

# the Oil Price

saving the planet is a deadly business



Guy Lane

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Titles by Guy Lane.

See details at the end of this book.

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## The Townsville Races

By mid-afternoon, the spectators of the Townsville Races lose interest in watching sweaty horses run around in circles. The final race is won, the horses are packed away, and the real purpose of visiting the racetrack becomes apparent. Beer flows, wine corks pop, and two young women wearing cocktail dresses slip out of the main pavilion on a lascivious mission.

Nursing empty champagne glasses, they make their way towards the corporate tents, careful that their high-heels don't sink into the grass. They halt at the gate of a hastily installed fence, observing an obese security guard scratching his ass.

“You ready?” asks the brunette. She’s wearing ornate headwear that resembles

a shrubbery. This man-trap is known as a fascinator.

“We didn’t come here to watch the horses,” giggles her blonde girlfriend, whose fascinator is made of black lace and thin wires, maintaining the shape of a small bird.

With eyelashes flapping and smiles flashing, they charm their way past the security guard. Inside the white picket fence, they halt, adjust their headwear and check each other’s makeup. Then they stride purposefully towards the entrance of a tent that bears a sign: Lexion Properties.

They peer inside the tent where thirty or so people are dressed to the nines. There are males and females, ages ranging from mid-twenties to late-fifties, engaging in discussion about the



Townsville property market.

In the center of the tent, a long table holds a half-eaten banquet and copious empty bottles. At the far end of the table, a handsome metrosexual, dressed immaculately in a tuxedo, devours shelled tiger prawns dipped in thousand islands sauce.

“There’s Trent,” says the blonde. She digs around in her small handbag and retrieves a twenty-cent coin. “Call,” she says.

“Heads,” says the brunette watching the coin flip in the air.

“Bugger,” says the blonde seeing the coin land on the grass.

Trent slides another prawn into his mouth and washes it down with a swig of beer from his stubby. Nodding appreciatively, he observes the two

women hovering at the entrance of the tent.

He glances over to where Danny Lexion, the sole Director of Lexion Properties, is listening without interest to the chatter from the female staff of a property rental firm. From where Trent stands, Danny is visible as just a head and shoulders above a sea of fascinators. Trent catches Danny's eye and nods towards to the two young women peering into the tent.

He holds two fingers in the air and mimes, "Two more?"

Danny shrugs his shoulders and Trent takes this as a definitive 'yes'. He takes a swig of beer and waves the young women into the tent. "Come in girls. The prawns and champagne are over here," he says.

Trent extends his hand as the girls approach, “I’m Trent,” he says and places a kiss on the back of each of their right hands. Then he pours two glasses of champagne, observing that the brunette is fixated on Danny Lexion.

“Are these low-carb prawns?” asks the blonde, holding a limp crustacean in her manicured fingers.

“Of course,” says Trent, “have we met before?”

“I met you at the Rhino Bar a few weeks ago. You were doing shooters.”

“I don’t remember that,” says Trent. “But I do remember you.”

“Hey, Trent,” says the brunette, “is it true that Danny just settled on the Penthouse at the Jade Apartments, the one with the jacuzzi?”

“The Jacuzzi. What a great idea. And yes, that went through just the other day,” Trent says, with a grin.

“And the tenant hasn’t moved in, yet?” asks the blonde, clinking her champagne glass against Trent’s stubby.

Trent can see where this is heading. “You know what?” he asks conspiratorially, “Julia, the Agent, is just over there and she has the keys in her car.”

“Will Danny come, too?” asks the blonde.

“I’ll see if I can tempt him.” Trent moves across to Danny Lexion and places a hand on his broad shoulder. He addresses the cluster of adoring females from the property rental firm. “My good ladies; would you allow me a moment to confer with Mr. Lexion.

The bubbly's in the esky over there."

Once Danny's entourage has moved away, Trent surveys the tent, proudly. "Quite a smorgasbord, huh?"

"Have you noticed something about all these women?" asks Danny, turning to his mate as though he were confiding a secret.

"Beautiful. Pissed. And they are all into property. Something else?"

"I don't know, mate," says Danny, deflated, "they're like the Stepford Wives without the brains. It's like a single branch of the tree of life. We need a new gene pool to swim in, Trent. How are we getting out of here?"

"Normal style, Delexion. I'll get the Jade keys off Julia. Pack the Hummer with piss and prawns. Then slip out the

back with some house-warming presents. What do you reckon?”

Danny looks at the newcomers, refreshing their glasses and chatting excitedly. “How is it going to play out, then?”

“I made a good impression with blondie at the Rhino a few weeks back,” says Trent, hopefully.

Danny takes stock of the brunette. He draws a deep breath and sighs at length. “Nice shoes. Sure. Whatever. Who’s driving?”

“The soberest?” asks Trent, looking at his stubby.

“I’ve had nine,” says Danny.

“Including the two beers in the car on the way over here?”

“Eleven, then.”

“And the shot of rum at your place

before we left.”

“Okay, twelve,” says Danny. “What about you?”

“I’ve had eight since breakfast,” says Trent. He glances at the two young women who are now looking expectantly in their direction. “So what do you reckon, Delexion?”

“I am warming to the idea, Trent. So, who’s driving?”

“The soberest.”

“Danny shrugs, feeling like he still hasn’t had his answer.

Trent retrieves the keys to the Black Hummer from his pocket and hands them to Danny. “Let’s go, driver,” he says.

## The Man Who Didn't Care

*A few days later.*

It is 10:15pm on Flinders Street East, the nightclub strip. One of the most popular watering holes in this coastal City in North Queensland is the Heritage Bar. Here, at a round wooden table, under a chalkboard menu advertising \$10 oysters, sits a man, alone.

Danny Lexion wears a crisp collared shirt with sufficient undone buttons to show off a patch of chest hair neatly clipped with a number two comb. The shirt is a size too small and it accentuates the strong contours of his body.

A faint trace of an expensive aftershave hovers around him like an invisible spider's web. Tonight, he



wears brushed crocodile leather shoes, designer jeans and Dolce & Gabbana underwear. As usual, Danny is well dressed, right to the last.

In front of him is a bottle of six dollar fifty beer with a slice of lime sticking out the top. Danny is the only person in the bar who knows that the lime is a technique developed by Mexicans to keep flies out of the bottle. Danny knows lots of things because he has the luxury of time and an appetite for knowing things regular people don't know.

As Danny watches a group of half-drunk women entering the bar he squeezes his biceps gently, feeling where the muscles are tender from the workout in the gym. The women are dressed in slinky night-time clothes, and

some still wear the fancy headpieces from the races a few days before. There are ‘fascinators’ of every type in the Heritage Bar tonight.

Danny Lexion has a strong jaw and a slightly gravelly complexion. At thirty-seven, he is the sort of guy that you might see toward the middle of a male fashion magazine. He works out in a gymnasium twice a week to maintain his Rugby League physique. He is a head taller and half-shoulder wider than most men in a crowd. He always dresses well, preferring smart casual with collared, colored shirts, moleskin pants and \$900 shoes.

Danny Lexion is not short of money to buy expensive shoes. Quite the opposite, in fact: for a single man in a regional country town, he is loaded.

Besides all the company money and personal wealth, he maintains a special bank account that holds \$30,000 for impulse purchases.

Danny's penthouse has stunning views across Cleveland Bay and Magnetic Island and is worth over two million dollars. He has casual staff to look after his housework: the white tiles are mopped twice a week and the washing up and laundry is always taken care of. He even pays his neighbor's son to take the bins out.

Danny lives alone and when he wants affection he dresses up and goes out. In an up-market, inner-city bar, Danny finds a stray single woman and charms her with his good looks, muscles and obvious affluence. He shows off his immaculate apartment and, after a few

glasses of quality champagne, he imbues upon these women a sense of having met the man of their dreams.

Then Danny inflicts upon them the attentions of a man who does know an ass from an elbow. And once they are swooning with bubbly and sensual pleasures, he seduces them and cuddles them all night. In the morning he politely has them leave.

Danny's neighbors would periodically share the elevator to the ground floor with his temporary friends. At 7:00 am, in high heels, the women would stagger out of his apartment, still inebriated from the night before. They'd check their lippy in the elevator mirrors, overwhelmed by a combination of fulfillment from what had gone on inside Danny's apartment, and a

sneaking suspicion that they'd never be invited back.

Women and money had similar characteristics for Danny Lexion. They were there in abundance and needed to be properly managed. Danny never bragged about these seductions, although he kept his old mate Trent up to date on the gossip.

Trent appears in the packed doorway of the Heritage Bar. As usual, he looks immaculate. He is better dressed than anyone in the bar, even the girls. In his smart fashion clothes and fresh cut hair, he looks like a brilliant butterfly. He slips effortlessly through the crowd.

"The man they call Delexion," he says, shaking Danny's hand.

"Only you call me that."

"What's wrong with your beer?" Trent

asks.

“It’s your shout.”

“Why is it always my shout?”

“Because you’re bloody late, mate.”

Danny watches as Trent weaves smoothly through the tight crowd to lean against the polished stainless steel bar and instantly connect with one of the female bartenders.

A redhead wearing a blue dress and fascinator with a peacock feather enters the Heritage Bar. She is slender with a wide cleavage formed from small breasts. Space clears in the crowd around her as she passes.

Trent returns to the table under the oyster sign with a bottle of beer in each hand, nearly bumping into her. “Wow!” he exclaims.

He seats himself and slides the fresh

beer across the table. “How’s your dharma, Danny Boy?” he asks, watching the redhead find her way down the back of the bar.

“I’m still on the path, mate,” says Danny with a smug grin, “the tenants just moved into the Jade Penthouse.”

“Awesome. Did you get a good rate?”

“You could hang wet towels on it, mate,” says Danny, raising his fist suggestively, “twenty-four months of solid income. Locked in.”

The two mates take a swig of their beers and nod appreciatively.

“How’s that Peggy coming along?” Danny asks.

“The dentist? She’s lovely.”

“She was an orthodontist, actually,” says Danny.

“Whatever. She’s gone. Took a job in

Melbourne.”

Danny shakes his head knowingly.  
“We can’t have you being alone,  
Trent.”

“Sounds good,” says Trent, “what  
have you got planned tonight?”

“What else is there?” asks Danny.  
“Tits and bricks and mortar.” He turns  
in his seat to survey the women in the  
crowd and then sighs. “I don’t know,”  
he says disheartened, “it’s like taking  
your pick in a room full of picks.”

The redhead storms past with a  
flustered man in a dark suit following  
close behind. It is a new moon and love  
in the air.

“Well that one’s alright,” says Trent  
watching the redhead.

“No mate,” says Danny, suddenly  
enthused, “check her out.” He nods



towards two young women at the table next to them, negotiating seating arrangements in the middle of a fast flowing conversation.

Danny shifts his position to observe the brunette with the oval face and wide eyes. She wears distinctive clothing, natural fibers, overt and colorful. The woman seems to have an aura accompanying her is a delicious aroma, as though flowers had bloomed in the Heritage Bar.

She has a distinctive look, intense, vulnerable, and full of spirit. Danny is convinced that he can feel the warmth radiating off her body.

“Wow. Who is that?” Danny asks rhetorically and observes that Trent is looking at the brunette’s girlfriend.

“Never seen them before,” says Trent.

“What do you reckon they’re drinking?”

As the women take their seats, Danny and Trent discretely gather intelligence using their own particular skills. Trent has an intuitive sixth sense and keen observation of body language. Danny’s has a good hearing.

After a few minutes, they raise their beer bottles and discuss their findings.

“I heard something about the environment,” says Danny. “The brunette is trying to get to a conference. Something like that.”

“I think that are just out of Uni. They are probably here for the two-for-one cocktails,” says Danny.

“Caprioscas half price tonight,” says Trent, putting it all together, “and it’s your shout.”

“How is it my shout?”

“I bought the beer?”

“Yeah, alright then,” grumbles Danny Lexion, “you want a Capriosca, too?”

“Sure. You get the drinks and I will get us a seat at their table.”

That is good news because when Trent says that he will get a seat at a woman’s table, you could put money on it.

Danny elbows his way to the bar and raises a hundred dollar bill to get attention. When he finally arrives back at the table with four cocktails, Trent is entertaining Bren Hannan, the brunette, and her friend Caroline, with a witty story.

The seating arrangement places Trent and Caroline together. However, most importantly for the wellbeing of a small

island in Fiji - and the survival of  
countless baby turtles, coconut crabs  
and seabirds - the seating arrangement  
puts Danny Lexion next to Bren  
Hannan.

## The Climate Cop

Twenty minutes later, Danny Lexion is listening to Bren Hannan's story with curious interest. He sips on his Capriosca cocktail as she speaks.

"Well that's very upsetting," he says after she has explained that she is supposed to be going to a United Nations Conference in Dubai and that her funding has been pulled at the last moment.

"I'm not upset," she says, "just disappointed. I was meant to deliver a proposal."

"What sort of proposal?"

"We were seeking two million dollars through carbon finance for an avoided deforestation scheme that would protect the remnant habitat of the Mahogany Glider," she says matter-of-

factly.

“Awesome,” Danny says, confused.

“Have you ever seen a mahogany glider?”

Danny avoids saying ‘no’ in order to keep Bren talking.

“Anyway,” she says, “just two million dollars would protect it from extinction, but I can’t get to Dubai. It’s so annoying.”

Danny is interested in Bren’s information. But he doesn’t understand why anyone would make a glider out of mahogany – it would be structurally unsound. Then he thinks about the two million dollars. Now, that’s very interesting, and he wonders who she banks with.

“What do you do, Danny?” asks Bren, observing him squeezing his biceps and

performing financial calculations in his head.

Danny answers truthfully and simply, “I manage rental properties, my own properties.” Then he realizes that he had said the word ‘properties’ twice in the same sentence. How cool is that?

Bren it is completely unsurprised that this good-looking fellow would be a devotee of the property market. His is a common species in the ecosystem of up-market city bars in Townsville.

She feels deflated because she is yearning for more; so much more. She’s hankering to meet a romantic eco-warrior who has a cunning plan to incapacitate the world’s coal-fired power stations, or somehow rescue things from the IUCN Red List.

“That sounds like an enviable life,”

she sighs, disingenuously. Then she reconsiders. Danny is handsome and strong and maybe there is more to him than property deals. In a second wind, Bren decides to give Danny another chance and a tiny bit of punishment for being so damned normal.

“Do you do anything substantial as a pastime?” she asks, directly.

Danny sits back in surprise and takes stock of the key points of the discussion so far: wooden airplanes, two million dollars and a smart-ass comment. He eyes Bren with a newfound curiosity and takes a few seconds to analyze her. She is very attractive with distinctive, sort of quirky features. He likes that, but she is not the sort of woman he would normally go after. There is something about her.



She is too... too...

Danny isn't sure what it is about Bren that is too... She has curves in the right place. And she has an aroma that is outstanding, like fruit with a deep undertone that he can't pick. And she knows how to dress, that's important. She is wearing a beige felt jacket from the Katelyn Aslett collection.

Danny observes the pale blue gemstone on the chain that rests at the top of her cleavage. And she is very feminine and intriguing, reminding him of a prickly but intelligent version of Muriel from the movie about the wedding. Despite all this, she is too... too...

That is it. She is too defensive. Danny prefers submissive. Sex kitten-like. Finally, he answers her question and

follows it with a question of his own.

“Do I do anything substantial? I work out and I read a bit in my pastime,” he says. “So what do you do to get invited to a U.N. conference in Dubai?”

“I’m a State C.C.P. Officer,” Bren answers, directly.

“You’re Russian?” asks Danny instantly.

Bren laughs spontaneously and Danny sits back and observe. When she is laughing, Bren’s prickliness defensiveness disappears and he sees a healthy, attractive woman with proud lips and sparkling eyes. He makes a mental note to make her laugh more often.

Even Bren is surprised by her laughter. It makes her feel vulnerable. “Is he deliberately playing with words,

or just being naïve?” she wonders.

Danny feels like he has discovered another woman inside the same glowing skin. Two women within the first few minutes of meeting; he is intrigued again. Maybe she isn't ‘not his type’ after all.

“I’m not Russian, Danny,” she says, “C.C.P. is Cities for Climate Protection. I look after greenhouse reduction programs for Local Governments across North Queensland.”

“And do you have any substantial pastimes?”

“I ran a direct action project against an oil project in Fiji. And I have the project with the Mahogany Gliders.”

“I have never been in a glider,” says Danny.

“Right,” Bren replies with a frown.

Danny nods for a little while, taking it all in. Then he rearranges the beer mats on the table and announces, “Substance is an interesting concept, actually. Let me share an idea with you.”

With these words, he begins talking about the insignificance of the material world. He says that the material found in the ‘material’ world is composed of atoms which themselves are made of electrons whizzing around a tiny nucleus. In between the electrons and the nucleus there is empty space. From this, Danny concludes that the material world itself is mainly comprised of a vacuum. Then he describes how humans create meaning out of an empty sea of meaninglessness. He rambles on for a while. Finally, he concludes with a broad-sweeping

statement about the Buddhist concept of dharma and that the pursuit of happiness, no matter how it is achieved, is the ultimate purpose of human existence.

Danny speaks passionately and quickly as he strings together a handpicked selection of Eastern religion, quantum physics, existential philosophy and common-or-garden bullshit.

As he speaks, Bren squirms in her seat. She has alarms going off inside her head. She wants to interrupt, but she holds her tongue in frustration because Danny is approaching his punch line.

In short, Danny tells her that a life of indolent property management has the moral equivalence of a life committed to environmental sustainability and the fight against greenhouse emissions and

species extinction. And to that extent, Bren and Danny were well matched.

“Fascinating,” Bren says, eventually, gritting her teeth. She feels angry with herself for having listened to the whole story. She is boiling in a particular manner. She can’t remember the last time she had felt that particular form of rage. She winces as Danny rest back in his seat, apparently proud of his vapid speech.

Bren has given several minutes of her life to this man and now she feels short-changed. She needs to punish him and so she resorts to a direct attack that allows plenty of wriggle room in case she chickens out from the kill. “You probably have Covey on your bookshelf,” she says, flatly.

“Seven Habits of Highly Influential

People,” Danny says, knowingly. “One of the most significant guides to living an empowered life, there is.”

“Did you read it?”

Danny thinks this through for a few moments, remembering back to when he started reading the book. It was about this time that the ancient story called “The Lascivious Monk” arrived in the mail from an online bookshop that specialized in smut. He dropped Covey and read the Monk, instead. “Did I miss something substantial?” he eventually replies.

“Probably. I suspect that your circle of influence greatly exceeds your circle of concern.”

“This is all getting a bit too personal,” Danny thinks. He shoots a glance at Trent and sees that his mate is totally

consumed, chatting with Caroline. So he picks up his Capriosca and swirls the icy green liquid around the sides.

He considers directing the conversation to the gemstones on the necklace around Bren's neck. "Is that Lapis Lazuli?" he could ask. But that wasn't going to work because she's onto him like a pug on a shoe. "Is that something to be concerned about?" he eventually asks.

"Probably not," says Bren, "You'll have a happy life, but you won't make a difference."

Danny straightens himself on his stool to assess Bren Hannan from a slightly different perspective. He says, "You are a very insightful woman, Bren."

"Thank you, Danny," she replies, grinning.



“But tell me, what is the difference between a having a good life and not making a difference?”

Bren shakes her head. She wonders how much longer she can sustain talking to the ‘human void’ while he demonstrates such a lack of empathy.

While the tension between Danny and Bren is stewing, Trent is receiving tuition in ecological sustainability from Caroline. Rather than fighting her, Trent is buying in *bolus-bolus*. He rescues Danny with some of his newfound wisdom. “Toot! Toot!” he says, pretending to tug on a steam whistle. “It’s all hands on deck to save the biosphere.”

“*Abhh*. Danny,” Bren sighs, “your friend is talking about biosphere. What a nice human being.”

Danny suddenly feels isolated, seeing his companions waiting on his response. He takes a long sip of his drink and surveys them all through the side of the cocktail glass. Then he places the glass on the beer mat. “The biosphere is like the planet, right?” he asks.

“Not the whole planet,” says Trent, the instant expert, “the bit on top.”

“I can’t believe that you are buying into this,” Danny tells him.

Caroline leans on Trent’s shoulder and says to Bren, “Trent is our new *cause célèbre*. We should make a poster of him.”

“Okay. I can believe you are buying into this.”

“The planet is made of iron and rock, Danny,” explains Bren, placing her

hand gently on his wrist. “It’s bullet-proof.”

Danny likes the feel of her warm hand on his own. He looks at her slim, manicured fingers as she draws them away.

Caroline takes over, “The bit that’s in trouble is all the life on the surface of the planet, between the tops of the clouds and the bottom of the sea. That’s called the biosphere, the sphere of life.”

“That’s right,” Trent chimes-in. “The biosphere is where all the living things live. And bloody humans are killing it off.”

Trent’s newfound wisdom causes quite a stir. Bren pats him on the arm, Caroline rolls her knuckle against his shoulder, and Trent purrs with all the

attention he is getting.

“So, somehow, the biosphere falls into my sphere of influence?” Danny grumbles, scowling at his mate.

“The circle of concern, Danny,” Bren says, “is all the things you chose to be concerned about, and try to influence.” She places her hand on his wrist again. “If your circle of concern extends no further than ensuring a steady supply of heavy objects to lift and one night stands, then--”

“Now hold on,” Danny snaps.

Bren hurries to finish her point, “Then the opportunity for you to be part of any meaningful solution to the world’s problems is severely limited. That’s all I wanted to say.” She sits back and folds her arms across her chest.

Danny mulls this over, not wanting

for Bren to have the last say. Then he leans forward and tells her, “You could buy some nice property with your two million dollar squirrel fund. I could help you with that, lady.”

Bren shows a look of undisguised horror. Her mouth falls open. “Okay, let’s go,” she says as she collects her purse. “Trent,” she says as she stands, “it was nice to meet you.”

“Nice to meet you, Trent,” says Caroline.

“And as for you, Mister,” Bren glares at Danny. “Some other time.”

Trent turns to watch them leave. He shakes his head, ruefully. “Good work, Dyslexion.”

“What is it with these bleeding-heart environmentalists?” Danny raises his glass and sees that it is empty.

“They’re good people, mate. They care about stuff.”

“I care about stuff too, you know.”

“The whole town knows that Danny Lexion cares about interest rates and leases.”

“I’m not standing for this.” Danny contradicts himself by standing. He pushes his bar stool under the table with his foot.

Trent starts laughing, “Don’t go there, mate. It’ll be expensive.”

Danny pulls out his wallet and slaps a fifty-dollar bill on the table. “Four Caprioscas, Captain Planet. I’m getting that woman back.”

Then he barges his way through the partygoers in the Heritage Bar towards the door. He steps into the bustling crowd on Flinders Street, looks left,

then right, and starts walking quickly down the street. He weaves between men in suits and women in fancy headwear.

As his walk turns into a run he's wondering, "What the hell is happening to me? Why am I chasing a woman down Flinders Street?"

## At Osman's

Racing through the crowd on Flinders Street, Danny eventually spots Bren and Caroline taking seats at the bar in Osman's restaurant. He steps inside, looking around the busy restaurant that is dimly illuminated by orange lights.

He is so fixated on Bren that he fails to notice a belly dancer performing in between the busy tables. She's wearing a revealing satin costume that has bells on a chain around her stomach. A real sword is balanced on her head as she dances.

Danny pushes past the people at the Maître d' station, immediately colliding with the belly dancer. She stumbles and the sword detaches from her head. The dancer snatches it from the air just before it impales one of the diners. She



heaves a sigh of relief and then projects towards Danny Lexion an Egyptian death-stare that would have killed a lesser man.

Ignorant of this near-tragedy, Danny places himself in front of Bren and begins a persuasive apology.

“I can’t believe that you nearly killed someone,” Bren says, astonished, interrupting him.

“Huh?”

Caroline orders drinks from the bartender and Danny realises that it’s too late to go back to the Heritage Bar. If he’s not quick, Trent will buy the Caprioscas and steal his change, so that will be fifty dollars gone. He steps aside to let Bren watch the belly dancer and takes out his smartphone to text Trent, “come to osmans.” As he is texting, he

doesn't notice the belly dancer waggling her sword at him, much to the amusement of the people in the crowd.

Bren looks at him, shaking her head as Trent texts back: "wtf I just bought the drinks."

Danny slips his phone into his pocket, cursing, and reaches for the wine list. He glances up to see Bren observing him, shaking her head wearily.

Shortly, Trent arrives. He slinks alongside Caroline, and a young Turkish man, Ali, asks if they would like a table.

"Is it a table for two or four," Caroline asks Bren.

Bren looks uneasily at Danny. For Danny, there is a moment of tension when many things held in the balance and then Bren relents and says, "Okay,

four.”

“Yes!” Danny thinks, “Back in the game! And it only cost fifty dollars.”

“We’ll have a booth, not a table,” he tells Ali, the Turkish waiter.

Minutes later the four are seated on the soft cushions around a low table with their shoes kicked off. Danny and Trent sit on one side of the table, Bren and Caroline on the other.

Danny leans forward, finally able to complete his apology. “Bren and Caroline, I ask that you accept my humble apology.”

“You clearly have no empathy for biodiversity conservation,” says Bren, pointing her finger.

“It’s a new concept for me. Nonetheless, the squirrel fund comment was a lapse in my judgment,”

Danny concedes.

Trent and Caroline grin, pleased to be back in each other's company, and watching Danny make a tit of himself.

"He was boorish," Caroline tells Trent, "don't you think?"

"Oh, he can be really boorish. I see it a lot." Then he says to Danny, "You were pretty arrogant, as well, mate."

"Shut up, Trent. I concede that I was boorish. Now if you have had enough flesh, I would like to make Bren a proposal."

Trent has been waiting for this. "This is going to cost him a packet of money," he whispers to Caroline. He mimes the word 'five' to Danny.

"You are proposing to me already?" laughs Bren.

"Well..." Danny starts clumsily but

quickly regains his stride, “It is very simple. I’ve never been to Dubai and I’d like to. I don’t like to travel alone, so if you would accept my offer I would...”

Bren looks at him with newfound interest as he fumbles for words. He is fumbling because he is simultaneously calculating the dollar cost of his proposal. Saving face for Danny can be very expensive, so he quickly commits to a budget in his head.

“Bren, would you allow me to fund your airfare and hotel accommodation, separate rooms of course, and I will accompany you to Dubai.”

“Wow,” says Trent, stunned.

Bren sits back with a surprised look and this emboldens Danny to continue.

“You attend your conference and I

have a travel companion for my holiday.”

“He’s taking her to Dubai,” Trent mutters. “That’s got to be ten thousand bucks.”

Danny continues pitching his idea, “Bren, I may not be able to incorporate the sphere of life into my circle of concern. But I can help you get to this important conference. And I would be very grateful if you allow us to travel together.”

“I’ll never be able to meet all your conditions,” she says.

“There’s only two. First, we dine together each night, with or without company; I don’t care. I’ll shout our meals but not theirs. And I’ll decide the restaurant.”

“That will limit the guests to the rich

and famous,” says Trent.

Bren nods slowly. “Okay. And two?”

Danny decides to get some flesh of his own. He thinks quickly and says, “Condition two. I get full access to everything you have access to during the Conference and the after hours activities. Call me your Personal Assistant if you like.”

“Just don’t ask him to do anything,” says Trent.

Bren eyes Danny with suspicion.

“*Hmmm*,” she says.

Danny resumes his money calculations and then realized that he has overlooked a vitally important consideration. “When are you due to fly?” he asks.

“Sunday.”

“Bugger,” Danny thinks, he’s

overlooked the cost of airfares purchased at short notice.

Trent picks up on this straight away. “Twenty grand,” he whispers to Caroline.

“Twenty?” she asks.

Trent speaks close to her ear, burying his nose in her blonde hair. “Twenty thousand dollars. That’s how much Danny will have to spend to honor his promise.”

“Really?”

“Two return airfares to Dubai purchased at short notice, business class, if he can afford them on the budget he’s committed. Two up-market hotel rooms in Dubai - he loves flash hotels. Plus there’s the transfers, the restaurant bills, the walking around money, drinking money and don’t



forget the general spending money.  
That's Twenty thousand dollars easily.  
Maybe more."

"Wow, has he got that much money?"  
asks Caroline.

"Oh, he's loaded, he does this stuff all  
the time."

Caroline looks at him with surprise.

"He doesn't support environmental  
stuff. But he spends wads of cash on a  
whim. He has a special savings account  
for it. I call it the 'saving face' account."

As Bren thinks over his interesting  
proposal, Danny observes Trent  
winning Caroline's heart by telling  
stories. He shakes his head, gravely,  
wondering why it is he who had ended  
up with the prickly brunette and the  
massive bill for looking good.

"Well, there's the offer," Danny says,

resting back against the purple cushions, deflated.

Bren folds her arms across her ample bosom and observes him, weighing it all up. Eventually, she comes to her conclusion. “Okay Danny, I accept your offer.”

“Toot! Toot!” Trent pulls the steam whistle again. “Danny and Bren are going to Dubai,” he says excitedly. “It must be Danny’s shout then.”

## C.E.O. Peking Petroleum

Twelve thousand kilometers from the Heritage Bar, in a tall office building in Dubai, the Chief Executive of Peking Petroleum observes the view through his floor to ceiling window. Holding a crystal tumbler of bourbon on ice, Brad Moore, the oilman, watches traffic streaming along Sheikh Zayed Road.

Beyond the skyscrapers is the body of water that separates the Arabian Peninsula from the Persian nation of Iran. The Gulf is hot and blue, and stretches into the hazy distance.

Brad Moore has blonde hair that is cropped short on the sides with a stylish parting. His big brown eyes and boyish face belie the very adult duties that he oversees. He's excellently presented, wearing suit pants and a silk

shirt without a tie.

Brad Moore is a self-made millionaire, an American businessman who gets things done, irrespective of the means. He is fond of saying things like, “You can’t make a brain omelet without cracking a few heads.” This expression is relevant to oil industry and the security contracting business, and Brad Moore has expertise in both.

On the desk in front of him is a document, recently confiscated. It is titled: ‘Going Green on Lala by Richard Holmes’. He eyes the document maliciously and scowls. He is in a contemplative mood right now, reminiscing on his plans to transform a tiny Island in Fiji into a multi-million dollar oil project, only to see it sent to the verge of bankruptcy by a bunch of

environmentalists.

His Personal Assistant interrupts him from his thoughts. She tells him that there is an incoming phone call from Iraq.

“Who is it?” he asks irritated.

“It is Alistair Sally, your replacement from Storm Front Security. He’s calling from Baghdad.”

Brad Moore contemplates the news. This is the first he has heard of Storm Front since he sold the company over a year ago. He picks up the phone.

“Hello Alistair, how’s Baghdad treating you?” he says.

“It got jolly exciting after you left, actually. How’s the oil game?”

“Same shit, different Arab. What’s going on?”

“We have some military equipment

excess to requirements.”

“Sure. What have you got?”

“Any use for a ruthless killer?” asks Sally.

“This is the oil business, Alistair.”

“Maybe you’d like to have your old bodyguard back.”

Brad Moore recognized the code: Storm Front has fired Teck and is looking for somewhere to dump him. It had to happen eventually.

“Teck,” says Brad Moore, enthusiastically. “Sure, send him over,”

“Thought so, old chap. He arrives Dubai tomorrow at four.”

“Great news, Alistair. Thanks for that. Anything else going on?”

“Just the normal, Old Chap. The bad guys put a bomb in a donkey the other day. It went off while we were trying to

defuse it.”

“And?” asks Brad Moore, impatiently.

“Made an ass of the entire company,” says Alistair Sally, laughing.

Brad Moore grunts and hangs up. He rests back in his chair and takes a slug of bourbon. He smiles as he rolls the fluid around his tongue.

Just then, Suli, the Co-Director of Peking Petroleum, walks into the office holding his mobile phone in the air. Suli’s olive skin is deeply tanned from years adventuring in deserts and war zones. His hair is cropped the same length as his three-day-beard. On first appearance, he gives an impression of strength and intelligence. It doesn’t last long Suli is a half-Persian half-Arab half-wit.

“What is it, Suli?” asks Brad Moore,

impatiently.

“Kuwaiti men. They call.”

“So what? Are the investors happy?”

“Asking. When Fiji man sign oil production contract.”

“And what did you tell them?”

“Lala big oilfield,” says Suli, gesticulating.

“They know it’s a big oil field, Suli,” says Brad Moore. “They gave us twenty million dollars to explore it, remember?”

“Meet them Abu Dhabi tomorrow. Two pm.”

“Hey, Suli. Guess what? We’re getting Teck back. We’ll pick him up from the airport after the meeting.”

Brad Moore slides the ‘Going Green on Lala’ document off the desk, letting it fall into a waste paper bin.



Suli watches the document fall. “Teck. He come Dubai?” he asks, glumly.

“He’s our new Head of Security.”

Suli looks despondently at the floor.

“What’s the matter?” asks Brad Moore.

“Is okay.”

“Hey, Suli, get this,” snaps Brad Moore. “I wouldn’t be here today if it wasn’t for you. Got to have an Emirati partner if you want to do business in Dubai, right?”

“Ya,” says Suli, reluctantly.

“Okay, so Teck works for us now. Us. That’s you and me. Don’t forget that. He trained you to be a soldier in Iraq. Now you train him to be an oil industry action man in Dubai.”

## Brad Moore's Dream

Next morning, as the sun casts its first rays across the beaches of Dubai, Brad Moore tosses in his bed, his head swimming in a bizarre and disturbing dream.

He is on Lala Island, barefoot, in a business suit, surrounded by frenetic activity. Over a phone, a man is yelling at him in Arabic, demanding to know where the oil is. Despite all the drills drilling, trucks rumbling and money being spent, there is no oil to be seen. As Brad Moore argues with the Arab, newly hatched seabird chicks crawl out of his suit sleeves. Their unformed bodies bristle with stubby feathers; their dark, bulging eyes still closed. Brad Moore squirms as their bulbous bodies fall onto the sand and squish between his toes.

Huge, dark skinned islander men avidly chopped at Lala's trees with axes. Over

and over they chop, but the trees won't fall. There are seabirds trying vainly to protect their nests by dive-bombing the workers. The damn wildlife on Lala is hampering every effort.

Across the island, bulldozers dig up the ground. But every bucket-load of dirt they dig turns into a bucket-load of baby turtles, spilling out and crawling in all directions.

Teck is in the dream, too. With his 'Baby Uzi' machine gun - the one that he got from his Dad on his tenth birthday - he is shooting baby turtles as fast as the bullets can leave the barrel. But no matter how fast Teck shoots the baby turtles, they keep crawling out of the ground. It is as though the entire island is a hatching turtle nest.

Suli is there too. He has been cloned and there are dozens of him with flamethrowers marching along the beach. They belch great gouts of orange flame at monstrous coconut crabs that crawl out of the sea with their great

coconut-cracking claws snapping in unison.

All around run hundreds of poor native children dressed in rags. They scoop up the roasted crabs and flame-grilled turtles, shouting, “Hoorah for Peking Petroleum! Hoorah!”

Overhead is a helicopter with a camera crew collecting vision of the events playing out on the island. Floating in mid-air, in front of the camera, is Madeline Obst, the former Vice President of Corporate Communications for Storm Front Security. She’s putting a positive spin on things, “The Peking Petroleum ecological management program is an exemplary demonstration of sustainability in action; setting a new global benchmark in environmental excellence and sustainable development for the people of the South Pacific.” Suddenly, from the kilometer-high oil derrick in the center of the island, comes a violent rumbling noise like an

earthquake. A wildcat rumbles up the drill stem. Suddenly, oil erupts in a massive surge, shooting into the sky and falling over the island like thick, black rain.

As the sticky fluid cascades over the workers and the frustrating wildlife, the drops find their way onto the army of Sulis with their flamethrowers. Instantly, the whole island erupts with the percussion of a fuel-air explosion. A vast, orange, roiling mushroom cloud rises into the air. Pressurized, burning oil bellows from the derrick with an earsplitting roar, like a jet engine – its radiant heat making the air glow orange. Singed and smoking, Brad Moore staggers around, drenched in the black sticky liquid with bits of busted-up seabirds between his toes. He watches as every living thing on the island, the children, men, the crabs and the baby turtles march into the terrifying inferno and are swept up in its ferocious heat and turned to carbon gas.

A team of men wearing oily coveralls advance on the flame with a long metal pole, trying to cap off the flow of oil. However, the heat of the oil fire prevents them from getting close enough.

Suddenly, the madness is punctuated by a loud beeping noise. It screeches on and on and Brad Moore wildly thrashes around trying to turn it off.

Brad Moore wakes, bathed in sweat and looks at the alarm clock blaring on the table next to his bed. The dream reverberates in his head while he showers and as he drives into work.

It is not until he arrives in his office to see the notes that he had made for the day that he remembers that he is getting Teck back. That thought settles him considerably. There is simply no problem in the oil industry that can't be solved by the appropriate application of

mass murder.

## Scolded by Kuwaitis

Later that day, Brad Moore and Suli are sitting in the boardroom of a plush office building in Abu Dhabi at the meeting that Suli had set up with the Peking Petroleum investors. They watch as five Kuwaiti men in white robes argue amongst themselves in Arabic. Brad Moore doesn't know what they are saying. He doubts that Suli does either. The room is opulent but the air is tense.

Aswan is the leader and he speaks British Private School English. He addresses Brad Moore directly. "Mr. Moore. It is our concern that if the oil extraction contract is not signed very soon, the Fiji government will cave in to pressure from subversive forces and prevent Lala Prospect from



proceeding.”

“Don’t worry about that,” says Brad Moore, waving his hand dismissively, “The Government is the subversive force in Fiji and they’ve already been paid.”

“Green subversive forces,” says Aswan. He presses a button on a remote control and a data projector above the boardroom table illuminates the wall.

“Yesterday,” says Aswan, gravely, “Al Jazeera news network carried this story.”

Brad Moore fidgets in his seat. He glances to Suli for moral support. It doesn’t help.

A news story comes onto the screen. It shows a large town hall meeting. On the stage is a long table at which are

seated a scrawny Australian man with dreadlocks. On either side of him are two young Fijian children, siblings, a boy and a girl. All three look naïve and exhausted.

The reporter says, “Touring Australia with two Fijian high school students, Mr. Andy Harris, from the Pacific Islands Greenhouse Group, says that the oil industry is a serious threat to the Fiji Islands.”

Brad Moore leans to Suli, whispering, “Who’s this bastard?”

“Big green bastard. Kuwaitis no like green shit.”

“That’s enough, Aswan,” says Brad Moore, waving his hand at the screen. “This environmental propaganda makes me nauseous.”

Aswan turns off the projector and

places the remote control on the table.  
He fixes Brad Moore with a stare.

“These children influence the minds of people in the Middle East, Mr. Moore.”

Suli leans close and whispers, “Say about Teck.”

Brad Moore nods enthusiastically,  
“Yes, of course. Aswan, today we take possession of a new asset to resolve this problem.”

“I hope this asset is brutally effective, Mr. Moore. You no fix this green stuff. No more money. No more Lala.”

“Bye-bye bula. I get it,” says Brad Moore, despondently.

After the meeting, Brad Moore and Suli walk towards the Peking Petroleum helicopter parked on the roof of the building.

“Well, that was f\*\*\*ing embarrassing,”

Brad Moore scowls, “three million of my own skin in this game only to be scolded by a man wearing a bed sheet.”

“Maybe Teck go bang-bang on Fiji kids,” suggests Suli.

“Shoot the kids? Shoot the Kuwaiti investors, more like,” says Brad Moore.

He thinks back to his strange dream, “Whatever happened to Madeline Obst?”

“The liar woman? Don’t know,” says Suli. “Maybe Teck know.”

“Yes. Teck will know. They were still working together after we left Iraq.”

Inside the helicopter, Brad Moore has another thought, “Hey Suli, when Teck arrives, separate him from his guns, okay. Do it quietly, so he doesn’t know.”

The chopper lifts off, heading towards

Dubai International.

At the airport, Brad Moore sends Suli to find Teck while he waits in the chopper. Eventually, a car pulls up alongside. Suli steps out of the vehicle and opens the helicopter door.

“Did you get them?” asks Brad Moore.

“Teck in car,” says Suli.

“I mean did you get his guns.”

“Yah. Yah. Have M4 and Baby Uzi.”

“Good. Don’t tell him. If he finds out that you took his birthday present he’ll kill you. Bring him over.”

Suli opens the car door and Teck steps out. He is mid-forties, heavysset with short hair and a trimmed goatee mustache. As usual, he is dressed for battle: combat pants, boots and a tactical vest. He snarls contemptuously

at Suli as he approaches the helicopter.

Teck is one dangerous, mixed-up hombre, but Brad Moore knows how to manage him. The soldier climbs into the helicopter and Brad Moore sniffs the air that is suddenly infused with the stench of vehicle exhaust, gun-smoke and blood.

“Despite your aroma, I am surprisingly glad that you’re here,” says Brad Moore, enthusiastically. He slaps Teck on the thigh and a cloud of dust arises from his pants.

“They took my weapons at the airport,” Teck moans.

“Don’t worry, soldier, we’ll get you some guns.”

Suli climbs into the helicopter and closes the door. The helicopter alights, heading towards the helipad on the roof

of the Peking Petroleum office building.

“Did Suli brief you on our project?”  
asks Brad Moore.

“He no listen to me,” grumbles Suli.

“Come on Suli, tell him again.”

“Ok. Ah, Teck. Lala, big oil field.” Suli demonstrates the size of the oil field with his hands.

“Maybe I’ll tell him,” says Brad Moore, shaking his head despondently.

“Teck, we have a competitor for our Fiji oil field. A so-called ‘green businessman’ called Richard Holmes has developed an alternative plan for the island. He calls it: Going Green on Lala. We are concerned that he will win the hearts and minds of the Fiji Government officials and they will shut down our project. We’re looking for some new ideas.”

Teck doesn't think long before he answers with his gravelly voice, "Bring him to Dubai. I'll shoot him in the head."

Brad Moore slaps his thigh excitedly, "What did I tell you Suli. The man is a tactical genius."

Suddenly, Suli becomes animated, like he was sitting on pins. "Thing!" he says, excitedly, "Big U.N. thing!" He retrieves a document from the pocket inside his suit and hands Brad Moore a brochure for an upcoming event in Dubai hosted by the United Nations. It is called the Oceania Ecozone Symposium. Inside the brochure is a folded sheet of paper, a list of delegates. Brad Moore takes the document and reads the title.

"The Oceania Eco- what?"



“Richard Holmes. He come Dubai, look,” says Suli, unfolding the sheet of paper and pointing to Holmes’ name on the list.

“How did you find this?” Brad Moore asks.

Suli taps the side of his nose. “Big secret.”

“Suli gets his hands on all sorts of secret Arab shit,” Brad Moore tells Teck. “He can even get us a suicide bomber.”

“Good price,” says Suli, nodding sagely.

“Martyrdom for money. I love Dubai,” says Brad Moore. “Good work, Suli. Good work.” He hands the brochure to Teck and says, “That’s your mission, soldier. Find Holmes. Shoot him dead.”

## Lala Island

Lala Island is a tiny dot in the Pacific Ocean. About 800 hectares in size, you could walk the entire circumference before lunch, even if you got up late. If you chose to do that, you would arrive back where you started, hot and thirsty less than an hour later.

Despite the idyllic setting of the island, there is no crystal clear stream to drink from or postcard-picture waterfall to stand under and cool down. In Brad Moore's words, Lala is as dry as a camel's crack.

Despite being dry, the island is forested with types of plants that are able to tolerate the irony of being surrounded by water, and yet live without. Lala Island is like a dried pea in a big blue puddle.

The traditional owners of Lala live on a neighboring island that has a more consistent water supply. For them, Lala is a spare larder and a holiday destination. The young men periodically visit Lala to collect turtle and bird eggs. Sometimes they just go there to escape the pressures of being surrounded by other humans. Their relationship with the island has spanned many generations. However, modernity brought great change.

Uninvited guests arrive in a variety of watercraft. These included luxury cruisers with sun-bronzed men and women with expensive sunglasses and designer spear guns. At the other extreme, there were Asian fishing boats with disheveled and hungry crew. No matter which end of the wealth

spectrum, the uninvited visitors show little respect for the natural resources of Lala; and the island larder is mercilessly raided. The big fish and the *beche de mere*, the valuable sea cucumber, are the first to go. The turtle eggs, coconut crabs and seabird eggs are next.

For many other islands, a bit of plunder would have had little consequence beyond its shores. However, Lala is an ‘ecological hotspot’ a place where critical biological processes are centered, and the island’s habitat forms a vital function in maintaining the health of living systems that stretch thousands of miles across the sea.

Five species of seabird rely on the island to lay their eggs. The poor *Chelonia mydas* - the Green Sea Turtle

that has flopped around the oceans for 300 million years and probably has less than fifty years left - chooses the seaward beaches of Lala to lay its eggs. And the coconut crab, so odd to look at but tasty to eat, exists nowhere else in the Fiji Islands but on Lala.

It was the past human interference on the island, the establishment of coconut plantations, which created the opportunity for the coconut crab in the first place. For hundreds of generations, humans and the island of Lala happily coexisted. However, it was the additional burden of spear-fishers and poachers that threatened the island's biological integrity.

The traditional owners of Lala knew that their island was being damaged. However, they had no resources to

protect it. They didn't even have a phone.

The Islanders could not have imagined what was to befall them when a Westerner stepped onto their island and asked many, many questions. When Brad Moore first arrived he was dressed as a tourist – albeit a tourist with a bundle of geophysical charts under his arm.

Brad Moore listened carefully to the tales that the islanders told. He asked all manner of probing questions and they answered these as well. They could never have known there were hundreds of millions of dollars worth of oil under Lala and that Brad Moore, the Proconsul of Petroleum, had a brutal plan to extract it.

## Ecocide on Lala

In his office in Dubai, Brad Moore reads through the brochure for the Oceania Ecozone Symposium. Across the room, Teck sits motionless in an armchair, staring into space.

The Chief Executive types the Symposium web address into the computer and starts browsing. He learns that Oceania is the region of the earth that includes the South Pacific Ocean and therefore includes the territory of Fiji and Lala Island. What's more, Brad Moore finds that a key topic of discussion is the sustainability of the oil industry in the region. He doesn't understand all the ecological jargon, but alarm bells start ringing in his head.

Just what the United Nations had in

mind, he couldn't be sure, but they would probably frown on his plan for Lala. Brad Moore rests back in his chair, closes his eyes and imagines that he is on Lala Island with the signed production contract in his hands.

The first thing is to engage hired-labor to chop down all of Lala's vegetation with chainsaws and axes. The vegetation, and the seabird nests that they contain, are dragged into rows and then set alight.

Next, he paves over the sea turtle nests on the beaches with a trafficable surface to allow trucks and construction equipment to move anywhere they needed to go. With a solid surface in place, he starts building things: derricks, pumps, sheds and oil storage tanks.

He brings material to the island on barges and ships that steam in and out of the island lagoon, churning up the seabed and dropping anchors on the coral in the shallows.



Mechanical diggers and trucks drive over the reef flat and set off dynamite charges, blasting out a harbor. The blasting goes on for months until a hole is big enough for an oil tanker to turn around inside. All the blasted coral rubble is sucked up and pumped over the outer edge of the lagoon.

With all the equipment in place, Brad Moore drill holes into the island, lubricated by a poisonous mud. Into these drill holes he feeds kilometers of metal pipe that drive into the middle of the oil-bearing structure, like a long metal drinking straw.

To these pipes he connects diesel-powered pumps that would suck the oil out. The oil is stored in huge metal tanks, built where the coconut grove used to be. Oil tankers steam into the lagoon and moor in the blasted-out harbor to fill up.

Oil spills would be met with no consequence because the Fijian Environment Department is prohibited

from interfering with the Lala Petroleum Extraction Zone. This exclusion is a result of a hurriedly written Act of Parliament, further evidence of the synergy between a corrupt government and the oil industry.

Then, after years of pumping, when the remaining oil is no longer economically viable to extract, Brad Moore stop the pumps. He fires all the island staff and auctions off the equipment. Anything remaining is sold as scrap.

Brad Moore nods as he thinks this through. It is a sound plan. However, what he fails to consider is that the plan will reduce Lala to a concrete moonscape, littered with bits of twisted metal and corroding oil tanks. The soil will be poisoned and contaminated with toxic mud and spilt oil. A big hole, like a shallow grave, will be filled with years' worth of industrial waste, leaking into

the soil.

What would be left of the ecological values of Lala Island after this fate? Practically nothing. The coconut crabs will be gone from Fiji for good. The turtles will no longer nest there, and they are on the brink of extinction already. Five species of seabird will have their numbers drastically reduced. The biosphere would be smaller and species could go extinct as a direct consequence of Brad Moore's plan.

Brad Moore did not specifically seek to destroy the ecology of Lala Island; this outcome was an emergent property of his business model. Simply put, the ecological function of Lala Island could not be maintained without imposing a cost on the oil extraction activities. Nature stood in the way of the oil, and

making any attempt to mitigate the environmental damage would add additional costs to the operation. These increased costs would, in turn, reduce the returns for shareholders – of which Brad Moore was one – and that simply wasn't going to happen. The very instant that Brad Moore had realized that Lala contained recoverable oil, the ecological death of the island was a forgone conclusion.

Brad Moore taps the Oceania Ecozone Symposium brochure against his palm, considering that the people at the UN conference might think ill of his Lala plan. He becomes indignant at that thought. After all, it's not as though he wasn't paying for the use of the island; and he was going to give it back once all the oil was sucked out.

When the Fijians signed the contract they enjoy the benefits and deal with the consequences, too.

He thinks back to the meeting with the Kuwaitis and news story about the hippy touring Australia with the Fijian kids.

Brad Moore types the words ‘Fiji’ and ‘oil’ into a search engine and instantly finds reams of news stories about the Pacific Island Greenhouse Group. He searches for the P.I.G.G. website and up pops Andy, dreadlocks, young Fijians, and all.

It seems as though the assaults on his oil project are coming from all sides. It’s like being in a war and Brad Moore knows that victory in war can be achieved by winning hearts and minds, as well as by shooting bullets into them.

He recalls his disturbing dream and that Madeline Obst was in it, floating above it all putting a positive spin on a bad situation.

Brad Moore glances over to Teck, who is seated in a comfy chair, silently staring into space. “Whatever happened to Madeline Obst?” the oilman asks.

Teck looks up blankly, “What?”

“Madeline Obst. Where is she now?”

Teck looks anxiously around the room. His hands grip the side of the chair and his teeth clench together.

“Teck. What happened to Madeline Obst?”

“She quit,” Teck blurts. Then he stands and staggers out of the office.

Thinking nothing of it, Brad Moore googles Madeline Obst, the former Vice President of Corporate

Communications for Storm Front Security in Baghdad. He finds that Madeline is back in Los Angeles and that she has set herself up as a Public Relations consultant under the name 'Rename Communications.'

Brad Moore dials her number and gets through straight away. "Madeline Obst this is Brad Moore."

"Braddy! What a surprise."

"How are you, Madeline?"

"I am doing fine, Brad. Yourself?"

"Very well, Madeline. Very well. So you got out of the Iraq security business?"

"The insurgency wasn't the same without you, Brad. Where are you?"

"A petroleum business based in Dubai. You'd like Dubai."

"Well, it's great to hear from you,

Brad.”

“Madeline, there is a reason for the call. We have a communications challenge and we need someone with your skill-set to help us problem solve it.”

“Well, that’s my thing.”

“Are you still expensive.”

“Very.”

“Then I will assume for ten thousand U.S. a day.”

“Twenty. Plus expenses.”

“Fifteen. I need you here promptly, Madeline. Jump on a plane right now.”

“Seventeen. You left me in Baghdad just before it all blew up. How long will it take?”

“You will be home within the week. Sixteen.”

“I hope you’ll have somewhere nice



for me to stay. The Palestine Hotel had too much gun smoke.”

“We’ll get you a non-smoking room in the *Burj al Arab*.” Brad Moore says the name of the hotel using the Arabic pronunciation.

“I don’t know what that is.”

“It is the best hotel in the world.”

“Well, there’s a start. Sixteen five plus expenses, then.”

“Deal. I’ll have my P.A. send you a contract and travel details.”

“Good to hear from you again, Brad”

“Sure. See you shortly.”

Brad Moore puts the phone down, content at the idea of having Madeline around for a while. He likes her powerful Ying energy. She is like a nuclear power station with a Ying Reactor.

Teck comes back in the office, looking calmer, having washed his face. He returns to his seat and stares into space.

Enthusiastically, Brad Moore announces, “Hey, Teck, guess what? Madeline Obst is coming to work with us. How cool is that? We’re getting the ‘old team back.’”

Teck’s heart starts racing again and sweat pours off him. Brad Moore observes the soldier’s discomfort, “What’s the matter with you?” he asks.

The soldier staggers to his feet and stands uneasily in front of Brad Moore’s desk. “I need to go home,” he says, holding his arm across his stomach.

“Sure. Whatever. Tell Suli,” says Brad Moore, dismissing Teck with a wave of the hand.

Free for the afternoon, Teck drives to a bottle shop and buys a bottle of single malt Scotch whiskey. In his hotel room, he takes the lid off the scotch bottle and starts drinking until he is completely smashed.

When he wakes the next morning he finds himself lying on the tiles on the kitchen floor. The door of the refrigerator is open. He has slept the night in front of the empty fridge. The empty scotch bottle lies on the floor next to him.

He sits there clutching his head trying to remember what all the fuss was about. Then he remembers. Madeline Obst is coming to town. Strange, he thinks, he hasn't even killed anyone yet.

## Danny's Pad

In Townsville, Bren Hannan arrives at Danny's apartment the day after they had met. Danny is on the cordless phone talking property when she arrives. Bren presses the buzzer on the intercom on the ground floor behind the security gate. Danny checks the security camera to see a woman dressed like a fashionista. He studies her image on the monitor intently, greatly impressed by what he sees, then presses the intercom and unlocks the gate.

“Come in, Bren, top floor. The door's open.”

When Bren arrives in his doorway, Danny is taken aback by her appearance. She wears a bright green felt jacket with a white lapel over a cotton blouse. She appears nervous,

clutching a handbag that looks like a large fig. She seems apprehensive and Danny thinks that she might not come into the flat.

He apologizes for being caught up on the phone and she eventually steps past him into the apartment. He waves his hand to illustrate she is free to entertain herself while she waits.

“Want coffee?” he asks covering the phone with his hand.

“Green tea,” she replies.

“What about black tea?”

“Whatever. Do you have soy milk?”

“What about cow milk?” Danny asks.

“Just black, thanks.”

“Black. Okay. Sugar?”

“Do you have raw sugar?”

“Just the white stuff,” Danny’s confused.

“No sugar, thanks.”

Danny lowers the phone to his side and looks at Bren in astonishment. He is going to say “Are you serious?” but instead he says, “Okay. Give me a minute to get this Muppet off the phone.”

Danny returns his attention to the man on the phone, shaking his head. As he concludes the phone call he prepares the drinks, observing Bren browsing his apartment. She slowly walks around, observing his bookshelf, the view over the Magnetic Island and the Palm Islands, the plush furnishings, the art pieces and the massive in-house entertainment system.

Bren steps onto the wide balcony that looks over Cleveland Bay and the long beach called the Strand. In the near

distance, Magnetic Island shimmers like a dark, green crocodile sleeping in the sun. She can see a distant smudge on the horizon that is Hinchinbrook Island. A light warm breeze drifts past her, lifting her hair. She closes her eyes in the breeze and imagines that she is standing on the bow of a solar powered ship accompanied by a Green Prince. They are steaming into the sunset on a great adventure rescuing baby whales, healing wounded sea lions and painting new colors into rainbows. Bren inhales a deep breath of warm tropical air, feeling euphoria wash over her.

The touch of a finger on her shoulder snaps her back into reality. She looks around to see Danny holding out the tea and abruptly instructing the ‘Muppet’ on the phone. “Pete, final

word mate. Just f\*\*\*cking evict them if they won't accept the rent increase. It's a free market, dude, not a free ride," he snaps.

Bren takes the tea, grudgingly, feeling her euphoria drain away. She watches Danny walk inside and place the phone onto its cradle. When he returns to the balcony he says, "Sorry about that, Bren, how are you?"

"I am okay, I guess. Was that really a Muppet?"

"Might as well have been. Managing properties is like zoo keeping sometimes."

"Great view," she says, dismissively.

"I like it, it's my little castle. How's the tea?"

Bren observes the tea suspiciously. It is in a long glass with a metal clasp. She



takes a sniff and reluctantly nods her acceptance.

“So, ready for a trip to the Middle East?” asks Danny, satisfied that he has been able to meet her eclectic standards.

“I am ready to visit Dubai with you.”

“Great. Let’s get online. I’ve already made a start on the itinerary.”

Danny’s workstation consists of a laptop computer on the dining room table surrounded by documents and books. He pulls a chair for Bren to sit next to the computer while he browses airline websites and hotel booking agencies. He looks up to see that Bren is back at his bookshelf again.

“Architecture of the Ottoman Empire,” she says, with her finger resting against the spine of one of the

books.

Danny looks up with a smile, thinking that he could get some mileage out of her comment. Before he can say anything, she finds another book.

“The Lascivious Monk,” Bren says, surprised.

“Bugger,” Danny thinks, “she found the Monk.”

Bren opens the cover and begins reading from the first page, “Nature has gifted him with strong muscles and straight, well-tooled limbs and, since we are speaking of tools, this part of his anatomy was one of the good father’s best and finest assets.”

Bren stops reading. A confused look appears on her face.

“Right,” she says, replacing the book in its place. “Do you have any Lovelock

in your library?” she asks.

“Lovelace?” Danny asks, not really paying attention, “I might have a video somewhere,” he says.

“Never mind, Danny. Never mind,” Bren murmurs, shaking her head. She returns to her seat next to him and smiles in the way she does when she wants to put distance between herself and another person.

“Okay,” Danny says, “let me show you what I have.” He discusses his proposed itinerary, his choice of airlines and hotels. He asks Bren if she agrees and she shrugs in the manner of someone who is not in a position to disagree.

Next, he takes out a credit card and systematically pays for each of the flights and the hotel bookings. He

prints out all the relevant details and files the documents in a sleeve folder. It takes over an hour. When the task is complete, he hands her the folder for her review.

“Easy, huh? Just add credit card,” he says.

“You are not going to offset the flights?” she asks.

“Umm...” Danny isn’t paying attention. “Umm, what?”

“Offset the flights.”

“Right, what is that then?”

“Jet fuel is made of old fish, Danny and it leaves carbon di-oxide in the atmosphere. We need to get it out.”

This sounds like gobble-de-gook to Danny and he says honestly, “Old fish? What are you talking about? I have never heard of such a service, nor

understand why I would want it.”

“It is a part of being a responsible citizen, Danny,” she says, curtly. Danny starts smarting, like he had at the Heritage Bar the first night he met her. “The cheeky bitch,” he thinks. He grits his teeth for a second then considers that maybe she knows something that he doesn’t, so he lets go his frustration. “Okay, Bren, show me, then.”

“Go to My Clean Sky dot net.”

Danny eyes Bren uneasily for a few seconds and then follows her directions. He opens a web browser and types in the address of the website. A blue web page appeared with pictures of airliners and a google map. It is very brisk and professional looking and it has his attention immediately. He spends a few seconds clicking around

the site to

familiarize himself with the service.

Then he returns to the index page.

“Okay, so I dial up Townsville Sydney, Sydney Singapore, Singapore Dubai return for two people, right? So what do I get for my money?”

“Do it and I will tell you,” Bren says, flatly.

Danny enters the flight details and he sees the red line drawn across a map of the world indicating the path of the air flight. Once he has entered the flight details, a fee appears and the ‘Clean the sky now’ button appears. He looks at Bren.

“I would like you to buy it.”

Danny wonders whether it occurs to Bren that he had just forked out thousands of dollars for her airfare and

hotel accommodation. He takes out his credit card again and makes the transaction. After a few seconds, a certificate appears on the computer screen.

Bren jumps as he sends it to the printer, “Don’t print it!”

“Too late. Why not?”

“Because you don’t have paper recycling. You’ll just send it to landfill.”

“That’s what the landfill is for, Bren” he says, sternly as he opens some .pdf factsheets and sends these to the printer as well. He observes the horror on Bren’s face as the printer starts spitting out full-color pages.

“Tell you what I’ll do,” says Danny, seeking to calm the situation. “I’ll print these files so that I can learn more about carbon offsetting then I’ll give

them to you to recycle.”

“Okay,” Bren says smiling, “that’s a good compromise.”

Danny watches the printer deliver the last of the documents. He packages them into the folder and sits back in his chair. He looks at Bren, wondering how she came to be in his apartment giving him instructions.

“Are we done?” Bren asks.

“I think so.”

“Good,” she says, collecting her bag.

“So, what’s next?”

Danny flips open the document folder, “According to the itinerary, I meet you at the Townsville airport Qantas check-in at 0520 hours. How does that sound?”

“Very efficient.”

“So you can look after booking me



into the conference?”

“I can do that,” says Bren.

“Great. So, that’s it for now.”

Bren stands and Danny escorts her to the door of the apartment. He watches as she walks towards the lift. She presses the button, then turns, seeing Danny looking at her. As the elevator doors open, she smiles and says, “Thanks.” Then she disappears and Danny is left with a strange sensation that something awesome and new has just happened.

## Choosing an Aroma

On the night before the flight, Bren prepares her suitcase. This is a mission to be meticulously planned and executed in fine detail. Her first task is to choose what she wants to wear in Dubai.

Bren has lots of clothes to choose from, but not just any clothes. In her wardrobe there are no nylon, polyester, micro-fibre or any other synthetic material. Bren knows how to dress immaculately without wearing anything that made from ‘old fish.’

She has a distinctive style in her natural fiber clothing, lots of happy colors that no one could miss in a crowd: deep purples, sharp orange, shimmering grey and vivid cobalt blue. She wears wool, cotton, hemp, linen,

silk and many other natural fibers that most people have never heard of.

She even has a hand-made felt bra from the Katelyn Aslett collection that she wears when she wants to look ‘eco’ right to the last. Her favorite garment is a red woolen hat and matching pashmina shawl. It is the most sensuous, smooth material imaginable, blended from silk and goat’s wool.

It takes Bren over two hours to select the wardrobe for the trip. And that is just the clothes. Next, come the cosmetics. Bren reasons that women had been modifying the color of their skin and the smell of their bodies since the time of the ancient Egyptians, over six thousand years ago. However, most modern cosmetics are manufactured by big corporation who’s Directors would

happily torture rabbits if they thought it would increase shareholder value. Bren wants cosmetics, but she is not prepared to support the evils of the global cosmetics industry. So she hunts out cosmetics that are not produced from the suffering of innocent animals. She wants the world's best 'eco-friendly' cosmetics and she has the lot.

After her clothes are packed, she stands in the doorway of her bedroom and observes the vast array of perfume oils, balms, fragrances, body butters, body scrubs and Eau-de-toilettes. For most people, it would be bewildering, but for Bren it is second nature. She has to smell good for a whole week so she spends some minutes in the doorway planning her aroma.

Eventually, she decides on some body

butters based on almond and hazelnut and a small collection of essential perfume oils. These oils are the source of her power and they include French Lavender, Bergamot Calabrian, Cedarwood Atlas, Lemon, Peppermint Arvensis, Rose Geranium, Mandarin, Eucalyptus Blue Gum, Juniper Leaf, Ylang Ylang and Patchouli Oil.

She eyes the Patchouli Oil suspiciously. This is a powerful aphrodisiac that she uses only on those occasions when she needs to seduce a man into doing what she wants. She decides against the Patchouli Oil for the trip. The last thing she needs is Danny getting a whiff of Patchouli; he would be all over her like a rash.

Once the clothes and cosmetics are packed, Bren checks the clock. It is

much later than she'd expected and she suddenly feels tired. She makes a brew of chamomile tea and snuggles into her hemp and organic cotton bed linen, sipping her tea. She thinks of Danny and how strange it is that she has spent the past five hours packing her bags to travel overseas with a total stranger.

A few kilometers away, in his luxury apartment that overlooks the Cleveland Bay, Danny is dozing off to sleep thinking about Bren. He is still trying to figure out why he is still thinking about her. Danny has also been packing this evening, a whirlwind affair taking just under twelve minutes. At the foot of his bed is a bag full of global brands made mostly of synthetics, polyester and nylon but with some natural fibers as well. For Danny, there is no distinction

between the two.

## Driving to the Airport

On the morning of the flight, Trent drives his black Hummer to Danny's apartment. Danny tosses his bag on the back seat, steps in and they drive off.

It is only a short trip to the airport and on the way, Trent's phone rings. He checks to see who is calling. "It's Old Mate Conrad."

Danny put his finger to his lips indicating for Trent not to tell Conrad he is in the car. Trent weighs it up and then takes the call. "Dude."

Conrad's voice booms over the speakerphone: "Trent. Have you heard about old mate Delexion?"

"Don't say anything he wouldn't want to hear," Trent replies.

Danny looks at Trent with muted amazement and shakes his head slowly.



Fortunately, Conrad didn't pick up on the deception.

"I heard that some greenie chick conned him into flying her to Dubai to go skiing," says Conrad.

"Yeah. And he's going with her," says Trent.

"Mate, if you see him, tell him to watch out. Jake's sister knows her from Uni. She's like a green radical with a paying job. They call her the Greenhouse Gestapo or something. I know she's a looker but..."

"But twenty grand, right?"

"I'm here with Jake now, we counted fifteen. Is Delexion flying cattle class?" asks Conrad.

"Delexion doesn't fly cattle class."

"Of course not; so business class to Dubai. Flash hotels and meals. Sure,

twenty grand easy.”

“That’s what I heard,” says Trent.

Danny interrupts the conversation, “You wouldn’t like her Conrad, she thinks for a living.”

Conrad says, “Hey, Delexion, mate, don’t end up like Squid. Remember Squid?”

“Tell me about Squid,” says Danny.

“He got tied up with this Greenpeace chick who lived up in Cardwell when they were doing the earthworks for Port Hinchinbrook. You remember? Anyway, next thing, Squid’s got his ball-bag super-glued to Barry Reynolds’ D9 Caterpillar.”

“That’s serious,” says Trent.

“Serious alright. Barry was spewing. Cost him two days downtime.”

“Thanks for looking out for me,” says

Danny.

“Just letting you know, Delexion, if you get your nut-sack glued to earth moving equipment, don’t ask me to squeegee it off,” says Conrad.

“Ugh. Me neither,” says Trent, screwing up his face. He turns the black Hummer onto the airport road.

Danny replies, “I appreciate the sentiment Conrad, but don’t worry, my wedding tackle is in good hands.”

“Yeah. Well. You tell Trent to get f\*\*\*ed, alright,” says Conrad then puts down the phone.

“News travels fast, hey?” Trent replies, cheerfully.

Danny shakes his head, knowing full well who had started the rumors. Trent parks the Hummer outside the airport departure terminal. Up ahead, Bren

Hannan steps out of a Toyota Prius taxi and retrieves her bags.

“There’s your girlfriend,” says Trent.

“She’s not my girlfriend, Trent. She’s my traveling companion.”

“For now,” says Trent, checking out Bren’s attire.

Bren is wearing a bright orange felt jacket and a light gray woolen skirt. She stands out from the crowd like a Bird of Paradise.

Danny is taken aback again. “Wow!” he says, without really meaning to.

“You are going to have to be someone else to land that one,” says Trent, cryptically.

“What does that mean?” asks Danny, tersely.

“You know, international man of mystery, property hero, that’s not going

to wash with a girl like that.”

“Don’t diss-the-Lexion, Trent.”

“I’m not mate. I’m looking out for you. I’m just saying that if you want that girl you are going to have to be someone else.”

“Thanks for the heads up, wingman.”

“Give us a call me on the way back. I’ll pick you up,” says Trent.

Danny looks at his friend, makes a short chuckle and steps out of the car.

## The Lower Stratosphere

Danny and Bren fly from Townsville to Sydney to meet a flight that will take them to Singapore and then on to Dubai. In the Sydney departure lounge, Danny stares in wonderment at their plane through the big glass windows.

Theirs is the Airbus A380, the super-jumbo. The plane is huge. Danny observes the dual aerobridges that connect to two levels on the airliner and decides that he will take a tour of the plane before it touches down in Singapore.

In the air, Bren starts chatting about environmental stuff. However, Danny is too preoccupied with learning how the in-house entertainment system works to notice what she is saying.

“You are not listening, are you

Danny?”

“I’m sorry, what?”

“I was talking about biopolymers.”

“Uh-uh? What’s that then?” he says.

He hears Bren start to talk but he cuts her off, “Got it!”

“What have you got, Danny?”

“Look,” he says proudly, nodding towards his TV monitor, “I found how to put the movies on.” He sees that Bren is glaring at him. He clips the TV handset into its holder and pays her the attention that she is demanding.

“Your shirt looks like it’s made from nylon. Old fish.”

“Old fish?”

“Nylon, made from oil which is made from ancient marine organisms. Old fish.”

“What are you talking about?”

“It is a way of teaching environmental things to non-technical people.”

“Okay. I see where you are going. What about dead fish?”

“*Hmmm*. That’s actually better. Your shirt is made of dead fish.”

“And what is your blouse made of?”

“There’s no dead fish in my wardrobe, Danny. I wear natural fibers that are either grown on an animal or a plant or biopolymers. You can go back to sleep now.”

Danny puts the headphones on and checks out the movie selection. “What a strange conversation,” he thinks.

Later, Bren nudges him and he puts the video on pause as she starts talking again. She describes how she works with Local Governments and helps them reduce their greenhouse



emissions. This discussion leads to a broader ramble about a range of environmental issues.

Initially, Danny enjoys listening to her talk. He considers that it is like listening to one of those educational tapes that you can play while driving a car; a great way to kill time and maybe learn something interesting. However, as she continues, Danny gets an uncomfortable feeling. It is almost like he was being asked to contribute to a charity.

He resolves to be attentive and learn what she is telling him, but not buy in. He figures that once the charity pitch has stopped, he will be wiser and better able to defend against it next time.

Bren chats away freely and Danny becomes annoyed when Bren talks

about investments in renewable energy like someone who had never invested. He enjoys her companionship and her spirit, but can see little relevance in what she says. He eventually gets a word in edgewise and starts to tell her about property. He manages to get across a small piece of wisdom. “When you are pitching a sale to someone, the moment they accept the sale, stop pitching and start formalizing the transaction.”

However, Bren is not interested in Danny’s property selling knowledge and they end up talking about green stuff again. Bren is an inveterate environmental educator; she can’t help herself. She tells him about the carbon cycle and describes how a few gasses that occur in very small quantities

regulate the temperature of the earth's atmosphere.

“Carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide,” Danny repeats, nodding appreciatively, feeling like he is at last learning something tangible. He notices that Bren responds positively when he repeats her words, and he makes a mental note to do that more often.

Bren explains that human activities, particularly burning fossil fuels and forests, has changed the heat balance of the atmosphere and threatened to shift the climate into a new pattern.

“Lovelock says that we have given the planet a fever that will last 200,000 years and that human civilization won't survive,” she tells him.

“Linda Lovelace?” Danny asks, confused.

“Who is Linda Lovelace?”

“Oh, look, it doesn’t matter,” says Danny, anxiously hoping to shift the conversation away from the seventies porn star. “So, who is Lovelock?”

“Lovelock developed the Gaia theory. He says that the biosphere behaves like an organism that self-regulates the chemistry of the ocean and atmosphere to promote its own survival.”

Danny doesn’t have a clue what she is talking about and zones out of the conversation again. Then he becomes frustrated as she resumes her pace. Bren has a way of describing things in personal terms, as though these environmental ideas were more than just an interesting intellectual pursuit. She makes them sound obligatory.

Eventually, she stops talking,

concluding with, “You see Danny, saving the planet is a big battle, and we don’t have enough soldiers.”

Danny is caught in a dilemma. He feels impelled to speak his mind honestly knowing that he might offend Bren. So he chooses his words very carefully, “I get it, Bren,” he says. “Human civilization will probably collapse by the end of the century. I just don’t see how that is relevant to me.”

Bren is flabbergasted. She feels her normal frustration well up. “What is it with these people?” she thinks, turning her face away so that she won’t show her angst. Then she sees the irony of Danny’s statement and she starts laughing.

“Do you know what that sounds like?”

“What?”

“Imagine that you are being mugged and you have a knife against your neck and the mugger says, ‘if you don’t give me your wallet I will cut your throat,’ can you imagine that, Danny?”

“Okay, I can imagine that.”

“You just told the mugger: tell me something relevant. ”

Danny thinks about that for some time. But he still doesn’t get it.

## Looking for a Scotch

Later in the flight, twelve kilometers above the ocean, Danny is wide awake with Bren asleep next to him. He has been reading the My Clean Sky brochures and watching a movie when the in-flight entertainment system crashed. On the TV monitor, white text scrolls down the black screen as the system reboots itself. Danny sits there pondering what to do next. He feels constrained by the seating arrangement and decides that it is time for an adventure on the Airbus.

He delicately maneuvers past Bren, careful not to wake her. Eventually, he is standing in the aisle. He looks around the cabin and figures that he will find adventure at the back of the plane, where the air-hostesses hang out.

He walks the along the aisle, casually glancing at the passengers as he passes their seats. When he arrives at the back of the plane, he sees a spiral staircase ascending to the upper level. He walks to the top and stands in the service area.

There are three Singapore Airlines air-hostesses smiling at him and he feels like he is in familiar territory. So he invents a theatrical story about how he was looking for the balcony because he wanted to step outside for some fresh air. He soon finds himself surrounded by a total of six attractive and smartly dressed Asian women who are under instruction to serve him as a guest of the airline. After ten minutes playing the fool, he walks away chuckling to himself with two plastic cups



containing Scotch Whiskey and block ice.

As he walks along the aisle back towards his seat he observes the humans all snuggled into their seats. Some are asleep, others drowsily watching their TV screens or drifting off to the sound of music in their earphones. It is very peaceful in the pressurized aluminum tube, zooming across the lower stratosphere at 900 kilometers per hour.

He looks down to see a child, probably 18 months old, sitting in a chair all on his own. On either side of him, his parents are fast asleep. The child's TV screen is playing the Teletubbies and the child is fiddling with the headphone from which the children's TV show can be heard.

Danny is struck by a strange unease.

He is reminded of a story in the My Clean Sky brochures. It said that the first private order for an Airbus A-380 had been from a Saudi Arabian businessman and it had replaced his aging Boeing 747.

Danny had also read that at any one time there are as many as two hundred thousand human beings in the lower stratosphere, sitting on jetliners. Danny wonders how many flights the child would take over his lifetime, how many tons of carbon emissions he would produce. He wonders whether the child would one day own his own Airbus A-380.

As Danny thinks these things, he observes the other passengers. He looks at all the TV monitors flickering away

showing movies, music videos, cartoons with small fluffy animals, games of Backgammon and Black Jack, and news stories about movie stars. He is reminded of Bren's comment that there aren't enough soldiers fighting the battle to save the planet.

And he remembers Trent's false charm at the Heritage Bar when he said it was all hands on deck to save civilization. "Not many hands on this deck saving civilization," he thinks.

He returns to his seat and carefully steps around Bren who is fast asleep. Then he spends a few moments examining her in the half-light. He looks at the texture of her skin and the tiny hole in her earlobe where the earring goes through. He leans closer to sniff her hair, drawn by the delightful

aroma.

Danny sits in the dark sniffing the tang of alcohol rising from his plastic cup. He considers that the air travel carbon emissions information is very interesting and might make for a good conversation one day.

Then he chuckles as he remembers the conversation with Connor in the car and he thinks, “I am not going to end up like squid, with his nuts glued to a bulldozer. Just stick to real estate.”

## Sleepless in Dubai

After an hour in Singapore international airport, Danny and Bren board a plane to Dubai. It is a seven-hour flight and the plane touches down the Emirates at 11pm. By the time they have cleared customs, found a taxi, traveled the streets of Dubai and checked into the hotel it is past midnight. They are both tired from the flight. Without ceremony, they take to their rooms with plans to meet for breakfast.

The hotel room is luxurious and large. The furnishings are beautifully matched and the carpet is plush. The lighting accentuates the room and Danny immediately feels at home in the luxury surrounds.

He starts to unpack his bag and gets

distracted and he paces around the room for a while investigating the insides of the cupboards.

He picks up the house phone and asks reception if there is a bar open. He's told there is a bar on the top floor of the southern end of the building.

After a quick shower and change of clothes, Danny begins his Dubai adventure, starting with the Uptown Bar in the Jumeirah Beach Hotel.

Danny likes Dubai, so far. He relishes the luxury of the hotel and the brisk efficiency of the service from the airport arrivals onward.

The Uptown Bar is on the second last floor. It is a small bar with a row of red leather stools neatly arranged along the pale yellow marble bar. Sliding glass doors open up onto the large patio

where there are leather lounge chairs and tables.

Danny walks to the edge of the balcony and watches the bright city lights glittering across the vast expanse of dark desert. On the other side of the balcony is the Gulf and the Burj al-Arab, the world's most luxurious hotel standing proudly on its own small island, connected to the mainland by a causeway. Huge floodlights bathe the Burj in a green light that slowly changes to purple, then orange. It is an exceptional sight; vast architecture that broadly resembles the headsail of a traditional sailing boat.

Danny orders a Cointreau on ice and makes small talk with the bar staff who are from South America and Japan. After his drink, he walks along the long

hallway to the other end of the building and the elevator with the mirrored door. When the door slides silently open on his floor he has a second wind and presses the button for the lobby.

It is one of Danny's philosophies to squeeze as much adventure out of every day and that generally means looking for things to occupy his mind until such time as tiredness overwhelms him. It also generally means late nights.

He wanders around the lobby for a while, chatting with the reception staff, asking about Dubai including how to get a SIM card so he could make calls locally without resorting to international roaming on his phone. He looks at maps and menus and a floor plan of the hotel. He asks the Asian girl at reception if she knows anything about



the UN conference, but she doesn't.

He sees the Kenyan girl who is minding the door. He marvels at her shiny brown skin and how immaculate she looks in her smart lime green uniform. He goes over to her and asks if he has a spare uniform because he would like to try it on. She giggles aloud and then anxiously glances around and regains her professional composure.

"Tell me," says Danny. "Where would you go for a drink tonight?"

"I would go to a bar in Deira," she says, "but you would go to the Skyview at the top of the Burj al Arab."

Danny wants to take the Kenyan girl there with him but knows that he should not even ask. Instead, he asks her for directions to walk there. Better still, she talks into a telephone and

minutes later Danny is escorted into an electric buggy that pulls up outside the doors of the hotel. He is the only houseguest in the lobby at this time of night and he receives undue attention from the international staff who laugh at his jokes and go out of their way to ensure that he is entertained.

Danny steps into the buggy, thoroughly enjoying himself and is whisked through the landscaped grounds and along the causeway towards the mind-boggling spectacle called the Burj al Arab – the Tower of the Arabs.

He steps out of the electric buggy, thanks his driver warmly and then walks through the glass sliding doors into the Burj. Inside, he stands in awe looking up at the vast atrium. The multi-colored

pastel layers of architectural lighting take him aback. He follows his nose up an elevator next to a huge marine aquarium, past a black slate fountain, past vast gold columns and into a room of exquisite marble where there are shiny elevator doors. He presses a button and stands back, not caring what happens next.

The elevator door opens in front of him. Danny enters the lift and is surprised to see a south Asian man in his twenties polishing the handrail.

“Which floor, Sir?” he asks.

“Skyview,” Danny takes a moment to observe the gleam of the brass handrails. “That’s a good job you are going. Where are you from?”

“Sri Lanka,” says the young man.

“And what would you be doing in Sri

Lanka if you weren't polishing brass in Dubai?" asks Danny, honestly.

The young Sri Lankan man shuffles uncomfortably in his place. His eyes flit nervously left and right and eventually he meets Danny's. Danny places his hand warmly on the Sri Lankan man's forearm. "It's okay. You don't have to tell me," says Danny, letting go and stepping back a pace.

The young man considers his situation for a few seconds, looks at the floor of the elevator and then says, "I would be playing with my wife and children, Sir."

"They are here, in Dubai?" asks Danny.

"No. They are in Colombo. Back home."

"*Hmmm.*" The comment plays on Danny's mind and it occurs to him that

there are people and working arrangements in Dubai that his not familiar with.

The elevator doors slide open and Danny observes the hallway that looks like something out of a Star Wars movie set. Then he sees the vulnerable look on the elevator attendant's face. Danny doesn't know what to say, so he says nothing, just smiles warmly and steps out of the elevator. He moves through the hallway, into the Skyview bar.

On his left, the restaurant is flanked by a wide expanse of glass that faces the Gulf. Except for a few staff cleaning the tables, the restaurant is empty. On his right, is a bar that is very well stocked with just about every type of alcohol under the sun. Danny takes a

seat, reviewing his alcohol options. There are too many to choose from at this time of night so he reverts to the old favorite. When the bartender approaches him, Danny asks for Cointreau on ice.

A few seats down the bar, Danny sees a woman sitting on her own and his interest is immediately piqued. She is Caucasian, maybe mid-thirties, immaculately dressed with long mousey brown hair and wears a green leather jacket. She looks smart and professional; a female version of himself, almost.

He glances around to try and ascertain if she is accompanied by a male but can't see any evidence of that. The bartender returns and places the Cointreau on a bar mat. Danny lays a

one hundred Australian dollar bill onto the bar and asks, “Can you change that?”

“Yes. And I will give you change in Dirham.”

“Okay.” As bartender performs the transaction, Danny takes a sip of his ice cold.

“Hey buddy,” Danny asks. “Is the lady down there on her own?”

“I believe so, Sir.”

Danny stands, moves towards the woman. As he approaches, he can sense both intensity and calmness and he observes that she is not wearing a wedding ring.

“Danny Lexion,” he says, offering his hand.

Madeline Obst meets his eyes briefly, “So?”

Danny chuckles quietly. “Tell me something. You come here often?”

Madeline raises her glass, an elaborate Dubai cocktail. She says firmly, “You busted in, buster. Why don’t you tell me something?”

The bartender returns with change and counts it out on the bar. Danny pushes the cash into the pocket of his pants, “It’s my first time in Dubai.” He raises his glass.

“Mine too.”

“You’re American?” Danny asks.

“Yep. You?”

“Australian.”

“Never heard of it,” says Madeline Obst.

Danny snorts and drinks some more Cointreau.

Madeline adjusts herself on her seat



and turns to face Danny, “And what brings you to Dubai, Mr. Lexion?” she asks in a manner faux-seductive.

Danny takes a few seconds to frame his answer, sizing Madeline up.

“Do you actually have a name?” he asks.

“Do you?” she snaps back, immediately.

Danny starts laughing, “You know, you are the first woman I have talked to in Dubai who was anything by charming, polite and respectful.”

“Sorry to disappoint you.”

“I’m not disappointed, I’m...”

“I’m Madeline Obst,” she says, extending her hand. Danny shakes it instinctively, regretting it immediately.

“So what brings Mr. Lexion to Dubai?” she turns away as if she has no

interest in his reply.

Danny sits back on his barstool, looking at Madeline. He takes another slug of the Cointreau, draining the glass. He leans forward so that his face is close to hers.

“I just came here to get my head kicked in, lady. Thanks for that.” Then he stands and moves back to the elevator. He stares at his reflection in the perfectly polished mirror all the way to the ground floor. When the door opens, he comes to his senses and sees the young Sri Lankan man ushering him out.

Danny shifts himself so that he is between the lift attendant and the door. He takes the bundle of dirham out of his pants pocket and pushes it into the hands of the young Sri Lankan man.

“You are a very honest man,” says Danny. Then he exits the elevator and heads towards his hotel. He walks along the causeway between the Burj Al Arab and the Jumeirah Beach Hotel. By 2 am he is asleep.

## The Komodo Dragon

The next day, Teck is resting in the lounge chair in Brad Moore's office. From this position, he is able to observe the two doors into the room. His hands are clasped loosely in his lap. Silently and without motion, he observes a point of space that allows him to see everything. Normally, he would be calm, but today his heart is racing.

Brad answers his desk phone and okays his personal assistant to send Madeline Obst into his office.

"You can't keep away from that bitch?" growls Teck.

"I like her, Teck, for the same reason that I like you. She is heartless and effective. We need more people like that in this industry."

When Madeline Obst enters the office, Tech is unable to tear his eyes away from her. He squirms breathlessly in his seat.

Madeline Obst wears a white silk shirt under a green leather jacket and a black pencil skirt. Her high heels accentuate the subtle musculature on her calves. Her hair is thick and mousy brown, hanging past her shoulders. Visible through this soft mane are silver hoop earrings that twinkle under the down-lights.

Teck is stunned. Instantly, old feelings of lust and love and anger and frustration return, all jumbled up. He remembers the nights that he spent with Madeline in the hotel in Baghdad, during that terrible dust storm. He remembers every time she had been in

Baghdad defending his atrocities. He remembers when she told him that she had eliminated Teck Junior.

“Braddy,” Madeline announces warmly as she spies her old boss, “how long since...” but she doesn’t finish her sentence because her attention is drawn to the cold presence in the room.

She looks down at the soldier sitting in the lounge chair and her smile disappears immediately. Her voice rises. “Oh, you can get f\*\*\*ed, Brad Moore! I DID NOT leave California to see the Butcher of Baghdad in your office.”

“Hey. Something I don’t know about here?” asks Brad Moore, stunned by Madeline’s outburst.

“What the f\*\*\*k is he doing here?”

“He works here.”

“You didn’t do your homework, this

time, Braddy,” Madeline spits.

“Something you want to tell me about here, Madeline? Teck?”

“I just work here,” growls Teck.

Madeline winds up some more, “If I had known that Teck was with you here I would have never picked up the phone.”

Brad interjects, quickly, “It is okay Madeline. I don’t know what is going on here, but there is a bigger picture.”

“There is NO PICTURE big enough for put him and me,” she snarls.

“You were a great team back in the old days.” Brad protests looking for common ground between them.

Madeline starts to irradiate heat, as though the Ying reactor was going into meltdown. “The good old days, hey Brad? You didn’t stick around for the

insurgency. You don't know what he does."

She storms towards the door, then turns with her finger pointed at Brad Moore. "Shove your public relations challenge up your ass, Brad, there was no mention of this."

Brad lifts a document from his desk, rolls it into a tight bundle and pounds it on the desk. "You've signed a contract!"

"What am I covering for this time? Has he napalmed a hospital?"

Holding Madeline's contract toward the soldier, Brad Moore announces sternly, "Teck is Head of Security with Peking Petroleum. This is the only time you need meet."

Madeline speaks very fast, "I am not covering for that mad man. I will be



crystal clear about that right now. If you want to go to court over the contract, I'll see you there."

"Last time you need meet," Brad repeats, glaring at her. He becomes conciliatory. "You are covering for Peking Petroleum, not for Teck."

"Then why is he here?" she barks.

"I want the whole to be understood by the sum of the parts. I don't want anyone caught in the crossfire," says Brad Moore.

"More like a sick social experiment," Madeline snarls, "are you going to take responsibility for the outcome?"

She turns her focus on the soldier in the armchair. She glares into his impassive eyes. It's like looking into the empty soul of a Komodo dragon.

Madeline stands in the doorway,

breathless. She looks back to Brad Moore and takes three slow steps towards him. Pointing a perfectly manicured finger at him again, she says, “This is the last time I work with you, Brad Moore. We are finished. You have dragged me back to Baghdad.”

“Then do your work and go home,” he says.

“And what am I here for?”

“We have a South Pacific project needs some interpretation.”

Teck adjusts himself in his chair and catches Madeline’s attention. For a long second, they wait on each other. Then soldier makes a slight facial expression to pre-empt a single word, “Lala.”

Brad interjects before Madeline explodes. He is so over this bullshit. He smacks the contract papers onto the

desk three times. Bam! Bam! Bam!

“Madeline! Concentrate! We have a black gold project being white-anted by greenies. They want to plant an oil crop on my oil field. Do you get the irony of that?” Brad Moore’s voice booms across the office.

He continues, “Meanwhile, here in Dubai we have a U.N. conference on the sustainable development of the Oceania Ecozone, whatever the f\*\*k that actually is!”

Brad becomes light-headed from shouting and he grips the side of the desk to stop himself falling. “If anyone can tell me what an Oceania Ecozone actually is, I would be very appreciative,” he says.

Teck stirs uncomfortably in his seat. That’s not the sort of thing he is

required to know.

“Moving on,” continues Brad Moore, speaking slowly, “in Australia, some scrawny hippy is dragging baby-faced Fiji islanders from one press conference to the next with a boo-hoo story about the sea level rising. The hippy is getting international media attention, Madeline. It’s on Al Jazeera news. To quote Suli, my half-witted half-breed of a business partner, Kuwaiti investors don’t want to know about greenhouse shit.”

Brad Moore’s heart is pounding. He wants Madeline to indicate that she understands. She nods slowly, a grave expression on her face.

Brad Moore continues, “Teck will take care of the business man. You look after the hippy. Bring him to Dubai, Madeline. Spin him to the media. Make

him tell the world what we want him to say.”

“What is the hippy’s name?” asks Madeline.

“Just google PIGG,” says Brad Moore.

“Googlepig?” Madeline asks, incredulously, screwing up her face.

“Not googlepig!” Brad Moore shouts, “Google. The verb. PIGG. P-I-G-G. Google PIGG. Google the word PIGG, it is perfectly simple!” Brad Moore clutches his hand to his throat and coughs repeatedly.

When he regains his breath, he continues with his voice hoarse.

“Madeline, the hippy’s name is Andy and his organization is called PIGG.

There is a workstation for you in the back office. Clear everything with me.

Get on it straight away.”

He waves her away and then fixes his eyes on the Head of Security, “And Teck, stay the f\*\*k out of her way.”

## Memories of Baghdad

Madeline locates the workstation at the back of the Peking Petroleum office, angry at having seen Teck and having Brad Moore shout at her.

She stares blankly at the computer monitor, her mind pounding with old memories that she had thought were forgotten. She then slumps forward with her palms pushed into her eyes and numbly finds herself drawn back in time.

She is in Baghdad when a huge sandstorm covers the city in a blanket of orange dust. All the normal activities of security guards, soldiers, and insurgents grind to a halt and everyone stays indoors. It is simply too dangerous to go to war.

Madeline is driven to the Palestine Hotel, one of the few places that are 'safe' for Westerners. She staggers,

exhausted, into the lobby, followed by Teck who, at this time, is Brad Moore's personal bodyguard. At the reception desk, Madeline swoons and Teck grips her under the arm, holding her up. Teck's mobile rings and he listens to the voice on the phone then passes it to her. It is Brad Moore calling, "Hi Maddy. How do you like Baghdad?"

"The car got shot twice," she gasps.

"Exciting, huh? This storm's a big one. You'll be here a while."

"You don't know what it is like being me right now," she stammers.

"Relax, Maddy. The baddies knock off for sand storms. It's a cultural thing."

A loud explosion outside is followed by screams and gunfire. A soldier staggers into the lobby surrounded by orange dust. The blast makes Madeline jump and a heel snaps off her shoe. Teck grips her arm even tighter.

"If you leave me here alone, I quit," she pleads into the phone.



“Alright. I’ll have Teck to stay with you.”

Madeline hands the phone back to Teck. He listens, grunts and then puts the phone in his pocket. He looks down to where his hand is gripped under Madeline’s breast, then into her eyes.

There is a moment between them, a sort of mutual desperation. Then Teck picks her up, drapes her over his shoulder and carries her up the stairs to her hotel room.

For three days Madeline is trapped in a bullet-ridden room with faltering air-conditioning. An unnerving orange glow seeps in from the windows like an ominous, toxic fog. Unable to work, unable to sleep, unable to think straight, Madeline finds herself in a frightening new state of mind. By way of remaining sane, she spends three days in a drunken orgy of sex and gin and tonic with Teck. Eventually, the dust storm lifts and the soldiers and suicide bombers go back to work. Madeline staggers out of the

Palestine hotel and into the Storm Front truck. Then she gets on the company jet and returns to America.

Back home, Madeline commences her routine for 'coming down' from Baghdad. This includes facials, manippeddies, Japanese food and lots of sleep. However, this time, she notices an odd sensation, a poignant nausea.

She starts having strange dreams of dwarf security guards who share her mannerisms. She wakes from one of these dreams screaming and comes to the horrific conclusion that she has a piece of the Baghdad insurgency growing inside her. Like a good soldier, she terminates the insurgent at the first opportunity.

On her next trip to Baghdad, Teck follows her around, like a puppy dog looking for affection. Madeline tells him plainly and firmly that there is nothing more between them. He takes this news with an emotionless scowl, but over the following weeks his heartache grows

and grows.

Then there is a change in leadership at Storm Front - Brad Moore leaves for Dubai with Suli - and the new Chief Executive takes over. Madeline is back State Side and only flies into Iraq when there is a PR emergency to deal with. Teck is lost and alone. Before long, a dark thought flickers through his reptile brain and he knows what he has to do to see Madeline again.

Madeline wakes to a phone call in the middle of the night. It is Alistair Sally, the new CEO of Stormfront Security calling from Baghdad. He sounds panicked. He explains that there has been a massacre of civilians by Storm Front personnel and it is Madeline's job to come to Baghdad and put a positive spin on things. This is the first of many such events.

Over and over, Madeline is dragged from the US to Iraq to defend Storm Front from Teck's handy-work: the dead civilians sprawled on the sidewalk

or in cars riddled with bullet holes and awash with blood.

Madeline pleads with the new Chief Executive to fire Teck, but she is told that he is just too valuable an asset in the crisis. Teck simply requires regular interpretation.

Eventually, Madeline's employment contract with Storm Front expires. She considers going on a long holiday, but chooses instead to keep busy and establish herself as a Communications Consultant, specializing in anything other than Security or Iraq. After years of torment, Madeline becomes the gun for hire.

When she takes the call from Brad Moore inviting her to work in Dubai, she is delighted. Brad Moore is the only good thing that she remembers of her time in Baghdad. She thinks that maybe some face time with the old Chief Executive will help heal the emotional wounds of the experience. That is clearly an incorrect assumption on her

part.

Madeline looks up from her hands, exhausted. She looks out the window at the traffic streaming along Sheik Zayed Road and shakes her head ruefully. “Do the work and go home,” she resolves.

## Googling PIGG

“Start with the end in mind,” Madeline thinks. She wants the environmental activists – the PIGGs – to tell the world’s media that petroleum oil is actually good, and that the lives of Fijians can only get better with the oil industry working for them. From this, she considers all the steps necessary to get them to that point.

She researches PIGG on the internet. She finds their website and learns that the name is a contraction of the ‘Pacific Islands Greenhouse Group.’ She finds herself chuckling and saying out loud, “Great branding, Andy the PIGG.”

She reviews the web site observing the clumsy graphic design and the spelling mistakes, and she reviews every press release and subsequent piece of earned

media she can find. Madeline soon forms an opinion of PIGG: they are passionate amateurs who have got had some luck with the media on some quiet news days.

Madeline prints and files everything then starts ringing around Dubai. She talks with media consultants and travel agencies, hotels and taxi firms. Over the period of the afternoon she identifies all the skills and services she needs.

Finally, she drafts a five-page brief with a spreadsheet for budget items titled ‘PIGG on a Spit’.

Brad Moore likes the plan instantly. “When can we get the PIGGs here?” he asks.

“There’s a flight leaves in a few hours if they agree to come.”

Brad Moore places a Peking

Petroleum credit card on the desk and slides it towards her. “This will cover the outlays. If you need an inducement, offer to take them snow skiing.”

“Snow skiing?” says Madeline, “it’s a desert.”

“It was a desert. Now it’s Dubai. Get them here straight away, Madeline. There is a lot riding on this.”

Madeline takes the credit card and returns to her workstation. Then she places a call to Andy the PIGG.

In Australia, Andy wakes to the sound of a ringing phone on the sofa in the lounge room of a ramshackle old house. Daylight enters around the edge of the curtains. On the walls are posters of Che Guevera, cannabis leaves and a Japanese whaling ship ramming the Sea Shepherd trimaran, Ady Gil. On the



floor, lying on mattresses next to his sofa, are two young Fijian ambassadors of the planet. They are fast asleep.

Worn out.

Andy locates his mobile and sits rubbing his eyes. “Who is this?” he asks the stranger on the other end of the phone.

Madeline has her feet up on the desk, looking out the window at Dubai, feeling relaxed and in command. “Who does your media?” she demands.

“I do everything,” says Andy, confused. “Who’s this?”

“Madeline Obst from Rename Communications. I am calling from Dubai.”

“Madeline what? What do you want?”

“We want to tell your story on syndicated cable networks across the

world.”

“I don’t know what that means?”

“It means, Yes, please, Ms. Obst!”

Madeline snaps.

“Well maybe, I guess. Sorry, where are you?”

“I am at the Oceania Ecozone Symposium in Dubai. And we have a breakout room set aside for your presentation.”

“The Oce-- what? Dubai? That’s like near Singapore, isn’t it? When is it?”

“You fly in four hours, Andy the Pig.”

“Four hours. That’s too soon.”

Madeline swings her feet off the table, and growls into the phone, “You think the United Nations is going to wait for you? Wake up Andy the Pig.”

“Wow. That’s really heavy,” says Andy, dazed.

“Listen here, Andy the Pig, I am calling you back in ten minutes expecting a very big: Yes please and thank you, Ms. Obst.” Madeline slams down.

When she rings back, Andy says, “You know these are five of us.”

“No, there are three, just three; you and the two Fijian children.” Madeline holds the line listening to Andy having an argument about the travel plan.

Eventually, he turns his attention back to the phone and asks, “Okay, so what do we do?”

After the call, books the taxis and airfares and organizes low budget accommodation in Sharjah, an hour’s drive from the Dubai airport.

Having worked for an Iraq security company, Madeline knows all about

Resistance to Interrogation techniques.  
She is going to sleep deprive the  
PIGGS. Then, they will do whatever  
she tells them.

## The Ecozone Symposium

In the morning at 8 am, Danny meets Bren for breakfast in the restaurant of the Jeremiah Beach Resort. The restaurant overlooks a large beachside patio with table settings covered by large umbrellas. Bren seems irritable and she doesn't speak. Danny eyes her with curiosity, wondering what he might have done to cause her bad mood.

This sultry silence is something new and he considers that he sees a new side to her character every day. He doesn't interfere with her thoughts, he just lets her be, chewing on a piece of bacon, looking around the restaurant.

“By my reckoning, we need to leave here in 25 minutes,” he says, eventually. “If you agree, say nothing.”

Bren glances at him and notices that he is eating bacon. She scowls then looks away.

Outside the lobby, they step into a waiting taxi and speed off into the Dubai traffic. Finally, Danny gets to see Dubai in daylight.

He rubbernecks at every spectacular piece of architecture and observes the clothes and the activities of the people on the street. A utility drives past with a camel sitting in the back. "Check that out. Arab livestock," Danny says, enthusiastically. He glances over at Bren and sees that she is still pouting like a sourpuss. "Did I do something to make you angry?" he asks, gently.

"You have been a perfect companion, Danny. Go back to your camel."

The taxi pulls up at the entrance of the

Convention Centre. Danny asks directions of an Arab in an immaculate white gown and they are directed down a wide air-conditioned marble corridor that seems a kilometer in length.

Finally, they see United Nations banners and a booth manned by a dozen frantic women surrounded by computers, printers and boxes of registration labels on orange and green neck strings. There is a big queue of delegates waiting for their passes.

Danny looks around to see a flight of marble steps beyond which is a security counter with metal detectors and smartly dressed guards with pistols in leather holsters. This is the entry to the convention halls and the Oceania Ecozone Symposium.

“This looks like us, Bren,” says

Danny, finding a place in one of the queues. He observes her nervously looking around the crowd.

“Danny, I have to attend to some business,” she tells him. “Can I see you inside?”

This is almost the first thing that Bren had said all day. Then to Danny’s surprise, she turns and walks quickly away into the crowd. He looks around for her as the queue moves forward, but she is nowhere to be seen.

Danny waits in the queue for twenty minutes, all the time looking out for Bren. When he finally gets in front of the registrar, he begins a tortuous process to get his registration pass, because his name does not appear on the list. Danny conjures up all manner of positive thinking and conniving to



convince the registrars that he should be allowed in. Finally, he is granted a security tag on a lanyard. Finally, he stands in the vast air-conditioned building looking at the pass, cranky and yet relieved, and wondering what the hell Bren is playing at.

Before he enters the auditorium he finds a shop where he can buy a SIM card and he calls Bren's mobile. He listens to it ring and then hears the international dial tone and then her message bank. He leaves a short message requesting that she call him on his new number. He is deliberately not angry or curt, but calm and informative.

Danny passes through the security scanners, into vast hallway adjacent to the conference auditoriums. Bren fades from his mind as he blends into the

crowd. There are hundreds of people here representing all the nations of the world. There are men, women, young and old. Danny grins as he remembers Trent in the Heritage bar saying, “Toot! Toot! It’s all hands on deck to save the biosphere.” Well, here he is, in the global capital of saving the planet. Danny Lexion reporting for duty, Sir!

It is a great spectacle and Danny strikes up conversations with whomever he stands next to. He discovers that everyone has a particular professional relationship to the challenges of saving the planet.

In one auditorium, Danny observes rows of tables with country names on them, crowded by people of many colors. On the stage, a woman is speaking about the need for

international consensus on the balance between environment and development. Danny finds an itinerary and learns that he is listening to the British Minister for Environment.

He finds a conference brochure that details three separate events over five days. The highlight event is a gathering of representatives of the Oceania Ecozone to discuss the sustainable development of the region.

“The Oceania Ecozone,” thinks Danny, “what the hell is that?” It sounds like something that Bren would talk about. And thinking of Bren, where the hell is she? He finds an elevated position and spends some time scanning the crowd. But she is not to be seen.

So Danny continues his adventure

alone. At a table leading into one auditorium, two women mind a pile of electronic devices. Danny makes a joke with them and walks back into the auditorium with one of the devices. He plugs the fitting into his right ear and fiddles with the dials. Through the device, the presenter in the auditorium is translated into Chinese, French and other languages. At the back of the auditorium, Danny observes wooden offices with big glass windows. Inside, wearing headphones, were the translators listening and talking. He observes five in all, young women, mainly.

He thinks of Trent when he sees this and he finds a spot where he can talk and puts a call through to his mate.

“Hey, Trent, it’s Delexion. How you

going, mate?”

“Hey, Danny! All good mate; how are you? Did the Carbon Cop put you in handcuffs last night?”

“No mate. Get this. She bailed on me this morning. I was in the queue for this crazy-ass U.N. event with her and next thing, she’s taken off.”

“You look out for yourself. Don’t end up like Squid.”

“Don’t worry Trent, I am in nirvana here. This place is awesome; there are hotties from all over the planet. I just need to brush up on this environmental lingo and I’m in.”

“Cool, dude. Can’t wait to see the photos.”

After the call to Trent, Danny makes his way to the restaurant and stands for several minutes systematically searching

the crowd for Bren; but there is no sign of her.

He buys a coffee and finds a table. As he sits there, trying to figure it out, he notices a young woman searching for a seat, holding a tray on which is balanced a cup of coffee. She has a large book pinned precariously under her arm.

“Hey beautiful,” says Danny instinctively pushing a chair out for her with his foot. The young woman addresses him defensively like she would any other stranger making value judgments about her appearance.

“*Pardon monsieur*” she replies with a thick French accent.

“Have a seat, darling,” Danny replies, ignoring her brash tone.

“Darling?” she and chuckles and then

takes up the offer.

“Is it French or English?” Danny asks as she seats herself.

“Which would you prefer?”

“I’d prefer French but I wouldn’t understand what you are talking about.”

She is in her early thirties, smart and sophisticated. All of a sudden, Bren’s mysterious disappearance ceases to be of concern to Danny. He watches as she arranges her tray and her book - The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment - on the table. When she is settled, Danny holds out his hand.

“I’m Danny Lexion, from Australia.”

“I am Jenny Quick. Sort of from France,” she places her soft hand in his.

“That’s a big book,” says Danny, “Did you write it?”

“I edited seven chapters.”

“You are an editor?”

“You’re an intelligent man,” Jenny Quick picks up her coffee cup and sips as she watches Danny digest her comment.

“And you have a lovely smile.”

“It is too soon, Mr. Lexion. Are you presenting at the Symposium?”

“No. I am just here.” Danny shrugs, not really sure why he is there at all.

“What do you do?”

“Properties. I rent buildings.”

“Green buildings?” she asks.

“Mostly white, actually. A few beige ones.”

Jenny Quick laughs spontaneously and observes Danny from a new angle, intrigued. She says, “I don’t think you belong at an environment event.”

“I am learning about sustainability,”



Danny says, resting his elbow on the table and moving his face closer to Jenny Quick.

*“Vous avez un long chemin à parcourir,”*  
Jenny Quick mutters to herself.

“What is that? Is that good?”

“I said it is a good thing for you to do.”

“You know, if you were to fancy a drink some time,” says Danny, cutting straight to the chase.

“In my country,” says Jenny Quick, “a man must have a woman’s trust before he has her company. Why don’t you ask me something about my work?”

“In my country...” Danny begins, but thinks better of it. He changes tack, “Okay. I keep hearing this word ‘sustainability’. What are we trying to sustain?”

“The integrity of the planetary boundaries to preserve human civilization. The former cannot survive without the latter.”

“You say that very matter-of-factly?”

“It is a fact. Seven point three billion people and carbon rising in the air. It cannot continue this way.”

“You make it sound serious.”

“Environment is not some little thing,” Jenny Quick snaps. She adjusts her book on the table, moving it away from Danny’s arm.

Danny reviews his approach, aiming for something less flippant. He looks at the cover of her book. “And these ecosystems, how are they getting along?”

“Not good. And the people who understand these things are very

concerned for the future.”

Danny adjusts his position and studies Jenny Quick intently. She has green eyes and straight dark hair that just touches her shoulders. Her southern Mediterranean complexion is coloured with a light touch blush. Jenny Quick observes him looking at her as she sips her coffee.

Danny realizes that his ignorance about the planet is actually a strength as it permits him to listen to women talking about the planet. As he sits gazing at Jenny Quick, she eyes him with curious suspicion. “You are very comfortable fawning,” she says. “But Environment is not for people who make light of things, Mr. Lexion.”

Her coffee is finished. She stands, collects her big book from the table. “I

have to go. Present my paper to people who may or may not care.” Then she offers Danny a pen and points to a serviette on the table. “Your numbers.”

Danny writes down his new local number and an email address and passes the napkin to her.

“Maybe I will call you,” she says, placing the napkin inside her book. “Or maybe not.”

Danny watches as Jenny Quick blends into the crowd. He feels humbled and somewhat taken aback at the brief exchange.

He picks up his coffee cup and immediately sees a petite blonde woman with a tray who is also looking for a place to sit. Given that the trick worked last time, he invites her to his table and he meets a new tutor.

The blonde is Michelle Tyler, a statistician with the United Nations Population Division. After a chat, Danny agrees to meet Michelle Tyler for a drink that evening, after dinner with Bren. Assuming Bren ever materializes, that is.

By mid-afternoon Danny has given up on ever seeing Bren again. So he spends the rest of the day moving between the coffee shop for chance encounters and conversations with strangers and the auditoriums to listen to the discussions.

He talks to a man with a tightly trimmed beard from the Worldwatch Institute. The Worldwatch guy works on Vital Signs, the journal that provides all the up to date information about the planet. He is like a walking talking sustainability fact-book. Danny takes

advantage of the situation and drills him for an assessment of the state of the planet.

“So how long have we got?” asks Danny, interrupting the human encyclopedia.

“Lovelock says that there will probably be some humans around once civilization is gone. So maybe humans will live for a long time. Maybe until the sun burns up the Earth, that’s several billion years. They call that the Long Future.”

“Well that’s not so bad, isn’t it?”

“McPherson says it’s all over by 2030 due to runaway greenhouse effect and the meltdown of nuclear power station cooling ponds. He calls that Near Term Human Extinction and says that we have already gone past the tipping

point.”

“And what’s your personal view on all this?”

“Somewhere between McPherson and Lovelock.”

“Great,” Danny says, deflated. “I have heard this sentiment numerous times over the last few days. It is always said so matter-of-factly,” he says.

“It’s a rational assessment of the situation of our home planet,” says the Worldwatch guy, “Do you have a cheery scenario that actually makes sense?”

Danny thinks back to his experience on the A-380 and the idea that there were not enough soldiers fighting for the planet. “I wish I did,” he says.

## The Whale's Eye

As the day's proceedings are winding up, Danny follows the crowd and finds himself heading for a taxi rank choked with delegates trying to get back to their hotels. He notices a bar down a marble corridor and decides to kill some time while the taxi queue subsides. Inside the bar he meets the Worldwatch guy again, sitting with a fat Australian journalist who won't shut up once he gets talking.

"Danny here is on a quest for knowledge about sustainability," says the Worldwatch guy making a stool available.

"Sustainability, huh? Did you tell him how much bottled water the Dings drink?" asks the Fat Journalist.

"I told him that."

"You've probably heard the story of



the Whale's eye," says the Fat Journalist to Danny directly.

"Can't say I have," says Danny, "I've got about ten minutes."

"What? Have you got to go somewhere?"

"Back to my hotel for dinner."

"Well we wouldn't want to keep you from your tucker," says the Fat Journalist, deliberately turning away.

"She's right, mate," says Danny, "I'll hear the story about the Whale's Eye."

"Alright, then sit down and get a beer. That's the way. It's pretty simple really."

As the Fat Journalist began the story, the Worldwatch guy gives Danny a knowing wink and listens in. The Fat Journalist speaks quickly and clearly using his podgy hands for emphasis.

"There was a mackerel boat called the

Ha’Penny fishing off the coast of North Western Australia. She fished with two dories, little boats, and in one of them was this nasty piece of work called Wayne Wyatt.

“Now, there was a humpback whale hanging around Wayne Wyatt’s dory and where-ever old-mate Wyatt went, the whale was there, coming up to the surface, blowing off its stinky whale breath. You ever smelt a whale’s breath, Danny Boy? It’s rotten!”

“Really?” asks Danny.

“Anyway, Wyatt had just joined the Ha’Penny and while he was a proficient deckhand, he was a nasty bastard. He was aggressive and cynical and within days, all the rest of the crew hated his guts.

“Wyatt had them all on edge by saying

things like ‘the flesh is more valuable if it is stripped off the fish while it is still alive’. Plus, he’d walk across the deck to where the bin was to throw plastics over the side. And he’d kick around the fish that they caught but didn’t want. The by-catch, they call that. And Wyatt nearly came to blows with Lou, the skipper, on a number of occasions, which would have been very foolish as Lou was a giant who would have smashed Wyatt to a pulp.

“Anyway, the whale had turned the tables on Wyatt big time, because while it was swimming around his little fishing boat, he couldn’t catch any fish and this was driving him insane with anger. Plus, Wyatt knew that all the crew on board the Ha’Penny were laughing at him. He hated being

laughed at. This went on for long enough for Wyatt to come up with a really horrible plan to save face and he shouted at the top of his voice: F\*\*\* the skipper, f\*\*\* the crew and f\*\*\* the f\*\*\*ing whale!”

“This is going to turn into something nasty, isn’t it?” asks Danny.

“You are right about that,” says the Worldwatch guy.

“You have heard the story before?” Danny asks.

“Two nights in a row. This guy is famous for telling stories. And this is his favorite.”

“Not just any stories,” says the Fat Journalist, “I only do environmental stories.”

“What, do you just make them up?” asks Danny.

“Make them up? Get f\*\*\*ed,” snaps the Fat Journalist, “I’m a print journalist. I hear them from the source, pump them up, change them around, put bits in, take bits out. I don’t f\*\*\*ing make them up.”

“And he makes some up. Hey, I saw a whale once,” says the Worldwatch guy. “Yeah, it was in a hamburger in Japan. I was on a nature tour.”

The Fat Journalist bursts into laughter. “Classic! What did they call it?” “The total eco-tourism experience. You’ve seen them in the sea. Now eat them up for tea.”

Danny chuckles, amused more by the interaction between his two drinking partners than the joke itself. The Worldwatch guy tries with another whale witticism and Danny becomes

distracted.

He looks at his watch and considers that he has been listening to environmental stories of one sort or another from the minute he met Bren in the Heritage Bar. What an extraordinary spectrum of tales, from the Mahogany Gliders, to the British Environment Minister and now a pair of cerebral piss-heads with a story about a whale.

“Anyway,” says the Fat Journalist, tapping Danny on the hand, “Wyatt had a bloody sawn-off shotgun in the dory.”

“Don’t tell me he was going to shoot the whale,” says Danny, snapping out of his own thoughts.

“You haven’t heard nothing yet,” says the Worldwatch guy.

“Anyway, Wyatt bought his dory alongside the Ha’Penny where the crew were standing on the gunwale watching him and falling about laughing. As the whale rose to the surface and let go a huge fishy stinking breath, Wyatt raised the shotgun in the air, and cocked it in a really deliberate fashion. *Clunk-clunk*. Like that. Then he lowered it slowly toward the whale, all the while watching the expression on the faces of the crew.”

The Worldwatch guy is nodding, looking gravely at Danny. “This guy is a real asshole,” he says.

The Fat Journalist leans close to Danny and exuded a beery breath in his direction. “Then he shot the whale in the eye! POP!”

“Not in the eye!” says Danny, taken

aback.

The Fat Journalist just nods his head. “That’s right mate, right in the f\*\*\*ing eyeball,” he says.

Hairs come up on Danny’s arms.

“Do you think that would have killed the whale?” asks the Worldwatch guy.

This interruption causes Danny to fall out of the conversation again and this time, he starts thinking about Bren. Where the hell is she? For the first time he considers that something bad might have happened to her. He frets on that for a while, considering a dozen fateful things that could have befallen her. He comes back to the whale story again and listens to the Worldwatch guy and the journalist arguing about the severity of a gunshot wound to a whale. Danny wonders what he is doing there and



where all this new information fits in.

The Fat Journalist notices that Danny is not concentrating and grabs his attention again.

“Nearly finished, Danny boy. Anyway, the whale threw up this huge mountain of water and all the crew on the Ha’Penny went ass-over-tit on the deck. There was a sheila onboard, Joaney, her name was, and she screamed so hard that she fainted and fell overboard.

“Then old-mate Wyatt rests back in his dory watching all the chaos he had made. He puts the shot gun in its leather pouch and lets it slip into the sea.”

“No evidence,” says the Worldwatch guy, shaking his head.

“That’s right mate, no gun, no whale, no evidence,” agreed the Fat Journalist.

“Yeah. No eye,” says the Worldwatch guy.

“It’s not like the whale was going to hang around with a wound like that,” says Danny.

“Have you ever smelt a whale’s breath, Danny?” asks the Fat Journalist again.

“Can’t say I have.”

“Stinks, mate, terrible smell. It’s off like a bucket of prawns in a schoolboy’s locker. You know what I mean?”

Danny looks at the Worldwatch guy who is shaking his head.

“Anyway,” says the Fat Journalist, “Wyatt pulls his dory alongside the Ha’Penny. He jumped onboard, and stands there watching the crew drag Joaney out of the sea and revive her. Then he shouts aloud, saying “One drowned, one sympathizing, one

standing there like a f\*\*\*ing Muppet, and the skipper's getting ready for some ultra-violence."

"Next thing, Lou, the skipper hauls his shirt over his head, tosses it on the deck, pulls his belt tight a notch and advances on Wayne Wyatt. And Just before the skipper turns Wyatt into a mangled lump of flesh, the deckhand staggers backward and he tells everyone aloud, "You know what? This reminds me of a ship, out of Victoria it was, we were after blue-fin tuna, and everywhere we went there were these f\*\*\*ing pilot whales!"

The Fat Journalist slumps back, exhausted, his face red. He is breathing heavily. He takes a long swig of his beer, watching Danny's reaction.

Danny remains in his stool, stunned.

His head is swimming, and he feels as though the room is moving, like he were on the deck of the Ha’Penny as the boat rolled back and forth in the waves. After a while, he notices that the Fat Journalist and the Worldwatch guy were chatting excitedly about the story.

They are arguing about the conservation status of Humpback whales and the implications of Wyatt’s brutal actions. The Fat Journalist protests that the Humpback whale is listed as endangered to extinction. The Worldwatch guy is shaking his head, saying it is just vulnerable.

“Bloody bullshit, mate. I’ve got the number of James what’s his name from the Red List, we’ll settle it now,” protests the Worldwatch guy.

As he listens to their boozy ecological

argument, Danny is struck by a strong desire to get into his own space. He muttered something about the taxi queue and steps off his bar stool. He doesn't want to make a formal goodbye, so he steps past the Fat Journalist and slaps his shoulder.

“Good on you mate,” he says. He nods to the Worldwatch guy and walks away.

The Fat Journalist doesn't protest Danny's hurried departure. But he is not finished talking yet. As Danny departs, he calls out: “F\*\*\* the endangered species, mate. Got to save face.”

## Bren Gets Busted

The entry into the Jumeirah Beach Hotel is a busy stream of vehicles and people. Danny steps out of the cab and the Kenyan he met the night before pulls open the door of the hotel for him. He smiles at her and she responds in kind.

Danny walks slowly into the reception area, enjoying the splendor of the building and the bustle of the crowd. Suddenly, out of nowhere, Bren appears, walking directly towards him. She is looking the other way and does not see him. Danny is taken aback and he moves quickly, taking hold of her arm as she passes. He swings her gently around so that they are facing each other.

“Hi, Bren,” he says, calmly.

She is startled and tries to walk away but Danny holds her back. She blushes, shuffling awkwardly.

“I missed you today,” Danny says, observing her eyes shoot nervously towards the doorway. “Are you off out?”

“Off out. What?” she asks, confused.

“Are you going somewhere?”

“Uh, yeah, yeah.” She glances furtively at her watch and then the lobby doors again.

“No dinner with Danny tonight?”

“Look, maybe we can give it a rain-check today.”

“A rain-check?” says Danny.

“We could go to dinner tomorrow night?” asks Bren, hopefully.

“Ok. Fine.” Danny steps aside and ushers her toward the lobby doors.

As she walks away, he says, “You know, I did check.”

Bren makes a perfunctory smile. She rubs her fingers over the face of her watch.

“I checked everywhere, but there was no sign of you.”

“Danny, can we talk about this later?”

“Do you want to just cancel our handshake agreement?”

“Is that okay?” asks Bren.

“I do business like that all the time,” says Danny.

“Thanks.” Bren turns and walks towards the door.

The Kenyan girl pulls the door open to allow Bren outside and Danny follows slowly.

“Kenyana, how are you today?” he asks the African door-girl.



“Very well Mr. Lexion. Is your friend okay?”

Danny watches Bren waving for a taxi. “She’s not herself today,” he says.

“Who is she, then?”

“That is a very good question, Kenyana.”

Kenyana moves close to Danny and whispers to him, “I think she has bad news from her friend today.”

“Her friend?”

“An old man. They were in the restaurant.”

This news comes as a surprise to Danny and he says, “Thank you, Kenyana.”

The African woman winks and resumes her duties. Danny takes a step back, mulling over what to do next. He sees a taxi pulling up near Bren and he

knows that she will not be around for much longer. He makes a frustrated grunt as he comes to his conclusion.

“Sorry Bren,” he says aloud, “but you bought this on yourself.” He walks up to Bren and opens the cab door for her. She forces a smile and steps into the cab. Before he closes the door, Danny lowers the window.

He closes the door firmly then leans into the cab. He is perfectly calm, behaving as though he had pushed the pause button on the universe for everyone but himself. He wants Bren to just chill for a second, just long enough to deliver his message.

“Bren, I forgot to tell you.”

“Tell me what?”

“I’m checking you out,” he says.

“Oh,” she says, “really... so...”

Danny takes a second to acknowledge the taxi driver, seeking patience. “I was just on my way to reception to cancel your room.”

Bren looked perplexed. “What?”

“I am checking you out, Bren.”

“Out of the hotel.”

“Yep.”

“But why?” Bren asks, astounded.

“You canceled our agreement about a minute ago.” Danny looks away from her, turning his head to see the Kenyan woman opening the glass doors of the hotel. He looks at the glistening metal, the polished glass and people from twelve different nationalities stepping in and out. He feels frustrated, wanting to be on the roundabout, playing with all the cool things out there, rather than applying discipline to one of his charity

cases. “Do you want to tell me what’s going on?” he asks gently.

“I can’t, Danny. It’s too delicate. I can’t do it.”

“Okay, Bren. I will change your ticket so you can fly out tomorrow afternoon. I will leave some cash at reception for when you check out for the taxi, whatever. You have a good night, okay.”

Danny stands and taps the roof of the cab firmly. The taxi driver catches Bren’s attention, asking her where she wants to go. She tells him to wait and when she looks back, Danny is gone.

Danny enters the lobby and takes the elevator to his floor. As the elevator ascends, pieces of the jigsaw start to align: the UN register that failed to show his name, Bren’s strange behavior

that morning, her meeting with an old man – whoever that was. Bren has ulterior motives and Danny doesn't know what they are. He concludes that Bren never intended to go to the conference in the first place. It is all a big ruse. But what were Bren's motivations? That is unknowable. She had cost him a few thousand of dollars but he is okay with that because he has discovered something amazing today – Dubai and the UNEP conference rocks! So he mentally writes off her airfares and two days hotel accommodation puts her out of his mind and gets on with his Dubai holiday without her.

Danny Lexion steps into the hallway calmly, thinking about taking a shower, changing his clothes having some food

and some alcohol. It's all good. He enters his room, flicks on the TV and surfs the channels looking for a news broadcast. There is a clatter at the door. He opens it to see Bren in a flustered state.

She starts jabbering immediately. "You know Danny Lexion, some people stand for something much greater than a holiday."

"Are you coming in or do you want to spit at me from the hallway?"

"Danny. Please honor your agreement and let me stay."

"Sure. Honor yours. Are you coming in?"

Bren takes a few steps forwards into the room then stops. "There is no CCP conference, Danny. There was. It was cancelled. I found out at short notice. I

didn't tell you that because I really wanted to come here."

"You wanted a Dubai holiday, too?"

"I have another reason," she says.

"Great. What is it?"

"I can't tell you."

"Can't is below the line, Bren."

"Danny, shove your personal development manual--" Bren takes deep breaths to compose herself. "I can't, Danny, I just can't."

"Bren, I am warming to this environmental stuff. I spent the day at a UNEP conference and talked to everyone I met. I am now aware of the miserable state of this planet."

"That's great, Danny. I am happy for you. Let me stay."

"It's a great story: all hands on deck to save the bit on the top; the paradigm

shift to the sustainable future. I love it. But it is not what I do, Bren. You have broken your agreement. What should I do?”

“You can trust me.”

“Trust you? Not after today? It’s time to make a choice,” Danny says firmly.

Bren stands with a red look, a mixture of fury and desperation. It is not becoming. She seems to swell with anger almost looking like she would burst.

“*Urggggh!*” she blurts as she turns and stomps into the hallway. Danny gently closes the door behind her.

Five minutes later, Danny is under a hot shower in his air-conditioned hotel room. The door clatters again and he calmly opens it, wearing a towel around his waist.



“You are a persistent woman, I’ll give you that.”

“Were you shaving in the shower?” she snaps.

“Not a good time for the Climate Cop, Bren. What do you want?”

“I need to make a phone call. See if you can come.”

Danny points to the phone on the cabinet. “Over there.”

Shaved and changed, Danny sits on the bed next to Bren as she hurriedly finishes her conversation on the phone. She is silent for some moments looking at him from the corner of her eye.

“Okay, you can come,” she says, slowly.

“Thank you. You can stay.”

Bren sighs cathartically, mixing up the words thank you and asshole at the

same time, so it sounds something like, “tharsole.”

Danny leans over and kisses the side of her head, more out of hubris than affection. He doesn’t linger as he senses anxiety mixed in with her perfume.

Bren moves away from him. “We have to go now,” she says.

## The PIGG Show

When Andy and the two Fijians enter the small function room at the Convention Centre they are exhausted. They'd spent two weeks on the road in Australia and the best part of a day flying to Dubai followed by hours rattling around in a taxi. The night in the weird hotel that Madeline has booked them in Sharjah was the last thing they needed.

Andy is particularly frazzled, feeling like he had been following instructions ever since he had picked up the phone call from Madeline Obst.

A young woman directs Andy to the stage in a small auditorium. There are a hundred empty seats and twenty drowsy delegates. Everything is stage managed apart from the audience. A

photographer fiddles with his camera as Andy and the two young Fijian's take their seats.

Manil is fifteen years old and has spent his whole life in the Fiji Islands until the day he flew to Sydney to meet Andy.

His sister, Pusan, is a year younger.

Neither Manil nor Pusan have scientific training, indeed, they are barely out of high school. For the purpose of communicating the message about climate change and the Pacific Islands, they do not need to know science, they just need to look noble, childish and helpless.

Manil and Pusan certainly look helpless, slumped in their seats.

However, their exhaustion has wiped away any semblance of nobility. Their red eyes are bleary with dark shadows.

Andy addresses the microphone in front of him and it feeds back a penetrating shriek and he struggles with it like he is fighting a snake. A technician steps onto the stage and they both engage in an uncoordinated struggle with the microphone screeching wildly.

Manil watches the clown act, unenthused. It has been like this for two weeks. “I’m so tired,” he says to his sister. “We go all around Australia, and now Dubai. Where is Dubai?”

“They so mean to us,” his sister moans in response, “I want to sleep.”

“No one here eat real food,” says Manil. “I want to eat stingray and octopus, not mum bean.”

“Not mum bean,” Pusan laughs weakly, “Mung bean.”

“I don’t care. I want to eat and sleep.”  
Manil lays his face in his arms on the table.

Andy knows that his Fijians are exhausted. Their arrival in Australia to kick off the PIGG Tour is the final push in a two-year campaign to win the hearts and minds of the Australian public and policy makers about climate change.

Unfortunately, Andy’s support network for the PIGG tour is characterized by ideology, enthusiasm and consistent lack of attention to detail. No one had properly considered the logistics of moving around Australia and organizing media events on a tight schedule and even tighter budget. No one had considered that Fiji Islanders had specific dietary requirements. Their

nights had been spent on the couches, and occasionally the floors, of the homes of willing strangers. The diet for the week had been strictly vegan.

Despite the difficulties, Andy had been able to get some media attention in each of the cities he visited – even a little piece on Al Jazeera, by a fluke. When the invitation to visit Dubai and speak at a United Nations Conference came from Madeline Obst, he felt like he had been vindicated. Little did he know, he had walked into a trap set by a master manipulator.

Andy begins his presentation. “Ladies and gentlemen. The small island states of the South Pacific are being flooded through sea level rise caused by global warming.”

Andy plays a short video presentation

and afterwards fields some questions for the Fijians. They are too delirious to comprehend what they are being asked, too worn out to frame a comprehensive answer. They were school age ambassadors, not diplomats. What did they know? A journalist asks whether the Fijians saw any future in the deliberations of the United Nations on greenhouse issues and Manil answers, “Maybe.” When asked what were their hopes for the future, Pusan drawls, “To go to sleep.”

After the questions, the PIGG show wraps up quickly. A woman makes her way to the stage. She wears a long dress and she has light brown hair in large curls that bounce around her neck and face as she walks. Silver hoop earrings glisten under the down lights. As she



approaches, Andy is struck by a combination of sexual desire, adrenalin, opportunity and risk.

“Andy, you have done such a passionate job. Congratulations,” says the woman, holding out her hand and catching him off guard. “I am Madeleine Obst. We spoke on the phone. How was your hotel?”

“It’s terrible. It’s like an hour’s drive away,” he protests.

“Yes, there was a bit of a mix-up, there. Sorry about that. Look, we want to do some media with you one-on-one. Rename Communications has close ties with BBC and a number of cable networks. It would be a great opportunity to get your story out.”

“But you booked us to fly out at 2 am tonight.”

“Yes, that was a mix up too. I am terribly sorry. We have a new girl in our team. She is not used to working with professionals. You’d understand that, I’m sure.”

Andy looks around for his young Fijians. They are staggering from the stage as the tables were being cleared away. “Couldn’t we do the media this evening?”

“Well, that’s an option. But honestly Andy, your Fijians look a bit...umm...worn out.”

“Worn out? We all are.”

“I wanted you in a world-class resort hotel,” Madeline says enthusiastically, “let me get you there now. I have a limousine here. You get some sleep. I’ll look after your flight itineraries and get you out once you are well rested and

we've done some world class media communications.”

Andy shuffles in his place, unsure what to do. He scratches his neck looking at the floor. Madeline glances at her watch impatiently. She has no time to stand around waiting for the hippy to make a decision. She needs an inducement.

“We'll take your Fijian friends snow skiing, Andy.”

“Snow skiing?”

“That's right. You are in Dubai. Desert one day, winter wonderland the next.”

Andy is unsure how all these things fit together. He scratches a different part of his neck and looks around for his Fijian friends.

“I guess. But I have to talk to Manil

and Pusan first.”

“Don’t ask them, Andy the Pig. Tell them.” Madeline instructs, firmly. “You are the boss right?”

“I am the team leader,” he says.

“Then, you’re the boss,” she snaps, “and don’t forget who’s in charge.”

Andy isn’t sure who is in charge, himself or Madeline. So he goes looking for Manil and Pusan. He finds them in the loading bay behind the auditorium, slumped in uncomfortable plastic chairs. He explains Madeline’s offer to them.

“Snow skiing?” asks Manil incredulously. He has never heard of such a thing. After some discussion, the two Fijians agree to accept Madeline’s offer. The opportunity to sleep in a comfortable bed is the clincher.

When she receives this news, Madeline smiles warmly and rings the limousine. Minutes later an immaculate, black limo pulls up in the loading bay. Manil and Pusan eye its arrival without connecting the dots.

They watch Madeline walk over to the driver and discuss with him.

“I think that is for us,” says Andy, as his Fijian friends slowly start to get the picture.

Madeline addresses them with a warm voice. “The driver will take you back to your hotel in Sharjah to collect your things and then drive you to your new hotel in Jumeirah. You will love the Jumeirah Beach Hotel.”

Madeline moves over to Pusan who is gaping at the shiny car. Madeline takes the young Fijian girl’s hand and walks

her to the limo saying,

“Pusan. My name is Madeline. I am from California. And I want to show you something.”

Theatrically, Madeline opens the door and Pusan looks inside. “*Ta-daa*,” says Madeline, imitating the prestige of a magician’s act. Except that this is no magic, just mind control by an expert.

Pusan’s face lights up with excitement when she sees inside the limo.

“Look it has a TV,” she squeals and scrambles onto the soft leather seats. Manil follows her, cautiously.

“In you go, Andy the Pig,” Madeline says, eyeing his dreadlocks with mistrust. When the three PIGGs are seated inside, Madeline addresses them formally. “I will see you at the Jumeirah Beach Hotel in two hours.”

She gets Pusan's attention by raising her eyebrows: "Then the fun begins." Madeline closes the door of the limo and pats the roof above the driver.

By the time they have reached their dingy hotel in Sharjah, the three PIGGs are back to life again, joking and laughing. Andy finds a cold beer in the mini-bar and shares it with Manil. In Sharjah, they rush to their rooms and quickly pack. Piling back into the limo, they are joking about their good fortune.

By the time the limousine pulls up in the lobby of the Jumeirah Beach Hotel, the three PIGGs are fast asleep. The driver gently wakes them to a sight of opulence. The entrance to the Jumeirah Beach Hotel features date palms covered in tiny lights and a dozen full-

scale camel statues painted in a variety of colors. One is covered in Gustav Klimt icons with a rich gold shining brightly under a spot lamp. Pusan stares out of the window of the limousine, her mouth hung open in amazement.

Madeline is there, surrounded by flashing lights, shiny glass and polished steel. To Pusan, Madeline looks like a Goddess as she rests casually against one of the big black marble spheres next to the hotel entrance.

There are luxury cars and expensive looking people being attended to by uniformed staff. Madeline welcomes them to the hotel and watches as all three stand in awe inside the lobby, staring up at the atrium that stretches 24 floors into the air. They gasp at the smart Kenyan girls who man the doors



and the elevators. Madeline lets them drink it all in. She takes Pusan's hand and escorts her to the reception desk.

Madeline explains that Pusan is a special guest of Rename Communications and that she should be afforded the best service possible. Madeline is authoritative yet polite and gains excellent response from the reception staff. Pusan is amazed at her new friend's influence.

Then Madeline signs the three little PIGGs into the hotel, whispering to Pusan to observe the way the reception staff are dressed and explaining things that the girl from the Fiji islands could never have dreamed of knowing. By the time Madeline's bonding session with Pusan is complete, she hands out three sets of keys. She tells the PIGGS that

she will be back at eight in the morning and that they are free to do whatever they want until then. She sits on her haunches in front of Pusan and places the tip of her finger on the little girl's nose, saying, "Don't be late."

## Another Plan for Lala

From the lobby of the hotel, Danny and Bren step inside a taxi and it moves off into the night. Bren sits with her back to Danny, staring out the window, chewing her lip. She is reconciling the fact that she has been playing a game that she isn't much good at. Danny has had her in check from the very beginning. She feels vulnerable and foolish to have inadvertently allowed him in on her secret.

When she finally turns to face Danny, he is looking at her calmly. He smiles peacefully, wondering what would be the outcome of all the nervous energy that radiates from her. She shuffles around in her handbag in the dark and retrieves a brochure.

“Read this,” she snaps, dropping the

document in his lap, then turning back to the window.

Danny looks at the brochure. One second it is in darkness, the next second it is illuminated by a street light. He shakes his head, amused by his new task. He glances ahead to view the pattern of the streetlights on the highway and then he gets present to the task in hand.

The Peking Petroleum brochure is glossy and slick, very professionally done. Below the title is the tag line, 'Empowering the World.' The most immediate visual elements are the broad grins of three native children, Pacific Islanders, on a manicured lawn surrounded by parkland. It conveys a simple message: you can trust this oil company with your kids.

Behind the children is a piece of infrastructure that looks like oversized playground equipment, over-engineered to ensure that it is absolutely safe. On second glance, however, illuminated by a different streetlight, the device is recognizable not as playground equipment but as a ‘horsehead pump,’ a ‘nodding donkey,’ the machine found on oil fields, designed to draw oil from deep under the ground. But this particular pump is not like the ones you would see in a real oil field.

Real horsehead pumps, the ones that worked for a living, are industrial looking devices with patch-work paint-jobs, streaks of rust and blobs of grease hanging out of their bearings and joints like industrial snot.

Unlike the manicured version in the

brochure, the real nodding donkeys creak and groan noisily. Some are accompanied by the sound of a nearby diesel engine spluttering away, providing the power to keep the head mindlessly and endlessly nodding up and down, up and down. Over and over the donkey nods, consuming an oil product to drag more oil from the ground.

Rather than manicured lawns, the real pumps were typically surrounded by mud, mashed up with tire tracks and reeking of spilled petroleum oil.

The pump in the picture is immaculate: glistening in the daylight, gloss white and with dark gray trim lines. This is a nodding donkey after Brad

Moore had a landscape architect

working with it. It is as false as the grins on the three native children in the photo. These were real Fijians but they had never seen a horse head pump. In fact, they had been recruited by a talent agency in Sydney, Australia for a photo-shoot against a blue screen.

Subsequently, the photos of the children had been superimposed onto the picture of the landscaped pump to create an illusion: Peking Petroleum cared.

As the orange glow of the streetlamps raises then fades, Danny reads the text that accompanies the picture. In short, it states that a representative of Peking Petroleum is like an industrial version of Santa Claus. It used the words ‘integrity’, ‘highest quality’, ‘enduring relationships’ and ‘prosperity’.

By the time Danny finally looks up from the brochure, Bren has got over her foul mood and acknowledges him. “I didn’t want to tell you about this, Danny, but you forced me.”

“I forced you?” asks Danny, sensing that he is being invited back into the argument. He mulls this over and then agrees, “Yes. I forced you.

What is this?”

“It is a Peking Petroleum brochure.”

“I can see that. How is it relevant?”

“What did you learn at the U.N.E.P. conference today?”

“I had an awesome day. I talked to all sorts of people.”

“Did you learn about sustainable development?”

“Maybe. I don’t know. I heard this weird story about whales.”



“There is an island in Fiji called Lala. It is an ecological hotspot. Do you know what that is?”

“Is it like carbon credits for a mahogany glider?”

Bren is surprised by this comment. She looks at Danny illuminated by the streetlights. He is looking at her. For a few seconds, the orange light rising and falling in the cab takes on a deep significance. There is a moment between them.

“It is to me, Danny,” says Bren.

“There are seven types of seabirds that lay their eggs on Lala island and turtles and crabs that eat coconuts.”

“Coconut eating crabs?” asks Danny, “Are you serious?”

“But Lala has been partly destroyed by the oil company.”

“There are crabs that eat coconuts?”

Danny repeats.

“Danny. That’s not the point.”

“Okay, okay, destroyed by Peking Petroleum?”

“The traditional owners lived on a neighboring island. Peking Petroleum approached them saying that they wanted to explore for oil on Lala. They showed the islanders this brochure.”

Bren takes the brochure from Danny’s hands and looks at it solemnly.

She continues, “The oil men showed the Elders a map of the Lala on which there were thin blue lines. Each line represented the track of their oil exploration equipment. But what they neglected to tell the Islanders is that the lines on the map represented a twenty-meter wide strip that would be cleared

for access by their vehicles.”

“Okay,” says Danny, sensing the tragedy that had unfolded on Lala Island.

Bren continues, “Plus, they detonated all these explosive charges in the ground. Do you know what explosive charges do to nesting seabirds, Danny?”

“I think I can guess. Why didn’t the islanders protest while this was going on?”

“They were instructed to keep away from the island during the exploration. The oil firm hired these big security guards from another island group. I was there, Danny. I saw it happen. They were really rough.”

“You were there?”

“I told you I ran a direct action group. We were only there a day before we

were thrown off the island.”

“Hmmm,” Danny mulled this over, thinking that it sounded a bit like a property development project.

Bren says, “Anyway, after the exploration, when the Islanders got back to Lala Island, they were furious. They wanted to protest. But how could they protest against an oil company based in Dubai. They didn’t even have a telephone.”

“Okay. But what has all this got to do with you?”

“Danny, just be quiet, I am getting to that.”

“Okay. Bren. Okay.”

“The Islanders received another proposal for Lala. This was a triple bottom line proposal for the island. Do you know what triple bottom line is?”

“Like an environmental proposal?”

“It creates environmental, social and economic value. The new proposal was to replant the island with native vegetation interspersed with jatropha and to establish a rigorous by effective environmental management program over the whole island.”

“What is jatropha?” asks Danny.

“Oh, Danny, where have you been? Jatropha is a plant that produces oil to make biodiesel. I thought that you read widely.”

“I do read widely. Just not about environmental stuff.”

“Well, that’s obvious.”

Danny feels his hackles rising at Bren’s curt tone, but he forces himself to be calm and not buy into her mood.

“Anyway, what is biodiesel?” he asks

again. The taxi hits a pothole distracting him from his thoughts.

“Are you still with me, Danny?”

“Yeah. I don’t know what biodiesel is. Where are we going?”

“We are meeting the guy who wants to save Lala.”

“Where?”

“A hotel in Sharjah.”

“Sharjah. Okay. Go on with the story.”

Bren continues, “The oil company really hurt Lala, but the turtles continued to nest there. The seabird rookery was reduced but still intact. The sustainable proposal would secure the ecological stability of the island, plus produce a revenue stream.”

Danny interrupts Bren’s story with more questions that he couldn’t

properly form into words. “But... but....”

“What is it Danny?” Bren snaps.

“Why, why, wouldn’t your sustainable guy just replant the whole island and re-establish what was originally there?”

“Oh, Danny, what were you doing at the U.N.E.P. conference today?” Bren snaps.

“I was listening.”

“Who were you listening to, the girl in the coffee shop?”

Danny coughs, instinctively.

“The reason the islanders accepted Peking Petroleum’s proposal in the first place was because they were poor. Yes, it would have been better for the environment just to replant it, but it would have put the Islanders back to square one. The only way to protect the

island was to establish a sustainable economy. It costs money to keep the environment protected, Danny, an ongoing supply of it.”

“This guy is a businessman, not a greenie, right?”

“He is a green businessman.”

“I don’t know what that is. Where does he get his money from, to invest in the project?”

“I don’t know.”

Danny sits upright and straightens his shirt. “So its a commercial venture?”

“Haven’t I already said that?” snaps Bren impatiently.

“I am not sure. What do the Fiji people think about all this?”

“It protects their island and gives them permanent jobs.”

“Permanent jobs?”



“Permanent, indefinite, ongoing. Their plan is ecologically sustainable. It doesn’t end,” says Bren.

“Hmmm.” Danny looks out the window at the buildings moving past and mulls over the idea. Drilling the oil is unsustainable. But growing oil amongst native vegetation is sustainable. It’s intuitively sensible, if it pays.

Danny’s thoughts are interrupted as the taxi pulls up in the foyer of the Sharjah Radisson hotel that is bathed in orange light. Danny sees a man in the reception area talking to one of the uniformed staff. He is short and skinny and badly dressed. He has a big black case at his feet.

Danny peers at him curiously.

“Is that your mate?” he asks Bren.

“That’s him,” says Bren, suddenly becoming animated.

Danny pulls a bundle of dirham from his pocket to pay the driver. As he does Bren steps out of the car.

“Bren, hold on. I don’t understand. Why did you have to deceive me? Why couldn’t you tell me this before?”

“Because it has all gone wrong, Danny,” she says, half in and half out of the taxi.

“Bren. Bren. You are running away again. Just stop.”

“What Danny?” she asks impatiently.

“What do you mean, gone wrong?”

“It has become sinister. The oil company put a huge lawsuit against him. That’s why he couldn’t pay for my flight to Dubai.”

“Bren, hold on. Who is this guy?”

Bren says, “His name is Richard Holmes,” then she steps out of the taxi.

## Richard Holmes

Danny steps out of the cab into the warm Sharjah night air. He adjusts his shirt and watches Bren skip up the steps. Richard Holmes embraces her warmly. Danny approaches cautiously, observing the height difference between Bren and this strange little man.

Holmes' hand is resting on Bren's shoulder but his short stature means that he has to reach up to keep it there. Danny is taken aback to observe them grinning like Cheshire Cats. He is reminded of a magazine photo of the Formula One motor racing boss and his former wife: Bernie and Slavica Eccelstone. The photo had shown a short, well tailored, old man with a tall supermodel. This scene is equally odd except that Holmes has no dress sense.

Holmes is pale and scrawny with a scruffy beard. He wears corduroy pants and a safari jacket with lots of pockets. He looks like he dresses out of opportunity shops and spends his life in airliners and hotels.

Holmes lets go of Bren's shoulder and sticks out his hand. Danny accepts, only to have his hand jerked around with an aggravated movement. He observes bits of green material stuck between Holmes' teeth. Danny pulls his hand away quickly, feeling like he has touched someone diseased. Someone who doesn't even know how to shake hands properly.

"Hello, Daniel. I trust Bren has briefed you on our project and our problem," snaps Holmes quickly, like he was interrogating a prisoner.

Danny grits his teeth glancing at Bren for support. There is none, just an impassive smile. He is on his own. Danny forces himself to be polite.

“It’s Danny, actually, Mr. Holmes. And yes, I’ve been briefed.”

“Well, come this way,” says Holmes without acknowledging that he had heard Danny’s reply. He ushers Bren into the hotel. Danny watches them go, shaking his head, annoyed.

The foyer of the Sharjah Radisson is a huge atrium. There are marble tiled floors, orange lighting and a pervasive aroma of a Middle Eastern perfume oil. Danny observes a forest growing from a lower section of the lobby.

Holmes walks them to a flight of steps that led down past a waterfall that fills the air with a soothing hiss. At the

bottom is a timber deck with a wooden table setting surrounded by vegetation. Holmes pulls a chair for Bren and she sits smiling sweetly at him.

Danny turns away, trying to regain his composure. He doesn't like being herded and questioned and jerked around by this man that Bren mysteriously dotes over. Danny realizes that he is being disempowered by his own interpretation of events, which go something like: I have been duped into meeting this stupid old bastard and I don't know how to get out of here.

There is no way Danny can join the table with a story like that. So he forces himself to find a more empowering interpretation. He looks around the Atrium and thinks, "I am in this cool hotel to learn the mystery of Bren's

strange behavior.” It’s not perfect, but it will do.

Richard Holmes talks to an Arab waiter and orders tea. “So, you know all about the Lala project, Daniel,” Holmes barks suddenly, taking Danny by surprise.

Danny takes a seat next to Bren and says, “Mr. Holmes, my name is Danny.”

“Very well, Daniel. Bren informs me you’re a successful businessman.”

“If you like.”

“Then you will understand the allure of an oil industry proposal to the owners of Lala Island.”

“I understand the interests of an investor,” says Danny, calmly.

“Of course. And these investments are tied to a market focused on short-term returns. Long term in economics is very



different to long term in the environment, you understand.”

Then, to Bren, Holmes asks, “Does he know anything about the environment?”

“I told him about Gaia Theory.”

“That’s a good start.” Holmes turns back to Danny and continues, “The global economy operates within the thin film of life on the planet’s surface, doesn’t it Daniel?”

“My name is Danny, Mr. Holmes,” says Danny firmly.

“As you wish, Daniel. Can you bring ecology and economy together in your mind? Hmm? They share the same prefix, don’t they, eco, Greek for home.”

“I guess so.”

Holmes starts rambling, “How long

does it take for an Island like Lala to recover its ecological function following the departure of the oil company? Assuming it ever does. What is the implication to the global environment of the consumption of the oil?”

Uncontrollably, Danny makes a snorting noise and his eyes start bulging as Holmes pumps him with questions. His story starts to slip back to where it had started. He fights against it, anxiously straightening his shirt.

Danny sees that Holmes is observing him dispassionately and impatiently.

“Am I supposed to answer this?”

Danny demands of Bren with aggravated hand movements, “he won’t even call me by my name.”

“Richard speaks fast because he believes that you are capable of

thinking fast,” Bren says, flatly.

Danny eyes her suspiciously. They are in on it together. He exhales loudly and indicates for Holmes to continue.

Holmes starts up again, “What is missing, Daniel, is the capacity to factor important ecological processes into the market economy. Greenhouse emissions, destruction of seabird rookeries and turtle nests are external to the economics of the oil project. Yet these elements contribute to the functioning and stability of the global ecosystem within which the oil project takes place.”

Danny shifts forward in his seat and opens his mouth to say something, but Holmes silences him, “There is no place for the planet in the company ledger, Daniel!” he barks.

Danny slumps back in his seat, nodding numbly. He feels as though he were being force-fed environmental economics through a nasal tube.

Holmes continues, “When the rules of global commerce were established a few hundred years ago, there was no need for these considerations. There weren’t many people. There was lots of untouched planet. The technology was very basic. But now, with two hundred and fifty human babies born every minute, things have changed.”

“Hey stop!” Danny is suddenly alert. “Say that again.”

Holmes is dumbfounded. He looks at Bren for help, “What?” she asks.

“I heard that number earlier today. From the Worldwatch guy.”

“It is part of the equation, Danny.”

Bren says, “Everything is connected. We all share the same biosphere. We are all going down the same gurgler.”

Holmes clears his throat. “Gurgler?” he asks. Bren shrugs.

“Okay. We are going down the gurgler then,” says Holmes, “particularly now there are economic opportunities for most of the world’s population to climb the ladder of development.

Consequently, humans are increasingly free to pursue the life of a movie star, with mansions, travel and the massive consumption of materials and energy.”

“Collectively called stuff,” says Bren.

Holmes stops talking and lets Bren take over to complete his sentence.

“It is the consumption of stuff that is killing the biosphere,” she says.

“Yes,” Holmes agrees, reluctantly, “we

are going down the gurgler because we consume too much stuff.”

The waiter returns with the tea and Holmes turns his attention to helping arrange the cups on the table.

“How are you going, Danny,” asks Bren.

“He is like an environmental machine gun.”

“He’s great isn’t he?” she says, enthusiastically.

Danny takes his teacup and sniffs the steam rising from the edge, looking at Holmes mistrustfully. He adjusts his story again to regain his empowerment, “I am hanging out with Bren’s crazy mate who is making very interesting connections with things I learned about today. That is a good story. It will buy me some favor with Bren.”

Holmes places his teacup on its saucer and continues talking, but slowly now, as though he were running out of steam. “What is needed, Danny, is a way of creating economic prosperity that works within the constraints of ecological systems. That maintains the planetary boundaries.”

“That’s because, without a functioning ecological system on earth, there cannot be an economy,” says Bren.

Danny shakes his head. “This is like David Suzuki meets Wallace & Grommit,” he thinks, “How do people get like this?”

Holmes has one last thing to say and he raises himself in his seat, wagging his finger at Danny like the conductor of an orchestra. “When our global economic systems reinforce ecological

systems, then the human family can climb the ladder of development indefinitely. Imagine that, a brave new world.”

Holmes suddenly stops talking. He rests back in his chair, holding his arm across his belly, grimacing. Bren is comfortable, snuggled into the thick white cushions, clutching her teacup in both hands, very calm.

Danny raises an eyebrow as if to say; “Is he okay?”

Bren nods gently. “Maybe it is your turn,” she says.

“My turn to speak?” asks Danny, sitting upright.

“Maybe. Try him out.”

Danny has many things to say, but they all arrive simultaneously and he holds himself back from speaking the



garble that is about to come out. His immediate concern is that he is talking business with fools. After a few moments, he has an angle.

Danny says, “I have the big picture, Mr. Holmes. But what is the Lala business proposition?”

“You will find out,” Holmes says, struggling to sit up in his chair. “I am meeting some associates tomorrow. You should come along and meet them too.” Holmes waves his arms as if to shoo Danny away.

Danny rests back in his seat, tapping his fingers on the armrest.

“He gets tired easily,” says Bren, helping Holmes stand. “You run around all day and then talk yourself into a heap don’t you Richard?” she says gently to him.

“Yes, that’s what I do. And we have a big day coming up. The Lala contracts are almost complete, Bren. Soon it will be time to take out a fountain pen and do some ecological business. The day after tomorrow, all going to plan.” Holmes squeezes her wrists.

“Thanks for coming down, Bren and nice to have a conversation with you, Daniel. I’ll see you both tomorrow.”

Danny stands with his teacup in his hands and his jaw hanging open. The words “nice to have a conversation with you” ring in his ears; the impertinent old bastard.

The old man shuffles along the wooden boardwalk and up the flight of stairs and disappears out of sight behind the foliage. Bren watches him walk off on his own, then turns to

Danny.

“Can we go now?” he asks.

In the taxi back to the Jumeirah Beach Hotel, Danny stares out at the city lights and construction cranes. Bren is curled up against the door, asleep.

Back at the hotel, Danny escorts Bren to her room. She says she is tired and wants to sleep early.

“You should go to bed, Bren, you look exhausted”

“I am exhausted, Danny,” she says.  
“Are you okay?”

“I am okay. You are not going to run away on me again, are you?”

“No. I promise. And thanks for being nice to Richard.”

“You might ask him to be nice to me next time.”

“Okay, I’ll do that. Good night then.”

Danny leans to kiss her cheek. He nearly connects but Bren pulls her face away and gives him a weary smile.

“Good night, Danny.”

The door closes in front of him and Danny stands in the hallway feeling a mixture of emotions. The one that is most prominent is a relief; he is glad that she is safe.

## A Hot Date in Dubai

Danny sits on his bed wondering what to do next. He feels weary but does not want to sleep. He remembers that he had agreed to meet the blonde girl he had met at the conference, the population statistician who worked with the U.N.

He calls Michelle Tyler and she answers the phone from her hotel room. He instantly has a picture of her in his mind, remembering the blonde curly hair and her slim figure, the moisture that glistens on her lips.

Michelle explains that she is working on her computer, sending emails. Danny asks her if she wants some company and she replies that she could be tempted for a drink at the nightclub on the ground floor of her hotel. She

tells him that the *Al Marooj Rotana* hotel is close to the *Burj Khalifa*, the world's tallest building. Danny has already developed a sense of the layout of Dubai and knew that he could be there in twenty minutes. She says that this would be enough time to finish her emails.

After the call, Danny stares at his phone. He wonders what time it is in Townsville and how much sleep he has missed over the past few days. He considers that he should just go to bed. But that was not a Delexion thing to do when there was a woman waiting for him in the lobby of a plush hotel. He imagines what Trent would think about him turning-in rather than going-out. So instead of going to bed, he changes his shirt, checks his wallet and keys, and

sets out for another Dubai adventure.

In the forecourt of the Jumeirah Beach Hotel, Danny stands patiently in the crowd at the taxi rank. There are Russians and British in the crowd, and he sits on a big black sphere made of marble outside the doors of the hotel, listening to the multiple languages as the group coordinates themselves into the waiting cars.

The *Al Marooj Rotana* Hotel is ornate, bathed in a yellow glow of floodlights. The hotel is surrounded by construction equipment and barricades, looking like a heavily defended fortress designed a hundred years ago. Arabic music plays quietly in the background as he stands in the glitzy lobby, looking around, drinking in the opulence. He observes the marble floor, the

illuminated blue glass fountain,  
chandeliers and the crowd of well-  
dressed Africans in white robes engaged  
in conversation.

His attention is drawn to a woman in a  
shimmering green cocktail dress  
walking purposefully in his direction,  
clipping along in high heels. She has  
long blonde hair that bounces around  
her shoulders. He is taken by surprise  
when she addresses him, “Hey Danny.”

“Oh, Michelle. You look stunning.”

“Of course. Do you like to dance?”  
she asks.

“I am a bit shy of Ballroom.”

Michelle checks inside her handbag  
for her keys, answering with a laugh,

“They don’t do ballroom in the  
Double Decker bar, Danny. Just disco.”

“I can do disco.”



The crowd of Africans begins to move towards the rotating doors. Seeing this, Michelle Tyler grabs Danny's hand. "Quick Danny," she says, "we don't want to get stuck behind the Nigerian contingent."

Danny allows himself to be led by the small woman, walking at her clipped pace, out the hotel, past the queue of limousines and taxis and down a flight of steps and through a courtyard. They come to a large white tent and a massive Arab security guard in the entrance. Danny eyes him cautiously as the petite blonde girl drags him inside. "Don't worry about the muscle," she says, "they just work here."

Danny feels like he is in the hands of a master, on a mission. Through the big white tent is the doorway to the Double

Decker bar, guarded by more large, dark-skinned men. Michelle keeps up the pace in the bar, moving through the crowd. They are British, South African and Australian property professionals mainly, shuffling and dancing to a contemporary house beat. She pulls him sharply to the left, up a flight of wooden stairs. In a second they were above it all, with a view of the crowd, mostly in their late twenties to early thirties, bopping away on the dance floor. Michelle directs Danny to the bar and in a second he is facing the bartender who holds up his finger, asking for a second's notice.

The bartender returns to the drink that he has just poured. This is a cocktail in a champagne glass with a shooter glass placed in the middle.

Danny watches as the bartender places an empty Galliano bottle on the shooter glass and pours liqueur over the bottle. Then he ignites the liquor with a cigarette lighter and a blue flame sweeps up the side of the bottle and dances in the air, touching the low ceiling of the wooden bar.

The recipient of the drink is a burly, tanned man who could have come from anywhere in the world. He takes up a straw and proceeds to suck up the cocktail from under the flaming Galliano bottle.

Danny is impressed by the size of the flame and the nonchalance of the man who sucks out the cocktail underneath it. He recalls a similar sight in the Heritage Bar, the same game, just a smaller flame. This is drinking games,

Dubai style. He watches the full sequence, which ends with the man wiping his mouth with his sleeve and receiving the adoration from the women he is with. Danny looks to Michelle with a dopey boy having- fun grin. He is about to say something like “How cool is that?” but he sees that Michelle has an un-amused look on her face.

“What?” Danny asks. Then he realizes that she had not brought him to this place to watch drinking games. He had been looking at the flame, not the girl. Danny straightens himself up.

“Michelle,” he says, raising his voice above the noise of the house music,

“I am going to order a drink, can get I you something?”

“You choose for me Danny,” says

Michelle, pulling against his arm and speaking directly into his ear.

Danny flags down the bartender with a bundle of dirham. He points to a bottle on the top shelf. Returning his eyes to Michelle, he observes her looking around the crowd. The drinks arrive and Danny places a spirit glass in her hand. The glass is nearly filled with big chunks of ice with a pale brown liquid filling the lower half. He watches Michelle cautiously sniff the glass.

“Whoa. It is strong,” she says.

“Single malt whiskey on the rocks, a double,” Danny says, knowingly.

“I don’t get it. Is it a double or single?” she asks, confused, but Danny doesn’t hear her question. Instead, he clinks the edge of his glass against hers and in return she makes a distinctive

facial expression. Danny did not know it meant, ‘I was hoping for something more girly...’

“The ice will melt,” he shouts into her ear, sensing something was amiss with her drink, “and dilution is the solution to pollution.”

They look at each other for a little while over their glasses. “You are new to the environment aren’t you?”

Michelle asks, leaning close.

“It is my new thing. You work with the U.N.?”

“Yes, I do,” she shouts, annoyed by the loud house music. She looks around and sees a row of booths in which people appear to be having conversations without resorting to raised voices. She drags Danny to one of the booths pulling him to sit

alongside her. It was much quieter here and they are close together.

“What do you do with the U.N.?” he asks.

“I’m a population statistician.”

Danny repeats her words slowly, thinking it over. “You make people count?”

“No, Danny. I count them.”

“How many have you counted, so far?”

“A bit over seven billion. That’s a seven with nine zeros.”

“That’s a lot of people”

“Plus about seventy million extra people every year who all need to be fed, housed and worst of all, entertained.”

Danny considers that for a while. He listens to the nightclub music, watching

Michelle sip her drink. She says, “What the hell were you doing at a UNEP conference?”

“I am learning about sustainability,” Danny replies.

“Well that’s good, I guess.”

“Do you know anything about the Gaia Theory?” he asks.

Michelle appears to be discomfited by this question. She grips his forearm and says, “Danny, you sound like you are still at the conference. We’re in a nightclub. We should be talking about movies or sex or something.”

“I feel like I have been in that conference for a week,” he says.

“You say that you are into property or something, are you into green buildings?”

“No, just normal ones. I am just a



normal guy who is learning about the planet. Can you tell me about Gaia?”

“Well I can, but I do this stuff every day, Danny. I was hoping for a night off.”

Danny displays a deflated look and Michelle takes hold of his wrist, draws him close and asks: “Do you mean weak or strong Gaia?”

“You make it sound like coffee.”

“Strong Gaia suggests that the biosphere chooses to self-regulate,” she says, “most scientists aren’t comfortable with that.”

Danny looks at her blankly. He makes to say something but she shuts him off.

“Purpose is a human thing. Sentient beings choose, the rest just do.”

“What about the weak coffee version?” he asks.

“In the weak version, it just happens. It is not being driven. It’s like a force of nature, like gravity. It just is.”

“Wow,” says Danny and he sits back nodding, trying to figure it all out.

“So the living organisms work together to create conditions suited to their survival?” he asks.

“Something like that,” says Michelle Tyler raising her glass.

“Pity the humans don’t do that,” says Danny.

“That is the problem,” Michelle says and she takes a gulp of her scotch whiskey, pulls a face of displeasure and pushes the glass across the table.

“Danny, I can’t finish this and to be honest I just want to go to bed.”

Danny picks up Michelle’s glass and takes a sniff.

“Will you take me there?” she asks.

“The drink is fine?”

“Will you take me to bed?” Michelle repeats.

“You want me to take you to bed?” Danny asks, finally hearing her correctly.

“Yes. Take to me to bed. But please don’t ask me any more questions about Gooa.”

“Gooa?”

“I am not up for it, okay,” she snaps, “I do this stuff fourteen hours a day. I just want to have a bit of sex and go to sleep. Are you good for that?”

Danny is stunned. He stares at Michelle blankly.

“Danny?”

“I’m right here, Michelle.”

“Will you look after me, just for a little

while,” she asks with a deliberate sex kitten look. She leans over and places a sloppy kiss on his mouth.

By this time, Danny has the full measure of the situation and decides to stop talking about sustainability. He kisses Michelle and squeezes her shoulders in his strong hands. He assists her out of the booth and guides her through the crowd, carefully down the wooden staircase and outside into the courtyard, up the steps, through the foyer, into the lift, along the corridor and into her room.

He pushes Michelle gently against the wall. And then he kisses her mouth and she kisses him back. He runs his hand under her blouse and onto her breast and she moves her arms so that he can touch her. As he connects with her, an

image of Bren flashes into his mind,  
just for a second. Then it goes away and  
he is back with Michelle.

## The Bathroom Light

In the morning, Danny wakes to find Michelle Tyler fast asleep on top of the covers. She is naked with the bed sheets all tangled up around her legs. He gazes at her quietly and then looks around the room to locate his stuff.

For a while, he sits there wondering what he should do. One option is to gently wake Michelle and see where that leads. However, he is glad that she is not awake, lest she disturb his thoughts.

He retrieves his watch from his shoe and sees that that he has enough time to get back to his hotel, shower and meet Bren for breakfast. He writes a note to Michelle apologizing for his departure, saying that he will call her later in the day.

As he leaves the room, taking one last

look at his latest bed partner he thinks, “Trent will kill me if he hears of this.” He closes the door quietly behind him, twisting the handle to confirm that it is locked.

Danny takes a taxi to the Jumeirah Beach Hotel. In his room, he showers, shaves, and dresses in fresh clothes. In the elevator, he observes the mirrored doors with the frosted glass squares. He is distracted by a text message on his phone. It is from Michelle and it reads: “Thanks for last night. See ya.”

Danny thinks back to when he had kissed Michelle and had instantly thought of Bren. He didn’t know what this meant. But to his mind came the expression: “the light that burns twice as bright burns half as long.”

He is still thinking these things when

the doors open onto to the opulent lobby of the Jumeirah Beach Resort. He finds Bren in the restaurant overlooking the beach, browsing through the menu. Danny observes her from a distance and is reminded of Michelle Tyler telling him off for wanting to talk about Gaia Theory in the nightclub. He feels anxious as he approaches Bren, a niggling feeling that he might be interrupting important thoughts.

In reality, Bren is concentrating on the vegetarian options from the menu.

“Hi Danny,” she says as she sees him. She is in much better spirits this morning.

“Hey Bren, how was your sleep?” Bren allows him to place a kiss on her cheek and directs him to the chair on the other side of the table.



“I slept well, well, well, Danny. Did you pace around your luxury hotel room for long before you fell asleep?”

“I didn’t pace for long,” he says, taking up a menu from the table.

“I spoke with Richard and we have a plan,” she says, “will you join me in the fruit salad or are you going to eat monstrous pig bacon?”

“Pig bacon?” he asks, “I’m sorry?”

“You don’t have to be sorry Danny, just aware. Pig bacon is monstrous. Do you know how much water is used to produce one hundred grams of pork?” Bren looks at him directly over the top of her menu as though she were seeking an answer.

“Yes and no,” says Danny, getting back into the swing of the Climate Cop dialogue.

“Great, then we will have two fruit salads,” says Bren. “You look very refreshed Danny, you must have had a good night.”

Danny wears a stunned smile and he is reminded of Michelle’s voice on the phone a few minutes after he had last seen Bren. He remembers all the things that happened subsequently: the taxi ride to the *Al Marooj Rotana* hotel, the unexpected proposition, sex on the big white bed and five hours sleep. He recalls that a few minutes ago he had received the text message that was the closure with a woman he had met just the day before.

This was all normal Danny Lexion stuff, really. But the context was all out of place. Here he was sitting at breakfast with Bren Hannan, the

Climate Cop, in a luxury hotel in Dubai. And in the time that he had had a Middle Eastern adventure, including sex with a stranger, Bren Hannan had simply been asleep. Danny suddenly wondered whether his adventure had actually been necessary. These thoughts cause him to parrot what he had last heard. “I had a good night’s rest,” he says, mesmerized.

“Good,” says Bren Hannan.

Danny is stunned by the simplicity of her reply. He feels as though she had been party to all the mush running through his head and had walked through it better than he had. She is glowing again and he can smell her perfume. Danny’s mouth opens and out of it came these words, “And I don’t know how many liters of water are

required to produce one hundred grams of bacon.”

“It’s a lot, Danny. A lot!” Bren says, emphatically. “I want you to order me a strawberry juice with the fruit salad.”

Over breakfast, Bren explains the day’s itinerary. They are going to pick up Holmes from his hotel in Sharjah and travel with him to the Convention Centre to meet with some of his associates.

When it comes time to depart the breakfast table, Danny realizes that he has come out without his wallet, so they travel together in the elevator to his room to retrieve it.

In the hallway, Danny pulls his hotel door closed and wiggles the handle to ensure it is locked. He slips the key into his pocket and guides Bren down the

hall with his hand in the small of her back. They walk along the ornate maroon hallway carpet to the elevator. Danny presses the button on the elevator and adjusts his shirt.

“Did you turn the light off in the bathroom?” asks Bren.

Danny looks at her without really connecting. He glances to the big window at the end of the corridor that has a stunning view over the city of Dubai.

When he looks back to Bren she says, “I think you left it on. Danny.”

“Left what on?”

“The bathroom light.”

“Oh, okay.”

“So, what are you going to do?” she demands.

“I will turn it off when I get back,”

Danny says, naively thinking that he was going escape the Climate Cop.

“You should turn it off now,” she says.

“The elevator is here, look.”

The metal doors slide open revealing the opulent mirrored space inside. Bren stands in the hallway glaring as Danny enters the lift. He sees the dark look on her face and foolishly thinks that the might be able to charm her into submission.

“Bren, you look lovely, hop in the lift darling, we’re running late.”

“No,” she says, emphatically.

This causes Danny to become less charming and he starts pleading. “Bren it’s like a 25 watt fluorescent lamp, it is not going to melt Antarctica.”

“It not the point, Danny, it’s the

principle.”

Danny’s temple starts to throb. Why did she do this? How could she do this? No one in the world knows how to press his buttons. He takes one step out of the lift towards her, looking around for some sanity. To his right, through the window at the end of the corridor, the city of Dubai can be seen in the dusty distance, stretching across hundreds of square kilometers of desert.

Across Dubai, the air conditioners and refrigerators of one point four million people pulsate and throb with unregulated energy. Danny remembers the engineer he had met at the conference who had told him about the power stations at Jebel Ali. In Jebel Ali, thousands of megawatts of electricity

were created in vast halls containing row upon row of turbine engines fed from the gas fields.

They were in the United Arab Emirates, the country with the highest per capita ecological footprint in human civilization. This was a nation that led the world in the global race to gobble up the planet's natural resources with no 'Plan B' for when they were all gone. A world leader of over seven billion souls who were destined to collectively wake up one morning with a massive hangover and realize that their luck had run out. Near term human extinction smashing through the planetary boundaries like an airliner crashing through the rarefied air of the stratosphere. And here was Bren Hannan, an expert in the field,



haranguing him over a vanity basin strip light. It was inconceivable to Danny that she could be serious. Talk about micro-managing the apocalypse.

He starts blurting in exasperation, which has no effect on the Climate Cop, except that she raises an eyebrow.

“Has it occurred to you,” stammers Danny, “that the strip light in my bathroom is insignificant in the big scheme of things?”

“It’s the principle, Danny.”

“The principle. What principle?”

“THE principal,” she emphasizes. “It wouldn’t matter if it were a candle.”

“You are unbelievable, Bren.”

“Go and turn the light off,” she says, defiantly.

“No!” Danny takes a step back in the elevator. “It’s just ridiculous.”

“Well I am not moving,” Bren crosses her arms.

“Bren... Bren...” Danny stammers, “the Chinese commission a gigawatt coal plant every week and you want to torment me over a pissy little lamp.”

Bren shows a look of shock, “You swore!” She stands resolute, her jaw fixed. Not budging.

Danny feels his temples swelling and before he can control it he blurts, “*Ughhhh!*” and stomps out of the lift and down the hall.

Bren remains in her spot with her arms folded watching him walk away. She can hear him muttering out loud.

When he returns, he has nearly regained his composure. He is working hard on his story. He smiles sweetly, although it looks and feels false.

“I turned the TV off as well,” he says, below his breath, then immediately wished he hadn’t told her that.

“You left the room with the TV on?!” Bren blurts, instinctively. “Did you turn it off at the wall?”

Danny glares at her and she decides to pull back. Clearly, he hadn’t, but she decides to let that go. She has already had her win with the vanity basin strip lamp.

“I will get in the lift now,” she says, grinning from sweet victory.

They enter the lift and the shiny metal door slides closed. Their reflection suddenly appears in front of them in the little squares in between the frosted checkerboard mirror. Danny sees his own expression, all closed in and grumpy. He sees Bren, whose face

lights up with pleasure as their eyes meet. Danny's story changes immediately and he is overcome by the ridiculousness of the argument. He bursts into laughter and Bren threads her arm through his.

“Thank you, Danny,” she says sweetly, “you don't realize how much difference that makes.”

“Yeah. A microgram of carbon dioxide equivalent.”

“Excellent work, Danny, you are learning so quickly.”

“I have a feverish instructor.”

“We will have you civilized in no time at all.”

Danny becomes aware of the smell of her perfume again. Frangipani. He adjusts his position to breathe it in and feel the warm softness of her body. She

immediately let go his arm and takes a half step aside.

“Stick to energy conservation, Danny,” she snaps. “It’s more rewarding.”

## Grooming the PIGGs

Madeline Obst meets the three PIGGs, Andy, Pusan and Manil at the Jumeirah Beach Hotel after breakfast as planned. The PIGGs are in high spirits as she explains the itinerary for the day. First thing is a trip to the Mall of the Emirates, one the biggest and most luxurious shopping centers in the world. They eagerly pile into the limousine for the journey.

The PIGGs are awed by the size and opulence of the shopping center. Madeline grips Pusan's hand tightly telling her that they would be going for Woman's Business on their own. When Pusan agrees, Madeline pulls out two bundles of Dubai currency. She offers the cash to the boys. "That's about five hundred dollars there for each of you."

She points them in the direction of the indoor ski slope telling them to return at 1 pm for lunch. Andy and Manil stagger away, gob-smacked at their good fortune.

Madeline squeezes Pusan's hand. "Close eyes," she says. Pusan complies and Madeline places a small object in her hands. It is flat and hard. "Open eyes," she says.

Pusan opens her eyes to see the Peking Petroleum credit card. She is shocked, not understanding the relevance of the gift, but knowing it's something of great value.

"It's time for retail therapy," says Madeline Obst. "You need a bikini."

Pusan shivers with joy, as she looks around the cavernous shopping mall and at her new companion, a tall,

beautiful, powerful woman. This is the most exciting moment of her life.

At one o'clock, Madeline and Pusan stand next to the limousine surrounded by boutique bags.

Andy and Manil appear out of the shopping mall grinning stupidly. Manil looks ridiculous with a garish shirt, shorts, and new sneakers. Andy is unchanged. He has bought some tobacco and kept the balance of the cash in his pocket.

Back at the Jumeirah Beach Hotel, Madeline introduces the PIGGs to a film crew, a cameraman, and a soundman. She explains that they will capture some vision ahead of the interviews after lunch in the day in the hotel room. She instructs the PIGGS to ignore the crew and their equipment.



Lunch at the Resort is a huge seafood platter. Manil devours most of it as Pusan chats excitedly about her adventure with Madeline. When the PIGGs are full and lying around in comfy chairs, Madeline whispers to Pusan and they both stand, announcing that they are going swimming.

In the pool, wearing her new \$300 bikini, Pusan comes alive. She splashes and shrieks and blows bubbles and crawls all over Madeline. It is amazing to watch, the young Pacific Island girl who, a week before, had never been out of her own country before, best mates with an international sophisticate.

Andy rests on a recliner watching Pusan and Madeleine in their bikinis. He is flushed with a sensation that he can't explain. Madeline reminds him of

a cross between a movie star and a domineering Aunt. “What’s really going on here?” he wonders as he rolls a cigarette, watching Madeline and Pusan together. Something ominous is happening, but he can’t determine what it is.

Wearing his new board shorts, Manil joins Madeline and Pusan in the pool. He demonstrates his prowess of underwater swimming and as the three of them play, Andy watches the cameraman and soundman move about the pool gathering vision and sound.

Periodically, Madeline would look away from her game with Pusan and directs the cameraman to capture footage from a particular angle. They follow her instructions instantly, without question.

After the swimming session, Madeline sits on the side of the pool toweling her hair. She tells them all that they should meet in one of the hotel rooms in an hour for the interview and that they should bring their traditional dress as well as their new clothes.

In the hotel room, there is a lighting technician and a makeup artist. Andy is taken aback at their proficiency and the squeaky clean order of events, following Madeline's orders. He thought back to the comment Madeline had made in the Convention Centre about him not being used to working with professionals.

Andy watches Madeline very deliberately ply Manil and Pusan with alcohol, not much, just a little bit. She gives a small amount of champagne to

Pusan and a glass of full strength beer for Manil.

Andy finds himself a seat that allows him to observe the entire goings on. The technicians know their roles implicitly and take instruction from Madeline without question. Andy is stunned with it all; she is so in control.

He considers how distinct this is of his management style; he uses a sort of democratic consensus model where anyone could throw in ideas and influence the decision-making. It resulted in a sort of groupthink muddling-through. Madeline, on the other hand, was a dictator; she got exactly what she wanted.

“What do you like best about Dubai?” asks Madeline, cocking her head and smiling in a manner that makes Pusan

feel instantly at ease.

Pusan is so eager to speak that she trips over her words at first. Then she manages to say, “In Dubai, I like the ski field. The people they dress in big coats. And all the snow.”

Pusan looks at the camera with a big smile at which the cameraman shakes his head and says curtly, “Famous girls don’t look at the camera,” and Pusan doesn’t look at the camera again after that.

“And would you like a one-kilometre ski field on your island in Fiji?”

Madeline asks, leaning close.

“Oh, yes,” says Pusan instantly, without considering the fundamental impracticality of the idea.

Madeline continues, “Tell me about your childhood. Did you have lots of

expensive toys? A big flat screen TV in your room?”

“We have a radio in our hut,” Pusan says excitedly, “but a mongoose eat the battery.”

Across the room, Andy watches Madeline intently. He knows that she has bad intentions but he can’t determine how they are playing out. Andy sees the world in black and white but Madeline plays skillfully with a thousand shades of gray.

“You poor thing,” says Madeline placing her hand on Pusan’s wrist. For Pusan there seems to be a powerful moment between them. In reality, Madeline was just reloading her artillery pieces.

Madeline says, “You’ve flown on a big airplane. Stayed in a big hotel. You saw

the ski field. All these good things are powered by petroleum oil, aren't they? Say 'Yes' with a big smile."

Pusan's eyes light up, "Oh, Yes. Yes."

Across the room Andy sits forward in his seat, intently. Hairs come up on the back of his arms as he studies every tiny detail of the interaction between Madeline and Pusan.

Pusan is grinning broadly now, feeling special and she listens intently to Madeline's next request. Madeline's artillery fired for effect.

"Now Pusan. You would rather stay in a nice hotel like this one and go snow skiing, than live in a hut with a broken radio and horrible mongooses running everywhere. And you need oil for this. Petroleum oil that has to be pumped from under the ground wherever it can

be found. Can you say this in your own words?”

*Can she ever?* Pusan is champing at the bit to say that in her own words. She clears her throat and says boldly, “I want to live where oil makes things good. In Fiji, we have no oil. To live there is very sad.”

Suddenly, Andy leaps from his seat, “Hey! What the hell?”

But Madeline is a step ahead of him. She has all that she needs. She turns to the film crew and claps her hands together, “Okay, that’s a wrap. I need everything at the studio right now. Come on people, let’s Go. Go. Go.”

In an instant, the film crew begins dismantling their gear. The cameraman and soundman hand her their tapes to Madeline and she puts these into her



bag. Then she takes Pusan's hand and kneels before her. She looks into the little girl's big brown eyes. "Beautiful island girl," she says, "you can keep the bikini."

In a flash, Madeline stands and disappears out the door. Andy, Pusan and Manil watch, stunned, as the film crew pack their gear and follow Madeline out of the room. The lighting technician is the last to leave. He addresses Andy.

"Ms. Obst asks me to give you this," he says. He hands Andy a folder containing air tickets and a taxi voucher. "The flight leaves in six hours," he says. Then he slips out the door leaving Andy looking blankly at the travel documents. He turns to his two Fijian mates, his face drawn with

despair.

Pusan, the little Fijian girl, has her face buried in her hands, sobbing inconsolably. Manil wraps his arm around her hugs her. “It’s okay, Pusan,” he says, sadly, “you don’t have to cry.”

## The Industrial Tourist

Danny steps into the taxi with Bren, hears her instruct the driver to go to the Golden Beach Motel in Sharjah. Danny queries this, saying, “What happened to the Radisson?”

“He moved. He moves hotels a lot.”

“Does he fear being found by the oil company people?”

“No Danny, he is just a bit eccentric. I thought you knew that.”

This time, the trip to Sharjah was in daylight and Danny observes the transition from the Emirate of Dubai to the Emirate of Sharjah with interest. Sharjah has different rulers than Dubai and much less of the western influence. Bren explains that because Sharjah was very Islamic, there is no alcohol.

“But don’t worry, Danny,” she teases,

“we won’t be here long.”

The Golden Beach Motel is a shabby affair with beige rendered concrete walls. It is one of a strip of resorts along the beach. Holmes is in the lobby reading a newspaper. When he sees Bren his face lights up and he greets her with the same affectionate enthusiasm that Danny had seen in the other hotel.

Danny holds his ground, eyeing Holmes suspiciously as he recalls the man’s irritating behavior. He remembers the bits of spinach caught between Holmes’ teeth the last time they met. “Reinvent the story,” Danny thinks, “find something nice to say.”

Eventually, Bren turns to him and says, “We’ll have tea on the patio with Richard before we head off.”

Danny follows them through the tight,

airless lobby of the Motel. He is a pace behind Bren as they exit the building through the back doors onto the patio. He suddenly thinks of something nice about Holmes and spontaneously whispers in Bren's ear, "He brushed his teeth." Bren glares at him, but the look is followed by a smile.

It is warm outside and the patio overlooks the beach onto which the Gulf rolls languidly, flat and hot. There is a swimming pool with people lazing around reading books and magazines. Children in bright coloured costumes leap about in the clear water. Holmes leads them to a table and fusses around to arrange the chairs.

As Danny takes in the view, an extraordinary sight beyond the grounds of the Golden Sands Motel suddenly

strikes him. He stands with his mouth agape, and drawls, “What the f\*\*\*?”

“Now Daniel, you sit over here,” instructs Holmes and then notices that Danny is not concentrating. Instead, he is staring aghast into the distance.

“What on Earth is that?” says Danny, pointing over the fence.

“Oh, that’s the water utility,” says Holmes.

The water utility is a massive industrial plant a few hundred meters from the motel. It is a tangle of metal sheds, giant chimneys and huge silver pipes with walkways crisscrossing the superstructure. There are floodlights burning brightly in the daylight. The tallest chimneys are painted with red and white stripes and they belch a long, greasy plume of smoke that blends with

the dusty sky. The site shivers with energy and a rumbling noise can be heard, almost felt, coming from its direction. While it is like any other similar industrial facility, its proximity to the resort is shocking.

“Talk about industrial tourism,” says Danny to himself.

“That’s where the water comes from,” says Bren.

“The water?” asks Danny.

“The water that you use in your thirty-minute showers.”

“That’s right,” says Holmes, “The water in the pool. The water in your tea, even. It’s a fascinating technology, reverse osmosis.”

Danny is incredulous: “You chose a motel next door to an industrial desalination plant?”

“You always choose hotels with distinctive characteristics, don’t you Richard?” says Bren, placing her hand on the old man’s wrist. This starts him talking again.

“Yes. I like this hotel,” says Holmes, “It gives me a sense of the true nature of things. I prefer the atrium in the Radisson when I want to forget about how things really are. But Dubai is a city in a desert with no natural water. And let’s face it, apart from the carbon emissions, the demand on the world’s peaking oil supplies, abundant air pollution, as you can see, and the brine stream, it’s really quite a sensible thing to do if you want to have a modern city in a place which is as dry as a... a...” Holmes pauses, seeming confused, unable to finish his sentence.



“As dry as a nun’s nasty,” Danny says, feeling uneasy about the status of Richard Holmes’ mind.

“Well, I don’t know about that. But how are you, Daniel?” Holmes reaches his hand to Danny to shake.

Danny takes his hand but rather than have it jerked all over the place like the last time, he holds very firmly and still. He looks into Holmes’ eyes and without speaking conveys the words, “Please do not annoy the piss out of me again.”

Holmes seemed to understand and his behavior shifts. “I am pleased to see you again, Daniel,” he says sincerely.

“Mr. Holmes,” says Danny, “would you do me a favour.”

“What is it?”

“Would you call me by my proper

name.”

“I do that already. I call you Daniel and I just don’t think that people should contract their names.”

“The name Danny appears on my birth certificate.”

“In that case, I will try my very best to call you Danny.”

“Thank you, Richard. I do like your hotel. It is very industrial.”

“Yes,” says Holmes, looking around, proudly, almost as though he actually owned the Resort. “And the beach over there of course and the palm tree. And look, almost as if it were planned, a seagull flying towards the water utility. Nature and industry in a single vista.”

“I have thought a lot about your green business model,” Danny says, “it is very interesting.”

“It is the new wave of economic prosperity,” Holmes replies, “when we get to the Convention Centre, I will introduce you to a few of my colleagues in the field. You will learn a lot from them.”

Then Holmes turns his attention to Bren who is sitting, waiting impatiently. Danny takes a seat and watches the pollution pouring from the smokestacks of the desalination plant, half listening to Bren and Holmes’ chatter.

After the tea, Danny and Bren wait in the airless lobby while Holmes retrieves his black case from his hotel room. They take a cab to the Dubai Convention Centre, with Danny sitting in the front seat next to the Egyptian driver.

The cab driver pulls up at the wrong

entrance and Danny instructs him to keep driving around the building. As could be expected, the Climate Cop interjects from the back seat and insists that they should walk through the Convention Centre rather than drive. She checks this with Holmes who agrees that a brisk walk is a good idea. Danny consents to this change of plan. He has become at ease with her constant interjections and notices that Bren is starting to pitch her Climate Coppery in a language he can relate to. “The walk will be good exercise,” she says.

They walk the kilometre of air-conditioned marble to the security gates. Inside the auditorium, past the bomb detectors, Holmes leads them to the coffee shop where he addresses

three suited men who are seated there.

Holmes introduces his associates one by one. After the handshaking, one man in a suit announces, “Richard has promised to explain the economics of greening his taxi fleet.”

“Sure,” says Danny, “that sounds like a good conversation.”

“It’s all pretty simple, really,” says Holmes, “you just need a few simple rules about green business, you know, like use standard business mechanisms, get off fossil fuels, use the media to promote what you are doing, think in a manner that is innovative, inclusive and long-term, and importantly keep it profitable.”

“So what’s the detail,” says one of the men.

“Simple, we swapped over to hybrids,

that cut the greenhouse emissions and the fuel bill by half, then we got government subsidy on LPG conversions, that cut the emissions and fuel costs by a further twenty percent plus gave the car a 1,500 kilometre range so we spent less money paying wages for filling up.”

Danny started laughing, “That’s very elegant,” he says.

“Oh, that’s just the beginning,” says Holmes. “Next, we got R&D tax exemption across the whole business by teaming up with the local university to convert ten percent of the fleet to plug-in-hybrid. Then we worked with the schools to offer a pick-up service for the kids with a vehicle that was running purely electric mode, saves all the mums and dads piling into the school

gates in their four wheel drives and polluting the air.”

Holmes goes on and on about his taxi fleet sustainability innovations and concludes with the profit and loss figures. With this, the three men at the table exclaim in surprise and start chatting excitedly. One of them pats Holmes on the shoulder, saying, “You are the best amongst us.”

Danny is fascinated by the story, but notices that Bren is looking distracted, uninterested. He asks if she is okay. “It’s all boy’s stuff,” she says, “will you get me some water?”

“Okay,” Danny says. “Anybody want a coffee?” Danny takes a coffee order and goes to the counter. When he returns, he is empty handed. Bren looks at him quizzically. He just smiles at her

and a few seconds later a waitress appears with a tray holding the drinks.

“Do you get people to do everything for you?” Bren asks.

“Only if they are getting paid for it.”

Danny indicates for the waitress to place a small green glass bottle of still water on the table in front of Bren.

Next to this she puts a highball glass full of ice. Bren is clearly unimpressed and Danny feels that he going to get Climate Copped again and tries to determine what his crime is.

“What’s this?” she asks, annoyed.

“It’s your water,” Danny says, hoping for the best.

“No, Danny. It is ice and metal and glass and paper labels with ink, made from petroleum oil probably. All I wanted was some water.”



Danny is about to protest, but Holmes interrupts him, “It’s a fine point, Danny, you should take note of it.”

Danny feels like he was back in the hotel in Radisson Hotel in Sharjah. He looks suspiciously at Holmes but Holmes is not being antagonistic.

“It illustrates the opportunity of green business,” Holmes says, “imagine being the water seller who did not need to buy the bottles, print the labels, or pay freight for carting the glass around the place. That could be a competitive advantage, could it not?”

## Death in a Taxi

After the meeting, Danny, Bren and Richard Holmes wait at a taxi rank outside the Convention Centre. The vehicle that pulls up is a beige Toyota Camry, brand new and spotlessly clean. Danny takes the paying seat in the front and Bren sits behind him with Holmes behind the driver. In between these two, sits Holmes' black case. Holmes tells the driver that he is going to the Golden Beach Hotel in Sharjah. The cab driver, a skinny man from Pakistan with a wispy mustache and a crisp white shirt, nods that he understands and the car pulls away.

On the way to Sharjah, the taxi stops at the lights with the indicator blinking for a left turn. Danny is thinking about the Lala business plan, while Bren and

Holmes chat quietly in the back seat.

A motorbike with a driver and passenger pulls up alongside the taxi, next to Danny's window. Danny glances at it briefly but doesn't pay it any attention. He does not notice the passenger lean forward to look inside the cab, then communicate with the driver with hand signals. The driver walks the bike a few paces backward so that it is behind the cab. Again the pillion passenger looks around inside the cab. Danny does not see him pull a long silver object from inside his jacket.

Inside the taxi, it is very quiet as though everyone's breath is held waiting for the lights to change from red to green. The vehicle has comfy, temperature-controlled air, a warm glow of instrument lights for the two

people in the front seats. From the radio, faintly can be heard the sound of Arabic pop music. Danny reaches for the volume on the radio, getting the eye of the driver to okay him to turn up the music. It is very comfortable space for four humans to spend some time. However, this is all set to change.

The silver object that the pillion passenger pulls from inside his jacket is a .45 caliber pistol and the gun is held in Teck's hand. Under the barrel is a laser pointer. Teck switches on the laser and a tiny red dot rolls around the inside of the taxi. It drifts around the back of Bren's head for a second before wandering away towards Holmes. Neither can see the red dot, although Danny gets a glimpse of red in a reflection from one of the windows, a

fleeting glimpse that foreshadows much more red inside the car.

A second before the lights turned green, Teck finds his target, and gently squeezes the trigger. The noise of the gunshot slams through the car like a massive thunderbolt.

CRACK!!!

Danny feels like his head has exploded as the shock of the blast causes him to slap his hands against his ears. He sits stunned with his mouth open as the motorcycle screams across the intersection with a cloud of blue smoke following. The cab driver is motionless, his mouth open. His white shirt is dotted with red and orange specks and he feverishly grips the steering wheel. Tendons stand out through the skin on his hands.

Danny's head is spinning as he tries to comprehend what had just happened. As clarity returns, he thinks of Bren, seated behind him. His attention is caught by the reflection in the rear vision mirror.

He stares at the little rectangular mirror trying to piece together what he was looking at.

“Oh, my,” he says.

## Blood Drenched Cab

Danny is immobilized, confused. His brain is reverberating from the noise of the gunshot. He knows that something terrible has happened in the back of the taxi where Bren is seated. He is having trouble making sense of it all. Then he thinks that maybe Bren had been harmed.

Instantly, his focus returns and he twists around in his seat to check on her. There she is, the glowing, mesmerizing woman. She's motionless, her fingertips lightly touching her cheeks. There is blood on her face. She is transfixed, her mouth wide open, brows pushed up together. She is looking towards Danny, not at him, straight through him. Danny watches her big wide eyes slowly move to her

left, towards Richard Holmes.

“Don’t look there, Bren!” Danny shouts, but he can’t hear his own voice, still deaf by the gunshot. He shouts again and she drops her hands from her face. There is blood on her hands and she stares at them silently, aghast.

Danny can see that Bren is coming out of her stupor. He knows that if she is to take the full measure of the condition in the back of the taxi, she will be thrown into panic. He stretches around towards her, but his seatbelt holds him tight. He shifts, clicks the buckle free, and then turns around to reach his hands towards Bren’s face.

He is suddenly struck by an overpowering smell in the cabin. It is a breathless stench of gun smoke and flesh and the exhaust of the motorcycle.



“Are you okay?” Danny asks her.

Then Bren speaks, in a whisper, two words rolled into one, over and over again: “Oh no, oh no, oh no...”

Danny’s hearing returns and he can sense panic starting to set in as Bren becomes aware of the situation. He is about to speak but his attention is caught by a small blob of something sticky drawing slowly from the ceiling of the cab. The blob falls and lands on Bren’s hair. Danny’s curls his fingertips around the blob and teases it from Bren’s hair. Pulling it free, he brings it closer to his face to make out what it is: it’s a piece of Holmes’ skull.

Danny looks past Bren to see a small hole in the rear window of the cab where the bullet had entered. He lets the piece of head fall from his fingers

and grips Bren's forearms tightly in his fist.

"Look at me, Bren"

"There's so much blood," she says. And she is right. There is blood everywhere. It is dashed over the ceiling of the vehicle, across the windows and on the seats. It is spattered through her hair and across her face.

Just then, the taxi driver, who has been locked into his own silent trauma, regains his senses and hits the panic button. He stamps on the accelerator and the taxi violently jerks into life. Shocked by the vehicle's movement, the driver struggles to control the steering wheel. The cab surges forward with the engine racing furiously, veering across lanes of traffic, left and then right in a slalom pattern down the

highway.

In the back seat, Holmes' body flops against Bren's shoulder. Danny turns to face the body, seeing a gaping hole in the top of his head, rimmed with hair and tissue and blood. The taxi pelts down the highway swerving left and right. Holmes' body flops against the door, then the other way, bumping against Bren's shoulder again. As the cab speeds along, car headlights fill the inside of the taxi and Holmes' head wound flashes in and out of view.

Bren starts screaming hysterically. Quickly, Danny tries to push Holmes' body away from Bren. He desperately claws at the bloody corpse, as though he were fighting a zombie. The cab driver has the accelerator flat on the floor and the engine howls. Blue smoke

belches from the exhaust pipe and its stench fills the cabin.

Danny turns to see ahead and instantly comes into a heightened state of alertness. He sees the faces of people in cars on the other side of the freeway. He sees a road worker's jacket hanging over a shovel. He sees the detail on the silver ring on the hand of the driver who madly swings the steering wheel from left to right blindly trying to avoid smashing into the other vehicles on the road. In this heightened state, Danny sees an obvious outcome; a fatal car crash very soon. He has to act.

“Put your belt on Bren,” he shouts, keeping Holmes' body off her. He watches her struggle against the violent rocking of the car to clip in her belt. Then he turns and attaches his own

belt.

He looks at the leg of the taxi driver that was attached to the foot that holds the accelerator to the floor. He weighed up the situation, then in a flash, delivered a full forced punch with the side of his fist onto the inside of the driver's inner thigh. He feels the side of his fist bang against the driver's femur. The driver yells in pain and he jerked his leg in the air. The screaming of the engine cuts off and Danny gently and firmly hauls up the handbrake.

The back wheels of the taxi lock on the tarmac with a tremendous squeal. White smoke envelopes the vehicle and it spins around and around in the middle of the highway cutting across the lanes of traffic.

The trunk of the taxi clips another

vehicle with a tremendous crash and the noise of split metal. Fast moving cars and trucks swerved wildly to avoid a collision. A second later, the taxi plows into the railing between the highway lanes, forcing the three living occupants of the car against their seat belts. Holmes is slammed against the back of the driver's seat and then falls sideways with his bloodied head half hanging out of the shattered passenger window.

Cars zap past with horns blaring. The stench of burnt rubber mixes with Holmes' brains and the smell of gunpowder and steam belting out of the radiator. With the taxi now halted, Danny clambers free from his seat, into the back of the taxi and clumsily falls on top of Bren. In a single movement,

he unclips her and pulls open her door. They both fall onto the road in a heap.

“Oh no, they killed him. They killed him,” she chants as she sits on the tarmac, a look of hot terror on her face.

Danny stands and looks around the street and considers a simple question. Stay or go. Stay means talk to police and possible face off with the assassin. Go means Go. Go. Go.

“Oh, fuck,” he says. He squats next to Bren who is sitting catatonic on the road next to the cab.

He cradles her head in his hands and pulls her close to her chest. Then he looks up and sees what he thinks to be a motorcycle in the distance.

“We’ve got to go,” he says. He climbs inside the back of the cab and fishes around inside Holme’s jacket for his

wallet. Then he grabs Holmes' black case and puts his hand under Bren's arm and lifts her from the street.

“Come on Bren, let's Go. Let's Go. Go Go.”

He drags her to her feet and they stumble along the highway railing, blinded by oncoming vehicles. There is a break in the traffic and Danny hurriedly moves Bren across the road toward the built up areas.

When the police arrive at the accident scene, the first thing they see is the taxi driver in shock, limping along the highway clutching his thigh and with blood spattered all over his crisp white shirt. The next thing they see is a mangled taxi with a dead man in the back seat.



## Holmes' Head Wound

After the interview, Madeline takes the limousine to the offices of the media firm that she had commissioned to edit the video footage. Once the work there is finished she has completed her duties.

She decides to take the limousine to the Gold Souks in Deira, the famous old gold markets. In the back of the limo, she lets her mind drift over her game plan with PIGG and shortly concludes that there is nothing left to be done except to wait for the media to do its work.

She searches inside the mini-bar and finds the ingredients for a screwdriver cocktail. She puts chunk ice in a glass, pours a healthy measure of vodka over the ice then tops the glass up with

orange juice.

Then she relaxes into the leather seat and takes a long gulp of the cold drink. Its effect is instantaneous. She slouches back with her drink in her lap and drifts off to sleep.

When she wakes, the limousine had slowed in the traffic and through the tinted glass that separates her from the driver she can see flashing lights, red and blue. She leans forward and opens the glass divider to talk to the driver.

“What’s going on?” she asks.

“Accident. Too slow.”

The limousine slowly approaches the accident scene. The dark night pulsates with emergency lights of ambulances and police cars. There is a long queue of vehicles leading up to where the lights are flashing. Madeline slumps

back and examines a fingernail. Maybe going to the Souks wasn't such a good idea, after all. She is bored sitting in the plush leather cabin going nowhere, so she pays attention to the activity ahead, trying to figure out what has happened.

The traffic is at a crawl and the limousine intermittently moves slowly forward and then bumps to a standstill. A clearing opened up ahead and the driver accelerates the limo to fill the gap. In a second they are alongside the crash scene. It is a beige taxi bathed in pulsating emergency lights.

Out of curiosity, Madeline presses the button for the electric window and the tinted glass lowers. The dark air rolls into the cabin of the limousine, hot and humid and rich with the stench of petrol fumes.

The taxi emanates a foul aroma, the mixture of burnt rubber, steam from the busted radiator and an organic smell that Madeline recognized. Intrigued, she stares into the night from the leather seats of the Peking

Petroleum limousine. With the chaotic jumble of emergency lights of police cars and ambulances, she can't make sense of what she is looking at. A paramedic wearing rubber gloves moves between her and the taxi, startling her.

The rear door of the taxi is close to her, drenched in the tangle of lights, orange, blue and red. On top of this are headlights of the traffic flashing past on the other side of the highway.

Madeline can see something inside the back of the cab. Another paramedic

moves between her and the taxi, pushing a stretcher. A police officer approaches with a digital camera. For a fleeting second, the back of the taxi is lit with a bright white flash and the thing in the back of the taxi comes momentarily and clearly into view.

Madeline gasps in horror and a wave of anxiety sweeps over her. She looks to the limousine driver through the glass divider window, hoping that he will speed her away from the horrible scene. But ahead is the tailgate of a truck.

She stabs her finger into the door of the limo, groping for the electric window switch. But in the darkness, with the vodka orange clouding her judgment, the window button can't be found. When she looks down to see it,

there is just darkness.

Madeline gasps desperately. Between her and the taxi, two men adjust a piece of equipment, a tall structure with legs. It's a floodlight.

Suddenly, the floodlight switches on. Madeline covers her face from the glare with her forearm. The limousine lurches forward then pulls to a halt again. Now, she is just directly alongside the back of the taxi, the door just a few meters away. She lowers her arm from her face and shortly her eyes acclimatize to the bright glare of the floodlight. Then she sees the body of a man in the back seat of the taxi, slumped against the door, his lifeless face staring in her direction through the smashed window.

The pistol bullet had glanced across

the top of Richard Holmes' head tearing out a chunk of skull and blasting out the window. The rapid air movement around the speeding bullet has drawn out the contents of his skull. Dark blood, speckled with bits of brain matter, flashing blue and orange and red, has drooled down the beige door of the taxi. The man's lifeless face stares out, eyes open, as though he has fallen asleep looking at the stars.

Madeline gasps and her stomach rises in her throat. She is back in Baghdad: the petrol fumes, humid air, chaos, flashing lights, rows of cars, carnage, the stench of blood. She is back in the private jet screaming into the car bombs and death squads of the Iraq insurgency.

She is tired and frightened. Her mind

is suddenly flooded with a series of images, like a movie playing in fast-forward, a grab-bag of horrifying memories from her time in Iraq. Then it stops dead, to a particular sequence that is seared into her memory.

The Storm Front corporate jet enters the airspace of the Baghdad International Airport and the pilot announces over the intercom: “Commencing spiral descent to hell... err... sorry Baghdad.”

There is a violent lurch and the plane rolls and falls, spiraling toward the runway. Madeline’s stomach rises in her throat and she desperately clutches the armrest, gripped by the sensation of helpless falling. Round and round. Down and down. And then WHUMP! the plane slams down hard on the tarmac.

Madeline is trembling so violently that she needs the assistance of two soldiers to get out of the plane. Alistair Sally, the



new C.E.O. of Storm Front, steps out of a black SUV that is covered in bullet holes. He approaches her holding something in his hand. He is tall, stiff, British and distressed. He hands her a color photo that shows a minibus full of people dressed for a wedding. 'They're all dead, shot to pieces with an automatic weapon.

“Spot of collateral damage on the roundabout, Maddy. Wedding party. Teck got a bit... umm... you know. If we're not Johnny on the Spot the press will write their own story. It's not what I do, but I was thinking you could say: difficult conditions, accidents happen, stay the course, yadda-yadda, that sort of thing...”

Alistair hands her a helmet covered in dust and grime. “Lot of bad guys out today, Maddy. Teck will look after you.” He pushes her into the back of the Storm Front truck where Teck is sitting, reeking of war. He puts his hand on her wrist. His fingernails are caked with

blood. “I love you, Madeline,” he says. “It hurts me when you won’t take my calls.”

“What the f\*\*\* did you do to those people?” Madeline gasps, pulling her hand away.

“It’s the only way I could see you.”

Back in Dubai, in the cabin of the Peking Petroleum limousine, Madeline becomes alert to her situation, stuck in traffic next to the corpse. The limousine driver adjusts the rear vision mirror to see her behaving oddly. He catches her eye just in time to see her vomit vodka orange all over the glass divider screen.

## Running Away

Danny brings Bren to a halt in the courtyard of an office building, pulling her out of sight of the road. He draws her behind a shrubbery. Squatting behind the bushes, he holds his hand up to keep Bren is quiet as he looks around to see if they were being pursued.

Bren is in a state. A hundred thoughts flash through her mind and she speaks a tumble of barely incoherent words. “They killed him... the gunshot... the taxi crash... flashing lights,” words mixed with fear and anxiety burst out in a mad babble.

Danny pushes his palm against her chest. He feels her heart racing and her chest heaving.

“What happened... who did it... all

the blood... the lights... the noise...” Tears well up in her eyes and she grips Danny’s forearm tightly.

Danny takes hold of her shoulders and shakes her gently and firmly, “Bren. Bren. Bren,” he says raising his index finger in front of her. He watches her focus on his fingertip.

“Calm down. Okay? We’ll go somewhere safe, then you can talk.”

“Okay, okay,” she says slowly regaining her senses. “I think I am okay.”

Danny shifts Bren around in the bushes to put her face into the light of a street lamp. She is covered in Holmes’ blood. It is in her hair, speckled all over her face. From under this war paint, Bren’s crystal clear eyes twinkle brightly. The aroma of Neroli Jasmin

perfume permeates the humid night air.

There is a garden hose coiled up on a tap a short distance away. Danny leans over and turns on the tap. “I want to get the blood off you,” he says. With his thumb over the end of the hose directs a fine spray of water delicately onto her through her cheeks and rubs the blood away.

“Careful,” says Bren, shifting Holmes’ black leather case away from the water.

Then Danny sprays water on his palm and wipes a final rinse over her face.

Their eyes connect just for a moment but no words are spoken. Next, Danny turns the hose on himself, spraying his own face and neck. When he is finished, he tosses the hose into the garden bed.

“Turn the tap off, Danny,” says Bren.

He shakes his head, wondering why he'd not thought to do that himself. He chuckles quietly, looking at the bloodstains all over her blouse, "You need a new top."

Danny raises himself to see along the road. In the distance, there is a well-lit market area that is teeming with people.

"Okay. Here's the plan. We are going to march down the road and find somewhere to debrief."

"March?"

"Fast. Purposeful. Invisible. Don't catch anyone's eye. Just walk with me at my pace."

Danny picks up Holmes' case and guides Bren onto the street. In the open, she immediately feels vulnerable but takes comfort from Danny's hand firmly gripped around hers.

“Just walk as though nothing is wrong.” Danny picks up his pace heading straight for the illuminated area that is alive with people out shopping, drinking coffee or just hanging out. Danny marches Bren through the crowds of Arabs and South Asians, past the glare of strip lights in shop windows. There is a woman’s clothing shop and Danny draws Bren inside, pulling a blouse from a rack as he ushers her into a changing cubicle with the garment.

“Here, put this on,” he says. Then he moves back to the doorway and nonchalantly glances around looking danger. His heart races when a motorcycle passed but it’s a different bike, not the killers returning. He hears Bren calling his name behind him.

“Danny. Danny,” she calls anxiously.

He rushes to the back of the shop and puts his face against the cubicle door, “Are you okay in there?”

Instantly the blouse he had given her flies over the top of the cubicle and lands on his head.

“I won’t wear dead fish,” Bren grumbles.

“What?”

“I don’t wear dead fish.”

“You’re kidding me?”

“Get me caterpillar.”

“What the f\*\*k are you talking about?” asks Danny, dumbfounded.

Bren opens the door of the cubicle a little and Danny sees that she is wearing just her bra, her arm held across her breasts for modesty. Her hair is wet and bedraggled and her eyes tell him that



she is deadly serious about the shirt.

“I don’t wear dead fish! I want something made by caterpillars,” she repeats, sternly.

Danny returns to the clothes rack with panic rising. He searches anxiously for ‘caterpillar,’ his mind racing, trying to figure it out.

“Lacoste is crocodile,” he thinks, “Ralph Lauren is a horse. Hot Tuna is a... a... What the f\*\*\* is Caterpillar?”

Danny finds a blouse that looks suitably different to the last one. Fingers crossed, he hands it to Bren and waits outside the cubicle. Breathing heavily, he nervously waits for her response, listening intently to the sounds coming from inside the cubicle.

He hears Bren sigh. Then she mutters a few unintelligible words. There is an

odd shuffling noise. Another sigh and then she steps out of the cubicle in her new shirt.

“It’s a lovely blouse,” she says, “made of caterpillars, not dead fish.”

“What are you talking about?” Danny asks, perplexed.

“Silk,” she says.

Danny pays for the shirt and they step back out onto the street. A few doors down there is a Golden Fork restaurant with a flight of stairs leading from the street to a first floor dining area.

Shortly, Danny and Bren are seated in a small booth out of sight of the other diners.

For the first time since the gun went off, Danny heaves a long sigh, feeling as though they have escaped.

## The Golden Fork

Danny calls over a waiter and orders tea. Then he just sits there cradling Bren's hand running through the details of what had just happened to them. Time ticks slowly by and it seems like an hour passes before the waiter returns with the drinks.

Danny pours and hands a china cup to Bren. She inhales the warm steam as she stares across the cubicle.

"I can't believe they killed Richard," she says eventually.

"They?" asks Danny, "Who are they?"

"It was so horrible. All the blood."

"It's over now." Danny puts his arm around her shoulder and places a kiss against the wet hair above her ear.

"He says it was all ready to go," she says. "He says The Greening was nearly

complete.”

“The Greening?” asks Danny.

“It just needed to be signed. He says it was all in the bag. But I didn’t know what he meant.”

Danny turned his attention to Holmes’ leather case, on the floor by his feet. He places the case on the seat between them and looks at the metal clasp on which was inscribed the words: The Greening.

“We should open it,” says Bren.

Danny unlocks the clasp and opens the case. It is full of documents, meticulously ordered in folders and files of various colours like one would expect of an obsessive-compulsive businessman. One of the folders had a note sticking up with the single word written on it: Bren.

“This one has your name on it,” says Danny, retrieving the file. He offers her the folder and she stares blankly at it

“Will you read it for me?” she asks.

Danny opens the folder and reviews the information inside. He reads the introduction page, flicks through the supporting documents. Then he rummages around in the case checking the titles of the other folders against the list in the documents in his hand.

Eventually, he sits back staring into space.

“What’s the matter?” Bren asks, anxiously.

“You’ve inherited it.”

“Inherited what?”

“Richard Holmes’ business empire.”

“I don’t know what that means.”

Danny looks at Bren sitting there,

bedraggled, sad, confused. He opens a folder to particular page, reviews the text and says, “You now own a taxi fleet. Commercial properties.

Residential properties. Bank accounts.

Artwork. Everything, in fact, except the Lala Project which you will also have once it is signed off tomorrow night.”

“Is that good?” Bren asks, confused.

“I don’t know. But it’s pretty amazing.”

“What do I do?”

“It says to call Richard’s lawyer, Mr. McLachlan.”

“I don’t know anything about Lawyers. Will you call him?”

“It’s a UK number. Let’s wake him up.”

Danny pulls his mobile phone from his jeans pocket and dials the number.

It seems to ring for an age before a man answers.

“Hello?”

“Is that Terry McLachlan?” Danny asks.

“Yes. Who is this?”

“My name is Danny Lexion. I’m an associate of Richard Holmes.”

“Are you with his niece?”

“His Niece?” Danny looks to Bren in surprise.

Bren sniffs and says, “Uncle Richard.”

Danny shakes his head slowly. It all makes sense, now. “The niece is here with me now.”

“And Mr. Holmes?”

“Holmes is dead.”

“You are in Dubai?” asks McLachlan.

“You don’t sound very surprised,” Danny says.

“Mr. Holmes was preparing for something like this.”

“Something like what exactly?”

“A succession at short notice. I have been instructed to transfer Holmes’ estate to Ms. Hannan and complete the documentation for the Lala project.”

“Where are you?”

“London. I am... I was... meeting Richard tomorrow evening in Dubai. Can you get Ms. Hannan to the rendezvous?”

“Where is the meeting?” asks Danny.

“The Skyview restaurant in the *Burj al Arab*. Do you know it?”

Danny sighs. He glances at Bren, trusting she can’t hear the Lawyer’s voice. “Yeah. I’ve been there,” he says.



## The Humanity of Chimpanzees

At the door to Bren's hotel room, Danny asks if she wants him to stay. She tells him that she wants to alone with her thoughts. She kisses him gently on the cheek and enters her room. Danny rests his forehead against the door wondering whether it would be prudent to notify the police of the day's events.

“Let them come and get us,” he concludes. He walks along the corridor to his own hotel room and sits on the end of his bed with his hands clasped together. In the dark, cool air he considers all of the events of the day thinking through everything that had happened, trying to find flaws that could come back against him or Bren and what to do next. He eventually

resolves that only task at hand is to get Bren to the meeting with the lawyer the following evening.

He empties his pockets on the bed and notices that his mobile phone is flashing. There is a text message from Jenny Quick Halloway, the French woman he had met in the coffee shop at the Conference.

Danny sits on the end of the bed looking at the text message for a long time, having trouble focusing on the words. Eventually, it became clear and he reads: ‘still up for that drink? JQ.’

A drink. Oh, yes. What a fantastic idea. Danny dials the number.

“Hi, Danny. Thanks for calling back.”

“It’s not too late?”

“I just got out of the conference. How are you?”

“*Abhh*. You don’t want to go there.”

“You sound exhausted.”

“Yeah. It’s like that.”

“Are you good for a drink?” she asks.

“Ten maybe. Where are you?”

“I’ll only have one. I am in a cab. I could come to you.”

Danny mulls it over, thinking that Bren was insistent on being alone, and that she was probably already asleep.

“Okay, then,” he says, finally, “The Uptown Bar, Jumeirah Beach Hotel, twenty-fourth floor.”

“I’ll find it. Are you okay?” she asks.

“I am fine. Just come and have a drink with me.”

When Jenny Quick arrives at the Uptown Bar, Danny is melancholic, feeling like he should be in Bren’s hotel room, sitting next to her bed, watching

her sleep. Guarding her. He is sitting at the bar, slouched on his stool, staring at the floor.

As Jenny Quick comes into view, his mood changes. He looks up to see her cheeky smile and her twinkling eyes.

Jenny Quick wears a black pencil skirt, a white blouse and a light checkered woolen jacket. She has long straight brunette hair that falls below her shoulders, eyes that sparkle like smooth river stones, long eyelashes and a Mediterranean complexion. Danny is reminded of his first impressions of her when he came across her in the coffee shop, a combination of Island Girl and United Nations professional. She bought sensuality and professionalism smoothly together. He recalls her switching between English and French.

“It’s you again,” Danny says, a smile forming across his face. He observes her as she reads the drinks menu, running his eyes across her clothes, her hair and the side of her face. Her calf has a distinctive shine like it had been freshly shaven or waxed. He observes her jewelry and clothes. Jenny Quick catches him looking at her ankles.

“Is it sufficient?” she asks.

“I was just... I don’t know. Checking you out.”

“Doing your due diligence.”

“I guess.”

Jenny Quick orders a Martini and shuffles things around in her purse for a few minutes while the bartender mixes the drink. She stands, looking at Danny looking at her until the bartender places the Martini next to

her. Then she settles on the bar stool next to Danny and gives him her attention.

In the absence of any direction, Danny feels his mind wander. He has images of toddlers in airliners, opulent hotels, old men with fatal head wounds and pulsating, flashing lights. He struggles to find sense of it all.

He wants to talk, although he doesn't really know what to say. Jenny Quick's book comes back to mind and he asks her about that.

"Tell me about the Millennium book."

"You look buggered," says Jenny Quick, in reply.

"I am buggered. I have had the most extraordinary, terrifying and exhilarating day of my life." He shakes his head slowly, looking at his hands. "I can't tell

you about it. Is that okay?”

“That’s okay. So you want to know about the Ecosystem Assessment?”

“I guess?”

“Wouldn’t you rather talk about your favourite holiday?”

Danny looks at Jenny Quick with surprise. Once, he might have taken warmly to that idea. “We’ll come to that later, maybe.”

“Okay. Well, the Assessment is a scientific appraisal of the state of the world’s ecosystems and a review of options for their sustainable use.” She stops and changes tone, “Danny, you should go to bed, you look exhausted.” She places the backs of her fingers against his forehead as if checking whether he had a fever.

“The next Assessment is in a thousand

years, right?” he asks, trying to look more awake.

Jenny Quick laughs, wondering whether it was a naive question or just Danny being funny. “There won’t be any humans left in a thousand years.” She raises her martini glass in salute to emphasize the point.

Danny places his hand on Jenny Quick’s forearm and draws her close, burying his face in her hair. He whispers, “Have you ever heard of Lala?” then sits back to observe her.

“Of course,” she says plainly.

“You are kidding me? How do you know about Lala?”

“Everyone knows about Lala,” Jenny Quick shrugs, like it was obvious.

“What? Everyone in the environmental industry?”



“No Danny, everyone with a T.V. “

“I just don’t get it,” Danny says, exasperated.

“I watch the Tele-tubbies with my niece.”

“The Tele-tubbies?”

“Lala lost her ball.”

Danny looks at Jenny Quick incredulously. “What are you even talking about?”

“*Have you seen Laa-Laa ball?*” Jenny Quick uses the voice of Laa-Laa from the children’s TV show.

Danny remembers the child on the Airbus A380. “Not Tinki-Winki Lala,” he snaps. “Have you heard of Lala Island, in Fiji?”

“I am not an encyclopedia of the South Pacific,” Jenny Quick protests.

“I wanted to know which ecozone it

was in,” Danny sighs.

“It’s in the Fiji ecozone, of course.”

Danny looks at Jenny Quick with a mixture of mistrust and surprise. “I should stop while I am behind.” He reaches for his glass.

“You weren’t to know. The Fiji ecozone was not incorporated in the Millennium Assessment.”

“Why not?”

“Lack of funding. There was no money for the report.”

Danny felt his energy drain away. This is a consistent theme in the conversations of the past few days. The frogs are going extinct but there is not enough money to find out why. Human civilization won’t be saved because it’s more profitable to let it die. Danny is used to being awash with money. But

the environment, the very thing that kept all the humans and their economy alive, it had the income of a Bombay Beggar.

“You environmentalists are the most beautiful people in the world but you tell the saddest, saddest story,” he says.

Jenny Quick makes an empathic smile, “You’re a good man, Danny.” They look at each other silently for a little while, sharing a quiet melancholy.

“I can see your teeth,” Danny says breaking the trance. Jenny Quick covers her face with her hand, giggling. “Tell me more,” he says, finding his energy.

*“Pour quelle raison?”*

“Pork and Riesling. Yes. White meat with white wine is fine.”

*“Pour quelle raison?”* she repeats slowly, “why do you want to know?”

“I am learning about sustainability.”

*“C’est une bonne chose à faire.”*

That sounded like... Danny didn’t know what that sounded like. But it had the word ‘good’ in it, he was sure.

“Ecosystems are critical, aren’t they? Like they form the organs of the body of Gaia?” asks Danny.

Jenny Quick shrugs and sighs. “I went to Malta on my last holiday,” she says.

“So, how are they, these ecosystems?”

*“Les écosystèmes sont totalement baisée,”* she says with overt hand movements.

“Totalment bassy?”

“They are f\*\*\*ed, Danny. Humans have f\*\*\*ed the ecosystems. Across the whole planet,” she says abruptly. “It’s not something that I can explain properly this time of night.”

She looks silently at her hands and

then deliberately shakes off the growing melancholy that naturally forms from such a statement. She says, light-heartedly, “I went on a boat trip and ate gelato on the beach.” She starts laughing.

“I don’t really get it,” Danny says. “I heard about this thing called the Sixth Extinction. Do you know what that is?”

Jenny Quick eyes Danny uneasily. It wasn’t normal for a guy like him to stretch his brain this time of night. It just didn’t seem right. She wished that he would comment on her jewelry or ask her what else she did in Malta apart from eating gelato. She leans forwards pushing her face close to his. Danny observes her mouth is just a few inches from his face.

“Do you know what is a Bonobo,

Danny?” she asks sensually, in English but with a thick French accent.

“A sweet breath?”

“A Bonobo is the closest living relative to the humans,” she whispers, “the Pygmy Chimpanzee, scientific name *Pan paniscus*. The other type of chimp is *Pan Troglodytes*, the Common Chimp.”

The scent of Jenny Quick’s mouth makes want to click his fingers and be instantly falling asleep with his face in her hair.

“Do you know Bubbles and Cheetah?” she asks, in a whisper.

“What are you talking about?” he whispers back.

She sits back in her chair and says, “Bubbles was Michael Jackson’s pet chimp. And Cheetah was Tarzan’s.

Don't you watch the television?"

"Sometimes."

"Can you picture them?"

"Yeah, like hairy monkeys."

"Chimpanzees aren't monkeys, Danny!" Jenny Quick snaps, sitting upright. "And Bubbles is a Bonobo, *Pan paniscus*, and Cheetah is a *Pan troglodytes*, a Common Chimpanzee. Are you with me?"

Danny feels like he is being hypnotized. He feels as if the shock of the pistol going off in the car has jolted him into a new paradigm of consciousness. All of a sudden, he was being immersed in a new language, new people, and a new culture – a whole world of things to care about. He remembers Trent saying, "All you care about is capital gains and leases." That

was changing.

“You are good with words, aren’t you,” says Danny.

“Bubbles is a Bonobo, *Pan paniscus* and Cheetah is *Pan troglodytes*, a Common Chimpanzee,” she repeats. “You should try saying that.”

“Where do you get this stuff from?” he asks.

“I am telling you a story about the planet.”

“Okay.”

“Humans should really be called *Pan sapien*.”

Danny blinks, thinking it through, “Not *Homo sapien*?”

“That’s right. By placing ourselves in a different genus, Homo rather than Pan, we surrender humanity’s link to our closest relatives. In reality, we are just a



bunch of chimpanzees. Talented but uncaring chimps with a bad attitude toward the rest of nature.”

Danny nods slowly.

“It’s Linneus’ fault,” she says. “He was the taxonomist who chose the name *Homo sapien* which translates to ‘wise man’ and thereby set us apart from all the other ‘dumb’ animals.”

Jenny Quick sits back and took a sip from her Martini glass. “I bet you didn’t know I was a wise man.”

Danny says, “Ironic isn’t it, it’s wise ones who are causing all the grief.”

“Yes. And back to your Sixth Extinction – thanks for bringing that up, by the way – the Bonobo is being wiped out. Endangered to extinction in the wild. Only a few thousand left: habitat loss, poachers, bush-meat,

mobile phones. Danny, we can't even save our closest relative. We can't even save the cheekiest creature that the world's most famous pop star keeps as a pet. Do you understand the tragedy of that? The human condition."

"Mobile phones?"

"Danny."

"What?"

"Did you know that the Bonobo is the most sexually promiscuous animal on Earth?"

Danny sits upright. He takes a long drink from his glass.

"*Il shag à la baisse du chapeau,*" Jenny Quick whispers, softly.

Danny starts chuckling uncontrollably. "I think I just learnt French, he says. "You sure know how to switch from sustainability to sex."

“There are many linkages between sex and sustainability if you know where to look for them,” she says knowingly. Then she surprises him some more.

“I won’t go to bed with you tonight, Danny,” she says slowly. “You are very sweet and I am sure that it would be a lot of fun.”

Danny rocks back in his seat, unsure where this all fits in.

“It would be nice to jump your bones and forget about the dying planet for a while,” she says, and then sighs.

Danny moves strands of hair from her cheek, brushing his fingers lightly against her skin. He feels her tiredness and the melancholy that is close to the surface.

“But for all the flirting, I have to be sharp tomorrow morning, United

Nations Conference, Millennium Assessment.” She clicks her fingers close to his face. Click. Click. Click. “And life on earth suffers when we get distracted. *Non?*”

“I’m starting to understand that.”

“You are a good man, Danny. I like you. I’ll go back to France and you’ll go back to Australia. This is probably the last time I see you.”

“I won’t stop you going. I won’t forget you, either,” says Danny.

“You are a very sweet man.” She leans and kisses his forehead.

Danny watches as Jenny Quick makes to leave. She stands, straightens her dress and spends a few contemplative moments rearranging the contents of her handbag. Then she looks at Danny with a weary smile and says, “With

respect to both your global and personal quest for sustainability, Danny, this wise man offers one more piece of wisdom.”

Danny is pleased for the reprieve from his own thoughts, “I want to hear it,” he says, honestly.

Jenny Quick considers her words carefully then says: “When an environmentalist asks you to do something - just do it.”

She makes one more flicker of those Mediterranean eyes before she turns and leaves forever and she says, “Or don’t, it’s your call.”

## Madeline Cries

The Peking Petroleum limousine pulls up in front of the Burj al Arab.

Madeline has cleaned her vodka orange vomit off the glass divider as best she can with napkins. She slides open the divider and apologizes to the driver and hands him some cash, asking for him to have the car detailed.

She walks quickly through the hotel lobby to the elevators, conscious of her appearance. Immediately inside her suite, she leans against the wall, breathing deeply. After a while in this position, she feels calmer. She strips off her clothes in the dim room and turns on the television. She walks into the bathroom and turns on the shower, full blast.

Hot water streams in the shower

cubicle. She is about to step inside when she hears a news broadcast, “In news just in, a mysterious killing in Dubai, has left a man dead in a crashed taxi...

“The dead man, identified as Australian, Richard Holmes, was killed by a single gunshot wound to the head.

“The taxi driver told police that two passengers, a man and a woman, fled the scene.

“Documents on the dead man’s body linked him to a project on a Pacific Island...”

Madeline stands naked in the dark hotel room with a towel in her hand. She is in front of the TV, staring at the images. Her jaw drops.

“Documents on the dead man’s body linked him to a project on a Pacific

Island called Lala.”

Madeline shudders. In the dim light of the hotel room, she imagines Teck, slouched in a chair next to her. In her mind’s eye, Teck holds her in his Komodo Dragon trance, like when he had prepared her for the full effect of that word: “Lala.”

*La-la. La-la. La-la.* An ambulance siren screams from the TV. Penetrating. Alarming.

In the darkness, the TV flashes blue and red and orange with moving pictures of that horrible scene. A paramedic in white overalls wearing rubber gloves moves around the TV screen. There is a limousine on the TV. For a brief instant, Madeline sees her own face as the TV camera pans past. She had been so fixated by Holmes’



body that she had not noticed that she had become part of the evening news.

Suddenly, Madeline feels panic again, feeling as though she was being stalked. Will she ever escape the Butcher of Baghdad? She clutches the towel to her chest. The taste of vodka orange vomit rises in her throat. A smell of burnt rubber seems to fill the room. She senses the confined space inside the Storm Front jet flying to Baghdad airport, screaming from the sky, spiraling into the flames of her own personal City of terror. *La-la. La-la. La-la.* Sirens. Flashing emergency lights. Loud noises. Horrible accidents. Death and pain.

Instantly, she picks up her mobile phone and dials Brad Moore.

Brad Moore speaks calmly, “Hello

Madeline. Are you watching the news?”

“I am not going to string up these innocents anymore,” she growls. “You are a murderer, whether it was you or Teck who pulled the trigger.”

“It is okay Madeline, you can go home now,” Brad Moore’s voice is cold, uncaring.

“It’s not finished you evil bastard. I am implicated in a murder. I am right in the middle of it. Do you think I will just lie down?”

“Don’t get caught in the crossfire, Madeline. Just get on the plane and go back to California.”

“Don’t threaten me you f\*\*\*ing monster!”

“Just go home, Madeline,” Brad Moore says curtly.

However, Madeline doesn’t hear this

last comment as the next story come over the TV news. In is an introduction to a feature about some Fiji Islanders who welcome the opportunity to engage with the petroleum industry. Madeline lowers the phone to listen to the report.

The presenter says, “In a rare interview, after the break, we meet two South Sea Islanders who are caught between the worlds of tradition and modernity and a fantastic opportunity to enter the oil age.”

All of the jigsaw pieces fall into place. “You choose to be evil, Brad Moore. Every second of every day, you choose it.”

Madeline closes the phone and stands in the dark swaying, blankly staring at adverts for sports cars and shampoo.

Her mind is a cacophony of words and noises and chaotic thoughts.

As she stands, naked, swooning in the dark, the advertisements end and the story about the Fiji Islanders came on the TV. She watches Pusan jumping into the luxury hotel swimming pool in a \$200 bikini. She sees Manil tucking into a plate of prawns and lobster, part of a seafood platter big enough to feed an army. She watches the carefully selected pieces of footage blend together to tell the TV audience that the Fiji Islanders would do anything to achieve the lifestyle that the Western world took for granted. Pusan says that the island culture was holding the young people back. Andy says that the Fijians faced an uncertain future.

The bulletin runs for seven minutes.

Madeline watches the bright, shining lie that she had created. It is impeccable work.

Immediately after the bulletin, there is a thirty second advert for Peking Petroleum. It shows manicured lawns around oil pumping equipment and healthy, smiling native people. The tagline reads: Peking Petroleum - Empowering Communities.

Madeline is dumbstruck. It is as though she had been living in fog her whole life and the fog just lifted. From an office on the thirtieth floor, Brad Moore was rearranging the consciousness of hundreds of millions of people for an oil project. She was just a small part of it. Just one cog in the wheel of a machine that swallowed up humans and the environment and

spat out money covered in petroleum oil.

Madeline is motionless, her mouth agape. In her hand, her mobile phone rings. The noise shocks her. She gasps, thinking it is Brad Moore calling her with more threats.

“F\*\*\* off!” she bellows down the handset, and then stands silently, listening for a reply.

For a few seconds there is nothing but silence, then a voice that is not Brad Moore’s, “That is not out of character, Madeline.”

“Who is this?”

“An apologist for the oil industry, apparently. That will come as a surprise to a lot of people.”

Madeline is in no mood to be pushed around by Andy the Pig. “Well, hello

Andy. You must be at the airport now. How nice of you to call. I saw you on TV. Very dashing with your dreadlocks and kangaroo skin tobacco pouch.”

“Who the f\*\*\* are you Madeleine Obst? Who do you work for?”

“Who the f\*\*\* are you, Mr. Piggy? Protector of the poor. Saver of the dying planet? What were you doing with those poor Islanders, Andrew? They don’t belong with us.”

“Us? There is nothing in common between you and I, Madeline. They are drowning. Their entire nation is drowning.”

“I didn’t see much drowning in the resort pool. Except Manil drowning in tiger prawns. Poor children had been living on mung beans and green-propaganda for weeks. What values do

you have to offer? What is in it for them?”

“What’s in it for you, Madeleine?”

“It’s a great story, Andy. I craft together pieces of information to make a story the world pays to hear.”

“And you don’t care what dies in the process.”

Madeline notes that Andy is very calm. All his nervous energy that had annoyed her so much has gone. “Don’t question my judgment, Piggy. I am crystal clear about what happens in the world and what I say about it.”

“Then why don’t you say something that does good?”

Madeline feels a hot flush race up her chest and into her face. The impertinent little prick just won’t go away. If he wants to fight, she’ll fight.



“Okay. How about I come and work for you, huh? Why doesn’t your group, what is it called, PIGG?” she laughs spontaneously as she says the word.

“PIGG. Great branding, Andy, you f\*\*\*ing amateur.” She can barely talk for laughing, the stress mixed up with the humor. “I can’t believe that I am fighting with you minuscule people. How’s this? You offer me a four-week contract, branding, marketing and communications strategy. You can be my boss. I will tell your story.”

“And what would be the cost of that?”

“More than your annual budget,” she snaps.

“You could volunteer,” says Andy, “undo some of the damage you’ve done.”

Madeline laughs aloud again. “That’s

your job, Andy. You are the volunteer. I am the media professional. Why don't you become a media professional?"

"That is not what I do."

"Then maybe you shouldn't be playing the game! Just get on the plane and go home, boy."

These words suddenly remind Madeline of Brad Moore's instructions, telling her to go back to California. It is almost as if Brad Moore were speaking through her.

The thought of Brad Moore's voice coming from her mouth makes Madeline shudder. Goosebumps flash across her whole body and she shivers violently.

She catches sight of herself in the mirror. Her long slender body is firm. She sees faint shadows, flickering from

the light of the TV that defines the muscle groups on her thighs and belly. She sees a fierce, talented woman. She looks alert, animated, and powerful. She sees the product of commitment and hard work standing there, doing what she did best.

She is naked. Aggressive. Fighting... But what is she fighting for?

“Why don’t you say something that leads to good?” Andy’s words come back to haunt her. They surrounded her. Taunt her.

Suddenly, she feels as though the hotel room has detached from Earth and is drifting into space. It feels as though the air-conditioner is stuck at its lowest setting. She is alone and cold, like she was standing on a tsunami beach as the water is receding, falling away from her,

as though even the ocean could not stand to be near her.

“Why don’t you say something that leads to good?” The words bring back the sea, rolling, foaming, consuming. A cold wave crashes over her, smashing her into the sand. She shudders as a vision appears before her eyes; a scene conjured out of the darkest corner of her mind.

Madeline is presenting a TV gameshow called: *Lets Do Something Good Today*. She’s standing next to the swimming pool in the Jumeirah Beach Hotel holding a microphone in her hand. The two Fijian children, Manil and Pusan are kneeling at the edge of the pool, facing the water. Their hands are tied behind their backs with electrical wire. They have dark bruises all over their faces and shoulders, looking like the wretched victims of the Iraqi death squads. Madeline asks the little girl, Pusan,

“Why don’t we do something good today?”

But she doesn’t listen to the mumbled reply. Instead, she stands back as Teck shoots the children through the back of the head and their bodies fall into the pool.

Brad Moore claps approvingly as Madeline steps forward into the view of the camera with the microphone and says, “Thank you for doing something good today.”

Madeline is wracked in pain. She is shuddering uncontrollably. Through her agony, a trickle of goodness was forced from her soul. “Andy,” she gasps. She can barely speak, choking back an emotional burden that is many years in the making. “Your heart is so much in the right place, Andy. But this is not some little squabble. You want to fight the oil industry. You pitiful, weaponless

people want to fight the purest evil on Earth. People who will kill anything for oil. And while you are losing the war, the whole world is being destroyed.”

“I didn’t know you knew that.”

“Who doesn’t know that, Andy? There aren’t enough people like me to hide the truth.”

“Then why don’t you start telling the truth?” Andy asks.

“I am too good at telling lies.”

“But you can change. You can change now.”

Madeline sighs, and when she speaks, the intonation of her voice changes, “No one can change, Andy. The best we can do is adapt to being wrong our whole lives.”

Andy is silent. He doesn’t understand. He doesn’t know what to say. It is like

he was talking to another woman now, not Madeline Obst.

“Keep your passion, Andy. But tuck it away. Be stone cold. Get a thick face and a black heart. Maybe you can save us all.”

Madeline can't speak any longer; she can't even see herself in the mirror as tears are flowing down her face. For the first time since she was a child, she feels vulnerable. She feels bad and wrong. She turns off the phone. She lies on the carpeted floor and hugs her knees close to her belly. Then she cries, like the last time, when she was six years old. It just all pours out.

When Madeline's tears finally stop, she finds herself curled up on the floor clutching the white bathroom towel. She stands slowly, weakly. She rubs

away her tears to see herself in the mirror again. She is neither powerful nor talented now, but crestfallen and weak. She can't bear to see that sight. So she moves to the shower, stopping at the curtain, staring at the hot water still streaming in the cubicle.

She watches litre after litre of hot water pouring down the plughole in one of the driest countries in the world. She feels like her own existence is being sucked down the drain with it, a wasted resource, powered by a finite and destructive energy source.

The hot shower washes away her tears. She scrubs every part of her body, as though to cleanse her of the horror that had crept back into her life. In front of the vanity mirror, she towels her hair, looking into her own eyes,



watching herself come to a conclusion. She slips into a white bathrobe and picks up the house phone.

First she makes a call to Suli and picks his meager brain for information. That doesn't take long. Then she dials the hotel reception desk and asks to be put through to the Jumeirah Beach Hotel and she asks for Bren Hannan's room.

After a few seconds, Bren answers the phone, "Hello?"

"Bren Hannan. You don't know me. My name is Madeline Obst. I need to speak with you."

"Madeline? What do you want to speak with me about?"

"I have some information for you. I know about Lala Island"

Bren is silent for a while. Then she asks cautiously, "Who are you? What

do you know about Lala?”

“I can’t talk over the phone. Can you meet me? There is a bar at the top of your hotel. Do you know where that is?”

Bren is uneasy, but she agrees. “I’ll find it,” she says.

## Bren Meets Madeline

Bren exits the elevator on the 24<sup>th</sup> floor and walks along the long corridor towards the Uptown Bar. As she approaches the entrance, she sees a young woman and asks, “It is Madeline?”

The woman smiles and says, “No. I’m Jenny Quick.”

“Oh, okay,” says Bren.

“I hope you find her.”

“Thanks.”

Bren enters the Uptown Bar and sees Danny on a barstool, wearily staring at his hands. She pauses briefly, observing the arrangement of the chairs and the empty martini glass. Then she glances out to the balcony where there is a woman seated, looking her direction. Bren approaches cautiously and the

woman holds out her hand.

“Bren. I am Madeline Obst.”

Danny exhales a long sigh and raises his head. He glances around the bar and notices something both strange and disturbing. For some reason, Bren has left her bed and has come to the Uptown Bar. What's more, she is on the balcony talking to the woman that he met in the Skyview on his first night in Dubai. Hairs instantly came up on Danny's arms. There is no way someone like Bren, so idealistic and naïve, could survive that killer woman. Danny watches intently, his nerves on edge, ready at moment's notice to spring into action and intervene on Bren's behalf.

Bren shies away from Madeline's hand. She stands clutching her purse to

her chest, feeling as though she were near a fierce animal. She can see that Madeline has been crying and she feels empathy.

“I know about Lala,” Madeline says.

“How do you know about Lala?” asks Bren, surprised. She studies Madeline, assessing whether it is safe to be near her.

“I was hired to help secure access to Lala’s oil.”

“What did you do?”

“I made up lies and put them on the TV.”

“Why would you do that?” asks Bren, stunned.

“That’s what I do. I protect corporations through the media.”

“You are with the oil company?” asks Bren, nervously.

“Yes. Peking Petroleum. But not any longer.”

“You just left?” asks Bren. “Why?”

“They killed someone.”

“Richard Holmes?”

“Yes, that’s him,” says Madeline.

“Yes, that’s him?” mimics Bren, her voice picking up. “That ‘him’ was my Uncle!”

Madeline is quiet, slowly nodding her head. “I understand.”

“I don’t think you do understand, Madeline! I had to wash bits of skull-bone out of my hair.” Bren’s voice cracks and she is nearly in tears herself. “Look,” she snaps, pushing out her shoe, “How do you get blood out of white leather, Madeline?”

Madeline reaches out for Bren’s hand but she shies away again. “Bren. Please

accept my deepest sympathy for your loss. I was not responsible for his death but I was involved with terrible people who were. I can't bring him back. But I can help you." Madeline keeps her hand held out, desperately wanting for Bren to touch her. "Please let me come across to the light side." Madeline's voice is strained as Andy's words come back to her mind. "Maybe I can change, Bren. Maybe I can say something good."

"How would you do that?" Bren asks.

"We could tell the world about Peking Petroleum and Lala. I am good at telling stories. I can tell the truth as well. Yes, I know I can."

Madeline is struggling against tears and Bren feels a tumble of emotions that include empathy, sadness and

bravery. She takes Madeline's hand and squats next to her chair. Then the two women hug and cry on each other's shoulders.



## Danny Finally Gets It

From inside the bar, Danny watches Bren and Madeline hugging. He shakes his head in weary concern. He sifts through a small bowl of spiced nuts and sultanas. Then he sees Madeline Obst walking in his direction. Just a few metres away, she stops and looks at him.

“Mr. Lexion,” she says, tersely.

“Ms. Obst.” Danny sits upright and conveys with his eyes a murderous intent. He glances across to the balcony to see Bren collecting her purse and standing. When he looks back to Madeline Obst, she is gone.

He heaves a sigh of relief and looks up to see Bren approaching him.

“Hello Danny,” she says calmly. She observes the empty Martini glass and

the trace of lipstick on the edge.

“Hey, Bren. You’re up late. Who was that?”

“That was Madeline Obst.”

“*Uhuh?* Is she a friend of yours?”

“She is now.”

“What is she doing here?”

“Madeline works for Peking Petroleum, the people who killed Uncle Richard.”

Danny chokes as a bit of peanut catches in his throat. “Are you serious? Why were you hugging her? You should have had me to throw the bitch off the balcony.”

“She has come around, Danny. She wants to help us. She says the oil company will do anything to get Lala, even if means killing more people.”

“Bren, you have no idea what you are

dealing with. That woman..."

"Do you know her?"

"I... I... I... know her type."

Bren scoffs, "All that from a glance."

Bren observes Danny sitting on his bar stool with the bowl of nuts in his hands. She is reminded of the first night she met him, and the feeling that he was a man who could not be relied on. With Madeline on her side, he has suddenly become somewhat unnecessary. Maybe it's a good time to cut him loose. "But look don't worry about it," she says, "It's a green thing, you are either into it or not."

"Hey I'm into it, you know," says Danny, "the planet is dying, committed people trying to save it. It's a great story."

He pops some nibbles into his mouth

and crunches them loudly. He notices Bren has a new mood and she's wearing game-face.

“*Nahhh*. It's not your thing, Danny. You should be back in Townsville with the Horny Monk. You don't have any empathy for the planet.”

Danny looks at his lap, feeling as though a friend had reprimanded him. He wants to just let the comment go but he knows that Bren has a point. There's a common element to all the environmental people he has met. For them, the environment is serious business, coming from somewhere deep inside them. He doesn't have it like that.

For Danny, the environment is an intellectual exercise. It's like finding a book about some obscure topic - the

torture methods used by the Americans on the inmates in Guantanamo Bay, for example - and becoming obsessed with it, wanting to talk about it and learn about it. But in reality, it's just a passing interest that will eventually be replaced with something else.

In this way, Danny is a dilettante, a butterfly, someone who dances around the edge but never commits. It was as though the environmentalists were from a common family, like they were genetically related. Danny wasn't like them because he didn't 'care' for the environment. In fact, just like Trent had said in the Heritage Bar, apart from signing leases, he didn't really care about anything. As he glumly ponders these things, Bren interrupts him.

"I didn't mean it that way, Danny. I'm

sorry. I am just so very sad right now.”

She leans over and kisses his cheek.

“You are a beautiful dabbler, Danny.

And you have a role. It’s an important one.”

“Do I have a role, Bren?” he asks, genuinely, looking up from his hands, “what would my role be?”

“Your job is to pleasure the environmental girls. That’s your role.”

Danny sits upright in his chair, a smile returning to his face. He pops a spicy sultana in his mouth and chews it, eyeing Bren with new interest.

“What an awesome mission,” he thinks. He recalls his encounter with Michelle Tyler. Hell, with a job like that, Danny could really get into environmentalism. He’d even be prepared to go full time.

“Have you finished drinking tonight?” Bren asks.

“Hell, yeah!” he says, enthusiastically, “I’ll walk you back to your room.”

As they step into the elevator, Danny wonders whether Madeline Obst falls under his new remit. If so, he could get to work straight away.

“So how did you meet Madeline?” he asks, hopefully as they step into the elevator.

“She called me tonight and asked to see me.”

“Why?”

“She saw Uncle Richard’s body in the taxi and realized that it was Peking Petroleum who did it.”

Danny mulls this over, unsure where it all fits in. “So what happens next?”

“We are going to the media to tell the

world about Lala.”

Danny senses that the word ‘we’ refers to Bren and Madeline, and not to him. She confirms this with her next statement.

“But you’ve already got a date lined up, so you needn’t come.”

“No, Bren, I don’t have a date,” says Danny, impatiently, “and I think I ought to come.”

“Are you sure, because you’ve been on a date every night since you have been here.”

The elevator stops at their floor and they take the argument into the hallway. Danny is about to protest that it was only two nights out of three that he has been on a date, because meeting Madeline on the first night didn’t count. Before he can speak, Bren continues.



“And I wouldn’t want saving Lala to interrupt your love life.”

“Bren.” Danny pulls her to a stop in the plush corridor.

This abrupt movement is all that’s needed to trigger Bren to end it with Danny once and for all. “Let’s face it, Danny, you are not an environmentalist,” she says, curtly.

“You should stick to being a property developer. That way you will have plenty of money to buy the sustainability girls a nice cocktail and take their mind off the fact that the humans are murdering the biosphere.”

“What are you talking about?” Danny protests.

“What am I talking about?” she snaps. “We have 24 hours to prevent a turtle breeding colony from being turned into

a parking lot for oil trucks and all you can think about is sex!”

Danny ups the ante, “As it happens, Bren, I have been in sustainability class tonight.”

“Oh, really? And what was tonight’s floozy teaching you?”

“That was no floozy. That was an editor for the Millennium Assessment Ecosystem Agreement and I’ve been learning about ecosystems, actually, and primate ecology. I have been learning about Bonobos tonight, Bren.”

“What would she know primatology? She was wearing dead fish.”

“You and your dead fish.”

“When the oil runs out all her clothes will disappear.”

“That sounds like a good outcome,” says Danny, brashly.

Bren glares at him with an expression of horror.

“Do you know what a Bonobo is, Bren?” Danny continues and then remembers that the Climate Cop knows everything about the planet.

“What did you learn about Bonobos, Danny?” Bren asks, snidely.

Danny sees an opening to show off his new knowledge, and to forward his argument that he was not just thinking about sex. “I learned that Bonobos are the most promiscuous animal on the planet and... *oooh*,” he says.

Bren’s jaw drops open. She starts shaking her head.

Out of his depth again, Danny starts blurting, “Bren, I would make a good environmentalist. I... I... I’m well prepared.”

“Prepared? Rubbish. You’re a nouveau-riche butterfly.”

“I spent three years as an army medic.”

“So?”

“I have a black belt in Tae Kwon Do and a Masters of Business. Huh? How about that?”

“So what?” she blurts.

“I manage a multi-million dollar property portfolio and... and... I read widely and I have my own views about how the world works. And when you call me a butterfly, Bren, I think that you miss this context.”

“But you don’t use green-power in your flat,” Bren snaps.

“Okay, I get that.”

“You don’t even drive the hybrid version of that huge Toyota.”

“It’s not a Toyota, Bren, it’s a Lexus.”

“It’s the same thing if it is not a hybrid. And you shave in the shower.”

“Well...”

“And you eat pig bacon. Pig bacon!”

“Alright! But I am just one man, Bren,” snaps Danny, his heat rising. “You forget that a billion Chinamen are industrializing. Why don’t you learn Cantonese and tell the f\*\*\*ing Chinks to turn their bathroom lights off!”

Outside Danny’s door, Bren stops in her tracks. “F\*\*\*ing? Is that all you ever think about?” she stammers, aghast.

“I am sorry, I was heated.”

“Oh, that’s okay Danny, don’t mind me. Don’t mind that the turtles are going extinct.”

“But Bren.”

“Don’t worry that your new girlfriend

was covered in seaweed, just f\*\*\* away, Danny! F\*\*\* away!”

“Oh, Bren everything’s out of context,” says Danny, feeling drained.

They arrived at the door of Danny’s room and he slides the card into the door lock. He’s angry, feeling like he is being punished just for being himself. He wants to use reason but Bren keeps mixing up all sorts of unrelated elements. It’s asymmetrical warfare and it just isn’t fair.

He pushes the door open but before he steps inside, he stops, gripping Bren’s forearm very tight. He suddenly feels as though he were back in Trent’s Hummer outside the Townsville airport. And, almost as though Trent were sitting right beside him, he hears the cryptic statement, “You are going to

have to be someone else to land that one.” Danny didn’t understand what Trent’s words meant at the time, but now the meaning is crystal clear.

Bren protests, trying to pull her arm away, but Danny’s grip is firm. She sees that his face is fixed and his eyes wide open. On his forearm, the hair is erect and his skin speckled with goose bumps.

It comes as a big shock to Danny, out of nowhere, and the realisation is totally and abundantly clear to him: he wants her, she’s in danger and she’s leaving him. The insight renders him speechless for a beat and then he says, “Okay, I just got it.”

“Will you let go of me?” Bren pulls her arm free.

“Okay, Bren, I am onboard.”

“On-board? You’re not even on the same planet.”

“No. I am onboard. Absolutely.”

“Onboard what?”

“Onboard like a jet engine leaving water vapour in the stratosphere.”

“Oh, is that right?” Bren chuckles, callously, “Danny Lexion is suddenly onboard?”

“When you get a sale, Bren, stop pitching. You’ve got what you wanted.”

“I have got what...” Bren growls, “Oh boy, you have delusions of grandeur!”

“I am telling you, Bren, I’m completely on your wavelength.”

“A dabbler expands his circle of concern,” she scoffs. “Just like that.”

“Bren...”

Bren draws a picture frame in the air



with her hands, “Danny Lexion, the new face of environmentalism.”

Danny is out of patience to convince her of his change of heart, so he says these words with a voice drawn from the pit of his stomach, loud, firm, booming. “I’m coming with you tomorrow, woman. And if anyone gets in the way I’M GUNNA TO PUT ‘EM DOWN!!”

Suddenly, Bren leaps ecstatically into the air. She lands against and kisses his mouth. The movement catches him by surprise and he staggers back against the wall.

“That’s the man I’m looking for!” Bren shouts excitedly, “that’s the man on fire!”

“That’s where I am,” Danny says, holding Bren by the shoulders and

grinning stupidly, “You won, Bren. You won. You converted me.”

He pulls her closer to kiss her some more but she fends him off. “Come on darling, give us a kiss.”

She shakes free from his embrace. “I am glad to have you onboard, Danny, but I am not going to f\*\*\* you,” she says, brushing herself down, defensively. “Because I’ve seen the types of girls you hang out with and I am clearly not your type.”

## The Tiff

In the morning, Danny places a call to Bren's room and sits on the side of his bed listening to the tone until it rings out. He puts down the phone, thinking about when he had first seen Bren with Madeline. Was Bren with Madeline now? Was she safe?

He takes the elevator to the ground floor and walks towards the breakfast restaurant. Bren is there, seated at a table, listening intently to a story that Madeline Obst is telling. Next to Bren, Madeline looks supremely powerful in her green leather jacket. Danny slows his pace, intently studying the interaction between the two women.

“How is this playing out?” he wonders, Madeline works for the Peking Petroleum, the people who

killed Richard Holmes. Now she is winning over Bren, the Heir to the Lala project. What should he do? Pick a fight with Madeline? Join the table and make light?

As Danny dithers pensively he notices a tall Middle Eastern man in a suit behaving oddly with a device that like a smartphone connected to a microphone. He is pointing the device through the foliage of the indoor plants that surrounded the restaurant.

Suli adjusts the earphone and glances up to see Danny looking at him. They stare blankly at each other for some seconds. Then Suli pulls the earphone from his ear, turns and walks away. Danny watches as he disappears into the crowd in the lobby.

Looking back at Bren and Madeline,

Danny decides that it is time to butt in. He marches up to the table and pulls a chair next to Bren. He places his hand on her shoulder and aims a kiss at her cheek.

Bren allows the kiss to land and she smiles. That's a good sign.

"Hi, Danny," she says, sweetly.

Danny settles himself in his seat and glares at Madeline. He holds out his hand formally and says, "Danny Lexion."

"That's already been established," laughs Madeline.

Danny takes note of his hand hovering in mid-air over the table and feels instantly frustrated that Bren has observed the rebuff. He lowers his hand and draws a menu towards him.

"Sounds like you've already met," says

Bren, confused.

Danny stays silent. He opens the menu and turns his attention to the breakfast options, hoping that Madeline wouldn't spill the beans.

Madeline says, "We met briefly a few nights ago."

"Really?" asks Bren.

Danny steps in quickly, desperate not to lose control of the story, "It was on our first night in Dubai, Bren. You went to bed. I went for a drink and found myself at the Skyview Bar. Madeline was on her way out."

Madeline laughs softly, "Something like that."

"Where is the Skyview Bar?" asks Bren, nonplussed.

"In the Burj Hotel. Where we are going to meet your Uncle's Lawyer

tonight,” says Danny.

“*Oh*,” says Bren, not knowing what to make of it all.

“We passed each other in the hallway,” says Madeline, meeting Danny’s eye for a second. She addresses Bren, “So, you are meeting your Uncle’s Lawyer?”

Bren becomes animated, “Oh, yes. Apparently, Uncle Richard planned that I would take over the Lala project in the event of his death,” she says.

Danny’s mouth falls open as he realises that he has inadvertently introduced the subject of Holmes’ Lawyer to Madeline. He looks anxiously at the menu, his mind whirring furiously. There is a movement behind the pot plants and Danny sees a glimpse of the Middle Eastern man

again. Who was that guy? Sniper? Paparazzi? Danny's heart starts pounding.

He looks back to Bren to see that she is chatting with Madeline, but he can hear nothing, just a whistling noise inside his head. He has to do something. Now.

Under the table, Danny moves his hand onto Bren's knee and grips it very firmly. At the same time he taps the edge of the menu loudly on the table. Bren stops talking and looks at him.

Danny's eyes lock on Madeline's as he leans forward and says very plainly, "Madeline, would you be so kind as to allow Bren and I a few moments alone."

Under the table, Bren grips Danny's hand trying to prevent him from cutting



circulation to her feet.

“Good timing, Mr. Lexion. I have a few calls to make.”

“Fantastic.” Danny watches as Madeline collects her purse and moves away from the table.

“What the f\*\*\* are you doing?” protests Bren, when Madeline is out of earshot.

“You’re completely out of your depth, Bren. You’ve no idea who you’re dealing with.”

“Will you stop molesting me?!” Bren pulls his hand off her knee.

“That woman is a machine, Bren, she’s barely even human.”

“You’ve already been there, haven’t you?” asks Bren, accusingly.

“I was in the Skyview the other night, I went to say hello and she was totally

cold to me.”

“Oh, I get it. You get knocked back, so obviously, she’s not even a human being. Danny Lexion, you so need to stop taking Viagra!”

Danny feels panic rising. He’s totally lost. “What!?”

“Maybe take the eye-drops instead of the tablets.”

“What does that even mean!?”

“Take a long hard look at yourself, Danny Lexion!” Bren crosses her arms and turns away from him.

“Bren, you don’t understand. That woman is in a totally different class.”

“Class? Are you kidding me? Last night, you were with a woman who had more dead fish than a tuna cannery.”

Danny thinks quickly. He needs Climate Cop language – and quick!

He says very directly, “And what the f\*\*\* was your new recruit wearing? Huh? You know what the label says: Panda leather dyed in greenwash.”

It works. Bren shows a look of undisguised horror. Danny presses for advantage. He searches desperately for words, conscious that the seconds are ticking away before Madeline returns. “I’m telling you, Bren. I have dealt with some hard-hitters f\*\*\*ers in my time and that woman will eat you alive. You can’t trust her motivations.”

“Her motivations! That’s an interesting idea. Actually, Danny, what were your motivations?”

“For what?”

“For flying me to Dubai,” Bren taps her fingernail repeatedly on the table.

“Tell me the truth, Danny.”

Whoa! It's like back to the Heritage Bar. A sweat breaks out on Danny's neck. He is being challenged, to tell the truth. The truth! What the hell is the truth, anyway? It's all just story in a sea of possibilities.

Getting knocked back in front of Trent and committing \$20,000 to regain his prestige by making an offer Bren couldn't refuse. Was that the truth? He had always wanted to go to Dubai and didn't want to travel alone. That was true as well. He needed something better, though.

Danny sweats over this life-changing question. He looks furtively around the restaurant for an answer. He can see Madeline in her green Panda leather jacket talking animatedly on her mobile. His mind races, thoughts tumble one

on top of another. Eventually, something blurts out of his mouth, “I liked you.” Danny feels numb, wondering why he just said that.

Bren shifts in her seat. She sighs a little bit. Scratches the side of her neck with a fingertip then lifts the menu from the table. She mumbles some incoherent words quietly to herself, shifts and sighs again. Danny wonders where it will all lead.

“Will you order me strawberry juice with the fruit salad, Danny?” Bren asks, finally.

Danny draws a long, deep breath, then exhales, staring at the ceiling, feeling a strong sense of catharsis. “Yeah. Panda juice. No worries,” he says, numbly.

“I don’t want Panda juice, Danny. Strawberry juice.”

“Yes. Strawberry juice. That’s right. I just think that Madeline is not going to serve you well for very long.”

“You let me worry about recruitment, Danny. You don’t know what she’s been through.”

“Okay,” he says, “and what has Madeline been through?”

“She used to work for a security company in the Iraq war,” says Bren from behind the menu.

“And?”

“There was this soldier called Teck. They had an affair and it went really wrong.”

“That figures,” says Danny.

“Teck was messed up and he’d kill people to force her back to Iraq to answer for the killings.”

“Why are you telling me this?” asks

Danny, perplexed.

“Because Teck is in Dubai. That’s who killed Uncle Richard.”

“Wow,” says Danny, rocking back in his seat. He looks up to see Madeline approaching. Madeline Obst, victim, perpetrator and Bren’s new best friend forever.

Danny leans close to Bren and says quickly, “Bren, promise me one thing. The second that Madeline fails to serve your cause. Let her go.”

Danny takes Bren’s hand in his, looks into her eyes, pleading, “Promise me that, Bren. Please. I’ll be there for you if it happens.”

Bren looks at Danny’s hands wrapped tightly around her own. She glances up as Madeline resumes her seat and starts talking immediately.

“I have just spoken with CNN, Al Jazeera and BBC. They are all very excited about the Lala story,” Madeline says, “And we have a limo to pick us up and take us to Media City.”

“That’s great news,” says Bren.

“And I also had a quick chat with my Mom,” says Madeline, cheerily.

“You have a mother?” asks Danny, curtly.

Madeline leans forward, pointing her perfectly manicured finger at Danny’s face, “Listen here, buster...”

Bren interrupts her, “It’s okay Madeline,” she says, “Danny’s on our side now.”



## Kill Madeline Obst

Brad Moore looks out at the Dubai skyline from his leather swivel chair. He is thinking about Madeline Obst yelling at him over the phone the night before, and the conversation with Suli that morning. He calls Teck and tells him to come in.

When Teck arrives, Brad Moore says, “Suli has been gaining intelligence this morning. It’s a funny concept, I know.”

Teck doesn’t respond; he just stands there looking like a sad sack.

Brad Moore continues, “It turns out that the Lala project has passed to the niece of the man you shot. Do you understand what that means?”

Teck nods silently. It means that there are more people to be killed.

“As if that wasn’t bad enough,

Madeline Obst, my personal liar for hire, has turned on us.”

“Turned?” asks Teck, surprised.

“It’s time to rub them all out, Teck.”

“All of them?”

“All of them. Madeline, too.”

“There is no point,” Teck protests.

“Madeline Obst has become an uncontrollable risk. She is taking her new friends to do media interviews. She is going to blow the lid off the story about you blowing the lid off old Richard Holmes.”

“Pay her off,” Teck snaps.

“She is a shareholder in an Iraq Security company, Teck. She’s rolling in money.”

“Pay her more.”

“Teck, you have to understand. Madeline Obst is a master at telling lies.

If she ever starts telling the truth, the entire oil industry will be finished. You need to rub her out.”

“I don’t think she should be killed.”

“And I don’t pay you to think!” Brad Moore shouts, slapping his palm on the desk. “It’s not your strong-suit.”

There is no outward reaction from Teck although his reptile brain starts working hard, considering the implications of going against Brad Moore.

Brad Moore observes Teck staring at the floor. He doesn’t look like the Action Man he used to be, just a big sack of misery. The Oil Man makes a dry grin, trying to get Teck to smile, “Your gun-work is all over the evening news, Tecky-boy. What do you call that one, *huh?* The JFK?”

Teck scowls. He shifts in his place, still looking at the floor.

“Come on soldier. It’s just a bit of bang-bang. There’s a nice bonus for you once we get Lala sorted. Huh? And a little something right now?”

Brad Moore moves over to a wall cupboard in which there are two cases containing the guns that had been confiscated at the Dubai airport: the Colt M4 assault rifle and the Baby Uzi. He retrieves the larger of the two cases, keeping the Baby Uzi out of sight.

“Sit down, son,” says Brad Moore, placing his hand on Teck’s shoulder and pushing him into the sofa next to the coffee table. He lays the gun case on the table and clicks open the plastic lugs that hold down the lid.

“I got your favourite toy back,”

whispers Brad Moore as he lifts the lid. Inside is the Colt M4, a powerful, deadly gun. It is made of dull black metal. Rows of loaded ammunition magazines were squeezed into the foam padding around the gun. Teck stares at the weapon as though he were looking at a familiar face, not knowing whether it was a friend or an enemy.

“That’s not my favourite toy,” Teck moans.

Brad Moore pulls a magazine from the gun case. He pushes one of the cartridges from the magazine and places it in Teck’s palm. Teck examines the cartridge, mesmerized by its brassy colour and the faint smell of gun oil.

“Head of Fiji Security. That’s your new job,” whispers Brad Moore. “Your office will be under a palm tree. And

they have military coups instead of public holidays in Fiji. You'll f\*\*\*ing love the place."

Brad Moore places the metal magazine in Teck's hand and closes the soldier's fist around it. He returns to his desk and watches Teck stare at the gun.

"Come on Tecky. There's a good boy. Suli is waiting for you with the car. Here..." Brad Moore tosses a set of keys.

Teck catches the keys and this snaps him out of his lethargic stupor. He places the bullet back in the magazine, and the magazine into the hole in the foam padding. Then he closes the lid of the gun case.

"The Liar for Hire made a mistake, Teck," says Brad Moore. "She's using the company limousine to transport her

friends from the Jumeirah Beach Hotel to Media City.” Brad Moore nods towards the door. “You should kill the driver too.”

## To the Jumeirah Beach Hotel

Teck takes the lift to the basement where Suli is waiting, resting against a black Chevrolet Suburban. Teck presses the remote key and the lights of the big car flash bright orange and the horn makes a loud ‘honk-honk’ noise, startling Suli.

Teck throws the keys sharply at Suli and he catches them.

“Lala bang-bang, hey, Teck?” says Suli, excitedly as he clambers into the driver’s seat of the Suburban.

Inside the car, Teck’s eyes start bulging and a muscle twitches on his face. In a flash, he pulls a knife from his boot and grabs Suli’s head, forcing it into his lap with the knife under his throat.

“Did you take my Baby Uzi?” snarls



Teck.

Suli gags, unable to breath, let alone speak.

“Where is my Baby Uzi?” growls the soldier.

Teck releases the pressure from Suli’s neck, enough for him to choke out these words, “Customs take at airport.”

Slowly, Teck comes down from his rush. He releases Suli who sits up and put his hands to his throat.

Eventually, Suli says, “We go for bang-bang now?”

“Shut up,” snaps Teck, “Jumeirah Beach Hotel. Drive f\*\*\*ing fast.”

“F\*\*\*ing fast, yeah!” says Suli, gunning the engine.

The black suburban squeals out of the basement. Suli plants his foot to pick up speed in the streaming traffic. He

swerves between lanes without indicating, using sharp aggressive maneuvers that disturb the other drivers.

The cabin of the Suburban fills with the stench of fuel and oil and the howl of the huge, racing engine. Within minutes, the Suburban screeches to a stop in front of the Jumeirah Beach Hotel, next to the painted camel statues.

Suli turns off the engine. He and Teck sit silently watching people come and go out of the revolving doors. Eventually, the Peking Petroleum limousine pulls up and they watch as Madeline, Bren and Danny step through the glass doors. Bren retrieves from her handbag a red woolen hat and pulls it over her head. The three step

inside the limousine.

The limousine drives away from the lobby and the Suburban pulls away from the painted camels. Teck retrieves the gun case from the floor and lays it on his lap. He is scowling, feeling frustrated and hemmed in.

“You see that, huh?” says Suli feeling ebullient, “double tap red hat, huh?”

Suli isn’t getting any response from Teck. He turns his attention to the traffic and allows two cars to separate them from the limousine.

After a few minutes of travel, he looks to Teck and sees the side of his head again. Suli doesn’t get it.

“We kill them all?” snaps Suli rhetorically, nodding in approval. He glances to Teck again, wanting Teck to

reply and engage in a discussion of tactical alternatives before finalizing the kill plan. But Teck is not communicating.

Instead, he is gritting his teeth and looking out the window at the streets of Dubai flashing past. He is cursing at the thought of crossing Brad Moore and letting Madeline live.

Maybe he could just wound Madeline, he thinks. He could shoot her in the legs and try not to hit the femoral artery. That would work. Kill the other two and just maim Madeline. Then, he could visit her in the hospital with some flowers. Hang out with her while she went through physiotherapy to learn how to walk again. That would be so cool.

Suli didn't like being ignored. Sure,

Teck was his master in arms, but Suli signed his paychecks. Suli remembers Brad Moore's instruction that Teck works for Peking Petroleum now. He grows angry.

"How we kill the vehicle?" he snaps.

"I'm going to kill the f\*\*\*ing vehicle, Suli!"

"How?"

If he were in Baghdad, Teck would have pulled a gun on Suli by now, shoved it into his throat while pulling down on his collar, forcing him to drive in a buckled up position. But he was not in Baghdad with a novice. Instead, he was in Dubai and Suli was his boss.

"Get me alongside the limo," he snarls, turning his attention to the gun case on his lap.

"When we do it?" asks Suli, eagerly.

“As soon as I’m ready.”

Teck un-clicks the lugs on the black case and looks at the Colt M4 submachine gun; his old mate from Baghdad. He looks at the little notches cut into the metal on the stock; one for each of the victims of the gun. There were dozens of them and room enough for a few more.

## The Limousine Party

Inside the limo, Madeline and Bren are in high spirits, comparing clothing. Danny is scowling. He's less concerned for Bren's safety now, but feeling left out.

"I love your hat?" says Madeline. Bren hands her the red woolen hat and Madeline pulls it over her head. She finds a mirrored surface to check her looks.

"That's made of sheep," Bren says.

"I'll take your shawl as well?" says Madeline, tugging at the edge of the fabric around Bren's neck.

Bren laughs, holding the shawl in its place. "This one is made from caterpillar and goat," she says, "I'll swap for your green jacket as long as it's not made from anything on the IUCN Red

List.”

“I don’t know what that means, but here.” Madeline takes off the green leather jacket and trades it for the pashmina shawl.

Bren checks the label of the jacket, “It’s made of cow. That’s not so bad,” she says.

Danny chuckles to himself as he watches Bren struggle into the jacket and try to close the buttons across her breasts. She and Madeline burst into peals of laughter.

Madeline sighs as she snuggles her cheek against the pashmina draped around her neck, “It’s nice being you for a while.”

“You know, despite your lousy choice of jobs, I would like to take on a bit of you,” says Bren.



“Which bit do you want?”

“Getting things done. The tough bitch.”

“You can have the tough bitch any day, I am over her.”

Bren and Madeline laugh out loud.

Danny grits his teeth. What a sight: a professional liar who speaks through the global media and a well-meaning pacifist. Gripped in an asymmetrical struggle of ideological values one day, and practically kissing each other the next. Blokes would never do that, Danny concludes. Better to fight to the death than kiss and makeup.

He sits upright and interrupts the laughter. “Oy! Next time I get in a limo with two hot chicks, I want to be sitting in the middle.”

## Assault on the Limousine

While Danny is scowling at Bren and Madeline's party in the back of the Peking Petroleum limousine, Teck is pulling the Colt M4 assault rifle out of its black case. The soldier holds the gun in his lap and pushes the case on the floor by his feet, cursing under his breath. He glances at Suli and their eyes meet for a brief instant.

Teck feels like he is under instruction from his student and he scowls as he clips the metal magazine into the Colt M4. Then he cocks the gun with a sharp action and rests his finger on the safety switch.

Instantly he is frustrated again, trying to figure out how to kill Bren without killing Madeline. Shooting her in the legs wasn't going to do, he realizes. He

lowers the electric window.

“Okay, go now,” Teck says with the gravelly voice that Suli recognizes.

A few seconds later, there is a clearing in oncoming traffic. Suli accelerates the Suburban. The big car rapidly picks up speed and veers across the road.

Teck shouts, “Go! Go! Go!”

Suli grips the wheel tightly, feeling adrenaline course through his body. He loves the natural rhyme of the action command and he shouts at the top of his voice: “Go! Go! Go! Lala! Ya Ya!”

The black Chevrolet Suburban comes alongside the limousine, the engine howling and the stench of petrol fumes filling the cabin. The muzzle of the Colt M4 flashes orange flame as Teck fires the full magazine into the driver’s side window and door. It was a familiar

feeling for Teck, a hot weapon shuddering in his hand as he ruminates about Madeline Obst and his broken heart.

The noise takes Suli by surprise and he accidentally swerves the Suburban. The movement throws Teck off balance, but he adjusts quickly and finishes firing on target. Through the muzzle flash, Teck watches the window of the limousine blow inwards and the limo driver writhing against his seat belt as the M4 bullets slam into his body. As the magazine emptied, Suli accelerates rapidly again, pulling in front of the limousine.

The dead driver slumps sideways and the long black limo finds its own direction. It drifts off to one side then ploughs into a row of parked cars.

Danny, Bren and Madeline are thrown violently around the cabin as the limo crashes. Danny is first to recover his senses and he clambers over the seats to the door and pulls it open. He drags Bren and Madeline and Holmes' black case out of the vehicle. He grips Bren under her arms and lifts her to her feet. Bren struggles to retrieve her red hat that had fallen onto the street, but Madeline, sprawling out of the vehicle in a chaotic haze, grabs hold of it instinctively.

Danny wants to run at 100 miles an hour away from there, but Madeline and Bren are not so focused.

“We have to go now. Now. Now. Now!” Danny shouts as he hauls the women to their feet and practically drags them along with him. Looking

over his shoulder, he watches the Black Suburban swerving along the road.

In the Suburban, Suli is stunned at what he had seen. What the hell was Teck up to?

“Why you shoot the driver?” he screams.

Suli turns awkwardly around in his seat to see the crashed limousine. As he does, the Suburban swerves into the oncoming traffic. This time, the lane is not empty.

“Look out!” Teck screams, bracing himself against the dashboard.

Suli looks back to the road to see the oncoming car and momentarily the expression on the faces of the driver and passenger. He slams on the brakes, but too late. The Suburban plows into the vehicle with a terrific squealing of

brakes and billow of blue tire smoke.  
The impact is deafening and violent.

The Suburban comes to an immediate halt with a violent noise of metal slamming and splitting. The bonnet buckles up and the windscreen shatters inwards. Suli and Teck lurched forward like crash test dummies and are bashed back by the rapid expansion of the air bags.

With steam pouring from the Suburban, Teck and Suli find themselves gaping at each other with eyes wide open. It takes a second to reconnect who was in charge of the situation.

“You f\*\*\*ing idiot!” Teck shrieks and smacks his fist into the dashboard. Once. Twice. Three times. His face is vivid, bright red. He raises his right leg

and pulls the knife from his boot. He slashes the airbag open and cuts the seatbelt from around his body.

Then he pulls a fresh magazine from the gun case and reloads the Colt M4. “Come on,” he shouts at Suli, “bring the case.”

Suli is still shaking his head, trying to regain his bearings. He watches Teck violently kicked the car door open, using all the fast aggression of his strong body against the twisted metal. Suli struggles out of his seat belt, clambers over the passenger seat and falls out the door.

There were people gathering around the crash scene. Teck sees the driver and passenger in the car they had hit, all bashed up and covered in blood and glass. The passenger is face down on



the bonnet flapping his hand around. Teck had seen enough gory car crashes to barely even register the details.

What was important was that he had stopped the limousine without killing Madeline. Now he could whack Bren and Danny and let Madeline escape. The Komodo Dragon was back in control.

He sprints down the street to the mangled limo, swinging the Colt M4 across his chest. There are young men in dish-dashes, Indians and Pakistanis, milling around the wrecked limousine, staring at the mutilated driver. The back door of the limousine is open. The cabin is empty. Teck sees motion in the distance: Danny, Bren and Madeline running away. He sees the red hat. The target.

Teck sprints towards them, dodging the oncoming traffic. He barely registers the honking of horns and the aggressive gesticulation of the drivers. He has only a few seconds before the red hat blends into the crowd and is gone. A vehicle squeals to a halt in front of him and he pounces onto its bonnet, then onto its roof and from there, he leaps onto the roof of a parked car.

He has a stable platform, elevation and just enough time. He raises the Colt M4 and picks his target quickly before it disappears down an alleyway; the woman with the red hat. He aims at the centre of body mass and fired two rounds: Choom! Choom!

The woman in the red hat crumples to the ground. Instantly, Teck leaps off the

car roof and sprints towards the body, swinging the Colt M4 left and right across his body. As he nears, he slows and lowers the rifle to his right hip, flipping the lever to automatic mode.

He confirms the kill by firing a short burst of five rounds into the upper back. The woman's body shudders on the pavement forcing the red hat to come loose, rolling onto the ground and spilling out a curl of long brown hair.

Teck stomps forward toward the body. He slows as he comes alongside. Then he squats there breathing heavily. He places his fingertip on the woman's neck and feels the absence of pulse.

As he squats there next to his freshest corpse, Teck has a wave of relief wash over him and he feels giddy. He shakes

his head to regain his balance and a thought comes to his mind. It is very detailed and real. For a while he is somewhere other than squatting next to a dead woman on a street in Dubai.

He is in the restaurant on a resort island in Fiji that overlooks the ocean and the reflection of the moon twinkling in the night. The rush of the waves rolling on the beach replaces the noise of the Dubai traffic. He is sitting with Madeline at a table and there is a pair of wooden crutches resting against her chair. They are drinking margaritas, gazing into each other's eyes. They are deeply in love. She pouts at him and he is mesmerized as he watches the tip of her tongue curl up to push away a tiny piece of salt from her lip. She looks so beautiful in the moonlight. She giggles and asks: "Did you tell Braddy I was coming?"

The vision is overwhelming. Teck breathes deeply, feeling light-headed.

He feels as though Madeline is very close to him.

Still in his trance, Teck looks down to the dead woman and sees the smooth curve of her neck. He sees her light brown hair in large curls lying on the pavement. Intertwined with her soft hair is a silver hoop earring glistening in the sunlight.

But something is wrong. It is the earrings; something about the earrings... The earrings he had seen in Brad Moore's office. On Madeline's ears.

Teck grabs the dead woman's hair and twists her head around to see her face. The first thing he sees is the tip of her tongue protruding like a sleeping cat. Through his Fiji trance, the tip of the dead woman's tongue blends with his

vision of Madeline as she pushed away the salt from her lip.

As he stares, the two images superimpose, one into the other. Teck's reptile brain starts crackling, as he understands that he is staring into the eyes of Madeline Obst. Then something else occurs to him.

He has just shot her in the back seven times.

“*Urrrrrrrrrrghb!!*” A great wind rushes out of him like he has been instantly deflated.

“*Ruuurrrrrrrrrrrghb!!*” Teck stands, staggering, swooning, stunned. He has killed over a hundred people in his time but this was the first time he had felt this sensation. It is as though his intestines were being torn out.

He staggers around in a circle,

moaning and clutching his guts, as the traffic blares and nervous pedestrians watch in fascination. He sees the faces of strangers as they stare at him. He waves the Colt M4 in their direction and opens fire. Bullets spew in all directions slamming into walls and people and cars.

Suli crashes into Teck and they fall awkwardly onto the ground. Suli grabs him by the collar, pulling him to his feet, trying to drag him down the road.

“Get off me!” Teck screams, casting Suli across the bonnet of a parked car. The weapons case flies from Suli’s hands as he careens over the car and lands in a heap on the tarmac.

Suli sees red. In a fit of rage, he picks up the weapons case and stomps towards Teck. He stands to his full

height and swings the case. It crashes against Teck's head, but with little effect.

Teck wanders around, staring at the ground, clutching his stomach. Suli paces up behind Teck, grabs his collar and drags him backward, stomping a boot heel into the soldier's calf. Teck drops and Suli hovers over him, his hand gripped tightly on his shirt, stabbing his thumb into his own chest.

“Don't f\*\*\* with me!” Suli screams and bits of spittle spatter into Teck's face. “I pay your bill now!”

Suli drags Teck to his feet. “You kill wrong woman! Go kill right one!”

Dragging him, Suli runs down the street in the direction of Bren and Danny. At first, Teck stumbles, gripping the hand that holds him. Then



he finds his feet and runs ahead of Suli with the Colt M4 swinging in front of him.

## Bribing the Chopper Pilot

Bren is immediately in front of Madeline when the first two bullets strike, forcing a sharp, unnatural gasp. Madeline falls to the ground, motionless. Bren instinctively stops to help, but instead finds herself staring at the bullet holes in the back of clothing. Danny pulls her away and a few seconds later, the other five bullets strike Madeline's so quickly that it sounds like a single round.

Danny drags Bren along the street, yelling for her to hurry; and she stumbles, trying to keep up. She just keeps running and running until she is directed to stop.

Exhausted, they halt in the grounds of a hotel. They squat next to a low wall surrounded by vegetation. Bren starts

babbling incoherently and Danny calms her by putting one hand over her mouth and the other against her chest. Her heart is pounding madly.

“Relax, relax, relax. *Shhhhhhh*,” he says. She fights against him, first out of her panic and then out of her frustration at him smothering her.

“Be calm, just be calm,” he implores her.

“I just saw Madeline killed. There are people being killed everywhere.”

“We’ll go the same way if you don’t settle. Get your thoughts straight. We don’t have much time.”

“I want to fly away, I want to fly away somewhere far away.” Bren starts to struggle against him.

“*Shhhhhhh*. Settle. Settle.”

“This is not adventure for me, Danny.

I don't want to do this.”

Danny looks around the hotel grounds and sees a way out. “Hey look, Bren. Maybe we can fly away.”

Across the lawn is a white circle in which a helicopter is winding down its engines. The pilot is fare-welling the passengers who have just returned from a joy ride.

“I am going to go over there and get the helicopter. You stay here till I call you over.”

“Okay. Get the helicopter, Danny.”

“We get in the chopper, then we fly away. Okay?”

“Okay. Okay.”

He stands, straightens his shirt and runs his fingers through his hair. “You can do this mate,” he tells himself, “just get in the helicopter and fly away.”

Then he walks purposefully across the lawn towards the helicopter.

As he approaches he sees that the pilot female, a red-head with a ponytail poked through the back of her cap. She is writing notes on a clipboard with her earphones around her neck and the pilot door open.

“G’day,” Danny says, turning on a bit of charm, still wondering how he was going to pull it off. He figures that a lie is likely to be more compelling than the truth so he spills one out, “My fiancée tells me that if she doesn’t get a joyride in a chopper before we leave Dubai tomorrow, the wedding’s off.”

“You’ll need to book your ticket at the travel desk.” The pilot nods towards the hotel.

“Can we sort it later?” Danny opens

his wallet to show off a wad of hundred dollar bills. “There’s a hundred in it for you if we can go right now.”

The pilot waves her hands, “I can’t do that, sorry.”

“Well a thousand then, I need to get in the air, sweetie.” Danny pulls all the bills out of his wallet and shoves them into the top pocket of the pilot’s shirt. The bills squash against her breast.

“I am not your sweetie,” she says sternly, peering down at the bundle of notes in her pocket.

“But you’ll be my pilot, right?”

She chuckles and says, “I am going to save your marriage.”

“Great. I’ll go get the missus.”

Danny walks quickly back to Bren, grabs her hand and walks with her at pace across the lawn. He helps her

climb into the back seat then steps in behind her.

The pilot instructs them how to put on the seat belts and the headphones.

“Ready to go,” says Danny when he and Bren are buckled in.

“Where do you want to go?”

“Where else? Australia.”

“Roger that. Stand by for a joyride to the World.”

The helicopter engine whines and there is a great whoosh of moving air as the craft lifts off the ground. As it comes free, Bren feels a huge wave of relief flush over her. She grips Danny’s hand. Her face is streaked with tears and she mouths the words, ‘thank you.’

## Ordering Honey

Teck arrives in the hotel grounds in time to see the helicopter lifting off. He instantly raises his rifle and fires but no bullets came out. The magazine is empty.

“It’s gone,” sighs Suli, pulling up alongside him.

Teck tosses the M4 at Suli and then sprints towards the chopper. His pace increases as he covers the thirty yards. At the last moment, he leaps into the air, trying to catch hold of the helicopter skids. His fingertips just touch, but not enough to give him purchase. He falls to the ground heavily.

Picking himself up, Teck takes the gun case from Suli, and places it on the perimeter of the helicopter pad.



“They go to Burj to make Lala contract,” Suli shouts.

“Get our chopper here now,” growls Teck.

Suli takes out his mobile phone and starts barking at the pilot of the Peking Petroleum helicopter who is on permanent standby at the airport.

Teck sits on the gun case, cradling the M4 on his knee. His head is aching and the sight of Madeline’s face hovers in front of him. He remembers Brad Moore talking about a job in Fiji and he imagines being smashed on scotch under a palm tree.

“Chopper here in five minutes,” growls Suli. “What we do next, Head of Security?”

“Brief the Chief Executive,” Teck growls.

Brad Moore is not impressed with what he hears. “What do you mean they got away?” he screams across the phone. “How could they possibly get away from Teck with a Colt M4? He specializes in civilians.”

“They go in helicopter.”

“Send Teck after them in the chopper. You wait there I’ll pick you up.”

“Maybe we get some honey?” asks Suli.

“The honey? What?” asks Brad Moore.

“Suicide man. He go to Burj.”

“Send a suicide bomber to the *Burj al Arab*?” says Brad Moore. “Whoa! That’s a real brain omelet. It won’t work, Suli, he’ll burn down the Burj then we’ll be right in the shit.”

“No. Have special bomb. Cold bomb.

Big bang. No fire.”

“Whoa! Whoa! Suli. That’s completely out of my league.”

“Maybe Teck no shoot them and they go Burj and sign contract. No more Lala. No more big oil field,” protests Suli, angrily.

Brad Moore mulls it over, “Okay Suli. Send in the Honey but on standby, okay. No bang-bang until I say so.”

“Okay. I call now.”

“And Suli.”

“Yes, Boss.”

“If you f\*\*\* this up, I will personally cut your head off. Turkish style with a blunt knife.”

Suli ends the call to Brad Moore and immediately places another call to his connections in the martyrdom business.

Teck sits in silence, staring at the

grass. An image of Madeline's lifeless face hovers in front of him. He is shaken from his trance by the noise of the Peking Petroleum helicopter descending in front of him. It is a Eurocopter Dauphin, sleek, sophisticated. The twin turbine engines howl and dust flies into the air.

The Eurocopter touches down and Teck marches forward. He pulls open the back door and tosses the Colt M4 and the gun case inside. Then, with a tremendous fit of exertion, he pulls the door back and forth against its hinges until the entire structure comes away in his hands. He casts it aside, the steps in the cabin and bangs on the fuselage, shouting: "Go! Go! Go!"

## Helicopter Dogfight

In the air above the Grange Hotel, the Jet Ranger helicopter pilot announces to his passengers, “On the left you can see the Palm Jumeirah.”

“I’m sorry, pilot, I didn’t catch your name,” Danny interjects.

“Just call me Pilot, it’s easier that way.”

“Okay, Pilot. We want to go to the *Burj al Arab*.”

“I thought you wanted to go to the World.”

“We have an appointment at the Burj.”

“You can’t just go to the Burj,” Pilot protests.

“Why not?”

“You need landing permission.”

“How do we get that?”

“You’ll need to get clearance from Security.”

“Okay. Book it. You have landed there before, haven’t you?” asks Danny.

“A thousand times. But I need permission from my flight manager.”

“So what’s the problem?”

“I am moonlighting, remember.”

“You are going to have to do better than that, Pilot.”

“Okay, tourist,” she snaps angrily, “how about I put you through to directory enquiries you book the damn landing pad yourself.”

“Fine by me.”

There is a loud beeping noise in Danny’s headphones as Pilot punches in the phone number. A female voice comes over the headphones, asking, “What name please.”

“That’s directory enquiries,” says Pilot.

“*Burj al Arab* hotel, please,” says  
Danny.

The headphones rattle with the noise of a ringing phone and then another voice, “*Burj al Arab*. How may I help you?”

“This is Danny Lexion from the United Nations Ecological Improvement Program.”

Bren makes a noise that is a gasp of disbelief and a laugh.

“I need helicopter landing clearance to attend an important meeting at the Skyview Restaurant.”

“What is your name, please Sir?”

“Lexion. Danny Lexion.”

“Hold the line please.”

The Jet Ranger helicopter purrs across the sky across the Gulf and a collection

of small sandy islands come into view. As the helicopter approaches, the arrangement of the islands takes on the appearance of a map of the World. Danny looks in awe at the islands, particularly interested in those on which buildings have been constructed. His real estate DNA comes alive as he studies the structures below. He is reminded of the promotional literature: *The Burj al Arab* put Dubai on the Map and the World put the map on Dubai.

Danny feels something touch his hand and looks down to see Bren's fingertips are playing across his palm. He turns to her and sees her weary smile. He closes his hands over her fingers and he watches as her eyes fall to their clasped hands. He turns back to look at the island properties.



Danny is interrupted a woman speaking briskly, “Mr. Lexion, there is no booking under your name at the Skyview.”

“Well make one, lady. It’s not hard. We are meeting Mr. Richard Holmes who has a booking already.” Danny looks at Bren who raises an eyebrow at his clumsy lie.

“Yes, Mr. Holmes and one other are booked in. Stand by, I’ll put you through to Security.”

Suddenly another helicopter screams past, leaving a trail of wispy exhaust. It’s the Peking Petroleum Eurocopter.

“What the hell?” Pilot screams, “did you see that?”

“The helicopter?” asks Danny, surprised, his heart racing.

“The dude with the gun.”

“Who has got a gun?”

“Your mate in the Dolphin.”

“What are you talking about?”

Then Danny sees what the pilot is talking about. The Eurocopter banks to port in a tight arc and disappears from view. For a few seconds, it seems as if they are alone in the sky. But then it comes back into view just meters away, traveling alongside the Jet Ranger.

Through the cabin windows of the helicopter, Danny can see the back of a big burly man leaning out of the missing door. He watches the man slowly turn around until they are looking at each other.

In the Peking Petroleum Eurocopter, Teck slaps the fuselage aggressively, signaling with his free hand for the pilot to get on the other side of the Jet

Ranger. The Eurocopter falls away and seconds later, with a roar, it appears close to the Jet Ranger again.

Teck is facing Bren now. She stares in horror at the helicopter, its rotor blades churning up the sky. Inside, sitting in the place of the ripped off door is the man with Komodo Dragon eyes, looking at her impassively. Teck adjusts the switch on the side of the gun – full automatic.

For a few seconds, everything seems to go quiet for Bren. Her stomach rises in expectation and then she sees a jagged orange flame burst out of the muzzle of the M4 machine gun. Then her world erupts into a deafening noise.

The Colt M4 bullets slam into the cabin around her. Chips of perspex and metal fragments splatter chaotically

inside the cabin as the Jet Ranger is filled with a grinding noise of bullet impact. Metal upon metal. Metal upon plastic, deafening and terrifying. Seconds seem to last for hours.

Yet, despite all the sound and fury, the gunfire fails to find flesh. The Jet Ranger windows and fuselage were pocked with bullet holes, but no one is wounded and the chopper is still flying.

Teck curses under his breath and unclips the empty magazine from the M4, letting it fall into the slipstream. He reloads with a fresh magazine from the floor.

The Jet Ranger pilot swerves the chopper down and Bren feels like she is falling. She grips the seat with white knuckles, terrified.

“What the f\*\*\* is going on?” screams

Pilot as she powers the Jet Ranger away from the Eurocopter, heading at full pace towards the island that represents South America.

Bren hyperventilates. She madly brushes bits of smashed perspex off her clothes.

Danny's heart is in his mouth, watching Bren's silent panic. He pushes his palm over her heart, locking his eyes onto hers, trying to convey calm. A loud beeping noise screeches through the cabin.

"Engine overstress," says Pilot, anxiously, scanning the instruments.

The Eurocopter comes close again and Pilot executes an evasive maneuver throwing Danny and Bren against their lap restraints.

The two helicopters swerve and whine

in chaotic circles over the World, as though they are unable to escape the gravity of the sandy islands below. The choppers flash across the equator and pull a tight turn to starboard over the North Pole and back across Alaska, Canada, the continental United States and over Mexico. The Jet Ranger nose-dives towards the Yucatan Peninsula but the Eurocopter is hot in pursuit.

As the choppers weave back and forth, Teck fires a three-round burst every time the Jet Ranger flashes into his line of fire.

Bren and Danny are thrown left and right across the Jet Ranger's cabin. Their seat belts pull tightly into their guts like when they had been tossed around in the taxi after Holmes was killed and later in the limousine.

Inside Danny's headphones, there booms a male voice, it is Ahmed from *Burj al Arab* Security, "Mr. Lexion we have no record of your name."

"Look, mate, it's not hard. Just add two to Holmes' table."

"There is no problem with the table, Mr. Lexion. But you cannot just land on our helipad. We need a 26,000 dirham fee and confirmation that you are traveling in a Class 'A' helicopter."

"Okay! Okay! I have a credit card for the landing fee," shouts Danny, and then to Pilot, "Please tell me this is a Class 'A' helicopter."

"Ahmed, it's Suzy from the Grange Hotel. We are in the Jet Ranger."

The Eurocopter flashes past and the Jet Ranger jolts as it hits the turbulence of the slipstream. The cabin is filled

with the smell of jet fuel exhaust.

“Thank you, Suzy. We can make a booking now. Your credit card details, Mr. Lexion,” says Ahmed from the Burj al Arab.

Danny recites his credit card details, “It’s a Visa. Number three five one...”

The Eurocopter appears next to the Jet Ranger again. As Danny recites his card details, Pilot swerves to starboard, across China.

“Okay, Mr. Lexion. You are cleared to land. What is your ETA?”

“Twelve minutes,” says Suzy.

“Roger. Out,” says Ahmed.

The overstress alarm blasts into the cabin again, this time accompanied by other alarm signals. Suddenly, the Jet Ranger’s turbine changes in intonation and the Pilot halts the helicopter in



mid-air. Lights are flashing all across the dashboard and the five separate alarms call for attention.

“We’re losing control,” shouts Pilot, rapidly scanning the instruments.

The Eurocopter appears close by, bellowing exhaust and churning the air.

“Drive the f\*\*\*ing machine, lady” Danny screams, pounding his palm on the back of Pilot’s seat.

“I can’t do it,” screams Pilot, “It’s too much.” The Jet Ranger remains in the same position, rolling side to side, the alarms screaming.

Horrified, Danny turns to Bren. She’s turned away from him, looking through the busted plexiglass windows. Right there, across a few meters of air is the Peking Petroleum helicopter. Teck is looking straight into their cabin and he

has fixed Bren in his reptile gaze. She is frozen.

Danny's mind races and his stomach cramps and he feels like he is losing her again. The Jet Ranger wavers in the air, going nowhere.

Teck raises his gun, brings the stock close to his face and squints along the barrel. Aiming the rifle at Bren's chest, he moves the weapon left and right, up and down in concert with the wavering of the paralyzed chopper. His finger curls across the trigger. Three rounds; that's all he needs. He pushes his face closer to the gun. Heart shot. Clean. Quick. Then Lala is secured for Peking Petroleum.

Then he notices Bren's clothing. She's wearing Madeline's green leather jacket.

Teck is stunned. He looks up from his

weapon into Bren's face, but instead he sees Madeline's face. He was about to shoot Madeline Obst again. Instantly tears well up in his eyes.

This is new, something very new. He doesn't like it. Instantly he wants something else, anything else. He wants to be smashed on single malt whiskey, asleep in front of the refrigerator; anything but this.

Teck squints along his rifle again, zooming in on Bren's chest. But he can't see because tears are welling in his eyes. He turns away from his gun, wipes his face on his sleeve and forlornly looks around for something more appealing than killing another woman and dying of liver disease in Fiji.

Madeline is dead. He doesn't want to shoot people anymore. He doesn't care

about Lala. He hates Brad Moore. He just wants to get off the planet.

The Eurocopter pilot makes it easy for him. He glances around, catching Teck's attention and shouting, "Come on, man! Do it."

That was it. One more notch on the M4 stock and it is all over. Teck raises the assault rifle and pushes the muzzle against the back of the pilot's helmet. "I love you Madeline," Teck sobs, tears pouring down his face. "It hurts me when you don't take my calls."

Then he squeezes the trigger and a three round burst of fire slams into the pilot's helmet. The pilot slumps forward, his visor drenched with blood, throwing the helicopter out of control. The Eurocopter rolls, the engine falters. Then it begins to spin round and round.

Danny watches as Teck is pinned against the fuselage of the Eurocopter as the chopper spins out of control, falling from the sky. The Colt M4, clutched tightly in Teck's hand, sprays bursts of orange flame as the remaining bullets are fired harmlessly into the air.

The Jet Ranger pilot regains control of her craft and pulls the chopper in a tight curve. Danny feels his stomach rise. Bren gasps breathlessly, gripping his arm.

The Eurocopter plummets rapidly towards the World and smashes onto the sand on the island called Iraq. In the mangled wreckage of the helicopter, Teck writhes, his gun no longer firing. A second later there is a powerful explosion and a rapidly expanding ball of orange flame and Teck is no more.

Danny takes off his headphones and tosses them aside. “You still in one piece?” he asks Bren and she nods numbly. He brings her hands close to his face and kisses the skin on her fingers.

“Good work, Pilot,” Danny says.

Pilot turns, her face ashen. She shakes her head. Then she heads the Jet Ranger towards the landing pad on the roof of the Burj al Arab hotel.

## Landing on the Burj

As the mangled Jet Ranger approaches the Burj al Arab, Danny's adrenalin rises again. He watches in awe as they approach the mighty building bathed in coloured light. Bren sighs in awe as chopper comes closer to the structure and descends. Touching down is like the joining together of two marvels of human creativity – the helicopter and the Burj.

There is a crowd of hotel security guards waiting adjacent to the circular helicopter deck. As the Jet Ranger settles on the landing pad, Danny looks out at officials and considers his next move.

“We won't be able to sign the Lala contract if we are in jail,” Bren tells him.

Danny is thinking the same thing as he watches a security guard approaching the helicopter door. He unbuckles the seatbelt and leans forward. Bits of perspex fall out of the folds of his shirt as he retrieves his wallet. He pulls out a bank card and taps the pilot on the shoulder with it. It is the card that accesses the ‘Saving Face Account.’

“Pilot, can you stall security guard for a minute, I have a proposition.”

She looks at the bankcard and considers the offer. She holds her hand and the guard steps back from the helicopter. “What’s the offer?” asks Pilot. “You going to buy me a new chopper.”

“It’s probably insured. But consider this. If I paid a grand for a joy ride, imagine how much I would pay to get



off this chopper deck unencumbered in the next ten minutes.”

“Okay mystery passenger, I am following you.”

Danny says, “This card will give you access to a bank account in Australia which currently contains...” He performs a mental calculation, subtracting airfares, hotels, meals and cash withdrawals from the \$30,000 in the account when he first met Bren.

“There is over ten thousand Australian in this account which you can access through any hole in the wall, two thousand a day limit, using the PIN number 6615. Sixty six fifteen. Can you repeat that?”

“Sixty-six fifteen,” says Pilot. “What’s the story?”

“We’re just joy riders and victims of

chance. I want to be off this chopper deck and free within ten minutes.”

Pilot raises her hand and takes the card. She slips it into her top pocket and steps out of the cabin.

Danny sits back in his seat and takes Bren’s hand. “No bullet holes?” he asks. He feels her fingers curl gently around his.

“Just bits of perspex,” she says, numbly.

## The Honey Sweats

Pilot does an excellent job with the security guards. She comes up with every plausible lie she can think of to keep the attention off her passengers. Throughout the exchange, Danny and Bren sit silently in the cabin.

Eventually, Pilot waves them out of the helicopter and they are escorted to a desk where they are commanded to give up their names and contact details. Then they are escorted by a hotel security guard to an elevator and told that their restaurant is one floor down.

Inside the Skyview Restaurant, Holmes' lawyer is waiting at a low table around which are four comfy chairs. He starts talking immediately. He is calm and kind. He squeezes Bren's hand sympathetically.

“I am so sorry to hear of your Uncle’s passing. I trust he didn’t suffer.”

“It was very quick,” Bren says sadly, feeling an odd shudder run the length of her body. She glances at Danny, who gives her a dazed ‘what the hell just happened’ look.

“On Mr. Holmes’ instruction, I have completed the papers to transfer Power of Attorney to you,” says the Lawyer.

“That was very fast,” says Danny.

“It was not unanticipated. Mr. Holmes was aware that standing in the way of an oil company required advanced preparation.”

The Lawyer retrieves a file from his bag. He draws out a sheath of papers and spreads them on the table. The paperwork is all for Bren’s attention, so Danny takes some time out to look

around the restaurant.

Periodically, he shivers as his adrenaline cools. Every time it happens he looks at Bren and wonders what she must be going through. He watches as she engages with the Lawyer, listening to his instructions and signing where he shows her. She is saying “yes” and “aha” as McLachlan explains each of the documents and points to where her signature is required.

Danny listens into the dialogue for a while and he recognizes the organizational brilliance of the late Richard Holmes.

He observes Bren, a complete novice, signing into contracts dozens of times bigger than any he had ever signed. He chuckles quietly to himself.

Danny looks around the room,

soaking in the surroundings of the hard-won signing ceremony. He looks at the people at the other tables. He notices the ceiling with its psychedelic waveform of bright green and blue neon ovals.

He thinks about liquor and turns to see the bar with the dazzling array of colorful bottles of booze. He finds himself looking into the eyes of a Muslim man, sitting on a barstool, who is quite distinctly looking in his direction. Without realizing it, Danny has just spotted the Honey.

The Honey recognises Danny and Bren from the photos that Suli had sent through on his phone. He sits with his mobile in front of him, waiting for the call. He is impatient to die, conscious of the prickle of the tape that holds the

explosives against his chest. The bomb is cold and he can feel moisture trickle down his belly.

A bartender, a young man from Sri Lanka, offers him a drink and the Honey waves him away, disgusted to have been offered alcohol. The Honey sweats. Why hasn't his phone rung?

He fidgets in his seat, handling his phone, willing it to ring. Then he notices a pungent smell. He sniffs the air intently, suddenly concerned. He looks around, but no one else seems to notice the tangy, chemical aroma.

He recognises the smell, but where from? He looks around trying to identify the source. The bartender looks in his direction and the Honey freezes, thinking that he has been sprung.

“Water,” he says nervously.

As the bartender turns away, the Honey sniffs furiously and he remembers where he had last smelled that acrid aroma: bomb training in Afghanistan. It is the smell of tri-acetone tri-peroxide explosive.

He thinks back to these lessons. The TATP bomb creates an explosion by sublimation, rapidly turning from solid to gas. If the three kilograms of TATP strapped to his chest sublimated instantly, they would spread the expanding gas so fast that it would pulverize the entire restaurant leaving carnage and a pungent stench of ozone and acetone. That's what he could now smell. The smell indicates that the TATP was slowly sublimating under his shirt.

The Sri Lankan bartender places a



frosty glass of iced water on the bar and the Honey shudders as he connected the dots - his bomb is leaking.

The Honey grips the iced water anxiously and gulps it down. What are his instructions? If anything goes wrong, get out of the hotel and call the handler. He stands and walks out of the bar, gripping his jacket against his belly to conceal the smell. He walks to the elevator, descends to the ground floor and moves quickly out of the Burj al Arab.

His behavior catches the eye of a security guard. Panicking, the Honey pushes the security guard and makes a run for it towards the causeway that connects the hotel to the shore. This attracts the attention of other guards who rush up from behind and tackle

him to the ground.

The Honey fights violently against the guards and escapes them. He sprints along the causeway. From the security post at the end of the causeway comes another guard who advances and grabs him. Again the Honey breaks free but in the scuffle his jacket and shirt are torn open, revealing the package strapped to his body.

A guard pulls a pistol, shouting, “Stop! Stop! Lie down!” The Honey stops in his tracks, holding his hands above his head. His eyes shoot furtively around looking for a way out. Failing that, he will detonate his explosives and send them all to hell.

## The Security Gate

Brad Moore's Land Rover screeches to a halt in front of the security barrier at the Causeway to the Burj al Arab. Normally, he would just point to Suli in the passenger seat, who was recognizable as an Emirati, and the security barrier would open up. Tonight is different. Tonight, the guards are on edge.

Brad Moore looks down the floodlit bridge between the security barrier and the hotel foyer. "He follows orders, doesn't he?"

"This Honey very fresh."

"That doesn't answer my question, Suli. How do we know he won't blow the hotel up while we are inside?"

"He wait my call." Suli brings his mobile phone into view.

“I hope his battery is charged,” Brad Moore growls. “What’s going on?” he snaps at a security guard who approaches the car.

“No one comes in. You wait here.”

Suli elbows Brad Moore’s arm, directing his attention towards the causeway. A guard is pointing his gun at a man in a suit with his hands above his head.

“*Ooooh*. Big no-no,” says Suli.

“What’s the matter?”

“Is Honey.”

“So much for following orders, huh?” says Brad Moore. “What’s he doing out here?”

The Honey pushes his hands forward in submission, shouting, “Don’t shoot! Don’t shoot!” Then he dashes plummets through the narrow gap and

crashes against the bonnet of the silver Land Rover in which Brad Moore and Suli are anxiously observing his movements. He stands with his hand resting on the bonnet, panting heavily, looking around and planning his next move.

The Honey is two feet away from Brad Moore's window. The Chief Executive can see panic on the Honey's face as well as the wires that lead from the bomb to the trigger device concealed in his sleeve. There are now three pistols trained on the Honey and the security guards are shouting at him from all directions.

Brad Moore checks the rear vision mirror to see that there are cars backed up behind him. He watches the driver of a vehicle step out and run away.

“Well isn’t this a wonderful situation, Suli.”

Suli makes a deep gulping sound. He faces Brad Moore with a guilty look.

“What is he wearing? Your mate, the Honey?” Brad asks.

“What?”

“What sort of bomb has he got?”

“Cold bomb.”

“And what exactly is a cold bomb?”

“Mother of Satan,” says Suli, defensively.

“So, the Honey is about to be shot wearing highly unstable, home-made explosive?” asks Brad Moore incredulously.

“We have good price.”

“You are top of your game, Suli.”

Brad Moore realizes that he has just a few seconds left to live.

Brad Moore pulls open the glove compartment and retrieves a small black machine gun. He tucks the gun into the inside pocket of this jacket.

“Hey,” says Suli. “Is Teck’s Baby Uzi.”

“Shut the f\*\*\* up and drive,” says Brad Moore, forcefully.

“Drive car?”

“Yeah,” Brad unclicks his seat buckle, “swap seats, now!”

Brad Moore clumsily crawls across the cabin, holding himself up while Suli crosses underneath him.

“*Abhh*. Is like a Cairo campervan,” Suli grumbles.

“Shut up and get in the driver’s seat.”

“Stop! Stop!” the guard shouts at the Honey as Brad Moore and Suli complete their change of position.

Suli is not impressed to be sitting inches away from the Honey. He rolls down the electric window and addresses the suicide bomber,

“Hey honey, you go-go somewhere,”

As he says this, he hears a noise behind him. It Is Brad Moore slamming the passenger door shut after his departure. Suli looks back to the Honey, suddenly putting all the pieces together.

The commotion alerts the Honey and he starts to run and he is instantly struck with two bullets. One punches a hole in the flesh under his right arm. The other slams into the edge of his explosive belt, setting off the explosives.

**B-o-o-o-o-m-m-m-m!!!**

Three kilograms of tri-acetone tri-



peroxide instantly sublimate, turning from a solid to a gas at ten thousand meters a second. A vast overpressure of ozone, acetone and dust burst across the vehicles at the security gate, tearing them apart, shattering windows, wreaking death and havoc. The Mother of Satan is free.

Honey disappears in a white flash of particles and gas. The blast smashes the driver's side of the Land Rover through the cabin, punching the mangled debris of Suli into the passenger door through which Brad Moore had just escaped. The Land Rover rolls over on its side.

Pieces of glass and metal and bits of Security Guards were cast in all directions by the explosion. A thundering noise booms and sends a vibration running the length of the

causeway.

The blast catches Brad Moore in the back. He is lifted off his feet, thrown through the air and then slammed onto the tarmac. He lays there, buckled and broken, air seeps out of his lungs as he gasps in pain. He struggles to breathe, drawing long deep breaths that rasp like he has bits of bomb debris in his windpipe.

The pain that sweeps his entire body makes him delirious but he manages to sits up, gasping in agony. Then he staggers to his feet and surveys the wreckage.

There are bodies mixed up in the mangled ruins of cars. He sees people on the periphery of the blast staggering around, covered in blood and dust. The air is filled with the acrid smell of

chemicals.

Brad Moore retrieves the baby Uzi machine gun from his jacket. He clutches his ribs and staggers away from the bombsite, into the darkness.

## The Lala Contract

In the Skyview Bar, Bren Hannan signs the contracts that will ensure the permanent future of Lala's delicate ecosystem. Then she signs into the green taxis and the refurbished office blocks with solar power and smart windows. Then she signs into all the company accounts, properties, artworks and residential properties.

Once Bren has signed the documents, the lawyer organizes them and hands some to Bren and puts the rest in his briefcase. They all raise glasses to toast the event.

At this point, they are distracted by a shudder in the building that is felt more than heard, like an Earth tremor. All the diners in the restaurant stop what they are doing and look around for a few

seconds. Seeing that everyone else is looking around and that there is no panic, they return to their conversations. Danny watches the restaurant guests with interest, wondering what caused the noise.

He looks at Bren who seems to have melted into her seat and is staring at the ceiling, exhausted. “Bren has just become a squillionaire,” he thinks.

As Bren gazes at the ceiling, she is thinking that she is now responsible for thousands of endangered seabirds, including the nesting grounds of the *Chelonia mydas*, the poor green sea turtle, and a bunch Fijians who probably knew about as much about sustainable business as she does. She wonders how long she will have Danny around to help her figure it out.

McLachlan finishes packing his case and he stands. Bren enthusiastically shakes his hand and sends him off. Then she slumps back into her chair again. “Wow,” is all she can say.

“I get wow,” says Danny. He reaches for the drinks menu. “Hey, you want to get drunk?” he asks, flipping through the pages.

“Okay,” she laughs nervously. “Let’s get drunk.”

“Okay, we have a cocktail here, based on the Macallan Single Malt scotch whiskey and passion fruit. Seven thousand dollars each.”

He reads some more. “Here we go. There’s a Chenin Blanc, twenty-two thousand for the bottle. Do you think that they’ll do it by the glass?”

Bren is amused by his questions. “Is

there anything normal in there?”

“Galliano lemonade is only \$48.”

“I like Galliano,” says Bren, “can we afford that?”

Danny looks over the top of the drinks list at Bren, suddenly feeling giddy. The restaurant seems to drift in and out of focus and meander from left to right. He becomes conscious of the scent of jet fuel wafting from his clothes. “I’m sorry?” he asks dumbly.

“Can we afford the Galliano?” Bren asks.

Danny thinks back to the documents that he has been reading in bits and pieces over the past few days. He remembers the biofuel transactions and the returns from the green taxi fleet and the spreadsheets from the solar thermal power stations.

Bren has inherited a small island project in Fiji, that is the signature project of a brilliant business mind. In total, the projects are worth millions. Bren has become the heiress to a fortune worth over three hundred million dollars and she so completely and utterly doesn't get it.

"Can we afford the Galliano?" Danny repeats, mesmerized. "I think so."

After the drink, they stand and collect the papers that had been left for them. They step out of the restaurant into the palatial hallway to the elevator. They walk through the cavernous lobby of the *Burj al Arab* hotel, past the black slate fountain and down the escalator.

"No taxis come in or out," the security guard tells them as they walk out of the main entrance, arm in arm.



“We’re just going over there. Can we walk?” asks Danny pointing to the Jumeirah Beach Hotel.

“Keep on the left of the causeway.”

Danny and Bren walk along the causeway cautiously observing the commotion up ahead. As they get closer, the detail amid the flashing lights becomes clearer. There are ambulances and police cars and military vehicles. There are bodies under white sheets and mangled cars and a pungent chemical smell in the air.

Danny pulls Bren close against him and they walk briskly towards the entrance. “It looks like a bomb went off,” he tells her.

They approach the guardhouse and a soldier with an automatic rifle halts them and demands to see their I.D.

They both retrieve driver's licenses and the soldier checks the photo against their faces. He uses a digital camera to photograph the license. When he's done, he says gruffly, "Okay, go."

Finally, they are off the causeway and move away from the flashing lights. To get to the hotel, they have to walk through an undercover car park that is under construction. It is dimly lit inside with half-finished lighting equipment hanging from the ceiling.

As they move through the car park, a voice calls out from the shadows. "Bren Hannan?"

## Bren with an Uzi

Suddenly, a man stumbles out of the darkness. He is dressed in a charcoal suit that is shredded and torn with bits of stuffing sticking out from under his arm. He has boyish looks and eyes that are shot with red. There is a smell about him, a pungent chemical odour. Brad Moore staggers out of the shadows of the half constructed car park like a zombie, blood glistening from his ears.

Bren sees him, thinking that he is a victim of the bomb. She moves towards him to help. But Brad Moore doesn't want assistance; he wants Lala.

“Oh, you poor man,” says Bren, stepping towards him.

Brad Moore raises the Baby Uzi and machine pistol begins to chatter but his aim is poor and the bullets go high. He

struggles to lower the weapon and Danny is onto him in a flash. He rushes the machine gun and delivers a powerful roundhouse kick to the side of Brad Moore's head.

Brad Moore falls to the ground and Danny leaps on him, slaps the gun aside and grabs hold of his lapel. A lanyard holding a security tag comes loose from around his neck and Danny casts this aside, grabs the front of Brad Moore's ruined jacket and cocks his fist.

“Who the f\*\*\* are you, he bellows.”

Brad Moore can't answer. Instead, he just gasps and looks at the fist raised above his head.

Then he feels something tap against his arm and he sees that Bren that Bren has the Baby Uzi gripped in her hands, the muzzle trained at Brad Moore's

body.

“It’s okay, Danny,” she says, “I’ve got him.”

“Whoa! What are you doing?” Danny says, shocked to see the gun wavering in her hand.

“His name badge says C.E.O. Peking Petroleum. This is Madeline’s boss. I am going to... I am going to put him down, too.”

“You really don’t want to do that, Bren.”

“This is the man who is killing Lala Island.”

“You’ve never fired a gun before,” says Danny, desperately anxious that the Climate Cop is now armed with a machine pistol.

“I am always being nice to people, Danny. Always trying to recruit new

soldiers.”

“You did a great job. I am onboard.  
So was Madeline Obst,”

“This is not just about recruitment  
anymore. We are at war, Danny. We  
need to kill their soldiers, too.”

“I’ve been there, Bren. Trust me, you  
don’t want to go there.”

“He is the boss. He makes the  
decisions.”

Danny nervously looks around the  
dim car park to see they were not being  
observed. “You don’t want to do this,  
Bren.”

“You can help me, Danny or you can  
wimp out. Make a choice.”

“I’m not wimping out of nothing,  
lady,” says Danny, indignantly.

“Well then stand back, Danny  
Lexion,” she snarls.

Brad Moore raises himself and looks at Bren. He makes to say something and finally he is able to enunciate a single word, “Lala.”

“This is for Uncle Richard,” Bren shouts. Then the car park reverberates with the sound the Baby Uzi discharging.

*Duuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuurt!*

Danny instinctively hits the ground as the Uzi bullets thunder in all directions. Bren holds on to the shaking gun with teeth gritted trying to control the direction of the bullets.

Concrete chips and dust erupt from the ceiling, the floor and the walls as Bren struggles against the recoil to keep the gun on target.

*Durrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrt! Durrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrt!*

Brick dust flies into the air as Bren

trains some of the bullets in the direction of Brad Moore's body. The oilman convulses and slumps, motionless.

*Durrrrrrrrrrrrrrt!* Click!

Bren stands terrified, holding the gun in front of her, her mouth agape, ears ringing. She stares at Brad Moore, a motionless lump surrounded by a pall of orange dust.

“F\*\*\* me,” says Danny, rising from the ground.

He takes the gun from Bren's hand, wipes it clean of fingerprints with his shirt and casts it across the car park into a dark corner.

“I’ll tell something I know about soldiers that I know, Bren,” he says, taking her hand, “they run towards gunfire.” He drags her away from the



mangled oilman, shouting, “Come on!  
Let’s Go! Go! Go!”

## Danny Wakes With Bren

At 2 a.m. Danny wakes. One second he is in deep sleep and the next his eyes are open and he feels anxious. The room is dark and quiet except for a gentle whirring noise, the air-conditioner feeding cool air into the room. But it's not his room.

There is a woman next to him, asleep. Who is she? Danny feels like the world is spinning backward. He listens to his own breathing in the dark, cool room and places together the jigsaw pieces in his mind. The last thing he remembers was sitting with Bren in her hotel room and drinking the mini-bar dry. Then he fell asleep. Then he woke up. That's where he is now, in her room, in her bed. He is safe. Bren is safe. It is all good.

He raises his head from the sheets to look at Bren. The bed sheets are pulled away from her. He observes the silhouette of her body in the silk nightdress. He can feel the warmth of her body radiating with a subtle aroma of Tea Rose perfume.

‘Oh, wow,’ he thinks. He rolls his arm out around Bren’s belly. A second before he loses consciousness, he moves his hand to her breast and shuffles his body close to her back.

At last Danny has Bren where he wants her. Up close. She is no longer nagging him about wasting toothpicks and dripping taps and she is exactly where she should be. Danny sighs contentedly as he drifts back into sleep.

When he next wakes, he sees the hem of Bren’s nightdress and the front of

her thighs and he feels the glow of her skin on his face. She is standing next to the bed with one hand by her side and the other holding a small white cup.

“Coffee, Sire?” she says, wryly.

Danny drags himself awake. He is naked under the bed sheets. He pulls some pillows and packs them behind his back as he sits up.

“Wow,” he says. “This is an awesome wake-up.”

“You sleep really well,” says Bren as she hands over the cup.

“Yeah, sleep is good. I like your nightie.”

“It’s made of caterpillars.”

“I get that now. You mean it’s made of silk, not actual caterpillars.”

“You are my brightest student,” she says.

Danny looks around the room, blinking awake. “Hoo. I don’t remember taking off my clothes,” he says.

“No, nor do I actually,” says Bren, “quite a surprise to have you prodding me in the spine at 5 a.m.”

“Sorry about that,” he sniffs the rich coffee aroma. “How are you feeling?”

“Worn out. Sad,” she says slowly. “I think I killed someone last night.”

“Yeah, he might have copped a ricochet off the ceiling.”

“Thanks for not stopping me. I found it quite liberating, actually.”

Danny scratches the back of his head thoughtfully. “It just had to be done, I guess. Revenge or closure or something.” Danny sees that Bren had bags under her eyes and a flatness of

spirit.

She sits on the bed next to him. Her shiny nightdress hugs her body and Danny observes the curves of her breasts and the shape of her waist. He sips his coffee following his eyes down her long hair to the skin on her back.

“All those people got hurt,” she says slowly.

“All bashed up for an oil field.”

Danny places his hand on the small of her back and rubs a circle with his fingertips. His fingers slip smoothly across the silk, pressed against her warm skin. Bren turns to him and he sees her bright eyes and her proud lips, and the down-turned corners of her mouth. She is beautiful even when she is sad.

A faint aroma of hazelnut body-butter

emanates from her skin. He gazes into her eyes, feeling light-headed, as though he had woken up in a heavenly place. He wants to touch her. He wants to taste her. All his masculine instincts are alerted to this woman seated on the side of his bed. Would Danny ever make love to Bren Hannan? Maybe this was the time and place where it would happen.

Instinctively, he sits upright and gently placed his fingertips on the back of her neck. He rearranges strands of hair to expose her skin. Then he cups her cheek and brings her face closer to his. With his coffee cup held in mid air, he angles her head in order to put his mouth next to hers and place a kiss. She is passive as Danny connects his lips to her skin.

Suddenly, Bren pushes him away and stands, angrily.

“F\*\*\*!” Danny yelps as the hot coffee spills on the white sheet and scalds his thigh. “Oh, Bren!” he protests.

“Oh, Danny!” she mimics sarcastically, standing in front of him with her knuckles on her hips and her shoulders back.

“You think I am going to be one of your floozies just because you saved my life?” she barks.

“That’s reasonable, isn’t it?” Danny stammers, wiping hot coffee off his leg.

“You will have to try harder than that, Mr. Void.”

“Mr. Void!” he protests and his temperature rises some degrees.

“You should go and have a shower and we can have breakfast.”



Bren takes a white towel from the back of a chair and tosses it on his head. “You can use my stuff,” she says.

“Stuff!” Danny grunts. He sits under the towel gritting his teeth and wiping coffee off his lap.

Once he has readjusted his story, he steps out of the bed, naked, and stands with his interest in her very evident. He observes her reaction to his nudity, with a wry smile. He wraps the towel around his waist and says, “Huh?”

Under the shower, Danny leans out of the cubicle and scans the dizzying array of cosmetics and perfumes that Bren has brought with her. He sees a razor in amongst the stuff and proceeds to shave under the stream of water when suddenly he hears Bren bellow, “Not in the shower!”

“What?”

“Don’t shave in the shower!”

Suddenly the shower door whisks open and Bren steps past his nakedness and flips off the tap. The Climate Cop strikes again!

“What the hell!”

Adamantly, Danny re-establishes the water flow. However, the second time Bren steps past him to flip off the tap, he grabs her by the shoulders, pulls her against his wet body and holds her under the water flow.

She has a look of a stunned rabbit. She is motionless as he holds her firmly, glaring at her. Instantly, she is saturated and the caterpillar nightie clings perfectly to the contours of her body.

Danny looks into her eyes. Then he kisses her. And she kisses him back.

It is like a dam breaking, rash and passionate. They grasp each other all over. Then she pushes him away gently, gripping his forearms, panting, blinking away the water from the shower.

“I am a passionate lover,” she says. “I would like to be your lover.”

“Great. That’s great. It will be fantastic.”

“Just there is a little something holding me back.”

Danny speaks very gently, maneuvering her so the water doesn’t splash in her eyes, “Okay. I understand. I don’t want to rush you.”

“Thank you, Danny. You are a good man.”

“What is holding you back?” he asks.

“It’s a little thing.”

“Something I should know about?”

Danny notices the look of incredulity growing on her face. It is the way one eyebrow lifts up and makes a crinkle in the skin on her forehead. He has seen this expression on her a few times before and he feels as though he should tread very carefully.

“You want to take a guess?” she asks.

“*Ummm*. I don’t know. Is it that time of the month?”

Bren’s incredulity deepens to a look of total astonishment. “No, Danny, that’s not it,” she says curtly.

“*Ummm...*” Danny is lost for words. He says, “Is there a clue?”

“What about car crashes, murders, someone trying to kill me. Does that ring any bells?”

“Oh...” Danny says, humbly. “Does that sort of thing kill your libido?” he

asks.

“A little bit Danny. Just a bit. It is sort of a girl thing.” She kisses him on the mouth and let go of his arms. “Let’s have breakfast, Danny. You can seduce me when I have recovered from post-traumatic stress. I promise.”

“How long do you think that might be?” Danny asks, then immediately wishes that he hadn’t. He winces, thinking that he might be made to suffer for that.

“You’ll know, Danny. You will know when I am ready for you.”

Danny watches her walk out of the shower cubicle with her wet silk nightie pinned against her skin.

“That is the most sensible thing that I have ever heard you say,” he tells her.

Danny steps out of the bathroom with

a towel around his waist. Bren is standing in front of the mirror in her wet nightie. Then they embrace and hug each other for a long time.

They lounge around in the restaurant for most of the day. In the afternoon, they pack their bags for the return trip home that night.

## Time to Choose

Danny and Bren fly from Dubai to Singapore where they have a stopover for a few hours. Bren drinks green tea at a café and Danny calls Trent to organize a ride from Townsville airport.

Then they fly from Singapore to Brisbane International, take the train to Brisbane Domestic terminal and in no time are on a connecting flight to Townsville. On the final leg of the long journey from Dubai, Bren starts talking in a tone that Danny has not heard before.

“Maybe there is something more,” she says.

Danny looks down to see that she has threaded her fingers around the base of his biceps. “More?” He eyes her suspiciously.

“We could open an office in Fiji,” she says.

“We? Office? What are you talking about?”

“You check out pretty well Dee-lex-ion,” says Bren use Trent’s name for him. “Maybe we could run the company, you know, together. Maybe I would be a Chairman?” she asks.

“Chairperson, maybe. You wouldn’t be the same if you lost your womanly bits.”

“I didn’t think that you had noticed my womanly bits.” Bren smiled and slipped her hand further under his biceps.

“And it’s not a company, it’s about twenty companies. It’s more like a consortium. An empire, even.”

“And what would you be called if you



were running the Empire? Emperor Lexion?”

“Not sure what the best model would be. You would need a Chief Executive, though.”

“And what would be the relationship between the Chairperson and the Chief Executive.”

“Relationship?”

“I like you, Danny. I was unsure at first, but you were so nice to Uncle Richard. You couldn’t possibly be as bad as you first made out.”

Danny presses the button above his head to call for an air-hostess. He adjusts himself in his seat to retrieve his wallet. “I am going to spend my way out of this,” he says.

“Have you ever wanted a family?”

“Oh, Bren,” Danny exclaims. He feels

hemmed in, like he was still escaping from the coin box of a charity worker. He used his new knowledge to barter his way to freedom.

“There are over seven billion humans on earth. Does the world really need more people?”

Bren had been arguing environment for much longer than Danny and she knew exactly how to argue back. “But imagine if they had a great circle of influence, educated, resourced, and cared about the planet. Imagine that. Then those additional humans would be a positive force in the world.”

Her hand is gripped tightly around his arm now and Danny smells a new perfume, a natural pheromone that eases out of her, on her breath; a

natural, musky perfume. Danny squirms in his seat. He likes it.

“I am ready for you now Danny,” she says with heavy breath.

“What here?” he says surprised, “In a Boeing 737. The cubicle is too small.”

“Are you talking from experience?”

“I am not speaking from experience,” he lies.

As the plane touches down in Townsville, Danny is quiet with his thoughts. He is silent as he lifts Bren’s bags from the luggage carousel, not knowing what to do next. They walk through the sliding doors to the taxi rank. The vehicle that pulls up is a hybrid Toyota Prius, the vehicle of choice for a Climate Cop.

“I’ve got the Prius,” Bren says, pulling open the back door. She asks the driver

to open the hatch and Danny shoves her bags inside.

There is the sound of a vehicle horn. Danny looks up to see Trent in his Hummer, parked across the road.

“Are you coming with me, Danny, or are you going home with Trent?” Bren taunts, making it sound like the choice were not life changing.

Danny stands his ground, not knowing what to do. It seems as though his life has come to a crossroads: go back to the Heritage Bar with Trent or dive into the world of sustainable business with the Climate Cop.

Bren watches Danny dithering. She is reminded of when he pushed her out of his hotel room, demanding that she let him in on her plans with Richard Holmes. “Danny!” she snaps, imitating

his voice, “Make a choice, darling.”

Trent hits the horn again and Danny acknowledges him with a wave. He looks back at Bren waiting expectantly by the open door of the Prius taxi. He instinctively puts his hand against his wallet in his jeans pocket, then realises that he can’t spend his way out of this one. He is going to have to make a choice.

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](mailto:guylane@longfuture.org)

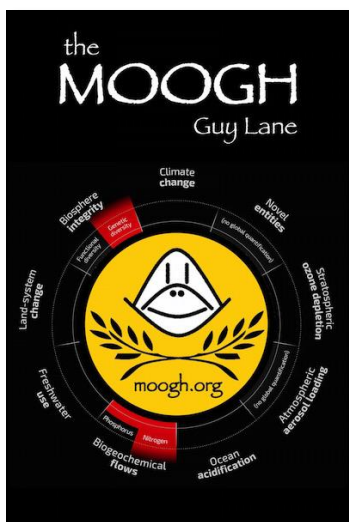


- Also, please join the [Guy Lane mailing list](#) to keep informed of developments.
- Get social on [Facebook](#) & [Twitter](#).
- Read my [blog posts](#) and see the official [Guy Lane website](#).
- On the following pages, you can see all the books by Guy Lane.
- And of course, tell people about 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](#)



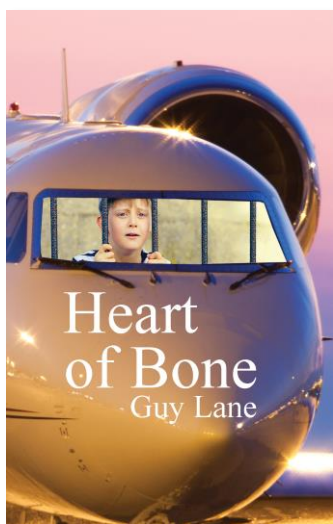
## Yongala

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

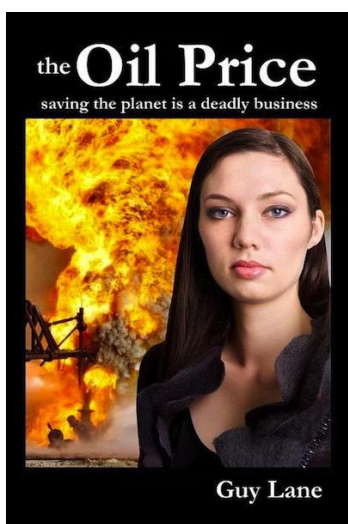
Rebecca is a personal assistant to billionaire poison merchant, Gilly Clay, and she's trapped in a ruinous employment contract.

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](#)



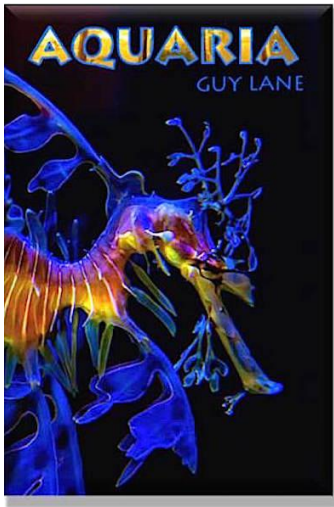
## Intervene

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, afterall. 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](#)