinks. She is reminded of her inner conflict when she first met Monty, not knowing why she was being instructed to hand him over to Gilly. Then she remembers the interpretation, reinforced by Tim, that Monty had been brought in as Gilly’s heir. She looks anew at Monty and Gilly and tries to understand what that might mean.

Rebecca realizes that Monty and Gilly were not strangers when she handed him over, just the night before. That

means that Gilly had been visiting him... meeting with him... grooming him... for some time before his arrival at the airport.

Rebecca suddenly becomes present to a chilling sensation. It is like the eerie feeling of waking a second before a noise in the house ceases. She becomes aware of the silence at her table an instant before it is broken.

Gilly leans back in his chair and looks towards a young waiter who is on permanent standby for the table. He clicks his fingers together and says, “Oy!”

The waiter steps forward and Gilly barks at him, “What, were you sleeping?” Then, with a sweep of his hand, he places the order using just four words, “*Osso Bucco*. Veal. Chicken.”

The young waiter retrieves his pad and starts to write. Gilly glares up at him. Then the waiter says, “*Osso Bucco*. Veal. I’m sorry, Sir, what was the third dish?”

“Get Roberto here,” says Gilly, curtly without looking at the waiter.

“I am sorry, Sir?” the young waiter leans closer to hear.

“The owner. Bring him here.”

“You mean Mr. Roberto, my boss.”

Gilly spreads his hands in astonishment and slaps his palms on the table. Rebecca can see his face reddening as his anger rises.

“What does he expect?” she wonders. He never looks at people when he talks to them.

The young waiter scurries off anxiously.

Monty follows with his eyes as he

disappears into the kitchen. “What’s happening?” he asks.

“This is a lesson in discipline,” growls Gilly.

Roberto emerges from the kitchen with his hand on the young waiter’s shoulder. “Gilmo. The new boy is still wet behind the ears.”

“Fire him,” says Gilly.

“I can’t be firing him,” says Roberto, “He is Bobby Sanders’ boy. The hedge fund guy. I am teaching the boy some people skills. You should come to my class sometime.”

Gilly turns his head to Roberto. “Do you know how much trade you get from me,” he growls.

“I do the bookwork, Gilmo. I fund my retirement on your trade. All these other customers, they’re just bread and

butter. You are the business. You are the only one I love.”

“That boy insulted me and he insulted Master Earle I am seeking natural justice. He should be instantly dismissed.” Gilly looks up at Roberto with his jaw locked in place. Rebecca sees the skin on Gilly’s face tighten. It is thin, translucent like baking paper. She can see relief of this skull bones and the blood vessels that cross them.

Roberto turns to the young waiter, “Sammy, go wait in the kitchen.”

“No,” growls Gilly. “Dismiss him.”

“Okay. Sammy, you’re fired. Go wait in the kitchen.”

Tears appear in Sammy’s eyes. “Am I really fired?” he stammers, “I have only been here eight minutes.”

“Just get into the goddam kitchen,

boy!” growls Roberto.

Sammy walks away, his head low.

“You happy now, Gilmo?” asks Roberto.

“And a bottle of the Rosé with that order,” Gilly says without looking up.

Roberto slaps Gilly on the back and says, “For you my friend, it’s on the house.” He steps back a pace and opens his arms. “Anything else, huh?” Then he walks away grumbling.

Silence falls across the table. Monty has lost Game Face and looks plain sad, staring at his napkin on his lap.

Rebecca glances at Gilly to see that he is looking at her. She can feel the black holes of his eyes sucking at her life force. A faint smirk-like smile affects one side of her mouth and she comes out in full support for her boss. “It’s

hard to find good help these days,” she says.

Remote Controlled Pen

The following morning Rebecca wakes and lays in bed feeling tired and sad. The flight across the Atlantic and then awful dinner with Gilly and Monty has drained her of energy.

Without leaving the bed, she calls Snowden, but the phone rings out. They are in different time zones now and she knows that he'll be busy now that he has given the okay to publish the book. It could be weeks before their respective schedules coincide again and they can speak freely or even meet again.

Later, she finds her way to the London office. It is a crisp, up-market location on the north bank of the Thames River overlooking Tower Bridge. In amongst the emails is a

shopping list from Gilly. There is a list of books and a link to a web page that shows a remote controlled car. The car is big and beefy with large knobbly tires. The email instructs her to immediately purchase the items and to notify him by text once she has them all.

This is a welcomed task as it allows her to depart the offices and cruise the City for a while. She particularly likes that she is being sent to buy a toy as this suggests that Gilly is thinking like the carer of a young boy.

A few hours later Rebecca is back in the office and she sends a text to notify Gilly of her return. Shortly, a young woman appears in her doorway and asks after the shopping. She has the nervous disposition of a young temp who is working with Gilly for the first

time. Rebecca hands over the bag containing the electric car and the books. The young temp takes hold of the handle but before Rebecca lets it go, she says, “Please pass this message to Mr. Clay. We are short by one book. They are sending it over later.”

Later, Rebecca is at her desk when the parcel arrives. She opens the bag to check the title: *The 48 Laws of Power*. “That’s consistent with Gilly’s bookshelf,” she thinks. Rather than send a text to notify Gilly of its arrival, she decides to run the book upstairs and take a look at what is going on up there.

When she arrives in Gilly’s office suite, she hears a cacophony of noises coming from an adjoining room. There is a shout, a whoop of excitement, a shriek of joy, the whirring of an electric

motor and a pitiful whimpering noise. Rebecca smiles, feeling as though the noises are more-or-less consistent with a young boy at play. She peers around the door into the room and her smile quickly falls.

Monty is driving the remote controlled car, following Gilly's direction. A red marker pen has been lashed to the bonnet of the car. Blue and green pens protrude from either side of the roof. The toy has been transformed into a battle chariot.

Gilly has the young temp – the one who picked up the books – standing on a sheet of paper. She has her eyes closed while Monty drives the car around the room. The young woman is trembling and her face is scrunched up in fear. Rebecca sees that she has

coloured ink marks on her ankles and shin. She moves a foot off the paper.

“Tell her to stand still!” Gilly barks at Monty.

“Stand still, Mary,” says Monty as the car races across the room.

“Don’t use her name, just speak in her direction.”

“Stand still,” instructs Monty.

“Okay,” says Gilly, “Blue pen, right ankle.”

“Blue pen, right ankle, Sir!” shouts Monty.

“Ramming speed!” bellows Gilly.

Monty directs the car at Mary’s legs and accelerates it. The vehicle zooms across the room and brushes against the temp’s leg leaving a blue mark above her ankle. She whimpers and lifts her leg.

“Gotcha!” shouts Monty.

The temp gasps and steps off the paper. “Get back on the paper!” shouts Gilly.

In the doorway, Rebecca gasps and Gilly turns to see her. Instantly, she is terrified.

Monty looks up from his game and sees Rebecca. “Bee!” he shouts, happily.

“Bee?” asks Gilly. “Who is Bee?”

Rebecca is mortified look. She grimly shakes her head. Monty sees this and says, “To be or not to be on the paper. Get back on the paper!” Then he directs the car towards Rebecca. It approaches rapidly then halts in front of her.

Rebecca looks up from the car, feeling desperate, wanting to be away from there. She raises her hand to show the

book that she was delivering.

“The book came,” she says, then hands it to Gilly.

Gilly takes remote control from Monty’s hands and replaces it with the 48 Laws of Power book, opened to a page. “Chapter Two,” he says, “to maintain power, you need to have no friends.”

Rebecca steps away from the door, stunned. She feels unable to breathe. She walks back to her office, bumping into walls. She sits in her chair, staring at the computer monitor, unable to focus. A wave of anxiety rises in her. She steps up quickly, feeling nauseous.

In the hallway, she turns towards her only sanctuary, the marbeled cave in the ladies toilets. But something is wrong. She doesn’t know which way to go. It’s

a different hallway. She realizes that her sanctuary is in New York, thousands of miles away. It's all too much for her. The hallway starts to spin around her and then the lights go out.

Sal Volatile

Rebecca wakes as a pungent chemical smell floods through her head. She sits bolt upright, gasping. Looking around, bewildered, she finds herself on the floor in her office, behind her desk.

Tim, the Head of Executive Security, is sitting on a chair looking down at her, chuckling. He is holding a small bottle in his hands. “Sal volatile,” he says, “never fails.”

“What?” asks Rebecca, annoyed.

He raises the small vial of smelling salts and wiggles them in the air as a way of explanation.

Rebecca checks her watch. “What happened?” she asks.

“Well, here I was, doing the rounds, checking out the new office suites,” says Tim, light-heartedly, “and what do

I see but an unconscious woman laying on the carpet.”

“That was probably me,” says Rebecca.

“That was you, actually. And do you know what was even more strange than an unconscious woman in the hallway.”

Rebecca is not sure where this is leading and she loses interest. She notices that her shoes are missing.

“Where are my shoes?” she asks.

“I was just getting to that,” says Tim.

“Anyway, lying next to the unconscious woman was a shoe, a phone with the back removed and two SIM cards. That’s two SIM cards.”

Rebecca’s heart stops beating for a second. She raises her hands to her chest, thinking fast.

“I didn’t really know what to make of that,” says Tim. “And I should be

taking a big interest in it, being Head of Executive Security, and all.”

“Okay,” says Rebecca, nervously. She sees goose bumps have broken out across her forearms and the red hairs have risen like an army.

Tim continues. “But I thought, what the hell. Maybe if I am lucky, the formerly unconscious woman might buy me a drink one evening and tell me, off the record, what it all means.”

“Are you asking me on a date?” Rebecca asks, suddenly combative.

“No, Rebecca,” Tim says sternly, “I am giving you a get out of jail card.”

Rebecca thinks it through for a few moments. Then she smiles, nicely and says, “Tim, would you allow me to take you for a drink, one evening after work?” she asks.

“I would be delighted, Ms. Parry.
Thank you so very much” he says.

“Not tonight, though,” she says.

“Tonight is not good for me, either.”

“To be confirmed, then,”

“T.B.C., it is,” agrees Tim. He retrieves a plastic bag from inside his jacket pocket containing the phone and the SIM cards. He hands it to Rebecca, asking, “Do you faint often?”

“Do you?”

Tim starts laughing. “Do you know what bought it on?”

“Jet lag, maybe.”

“Do you want to try again?”

Rebecca looks at plastic bag, wondering what to say. “Did you hear about Monty’s driving lesson?”

“I had a new girl come to me in tears,”

Tim says, “She wanted to press charges against Gilly. I advised against it.”

“Why?”

“Well, simply put, Mr. Clay can do whatever he likes with his property.”

“I don’t follow,” says Rebecca.

Tim repeats his words, enunciating them very clearly as if to underscore a deeper message. “He can do what he likes *with his property*.”

“You mean the toy car?”

“No. I mean the boy.”

“I don’t understand, I...” then the statement makes sense; Gilly didn’t adopt Monty. He bought him.

A chill runs through Rebecca’s body as she thinks this through. “But why would they change his name?”

“At a guess, I’d say it was a commercial decision.”

“What does that mean?”

“I’d say that in that marketplace, a Montgomery fetches a higher price than a Monty.”

Weepy Apology

Later that afternoon, Rebecca is at her workstation when she sees a little face peering at her from the doorway. Monty is glum and he steps forward, looking at the floor.

Rebecca beckons him into the room. “Come on,” she says and he walks around the desk and allows her to enfold him in her arms.

“I did something really bad today,” he mumbles, his face pressed in her blouse.

“You mean the game with the car?” Rebecca asks, stroking his hair. She feels him nod his head against her shoulder.

“I was a bit harsh,” she says. She pulls him away from her body and holds him by the shoulders. “I think the word we are looking for is ‘consent’.”

“What does that mean?”

“It means that you agree to do something. And here is the problem. You can’t really disagree with Gilly. He is older. He is powerful. And he is your guardian. You are in a really tight spot, kiddo.”

Monty nods his head, glumly.

“How about this,” says Rebecca. “I’ll write a letter to Mary and tell her that you’re very sorry for what happened. Would you like that?”

Monty nods his head, excitedly.

“Would you do that?”

“I will do that,” Rebecca says. “And given these circumstances and that you know it was wrong and that you have voluntarily apologized, I think that means that you are off the hook, buddy.”

“Really,” asks Monty, his eyes lighting

up.

“Definitely.”

Monty wraps his arms around Rebecca’s shoulders and squeezes her tightly. “Thank you, Bee.”

The hug only lasts a moment before he looks towards the door, his ears seeming to pick up danger like an animal in the wild. “I should go.” He moves to the door and looks up and down the hallway. Then he turns to her and grins and moves away.

Rebecca draws a long breath and taps her fist against her sternum. The knot in her gut returns, not hard and tight like it gets when it’s really bad. The knot is lighter but feels more permanent. A persistent angst. It is driven by an answerless question, “What am I to him? Mother? Therapist?”

Strategist?” The thought reminds her of her therapist based in London. She calls the clinic and books a session for midday, the following day.

New Therapist

The next day, Rebecca sets out on foot to the therapist. It is a brisk fifteen-minute walk along the Thames River to a quiet street that has rows of Georgian terraces with black iron paling fence. She checks her watch, ascends a short flight of stairs and enters the clinic.

The clinic is immaculately kept building with exposed beams. The luminaires are brushed aluminium, accentuating the rustic oldness of the building.

Rebecca presents at the reception desk and tells the receptionist her name. She is asked to take a seat and wait. A few minutes later, a woman whom Rebecca does not recognize approaches.

“Hi Rebecca,” the woman says,

warmly, “I am Ninian. I manage the practice. I am so very sorry to tell you at such short notice, but Jenine has been unable to attend work today. We fully appreciate that this may inconvenience you. However, Jenine’s replacement Miriam is very capable and she would be delighted to work with you today. I could take you into Miriam now if it would suit you.”

“Is Jenine okay?” asks Rebecca.

“She’s fine. Unfortunately unable to attend work today.”

“Okay. I’ll see... umm...”

“Miriam.”

“Yes, I’ll see Miriam, I guess.”

“That’s fantastic. Would you come this way?”

Rebecca stands and suddenly feels a great sadness comes over her, like a

cross between rejection and bereavement. She follows Ninian through a hallway, her heart heavy. She feels as if she were walking into uncertainty when certainty was the one thing she came to this place for.

One wall of the hallway is a floor to ceiling window looking into an immaculate enclosed terrarium and water feature. Rebecca pauses momentarily, looking at the tiny landscaped area. Her eye is caught by something rustling the foliage.

“There is a little reptile in their called Tommy,” says Ninian, “He’s a bit skittish.”

“I haven’t seen this before.”

“It’s new. We are trying to do our little bit for nature.” Ninian moves on to the end of the hall and opens a door. She

ushers Rebecca inside. A woman, maybe fifteen years Rebecca's junior, steps up from behind a large mahogany desk and extends her hand.

The woman wears an orange woollen dress that hugs her figure and a necklace of the same colour comprised of large round beads. Shiny orange shoes complete the package.

"You must be Rebecca."

Her smile warms Rebecca and she sees that the woman's makeup is also orange themed. "Yes, I am."

"I'm Miriam."

"Good luck," says Ninian and she moves through the door closing it behind her.

"This way," Miriam directs Rebecca to an old settee. It looks threadbare in an antique way but also clean and

comfortable. Before she sits, Rebecca looks around the room. It is replete with antique bookshelves, thick carpets, and ornate lampshades. There are French windows overlooking a small garden that features a rockery with lichens and moss growing on the weathered surfaces. The beds are abundant with verdant plants like agave and cheese plant. There are the soft hissing sound and a fine spray of mist coming from the irrigation.

“How are you today, Rebecca?” asks Miriam, informally as she retrieves her notepad from the desk.

“I just want to cry, actually,” says Rebecca, taking herself by surprise.

“You can do that if you like,” says Miriam cheerfully.

“It's actually quite odd for me,”

Rebecca says, feeling tears well in her eyes. “Normally when I come here and meet with Jenine, it’s very brisk and professional. But right now I just want to blab.”

“Orange does that,” says Miriam.

Rebecca observes the young therapist, confused at first. Then she acknowledges the complete orange-ness of her clothing, jewellery, makeup, and shoes.

Rebecca laughs spontaneously, “Can I call you sister?” she asks, then wonders where the question came from. She notices that she is gesticulating a lot. In amongst the movement of her hands she goes to check her watch but catches herself in time and doesn’t get to see the watch face. So she doesn’t know what the exact time is and she feels

confused and lost.

“You can call me sister if you like,” says Miriam, as if nothing could be asked of her that would be a problem.

“Do you have a sister?”

“No. And I meant in the colloquial sense, like the brotherhood of women. If that makes sense.”

“However you want it.”

“Thanks,” says Rebecca, looking around, “I love your space.”

“It’s great isn’t it?”

“I saw the frog thing in the garden out there.”

“You saw Tommy the Sand Lizard.”

“Lizard? Is it imported?”

“Oh no. That’s a very British lizard. Very rare. Threatened with extinction the poor dear.”

Rebecca thinks this through for a few

moments, remembering comments that Snowden had made. “Why do you do that?” she asks, not sure if that is the right question.

“We are an extension of a breeding program with the zoo. We think there is plenty of room to share with nature.”

The rich tapestry of the room, the warm individualism of the people and their empathy with nature suddenly resonates with Rebecca. She has an insight of how dark and morally foul is the dungeon that she inhabits with Gilly and now, also, with Monty.

“Rebecca, before we begin I want you to know that this conversation is confidential.”

“How confidential?” asks Rebecca, suddenly alert to danger.

“Completely confidential.”

“I mean, how good is your data security?”

“Umm,” says Miriam.

“I mean, how would you know if someone had illegally accessed your database and reviewed your client list?”

“Are you concerned that somebody will be looking for information about you?”

“No. I’m just...” Rebecca stops talking, aware that her heart is pounding again and that she is on edge. She checks her watch, anxiously, hoping that it will make it better. Now she knows what the time is. It doesn’t help.

Rebecca observes Miriam open the cover of the manila folder. She doesn’t want that.

“Can I just bring you to speed?”

“I was just going to review your file.”

“Let me give you the potted history.”

Rebecca looks from the folder to Miriam and makes a facial expression that seeks to entice her to put down the folder.

“Okay.” Miriam places the folder on the floor. “Tell me the story.” Rebecca lets out a long sigh. She adjusts herself on the settee comfortably and thinks it through for a few seconds. Then she starts talking.

“I was married young, at 21,” she begins, “I loved my husband in an immature sort of way. I wouldn’t be able to love him if I met him now, though. When I was twenty-nine, my husband and my little boy, Ruby, were killed in a motor vehicle accident. Ruby was eight. Very beautiful.”

Rebecca looks at the floor and seems to be absorbed by it. She feels herself falling, catches herself and thinks it through. “What an incredible opening sequence,” she thinks. “I never shared that with the other therapist.”

“I didn’t cope well,” Rebecca continues, slower now, measuring her words. “I started drinking, white wine and vodka. Mainly vodka; it is so much quicker. That went on for about three years. One day I woke up in a hospital bed covered in bruises. My girlfriend was there and she had set up her laptop computer on a table in front of me. It showed CCTV footage running in a loop, over and over again. The video showed a railway station where a woman staggers onto the platform, falls over and nearly rolls into the path of an

oncoming train. You could see her hair rise as the air whooshed around the train. I asked my girlfriend what I was looking at and she said: ‘that was you last night’. That sobered me up really quick.”

Miriam adjusts herself on her seat and creates the space for Rebecca to continue.

“I needed to stop thinking about my little boy, so I went to university and signed up for courses that were foreign to me and challenging. I concentrated so hard that I succeeded at everything and eventually I moved on with a Ph.D. in Commerce and International Relations. Then I started applying for jobs, the really difficult ones and I just hammered away at C.V. writing. I guess I won that game, too. I got a role with a

big multinational that most people have never heard of. It doesn't even have a website. I bumped into the Chairman, Gilly, on the first day and he asked me what I was doing with them. Shortly thereafter he offered me to work in the inner sanctum. I felt as though the offer were preordained, as though I had reached the end of the journey. So I signed this contract without reading it.” Rebecca pauses and looks around the room. She feels glum at the retelling of the story, but also relieved to have it out of her.

“The contract,” says Miriam. “Would you like some water?”

“A vodka, maybe,” Rebecca laughs.

“Do you still have a problem with the drinking?”

“No, I moved on from that. I can

drink casually now.”

“Tell me about this contract.”

“It pretty much says that he can get me to do whatever he wants in the context of me being a Personal Assistant. But there aren’t really any boundaries to what a Personal Assistant can be asked to do. And if I refuse or quit before the contract expiry then he can sue me for everything I have. And that’s how he is. He controls everything. Even when he is not around, I can feel the weight of his control. Like his breath on my neck.”

“Hence your question about our data security.”

“I guess.”

“What does your firm do?”

“Have you heard the expression: dear as poison?” asks Rebecca.

“Yes.”

“There is a lot of money to be made in poisonous things. We buy it. Sell it. Make it. Dispose of it. Toxic chemicals. The worst of the fossil fuels. We are moving into oil-shale and tar-sands in a big way.”

“And how do you deal with this all-encompassing control over your life?” ask Miriam. “What are your coping mechanisms?”

“I am having a covert affair with an academic who is writing a book about the most powerful men in the world and how they are disproportionately responsible for the destruction of the living systems on this planet.”

Miriam absorbs this information with some surprise. For a time, she seems ill at ease, thinking it through. Finally, she

enunciates a single word, “Right.”

Rebecca observes Miriam’s changed demeanour and she raises a little smile. She has the sense that Miriam is suddenly out of her depth. This makes her warm to her new therapist. It is as if roles have been reversed and Miriam actually needs Rebecca. The feeling lasts only a few seconds. Miriam asks, “Your lover knows about your job?”

“Yes. I help contextualize his research. Make it personal.”

“And how would you describe your feeling towards your boss, is it Gilly?”

“Yes, Gilly. Everything about him is abominable to me. His moral compass has no hand. Is that the right word? No. Needle. His moral compass has no needle. He is morally needle-less.” Rebecca starts to chuckle. “That’s

funny. I am laughing only because being around him is so grim.”

“Grim,” says Miriam.

“Yes.”

“Do you dream about him?”

“No. But if I did, I would dream of the world in which he had never existed. Gilly is not just a bad human, Miriam. He is a bad concept.”

Rebecca draws a long breath and looks at the weave on the carpet for a while.

“It must be very hard to work in that environment?”

“No, actually, it’s not. I am really able to deal with all that. I am stalwart. Robust.” Rebecca inhales deeply and sighs. She looks up to see Miriam looking at her empathically. For a second she doubts whether she will go through with the final part of the story.

Then it just pours out.

“My boss has just adopted an eight-year-old boy with the intention of making him his heir to both his empire and his needle-less moral compass.”

Miriam adjusts herself in her chair, leaning forward with her forearms on her knees and looking intently at Rebecca.

Rebecca has tears welling and her face feels full, hot and heavy. She grits her teeth to prevent the tears from spilling over. Her jaw feels tight and her breathing is constrained. She has one more thing to say.

“Go on,” says Miriam, gently.

“Since Monty has arrived on the scene.”

“That’s the boy?”

“Yes. Since Monty as arrived, I often

think about the footage of me falling on the train station.”

“Go on.”

“And I wish that the video actually showed me fall in front of the train.”

Rebecca looks up at the ceiling and sees the cornice blur. She wipes her eyes and nods gently a few times thinking it through. When she looks to Miriam, the young therapist immediately asks a targeted question.

“Did Gilly know that you had had such an intense experience before he offered you the PA job?”

“Yes, I told him that”

“Before he asked you in?”

“I don’t understand the question”

“Did Gilly learn about you having lost a child before or after he offered you the PA job?”

Rebecca thinks this through, wondering how it is relevant. She wants to dismiss the question but respects the sister who asked it, so she thinks some more. Miriam doesn't seem to have another question and this makes Rebecca curious. She digs further into her psyche. And there she finds something of great interest.

“He interrogated me in the elevator,” she says. Then she has an insight that shifts her emotional state. He sadness lifts and in its place there is anger. “He interrogated me in the elevator,” she repeats.

“It must have been a tall building,” says Miriam, lightly.

“The Petronas Towers in Kuala Lumpur. It's huge.”

“Twenty minutes in the elevator, says

Miriam, lightly, “must have been a deep and meaningful.”

For a second, Rebecca’s anger rises at Miriam’s flippant tone. “No, our offices were split between two floors 18 to 30. So it was just a few minutes, with the normal delays.”

“You offered up your vulnerabilities very quickly, then,” says Miriam, matter-of-factly.

Rebecca stops, suddenly aware that hairs on her arm are erect again. She turns her wrist to observe the frail, pale hairs forming a protective layer, a force-field around her skin. Why were they doing that now? Where was that force-field that day that Gilly unzipped her with twenty questions in the elevator, each question advised by the previous answer.

Each question driving deep into her, searching for her greatest vulnerability.

It is as though the lights have come up in the room. The ornate furnishings are now visible with much greater vibrancy. Rebecca realizes that Gilly had found her weak spot in as much time as it takes most people to establish which country someone is from or what they do for a living.

Instead of saying, “I come from a small town in southeast England,” Rebecca had said, “I lost a child, had an intense bout of alcoholism, tried to commit suicide and then studied my brains out so I didn’t have to think.” And while she didn’t say this in words, she went on to tell him, “and you, Gilly, are the embodiment of what I think I am aiming for and whatever you offer I

will accept without question.”

She thinks back to when her tryst with Snowden was interrupted by the phone call instructing her to go to the airport. Gilly knew that he was sending a woman who had lost a child to pick up the boy. And then she realizes how Monty’s photo came to be in the pile of doctor’s contacts: Gilly had put it there.

In that Malaysian elevator four years ago, like a manikin made self-aware, Rebecca had handed over her strings to the evil puppet-master, Gilly Clay. All in the time that it took to move just twelve floors.

The oil painting on the far wall of Miriam’s office features a game of polo. The main figure is a dashing male riding a chestnut horse that has lost it’s footing and is stumbling. Maybe it is

the Fibonacci sequence playing out, but Rebecca's eyes are immediately drawn to a clod of earth thrown up by the rear hoof of the horse. Rebecca comes out of her trance to find herself staring at the clod of mud flying in mid-air.

She shifts her eyes and sees Miriam calmly observing her with a warm smile, as though nothing was wrong in the world. A long, deep sigh eases from her and she feels cathartic, as though she has moved through to the next level.

Rebecca moves forward and hugs Miriam. The therapist tries to maintain a professional distance but Rebecca knows that she is enjoying it more than she is letting on.

“Thank you,” says Rebecca. “I think I got somewhere.”

“I think you got somewhere, says

Miriam. “It’s not your fault. It almost never is.”

Relocate to Sydney

After the therapy session, Rebecca sits in a café and checks her phone messages. There are two text messages. One is from Gilly announcing that the entourage is to be shipped off to Sydney, Australia the following morning in pursuit of new opportunities that have opened up. The news of another shift is not welcome for Rebecca, but a trip to Sydney sounds like fun.

She swaps out the SIM card and checks for messages from Snowdon. There is a text that says that his publisher is pushing for an early release of the book and has offered him it to be in either New York or London. Snowdon is leaving that choice for her.

Rebecca smiles and sends a single

word reply: “London.” Then she places a call to his number but it goes straight to message bank.

“Exciting,” she says into the phone, “do the launch in London. Hopefully, I will be back from Sydney by then.” She returns to her office and seeks out Tim. It is Tim’s job to direct the procedure for relocating.

“What’s up with Sydney?” she asks.

“Gilly has found some Aussie poison that he wants to get his hands on.”

“But we have only just arrived in London.”

“You and me both,” says Tim. Then he says, “While you are on this floor, you should check this out.”

Tim escorts her out of his office and down the hallway. They pass the double doors leading into the board room. He

directs her into the next which is replete with printers and office equipment. It also features a small window that looks into the board room through one-way glass.

Rebecca peers into the board room to see what is happening. Gilly is bent over the boardroom table with his pants around his ankles. One of the oncologists has his finger up his ass. The others are either waiting their turn or arguing over a stool sample in a metal tray.

“I saw the first one of these in New York,” says Rebecca.

“Daily ritual,” says Tim, shaking his head. “I have traveled all over the world, Rebecca, I’ve been from war zones to board rooms and I never seen anything like this. Do you know that we spent

fifteen million on a new Gulfstream jet just to fly those clowns around?

Everywhere he goes, they go.”

“That’s amazing,” says Rebecca.

“And here’s another thing,” says Tim, “his tumor is not even cancerous. It’s benign. It’s like a polyp.”

“How do you know that?” asks Rebecca.

“I have my sources.”

“Who carts the turds to the lab these days?”

“I took that burden my shoulders,” Tim says, “and I am starting to think that he gets these daily anal probes for reasons other than health.” He makes a cheeky grin.

Rebecca chuckles. “Whatever floats your boat, I guess.”

Killing a Gecko

The first week in Sydney passes without incident. Rebecca is kept busy scheduling meetings and assembling documents relating to a proposed purchase of a Queensland company. Snowden is hard to get hold of and Monty has only been seen a few times, fleetingly.

One morning, Rebecca gets a text instructing her to come to Gilly's quarters to collect Monty and take him to his tutor. This all seems a bit strange, but at the allotted time, Rebecca enters suite where Gilly and Monty are domiciled. They are both standing in the kitchen, eating muesli from a bowl.

"Hi, Gilly. Hi, Montgomery."

"Hi, Rebecca," says Monty.

She tries hard not to smile at him at Monty because she feels Gilly glaring at

her.

“Open the curtains,” he instructs her, with a gruff voice.

Rebecca moves to the window and drags the heavy drapes open. Daylight tinged with the brilliant blue of the Sydney Harbour floods into the room. From the twentieth floor, the view is stunning. Ferries carve white feathers in the cobalt water and the perimeter is shaped with the distinctive icons of the city: the Bridge, the Opera House, Circular Quay and the tall buildings of the CBD.

Rebecca looks back to Monty and sees that behind him a small lizard, a gecko, appears from the side of the fridge and walks along the white surface. It stops, its little head swiveling around. Gilly sees the lizard and with a single motion,

let's go his spoon and slaps the back of his bony hand against the little gecko. The force of the blow splits the gecko open and it drops to the floor, stunned or dead, with a loop of intestine protruding from its belly. On the fridge is a red smear where it had been. Gilly resumes eating his muesli, the chinking noise of spoon against bowl becoming poignant.

Monty looks at the dead gecko, watching its leg kick a few last times before it goes completely still.

“Why did you do that?” Monty asks, disturbed.

“Because I don’t like it,” says Gilly, “if I want to see a bug, I’ll go to a zoo.”

Monty is too surprised to be angry or sad or anything else and he asks,

“Is there a zoo in Sydney?” but he

does not receive an answer from Gilly.

“There is a fantastic Zoo called Taronga,” says Rebecca instinctively and then instantly regrets it. She winces and turns her attention back to the harbour view.

“Can we go to the zoo, Gilly?” asks Monty.

It is such a natural and healthy question. And there is a standard healthy answer that follows, “Of course you can.”

“Why would you waste time doing that?” growls Gilly.

“To see the animals,” says Monty, matter-of-factly.

“We are not in Australia for animals. We are here for oil shale. You are coming with me to central Queensland the day after tomorrow.”

“What’s up there?” he asks.

“We just bought into a company that doesn’t know how to get poison from the ground. We are going to show them how.”

“Why do we want poison?”

“You ever heard the expression dear as poison?”

“Is that it?” asks Monty.

“That’s where it started.” Gilly clatters his bowl into the sink and says, “Alright. I have to see the lawyers.” Then he addresses Rebecca without using her name or looking at her.

“Get Master Earle to his tutor.”

Gilly moves out of the room and Rebecca feels his presence fade and she is able to draw a full breath. She approaches Monty who is looking at the dead gecko.

“I’ll get rid of that,” she says, picking the lizard up by the tip of its tail.”

“Why did he do that?” asks Monty.

“I don’t know.” Rebecca pulls open the door of a low cupboard, looking for a bin.

Monty interrupts her by placing his hand on her arm. “It should go outside,” he says, “back into nature.”

Rebecca walks over to the window with the dead lizard and turns the latch. The window only opens a few inches and she looks around outside, canvassing the options for the gecko’s final resting place.

“Throw it over there,” says Monty, pointing to a planter on the edge below the window.

“I am not sure if I can do that,” says Rebecca, pushing her arm out the

window and rocking her hand back and forward so that the gecko develops a pendulum motion that will help carry it through the air.

“Are you ready,” she asks.

“Yeah,” says Monty, his nose pushed against the glass.

Rebecca gives the lizard one final swing and is about to let go when the body comes free from the tail and drops onto the edge, falling short of the planter by six inches.

“Oh dear,” says Rebecca, looking at the lizard tail gripped in her fingers that is now wiggling furiously. She looks horrified at the tail, unable to drop it and not wanting to bring it inside.

Monty suddenly breaks into a peal of laughter. He clutches his stomach and points at the writhing lizard tail. “That’s

so funny,” he says.

“What should I do with this?” asks Rebecca, now seeing the lighter side of the situation.

“See if you can get that in the planter.”

“Okay.” Rebecca gives the tail a sharp flick of the wrist and sends it on its way towards the planter. It lands in the shrub in the planter and for a few seconds, wriggles around in its resting place then goes still. Rebecca closes the window then moves to the kitchen to wash her hands.

“The ants will get it,” says Monty, looking at the lizard.

“Is that good?”

“I think so,” says Monty. “And a bird will get the tail.”

“So, we have given nature its breakfast today.”

“I guess.”

“So Monty,” says Rebecca, surprising herself. She finds herself light-headed for a moment, unsure of the implications of what she is about to say. For some seconds, she feels adrift, not knowing whether she should proceed. She sees Monty standing in front of her, smiling. The Golden Child. How could do anything other than rest on her haunches and raise her finger in the ‘shoosh’ position?

Monty nods, conspiratorially and he leans forward to better hear what she is about to whisper. With his face close to hers, Rebecca can smell the aroma of his skin. It is a young boy smell, a subtle perfume that is blended from youth and adventure and a tincture of fun.

“Tomorrow,” she says, “you and I will

go to Taronga Zoo.”

She keeps the ‘*shoosh*’ sign up as Monty does a little dance of joy.

“Game Face,” she says.

Monty adopts a professional gravitas and Rebecca takes him by the hand and leads him towards his tutor. As she walks, she is thinking, “How the hell am I going to pull that off?”

In the Stairwell

The next day, Rebecca enters Gilly's chambers. Monty is studying at a working desk, minded over by a temp who is checking her facebook page on an iPad. Monty looks glum, but when he sees Rebecca he lightens up.

Rebecca makes the Game Face expression and Monty assumes a frown.

"What's your instructions from Mr. Gilly?" asks Rebecca of the temp from behind her back. The girl jumps up in surprise, moving her iPad out of sight.

"I am to deliver him to the reception at the Intercontinental Hotel at four," she says.

"I'll take over from here."

"Umm." The temp looks around, concerned.

"It's quite alright," says Rebecca,

“Gilly only had you standing in because I was unavailable. But I am free now.”

Rebecca raises her hands theatrically.

“See,” she says.

“Well, okay, I guess,” says the temp.

“If Mr. Gilly calls, you can tell him that I dismissed you. Then call and notify me.” She hands the temp one of her business cards.

“Don’t worry, I will look after your timesheets. You’ll be on full pay.”

“Okay, then thank you Ms...”

“Rebecca.”

“Thank you, Ms. Rebecca.”

Rebecca watches the temp collect her things then exit the building. “What happened to your tutor?” she asks Monty when the temp has gone.

“Gilly fired him.”

“Why?”

“He said that I liked him too much.”

“Are you sad?”

“I am okay, I guess. I just don’t understand why Gilly is so spiteful.”

“There are a lot of people wondering that. Let’s try and take your mind off it. Are you ready for an adventure?”

“Are we going to the zoo?” asks Monty, still holding his pen above his notebook.

“Yep.”

“Really?” he says, excitedly.

“So lower your pen and take my hand.”

Monty complies instantly, gob-smacked at his good fortune. They walk out of the room together and Rebecca directs him along the hallway toward the fire exit. She pulls open the door and steps with him into the stairwell. It

is half-lit and smells of concrete and stale air.

The door closes behind them and Rebecca halts Monty and leans towards him so that their faces are close. She says to him, “We have to have an agreement about today.”

“Okay.”

“Do you know what would happen to me if Gilly finds out that I took you to the zoo?”

Monty shakes his head.

“He would fire me too. And sue me.”

“What does that mean?” asks Monty.

“It means his lawyers would take all my money off me.”

“But why?”

“Because that’s just how it is. Do you understand?”

“I guess.”

“Now, I knew a little boy once and you remind me of him a lot. And when Gilly said that you couldn’t go to the zoo, I imagined how that must have felt. So I will take you to the zoo but I want you to be very careful what you say about today. Do you understand?”

Monty nods, glumly.

Rebecca steps back, feeling awful. She feels as though she has dumped a world of adult shit onto Monty’s head. She recriminates for a few moments but remains clear that the situation warrants Monty to be briefed.

“So it means that you can’t volunteer this information to Gilly. Unless he asks you directly. In that case, you tell him the truth. Do you understand?”

“I think so.”

Monty doesn’t seem convinced and

Rebecca thinks it that it is worth reiterating a bit.

“And you can’t accidentally let him know, either. So you have to consciously choose to not say anything that lets him figure it out. Unless he asks you. And then you tell him. Do you understand?”

Monty shakes his head and says, “Yes,” in a tone that is not convincing.

Rebecca is not so sure that she understands either. She gently takes his forearms hands and looks straight into his eyes. She says gravely, “I am sorry that it is like this. But it just is.”

Monty nods slowly, a sad look on his face. “What was his name?”

“Whose name?”

“The little boy you had.”

“Gem.”

“Where is he now?”

“Gem died when he was young.”

“How?”

“It was a car.”

Monty looks at the floor, despondently. This makes Rebecca feel melancholic and she doesn't want this to spoil the zoo trip.

“That was a long time ago. It's in the past now.” She lifts Monty's chin so that their eyes meet. She makes a crooked smile it lightens him up. His glumness disappears and he looks around the concrete chamber they are standing in.

“Why are we going down the stairs?” Monty asks.

“It's part of the adventure.”

“But we are on the twentieth floor.”

“We'd better hurry, then.”

Taronga Zoo

Rebecca and Monty exit the hotel through the fire escape and walk to Circular Quay. The Quay is bustling with activity. The Manly Ferries pull up here as do a flotilla of fast catamaran passenger ferries. There is also a cluster of private water taxis and Rebecca searches for the one that she has booked.

This is Monty's first time outdoors in Australia and he just stands there, staring at all the activity and the sights of Sydney Harbour. The sky is a brilliant radiance of blue and puffy white clouds and the air is warm, tinged with humidity and the smell of saltwater and seaweed.

From this location the Harbour Bridge and the Opera House are visible,

enormous, distinctive structures that are seemingly designed to tempt a little boy into a career of architecture or engineering. There is even a big white cruise liner tied alongside the wharf. Monty's mouth open as he looks around, drinking it all in.

Rebecca's concern is the safety and speed of the private water taxi. It is a bright yellow device with two monstrous engines on the back. She can count at least three life rings, and so the vessel meets her approval.

When Monty sees the water taxi, his eyes light up. "Are we going on that?" he asks, desperately hoping for a 'yes' answer.

Rebecca takes his hand and moves him towards the water taxi. She beckons the skipper to help Monty

board the vessel. Monty bravely makes the crossing from shore to ship unaided. Then, on the deck with the entire vessel wavering under his feet, Monty is so taken aback that all he can do is stand and stare and wait for instructions.

Rebecca steps aboard, expertly. She pays cash in advance for the ride and asks the skipper for safest and driest place for her and Monty to sit.

She draws Monty towards her and crosses her arms around his chest. The vessel picks up speed and then pounds across the harbour. With her cheeks pushed against the back of his head, Rebecca inhales Monty's aroma and it puts her into a blissful state.

The twenty-minute journey is exhilarating. Monty looks around furtively at everything there is to see:

the mansions on the waterfront, the sailing yachts, and the big green Manly Ferry that they overtake at close quarters. Rebecca sees none of this. She's in a trance, transported back in time to when she used to regularly inhale the aroma of a little boy. A part of her wants to fall apart, but the larger part is alert for danger.

Kidnapping. That's what Gilly's lawyers would have her charged with. She'd be old and destitute by the time that she got out of jail. And Monty would be middle aged. And all he would know of Rebecca is that she was one of his service providers who was terminated at short notice for inappropriate behaviour.

At the zoo, Rebecca's emotional state is characterised by intense stress. She

doesn't see the animals. Instead, she checks her watch every few minutes and her mind, churns through dozens of possible ways that she could be compromised.

“What if Gilly's meeting ends early?” she thinks. What if he calls her? She imagines Gilly being able to triangulate her. Maybe the closest phone tower shows up on the records under the name ‘Taronga Zoo?’

“Are you at Taronga Zoo with Monty?” She can hear Gilly's gravelly voice as if it is real. “Of course not,” she replies. And then BANG!

She walks into the hotel with Monty. Gilly is waiting for her. He takes Monty's hand and leads him away. The second they are out of sight, the police move in on her, watched over by one of

Gilly's lawyers, the one who specialises in crucifying innocent people.

Rebecca finds herself anxiously looking around the zoo for mobile phone towers. "Oh, Christ," she sighs, her hand wrapped around her body.

She is so anxious about the phone towers that she fails to notice Monty wander off and disappear into the crowd. "Monty," she asks, turning a full three hundred and sixty degrees and not seeing the boy.

At first, she thinks that he is somewhere close by. So remains in the same place, slowly turning, looking for a pattern that is representative of him. She primes herself to see the colour and shape of his hair, the pattern on his shirt, or his distinctive pattern of his gait. A minute passes, and still Monty is

invisible to her.

An ulcer starts bubbling in Rebecca's stomach, like a volcano giving notice of an imminent eruption. It releases its first belch of gas, rising in the back of Rebecca's throat, the distinctive sick taste of stress vomit. Pain wracks across her belly. Standing in this same place is clearly not helping.

So she moves. She sweeps around the area, gripped by panic. Then she thinks that she moved so far from her original position that Monty is now probably her! And where was that original position?

She swoops past the giraffe enclosure where they had spent some time, but he's not there. She runs to the agreed rendezvous position, but still no sign of him. Then she runs to the where the sea

lions are housed.

And all the time her mind is running through disaster scenarios. What if Monty has had an accident? What if he is lost forever? What if he is kidnapped by an evil person? What if he falls into the enclosure with the tiger? Whatever happens, she will need to inform the police and they will ask, “Is he your son?” and she will say, “No. He is the property of Mr. Gilly Clay, the billionaire poise merchant.”

Rebecca checks her watch, conscious that at any second her phone could ring. Then she looks up and sees Monty wandering towards her, holding a show bag.

“Look what I got,” he says as if a volcanic eruption weren’t taking place inside Rebecca’s stomach. She grabs

him, pulls him tightly against her chest and her breath pounds in and out of her. The wind lifts her hair and drapes it over his face.

Monty struggles to get free. “You hair is tickling my nose.”

Rebecca lets him go and just stands there, panting, exhausted.

“Are you okay, Bee?” Monty asks.

Rebecca’s heart pounds like a drumroll. Her mouth is dry and she is unable to form words.

“Look, they gave me a badge.” Monty proudly indicated the little round disc pinned to his shirt. Poignantly, it has the words: ‘I went to Taronga Zoo’.

Rebecca finds herself laughing. At first, it is a chuckle, then it grows to a throaty laugh. The feeling of catharsis is almost as overpowering as the stress. She feels

her arms go numb.

“You know you can’t keep that,” she says.

“I know.” Monty unhooks the badge from his shirt and holds the button in his palm looking around. There is a park bench a few meters away. He wanders over and places the badge on the armrest. “Someone else can have it,” he says.

“What would you like to see next?” Rebecca asks.

“Can we go and see the lizards.”

“Okay. Let’s go and see the lizards.”

Monty turns towards the lizard enclosure. As soon as his back is turned, she takes the “I’ve been to Taronga Zoo’ badge and slips it into her pocket. One day, when things are different, she will return it to its rightful owner.

A Single Red Hair

The next day Tim comes into Rebecca's office and pushes the door closed. He sits in front of her desk and seems to have trouble forming his words. Rebecca feels the knot form in her stomach again. She knows what's coming. Somehow Gilly has got wind of her trip to the zoo with Monty.

Finally, Tim finds his words and says them very plainly, "Gilly has instructed me to escort you to his office."

"Do you know what for, specifically?"

"I don't know, but let me tell you what I do know." He looks at his watch. "You have got one minute to crunch this equation. Gilly is up there with his legal counsel. On his desk are phone records, an employment contract, and a manila envelope. Is there anything I can

help you problem solve.”

Rebecca feels numb. She sees the periphery of her red hair wobbling side to side. Her mouth goes dry.

Tim looks at her empathetically. “I have heard nothing. He doesn’t seem to be in a bad mood. It’s only an hour before jumps on the jet to Central Queensland with Master Earle. It’s probably just a drill.”

“A drill?”

“That’s what I call it. He’s brought me in at least three times. Built up a case that looked like it deserved an immediate sacking, and then just let it pass. He’s preparing me to be ruined for life for breach of contract.”

Rebecca stands, numbly, and moves out from behind her desk. Tim follows her out the door and they silently walk

to Gilly's office. Tim follows her into the room, for moral support. He doesn't leave until he is instructed to do so.

Gilly is sitting with a sour-looking, Sydney Lawyer. "Sit down, Rebecca."

"Is everything okay?"

"I certainly hope so. For your sake."

He retrieves a clear plastic bag from a manila envelope and hands it to her.

"Can you tell me about this?"

Rebecca peers at the bag. Initially, it appears empty, but on closer inspection is contains a long fiery red hair. One of hers.

"Have you seen that before?" Gilly asks, ominously.

"This is Kafkaesque," thinks Rebecca. The question is so ridiculous that she feels her stress sublimating to laughter.

She is cautious not to laugh aloud.

“Have I have seen one of these? Yes.”

“Where do you think it came from?”
asks the Lawyer.

“I am sort of surrounded by them,”
she says, indicating the frizzy mass of
similarly red hair. “Where did you find
this particular one?”

“I found it on Monty’s shirt last night,”
says Gilly.

“*Uh-huh*,” Rebecca feels her guts
cramping up.

“How do you suppose it got there?”

“It’s the bane of my life, Gilly. Red
hair turns up everywhere I go. They’re
in my lunch. I find them in my handbag.
In my toothbrush, even.”

“Where were you yesterday afternoon.
Did you make any calls?”

“I was here,” she says weakly. “I didn’t

make any calls.”

“We’ll let the record decide that,” the lawyer says. He retrieves the phone account from the desk and the guillotine starts to fall.

Rebecca swallows hard, seeing how it all fits together. The hair must have fallen on Monty’s shoulders when she hugged him at the zoo. The phone records will show that she called the water taxi company once to check availability and a second time to book the trip. She could try to lie about why she called the water taxi twice, but the lawyer would interrogate her with interlinked, cross-referenced questions. Eventually, within about two minutes, she would contradict herself. Monty would be pressured to give her up and she would be found to be in breach of

her employment contract. Then the lawyer would proceed to chop up her hard-won estate until Gilly had it all, and she was ruined. Her mother would be sent to a aged-care home that smelt of old man's urine. Rebecca would be unemployable. She would be back on the vodka within the month, and dead on a train line before the year was out.

“If that's my imminent future,” Rebecca thinks, “I'm not going without a fight.” Hell no! When Rebecca Parry gets sent to the gallows, she'll go screaming and kicking, biting, scratching and shedding a mountain of red hair. It is time to tell Gilly exactly what she thinks of him. Rebecca opens her mouth to let loose a torrent of invective, but no words came out; just a rasping noise.

The lawyer runs his finger along the list of calls from her mobile phone. Then he puts the document on the table. “There were no calls.”

The room seems to go completely quiet apart from a faint, high-pitched whining noise in Rebecca’s left ear. The room starts circling around. Her vision becomes black at the periphery. Her knees give way momentarily and she clutches the table to stop herself falling.

“Take a breath, lady” the lawyer instructs her, firmly. Rebecca complies instinctively and inhales. Immediately she is flushed with oxygen and the room stops spinning.

“Can I go now?” she asks, lightly.

The lawyer takes the plastic bag from her hands. “That will be all, Rebecca.”

Firing the Tutor

Leaving Gilly's office, Rebecca finds herself walking numbly and opening the door to the stairwell. She stands in there for a long time, slowly coming to her senses. When she finally finds her way out of her shock, she finds herself looking down the centre of the stairwell to the concrete floor a thousand feet below.

She steps out of the stairwell, still not fully in command of her senses. She presses the button for the elevator and when the door opens, she sees Gilly and Monty inside. She raises her hand as if to say, "I'll take the next one," but Gilly growls and she steps inside.

The door slides closed and Rebecca finds herself in the midst of an argument about the tutor who was fired

the day before.

“He was my friend,” Monty pleads to Gilly.

“You shouldn’t have friends,” says Gilly, “Didn’t you read the book.”

“I read the stupid book. And it didn’t say that. It said be wary of friends. It didn’t say not to have them.”

“It’s the same thing,” snaps Gilly.

“But I liked him.”

“Fight against that.”

Monty thinks it through and starts to plead, “Maybe he can be my friend and I will be very, very wary of him?”

“It won’t happen,”

“But why?”

“Because he is being paid to provide a service. That is all he is to you. A service provider.”

“What are you then? Are you my

friend?”

Gilly looks down at Monty and almost seems stuck for words, “There are other terms to describe our relationship.”

“Then I don’t have any friends in the whole world,” Monty concludes, glumly.

“You don’t need them.”

“I had lots of friends before I came here.”

“You will thank me for that,” says Gilly.

The elevator arrives at Rebecca’s floor and she sees Gilly eyeballing her.

“Are you getting out?” he asks, gruffly.

She steps out of the elevator and freezes. The door slides closed silently behind her.

Finally, sitting behind her desk, she finds herself staring at the computer

monitor. She has a single question running through her head. “What is the name for that?” What is the name for someone who can be so damn mean and wants to spread it around?

She spends most of the afternoon feeling hollowed out and watching the wall clock move its hands glacially until they read 5.30 pm. Finally, she feels free to depart the building.

Rebecca walks down to the Harbour and sits on a park bench watching the brown seaweed waving backward and forwards as the clear seawater sloshes around.

She retrieves her phone, slips off her shoe, swaps SIM cards and checks in on her other life. There is a long text message from Snowden saying that the publisher has organized a venue in

London for a small book launch ahead of a more formal launch in a few month's time. Rebecca's heart falls, thinking that she is unlikely to be back from Sydney in time. She stares at the water, feeling melancholic and tired. She heaves a long sigh and replaces her work SIM card and reboots the phone.

The phone beeps instantly and this shakes her alert. Someone has called in the time that she was reading Snowden's text. She can't take a break for even a minute!

Her heart races again as she thinks that it is a call from Gilly, calling her back into office with the lawyer again. She calms down when she sees that it is a text message from Tim, Head of Executive Security. He wishes her well and says that the entourage is traveling

back to London within the week. At last, some good news. Back to familiar territory. Close to Snowdon.

Rebecca rests back against the bench, exhausted, feeling the afternoon sun warm her face. She watches long, shiny strands of kelp wafting backward and forwards under the surface of the clear harbour water. They are being pushed around randomly by the waves, and these waves are themselves shunted by the wind, the wake of the ferries, and even the broken remains of the waves that went before, bouncing off the sea wall.

Rebecca tunes into the sound of the water sloshing against the quay. She feels thankful to the seaweed for showing her that being sloshed around with no control is not a phenomenon

that is unique to her.

The Occupy Activist

Back in London, Rebecca is able to get free from the office in time to attend Snowden's book launch. She has barely spoken to him over the past few weeks what with the different time zones and his busy schedule.

On the way to the book launch, she sees that a protest group has set up an information stall in a park across from the hotel. She observes it cautiously from a distance, noting that it is an Occupy group, protesting about the inequitable distribution of global wealth.

Feeling a strong urge to share a secret, Rebecca crosses the road. As she approaches, she raises the lapel of her jacket and adjusts her hair and glasses such that she is invisible and unidentifiable. There is a young man in

the stall dressed in shabby jeans, with a grubby, flamboyant white shirt unbuttoned to the naval. He has a distinctive tattoo on his hand where the index finger and thumb meet.

The tattoo is a black rectangle that looks like a loaf of bread has been sliced into five pieces. The first piece is so thin that it droops over. The second slice is thicker and the third and fourth slices are thicker still.

The last slice is more of a slab, representing about two-thirds of the whole loaf. Rebecca is fascinated by this shape and she looks up to see the activist is looking at her.

He points to the tattoo. “Which one are you in?” he asks.

“I don’t understand,” says Rebecca.

“Each of these slices represents 20%

of the world's population," he says.

"There are five of them. You see, one, two, three, four, five." The young man is both forceful and precise in his words. Rebecca is engaged by his story and she lets him continue. He says, "The word 'quin' means five so we call them quintiles. Do you follow?"

Rebecca nods silently, hoping that her mane moves enough that the man will continue without her having to speak. He does continue, with a grubby fingernail pointing at the tattoo. He says, "The thickness of the slice represents the total wealth of that quintile. So this quintile here, the thinnest slice, represents the poorest 20% of the world. See how thin it is. Not much of a meal for those poor fuckers, hey? That slice represents over a billion

people with empty stomachs and inadequate shelter.”

Rebecca nods her head, conscious of the red hair moving through the air.

“This quintile,” says the activist pointing to the thick slab, “is the richest quintile. This 20% of the world’s population owns over 80% of all the whammy. They are not only overfed, these fuckers are dying of obesity.

They’ve got so much, they waste it. You ever see a rich kid crash a Porsche?”

Rebecca observes her hair shaking left to right. “Why did you get it tattooed on your hand,” she asks.

“I did it myself so that I’d never forget what my life mission is.”

“And what is that?”

“To tell everyone I meet the story that I just told you.”

“My boss is one of the one percent,” says Rebecca. She instantly feels good to have the dirty secret out and into the hands of someone who would know how to adequately respond. She has a flush of relief, almost like she were back in therapy with Miriam.

“Who is your boss?”

“Nobody’s ever heard of him. His name is Gilly Clay.”

“The poison merchant?”

“You have heard of him?”

“Missus, I may dress like Dexy’s Midnight Runners, but I read Forbes.”

“You buy Forbes?” asks Rebecca, surprised.

“I didn’t say, I buy it. That fucker’s at the top of the rich list ‘global’. What do you do for him?”

“I am a PA.”

“Which one?”

“I am sorry?”

“He has lots of PA’s.”

“You are not going to record this, are you?” asks Rebecca, now looking around the street anxiously.

The activist softens his tone and says, “No miss, we are just having a chat about an important issue.” Then he takes Rebecca by surprise by saying, “You’re not Ebony Flax, are you?”

“No. Who is that?”

“Some PA to someone, I get a bit confused with the PA’s. Which one are you, then?”

“Rebecca Parry,” she says, feeling surprisingly confident.

“We track them, Beccy. Those Superclass fuckers. Like a fox sniffing out a rat, we get our snouts right up the

hole. Where they go. What they do. Who they work with. And by the way, your boss is the zero point zero one percent. You are the one per cent.”

“I am?” Rebecca says, surprised. She feels as though her plot to dob-in Gilly is backfiring. “How’s that possible?”

“What’s your take home pay?” asks the activist, raising a scruffy laminated chart with a table drawn on it. “Point to it on the chart, here.”

Rebecca points to one of the higher sections.

“You are well within the one per cent.”

“One per cent of what, exactly?” she asks, defiantly.

“You are one of the richest 1% of humanity. In fact, you are one of the richest 1% of ‘all’ humanity?”

“What’s the difference?”

“All humanity refers to the entire 108 billion humans that have ever lived. Not just the seven billion who are around now.”

“But that includes people in Africa,” Rebecca says dismissively.

“It includes everyone.”

“That hardly counts then, does it?”

The activist laughs. “Alright then,” he says, “Prickly Miss.” He rummages around his improvised stall and raises another board, this one more dog-eared than the last. “This is a British chart.” He runs his finger along the list until he finds the same income bracket. “There, you are in the top four per cent of the UK.”

“Well, that’s not so bad,” says Rebecca. She glances down at her watch and then addresses the young man.

“Thank you for sharing with me. I do like your tattoo.”

“You know what,” says the activist, seeking to keep her attention a little longer. Rebecca’s ginger mane moves side to side.

“Some of my uncouth mates would call you a ‘rich bitch’. But I will call you Ms. Parry.” He holds out his hand to shake.

Rebecca eyes the hand, warily. It is grubby, plus it is attached the activist. She reluctantly takes his hand to shake and he grasps her and draws her close. With his other hand, he raises a plastic container that looks like it has been thoroughly worked over many times. He shakes it and a few lonely coins clatter around inside the tub.

“Care to make a donation to the

cause?” he asks.

Paying him off seems like the simplest way of making a quick escape, so Rebecca retrieves her purse. She places a one pound coin into the plastic tub.

“A quid?” protests the activist. “Is that it?”

Rebecca pulls out a five-pound note, folds it and pokes it into the opening of the container.

“That’s the spirit, lovely,” says the activist.

She turns and walks away quickly. Behind her, the activist calls out and says, “Pass my regards to Gilly Clay. Not.”

Book Launch

Snowdon is on the lectern, talking when Rebecca arrives at the hall. The room is packed with a hundred or so chairs and people standing around the back and sides. She finds a place to stand at the back of the auditorium. She catches his eye and she raises a tiny smile on one side of her face.

As Snowdon talks, he glances towards her periodically and she can discern that he is smiling at her. He raises his hands to his face in a particular manner that she recognizes from the restaurant on the night Monty arrived. He wants her to remove her glasses.

Rebecca looks around the room for danger and then raises her fingers to the arm of the glasses and moves them down. She puts on a sex kitten look,

feeling safe and protected from within her fiery mane, as though the only people can see her face are those standing directly in front of her.

Snowdon sees her eyes and in amid his speech he gives way to a smile that completes the contract. Rebecca is about to replace her sunglasses when she feels fear creep up her spine. She stops dead, afraid to even move her eyes. Something is encroaching on her security. She gingerly rolls her eyes to the left. Then, very slowly, she turns her head.

Across the room, there is a woman with an SLR camera and a long lens. Rebecca sees the shutter wink at her three times in short succession.

“Fuck,” she says as she slides on her glasses, conscious of the expression

about the horse having left the stable. She glances back to the woman with the camera. She seems familiar, somehow. She doesn't look like paparazzi. Maybe she is part of the book launch entourage.

This incident puts her on edge and when the presentation is over and the people in the crowd break for refreshments, Rebecca departs. In the lobby of the hotel, she swaps SIM cards and leaves a message for Snowdon congratulating him on his success and notifying him of her hotel and room number.

It is past midnight when Snowdon arrives. Rebecca meets him in the doorway in her dressing gown. He looks exhausted, exhilarated and a bit drunk.

“Oh, baby, what a rush.”

“How was it.”

“It went on for hours.”

“You need to take these clothes off,”
says Rebecca.

“Oh, really.”

“Yes, really. You can tell me the rest
of your story once you have
pleasured me.”

“Okay,” says Snowdon, “that sounds
like a plan.”

Irina Thren

The following morning, Rebecca takes breakfast with Snowden in a cafe. She is anxious to get to her office on time while Snowden is more relaxed. His morning starts later with a book signing close by.

Rebecca arrives at the office a few minutes later than planned and is anxious to see a temp waiting next to her workstation.

“Are you Rebecca Parry?” the temp asks.

“Maybe,” says Rebecca, “who are you?”

“I’m from the agency.”

“Okay, ‘From the Agency’, what do you want?”

“Mr. Clay has asked that you meet him in his office.”

“Okay, thank you From the Agency,

message received.”

The temp dithers in her place.

“Is something the matter?” asks Rebecca.

“Mr. Clay asked that I escort you to his office.”

Rebecca heaves an annoyed sigh. She brings her hands together as if she was locked in handcuffs. “Let’s go then.”

In the elevator, she feels stress building in her gut. By the time the elevator has reached Gilly’s floor, she has resigned herself to her fate. If she gets fired and ruined today, at least she will be able to tell Snowden, face to face.

Rebecca enters Gilly’s office and sees him resting against his desk, browsing a magazine.

“Tell me about Snowden,” Gilly says,

directly, catching her off guard. For a few moments, Rebecca feels vulnerable, naked. Like she is about to be harmed, somehow.

“Umm. The mountain?” she says, not knowing what else to say.

“The author,” snaps Gilly.

“Don’t think I’ve read Snowdon,” she says disingenuously, but also truthfully – she has never read the manuscript in full.

Gilly passes the magazine to her. “Is that you?”

The magazine is opened to a double page spread about Snowdon’s book launch. The top of the two pages consists of a panoramic photograph that encompasses almost everyone who was in the room. Rebecca is in the picture. Her glasses are off and her face

is visible in profile. Hair covers most of her face. At the bottom of the image is a photo credit to Irina Thren.

“What a weird name,” thinks Rebecca. She studies the image with gravitas, resolving how to reply to Gilly.

“Oh, that Snowden,” she says, then immediately feels as if it were a wrong move. Now she has admitted knowing of Snowden. Where did that put her? It contradicts the first statement she made. She talks through her own confusion. “I’ve heard about this rascal. What is he saying?” she asks.

“You tell me. You were there.”

Rebecca feels a flash of anger. She recalls her discussions with Miriam and remembers that her role in the organization is to be victimized by Gilly. She has also come to realize that her

boss gets angry when people roll over too quickly; and that when his victims put up a clever and spirited defense, he actually warms a little. Rebecca knows that one of Gilly's weak spots is that he is devoid of social intelligence. He has no sense of social interactions; he's not even particularly good at recognizing faces. It lends weight to the proposal that Gilly is not actually human but some sort of reptile.

Rebecca figures that if she is going to cop abuse, she may as well take it with some spirit. "Oh, Gilly. You need to date more," she laughs, aloud.

"What?" he asks, his voice sharp, like a pin coming out of a grenade.

"Don't you know the difference between red hair and auburn?" asks Rebecca, quickly. She taps the magazine

with her fingertip, “She’s auburn and I am red. And it’s dyed, look at it. She’s probably some strawberry blonde having an identity crisis. I bet she’s wearing headphones under that mop, listening to Tori Amos and day-dreaming about one day waking up red with a real man in her bed.”

Rebecca takes a very quick glance at Gilly and sees that he is studying the image with a profoundly confused look. So she pushes on, putting more distance between herself and the grenade.

“If I didn’t know you, Gilly, I’d think you were trying to get a rise out of me.”

Gilly grunts and turns away from her to retrieve something from his desk. He turns back to her, holding a copy of Snowden’s book. “Well, here’s your

chance,” he says. He hands the book to her.

Rebecca takes the book from Gilly, nonplussed. For a moment, time seems to stand still and she holds the book in front of her and slowly allows her eyes to lower towards the cover. This is the hardcover version. It is weighty and strong. The dust jacket features an image of a Gulfstream Jet superimposed over a photo of planet Earth that is blurred by the hot exhaust from the plane. Snowden had once described the image with the words: business elites fouling the Earth. In a bathtub, that was.

This is the first time that Rebecca has held a copy. It feels weighty and serious. She turns it over and scans the text on the back cover. She recognizes the

words. She helped Snowden write them one night, in a penthouse in Manhattan, getting drunk on Cointreau and ice.

How strange, she thinks, to be standing in front of Gilly Clay, looking at the photo of Snowden's face on the back cover of his book. How awesome it would be if Snowden could see this exchange.

"Read it," growls Gilly, snapping Rebecca out of her daydream.

"What?" she asks, dumbfounded.

"Tell me what it says."

"You want me to read it?" she asks, incredulously.

"Find out what the rat has to say."

"Are you in it?" she asks, knowing that he is not.

"If I am I will suck his eyes out."

"It's a big book," Rebecca says,

cryptically, pretending to weigh the tome. “It could take me a few weeks to get through it.”

There is silence from Gilly, so she goes for the kill. “Unless you wanted me to prioritize it. Take a few days out and read it through.”

“Whatever,” he says, “just get it read and report back.”

“Okay.” Rebecca finds herself walking out of Gilly’s office, lightheaded.

Once outside the door, she can hardly contain her glee. She doesn’t even go to her workstation. Instead, she returns to her hotel room and packs an overnight bag. She calls Snowden and gets through.

“I have just totally lucked out,” she says and tells him the story.

“What are you going to do?”

Snowdon asks.

“I am going to stay with Mum in Frinton for a few days and read your book on the beach. How cool is that? Can you come down?”

“I’ll come down on the train, tonight.”

Later, Rebecca walks to the station and takes a train to the small sea-side town where she owns a sturdy red-brick Art Deco-styled apartment that overlooks the greensward and the English Channel. This is home for her Mum in the twilight few years of her life.

When she arrives, Rebecca farewells Hillary, the permanent carer, who goes to visit her sister when Rebecca is in town. Rebecca’s mother is frail and old and lives in slippers and a dressing gown. Rebecca places a kiss on her

forehead.

“Oh, hello,” says old Mrs. Parry, confused, “Do I know you?”

“I’m Rebecca,” says Rebecca as she settles into her favorite lounge chair and tucks the copy of Sustainability and the Superclass down the side of the cushion.

“I remember,” says Mrs. Parry, “you work with that lovely man, Gilly Clay.”

Rebecca laughs aloud. “You know something, Mrs. Parry,” she says, “your memory is a constant source of fascination to me.”

Nursery Rhyme

It is a blissful three days with Snowdon and the book and old Mrs. Parry. Snowdon conducts his interviews by phone and skype while Rebecca curls up in the chair and reads. It is a strange feeling, almost as if her life is normal.

Finally, they both travel by train to London and spend the last night together before they go their separate ways the next morning. Snowdon flies back to New York first thing, departing the hotel at 4 am.

Back in her office, Rebecca sends a text to Gilly to notify him that she has read the book and that she is ready to brief him on it. A few days later she is notified that he has scheduled some time with her between his meetings.

She walks to the location, an Edwardian building with marble statues, that has been taken over as the offices of a legal practice. Gilly has been holed up here for days. She is directed to a waiting area beneath an ornate, dark wood staircase that curves gracefully to the first floor. She hears the sound of a young boy singing and is warmed when she sees Monty seated under the stairs, kicking his legs, killing time.

“Do you mind if I share your bench,” Rebecca asks, pretending to be a stranger.

“You can share my bench, lady,” says Monty.

“What was that song you were singing?” she asks.

Monty starts to sing again, “Socialise the losses. Privatisise the profits. Blow

into the bubble. Sift through the rubble. Keep the money in the family, never let it go.”

“That’s an interesting song,” says Rebecca. “Where did you learn that?”

“Bordon Musk.”

“Who is that?”

“He is the son of one of Gilly’s people. I spent an afternoon working with him while Gilly and the other guy were playing with the lawyer.”

Rebecca chuckles. “Do you know what that actually means,” she asks, casually.

“Of course.”

“What does it mean, then?” she asks, gently.

“It doesn’t mean anything.”

“Do you really think that?”

“I don’t know.”

“The words mean something.”

“Like what?”

“Let me explain,” Rebecca offers.

“Alright,” says Monty.

“Alright,” repeats Rebecca as she rubs her hands together, theatrically, “let’s do this thing.”

Monty’s eye’s light up. “Let’s do it,” he says, excitedly.

“Socialize the losses,” says Rebecca, “what does that mean?”

“I don’t know,” says Monty.

“It means to spread the bad stuff around.”

“That’s not very nice,” says Monty.

“No, it’s not. And privatize the profits. What does that mean?”

“I don’t know.”

“It means to keep all the good stuff for yourself.”

“Share the bad stuff and keep the good stuff for yourself,” Monty says, thinking it through.

“That’s what it means,” says Rebecca. “It’s not very nice is it?”

“It’s very selfish,” says Monty.

“I think so.”

“I think I’ll stick to the other song.”

“Which one.”

“The one about the rosies.”

“Oh, that one,” says Rebecca.

Monty starts to sing. “Ring a Ring a Rosies. A pocket full of posies. Atishoo. Atishoo. We all fall down.”

“I’m not too sure about those lyrics, either,” she says.

“Why not?”

“Well, a ring of rosies is a rash that you get on your skin when you get bubonic plague.”

“What?” asks Monty, screwing up his face.

“The Black Death. It’s a terrible disease that killed millions of people in the Middle Ages.”

“That’s horrible.”

“And posies are a collection of flowers and nice smelling things that are supposed to protect you from the foul stench of the City from when people used to poo in the street.” Rebecca finds herself enjoying tearing the rhyme apart. “And ‘atishoo’ and ‘fall down’ means sneezing and dropping dead.”

“That’s horrible,” says Monty, obviously distressed.

“So, I wouldn’t be singing nursery rhymes if I were you.”

“What is a nursery, anyway?” asks Monty.

“It’s a place where little children are stored.”

“Well, I have just outgrown nursery rhymes,” Monty snaps, definitively.

“Bordon Musk is a fool.”

Rebecca smiles, feeling like she has had a win. She looks up to see an elderly woman approaching.

“Rebecca Parry?”

“Yes.”

“Mr. Gilly Clay will see you now.”

“He’s got a PA to show in his PA,” says Rebecca quietly to Monty, shaking her head.

“He’s got too much,” Monty shakes his head, ruefully. “Way too much.”

Briefing Gilly

The old woman shows Rebecca to a board room. She takes a seat and patiently waits. Finally, the door opens again and Gilly steps inside. He doesn't acknowledge her as he pulls a seat across the table from her and clasps his hands together.

“Alright, lets, go,” he says, looking down at this watch.

Rebecca leaps right in. She says, “The book – Sustainability and the Superclass – is based on academic research, although it is written in a non-academic style, seeking to appeal to a...”

Gilly interrupts her immediately. “I have no interest in how the damned thing has been written. It could have been written upside-down on monkey bars in Cantonese for all I care. What

does it say?”

Rebecca refocuses and starts again.

“Umm. The book investigates the psychology of global business leaders in the fossil fuel industry and particularly how they view the contemporary discourse on ecological sustainability.”

“Uh-huh,” says Gilly, “what’s that?”

Rebecca thinks quickly, trying to summarize the broad concepts into words that Gilly will immediately understand. She says, “The atmosphere, the oceans and the soil and all the living things inside them interact in a complex manner that is referred to as ‘ecological’. Human society can’t function if these systems fail. However, some human activities are harming these big global systems and there are concerns that they will collapse unless there are big

changes in the global economy. That is ecological sustainability.”

“Uh-huh,” says Gilly.

“What Snowdon has found is that the global business leaders – those whose enterprises have the greatest impact on ecological sustainability - are largely ignorant of the detail of the discourse. In their worldview, they are charged running profitable commercial activities and it is the responsibility of others to resolve the world’s ecological problems.”

“Good,” says Gilly.

Rebecca is about to continue, but Gilly cuts her off. He stands, nodding his head in appreciation. “That’s good,” he repeats. “You keep the book.” Then he departs the board room, leaving Rebecca bewildered.

She stays in her seat motionless, half-

expecting for Gilly to return and allow her to finish telling the story. But as the seconds and minutes tick by, she is conscious of the fact that he is not coming back. She thinks through what she has just said and feels as though she has inadvertently

told the story in a way that paints the power elite in a glowing light. It is almost as if she were condoning their stance.

Rebecca imagines Snowdon sitting across the table from her, wearing a frown, and marking her report card with a big, red letter ‘F’ and the words ‘See Me’ scrawled in the top right corner. “How could it have all gone so wrong,” she wonders.

She tries to work it out. For a start, she had the opportunity to say ‘some

human activities such as burning fossil fuels' but she neglected to mention the fossil fuels. Strike one against Rebecca. Second, she had the total of about one minute to tell the story. Whose fault was that? Either way, she feels light-headed and soiled.

The boardroom door opens and the Rebecca thinks that she might be reprieved. However, it is not Gilly but the old lady PA.

"I will have to ask you to leave here," the old lady says in an old croaky voice. "This room is for business, you see."

Rebecca stands and gives her a glare. As she is ushered out of the room, the old lady tells her, "Mr. Clay asked me to pass on a message."

"What is that?" asks Rebecca.

"He says that you need to pack for

Switzerland.”

“Switzerland?”

“You are going to the Economic Forum over there.”

“Did he say when we are leaving.”

“Tomorrow morning.”

The Envelopes

On the flight to Davos, Rebecca gets some sleep by reclining the leather chair in the Gulf Stream. She is feeling very calm having spent three days on holiday with Snowdon. The trip to Davos is an added bonus.

Normally, Gilly is so wrapped up in engagements that he doesn't find time to task her. She gets the run of luxury hotels and the crisp mountain air all on her own.

This trip, however, is different. Gilly is on the plane with her, working furtively with some lawyers and consultants on a secret mission. They have a workstation with a printer set up in the back of the plane.

When the document is complete, Gilly approaches Rebecca, who is fast asleep

in a leather chair. He doesn't touch her or say anything, just lets his presence waft its way into her consciousness. It has the same impact as smelling salts.

Rebecca gasps as she wakes and sees the hollow eyes of her reptilian boss. She feels naked and vulnerable and in immediate need to apologize for something.

Before she can speak, Gilly hands her the stack of A4 sized envelopes.

“Hand deliver from Gilly Clay,” he says. Then moves toward the back of the plane to where the lawyers and consultants are now drinking Heineken Beer from small, cold cans.

Rebecca heaves a sigh, thankful that the exchange is over. She familiarizes herself with the task by flicking through the envelopes. There are about twenty

in all, tightly and precisely packaged in thick paper that is emblazoned with a raised watermark and the logo of the prestigious international consulting firm Princeton Pearce.

Each letter has a hand-written name on it, just a first and second name without a salutation. These are personal invitations from Gilly. She recognizes most of the names as the CEOs and Directors of the corporates that Gilly trades with. Obviously, they are all attending Davos this year.

The thought occurs that this new task could ruin her entire Davos ‘holiday’ if she has to spend a week chasing down CEOs. She needs to be proactive starting now. She knows that the best way to find your way around CEO’s is to keep up on the gossip with their PAs.

Rebecca sorts the documents into two piles, those who's PA she has the phone number for and those she doesn't. She feels confident that that missing PAs will be known by some of the other PAs and so she crafts an email to the PAs that she knows, enrolling them to help her get the messages hand delivered as soon as possible.

They touch down in Davos early in the morning. Rebecca gets a few hours' sleep before setting off in the early morning to get rid of the envelopes.

The first five envelopes practically fly out of her hands in the restaurant of her hotel. She gets excited that maybe the task can be wrapped up on the first day. She gets rid of two more packages in the lobby and following a coffee and

gossip with the PA to one of the Vice VPs of Exxon Oil, she completes the last of her intelligence gathering.

It is two in the afternoon when she tracks down Morgan Bench, the founder, Chairman and major shareholder of a plastics empire the crosses five continents. She is bought to Bench by his PA.

The business mogul is pacing around in a smoking gown. He has a white earphone cable running from his mobile phone in his pocket to his right ear.

“Mr. Bench,” says Rebecca.

“Something about a hand-delivered note,” he says to her.

Rebecca approaches, holding the document in front of her. “This is from Gilly Clay,” she says, but she is

interrupted by Bench turning his attention to the phone.

“Yes,” he barks pushing the earphone further into his ear. He takes the document from Rebecca and tears it open.

“You want me to hold?” he bellows.
“Are you fucking kidding me?”

Rebecca wants to get away from the aggression and she seeks an imprimatur from Bench. But he is distracted, listening into the phone and casting his eyes across the document.

“Who is it from?” he asks.

“It’s from Gilly Clay,” she says.

Bench’s eyes widen and his skin seems to go red. Then, it feels as if the whole room trembles. Bench becomes animated and he flicks to the last page of the document where he confirms

what he has heard Rebecca say.

“Clay!!!” he yells.

Rebecca gasps as Bench erupts in an apoplexy of rage. In a single, violent movement he tears the document apart and casts it at Rebecca. It slaps her in the face, causing her to stumble backward.

“Get that fucking shit out of here!” Bench trembles with fury as he yells.

Rebecca stoops to retrieve the document from the floor and then heads for the door.

“You tell Clay I’ll eat his fucking head. Get out!!”

Rebecca steps outside the room, pulling the door behind her. Her chest is heaving and she’s having trouble getting enough air. She looks up to see one of the PA approaches with a

delicate cup of tea balanced on a saucer heading into Bench's room. Cryptically, she says, "He's in a bit of a funny mood today."

Once the PA has passed, Rebecca makes a break for it. She swoops out of the suite and into the stairwell where she descends three floors before halting, out of breath. She leans over the rail looking down at the concrete floor hundreds of feet below. A cramp chews up her guts and she's feeling as though she has come to the end of her tolerance for all the anxiety and abuse. There are only two options in her world. One is to tumble over the handrail into the air. And the other is to swaddle herself in white cotton and vodka.

Eradicating Ecocide

By the time Rebecca reaches her hotel, the anxiety is gone, replaced by white hot anger. She's had the total jack-shit of getting set up by Gilly Clay. And she's furious at herself that she never sees the signs.

She storms into her room, gathers supplies from the minibar: six small bottles of vodka, a glass, the ice tray. Holding these in the fold of her arm, she drags a lounge chair into the bathroom and closes the door behind her. She sets the chair against the door handle, then runs the shower, adjusting the water flow so that it sends out a soothing, muffling white noise.

In a well-rehearsed manner, Rebecca bundles the towels and bathrobes into a corner and curls up in them. She puts

ice into the glass and vodka over the ice, then holds the drink against her nose. She inhales deeply through her nostrils, instantly gratified by the head-rush from the vodka fumes.

She is reminded of her previous life where vodka and bathrooms were pretty much all that she remembered. There is one thing to be said for being permanently drunk, there is not much feeling goes on, good or bad. She inhales the volatile aroma again. But she doesn't drink the vodka.

Instead, she thinks about Snowden. She last spoke with him in the small hours of the day that he left for New York. She retrieves the SIM card from inside her shoe. Normally she would delicately place the business SIM card somewhere safe, but this time, she

tosses it across the room.

As she is dialling Snowden's number, she wonders what time it will be where he is. The phone rings out once and she tries again. It seems like an age before she hears his voice.

"Rebecca."

"Tom."

She needs only say one word for him to know that she is in a state. "What's going on baby? Are you okay? Are you safe?"

"Oh, you know, the pressures of the marketplace."

"What's he had you doing now?"

"Hand delivering some envelopes."

"To who?"

"The normal suspects. The power elite at the World Economic Forum."

"Are you there now? In Davos?"

“Yeah. I am considering getting smashed in a Davos bathroom.”

Snowdon makes an anxious laugh. “I can hear the shower going.”

“Oh boy, it’s good to hear your voice,” sighs Rebecca.

“You too, baby. I wish I could be over there with you.”

“Where are you now?”

“I’m staying at Terry’s apartment in Manhattan.

Rebecca goes quite, feeling exhausted and calm.

“What was it?” asks Snowdon, “The package.”

“I don’t know actually,” Rebecca says. She rummages around in her bag and retrieves the ripped up document. She flips through a few pages trying to discern the message. “It’s something

about Eradicating Ecocide,” she says.

“Eradicating Ecocide,” says Snowdon.

“Serious? Clay’s into that?”

“I guess.”

“Wait up,” says Snowdon, that makes no sense.”

“I told you about it at Crosby’s that night.”

“It’s a campaign to add ecocide to a list of crimes prosecuted by the International Criminal Court.”

“Gilly killed a lizard in Sydney.”

“Ecocide is bigger than that.”

“How much bigger.”

“Like killing all the lizards. The legislation is designed to help prosecute individuals and organizations that cause mass damage or loss to nature.”

“That definitely does sound like Gilly.”

“Well, I am lost to know why he’d be

promoting it.”

“*Abhh*,” says Rebecca, “I think I found it. Last page. I am paraphrasing, now. Blah, blah, blah... As this legislation is likely to make capital raising for extractive industries, chemical processing and the group’s normal business activities more difficult, I am calling on you to contribute cash or in-kind to crush this legislation before it gets put to the vote.”

“Oh, hell no,” gasps Snowdon. He sounds as though a little bit of him has died.

Rebecca continues, “He’s trying to raise fifteen million for lawyers and lobbyists to squash the Eradicating Ecocide legislation.”

“*Ugggh!*” Snowdon grunts and then the line goes silent.

Rebecca strains to hear a faint noise in the earpiece. It's Tom groaning. "Tom?" she asks, anxiously. "Tom!?"

"I just..." Snowden's voice is frail. "I don't know if I am doing the right thing."

"I don't understand." Rebecca can hear Snowden's exasperation.

Eventually, he is able to speak and his voice is calm and cool. "The Nazi doctors used to execute their research subjects after they were finished with them. And I have these fucking monsters on my couch telling me why they don't connect with the suffering they cause and I just let them walk away."

"Do you want to put Gilly Clay on the couch?" asks Rebecca.

"I want to put a bullet in his fucking

skull,” says Tom, gravely. This is completely out of character for Tom and he follows by saying, “Actually, what I want to do is to put a bullet into the head of the system that allows a single man the power to destroy a program like Eradicating Ecocide.”

Suddenly, Rebecca is excited and she sits upright, pressing the phone against her ear. “This is a crazy idea, Tom, but hear me out. I think that Gilly has read your book.”

Snowdon snorts. If the noise were translated into words it would mean ‘who gives a fuck’ and ‘are you kidding me?’.

She continues, hurriedly, “After I spent a full minute describing it to him, he seemed pleased. Now, I kept the copy he gave me but I have seen the

book around him a few times since then.”

Rebecca is excited, she leans forward, talking rapidly. “So he must have another copy. We move so much so he must be taking it with him. And he refers to it. Two or three times now, I have heard him. It all makes sense now. I think that he respects you. I think that he is envious.”

“Envious?”

“I think that he’s envious of his peers who got into the book.”

Snowdon starts laughing, “That’s really funny.”

Rebecca continues, “Okay, hear me out, Tom. I know his schedule and it’s not all filled in yet. We have three Gulfstream jets sitting around doing nothing, that’s your cab ride. I will tell

him that I took a call from you, that you want to put him on the couch, you'll charge him \$50,000 and can do it sometime later this week."

"That's amazing," Snowdon chuckles, mischievously.

"Are you up for it?"

"Hell, yeah! Do you think that he'll bite?"

"You are damned right he'll bite."

"How do you know?"

"Because I am so fucking angry, Tom. I am so angry that everyone knows that the world needs to change and I have only just woken up to it. You know it. The occupy guy knows it. My therapist with the funny lizard knows it. Even Monty knows it and he's only eight. And I am the dope who doesn't really understand why we need the bugs and

the little plants that live in the ocean. But I totally get that we do! And Gilly Clay, who I support, every day, he is killing it all.”

“I love it,” says Snowdon, excitedly. “Let’s do this thing!”

“So you need to give me a call on my work number in ten minutes. For when he checks the phone records, as he does.”

“I can do that, but...” says Snowdon.

“But, what?”

“There is a flaw in your Kato plan, Bee.”

“What?” asks Rebecca, perplexed.

“I don’t know your work number,” Tom says, plainly.

“You know what, Tom Snowdon? You have just saved me from a fresh bout of vodka abuse. I am going to give

you my phone number.”

Getting a Bite

The following morning Rebecca feels confident that she can make a persuasive case for Gilly to engage Tom Snowden at short notice. She has concluded that short, sharp and direct is going to work best and opportunity presents in the elevator on the way to the restaurant for breakfast. She carries with her the remaining packages and psyches herself to talking directly to her boss.

Inside the elevator with Gilly and Monty, Rebecca hears her own voice saying, “I have seven packets left to deliver, Mr. Clay and if I am prompt I can get them into the right hands before these folks leave Davos. Also, I fielded a call from that author, Snowden.”

“Really?” asks Gilly, “how did he get your number?”

Rebecca is unable to answer. She has not properly thought that through and she realizes that it is potentially a fatal flaw in her plan. She is stunned that she could have overlooked this and for a moment she flounders, not knowing how to reply. She decides to ignore the question and press on, regardless. “He says that he’s conducting interviews for the second edition of the book and that he’d like to have you on the couch.” She looks down at Monty, then back to Gilly. “If you follow the meaning.”

Clay is silent and this actually bodes well for Rebecca to continue. “He’s got timeslots this week or not for some months. If you wanted to wait...”

“Hell, no,” snaps Gilly abruptly.

“In that case, an option is to send a Gulfstream to pick him up from New York and do a session here, this Friday morning eleven to twelve thirty.”

“Do it,” says Gilly.

“He wants a hundred and fifty thousand,” says Rebecca. She feels a muscle twitch on her face and hopes that it is not visible and gives away her lie.

Gilly places his hand on Monty’s shoulder. The boy looks up at him and Gilly says, “Shrinks are more expensive than lawyers these days.” He turns to Rebecca and simply shrugs. The door opens and Gilly and Monty step out of the elevator.

Rebecca stays in her place, gob-smacked. The door closes and she stands there looking at herself in the

polished stainless steel mirrored surface
wondering what on Earth she has just
done. More importantly, she comes to
realize that she is now able to do
something that she has long dreamed of:
call Snowden from her work phone.

Caramel Fondue

Friday morning comes and Rebecca receives a text message from Tim, the Head of Executive Security saying that Dr. Tom Snowden has arrived for a meeting with Gilly, and perhaps she would like to take charge.

She finds her way to the room to where Snowden is waiting with Tim. He is wearing game face, not permitted to give away that he knows her.

Tim says, “Rebecca, this is Dr. Tom Snowden.”

Rebecca steps forward and extends her hand. “Hello, Dr. Snowden. I’m Rebecca Parry, I am Gilly’s Personal Assistant.”

“Call me Tom,” he says.

Rebecca tries hard to stifle her joy at the situation.

Tim addresses Rebecca, “Will you give me a minute?” He ushers her into the hallway, asking, “Do you know this guy?”

“I know of him,” says Rebecca, honestly.

“Who is he?”

“He’s a psychologist.”

“Gilly’s got a shrink. About fucking time,” says Tim, nodding. “Are you all good in there?”

“I’ll be fine.”

Tim departs and Rebecca returns to Snowdon. He is seated in an ornate leather settee and she stands in the doorway, observing him, lustfully.

“Fancy meeting you here,” she says, quietly.

“Fancy being here. Davos of all places. Good work on your part.”

“You’re most welcome.”

“Is there a schedule?”

“It has sort of taken a life of its own,” Rebecca says. “I was supposed to pick you up, but at the last moment, Tim gets drafted in.”

The door opens and Gilly enters. He extends his hand. “Dr. Snowdon, I am Gilly Clay. Please come this way.” Gilly moves through to the adjoining room, ushering Snowdon inside. “You stay here,” he says in Rebecca’s direction.

The door closes, and Rebecca feels a hollow emptiness take over. She sighs and moves to the seat where Snowdon had been sitting. She places her hand on the seat and is able to detect a faint trace of warmth, the only evidence that he had actually been there at all.

She finds herself drifting into a

meditative state which makes her drowsy. After about twenty minutes she gets irritable and casts her eyes towards the door separating the two rooms. She moves towards the door and stands close to it, listening intently but is unable to hear any noise coming from within. She notices that there is a keyhole and withdraws her smartphone and activates the camera.

Within seconds, she is able to observe a most uninteresting scene. All that is going on inside the room is Snowdon sitting in an armchair with his notebook on his lap and Gilly Clay slouched on the couch. It is not animated, it is not dynamic. Except that one or the other of the men's mouths move, it is almost perfectly still.

“What on Earth did you expect?”

Rebecca wonders. She turns off the phone and sits back on the couch. Then she starts to fret. She frets about three things.

First she is worried that Snowden will say something or for some other reason Gilly will get suspicious that she and Snowden know each other. All Gilly needs to do is to suspect and he will have investigators all over her. They will snoop through her life and bombard her with endless interconnected questions. And even if they don't find anything conclusive, the suspicion will be damning in itself.

The next thing that she worries about is that Snowden will be so enraged by Gilly that he will kill him after the interview like the Nazi doctors did to their research subjects. She thinks this

through and concludes that while it is likely that Gilly will be horrid enough to justify being executed, Snowden is too much of a pacifist to do the work.

Finally, Rebecca starts to fret about the most worrying thing of all: her motivations. Why did she choose to bring together the man she most loves with the one she most loathes? Why would she do that? Why would she have engineered the situation in which the other two risks, and all the other risks that she had not had time to fret about, could exist?

Rebecca lets out a long sigh; she's exhausted from thinking too much, the mind-miles. She lays her head back on the settee, looking at the ornate cornice on the ceiling and she resolves to think about something else. She closes her

eyes and soon drifts off to sleep.

She wakes to see Gilly and Snowdon standing in the doorway shaking hands and talking closely together. Gilly has his hand gripped around

Snowdon's elbow as they shake. It is bizarre to see the pair of them together, so opposite in their worldviews and yet having bonded over something. Even more bizarre, Gilly is acting like a real human being for the first time. He turns to Rebecca and spreads a smile.

He stretches his hand towards her and says to her the first socially inclusive sentence that she can remember:

“Rebecca, we can't let Tom go without him trying the caramel fondue.”

This takes Rebecca completely off guard and she stutters and manages to say, “*Ahh*. Okay...”

“Show him around the *Bistro Gentiana* then get him into the limo for the airport.”

“I would be delighted to.” Rebecca stands and straightens her skirt. Gilly squeezes his hand against Snowdon’s and gives it a firm shake, “I will leave you with Rebecca.” Then he moves through the door.

Rebecca looks at Snowdon who is observing her with a bemused smile.

“Well,” she says, airily. “Fondue it is.”

Benedictine and Brandy

Rebecca and Snowdon walk out of the hotel in silence and it is not until they have travelled a block that they feel free to speak.

“That was bizarre,” she says.

“Tell me about it.”

“How did it go in there?”

“Phew. Obviously, I can’t share the details.”

“I understand that.”

“Some things fell into place. Not about him, so much, but about them.”

Rebecca interrupts him by pulling open the door to the *Bistro Gentiana*.

He steps inside and then halts, gripping her by the shoulders.

“I want to kiss you,” he says.

“I want that too.”

“But I can’t.”

“I know,” Rebecca says.

“How about this,” says Snowdon, looking around the Bistro. “Let’s get a sample of this fondue, so I can keep my agreement with Mr. Clay, then I will insist that you have a drink with me somewhere darkish.”

“That would work.”

Ten minutes later, Rebecca and Snowdon are seated in a tavern a few doors down from the Bistro. It has a low roof and old, dark wooden beams.

They settle themselves on stools at the bar.

“What do they drink here in Davos?” asks Snowdon studying the variety of unfamiliar bottles behind the bar.

“I’ll have what you are having.”

“What you’re having.”

“How about a B&B.”

“You are making that up.”

“It’s an old cocktail. Benedictine liquor and Brandy. You want one?”

“Alright. I’ll try it.”

Snowdon orders the drink and turns his attention to Rebecca.

“How’s the book coming along?” she asks.

“You know, the terror of locking off the manuscript is not because of what is in there,” says Snowdon, “it’s the fear of what you have left out.

I need some sort of a summary. I think that there are four or five categories of response to the sustainability problem by global business leaders.”

“These are all new ideas ?”

“Yeah. Unformed, but now pressing to get turned into words.”

“Well let’s get them out. Let’s birth the first draft right here.”

The bartender places the two whiskey glasses on the bar.

“I’ve got Swiss francs. I’ll get it,” says Rebecca. She pays for the drinks then raises the glass to her nose. The drink is viscous, golden coloured with the spicy aroma of Benedictine and the volatile tang of brandy.

They clink glasses and sip on their drinks.

“Lets, go,” says Rebecca, “the B&B list.”

“Okay,” says Snowdon. “There is a class of leaders who are proactive about sustainability but they give it the shortest shrift. They will make minute changes that are so bloody obvious that they should have made twenty years ago

and then run the flag up like they are thought leaders.”

“What do we call that category?”

“Bumble-puppy.”

“Bumble-puppy?” asks Rebecca, laughing.

“Did you read Brave New World?”

“Years ago.”

“The Alphas used to play this inane game called Centrifugal Bumble-puppy.”

“I can’t believe the things that you retain. How did it go?”

“I think that it was like badminton where they swapped the shuttlecock with a hamster or something.”

“You’re making that up.”

“That bit I am.”

“How about we call these guys: Minimum Effort.”

“Yes. But is voluntary, remember, they

choose to do it.”

“Alright. Next.”

“Next, is this approach that has a common outcome, but two different motivations. Both of them accept that there is a problem, but they say it is simply not my responsibility. Saving the planet is the job of the UN or Governments or Greenpeace, whatever.”

“It’s like a demarcation issue,” says Rebecca.

“Yes. That’s right. What would we call these guys?”

“Category: Not My Responsibility.”

“That sounds good. Next is the guys who might try to have a go at changing their operations, but the system is so constrained that they can’t break the inertia. Or they feel that they can’t make any meaningful change without

jeopardizing key performance indicators. The CEO's do, after all, have masters to satisfy."

"The shareholders."

"Yes. So while a CEO might propose to cut carbon footprint or move to biopolymers, the initiatives will ultimately end up being judged by unenlightened shareholders who will gauge it by whether it also cuts costs or raises revenue. And given that most of the 'green' options are more expensive, they simply stop trying."

"Category: Too Hard Basket."

"That's right. Now both these guys, Not my responsibility and Too hard basket will actually jump in and act, on the provision that someone does the work for them or pays for it. There is hope for these guys but they have to be

cajoled. These guys actually make up the bulk of the people.”

“Okay. Next category.”

“Yeah, next category...” Snowdon shakes his head, ruefully. “These guys simply do not give a damn. They just don’t care. For them, it is not my responsibility and it’s too hard and I don’t care to even think about it. My company is fine. Not interested. Even if you paid for it and did the work, they wouldn’t pick it up.”

“Category: I Don’t Care.”

“Next category, even worse still. These are people who actively seek to retard any movement towards a sustainable future. They deliberately buy up new technology with the intention of shelving it. They lobby against legislative change. And they

commit billions of dollars into infrastructure that will perpetuate the unsustainable practices. ”

“Let’s call them The Dark Side.”

“For want of a better term.”

“This is so glum,” says Rebecca, “Is there a light side in all of this?”

“Yes, there is. At the very beginning, I should have mentioned a group. These are the people who rise above all of the challenges and help to create an alternative business paradigm. Consider the oil company executives that make strategic investments in algae biofuel technology, nurturing the relationships between shareholders. These guys go out of their way to make a change. Consider the hedge fund manager who strategically develops a portfolio of clean technology firms. If these guys

prevail, then the humans get to live another billion years on this planet.

We'd probably call these guys the Avante-Garde. They are the pioneers of a whole new business paradigm that restores the planet and ensures that all the humans are fed, safe and happy."

Rebecca sighs, forlornly. She swirls the B&B around the blocks of ice. "What was that sigh?" asks Snowdon, cocking his head to look at her from a different angle.

"Well my boss is definitely not Avant-Garde," she says. "He is like an extreme version Dark Side. How long does the planet last if people like him prevail?"

"Not long," says Snowdon. "If we get through this century without global collapse, we'll be doing pretty well."

"Do you think that Gilly cares about

Monty,” asks Rebecca looking at her hands.

“I can’t answer that. Really. It wouldn’t be ethical.”

“I know. I know. I know. I am sorry.”

“It’s okay, I just...”

“I understand,” says Rebecca, “I’ll rephrase it. Do you think that someone who was an extreme version of the Dark Side would care about someone like Monty?”

“A carpenter cares for his hammer,” says Snowdon, cryptically.

“I guess,” says Rebecca, confused.

“Until it breaks,” says Snowdon.

“Then what?”

“Then he gets another hammer.”

Rebecca rests back and releases a long, deep sigh. It goes on for so long that she seems to collapse in on herself,

leaving just a mane of orange hair and a knitted woollen jacket.

Snowdon looks down to his lap, sad to have broken the news in that way. He squeezes Rebecca's hand, trying to revive her. A second later she inhales, sniffs and takes a sip of her drink, composing herself to speak again. She looks across the tavern for a while before returning to the conversation.

"I have just realized why I had you come here." Rebecca shakes her head, stunned by her realization.

"Why?"

"I needed you to help me understand whether Gilly was actually capable of caring for Monty. Other than using him as a construction tool for his empire, that is." Snowdon moves Rebecca's hand onto his lap.

“I am so sorry,” he says.

They fall into a silence that seems to go on for a long time. Rebecca becomes conscious of her breathing and tries to make sense of a tumble of thoughts. She feels a vibration resonating from her bag and this snaps her out of her melancholy. She retrieves her phone and looks at the text message that has just arrived. She types a message in reply.

“That’s the limo driver,” she says, “he’ll be outside in thirty seconds.”

Snowdon swallows the last slug of his drink. “This visit was just so short.”

“Yeah.”

“Are you okay?”

“I am okay, Tom. You need to go.”

Snowdon stands. He drapes his jacket over his arm. Then he leans forward so

that his nose is touching the edge of Rebecca's mane. "How do I eat you in public without looking as though we are intimate?"

Rebecca turns her face slightly. She is smiling now and she says, "Just a peck on the cheek as an appetizer. We'll get to the main course soon enough."

Snowdon kisses her, then turns and walks towards the door. Rebecca looks to her hands, despondently, turning her phone over in her fingers. She feels herself drifting into a hypnotized state, then she thinks that she should take a last, fleeting glimpse of Snowdon as he exits the tavern and gets into the limo.

She looks up just in time to see a woman approach Snowdon and draw attention to her presence by touching his arm. For a fleeting second, before

they both step outside onto the street, Rebecca sees Snowden turn his face and his expression is one of a pleasant surprise, as if the woman was familiar to him. The tavern door closes behind them.

“Who the fuck is that?” thinks Rebecca, her heart suddenly pounding. The woman was vaguely familiar and this which makes it even worse.

Rebecca sits, stunned, not knowing what to make of this event. It all happens so fast, she is not even sure that it actually took place. Seconds tick by as she waits for the door to open and the woman to step back inside the tavern. But the door remains closed.

A torrent of emotions flushes through her and Rebecca has the thought that the woman may have gotten into the

limo with Snowden for the two-hour ride back to Zurich where the Gulfstream jet is waiting. This thought is paralysing. To make it worse, through the window onto the street, Rebecca sees the limousine move away. Every second that passes with the door not opening and the woman returning to the tavern confirms her fear.

Finally, the latch moves and Rebecca watches as the dark, wooden door opens. Filling the doorway are two large African men in suits and heavy overcoats. They step inside the building and look around, appraising the quaint old tavern. Then, from behind them, the woman appears. She's wearing a woollen hat and she seems to dart across the tavern as if she is hoping not to be seen. Rebecca watches as she

moves to a high table near the open fireplace where she joins two young men.

Rebecca sees that the two men are looking at her. Then the woman in the woollen hat turns her attention to Rebecca and all three raise their glasses to her. One of the men beckons her over.

The Davos Activists

Rebecca accepts the invitation, wondering who these people are, how the woman knows Snowden and ‘why the hell’ she is approaching them. She halts in front of their table, not sure what to do next. One of the men invites her to come closer still.

“Sit down,” he says, “Grab a chair. Have some Schnapps.” He pours clear fluid from a bottle into an empty shot glass.

“We put that glass aside for Tom, but he bailed on us,” he says. “I am Preece, by the way.”

“Who?” asks Rebecca, conscious of the aggression in her voice.

“Preece,” says Preece, again. “Like the Cab Merlot.”

“I mean Tom who?” asks Rebecca,

agitated.

“Tom Snowdon,” says the woman with a tone that instantly rankles

Rebecca. It is as though by using that name, she is claiming ownership of the man. “I’m Irina,” she says, raising her schnapps glass.

“Irina Thren?” asks Rebecca, instinctively.

“That’s right.”

“The photographer.”

“Amongst other things,” says Irina.

“Irina is multi-talented,” laughs Preece.

“But she can’t sing,” says the other man.

“Shut up, Toby,” says Irina, breaking into a familiar smile. Then she looks back at Rebecca.

Rebecca is thinking how strange it is that this woman - who she wants to kill,

by the way - is directly responsible for Snowden coming to Davos. It was, after all, Thren's photo of Rebecca that alerted Gilly to Snowden's book.

"How does this work?" Rebecca wonders. She observes that Thren is not acting aggressively, instead, she is being kind and inclusive. But maybe that's a trap, right?

"How do you know Tom?" Rebecca asks and immediately feels vulnerable for having asked it. She realizes that she has never asked anyone that question before. She had never let anyone in on the secret of their affair. Apart from her mother. But that didn't really count.

Thren cocks her head and says, "Oh, Tom and I hook up every now and then." Her two male companions chuckle like they were responding to a

private joke. Thren waits for a beat before completing her statement by saying, “Professionally, that is.”

“Tom is our hero,” says Preece, interrupting Rebecca’s line of thought.

“We’ve named a mountain after him,” says Toby, “Mount Awesome.”

This comment is jarring for Rebecca and she grits her teeth, thinking it through. She realizes that Snowden obviously has other friends who would have come to the same amusing use of his name. In an instant, she feels as though she is among friends, but looking back to Irina, also in the company of a direct competitor. She doesn’t know how to react and figures the best thing is to just leave.

“Okay,” she says, “Well you should enjoy Davos, then,” She makes to move

away but is distracted by Preece's intervention.

“Don't go just yet,” he says, “you didn't tell us your name. How do you know Tom?”

“How do you know him?” Rebecca replies, tersely.

“We know him through the Centre,” says Preece.

“The Centre?”

“The Centre for Corporate Surveillance,” says Thren.

“What is that?” asks Rebecca with disdain.

“It's a group who monitor the activity of the Davos Club to keep them honest.”

“I don't know what that means,” says Rebecca.

“It means that we monitor the

behaviour of the world's most powerful business figures to understand the world that they are creating.”

“And what are you doing in a bar?” asks Rebecca, incredulously.

“We have microphones everywhere,” jokes Toby.

This comment sends a shiver up Rebecca's spine and she realizes that she has lost track of where she should be with respect to Gilly. She wracks her brains and remembers that Gilly's meeting after Snowden's interview was probably going to be an all-nighter, so she is off the hook.

There were still three parcels to hand out, but now that she knew what they contained, she was unsure if she wanted to continue.

Irina says calmly, “We've just arrived

and we are really excited. So we are just getting our bearings.”

“And how did you get here?” Rebecca asks. Davos just seems so totally out of their budget.

“First Class flight from New York City,” says Toby.

“Amateurs,” thinks Rebecca.

“The big question, is the journey by which we came to be here,” says Preece.

“I am all ears,” Rebecca says.

“Well,” says Preece, “For years I thought that the solution to the world’s problems was to encourage the general public to learn and take action. I could never understand why that strategy was so unsuccessful at creating change. Then Tom helped us understand the super-wealthy, super powerful, superclass actually have much more

control over the world than the general public. So we decided to set something up to bring the message to them.”

“What a journey,” says Toby, shaking his head.

“Yeah,” says Preece, heaving a sigh, “tossed out of the Bilderberg Meetings.”

“Beaten up at the Skull and Bones club,” says Toby.

“Looking for the Skull and Bones Club,” corrects, Preece, “we didn’t actually find it.”

“We nearly got invited to Nelson Mandela’s Funeral,” says Thren.

“Mandela’s funeral?” asks Rebecca.

“And finally gifted a trip to the World Economic Forum in Davos.”

“Gifted?”

“A philanthropist lent us a credit card.”

“Why?”

“He says, you guys need to go and talk some sense to those old boys who are running the world so badly.”

“So will you tell us your name?” asks Thren.

Rebecca becomes conscious that she is acting in a very anally-retentive manner, all closed up, giving little away. Standing there, hidden by her mane. And yet these three people were befriending her because of their mutual friend.

“My name is Rebecca,” she says, at length.

“Hi Rebecca,” they all seem to say at the same time.

“So what will you say to one of these old boys if you get to meet one?”

“We would outline an alternative model of wealth creation,” says Thren.

“And what would that look like?” asks Rebecca.

“It’s a very simple paradigm shift,” says Preece. “Can I show you?”

Rebecca softens a bit. She is actually intrigued to know what they think they could teach Gilly. She nods silently.

Toby moves glasses aside to make a clearing for the presentation that he has obviously rehearsed a few times before. Toby hands him two beer mats. Preece places one on the left of the table and the other on the right.

“Over here,” Preece says, pointing to the beer mat on the right, “we have a model that we refer to as ‘business as usual’. It features the inefficient use of polluting, climate changing energy sources such as coal, oil and gas that are running out and causing conflict around

the world.”

Rebecca gulps quietly. It sounds like Gilly’s professional CV.

Preece continues, “And it leads to the destruction of natural capital including forests, fisheries, farms, freshwater and biodiversity and the pollution of the natural world with chemicals and compounds that can’t be digested by living things.”

“Plastics in the ocean,” Toby, shakes his head, gravely.

“Don’t get me started on that,” says Thren.

“That’s right,” says Preece, “and it leads to the inequitable distribution of global wealth, health and happiness.”

“Happiness?” asks Rebecca, ruefully. Just hearing that concept makes her feel sad.

“That’s right,” Preece says. “We have all grown up to believe that this is the natural order of global business. That’s what governments facilitate and the business leaders of Davos implement. The trouble is, this model has forced really important global systems - like the climate and biodiversity - into the danger zone. We need to bring the global economy into the safe operating space for humanity.”

Rebecca nods silently, almost like she was accepting responsibility for having helped Gilly being so successful at doing ‘business as usual’.

She looks at Irina Thren, still not loving the woman, but getting a better feel for how she might interact with Snowden with her clothes on.

Then Rebecca realizes something

important. These three people share something with Snowden that she, herself, doesn't: they are in sync with him. Rebecca has always been fascinated with Snowden's interests in an academic, intellectual way. But she had never developed an empathy for these things on her own. It always seemed like such an esoteric, noble enquiry; but also a bit odd. She is reminded of thinking that her therapist was strange for keeping the lizard in the glass case in London clinic. But now she realizes that these ideas - about sustainability and the better world - are widespread and that they express themselves in different ways. These three folk sitting at the Davos bar on the borrowed credit card would certainly get the 'lizard in the glass cage'.

That's for sure.

Surprisingly, this insight into Irina Thren causes Rebecca to retract her claws. It is conceivable that Thren respects Snowden for this shared empathy rather than as a lover. Rebecca becomes present to the fact that for the entire time of this exchange, she has offered only the harsh professional version of herself. And despite this, she is still welcome at their table. Rebecca suddenly feels self-conscious, wanting to show another side of herself.

On the table in front of her is the glass of schnapps that she has yet to touch. She picks it up and skulls the lot in one go. It burns her throat, but her years of vodka abuse protect her and she doesn't grimace. She slaps the glass on the table and lets out a refreshed,

“Ahhh!” noise. She is conscious of the fact that this act must make her look totally cool.

“Wow,” she says. “That business as usual paradigm could drive you to drink.”

Breaking out like this has a big effect on her three table-mates and they all smile and become animated.

“I can’t believe that you just did that,” says Toby.

“I am Rebecca Parry,” she says, proudly.

“You work with Gilly Clay?” Toby asks.

“I do. And he is as business as usual as it gets.”

“Well, we have an alternative model for him,” says Preece.

“I’d like to hear it,” says Rebecca.

“Will you convey it to him?”

“I cannot commit to that,” says Rebecca, freely and honestly, “but if you tell me, I may have an opportunity to convey the idea in some way at some time.” Having said those words, she feels conscious that she’s rebuffed her new friends but also aware that these were honest sentiments.

“Well, that’s fantastic,” says Thren, excitedly. “Preece, roll out the alternative paradigm.”

“This is so cool,” says Toby, “we have only been in Davos a few hours and already we are channeling Gilly Clay.”

Thren’s response is swift and sharp. She slaps her hand on the table and barks, “Toby!”

Just one word and Toby shrivels up like a tortoise retreating into its shell.

Rebecca is pleasantly surprised by this show of authority.

“I am sorry, Rebecca,” says Thren.

“That is quite alright,” says Rebecca.

“And to be clear, I really don’t have the opportunity to put alternative paradigms to my boss. It’s not that sort of relationship. But, like I say...”

“That’s all we want,” says Thren. She reaches out and takes Rebecca’s hand. Rebecca receives it warmly. For a few seconds the sisterhood forms.

“I really would like to hear an alternative. I don’t know much about sustainability. But I really get that business as usual is... it’s just wrong.”

“Cue the alternative paradigm,” says Preece.

Rebecca turns her attention to him, then shifts her gaze to Toby who is

looking dishevelled. She winks at him and he smiles.

Preece says, “What we need, Rebecca, is a world in which there is efficient use of clean, climate-friendly energy from sources such as solar, wind and waves that will never run out and are so abundant that they don’t foster conflict.”

“I totally get that,” says Rebecca.

“And the profitable restoration of natural capital including forests, fisheries, freshwater, farms and biodiversity and the fair and efficient distribution of global wealth, health and happiness.”

Preece delivers the message so succinctly that it takes Rebecca by surprise. She gasps at the audacity of it.

“You have a new convert,” says Rebecca, “but I have no idea how you

are going to implement such a profound turnaround.”

Toby pokes his head a little way out of his shell and says, “We have a simple plan.”

“And what is that?” asks Rebecca.

Thren answers, “To have the same conversation with the most powerful people in the world. And introduce them to sustainability frameworks such as the Blue Economy and the Circular Economy.”

“Well, you are in the right bar for that,” says Rebecca.

“Is there anybody here you might be able to hook us up with?” asks Toby, meekly.

Rebecca looks around the bar but there is no one she recognizes. “I am not sure how I would do that. You

might want to let me process that for a while.”

“Do you have a card?” asks Preece.

“I don’t,” Rebecca lies, “But I’d be happy to take yours.”

Thren brings her handbag onto her lap and opens it. Simultaneously, Rebecca feels her bag vibrating again with another incoming text

message. She draws it open to retrieve her phone.

“What is this, a battle of the bags,” says Toby.

“You are such a doofus, Toby,” says Preece.

Rebecca checks the message. It is from Gilly, instructing her to attend a press conference in one of the hotels. “Press conference,” she thinks, “since when does Gilly talk to the media?”

Thren offers her a business card and she takes it, reads the words and then pockets it.

“I really have enjoyed talking to you all she says.”

Then she departs.

Gilly on CNN

Outside on the street, Rebecca makes her way to the hotel where Gilly's press conference is to take place. When she arrives, she is surprised to see that there is a full media contingent who are being professionally managed by what could only be a media consultant brought in at short notice. It doesn't make any sense. Gilly must have been planning this for days.

She sees Gilly amongst the group and he waves her over and flops a document into her hands. "Stay close," he growls, without meeting her eyes. Despite being terse with her, his demeanour seems unusually light and buoyant.

She sees Tim. He is holding one of the manuscripts, looking grave and

withdrawn.

“What’s going on?” Rebecca asks him, perplexed.

“He wants us on stage with him.”

“What? What for?”

“Self-validation. You should read it.”

Tim nods towards the document in Rebecca’s hands, shaking his head, morosely.

Rebecca quickly scans the document and immediately picks up keywords that tell a simple story: Gilly is coming out about his plan to scotch the Eradicating Ecocide legislation. He is also going to let it be known that indeed there is a global power elite, that he is one of them and that they are very much in command and that the public should be grateful for them running things on their behalf. Sustainability, according to

Gilly: don't worry, we have got it covered. The speech is stunning in its audacity.

“Did you read the bit about King Kong?” asks Tim. He points to the words on the page. Let me read it to you,” he says. Rebecca nods for him to continue.

“We are encouraged to shape the global economy into the form of a natural ecosystem. We hear you. This is what we have done. We all know the story about King Kong, the king of the jungle. In us – your leaders – you have King Kong. So long as we are able to reign, the jungle will survive.”

“Fuck,” says Rebecca.

Tim says, “I am a soldier at heart and even I know that is bullshit. Where does he get this from?”

There is commotion as Gilly steps up onto the podium and the considerable scrum of journalists, photographers and TV cameras all jostle for position. Behind the lectern, Gilly is suddenly flooded with lights as camera flashes go off.

“What the fuck is going on?” she asks, perplexed.

“I don’t know what that shrink told him,” says Tim, “but he’s really come out of his shell.”

“I can’t believe this,” says Rebecca looking again at the speech. “It is just terrible what he wants to do to the Ecocide program.”

“I didn’t follow that bit. What is that?”

Rebecca says, “Gilly is trying to block legislation in the International Criminal Court that prevents companies from

destroying the environment.”

“Fuck me,” says Tim, gravely, shaking his head.

Then Rebecca sees Gilly motioning for her and Tim to join him on the raised platform. He indicates for them to stand on either side of him.

“Does he want us up there?” asks Rebecca, aghast.

“That’s the plan.”

“What for?”

“He doesn’t want to be lonely.”

Rebecca feels a wave of nausea wash over her. She is reminded of her conversation with Irina Thren and the feeling that Thren and Snowdon were on the light side, and that Rebecca was a sympathizer working with the dark side. Now, she was about to step into the limelight to lend her support to

Gilly as he exposed his awful views to the world.

Rebecca gags, feeling bile rising in her throat. Tim moves ahead of her towards the podium. She feels like she is on autopilot as she follows a pace behind.

“Tim,” she says, weakly, but he doesn’t hear her.

She looks up and sees Gilly’s face illuminated by the flicker of camera flashes. His pale flesh is dotted with leather patches, the skin drawn tightly over his bones. As if that sight is not disturbing enough, he is smiling. Gilly never smiles.

“This is my fault,” thinks Rebecca. I bought Gilly and Snowdon together. And spending time with Snowdon seems to have helped vindicate Gilly’s

position. This has emboldened him to spread his poison around the world. It's too much for Rebecca to bear. She feels nauseous and weak.

“Tim,” she says weakly. She sees her hand rise in front of her, reaching for Tim's shoulder. “Tim.” Her voice is so weak that even she can't hear it. The room starts to swirl around and the lights go out.

What Happened?

Rebecca wakes with a jolt and the stench of a pungent chemical flooding her nose. She sits bolt upright, gasping. Looking around, bewildered, she sees Tim sitting on a chair looking at her with a wry grin. He rests back, screwing the lid on a small glass bottle in his hand.

“*Sal volatile*,” he says, chuckling.

“Again,”

“Yeah,” says Rebecca, “*déjà vu*.”

“Thanks for that, by the way.”

“Thanks for what?”

“You rescued me what could have been the worst experience of my life. And I have had a few bad ones, let me tell you.”

“What have I saved you from?”

“Publically endorsing Gilly Clay’s

worldview in front of tens of millions of TV viewers.”

Rebecca grimaces and folds her arm around her stomach. “Is it still going?”

“I left you out of it until they had finished.”

“Thanks for that. Is he after my blood?”

“I think that you are in the clear.”

Rebecca puts her face in her hands, exhausted.

“Are you feeling alright?”

Rebecca shakes her head, conscious of the mane of red hair wavering around her.

“We still haven’t had that chat, you know?”

“Chat?”

“Two SIM cards. Glass of wine. Remember that one?”

“Thanks for reminding me,” Rebecca says, unenthused.

“We might do that when we get back to London. I have a bit of a plan I am working on.”

Rebecca stares at the wall glumly and Tim slaps his knees and stands.

“Anyway, I’d say we won’t be hearing from Gilly tonight. He’s off to a big gig at the Seehof Hotel with his billionaire bum-buddies. So, I’m going to my room and I am going to pick a fight I can’t win with a bottle of scotch. Are you good to go?”

“I’m fine, Tim. Thanks again.”

“No, thank you.

Picking on Gilly

Back in her room, Rebecca sits glumly on the side of her bed. She wants to call Snowdon but knows that he will be in the air, flying back to New York. She feels terribly lonely and sad. Her thoughts turn Monty. She wonders where he is, whether he is okay.

This idea gives her a second wind and she departs her room for Gilly's quarters. When she arrives, she sees a maid and asks after the boy. She is informed that Monty has escorted Gilly to the event at the Seehof Hotel.

Rebecca sets out for the Seehof Hotel on foot. The night air is crisp and cold and her breath frosts in front of her as she walks. The hotel lobby is illuminated in a great glare of golden light that reflects off the falling snow.

There is tight security inside the lobby and the smell of wood smoke from an open fire. Rebecca goes to reception and informs them that she is to Gilly Clay and one of the concierges is directed to take her to the function.

The function is a massive piss-up that features the world's most powerful people, their spouses, personal assistants, lovers and even some very classy hookers. Rebecca moves around the room looking for Gilly. She finds him in the centre of a group of angry looking men - the men she had delivered the packages to.

As she gets closer, she sees that Gilly is getting seriously grilled by these guys. They are big, immaculately dressed and very angry. Rebecca steps closer to listen and hears a torrent of foul

language directed at Gilly. She is surprised to see that he is cowering, on the defensive. This immediately puts Rebecca on alert and she feels a tightness in her chest. She is happy to see Gilly getting fed to the wolves but what concerns her is the blowback. She has never seen this before and does not know how Gilly will respond.

“You’re a stupid little fuck if you think I am going to associate with this campaign after you shoot your mouth off on CNN,” says one of the men, pushing his finger into Gilly’s chest.

“First, you fuck me on the Indian oil shale deal and next thing you try and rope me into this idiot ecocide scheme,” says Border, the man who threw the document at Rebecca. Rebecca moves a few paces to get a better look. She

becomes so absorbed by listening to Gilly getting ribbed that she forgets why she came.

“You want to draw attention to this ecocide program or kill it off quietly?” asks one of the businessmen.

“You are a f**king fool, Gilly Clay,” says another, patting him roughly on the cheek.

Rebecca takes a step back, aghast. She has an insight into how accurate were Snowden’s observations about these power elite. Not one of the men was arguing against the proposal to smash the Eradicating Ecocide legislation. Instead, they are furious that Gilly had jeopardized the initiative by going public with it.

“Someone just kill him and get it over with,” Rebecca thinks. Suddenly, she

feels words rising and she speaks, spontaneously.

“Do you know what I reckon?” she asks with such volume and conviction that the six oligarchs turn and look at her in surprise. She sees Gilly looking in her direction. He seems relieved that she has taken the pressure off him.

“I wouldn’t mind you greedy fools running the world. But you do such a lousy job of it.”

“Who the fuck are you?” asks one of the oligarchs, abruptly.

“That’s Clay’s PA,” says Borden.

One of the men puts out his tongue and blows a loud raspberry. Simultaneously, he waggles his clenched fist in front of his groin and shouts at her, “Suck my bat, you fucking whore!” Then he turns to Gilly and barks, “Get

your ginger bitch on a leash, Clay.”

The men turn away from Rebecca and resume berating Gilly about the press release. Rebecca steps back, unsure what has just transpired. She looks around, confused. Her eyes fall on a young boy, sheltering behind a table. It is Monty. He looks afraid and confused. His big round eyes look up at her, pleading for her to rescue him.

Rebecca moves towards Monty, hypnotically. She observes her own hand reach out towards him and watches as he steps forward and curls his fingers around hers. Then she turns and walks away from the awful scene with Monty moving in step with her.

Without speaking, they walk out of the auditorium, down the stairway, through the lobby and out onto the street. They

travel a block at a hurried pace. Then Rebecca directs Monty into a busy café. Inside, she observes a couple move away from a booth with a bench seat either side of a wooden table. She directs Monty to one side of the table and seats herself on the other side. As she sits, Monty slips under the table and crosses to her side. Wedged in between her and the dark wood, he breathes a long sigh and looks up at her.

“How are you doing, champ?”
Rebecca asks.

“I’m okay, I think. Thanks for coming for me.”

“I think you should stay with me tonight,” she says.

“I’d like that,” says Monty.

2 a.m.

At two a.m., Rebecca is woken by the sound of someone pounding on her hotel door. She sits up in bed dazed, unsure what woke her. The pounding noise comes again. She steps into the lounge area of her suite and sees Monty, swaddled in blankets on the sofa. He is awake, laying there, looking at her.

“That is probably Gilly,” she says.

Rebecca opens the door to see Gilly standing there. She is feeling very calm and ready for anything that he throws at her. Gilly doesn’t speak, but the silence is explicit. It is obvious that he has come to collect Monty. Even Monty picks it up and he walks towards the door, holding his shoes in hands.

“Thanks for rescuing me, Bee,” he says.

Gilly turns to walk along the hallway with Monty by his side.

Spontaneously, Rebecca speaks out, “Gilly,” she says. He stops and turns his head a little way towards her.

“I was hoping that we could have a chat tomorrow,” she says.

“In London,” he says, over his shoulder, “We leave in the morning.”

Getting out of Davos

The next morning, Rebecca is up early. She still has three parcels left to deliver and thinks hard whether she can or even wants to deliver them. Eventually, she shoves them in her bag and puts them out of her mind. The priority is getting out of Switzerland and back to England.

However, getting out of Switzerland isn't as straightforward as it should be. Typically, such logistics are conducted smoothly with servants, concierges, reception staff and drivers all working seamlessly together.

However, today, two things conspire to make this departure complex and incomplete. First, Tim, who normally directs these events, seems to be running interference by being

uncooperative and inconsistent. One minute, the limos are due to arrive at 0900 hours. Next minute he says they were never ordered. And the next minute again, they have been rescheduled for 1100 hours.

Secondly, Gilly Clay's image and name are front page news. Going outside is not sensible because at every step Rebecca and the entourage are accosted by journalists. Even the hotel lobby is not safe as there are paparazzi outside, snapping images and capturing vision.

The commentary about Gilly's press release is withering. Rebecca browses the international news on her smart phone while she waits for the limo that never comes. The news stories have titles such as 'The Superclass Speaks' and 'Super-class, Super-Mean'.

The press is having a field day because Gilly has effectively confirmed the worst fears of every democratic person in the world: the rulers of the world have no empathy for the suffering of the people or the environment. They operate with a business model that is so depleted that it can only benefit a small group at the expense of every other living thing on the planet.

Rebecca wears her black overcoat and sunglasses as she sits in the lobby, flicking from one global news bulletin to another. She is invisible except for her fiery mane that waves in the air gently as she shakes her head in disbelief.

Finally, she gets confirmation that there is a limo outside that has a seat for her and she walks through the

media scrum outside the hotel, holding a newspaper up in front of her to shield her face from the cameras.

As she steps into the limo, one of the journalists calls out to her, “Did you know you worked for Dr Evil?”

The limo door closes behind her and she takes off her glasses to see that she shares the cabin with five others – all oncologists. Sitting next to her is Dr Terry Bloomfield.

“Fuck,” she thinks but she says, “Hi Terry,” in a perfunctory manner.

The trip to Zurich in the limo and the flight to London is hellish. All the way she has to listen to the lamentation of oncologists. Amongst them, a groupthink has emerged that holds Rebecca solely responsible for their predicament.

Finally, the Gulfstream touches down in London but there are delays clearing Customs. “Further evidence of the hand of Tim,” thinks Rebecca.

Once she has had her passport stamped, Rebecca is free and moves away from the group on foot to find a taxi. She gets to her hotel as quickly as she can.

She takes a long shower and mixes a vodka orange from the bar fridge. Then she swaps SIM cards and places a call to Snowdon. He picks up on the first ring.

“Hi,” he says.

“Hi.”

“Where are you?”

“London. You?”

“New York?”

“Could you come here?” she asks directly.

“I was thinking the same. How is it for you?”

“Tom, it’s hellish. I have lost my anonymity. There are people taking my photograph in the street.”

“I’ve seen that. CNN has published the names and photos of all of Gilly’s key staff.”

“I am up there, too.”

“Yeah.”

“Is it a nice photo?”

“It is, actually. It’s one from the book launch.”

“Fucking bitch,” she says under her breath. “I met Irina Thren,” she tells Snowden, flatly.

“Yes. She was in the bar we were in. She accosted me just as I was leaving.”

“I saw that,” she says, biting her tongue. “How do you know Irina?”

“I know here from the Centre.”

This answer gives Rebecca a pang of anger and frustration. It is almost as if Snowden and Thren had agreed on that answer in case they were ever asked. They probably cooked it up in a bubble-bath somewhere.

“Irina Snowden,” thinks Rebecca. She grits her teeth and forces herself to be kind.

“It’s funny,” she says. “It was her photo that kicked all this madness off,” says Rebecca.

“And Rebecca, get this, there was a cheque for me on the plane. \$150,000 US dollars. I couldn’t believe it.”

“Yeah, well, that was low-hanging fruit that just had to be plucked,” she says dryly.

“Christ, I would have done the session

just for the fondue.”

“You might have done it just to see me,” thinks Rebecca. She concentrates on not changing her intonation. “There are a few people wondering what you said to Gilly to get him to come out,” she says.

“Hmmm,” says Snowden, “it’s a fascinating case study. That’s for sure.”

“Can you come here now?”

“I am on the airline booking site right now. Are you okay, you sound piqued?”

“Piqued? What is that supposed to mean?”

“Calm and angry, that’s how I meant it.”

“That’s actually pretty accurate, Tom. But there is something else.”

“What is it?” Tom asks.

“How long have you been fucking

Irina Thren?” she thinks – but she doesn’t say it. Instead, she says, gravely, “Trepidation. I think tomorrow is really going to blow up.”

A Hellish Day

The next morning, Rebecca wakes to an early phone call. It is the Head of Security for her hotel. He says that there is a press contingent waiting for her outside the hotel and suggests that she exit by the service door.

She does this but nonetheless is set upon by a journalist. As she walks to work at a brisk pace, the journalist fires a series of targeted questions at her, trying to get under her skin. Ahead of her is a photographer and a guy with a TV camera.

“Did you know that Gilly Clay was funding both sides of the war in Logonoland,” says the journalist.

“Never heard of the place,” she says.

“It is an impoverished region of Central Africa.”

“That’s ridiculous,” says Rebecca,
“why would he do that?”

“Both sides have offered him rights to the tar sands deposits in the Logono Ecological Reserve.”

Rebecca hurries her pace, but the journalist keeps up. “Is this why Gilly sought to halt the Eradicating Ecocide legislation?”

Closer to the office building, the media scrum is thicker still. The questions become more demanding. She is nearly in the door when a woman asks a question that stops Rebecca dead in her tracks.

“Is it true that you are one of Tom Snowden’s lovers?” Rebecca is catatonic, her mouth hangs open. “One of,” she thinks, “what do the press know?” She is immediately peppered

with white light as a dozen cameras go off around her.

“Is that a yes?” asks the journalist.

“Did she say yes?” asks another from the back of the scrum.

“Who said yes?” shouts another.

“How long have you been intimate with Snowden,” asks a young man, holding out a recording device.

“Is Mr. Clay aware of the affair?”

Rebecca gasps. She steps inside the lobby and lets security manhandle the press out of the building. Breathlessly, she moves towards the elevators. She presses the button repeatedly, feeling harried and panicked.

Eventually, the elevator door opens and she steps inside. She is taken by surprise when Tim steps into the lift beside her. He reaches across her and

presses the close door button and keeps his finger on it. This has the effect of immobilizing the lift.

Rebecca stumbles back against the wall, stunned. Tim smells of alcohol and it looks like he hasn't shaved or showered since Davos.

“What the hell is going on?” she asks.

“Cry havoc and let slip the dogs of war,” Tim says cryptically. Then he looks at her very directly. “We need to have that chat, tonight.”

Despite looking dishevelled, Tim is very calm and composed, Rebecca observes. “I can't do it tonight,” she says.

“That is actually an order, Ms. Parry,” he says ominously. “Your job is on the line. Meet me at six p.m. The Red Lion. Across the river. Do you know where

that it is?”

“Yes.”

“It won’t take long. I just need to brief you on a few issues. Get you out of the house for a while.”

Rebecca gulps and says faintly, “Okay. I’ll be there.”

Tim shifts his finger from the elevator switch and metal doors slide open.

“Keep your helmet on today, Rebecca,” he says, “war has broken out.”

The door slides closed and Rebecca sees her reflection. She looks like an empty doll, just clothes and hair and sunglasses with no doll inside.

On her floor, Rebecca moves along the hallway towards her office. The tension in the air is palpable. Up ahead, she sees three security guards in a uniform that she doesn’t recognize.

They are big, burly men with ignorant faces, moving towards her. Tim's war dogs, off their leash, perhaps.

Rebecca feels panic and she automatically finds herself stepping into a small kitchenette that is recessed from the hallway. The security guards pass and she looks up, to see a TV set that is mounted on a wall bracket.

She sees faces that she recognizes on the news bulletin. Dr. Terry Bloomfield is in front of the cameras, looking like he has finally found his place in the organization. "I am unable to confirm or deny these accusations," he says, "but nothing that I have heard surprises me." He listens to a question and replies, "I can confirm that there are eleven oncologists all with the equivalent stature to mine in the full-

time employ of Mr. Gilly Clay.”

Then a photo of Tom Snowdon flashes on the screen and the news reader says, “Speculation continues to mount that Gilly Clay’s stunning admissions were prompted by a visit a few days ago by celebrity psychologist and author, Tom Snowdon.”

Rebecca is aghast, staring at the TV. Then a moving image of Snowdon comes on the screen. It is a contemporary shot of him in the lobby of a

hotel. In the background, a few paces behind him, is Irina Thren. Rebecca gasps and brings her hand to her mouth.

“Snowdon, whose recently released book, *Sustainability and the Superclass*, identified the psychology behind the global business leaders with respect to

the planet's ecological crisis.”

In the lobby, the reporter holds a microphone to Snowden. He says, “My professional code prevents me from disclosing the names of my clients.”

“Dr. Snowden,” asks the reporter, “is it true that you are in a relationship with one of Gilly Clay’s inner staff?”

“I can’t comment on that,” says Snowden.

“Fuck!” gasps Rebecca.

There is a loud commotion from the hallway and a shriek and a gruff voice says, “Come on you fucking bitch!”

Rebecca watches as the three thuggish security guards manhandle one of the office staff along the hallway. It is a young woman in her mid-twenties. She is one of the secretarial staff who are based permanently in London. She is

screaming and struggling as one of the guards drags her by her hair.

The commotion passes in a second and Rebecca looks back to the TV.

There is a picture of Gilly Clay. She doesn't recognize its origins, there are precious few images of Clay available. The next image is that of a child with a massively deformed head being nursed in an impoverished hospital. Rebecca gasps and listens to the news report.

“Researchers from the Centre for Corporate Surveillance have linked a cancer cluster in Bogota, Columbia to a toxic waste disposal facility operated by Gilly Clay. Social activist, Michele Bohr, who was murdered last year, claims that the business was using an underground aquifer to dispose of the chemicals, instead of rendering them harmless

through a chemical process. Bohr - whose body was found mutilated and dumped in a rubbish tip - had collected documents demonstrating that the chemical processing equipment had never been installed. He also produced water samples that were taken from around the facility that showed massively elevated levels of toxins including 3-nitro-benzathrone, the most deadly synthetic chemical known to science.”

“Oh, my God,” says Rebecca, staring at the TV. Then the TV screen goes blank.

Standing in the entrance to the kitchenette, holding the remote control is Gilly Clay. He is a hollow man. A physical structure built around a vacuum. The pupils of his eyes are tiny

black holes that connect the living outside with the emptiness inside.

“Is that true?” asks Rebecca. “About the cancer cluster?”

“Is it true that you are fucking my psychologist,” he asks.

Rebecca shakes her head.

“That’s good, then. Do you want to have that little chat now?”

Rebecca gulps, unsure what it was she had in mind to talk about.

“Okay.”

“Something you want to say?”

Rebecca’s mouth goes dry and she forces herself to speak. “I wanted to offer that I could help... umm...”

“Is that it?” Gilly asks, impatiently.

“Spend some time with Monty,” she says.

“Who is Monty?”

Rebecca looks at him blankly, speechless at first. “Umm. Master Montgomery Earle.”

“Master Earle has everything he needs,” says Gilly.

“I...”

Gilly raises his hand to stop her talking. “Two things for you,” he says. He waits until she nods her head silently, then continues, “First, Master Earle has everything he needs. Second, you need to be very, very careful. Do you understand?”

Rebecca nods silently.

“Is there anything else?”

Rebecca shakes her head. Gilly hands her the TV remote control. “Go back to work,” he says, “you are in breach of your employment contract.” Then he moves away into the hall.

Rebecca moves to her workstation and stares at the wall, feeling numb and cold. Minutes pass before she becomes present to that fact that her office is calm and that there are no immediate threats to concern her.

She powers up her computer and removes her jacket. When her email system opens up, she is surprised to see that she had hundreds of emails. She runs her eyes down the list of subjects noticing that none of them look like the familiar words she is used to. One that sticks out has the words ‘cancer cluster report’. The email has an attached document. She opens this and scrolls quickly down the pages. There is lots of text, tables, maps, and a whole block of photographs of young children like the one on the TV in the kitchenette. Their

faces are malformed, their bodies oddly shaped.

Rebecca hears a noise and looks up. Monty is in the doorway. His eyes are wide open, like he was terrified. “Can I come in?”

“Of course.” She opens her arms and he falls against her, sobbing.

“It’s okay, sweetie,” she says.

“I am afraid,” Monty says.

Rebecca pulls him back and looks in his eyes, alarmed, “What are you afraid of? Has someone hurt you?”

“No,” says Monty, shaking his head, “I am afraid for my goodness.”

Suddenly, Monty straightens up and his expression changes. Rebecca is surprised to see him adopt Game Face. She looks around and sees Gilly in the doorway, beckoning Monty to come to

him.

Without thinking, Rebecca says to, “Gilly, if you like, I’d be happy to look out for Monty today.”

The response is swift and brutal. Gilly bellows, “You have had your little chat today, Parry! Do not fuck with me! I’ll have your head off!”

Rebecca freezes and shrinks in her place. Monty suddenly goes completely rigid, terrified. She sees that his eyes have connected with the images of the swollen-headed and deformed children on Rebecca’s computer monitor.

“What’s that?” Monty gasps, under his breath.

“That’s one of Gilly’s projects,” Rebecca whispers. Then she says aloud, “I understand, Gilly.” And then quietly, “You should go, Monty. Keep your

head down, okay.”

Monty nods numbly and walks out from behind Rebecca’s desk. As she watches them both move away, into the hallway, Rebecca feels nauseous.

“Oh, Dear,” she says. Her stomach knots tightly and she considers that Gilly had never actually yelled at her before. She stares blankly at the computer monitor for a while but is unable to face any more emails. She finds herself checking the international news on the internet. Stories about Gilly Clay lead almost every major newspaper. And wherever there are stories about Gilly, there are stories about Snowden and Rebecca close by.

One story, by the British tabloid, the Sun, runs a story titled “On the Couch” that paints Tom Snowden as an

international playboy. It covers all of page five.

There is a picture of Snowden in the middle of the page. Around the outside of Snowden's image are photos of about half a dozen women including Rebecca, Irina Thren, Snowden's publisher and other women that Rebecca doesn't recognize. Just to really dig the knife in, Snowden's image shows him looking wistfully to the top right – towards Irina Thren's image.

“What do they know?” Rebecca thinks. Then she recalls Thren accost Snowden in the bar in Davos and realizes that this question has been playing on her mind ever since. She resolves that it is time to resolve this issue once and for all. She pulls off her shoe and retrieves the SIM. Then she rips the back off her

phone, seats the SIM card and reboots. Within a minute she has Snowden's voice in her ear and the picture of him looking up Irina Thren's dress right in front of her.

Snowden answers her call in an unconventional manner, which only serves to confirm her suspicions.

"Hey," he says.

"How long have you been fucking Irina Thren?"

"Hold on," Tom says. The line goes quiet and Rebecca listens intently. At first she is confused, then it becomes apparent Snowden is taking some time to find an excuse.

"Hey," he says, "I was just about to step into a meeting with the publicist."

"Which one is she?"

"She?"

“Why don’t you just answer the question?”

“I’m sorry Rebecca, I’m lost. Are you okay?”

“*Uh-huh*. Any reason why I shouldn’t be?”

Snowdon goes silent again. A long pause, then, “Rebecca, I am stepping into a meeting with the American publicist. I am sorry but you are not making any sense. Is something wrong?”

“Answer the question, Tom.”

“What question?”

“How long have you been fucking Irina Thren?”

“Thren?” Snowdon laughs.

“Don’t laugh at me.”

“Why not, Rebecca?”

“Because it is all over the world news.”

“No, it’s not.”

“And how would you know that?”

“I spend an hour and a half each morning reading the world news. You know that.”

“So you are fucking her, then. Oh, my God. Tom. I can’t believe it.”

“Bee, what newspaper have you been reading?”

“It’s a full page of the Sun,” Rebecca says accusingly.

“The Sun? The British Tabloid? The one with the page three topless girl?”

“And it is online. I have it right here in front of me.”

“Okay, Rebecca. Let me know when the story makes it to the Guardian.”

“What?”

“I have to go. I am sorry. This conversation is cutting into to my publicist meeting. I’ll call you later.”

Rebecca hears Snowden put down the phone. She blinks disbelievingly, keeping her mobile pressed against her ear, stunned by the rebuff. Eventually, she lowers her phone and lays it on the desk. She stares blankly the image on the computer monitor. It no longer holds any relevance and she wonders why she had made the call. As she is mulling these things over she sees her phone light up and a text message appears on the screen.

The message reads, “Thren is lesbian ;) i love you c u in 10 hours”

Rebecca sits looking at the message until the backlight on the screen fades and then she is just looking at a blank screen.

“Oh, no,” she says aloud. “What have I done?”

Drink with Tim

That evening, at the agreed time, Rebecca walks into the Red Lion Bar to meet Tim. She is not looking forward to meeting him, but it is a welcomed break to be out of the office, even though she did have to leave via the service exit. It is tight and dim in the bar. She looks around for Tim but he is nowhere to be seen. So she pulls up at table that allows her to see the entrance way and she waits.

“What an awful day,” she thinks, shaking her head. This is the first instance that she has had to depressurize. A day of abusive phone calls; awful emails; people getting fired and Gilly shouting at her. She thinks about all the new revelations that are coming to light about Gilly

Clay's empire. The wars, the bribery, the pollution, the cancers – the real ones, that is. She is angry at herself for blowing off steam to Snowdon and the fact that she still has a lingering thought that he might be intimate with Thren.

Rebecca lets out a long sigh and looks at her watch. Over an hour has passed and all she has done is to stare at a blank wall. “Where the hell is ‘Tim?’” she wonders. She lets another thirty minutes pass, watching people come and go from the bar.

She wonders how Monty is faring with it all. She shakes her head ruefully. Having enraged Gilly in front of Monty was a big mistake. But what else was she to do?

She retrieves her phone and sends a text to Tim enquiring of his movements.

He replies instantly, “I am in the Fox.”

“That Fox?” thinks Rebecca, “Fuck! I am in the wrong bar.”

She hurries out of the Red Lion, wracking her brains as the quickest way to get to the other pub. She arrives fifteen minutes later and sees Tim down the back in a quiet corner.

“Hell, I don’t know what got into me,” she says as she approaches, “I thought you said the Red Lion.”

Tim acknowledges with a very subtle nod of his head. He has dark shadows under his eyes and unshaved skin, but his eyes are sparkling.

“Are you okay?” she asks placing her hand briefly on his forearm.

“I am in a place,” he says, “it’s not uncomfortable.” He takes a sip of his scotch and rolls the fluid around his

mouth before swallowing. “I did say the Red Lion, by the way,” he says.

“Right,” she says, eyeing him suspiciously. “It’s just one of those days, I guess?”

“Do you mind if I talk a little?” Tim asks.

“Do you mind if I drink a lot?” Rebecca replies. She gets the attention of the barman and orders a Gin and Tonic. She seats herself next to Tim and gives him the space to continue.

“Maybe you can help with this one,” Tim says. He dwells for a little while then starts talking, slowly, methodically, like here trying to recall a dream in intimate detail. “It is like seeing for the very first time the gears operating inside the machine. Like the inspection hatch has been removed. The inanimate

chunks of material slowly clinking one against another. The core elements of my life, deployed in the way that a clockmaker places a spring against a cog in just the right place. For just the right purpose.”

A shudder passes up Rebecca’s spine. She knows exactly what Tim is talking about: Gilly Clay’s omnipresent psychological manipulation. “What are the elements in your life?” she asks.

“For me, Rebecca, a successful military career. A lucrative security business. A wife who committed suicide for a reason that I still can’t understand. A nervous breakdown. A bankruptcy. Depression. An offer, consideration and acceptance. And a contract.”

“A contract with Gilly Clay,” says

Rebecca, nodding gravely.

“All bought together like cogs in a machine. But what does the machine actually do, Rebecca? That’s the bit that I can’t understand.”

“It sells poison.”

The bartender places a frosty spirit glass on a bar mat next to Rebecca. She raises the glass and sniffs the pungent tang of tonic. She takes a sip and inhales the tangy aroma through her nose. It is a brief respite.

Tim waves his hand and shakes his head, “No, the poison, that’s just the business plan. I mean, why does he do it the way it does it? A clock moves the big hand and the little hand in an ordered way for the purpose of marking the passage of time. What is the purpose of the machine that Gilly has

made of the cogs of my life? It just doesn't make any sense."

Rebecca feels warmth on her face and she moves her head to see that Tim is looking directly at her. He has moved on from his trancelike state and more of the old Tim seems to be shining through.

"Am I being too philosophical?" he asks.

"Most of the time that I am around him, I feel like a rat in a cage," she says, placing the glass back on its mat.

"I get that," says Tim. "But why does he keep rats in a cage? What's the meaning to it? You know, if he were a normal person, he'd just be a lonely nobody. He wouldn't be able to fuck anything up. But because he has this special gift that allows him to be

powerful and wealthy he is able to spread his evil around a lot further. He's got no peers. No one to guide him to a better place."

Rebecca swallows a large slug of Gin and Tonic and she feels a flash of enlivenment surge through her. Having this conversation with Tim reminds her of her emotional state when she was in the session with Miriam.

Tim calls for another drink. He asks for a double scotch, no ice. Then he starts to talk again. This time, his tone is different. He's no longer philosophical. Now he is martial. "That business with the cancer cluster was the last straw for me," he says, gravely, "did you hear about that?"

"About a hundred people have emailed me with the photos today,"

says Rebecca. “It is very harsh.”

“It’s true, you know. I was over there.”

“Where is there?”

“Bogota. Where it happened.”

“Why were you there?”

“Security stuff. I had to get some executives out before they got lynched. A lot of very angry poor people over there.”

Tim starts to tap a tune on the bar top with his fingertips. It is ominous, almost like a kettle drum announcing a battle is about to begin. “This is how I see it,” he says. “The cancer cluster is one thing. The eleven oncologists on permanent standby for Gilly’s non-cancerous polyp, that is something else. But you know, Rebecca, when the cancer cluster and the eleven oncologists come together in my mind,

they don't just synergize, they fucking explode!" Tim turns to her, tapping the side of his head with his finger. "Did you know that the oncologists are contracted to the firm even if he dies."

Rebecca is confused. "Why would he do that?"

"Because he is Gilly Clay," says Tim and that answer makes perfect sense. "So I swooped into action," Tim says, "and I'm getting off."

"Getting off what?" asks Rebecca, worried. "What does that mean?"

The new tone of his voice and the enigmatic statement makes Rebecca freeze. She numbly watches the bartender place the glass of scotch on the table. It is a double shot of single malt with no ice. Tim slides a hundred pound bill onto the bar and tells the

bartender that he is settling up and paying for Rebecca's drinks as well and that he should keep the change. Tim downs the spirit in one swig. Then he stands and puts on his jacket.

"Why did you bring me here?" asks Rebecca, perplexed, almost disturbed that he is leaving with so many questions unanswered.

"Just had to get you out of the house for a while."

"What does that mean?"

"I think you should be off the hook now, Rebecca," he says, nodding thoughtfully.

"I don't know what you are talking about, Tim. And to be honest, you are freaking me out a bit."

"You need to take care of that little boy," Tim buttons his jacket. "He'll be

getting back from his tutors shortly.”

“What have you done, Tim?”

Tim moves closer and takes Rebecca by the hand. He raises it and places a kiss on her knuckle. “Would you do something for me, Rebecca?”

She shrugs, noncommittally.

“Do you know Judy, the nurse?”

“Yes.”

“Will you tell her that I think that she is really sweet?”

Then Tim moves away. Rebecca watches him walking through the bar, out the door and onto the street. She sits there stunned, trying to make sense of the conversation. What does ‘swooped into action’ mean? Then another thought comes to mind: is Monty safe? Instantly, she feels compelled to be close to him.

Rebecca steps off of her stool and heads out of the bar. She follows the path that runs along the River Thames towards Tower Bridge. She walks up the flight of stairs and onto bridge's walkway. Up ahead, she notices a crowd of people gathered looking over the side, at the river below.

Rebecca approaches, cautiously, listening in to the chatter from the people. She hears the word 'jumped' and she addresses an old woman who is peering into the darkness below.

"What happened?" asks Rebecca.

"This man," the old lady says, distraught. "He stops right in front of me. Takes off his jacket. Then jumps over." Rebecca looks down at the jacket in question. It is the one that Tim donned just a few minutes before.

“Oh, boy,” Rebecca sighs. She continues her way along the bridge. First she walks. Then she picks up her pace to a brisk walk. Then she runs.

Finally, she pulls up outside the lobby of the hotel where Gilly stays with Monty and catches her breath. Once she is breathing normally, she walks inside, as if nothing is out of place.

The Twelfth Doctor

Rebecca takes the elevator to Gilly's floor. The entrance to the suite is ajar and this causes her to move slowly, cautiously. Inside, she moves from room to room, searching for life, but there is no one there. She finds herself in a plush lounge room where she pauses, looking around.

She takes a step forward, conscious of the hairs rising on her arm. There is what looks like a small, medicine bottle on the coffee table. It is odd because Gilly doesn't take medicine in common areas, he has physicians attend him in the boardroom. So what is it doing there?

She lowers herself to view the bottle at a closer range without picking it up. She sees that it is not a bottle, but more like

a vial from a chemistry lab. On the label is an obscure chemical name: 3-*nitrobenzathrone* and a symbol with a skull and crossbones and the word ‘poison’. Rebecca racks her brains trying to remember where she has heard that name before. Then she remembers; it is the chemical responsible for the cancer cluster. She peers more closely at the bottle and sees through the brown glass that it is empty.

Then she notices that a chair has been knocked over and there are other signs of a struggle in the room. Tim’s words come back to her “I swooped into action,” he had said. Is this where he did it?

Rebecca is alerted to a noise and looks towards the hallway. She can hear a

voice. It is Monty. She moves silently along the hallway with her heart in her mouth. She comes to the bathroom. The door is half open and she quietly peers inside.

Monty is standing just inside the door with his back to her. In front of him, Gilly is laying on the white tiled floor. He is wearing just a pair of underpants. He has a black eye and his body looks like a sack of bones with pale flesh and leather patches. There is blood in his mouth and he is groaning, trying to speak. His arm is outstretched towards Monty. He has dark rings under his eyes and he looks close to death.

Monty is talking quietly, almost like he were muttering to himself.

“I don’t know why you hit that little lizard,” he says. “Then you left it for

Bee to clean it up. We did the right thing, you know. We threw it back into nature, not into the rubbish bin. The ants and the birds will eat it. But that's not really the point, I think. The point is that it got killed for no reason. Why did you do that?"

Gilly is so weak that he is unable to speak. His breath escapes in a long rasping noise.

Rebecca looks up and sees Monty's reflection in a mirror. He is holding a small medicine bottle. Their eyes meet in the mirrored surface. He addresses her without turning around.

"Hi Bee," he says, watching her reflection.

"Hey. What's up?"

"I was going to give Gilly his medicine."

“Really,” says Rebecca. “Are you sure you really want to do that?”

“I want to help him,” says Monty.

“Oh Monty,” says Rebecca breathlessly. Her mind is racing furiously to think what she could say to him. “Do you really want to do that?”

“He helped me.”

“I know that. But you have paid that back by trusting him. And he has shown himself to be untrustworthy.”

“I don’t want to be like the little people,” Monty says.

This is new. Rebecca has never heard Monty express that sentiment before.

“Who told you about little people?” she asks.

“Bordon Musk.”

“Bordon Musk is a mean fool, Monty. Do you remember that song he taught

you?”

“Take the good stuff for yourself and give the bad stuff to other people,” says Monty, glumly.

“You don’t really want to be like that, do you?”

Monty looks at the floor, shaking his head.

“You will never be little, Monty,” says Rebecca. “You will never be little in any way. But if that man continues to guide you, your heart will be poor and empty and small. You will have riches outside but poverty inside. How can you be rich inside when you take away eleven doctors from other people.”

“That is pretty bad,” says Monty.

“Do you think so?”

“Yeah,” he snorts as if it is obvious.

“How many doctors does anyone

need?”

“And are always arguing,” says Monty, “when they should be helping people.”

“That’s because he has trapped them. And it could end now,” Rebecca pleads.

“How?”

“Just leave him alone.”

“And what will happen then?”

“He will just... go the natural way.”

“I don’t think he should die.”

“Well go on then,” snaps Rebecca, tersely. “Go and be his doctor then. Like he really needs another one.”

“No,” protests Monty.

“We’ll call you Doctor Monty. Doctor fucking Monty!”

Tears suddenly spring to Monty’s eyes. “Don’t be like that,” he says.

“Well make a decision Montgomery Earle! There are choices every day in

life,” growls Rebecca. “And every decision comes with consequences that affect other people. And the way that Gilly lives, he doesn’t care about anyone. And he is turning you into that person. So make your choice, little man. Let nature take over. Or become the twelfth, like he really needs one more.”

Gilly moans and inhales in a long rasp. Rebecca can see that there is liquid on his cheek, obviously spilled when Tim forced the poison into his mouth.

“Why did you make me do that?”
Monty asks him.

Gilly seems to try to respond to the question. But all that comes out is more rasping noises.

“The game with the remote control car. Why did you make me hurt that nice lady? And why did you fire the

waiter in the restaurant?”

Rebecca pulls back into the hallway. She rests her back against the wall and slumps onto the floor. Tears well up in her eyes but she forces them back. Her stomach cramps terribly, knowing that she could so easily miss the exceptional opportunity to rid the world of Gilly Clay. She says aloud, “He killed the lizard.”

“And you killed the lizard,” Monty weeps, “why did you do that?”

“Why do you need so many doctors when you are not even sick?” Rebecca hisses.

“Why do you need so many doctors?” asks Monty.

“How many people don’t have doctors because of you?”

“I don’t want to hurt you, Gilly,” says

Monty. “But I don’t want to help you either.” He takes a few steps backward into the hallway.

Rebecca looks up and sees that Monty has stepped into her territory. In an instant, she comes to her feet. She watches breathlessly as Monty slowly turns his body away from Gilly Clay and then wraps his arms around her waist and pushes his face into her belly and starts to sob, inconsolably.

As Rebecca holds the little boy, she glares at Gilly rasping on the bathroom floor. “Die, damn you, die,” she implores, desperately trying to transfer her thoughts telekinetically. She wants to turn off those empty eyes once and for all. She bares her teeth and snarls.

“You are not welcome here,” she projects, “Go back to your own planet.”

Gilly lets out a long moan and his eyes roll white in their sockets. His tongue protrudes from his mouth and he draws a long breath. He slowly sucks it all the way in but then nothing comes out. Rebecca moves forward, holding Monty's face hard against her belly. She reaches for the door handle and brings the door closed. The last thing she seeks is Gilly's body thrash momentarily and his bladder lets go. She audibly brings the door against the frame.

"It is all over now." She lowers herself and gently picks up Monty, placing her hand on the back of his head. Then she walks with him down the hallway. Every step that she takes away from the bathroom feels like a step towards freedom. Getting out of the hallway

into the lounge room is another huge milestone and finally, she is in the elevator and watching the numbers descend away from Gilly's floor.

The elevator arrives at the ground floor and the door slides open.

Through reflective surfaces, Rebecca can see that the lobby is busy. She realizes that she doesn't really know what she is doing except that she wants to get Monty far away from Gilly.

"How are you doing champ?" she asks.

Monty raises his head from her shoulder and looks at her with sad eyes.

"I am sorry I made you do that, Monty, I am so very sorry," says Rebecca.

"It's okay, Bee," he says, placing his hand on her cheek. "You didn't make me do it. Gilly did."

"*Uhuh?*" Rebecca is nodding, confused.

“I don’t understand.”

“It was Gilly’s own fault,” Monty tells her calmly. “He put a bone in my heart. So I just gave it back to him.”

“Is it gone now?”

“It’s gone now.”

Rebecca nods gently. She readjusts Monty’s weight in her arms and peers through the elevator doors into the palatial lobby of the hotel, observing that no one is looking in her. “We have to get out of here. I am going to take you somewhere safe.”

“Okay,” Monty adjusts himself to grip her tighter.

Rebecca steps into the lobby and walks briskly towards the main doors, desperately hoping that she is not observed and that the security cameras won’t pick up her face or Monty’s. It

seems like an age before she is out of the lobby and through the main doors. The concierge nods in her direction and she grins at him as she moves past. She turns left on the street and starts picks up her pace, conscious that every footfall is one more pace away from Gilly. She's walking fast now, subconsciously heading towards her safe zone, the bathroom in her hotel room. She's power-walking now, gripping Monty tightly against her body.

She feels euphoric as the breeze moves past her face and her blood courses through her body. Then a thought comes to her, she doesn't know what she is doing. There is so much at stake and she has minutes to come up with a plan.

So Much at Stake

The first thing that needs to be thought through is that as a witness to Gilly's death, she is going to be of great interest to the authorities. Her life will be much harder if she seems to be withholding the truth. She resolves to be completely honest and forthcoming with the authorities particularly the police. That thought through and its final. The Policy of Truth is the first Executive Decision.

The next agenda item relates to her meeting with Tim and his enigmatic statements about having done something, getting off, and then him apparently jumping from Tower Bridge. This all has to come out without delay because the balance of evidence suggests that Tim poisoned Gilly. "Why

would he do that?” she wonders. “Why wouldn’t he do that, more like?” So, Throw Tim Under the bus is Executive Decision number two.

Next: the media. With Gilly’s recent fame, she is going to be ducking paparazzi and journalists for days. And if – or more likely, when – the details of Snowden and her are confirmed it could be years of hell. Executive Decision number three: somehow rise above all of that stuff.

“Fuck,” she says.

“Bee.” Rebecca hears a noise coming from somewhere on the periphery of her thoughts but her thoughts are thundering right now and the next item to be considered is to ensure that some government agency or one of Gilly’s lawyers doesn’t snatch Monty and tear

out her guts out in the process.

Thus, Executive Decision number four, Monty stays with her and everything gets thrown under the bus to facilitate that. That means everything and everyone. This is Rebecca's last stand. This is the Alamo.

To achieve this, she must not be implicated in the murder. After all, as soon as the question of motive for the killing Gilly comes up, Rebecca will feature as one of about a hundred million people around the world who wanted the fucker dead. However, she will be the leading contender for having actually killed him by a mile. Plus, with her being so single minded about taking custody of Monty, there will be an immediate suspicion that her motives are more to do with Monty's

inheritance than anything else.

So, Executive Decision number five is to – *something magic happens*.

“Fuck,” she says, aloud.

“Bee.” That noise again, closer than last time, but not loud enough to break her thoughts.

Next agenda item: as soon as she breaks the news about Gilly’s death there will be massive pressure to do everything possible to revive him.

There will be a congo-line of medics with the world’s most advanced medical gear in there. And what if he is not actually dead? After all, it was only a single missed breath, a protruding tongue, and a short death rattle that convinced her that Gilly had actually passed. She curse herself that she didn’t take the time to hack off his head, put a

stake through his heart, and put one in his brain while she had the chance.

How will things play out if Gilly comes back from the dead with total recall? So Executive Decision number six: ensure that Gilly's carcass spends as many minutes festering on the bathroom tiles as possible before the angels of life get to him. And that means running interference with the authorities. But that contradicts Executive Decision number one, the policy of truth. And so does kidnapping Monty from the crime scene.

"Fuck," she says, aloud.

"Bee," says Monty again. "Stop Bee. Please Stop."

"What's the matter? What's the matter?" she asks, panicked. She is hyperventilating. Breathless. Panting.

Bewildered.

She looks around to see that she is in the bathroom of her hotel, standing in front of the mirror with Monty gripped in her arms. He is struggling to get down.

“There is a man here,” he says.

Rebecca lowers Monty to the floor and looks up and sees in the mirror a familiar face. Standing in the doorway, very calm, smiling gently is Snowdon.

“Hi Rebecca,” he says. He moves towards her. She turns and allows him to enfold her in his arms. The embrace has a profound effect and a violent tremble runs the length of her body. She feels lightheaded, and allows Snowdon to take the weight of her body. For a while she is weightless, like she were floating in space. She looks up

at Snowdon's face, his boyish features and the subtle line of his cheekbones.

In all of her calculations she had failed to include one important element: Snowdon was there for her. "You are safe now," he says. "Do you want to introduce me to your friend."

"Tom this is Monty. Monty, this is Tom," Rebecca says.

"Hi, Monty."

"Hi, Tom."

They shake hands formally and Rebecca observes Monty's expression. It would be hard to imagine a man more different to Gilly than Tom Snowdon. Monty's smile confirms that they are friends.

"Would you mind if I just lay down here for a little while? Rebecca asks, as she drags a towel and bathrobe into the

corner of the bathroom. She lowers herself into position with her back against the wall and looks up at Snowden and Monty and then starts shaking, uncontrollably.

Family Life

Three months later, Rebecca finds herself standing in the kitchen of an apartment overlooking Tower Bridge and the River Thames. Outside, the sun is shining and a light breeze moves the curtains making the light shimmer around the room.

She is on her own and has spent the morning trying sort the pile of paperwork that is spread untidily across the kitchen bench. She stares at the documents, thinking that she can see a pattern emerging in colours and patterns of the logos. There are the formal blue and white documents from the UK Adoption Agency. The two separate piles of documents from the Government Department that concerns Marriages and Deaths. There is the

bright red and yellow of the real estate agents. And there are power bills, phone bills, bank statements and all the normal paperwork that a family naturally accumulates.

In her heyday, Rebecca would have had this stack of documents filed within minutes, but today she just stands there, catatonic.

The curtain rises in the breeze and sunlight floods the room. This distracts her from her hypnotic trance and she begins to move. She retrieves a cardboard box from the floor and raises it to the edge of the table. In a single movement, she swipes all of the documents into the box. Then she places the box into a cupboard and closes the door.

“Handled,” she says aloud. Then she

pauses to ponder a strange sensation.

“What’s that one called?” she asks herself. “It’s called nothing to do. I have nothing to do.”

She moves to the window and looks at the barges moving along the river for a little while. Then she sits on the couch and watches the curtains move in and out on the wind. Then she lies down and closes her eyes.

When she wakes there is a young boy standing in front of her. He has a smile as wide as his face allows. He is holding a show bag. Pinned to his jacket is a small round badge that reads: “I went to London Zoo.”

Rebecca reaches out her hand. He approaches without hesitation and kneels down in front of her and places his chin on her shoulder. She wraps her

arms around him and breathes his boy smell that is infused with adventure the aroma of exotic animals.

She looks up and sees another male standing in the kitchen, unloading takeaway containers onto the workstation. He is looking at her, too, smiling.

“Hi, Tom,” she says.

“Hi, Bee. You okay? Did you take your tablets?” He watches as she nods weakly in reply.

“How has that man Tom Snowdon been behaving?” Rebecca asks Monty.

“I like Snowdon,” says Monty, bashfully.

“Let me tell you something about that man,” says Rebecca, beckoning him over.

“Okay,” says Monty, coming close.

Rebecca cups her hands around his ear and whispers. “Tom Snowden is a good man who one time did something very, very bad.”

Monty gasps. “What?”

“He put the phone down on me.”

“That’s not bad?” says Monty, laughing.

“It’s true.”

“And what about Gilly? What sort of a man was he?”

“Gilly was a bad man who once did something good.”

“And what was that?”

“He brought me to you,” Rebecca says.

End





Guy Lane
Focus on Sustainability
Entrepreneur / Commentator / Novelist

A writer without readers is just a dreamer, so thank you, thank you, thank you for reading my book!

If you would like to continue with our new relationship, here are some things you might like to do:

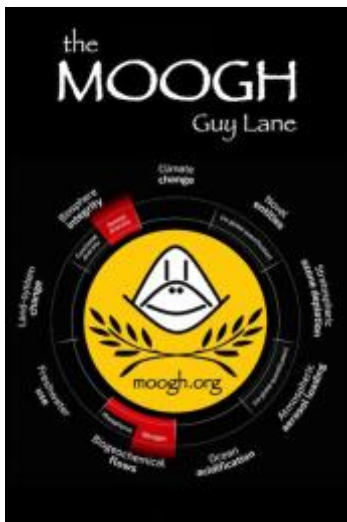
- I would love to hear your thoughts about the book. I appreciate all feedback, good bad or indifferent.
- Maybe could write a short book review ([see reviews here](#)) that I could put on my website for others to see. Send reviews to my email address: guylane@longfuture.org

- Also, please join the [Guy Lane mailing list](#) to keep informed of developments.
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- Read my [blog posts](#) and see the official [Guy Lane website](#).
- On the following pages, you can see all the books by Guy Lane.
- And of course, tell people about the book and the sustainability themes therein.
- There is no [trillionaire spaceman](#) coming to save us, and we are all going to have to intervene, ourselves.

Thank you again, dear reader.

All the best.

Guy Lane



The Moogh

When people see the Moogh, they run towards it screaming with joy, believing it to be a messenger of peace and

sustainability. Maggie Tarp kept her head, and now she's the Moogh Reporter for the Fractious News Network. She's embedded with moogh.org, the shadowy organisation that won the UN contract to manage Moogh affairs. Unfortunately, for Maggie, her bosses don't like the stories that she writes about spirituality and Moogh philosophy - they just don't sell. So they pair her up with the hot-shot journalist, Perrin Speer. Sparks fly, and

Maggie rejects everything that Perrin tries to teach her. Perrin falls foul of moogh.org when he reveals that they are killing people to hide a deadly secret. As the Moogh Zone descends into chaos, Maggie finds that the Moogh also keeps a secret. But does she have what it takes to get the story?

“There are pop-culture icons for killing zombies & catching criminals, now there is one for saving the planet. The Moogh restores nature and revives the planetary boundaries.”

[Read **THE MOOGH** today](#)



Yongala

Boer War veteran Corben Plath has nothing to lose when his estranged half-brother (the C.E.O. of the Queensland Coal Board) offers him blood money and a ticket on the luxury cruise liner S.S. Yongala. Aboard Yongala, Prof. Frederick Portland is traveling to Townsville with his young niece, Felicity, and his renewable energy invention, the 'Smoke Engine'. Fearing that the Smoke Engine will ruin them, the Coal Board task Plath with murdering Portland and destroying his machine. Onboard the ship, Plath strikes an innocent friendship with

Felicity, not realizing that she is the niece of the man he has been sent to kill. As Yongala steams into heavy weather, Plath learns that there are armed men aboard looking for him. Tired of fighting, he comes to see that his own salvation depends on Felicity surviving the storm.

“I wrote a fictional version of the final voyage of Yongala because I wanted the public to know that scientists have understood the basics of climate change since 1905.”

[Read **YONGALA** today](#)



Heart of Bone

Rebecca is a personal assistant to billionaire poison merchant, Gilly Clay, and she's trapped in a ruinous employment contract.

Her life flashes past through a mane of ginger hair and stress. Rebecca keeps her sanity through a secret love affair with psychologist and author, Tom Snowdon. Snowdon's new book - *Sustainability and the Superclass* - gets inside the heads of the powerful men who run the world so poorly. One day, Clay adopts an 8-year-old boy, Montgomery Earle, and grooms him as the heir to both the business empire and his defective moral compass.

Seeing this, all of Rebecca's certainties slip away, and she's forced to make a choice. She can either keep silent and watch the young boy being corrupted or risk everything by speaking out.

“We live in the age of a global Superclass, where half of the world’s wealth is controlled by as few people as could fit on a single corporate jet. They are so unplugged from reality, that we can’t rely on them to lead a transition to a sustainable future. Instead, we need to take matters into our own hands.”

[Read **HEART OF BONE** today](#)



The Oil Price

Danny Lexion easily meets his two life goals: he looks good and makes lots of money. One night, out on the town, he falls for the stunning environmental activist, Bren Hannan. Bren's mission is to save a tiny island from a ruthless oil company called Peking Petroleum. To do this, she needs to get to a UN Conference in Dubai. Danny offers to fly her there, thinking that it might lead to some romance in an exotic city. In Dubai, Danny learns that Bren's story doesn't check out. He finds himself in the cross-hairs of the mercenary security firm - Storm Front - who are

protecting Peking Petroleum's interests. As the bullets fly through the streets of Dubai, Danny learns that saving the planet is a deadly business, and the real price of oil is blood.

“The Oil Price is my first novel and something of an ensemble piece of characters and themes around the oil industry and the blocking moves of environmentalists.”

[Read **THE OIL PRICE** today](#)



Intervene

Anton Vorlov runs the world's biggest company, Between Destiny, from an island off the coast of Dubai. Officially, he's a billionaire from Ukraine, but he is actually a trillionaire spaceman - and his real name is Zem. He never sleeps, and his vast organisation spends \$100 billion a week financing the restructure of the global economy to make it sustainable. Zem is trained to handle complicated international negotiations and the inevitable interference of the oil industry. However, when his personal assistant - a feisty Earthling called Megan - decides that she wants his

attention, Zem gets right out his depth.

‘In twenty years of world-watching, I have yet to be convinced that there is an individual or an organisation that has the influence to alter the destiny of human civilization. I created a fictional spaceman to do the job, to foster the idea that collectively, we might all intervene, ourselves.’

[Read **INTERVENE** today](#)



Aquaria

Lucy Callahan (38) is known as the Sealioness of Aquaria Bay due to her reputation for risk-taking, showmanship and thinking big. She's the founder of Aquaria, the world's most popular public aquarium and marine science precinct. One day, an oil rig ominously parks offshore. Callahan learns that Expedient Energy plans to drill for petroleum in the Aquaria marine park. The threat crystallises when the oil firm take over the Aquaria board, and the extent of their plan becomes known. Callahan dives into battle, prepared to risk everything – even her own safety –

to protect her life's work. However, when her boyfriend, Sam, starts running interference, Callahan realises that winning the battle against the oil firm may come at a personal cost, a relationship and possibly a family. How will the Sealioness of Aquaria Bay respond to this dilemma? Will she give in to her partner's wishes, or fight to the bitter end, even at the risk of her own life?

“Climate change, ocean acidification and plastics are killing our oceans. The fossil fuel industry, and particularly the oil industry, is to blame. Plastics are made of oil, after all. We must all become ambassadors of the ocean if we want it to survive. Fortunately, we needn't juggle white sharks and stonefish, like Lucy Callahan, to play a part.”

[Read **AQUARIA** today](#)