

**Faculty of Media, Society and Culture**

**“The Wild Apple Tree”**

**And**

**Narrative Time and the War Novel**

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## **Declaration**

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

Signature: .....

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## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements .....	iv
Abstract.....	v
The Wild Apple Tree .....	2
Narrative Time and the War Novel .....	120
1. War Neurosis, Identity and Narrative .....	121
Introduction .....	121
Background .....	123
War Neurosis: from shell shock to PTSD .....	124
Trauma, Memory and Narrative.....	127
Temporal Narrative Strategies .....	131
Story and Plot .....	132
Order .....	133
Duration .....	134
Repetition and Frequency .....	136
Tense.....	137
2. Temporal Narrative Strategies and the War Novel.....	139
An analysis of selected novels .....	139
Order .....	141
Duration .....	147
Repetition.....	151
Functions of the war novel .....	160
Summary .....	163
3.Temporal Narrative Strategies in the Novella .....	166
4. Conclusion .....	171
References.....	173

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# The Wild Apple Tree And Narrative Time and the War Novel

## **Abstract**

This thesis consists of two distinct but related parts: a creative component, “The Wild Apple Tree” and an exegetical essay. Both will attempt to answer the question: How can narrative strategies of time enable the representation of war neurosis in fiction?

“The Wild Apple Tree” is narrated by a seventy-seven year-old man who returns to England after almost fifty years in Australia. The purpose of his visit is to return to certain places from his early life in an attempt to regain his missing memory. It is apparent that the narrator has no memory (or unreliable memory) concerning certain parts of his life due to war neurosis or Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The traumatic events are revealed to the reader as they are recalled by the narrator (sometimes in dream sequences and sometimes prompted by his visit to familiar places) and therefore the structure of the novella is not chronological. “The Wild Apple Tree” takes place in several time-frames and the writing employs several temporal narrative strategies. In addition to the non-chronological order, certain scenes are repeated or elided or postponed to a later stage of the narration. While certain passages of his life are recalled and narrated with clarity, others are less clear and related over several chapters. Present tense and past tense are used mainly to differentiate the time of the narration but also to provide immediacy for the reader in certain passages.

The essay discusses the relationship between trauma, memory and identity as well as the importance of narrative in the establishment of memory and identity. I then examine the various temporal narrative strategies used in fiction: order, duration, repetition, and tense. These

two themes (memory/identity and narrative strategies of time) are then used in a review of seven novels related to war neurosis. The novels discussed are: Pat Barker's Regeneration Trilogy; *Regeneration*, *The Eye in the Door* and *The Ghost Road*; her later novel *Another World*; Sebastian Faulks' *Charlotte Gray*; Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*; and Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*. This close reading of the texts provides examples of the use of temporal narrative strategies in the representation of war neurosis or shell-shock and attempts to provide reasons for their inclusion in the texts and the possible outcomes of their use in these contexts. Finally in an exegetical chapter I discuss the application of temporal narrative strategies in the writing of "The Wild Apple Tree", and the benefits and difficulties of employing such techniques in the representation of disrupted identity in PTSD.

This thesis illustrates the link between the theory of temporal narrative strategy and the representation of war neurosis and will have use in the creative construction of fictional texts which seek to represent trauma-induced distorted memory and identity.

**The Wild Apple Tree**

**A Novella**

**By**

**Philip Silvester**

# The Wild Apple Tree

## Prologue

“Did you ever kill anyone, sir?” It’s Richardson. We’d been reading Steinbeck. I could bloody well kill Richardson sometimes.

“In the trenches, sir?” This from Loebel who knows full well I’m not that old, but he’s been reading *All Quiet on the Western Front*. His comment gets a rise out of me and an appreciative snicker of amusement from the class.

“In the war though, sir?” This is Richardson again. They’re trying to sidetrack me. They always do; schoolboys hunting in packs.

“Let’s get back to the Great Depression in America shall we?”

It’s only later that Richardson’s comment bites. I’m back in the common room and overtaken by a wave of panic. Frobisher is watching me closely. I reach out to put my cup back on the bench but my arm jerks and my fingers are numb. Tea slops onto the clean worktop.

“Seen a ghost, Markham?”

I ignore him and stagger out into the hot Australian sunlight gasping for air. Yes, headmaster, I’ve seen a ghost.

The late afternoon monsoon has stopped but the rain still drips from the heavy flat leaves of the jungle over my head. I am lying in a shallow ditch on soft leaves, holding my leg, squeezing my muscle between my fingers. The rifle fire has stopped. Just the shouting tells me the Japanese are still here. Wharton’s face looms over me. Blood and sweat. My leg hurts. The jungle has come back to life with the screech of animals and the chirping of the night insects. The peak of a cap, a dark shape silhouetted in the shadows; the flash of a bayonet; Wharton falls across my chest and I gasp for air. More blood pours onto my uniform: Sergeant Wharton’s blood. And his body is



heavy. I can't breathe. Then the knife moves across his throat and another gush of blood splashes my face and mouth before I shake myself free of the image.

That was how they started again. Ten years ago. My last year at Milton Grammar. I'd had them before, the images, the nightmares, in the missing years, but I'd forgotten. Now they were back.

“What will you do in your retirement, Markham?” Everyone asked. I told them about courses I'd never take, languages I'd never learn, hobbies I didn't have, places I'd never visit. A quiet time, that's what I really hoped for, but they wouldn't understand. A lazy, peaceful retirement. But the nightmares have put paid to that.

## Chapter One

Sometimes I wake up angry; afraid of what I might be capable of. I wake in different places, disorientated. Twelve months ago I came to you for help. Coming back to Lourné was your solution, not mine.

The house is a hotel now, the Dursley Country Club. Much has changed, especially out there on the estate. The lake has been drained to make way for a golf course, and the orchard no longer exists, but enough remains to be frighteningly familiar. It smells different: the old house would change with the seasons, the smoke from burning leaves in early winter, the gun dogs wet from the marsh at New Year, and flowers, always flowers arranged in ridiculously large vases down there in the entrance hall or on the small table here on the first floor landing. Today the smell is neutral, fresh and clean but unremarkable. And the rooms no longer echo as they once did. The hall has plush carpet where once heels tapped on brown and white mosaic tiles.

I'm still not sure this is a good idea but I have to try. When I arrived this afternoon I hardly noticed the changes. I only partly remembered the old house and barely understood why I had come. What has this house to do with me? It might all have belonged to someone else's life. In just a few hours I have learned a great deal; little things from the time before the war; memories from my childhood, although those are not the missing years. This house is important, and not just because I grew up here. For a moment this evening, walking along the corridor and down the main staircase, I was overcome by a feeling of...not dread exactly, more like foreboding. Surely there's nothing in my childhood to fear. Even so, I was tempted to abandon the whole project and fly back to Australia on the first available plane. Did you know this would happen, Dr Kingston? Did you try to warn me? There are some memories, you said, that we have to risk everything to recover.

Lourne belongs to a time before the war, a time I have tried to forget. And for forty years it was as if I'd never heard of the place. Then the dreams began again and now I know they come from that time: from Malaya during the war, and after the war back here in England. The nightmares are beginning to fill in the gaps from those missing years. And coming back after all this time has already revived so much.

Did I tell you about it, Dr Kingston, the great house at Lourne? Is that why you sent me back? You must have had misgivings about my age; it's a long way from Australia and I am not a young man anymore. And did you think that coming back – visiting places from my past – could revive my lost memories without disturbing my peace of mind? But then I'd come to you because that peace of mind seemed so elusive: night-time dreams and daytime visions. Like this place. This is not the house I described for Justin that day when he asked about the Yorkshire moors; this place lies in East Anglia. But there are other buildings in my past – great houses like this one that seem to belong to a Brontë novel – that I can't properly recall. The place I described for Justin that day – a building somewhere on the Yorkshire moors; I saw it so clearly, another memory dredging itself up from the murky depths of my childhood. We know now that it wasn't Lourne that I saw that day; it was the school at Premworth Court. I didn't think my childhood was important but you insisted. Let's start there, you said, let's see what you can remember. Ah, Dr Kingston, you were wise to insist. It's true this house is part of my childhood but it's in one of my dreams too. Did I tell you that?

Remembering can be painful. You said it yourself and I was reminded of it earlier this afternoon. Not just the feeling of strangeness I felt on the stairs, but a moment later when I reached the massive first floor window. The landing looks down into the hotel lobby on one side, but I was looking out onto the old garden and I had another of my visions, only this time it was longer and clearer than usual. Nothing sudden: it started so slowly I was hardly aware

of it, but the fragments of memory and the dreams began to mesh together and the net they formed was not a pretty one. The house felt strange and unpleasant, as if I were standing here all those years ago. Was this what you expected? I came to you to make the dreams and visions go away, and I can't help thinking that this trip can only make things worse. Yet in spite of my concerns I have done as you suggested Dr Kingston, I am making an effort.

Going back to the past is a way to fill in the gaps, you said. I tried to change your mind on that; I didn't believe it would work, at least as far as I was concerned. Even so, I don't think this is quite what you had in mind. What would you make of it, I wonder, if you could see the effect Lourné is having on me? No doubt you'd rest your elbows on the desk and purse your lips in displeasure, like you did the day you found out I wasn't Australian.

"English?" You never raise your voice do you, Dr Kingston? But I think you were a little surprised and genuinely angry when I told you. I saw it when I looked up to find your steely grey eyes fixed on me. "And you've always known this?"

Yes, I'd always known it but I really didn't want to go down that particular path. I was brought up in East Anglia, went to school in Yorkshire, and, yes, I've forgotten much of that time but that's not my problem. My problem is later – something in the war, the years after the war. Where are those years, Dr Kingston? That's what I wanted you to tell me. But this is your style, isn't it; follow the line of questioning back as far as it leads? All I had to go on were the dreams. They were too English. They weren't part of Tom Markham's life. And then there was Justin's question – I told you about him, didn't I? One of my brighter pupils, Justin Hutton. He must have been about twelve when he fell in love with the Brontës – he could quote whole sections of *Jane Eyre*. I forget what he asked me. Something about *Wuthering Heights* or had I ever been to Haworth? That was it, that's how it started. I've never been to Haworth, the vicarage or the village, but I do know the Yorkshire moors and there

are great houses there, I've seen them. One of them was my school at Premworth Court. That was the building I described for Justin that day. But how could Tom Markham have seen them, Dr Kingston? I couldn't tell you then, but the moors belong to a childhood only partly forgotten. This was my secret past leaking into the present and it frightened me. I thought I'd done a better job of hiding it. A couple of simple questions from a couple of school children like Justin Hutton and Denis Richardson at Milton Grammar and it was all unravelling.

But you were more interested in the dreams than the answers I'd given to Justin or Denis Richardson, weren't you?

"Dreams can feel very real can't they?"

I know, Doctor Kingston, I know. And the images I conjured up from the muddy depths of my mind – standing here on the staircase at Lourné this afternoon – were very real too. A mixture of dreams and reality or parts of the past I can't get a grip on, and without them my story – my identity – is incomplete, like a jigsaw puzzle with missing pieces.

Watching the light fade across the grass down there I remembered an evening years ago – in the Autumn of 1931 – and the clarity of the image frightened me. The travelling folk were camped on the common and I could just make out the tops of their vans through the beech trees. They came across four counties to gather at Lourné twice a year. They came for the fairs in spring and autumn. Between times they would work the farms, pick fruit or scratch for potatoes; in winter they lifted beet from the frozen earth. They would work, carve small wooden dolls for the children of the village, and sell quilts to the housewives, trade horses and move on. Swarthy men with bad teeth; slim-waisted women with wild hair and colourful skirts.

The gypsies would set their vans in an untidy circle on the common and on a clear night you could hear the music and see the flickering of their fire reflected through the hedge onto the beech

trees. It was there, that autumn night, among those trees – known locally as Charter’s Wood – that my brother met the girl.

From this window I watched him cross the lawn, a shadow in the failing light. He looked back once at the house, scanning the windows as if he knew I was watching, then pushed his way through the hedge towards the fallow pasture. I knew where he was going. And I knew him well enough to realize he had some mischief or other in mind. So, full of curiosity and a vicarious feeling of waywardness, I followed him. I may have known, too, that he was going to meet her. But I can’t be certain.

She was the daughter of the fortune teller and I had seen her at the fair earlier in the week, and foolishly thought myself in love with her. She would have been fifteen or sixteen; my brother’s age. She had long dark hair that fell untidily onto bare shoulders and her soft, green eyes had danced when she’d looked at me even in that brief moment before I was forced to look away. She was darker than other girls I knew with a shadow on her skin like a soft tan and I thought she was the loveliest thing I’d ever seen.

I knew who he met that night because I followed him and I saw them together. I ran down the stairs and out through the front door, crossed the lawn and to where my brother had pushed through the hedge in the darkness. I saw him skirt around the caravans and make towards the woods. The girl was hidden by the tree line in the shadows of an early moon waiting for him, and she turned to follow him willingly enough into Charter’s Wood. I crept closer and hid among some brambles and nettles grown tall in the damp interior of the copse. I could make out the two figures silhouetted against the fractured mixture of silvery moonlight and the glimmer of firelight from the camp. I crouched in a dark patch of weed. The earth smelled of summer dryness. How clear it all seems in my memory, now that I’ve come back.

Perhaps she had intended only to tease him. Or perhaps she expected money from him. I don’t know and I was too young to even

consider those things at the time. But something in their manner and their movements changed rapidly. There was an embrace, a kiss, perhaps, then a tearing of clothes, a smack across the face bringing a gasp from her – and me, the invisible watcher in the moon shadow. A shuffling, a human voice, a leg, her leg raised against his thigh; and then his voice, indistinct and muffled. He hit her twice and she fought back, biting, spitting and scratching in the darkness. I saw them fall to the ground where they seemed to fight and struggle together. I knelt in the dirt, transfixed – the gritty earth cut into my knees and the nettles stung my bare legs. I wanted to run forward and reveal myself, put an end to it. I wanted to be her saviour, her heroic knight. But fear, fear of him, fear of making a fool of myself, perhaps, kept me rooted to the spot. Then, as quickly as it had begun, it was over. He stood up pulling at his clothes, and she swore at him, her voice raised now. He laughed and threw something, coins perhaps, guilt money, appeasement. It was the first time I'd seen my brother violent with anyone but me. But I had experienced enough of his fighting and punching to know the sort of boy he was. Then he turned and picked up a fallen stick before retracing his steps dangerously close to where I lay. As he walked he swiped at the undergrowth with the stick and slashed the nettles like a pirate with his cutlass. Pleased with himself. His path through the trees brought him to within a few yards of my hiding place and he stopped like a wild animal, listening. I held my breath and kept low to the ground, the beating of my heart rang loud in my ears. Again I wanted to rush forward and attack him, but I knew he would beat me. It was futile and I crouched like a coward with my growing rage. I didn't understand what he'd done, but I had seen, and something in the way he moved on told me that he knew that I had seen.

You asked me once about this girl, remember? I'd told you about one of the nightmares, a patchwork of images linking my brother's attack in Charter's Wood and the seagull. Now I know the attack was real

but I have absolutely no idea about the seagull. And was the girl significant? I told you then that I didn't know. And my brother? I still don't know. I went off to school the following week. A school in Yorkshire – the school my grandfather had been to. You weren't too sure where to take this and I had no clue where it would lead. I remember thinking at the time that I must have been afraid of my brother and I'm certain I was bullied at the school...but nothing else came from that session.

Now I know the girl was significant. I just don't know how. I can remember leaving this house, Lourne House as it was then, in the back of the Bentley. I was leaving for school that first day. On the way to the station we took the back lane. A group of people were working in the fields beyond Lynford village – lifting potatoes or beet, I can't recall, for in those days I hardly noticed such things. As we passed by, one of the figures straightened up and stared across the field to the horizon. It was the girl. She didn't look at me or seem to notice the car at all. How I must have yearned for her to look at me. But she just stared straight ahead at nothing and the car sped past within twenty yards of where she stood. I twisted round to get one last look at her before a bend in the lane obscured my view. That was less than a week after the incident with my brother in the wood. Was it rape? Today I would have to say that it was...but then, I'd never heard the word...I was innocent of all such things. And how long before I saw her again, if ever? Hard to say, but things are stirring in my memory, the same dark clouds that disturb my sleep.

Yes, Dr Kingston, I can answer some of your questions now. I was bullied at school and my brother was involved and I think it was connected to the girl. But, then, I had been bullied by him at home, too. So what was different? I just know that these things, the dream sequences and the images I am seeing now I'm back in England, are connected. And Malaya...



I wake again in the night not knowing where I am. My head aches and my vision is blurred as I stare into the shadows. A weak moon breaks through the low cloud over the mountain but there are no stars. Monsoon rain slices the night air and cuts into my bare skin and turns the red sand of the compound to mud. I want to stop, to sleep, I am so tired but I keep crawling in the mud. It will be safe now, the guards are eating. Daniel is close by in the darkness, pinned like an animal in a bamboo cage. I must reach him. If I can wake him he can drink the rain as it hits his face. He needs to drink. I must get to him...if I don't...

Voices shouting over the rain. Japanese soldiers barking orders. Feet running, splashing across the puddles by my face. I turn my head and press my face into the wet sand and wait...the heat is gone from the night air...the Malayan dirt cools rapidly against my skin and I shiver. I am on the edge of the dunes...the guards have gone and the rain is cold and stinging. Below me on the beach a dead seagull caught in jetsam, the high-tide line of nature's dross. One green eye stares at me and I am afraid.

## Chapter Two

Mid-morning on Monday and I've come back to the north, looking for Premworth Court. I'm still trying to shake off the horror of last night's dream. I've been back in England less than twenty-four hours and I'm standing on the pavement looking down into Prestondale. It is sixty-six years since I first came here: I was eleven years old. The place is hardly recognizable to me in the thin morning sunlight. Everything is cleaner now and larger. A minor tourist attraction in the north dales. There are cars, too – before the war I hardly saw a car in these grey streets. The great pit-head wheel is gone and, along with it, the dirt and grime; the walls are sandblasted and scrubbed. The air is cleaner too. Prestondale was a place for mining coal and the smell of black dust pervaded everywhere among the surly cottages, grown old before their time. Now the smell of the moors seeps in, the real smell of grass and the imagined smell of warm cattle and damp sheep. The old station is now a tourist office and I find a free map of the area and buy some chocolate and Kendal Mint Cake. There are souvenir shops, and the last of the few blown nasturtiums in large stone pots around the market square. But the structure is the same as it always was; the unplanned layout of the place, and I find that comforting.

In my memory there is always a drizzle of rain in Prestondale, with a slate-grey sky sucking the colour from the surrounding hills, but not today. I cross the square to catch the coach and pause for a moment at the small memorial to the fallen of both wars. I read the list of names – more of them now than there were all those years ago, and among them I find a name that brings memories flooding back. Too many memories. Too sudden. The breath catches in my throat at the hundred images his name evokes. Daniel Carshalton.

When I look up I can see the hills beyond the town, the looming peak of Inger Moor, and I know that I was not a part of this

geography, however familiar it seems to me. I was a child of the English Fens: the flat country of East Anglia, where the fog lies hard against November landscapes and spires of village churches guide a traveller from miles away across the fields. My family lived at Lourné and I came here to school in Yorkshire. But still the memories are indistinct, confusing. How did I feel coming here for the first time as a small boy? These hills must have seemed like another world to me. I can feel it as I stand here today, that sense of unbelonging that I must've felt in 1931 on my first sight of Prestondale. If my paternal grandfather really was a Yorkshireman I never knew him. I only have the vaguest recollection of being told about him. But that was why my brother and I were sent away to school at Premworth Court and now my memory of coming here that first day begins to clear.

That day, in September 1931, I had climbed onto the rear of the pony trap with another new boy sitting opposite, both of us too shy to speak. I stared at the stone obelisk beside me trying to read the names of those young men who had fallen in what was then called The Great War. This I remember so clearly now that it frightens me. Is that what you tried to warn me about, Dr Kingston?

A narrow lane still winds up the slope out of town and over the first hump of the moors. From here it enters a different country; the mining village falls from view behind while in front the valley opens into a picture of the rolling hills of green as the wind plays in the long grass with flashes of yellow where the gorse blossom catches the sun. The coach is taking me back to Premworth Court for the first time in over sixty years.

I am an old man with much to remember, and I am relieved to be away from Prestondale and the strength of the memories the place has brought up. Especially the war memorial with the name on it: Daniel Carshalton. Died 1944. My gaze was drawn to the letters.

Ah, Dr Kingston, these were things I couldn't talk to you about. I know you thought I was hiding them, and in a way I was. But not for the reasons you think. I knew I wasn't Tom Markham, you see. That

was my secret and I'd never told another living soul. How could I tell you? I was too confused to explain; the past I thought I knew about and the past I couldn't recall. I couldn't talk about it because I didn't remember it clearly. And I couldn't understand the dreams. That's why I came to you. But I had built myself a house of cards, and to reveal who I was – even to you – would bring the whole lot down around my ears. It seemed impossible.

Daniel lived within ten miles of the school: five if you hiked over Inger Moor, but Premworth Court was a boarding school and, like the rest of us, he had boarded and only had the same access to his home and family as everyone else. That is, until we were in upper school and allowed to ramble across the moors on Sundays. The memories come back gradually – and painfully – as the coach takes me to Premworth Court. Now I have seen his name again it seems like only yesterday that we first became friends.

The coach drops me at the front gate and I am surprised by the look of the place. It had been a great house for a hundred years before it became a school; now it looks lower and longer than I remember. But this is Justin's *Wuthering Heights*. I have found it. He'd love it. The chapel at one end and the library at the other, like neo-gothic wings. The two-storey central building with an arch leading through the short, dark tunnel to the quadrangle are the same but the dormitory windows above, are different, with plastic Venetian blinds. On the front gate, where once had been a wooden board with the name of Premworth Court Grammar School, there is now a new sign for Carmody's Pharmaceuticals. The school is closed. It houses the European headquarters of a drug company now. It had never occurred to me that Premworth would do anything other than carry on as a school forever.

I have come back to look. Just look and remember. I stand by the gate and take my bearings. The sports pitches are gone now and in their place a row of demountable offices. I walk into the front

driveway, with gardens on each side where once had been...what? I can't remember. I move through the familiar archway into the shaded tunnel and through to the quad. No-one challenges me.

But the old school is lost to me for a moment as I emerge into the sunlight to find a car park with perhaps eighty or a hundred cars, lined in marked bays. This, more than the new sign by the gate, tells me that my old school has gone, and I turn back disappointed, although I cannot explain what I was looking for. As I emerge from the shadow of the neo-gothic arch, a smell of polished wood and the half-remembered fragrance of school dinners mingles with the lingering perfume of pipe tobacco and I am overwhelmed by *déjà vu*.

And what I remember is my brother and his obnoxious friend Campbell-Fraser.

My brother had been the school bully for several years before I arrived at Premworth Court. In his final year, he was a prefect and head boy of his house. But I knew I only had one year to survive and then he would be gone from my life, at least as far as school was concerned.

"You there, Pleb!" I was hailed by one of the senior boys on returning to my dormitory after evening prep. I'd been at Premworth Court less than a week. We were under the archway leading to the stairwells. "Do you know where the sport store is, Pleb?" I did know and he pointed to a pile of cricket gear, bats and stumps and a set of pads, "Take those to the store and be sure to get back here before lights out or you'll be in real trouble. Understand?"

The storeroom was in the old pavilion across the rugby pitches. The summer and the cricket season were over: rugby posts had been erected for winter. I carried the gear across the grass to the pavilion and with the bundle perched across my arms I pushed open the door and entered a murky space ripe with the smell of dust and sweat and mouldy sacking. It was dark and I was about to put down my burden and turn back to the half-light from the doorway when I realized I

was not alone. A silent figure, sensed rather than seen, loomed close to me and I was struck by a hard stick on the arm. A second blow hit me in the small of the back and I dropped the bats and stumps. Then a third blow to the rib cage and one to my shins. My attacker was not working alone, there were two of them, one in front of me and one behind. And they had the advantage of knowing the layout of the storeroom; their eyes were more adjusted to the darkness.

“Little spy,” one of them growled. “This is what little spies get.” I could smell his breath against my face. I pulled back and the other one pushed me forward. I raised my arms to protect my head and grabbed one of the weapons being used against me: a cricket stump. For a brief second I struggled with him but he was bigger and stronger than me and twisted the stump from my grasp and lashed it across my shoulder. I fell on one knee and then the second assailant spoke, “And this is just a taste of what you’ll get if you ever tell anyone about the gypsy girl.” My brother’s voice, harsher and more menacing than I had ever heard it before. “Understand?” He snapped. A fist hit my ribs and I slumped forward onto the floor, the taste of blood and dust in my mouth. “Understand?” He shouted a second time and I moaned my submission. Then, as quickly as it had begun, it was over and I was alone on the storeroom floor, in the darkness.

I crawled out into the fading light and staggered across the newly-marked rugby pitch. Somewhere near the goal posts I could go no further and sank to the grass and began to cry. This was why my brother had not mentioned the girl at home. He knew I would never tell our parents. But I might just use it here at school against him, or tell one of my new classmates. And here at Premworth Court he had his henchmen, his fellow bullies, like the one who had just helped him beat me almost unconscious. I knew who that was too; a great ginger-haired oaf called Christopher Campbell-Frazer.

It was after dark before Daniel found me. He had waited until lights out then left the dorm with a torch to look for me. He’d heard the senior boy send me to the pavilion and knew where I’d be. He

found me and lifted me by one arm to help me back to the school block, across the sports pitches and the quadrangle and through the neo-gothic arch to the doorway leading up to the first-floor dorms. I was groaning in pain at every step, and seething at my humiliation, but all he said was, "Aquila electa juste omnia vincit." And he grinned at me in the pale light of the single bulb in the shower block as he splashed water on my face to wash away the blood from my swollen lip. "The chosen eagle rightly vanquishes everything." It was a line from our first Latin lesson earlier that day. The idea of the chosen eagle had appealed to us both, and after that night, in our childish way, we adopted the title as our own. In the years to come it would be quoted between us in times of stress and came to mean almost whatever we wanted it to mean.

But that was the first time he'd used it. The last would be in the camp at Bukit Merah.

Now, almost seventy years later I am standing in the shadow of the archway at Premworth Court remembering the name of Campbell-Frazer. His name evokes a distant sense of panic and I reach out to the cold bricks of the school wall for support breathing deeply. I saw him again somewhere but I can't remember where – Singapore perhaps, but he was not part of my war, or Daniel's war. Was he following me? Was he looking for me? I don't know.

I've been back in England less than two days and already I've learned so much. But at night the dreams continue unabated; the deserted fishing village crumbling into a cold sea; the dead seabird lying twisted on the debris of ages, the tide line. If these are only dreams why do they disturb me so much?

## Chapter Three

From the upper slopes of Inger Moor I can still see the roof of Premworth Court below me in the valley. When I left the school an hour ago I turned into the narrow track and knew instinctively it would lead me to the top of the moor. The path was familiar to me...from my youth... I'd climbed this path many times...I'd climbed it with Daniel. Perhaps I was carried away by the memories but I'd foolishly felt myself still capable of making the hike. Walking is my one remaining exercise these days and I'm fit for my age. But the slope is steeper than I remember, the path slower, the backs of my legs burn from the effort and my heart is beating with an irregular rhythm.

I reach the cluster of giant stones just under the lip of the Inger and sit on the grass with my back against a boulder, drinking the last of my water and eating the mint cake I bought in Prestondale. I need time to reflect on what I'm doing. I suppose you'd ask me how I feel about my journey so far, wouldn't you, doctor? I said I wouldn't do it but I have. I've come back to England and I found it changed after fifty years: a land of graffiti and litter. But not here, Inger Moor remains unchanged. Hard to imagine now how much industry once thrived around these gentle hills, unseen from here even in its heyday. Cotton to the east and wool mills to the west, and, not two miles down the valley, the small pit at Prestondale once lay hidden from this pastoral height. Parts of these slopes were given to agriculture but where they proved too steep for man's ingenuity nature still rules as she has for millennia. I have stood here in summer with the sun flashing off the rock face, or in winter when two feet of snow coated the moors and bitter winds swept up the dale from the narrow bed of the Ance to the majestic peak of the Inger. The few trees on the exposed side of the moor are stunted and sparse. And how do I feel?



A better question for you, Dr Kingston: What led me to turn up this pathway? I think Daniel did, but that was sixty years ago. Maybe he's with me now. No, I refuse to get maudlin. I must stay realistic. But I could hardly expect the ghosts of my childhood to come back as clearly as they have, could I? Or is that why you wanted me to come?

Sitting here near the peak watching the breeze playing through the grass around me, I can see my schooldays at Premworth Court School. And today, what had I expected to find there? Honour boards with my name on them? Old year books in the library telling me something about myself I don't know? Would I find my name, and, if I did, would I claim it as mine, own up to it? I would now. Yes, Dr Kingston, I would now. I close my eyes and rest my head on the boulder trying to picture the classrooms of my old school, but they are changed and confused with those of Milton Grammar School in Australia where I taught for thirty years; where Justin Hutton asked about *Wuthering Heights* and Richardson and Loebel asked about...what? Anything and everything to avoid doing English. Snivelling little wretch, Richardson, he reminded me of Christopher Campbell-Frazer. Perhaps that's why I never liked him. Sitting here now I recall the image of an army barracks... not in Australia, somewhere here in England. Missing pieces of the jigsaw puzzle. The man in the dream – not Wharton, no, not Sergeant Wharton – Daniel, Daniel Carshalton. Died in 1944. And we think we know how he died, don't we, Dr Kingston? Caged like an animal. But it wasn't as simple as that. There is another aspect to the nightmares I haven't told you about. That's why I agreed to this experiment of yours, why I've come back: to find the answer to those riddles I couldn't talk about.

Even in this peaceful setting among the rocks on Inger Moor, something in those riddles frightens me and I open my eyes and start walking again to drive the memories away. I know where this track leads; but do I really want to go there? The path is downhill from the boulders. Another hundred yards and I am looking down into the next valley: farmland with trees and, nestled among the neat

hedgerows, the Carshalton farmhouse. This scene is familiar to me. This could be the Grange, Justin, where Lockwood lodged. Or Wildfell Hall? Ah, if only I had your imagination Justin, the ability to escape from my past. From a distance the farm looks run down but as I approach I see that the outbuildings are in good shape and just the house is looking old. Or perhaps the house always looked like this and my eyes, more accustomed to the newer buildings and straighter roof caps of Australia, are being fooled again.

A black and white sheep dog barks as I enter the yard, but it is benign enough and makes no move to approach me. I look for a tap to fill my bottle but the barking of the dog has brought a middle-aged man to the doorway of the barn. Stocky with broad shoulders, his face is weathered by forty years farming up here on the moors. Daniel and his father were tall slim men with narrow shoulders. Nothing in the stance or the walk of this man resembles them, yet the unmistakable mop of blonde hair, falling in an unruly wave over the forehead, marks him as a Carshalton.

“Looks mebbe tha’s got lost,” the farmer’s voice is deeper, his accent broader than Daniel’s ever was. The dog walks beside him across the yard.

I raise my arm to shield my eyes from the afternoon sun and shake my head by way of reply.

“No, not lost exactly,” I reply. “Just hiking over Inger Moor. I came this way once before...a long time ago. Thought I’d cross over to the farm track and then take the back lane to Prestondale.”

“Oh, right.” He reaches down and scratches the dog’s neck. “It’s a fair old hike if you don’t mind my sayin’ so.”

“The worst is over. But the climb was harder than I expected. I wouldn’t bother you but I just wanted...” I hold out my water bottle.

“We’ve plenty of that,” the farmer smiles. The dog snuffles at my shoes. “Come on inside and we’ll fill it from the cold. Shirley always has water in the fridge.”

I follow him back towards the house with the dog trotting beside me. Memories flood in again. I see the porch and know that it leads into a short passageway with doors to the kitchen and living rooms and a flight of wooden stairs at the far end leading to the bedrooms. Sixty years but I know almost every detail. So much comes back to me and so clearly. I hang back in the shade of the porch and hold out the water bottle again.

“Nay, come on in.” A nervous cough. “Wife’d not forgive me if I left thee standing about outside.”

The passageway is narrower and shorter and darker than I thought, but the red tiles on the floor are the same, and what looks like the same muddy boots by the door.

“What’s this then, visitors?” The farmer’s wife, like her husband, is short and thickset with powerful shoulders. She comes from the rear of the house with a basket of eggs for the kitchen. I remember Daniel’s mother, taller and slimmer with blonde hair, tending the house chickens all those years ago.

“Gentleman’s out walking Inger Moor,” the farmer takes my water bottle. “I’ll get thee some water.”

His wife looks at me with moist, warm eyes. “It’s a fair trek over from West Drayford.” I can see that she thinks a man of my age foolish to attempt it and perhaps she’s right.

“I think tha’d best stop and have a cuppa tea,” she says. “Come in here and sit awhile and I’ll make a pot.”

The kitchen, the hub of the farmhouse, is little changed. A large kettle of water sits on the side of a warm stove, as it had the last time I’d been here. The man pulls out a chair from the scrubbed table and indicates, with a wave of his hand for me to sit. I feel uncomfortable intruding on the very private lives of these hill farmers, while at the same time I’m strangely at home here. Nostalgia sweeps over me in a great sad wave like a long sigh from the past. This is what I came back for. To feel, to really feel, the person I had once been. For forty-seven years I’ve weaved another cloth for myself; I’ve been someone

else. The pattern of that weave has become so familiar to me that, somewhere along the way I have accepted it as truth.

“Not from around here then?” the woman asks as she spoons the tea into the pot. Watching her I feel a familiar edgy panic at the sudden richness of the images. I’d felt it earlier at the war memorial, and standing under the archway at the school. I felt it sometimes when you interrogated me, Dr Kingston, probing for lost memories, like a pricking of my skin. I am so near to Daniel – my closest friend, – that I can feel his presence in the room. Yet I still can’t face his death, though for a painful moment, talking with these gentle people, I see it again.

“From Australia,” I say. A ridiculous answer. The truth, but not the whole truth. “But I was brought up in England.” An unpractised phrase, ‘brought up’, that gave the impression that I was not a true Englishman by birth. Subtle layers of camouflage laid over my life by years of studied answers. The truth is always harder to tell.

“Australia,” the man laughs. “Aye, I thought tha were lost!”

“Jim,” the wife says. “Don’t mind him, sir; he will have his little joke.” She pours the tea into the blue china mugs, adds milk without asking and pushes two mugs and the sugar bowl towards me and her husband. “Actually, we have a cousin out there. Adelaide. Do you know it?”

I nod. I know Adelaide. I know much of Australia. Although I live now in Perth on the west coast, I spent my first few years in the country, moving around, moving on, and taking on the persona of the Australian I was trying to be along with the dust and the suntan. Somewhere in that time I had come to think of myself as Australian. More than that: I had become Australian. Until the nightmares came back.

“What brings you to these parts then?”

I sip my tea. I was expecting the question; I’d rehearsed it in my mind, but I have no ready answer. My brain is not quite as quick as it used to be. In another time I would have had a whole network of

answers, like chess moves, the one lie covered by the next. But I am tired of that, and now I mix lies and truth in equal parts to produce a harmless old fool from Australia, brought up in England.

“Actually I’ve been here before.” The statement comes out too precise. I’d meant to say that I’d been in these parts before. I’d been in the area. But what I say seems to put me there in the farmhouse before. “I once hiked over here with a friend whose family owned this farm,” I say.

They look confused. I want to ward off any further questions, and yet something in me wants to say more. There’s no risk here. I can safely blend the truth with the lies.

“Daniel, I think.” I try to sound vague about it. “Daniel Carshalton.”

The farmer nods. “Aye, Daniel,” he says slowly as if picking out pieces from a long-forgotten family album. “Never knew him meself, died before I were born. Died in t’war did Daniel.” I wait and he continues. “My grandmother was a Carshalton,” he says. “We’re Eagleton’s, but the farm came down to me through my mother. Oh, haven’t been Carshalton’s here since, when?” He looks at his wife but her face gives no answer. “Since just after the war, I reckon.” He looks to her again for confirmation but she just shrugs. “No Carshaltons left now,” he says.

“Exceptin’ Emily,” the wife speaks with a slow thoughtful tone as she, too, rakes over half-remembered details.

“Oh, aye, Emily would be a Carshalton,” the farmer nods to himself and sips at his tea. “She’d be... what? My great aunt I suppose.”

Suddenly, at the mention of her name, I remembered Daniel’s sister, Emily...Emily Carshalton.

“Daniel’s sister,” I say.

“Daniel’s sister, was she? Yes, I do think your right there sir. Daniel’s sister. ‘Course, she’s getting on a bit now is Emily.”

“We really should’ve gone across and seen her before this,” the wife says with genuine concern. “It’s just that with the farm an’ all, it’s not easy.”

“You mean she’s alive?” I try to sound casual, a stranger who passed this way once long ago. An old man who had once known someone from their family who was killed in the war. Someone who had a vague recollection of a sister Emily. “But she’d be my era all right, wouldn’t she, Emily?”

“Older than that, I shouldn’t wonder,” the farmer says looking at me as if for the first time. “She’s into her eighties now.”

But I know how old she is. Daniel had been the same age as me, and Emily was four years younger. She was seventy-three.

“Been taken into Barrowmere now,” says the wife sadly as if reflecting on death. “That’s a home in Arnaby. We really should make an effort, Jim.”

The farmer doesn’t appear to share the same pressure to visit his aging relative but he acquiesces with a shrug and says “Aye.” Then he stands and takes his mug to the sink as if to say the conversation was over. “I have to make an effort here if I’m to finish before dark. I’m takin’ feed up to t’big pasture for the sheep, I could take you most of the way back to Prestondale.”

“If the gentleman doesn’t mind sitting on an old milk crate,” the wife chuckles.

## Chapter Four

“Look after him, Alex. Look after him.” It is Emily Carshalton, a serious young woman of fourteen. I am standing by the rock face on Inger Moor. We have been talking but I cannot hear the words or see her face until she turns towards me and says this. I look down and my uniform is covered in blood. I want to explain something to her but when I look up she is gone and the pain in my leg has started again, like a cramp in the night and I wake up in a small hotel room in Arnaby, grasping my calf muscle where the old scar burns with anger.

“She doesn’t get many visitors.” The matron at Barrowmere still wears the old-fashioned blue dress and wasp belt with silver buckle. Her chest bears the badges of office: a nurse’s watch and a silver state registration badge.

There’s a faint smell of disinfectant tinged with a floral scent. No longer the reeking fumes of phenolic; the ‘hospital smell’ of those post-war years. The smell that reminds me of my discharge medical board at Aldershot and all the things I had kept hidden from them. My physical wounds were healed by then, a bullet had creased my leg and a bayonet had cut through the muscles of my chest between the ribs, both were shallow and benign. And I was considered fit to be honourably demobilized and return to civilian life. My deeper wounds were of a different nature, and, like most men, I had not discussed them with the army.

Emily Carshalton is sitting in a high-backed chair of woven fabric with one foot raised onto a stool. She wears small glasses set well down on her nose like pince-nez, and her white hair is pulled back into a neat bundle at the nape of her neck. She is reading a hard-backed book with her head arched slightly to accommodate the angle of her reading glasses. Beside her on a small table a copy of *The Times* is open at the crossword page and she has completed almost

half of it already, though it is not yet ten in the morning. The daily cryptic is a vice we share, although since my return to England I have allowed myself no time for crossword puzzles.

“Gentleman to see you, Miss Carshalton,” the matron says softly as I hang back, reluctant to invade the private space of this woman I have not seen for over sixty years. But I notice the title ‘miss’. So, presumably, she never married and I find that sadly incongruous with the image of the pretty fourteen-year old in her Sunday frock in my dream and in my memory.

“He says he knew your family a long time ago.” With that the matron steps back and says quietly to me, “She tires easily.” And with a rustle of starched apron she leaves us alone.

I still haven’t thought about how I will handle this meeting. I had assumed that Emily would be infirm, mentally incapable, even senile. Something in the way the couple at the farm had spoken about her perhaps. In that case I would simply have done my duty by looking in on her, paying some of my debt to the past. But the woman I face is not the one I had imagined. She puts a small leather bookmark into the book and places it carefully beside her on the table with the newspaper. Her movements are slow and precise as she looks up and takes in my face.

“Good morning,” she says smiling up at me and extending her hand to shake mine. “Please, pull that chair over and sit down. I do feel so damned helpless sitting here with this ankle. Useless thing.” She raises her foot from the stool for a second as if to show me how useless it is. I take her hand and shake it lightly. Her skin is loose and dry but the touch of the fingers is firm and confident and her accent, when she speaks, is less broad than it must have been the last time I saw her, more refined but still with that trace of the Yorkshire dales about it.

“I hope you don’t mind me bursting in on you like this,” I begin. “I was in the area and I heard that you were here in Barrowmere, and I thought...”



“Mr...?”

“Markham, Tom Markham.”

She takes the glasses from her nose and looks at me closely as I pull the other chair up to hers and sit.

“Don’t remember the name,” she says. “Usually very good with names. Still remember most of my children’s names and there were hundreds of those.”

She sees the look of surprise on my face and adds: “Oh, my pupils, of course, but I think of them all as my own.”

School teacher then. That would have been a remarkable career for the young Emily to aspire to with so little formal education out on the remote farm.

“You taught then?”

“Mm, history,” she is wondering now who I could be. A man who claims to know her family yet seems to know nothing about her teaching life. “My brother read history at university, you know.” I did know, but I had forgotten. “It’s all down to him,” she continued. “He taught me everything, or at least enough to get a scholarship for myself ... after the war. I was a little older than most students.”

“Daniel?”

She smiles slightly now and relaxes a little, as if my use of his name acts as my bona fides, I really am someone from the family’s past, and not some crank come to pester her, to sell her an unwanted life policy, perhaps.

“I’m sorry, Mr. Markham, I can’t remember you,” she looks disturbed for a moment by her inability to place the name. In my dream last night she’d called me Alex. But that had been a long time ago. “You knew my brother, you say?”

“We were at Premworth Court together.”

“Ah, yes. The school. We were so proud of him, you know. Not easy to get an education like that under the circumstance.” She pauses.

“And without his education I would never have got mine.” She looks

up again and I feel her studying my face. "He died, you know." This is sudden and full of unspoken shadows. "In the war."

"Yes, yes," I say, then add, "I know, I was..."

"I suppose the old boy's network kept you all informed," she laughs softly at that. I was about to tell her that I had seen her brother die: but I say nothing.

"So you were a Premworth boy and you've come all this way to Barrowmere to see an old lady because you were at school with her brother?" I feel a wall crumbling. "You're not from around here are you, Mr. Markham? Abroad, perhaps?"

"Australia."

"Yes, I thought I could detect...not strong, though...but then you were educated here."

She looks at me and her eyes sparkle and the small lines beside her mouth pull tight before that same hint of a smile comes and goes as quickly as before. She nods her head slowly.

"Were you in the war, too, Mr. Markham?" she says and something in the way she uses my name tells me she knows who I am. "It must have been terrible for you. And poor Daniel. For all of you."

A nurse in a blue smock brings some tea on a tray and Emily fusses, pouring two cups, adding sugar and offering biscuits. Then, as she settles back into her chair, that look again, the smile and a gentle nod to herself.

"There was one special friend I remember," she says and then falls silent, her eyes gazing into the middle distance. "An officer who was with him. Someone who knew him. He wrote to us after the war, you know. Mother kept that letter for years. It was a great comfort to her, Mr. Markham, and to me. It is some consolation to know that your brother did not die a lonely death...or a death among strangers. I still remember the name of the place, Bukit Merah. I always thought it sounded such a pleasant place for such an evil thing to happen there. Do you not think so, Mr. Markham?" She looks back at my face, her

eyes sparkle. "I often thought that I should like to thank that officer for writing to us. It was a great kindness."

"Yes," I say, with a sense of relief. After all these years of hiding behind the lies, Emily Carshalton knows. I almost ask her to tell me everything. But I can't and after a moment she continues, "Of course the farm is still technically in the family, you know. Jim Eagleton is my...oh, grand nephew...or some such." She has changed the subject and the moment is gone. "I take it you met them?"

I nod but my mind has wandered. I try to remember the letter. Had I written to her family after my release? Convalescing in Singapore? Or had I been back in England? One thing was certain, I had written. Emily's memory is more reliable than mine.

"And what did you do, Mr. Markham?" Emily Carshalton asks softly. And I tell her that I had taught which was true enough.

"Ah, another teacher," she says dragging me back to the present, deliberately moving away from the one small truth we have quietly acknowledged between us. "In Australia, after the war?"

"Yes."

"He would have made such a wonderful teacher," she says. "Daniel had what can only be described as a gift for it." She closed her eyes briefly as if picturing her brother, the young man who had gone home from Premworth Court during the vacations and taught his younger sister.

Daniel was much cleverer than I was, did I tell you that, Dr Kingston? We had this Latin motto, did I tell you about that? *Aquila electa juste vincit*. Very good at languages and history. My memory of him grows clearer and I know that Emily is right. Little things about him come back now, his ability to explain things in simple terms, to find a suitable example, a fresh metaphor. He told me once how they would sit together in that farmhouse kitchen, where I sat just yesterday, lit by an oil lamp, warmed by the heat of the wood-fired stove, and he would pass on the lessons from Premworth Court to her. The young man who had gained a scholarship to grammar

school and would do so again to go up Oxford. I close my eyes and try to see him again but all I can see is that name carved in the marble cenotaph at Prestondale.

Emily and I talk on about a few inconsequential things before she begins to tire and I stand to take my leave.

“It all seems so long ago, Mr. Markham,” she says as we shake hands again. “You would think that a merciful God would let us forget, wouldn’t you?”

If that were true then Emily Carshalton’s God had certainly been kind to me. Yet I feel the pricking of my skin and with it the cold sweat of fear. It was all so long ago but something tells me I am raising memories I really don’t want to own.

## Chapter Five

Sometimes the nightmares are lucid, at other times they can be obscure and confused. Sometimes it is clearly Daniel and sometimes I confuse him with Sergeant Wharton. Often they are both in the same image but I know it wasn't like that. For a long time I thought Daniel died in an ambush but that was Wharton. Sometimes I even thought there was a car in the ambush...but there couldn't have been. That was Markham. Did I tell you about Daniel's death, Dr Kingston?

After leaving Emily I took the train back as far as Cambridge and a taxi back to Lourn House – the Dursley Country Club. I must have dozed off on the train and perhaps I dreamt, but I don't remember dreaming and I wasn't afraid, not this time. But when I woke, somewhere near Peterborough, I had an image of the camp at Bukit Merah so real it might have been just a few days ago, rather than fifty years. I sat in the warm compartment and stared at the passing landscape without taking it in. For a moment I was looking out at Malaya. It was the most real of all the memories so far and yet this, time as I say, I didn't feel frightened. Lulled by the gentle rocking of the train I was seeing another country, another time. I could picture the makeshift huts and the smells, the desolation and hopelessness. I remembered Colonel Hamilton for the first time in years. Hamilton and Sandy Graham, the new Japanese commandant and Sato and all of them – although I couldn't see their faces, everything else had come back so clearly. I looked round at the other people in the carriage and envied them their certainty: their singular identities. Whatever horrors my mind had hidden from me all this time, I knew that the fragments I was dredging up now once really happened.

We'd been clearing the jungle to the southern side of the hill for several weeks while another party from the camp cleared a line to the north. The Japanese were constructing a new road through the

foothills; a supply route between Singapore to the south and the Siamese border in the north. It had been another humid day and the thick undergrowth held the damp heat as we worked, so I was beyond tired by the time we dragged ourselves back into camp through the bamboo gate.

I was almost too exhausted to eat, but none of us had eaten since just after dawn and a bowl of steamed rice and a handful of Hamilton's homemade tea in a cup of tepid water, while not exactly refreshing, would at least keep me alive for another day.

Thoughts of Hamilton, as I poured water over his mixture of jungle leaves, reminded me that I had other duties to see to before I collapsed in my basher for the night. Colonel Hamilton was in the sick bay – the dysentery tent, struggling with the usual mix of tropical fevers, malaria and diarrhoea, and now the doctor had told me he was concerned with a tropical ulcer on Hamilton's leg that was poisoning his blood and threatened to take his life if things weren't resolved.

The stench met my nostrils as I lifted the flap. A dozen men, thin and pale, lay on bamboo charpoys. Two orderlies carried buckets between beds and lifted men up in an effort to feed them or give them water. There were other men with dysentery in the camp but these were the worst. Most of them would die. Colonel Hamilton was in the last bed and he looked worse than he had the day before. The doctor, a quiet Scot called Sandy Graham, shook his head silently and made a note in his book before lifting the flap and leading me back out into the compound.

“That leg's got to come off tomorrow,” he said putting his empty pipe into the side of his mouth and sucking on it. “Quite frankly,” he added sullenly as we stepped out into the warm damp night air, “I think it's going to kill him either way. He's not really strong enough to take the op but if I leave him with it...”

He sucked on the pipe. The off-white meerschaum bowl had seen no tobacco for over a year now, but Sandy still enjoyed the taste and the feel of the pipe in his teeth.

“You’re not asking my blessing, are you?”

“No, no. I wouldn’t saddle you with that responsibility. I’ll amputate and that’s that. You’ve enough on your plate as it is.”

“Mm.”

“You know the new boy arrived today, I suppose?” He took the pipe and pointed up the hill towards the scar of red sand lost to us against the evening sky, the red sand from which the hill got its name. Somewhere up there in the gathering darkness was a bungalow where the Japanese commandant lived. Only the week before we’d heard that Colonel Ishigawa was being sent to Singapore and his replacement was due at any time. Now, the doctor was telling me the new commandant had arrived. For the six hundred prisoners in Bukit Merah the change had made everyone jumpy. Ishigawa had greeted us when we first came into the camp. He had overseen much of the construction of the bashers, the makeshift buildings we slept in. And it was Ishigawa who executed the first handful of men who tried to escape. He had made the rules. He had been the law.

He might have been a bastard but he was a bastard we knew. Whoever replaced him could be worse, or, if no-one replaced him, then Warrant Officer Sato would have free reign to treat us as he wished. And Sato had no sense of honour, no decency, just cruelty. As acting senior officer I was as anxious as anyone else.

As we crossed the red dirt square between the sickbay and the living quarters, a figure loomed out of the evening gloom.

“Captain!” The rasping voice of Sergeant Dowd, interrupted our quiet stroll. The medical officer took his leave and returned to his duty in the dysentery tent.

“Yes, Dowd. What’s the problem?”

“Thought you should know, sir, that Ishigawa’s left a parting gift outside the Nip’s quarters.”

“A what?”

He sucked in a lungful of air. “There’s a man in a bamboo cage. Bad way, sir. Work party coming back tonight saw ‘im, but couldn’t get a chance to...well, they were with the Korean guards.”

“Is he one of us, Sergeant?”

“No sir,” again the sudden and violent intake of breath as if talking made it more difficult. “But Smithy says he knows ‘im sir. Says he was a late capture, one of them as carried on behind the line. Smithy should know, he was one of ‘em hisself.”

I left Dowd and crossed the compound towards the rear gate and the cluster of huts occupied by the Japanese and Korean guards. Somewhere in that failing light, a man had been caged like an animal in the hot sun and left to die. If this was Ishigawa’s last act as commandant, then it was typical of the man. I knew I had little chance of getting into the compound to investigate but I had to try.

I approached the gate and stepped into the pool of light from the guard hut. There were two of them, a Japanese and a Korean. Neither was a man I felt inclined to deal with. Neither had ever shown any compassion for the prisoners. I bowed low from the waist as the Japanese moved his rifle from the shoulder to the front of his chest; threatening me. He jabbed the air menacingly to tell me to go back.

“I want to see the British prisoner who is being held in the guard compound.” My words seemed inadequate to the situation and I knew that the dryness in my throat must sound like weakness and fear – which is what it was.

The Korean guard now raised his rifle with the butt towards me and I almost flinched away, but I held my ground and met his eye.

“I am acting senior officer and I wish to speak with the prisoner. He must be given water. He must be...” My words were cut short as the Korean leapt forward and struck a glancing blow to the side of my head. I was knocked to the ground and dazed by the force of it. My head spun and my vision blurred and for several seconds I fought to remain conscious. I struggled to my knees and looked up. The Korean



had his rifle raised for a second blow to my face. I knew he couldn't understand the words, but he knew why I was there. It would be pointless to say anything further. One more word would bring down the rifle butt with such force that I would certainly be knocked unconscious. I struggled to my feet and bowed as politely as I could. A trickle of blood ran down the side of my face as I turned away to cross the darkened compound. With my head reeling I tried to march away like a soldier but my steps were uneven and I staggered to my left side fighting to keep upright until Sergeant Dowd, who had witnessed the whole thing from the shadows, came and took my arm.

"He's a bastard that one an' no mistake." He slung my arm around his shoulders and half carried me back towards the sickbay, as the dull throb began to beat in my temple.

Sandy Graham dabbed the gash on my head with something that smelled pretty foul and told me to keep out of trouble. He and I both knew that Colonel Hamilton was unlikely to survive more than another two days, and we also knew that the man trapped in the bamboo cage would probably die first, and there was nothing I, as acting senior officer, could do about either of them.

"But I've got to try, Doc," I said as we stepped out onto the compound from his tent and he wedged the empty pipe back between his teeth. "Too many deaths on my hands already to sleep easy at night." Doc knew that I'd lost the best part of a company, twenty men, killed in an ambush north of Paloh during the Japanese offensive. What he didn't know – nobody knew – was why the incident haunted me so.

The evening had cooled by the time I got back to my quarters but I couldn't settle. I had to speak to Ishigawa or the new commandant. I had to do something. Perhaps I was trying to appease those other deaths. Could saving a life now, compensate for the deaths then?

Firstly I needed to talk to Brian Smith, the signaller who'd said he knew our mystery prisoner. Smith was a reliable little man with a

heavy Tyneside accent. A wiry chap not much over five feet tall, whose powerful shoulders belied his stature.

I found him in his quarters on the far side of the compound, finishing a bowl of cold rice. Like all the men in Bukit Merah, he looked tired and drained. An inadequate diet and months of hard labour clearing the jungle for the Japanese was sapping everyone and several men had already dropped dead from the heat and exhaustion, and the regular mixture of tropical diseases. Some of them I had known, others were just names added to a list that the doc kept in a secret book in the dysentery ward.

“Smithy,” I said from the door to the room he shared with eleven other prisoners. “Sergeant Dowd tells me you know who the British officer is.”

“Barbaric that is sir,” he chirped. “Them bastard’s’ll get theirs, sir, one day. Only ‘ope I’m around to administer it.” The familiar Geordie twang made the very serious subject of revenge – a sustaining emotion among us – seem light-natured, almost like a joke. “He’s a tough bugger though, beggin’ your pardon, sir. I was with him after Singapore fell, left behind somehow we was, and we formed a small group to carry on fighting in Malaya, you understand. Surrender or no surrender. The Captain had a plan, determined he was, get the locals to join us and fight the Japs behind the line for as long as it took. Until we was caught, that is. Or killed.” Smith stood up and stepped out beside me into the cooler air of the compound. “Didn’t take the Nips long to catch some of us. I was with a party of five infantry trying to burn a train up at Ipoh. But the Captain and his group got away and I ‘eard later as how they’d disconnected the track somehow. Caused an almighty kafuffle up there on the Siamese border. Trouble was you never knew when a train would come through with allied prisoners.”

“What regiment?”

“Dunno sir,” Smithy shrugged. “Yorkshire though.”

“Yorkshire?” I wondered casually which regiment the man might be with.

“Posh sort o’name though, it’ll come to me in a minute. Not that he had any... well, you know, sir, he was just like one of the lads.”

Smithy thought for a while. “Carshalton, that was it.”

I stopped dead in my tracks and turned to face him, I felt the blood drain from my face. “Daniel Carshalton?”

“Yes, sir, Daniel, that was it. Know ‘im do you sir?”

## Chapter Six

I was exhausted by the time I got back to Lourne last night. Two days in Yorkshire and a hike over Inger Moor had left me tired and stiff in the joints. But I was wide awake again by three this morning, staring into the darkness. The memories of Bukit Merah had been so clear on the train, and now they were back as lucid as ever.

Once Private Smith had told me who the man being held in isolation was I knew I had to try again to get something done about it and I left Smithy standing on the edge of the dusty compound and headed towards the guardroom by the North gate, where I knew Warrant Officer Sato would be watching my approach with dark, hooded eyes and round shiny head. I felt his presence, standing by the open bamboo screen, staring out at me, full of hate, but I did not look up to meet his eye. I did not look up until I came to the steps of the guardroom where I bowed deeply and straightened slowly. The last thing I wanted was to give offence to Sato.

He moved down the steps slowly in that waddling, wide-legged way he had, and stood silently about ten yards in front of me.

“Go back English,” he shouted. “Curfew, curfew.”

“I wish to see the new commandant,” I said as confidently as I could. The blow to the side of my head from the Korean’s rifle butt throbbed to remind me of the danger I was in. “I am acting senior officer... British...”

“Not senior,” he snarled now and took a menacing pace towards me. “Colonel is senior man British.”

“Colonel Hamilton is sick. I am acting... I have come in place of Colonel Hamilton.”

He did not reply but turned his body side on to me. I had seen Sato do this before. Whenever he wanted to assert his authority over the prisoners but could not think of the words in English with which to do so he would turn away and stand, as if listening, as if waiting. To

speak further now, I knew, was to invite a beating. To bow politely and back away was acceptable. I stood silent and stared at the red sand on his boots.

For several minutes we held this strange tableau, neither of us speaking. I hardly dared to breathe. I could not succeed with the warrant officer once he lost his temper. So I stood and waited. Daniel Carshalton was being subjected to some cruel punishment in the other compound. I had to keep my nerve for his sake.

Eventually, after what seemed an age, Sato's hand came up to his chin like a caricature of a man thinking. Still I waited with the sweat soaking through my khaki shirt. The camp behind me was quiet; the jungle behind Sato buzzed softly with the noise of night insects.

"New commandant," he said without raising his head to look at me. "Maybe new commandant need to meet senior officer British."

I could tell that whatever Sato had in mind he was not suggesting anything for my benefit. He needed to control the new commandant as he had tried to control Ishigawa. This could be the first test of his relationship with the new man.

"English wait!" He snapped and stamped off with the same wide-legged waddle as always. I watched as he approached the main gate and shouted at the guards to let him through. The commandant's quarters were in a small bungalow hidden in the trees up the hill from the camp. Nothing beyond the pale light from the guardhouse was visible in the moonless jungle night.

Mosquitoes played around my head and my uniform itched against my skin as the sweat trickled down my back. I waited. I waited for perhaps twenty minutes. The two guards in the bamboo hut watched me while I watched the darkened path up the hill for the warrant officer's return. Suddenly they jumped up and opened the gate for him. He shouted something and one of the guards ran towards me pushing me with his rifle. I fell forward, staggered and recovered. Shouting in Japanese he prodded me through the gate towards the warrant officer. I had been granted a meeting with the new

commandant but I could not consider it my victory. I was too frightened to consider much at all. None of us knew anything about this Japanese officer. After months of studying Ishigawa and learning his peculiarities I was faced now with a new commandant, a man, undoubtedly with different ways.

The bungalow had once been the home of the District Officer, a British colonial administrator. It was built into the hill on two levels and approached by a set of wooden steps, warped and bleached by the monsoon rain and the unforgiving sun. Facing me was a wide veranda with bamboo blinds and an overhanging roof of banana leaves and tualang branches. Light from a paraffin lamp in the living quarters drew a swarm of flying ants, and the tiny *tokek* lizards clung to the bare plank walls and feasted on them.

The new commandant sat behind the desk with a stern look on his broad face. I had only been here once before and his predecessor, Ishigawa, had looked much the same as this man; his fat body and round full face all the more surprising after being surrounded by half-starved prisoners-of-war. I hated him. I hated the Japanese race, but I had to stay calm, remain subservient no matter what. In his eyes, and the eyes of the warrant officer who stood now to one side of the room, as a prisoner, one of the defeated imperialist forces, I was worthless. In their culture I should have been dead rather than allow myself to be captured. I bowed low from the waste in a gesture of humility that had been taught to us from the first day of our captivity.

“You are Captain, senior British officer,” he said looking up at me from his chair. “I am Colonel Higa.” He spoke English and by all appearances he spoke it well. That at least was something to be grateful for. Ishigawa had spoken little or no English and orders, speeches, exchanges of any kind, had been accompanied by an interpreter. There was no interpreter in the room now and I suspected that the bespectacled schoolmaster from Kyoto who’d performed that job, had left with Ishigawa that morning.

“I represent Colonel Hamilton as senior officer,” I said calmly.

“Where is Colonel Hamilton?” He pronounced all three syllables in ‘Hamilton’ clearly but otherwise there was no trace of awkwardness in his speech.

“He is sick.”

“Too many men sick,” he said glancing at the warrant officer. It was impossible to say whether he was concerned for the health of his prisoners or, like Ishigawa, he was a man who would constantly harass the M.O. to clear the men out of the sickbay and the dysentery tent and get them back into the working parties. I wanted to tell him that men would be sick; men would continue to die, if he and his guards continued to treat us like animals, starve us until we could hardly walk, and deprive us of the essential medicines from the Red Cross. But I was not here for that.

“Commandant,” I began nervously. “There is a British officer caged like an animal in the guard compound. As the senior officer I must protest...and I request that you release this man so that Doctor Graham can treat him. Otherwise, as you know, he will probably die.”

He understood what I was saying yet his face remained unmoved and his dark eyes hardly blinked. I knew that my words were insufficient to plead my case, but I also knew that this man had the power of life and death in his hands, and to annoy him was too risky. I waited, unsure whether or not to say more; whether or not to press my case by being firmer, or to save myself by apologizing for my rudeness. But I was not being rude. Daniel Carshalton’s life was at stake. Although afraid for myself I opened my mouth to repeat my demands. But I said nothing. It was unlikely that this man would have me killed, but it was highly probable, if he was anything like his predecessor, that he would order the sadistic warrant officer to take me away and deal with me. That would entail a severe beating – with rattan canes and fists and finally with boots, until I eventually lost consciousness.

Slowly the commandant raised himself from the chair and stepped to one side. The similarity with his predecessor was lost when he stood. The new commandant was taller and slimmer, his uniform, although lacking the formality of its leather straps and belt, was neatly pressed with no trace of the ubiquitous sweat stain around the armpits. He had bathed recently, and, although I was not close enough to actually smell him I suspect Ishigawa's characteristic odour of stale sweat would be absent with this man. Cleanliness, I thought. Can I use that? Can I store that away for future purposes? Will he be a hygiene freak and get the camp cleaned up, or is his brand of cleanliness restricted only to himself? As the first of the prisoners to meet with the new commandant I knew that one of my tasks was to try to work the man out; pick his strengths and weaknesses, judge his capacity for cruelty.

"You see this tree?" his accent now was almost perfect English and I was grateful again for being able to plead my case without the intervention of an interpreter. The tree he was pointing to was little more than a tiny bush set in a low ceramic bowl, one single tap root visible above the surface of the soil. Although small, the plant resembled a full-sized tree in its shape and proportion. This was the first time in my life I had seen a tree cultivated in the manner known as *bonsai*.

"It is a fig tree," he said. "The same as that one over there." He pointed under the rolled bamboo blind across the veranda into the darkness. I could see no trees in the black night but I knew the tree he meant. I had marched past it in daylight that morning and almost every morning since our work on the clearing up the slope had begun. It was a massive tree, taller by far than the bungalow in which we stood: taller and broader, with massive deep green leaves. I looked again at the tiny plant in the pot. If I was to get anywhere with my case for Daniel's life I would need to move slowly. Frustrated at the commandant's need to point out his small tree to me, I knew that I could do nothing about it. As I watched he took a small glass bottle



with a rubber ball attached, an insufflator for lady's perfume. He puffed some water over the plant's leaves. I stood patiently.

"I found this seedling near Kota Bharu the day after we landed," he turned back to look at me and I was aware of his intense dark eyes at once menacing and searching. "The bowl I bought in Ipoh. It is Chinese and fine quality." The commandant was studying me now, as I was studying him. Was I the first Englishman he'd met? His English was too perfect for that. "It is called bonsai and is an art form handed down from my father and from his father." He waved his hand at the warrant officer and said something in Japanese. Sato looked troubled for a second, reluctant, then he saluted and turned noisily and left the room to stand waiting on the verandah, from where, no doubt, he continued to listen to our conversation. But I knew Sato well enough. His English was restricted to one or two commands and a handful of swear words he'd picked up from the Australians. Anything he overheard now he would not understand.

"Are you familiar with the wild apple, Captain?" A Japanese commandant, a Colonel in the emperor's successful army, and he wanted to talk about apple trees! "Also called, I believe, the crab apple?"

"Yes, sir," I turned to watch his face. Was he mad? War affected people in different ways. "I know the tree. But it is not trees I wish to speak about. It is the British officer in the cage." I could feel my temper wearing thin. I must control myself. Would I be so enthusiastic if I hadn't known the officer in question? Would I have acted like the coward I knew myself to be if it were anyone but Daniel Carshalton?

"At home in Hiroshima," the commandant continued in the same calm voice, ignoring my request to talk about the British officer. "At home in Hiroshima I have such a tree. It is little bigger than this one." He pointed to the tiny fig tree on the side table. "And yet it is one hundred and twenty years old, Captain. Can you picture this tree? My great-grandfather brought it back from your country, all

those years ago. Some seeds. He was a traveller, my great-grandfather, a traveller at a time when Japan did not encourage such people. A sailor and a diplomat. But also he was a man who loved the art of bonsai, the growing of small trees in pots. Plants such as this humble seedling here. My great-grandfather's wild apple tree has been cared for over several generations. I am now responsible for this tree, and many others in the family garden. It is a duty, Captain, you understand this? A responsibility. Not unpleasant, but a duty nonetheless. I tend my ancestor's plants as one day, if it pleases the gods, my son will continue to tend them, and his son and so forth. I can no more refuse that duty to the apple tree than I can refuse my duty to the emperor." He looked up at me again and I saw a softening in his eyes. Not a weakness, but a small deep spark of humanity, a spark I had never detected in his predecessor, Ishigawa.

"I understand duty, Colonel," I said as firmly as I could. "And it is my duty, as acting senior officer..."

"Yes, yes, Captain, we understand each other, I think." He returned to his chair. "I too have duties here at Bukit Merah. And I have little pleasure in them, unlike my garden in Hiroshima. My father loved all things European. French, German, English. It was through him and partly because of that apple tree...I wanted to see the land from which it came, you understand, that I learned your language, Captain. I travelled to England myself, just as my great-grandfather had done. I saw your trees. They are not the trees of my homeland, Captain, but they are, in their way, magnificent trees. You see it is not just small trees I love; I love all trees, Captain. In another world, another time perhaps, I would have been a botanist, travelled the world, studying strange trees." He looked down sadly as if seeing that other world, that other time, or perhaps remembering his garden in Japan. I had an image of England, but I was more a farmer than a gardener. I loved the fields of barley and pasture, the cows and sheep. I loved the farmlands of East Anglia and the moors of Yorkshire.

“I came to protest about the way you are treating a British officer,” I said calmly.

He sat silently for a moment like a headmaster who knows that his errant pupil had failed to grasp the connection in some allegorical lecture. Finally he sighed and looked up at me.

“Just as I have been entrusted to care for that apple tree, Captain, as my ancestor would wish it, in the same way I am not free to do as I please. When I return to my garden I must do as he would have wanted me to. It is so here in Malaya also. I must do what those who came before me entrust to me to do. And if that means concluding the punishment of Captain Carshalton, then so be it.”

I was shocked by the sound of Daniel’s name on the lips of this Japanese officer. I had assumed that the commandant had been unaware of Daniel’s punishment, but now I knew, I knew for certain that he was not only aware that a man had been left caged in the full glare of the Malayan sun all day but he knew who that man was.

“Colonel Ishigawa was responsible for this man,” he said with no expression in his eyes. “He was caught in the jungle near here by one of our patrols. He was a...a nuisance to us. He was known to us. He had been in a camp near the causeway, to the south, you understand. A prisoner, Captain, like you. But he refused to stay a prisoner. He escaped. He had talked to local people in the kampongs and tried to continue the war against the Imperial Army of Nippon. He must die, but firstly he must be made to realize that he cannot win this battle, Captain. He cannot win. None of you can win. We are too strong for you British and your friends. We have released the people of Asia from the colonial slavery to which you and your friends had bound them. This British officer must die, and he must die as Colonel Ishigawa has directed. He must be an example to all the men here, to all of you. Like the wild apple tree, Captain, this task also has been entrusted to me.”

Below me the house is silent. In a few hours dawn will break through at the edge of the curtains and the kitchen staff of the Dursley Country Club will begin the preparations for breakfast and the first birds will start to sing in the shrubbery. Lourné house was like this when I was a boy. If I lie very still and imagine myself as I was then, maybe I can fall asleep. But it may take me some time...I am afraid to sleep, this house ...my family home...makes my nightmares so real. Ah, Dr Kingston, if only I could talk to you about these things. There are things now I remember much better; things I couldn't talk about before. But there are things I still don't know, don't understand.

## Chapter Seven

When I finally wake, it's broad daylight outside. I don't feel refreshed at all. A shower of rain is blowing onto my bedroom window. I'm suddenly cold and shivering. I'm surprised, too, that I'm not in the bed. Sometime during the night I'd got up and moved to the wall and when I wake I'm crouched in a corner. I stand up and put the light on expecting to see bodies lying in the grass and smell the jungle and fresh blood. But there's just the room. Only minutes ago I could hear the Japanese voices ... and something else isn't right; my clothes have been dragged out of the wardrobe and scattered across the floor... I've been awake several times in the early hours and I'm afraid... afraid of what I might do one of these nights.

I told you about Sergeant Wharton, didn't I? Or at least what I could remember. People get killed in wars, you said, and it wasn't my fault. Nothing I could've done. That's what you said about Daniel's death too, but it doesn't help.

Christmas Day 1941. We were deployed north from Johor Bahru as far as Mersing where the east coast road reaches the sea. The battalion split here; the larger party to cover the main road and my section to move inland to watch the jungle – but if the Japanese were coming this way they would be foolish to attempt the jungle route. I must have felt myself fortunate to be avoiding the greater danger.

I took twenty men along a narrow jungle road as far as a river. Was this Keluang and the Sungai Lambat river? The names ring distant bells in my brain. I think our objective was a small hill at Bukit Peta and we should have arrived by late afternoon. My map showed a Malay village near the river on the far bank about five miles from the main road, Kampong Sejak in the shadow of the hill. Although I was nominally in charge of the section I had Sergeant Wharton with me and he knew more about soldiering than I ever would, so he was looking after me, quietly making the decisions. It must have been

opposite the Kampong at Sejak that he suggested we camp for the night by the river.

Tracks in Malaya are always overhung with branches dripping rain water from the last monsoon and I seem to think this one was no different. The river bank was too exposed so we – Wharton and I – moved the men back into the jungle and cleared a small area of undergrowth for cooking and sleeping. He posted two men on the tree line facing the lane and the river – from here they could see the first two rattan roofs of the village across the water and watch the road for several hundred yards either way.

It was about five days since the Japanese landed at Kota Bharu in the far north. It seemed unlikely that they'd ever get as far south as this so quickly. I remember feeling quite safe and confident that we would rendezvous with the rest of the battalion by late the following afternoon. I must have thought that the people at headquarters had sent us up there on a fool's errand. Wharton, I remember, was more cautious. I don't know if any of the men slept but I think I nodded off at some time in the night.

As the first light of dawn broke along the canopy of the jungle above my head, I awoke to Corporal Symes shaking me. "Sir, some activity on the road. Couldn't quite make it out, but north of the bend in the river it looks like a column of men coming at a fast pace."

"How do you mean Corporal," I grabbed my rifle and backpack. "Fast pace?"

"Dunno sir, marching I suppose. But faster than marching if you get my drift. Couldn't be Japs could it sir?"

Because the road followed a bend in the river, the column could be seen from a thousand yards away through the trees, but by the time we met up with Sergeant Wharton he was crashing back towards us and diving into the undergrowth just ahead of me. "Down, sir! For Christ's sake get down. It's the bloody Nips." He was whispering across the scrubby grass at me. "Japs on bloody bicycles!"

I edged up beside him and peered over a tuft of grass. We were fifteen yards from the road and not more than twenty five from the river, but between us and the water was a blur of helmets and rifle packs, soldiers whirling past on bicycles. Difficult to pick up the detail at first. I estimated a thousand men. Japanese. What the hell was going on? How had they got this far south in just five days?

One thing was certain: it was pointless attacking a force of such overwhelming numbers. To ambush this lot would be suicide. Better to lie low, get an estimate of their numbers and report back to command.

I signalled for the men to keep heads down, eyes open and mouths shut and we lay on the edge of the jungle and watched as the full enormity of what we were seeing sank in. The Japs had not chosen the coast road from Kuantan to Mersing, the road where the British and Australian battalions lay in wait for them. And they weren't waiting to the north for orders from Tokyo to move down towards Singapore. There were over a thousand men and, if they weren't stopped, they would reach the causeway in little more than a day.

The war in Malaya was going worse than I had ever thought possible. We weren't prepared for anything like this. It looked as if the peninsular would be overrun by the little invaders on bicycles in less than a week. Even then I doubt whether I could comprehend that Singapore might fall.

Wharton, I think, wanted to move on but I decided to lie low for the short term and if we didn't hear from Headquarters or from the battalion commander on the coast then I would proceed with caution up the river to Bukit Peta. About eight in the morning Private Alderton reported seeing some more troops which he took to be Japanese, at the bend in the river to the north. I came back to the grassy bank and examined the lane through field glasses. He was right, but this time nowhere near the numbers we had seen earlier. Ten or twelve of them, on foot and weighed down by packs. I checked

with Sergeant Wharton and we made a quick decision to attack. This would be my first combat. I tried to stay calm.

I sent Symes and Alderton across the road to the river bank and kept Sergeant Wharton and the others with me. The men lay in the tree line and waited for the Japanese soldiers to come in to view. They moved easily, talking to each other. They weren't expecting trouble. Their main thrust had passed this way less than two hours before so any resistance should have been handled already. And, unlike the main column, these troops didn't seem as professional. A support force of some kind: suppliers, caterers, perhaps.

At a signal from me the men opened fire and the Japanese stragglers on the road fell into disarray. Two or three died instantly. Others dropped injured and screamed or rolled away in the dust. Four or five tried to scatter towards the river or the jungle but their route was cut off. I had counted twelve of them and all of them had fallen: ten dead and two seriously wounded. It had been too easy. Disgusting. Bloody. Totally without chivalry. And easy. One of my men could be heard vomiting in the scrub behind us and I knew how he felt. Within three minutes a lonely dust track beside a sluggish river in eastern Malaya had been transformed from a peaceful quiet morning to an abattoir of killing.

I struggled to my feet and moved towards the road. Corporal Syme emerged from the jungle on the far side of the road and began checking the dead and moving their weapons away from them. They hadn't even returned fire. I moved through the line of bodies; shocked by what I saw. Then, a cry from behind me and I spun round. One lone shot sounding stark and ominous after the fusillade of shots of two minutes before. Alderton fell to the road with half his head blown away. A Japanese soldier, lying wounded behind us had managed to manoeuvre his rifle to his shoulder. A second shot and he lay dead. Behind me another shot and the last one was dead too. I turned to Syme who stood over the two of them with his rifle shaking at the bodies. They were all dead. No survivors. In a way that was a relief.



Prisoners were the last thing we wanted in this position. But the last to die had been unarmed; Alderton had already moved his rifle out of reach in the dust. Syme need not have killed him. He might have been useful for information. But that was nonsense now. They were all dead. And Alderton was dead too.

We hid the Japanese bodies in the undergrowth, and retreated back into the jungle. I must have spent the day in a mental haze. I remember at some point I had sat beside the muddy river, my face damp with sweat, trying to shake off the sight of all that blood.

We had eaten nothing all day and I allowed the men only water to drink as lighting a fire for a brew might have brought attention to our position. Twice during the afternoon I tried to contact base and headquarters hoping for orders to move – move anywhere, forward, back, it mattered little enough now.

Just after six in the evening it didn't matter at all. Johnson and Syme were on watch and the others lay among the trees and stared vacantly ahead of them. As dusk fell I closed my eyes and tried to catch some sleep. That's when they came. And they came without warning. No sounds from the scrub around. No flash of bicycles on the road. These soldiers came from the jungle; the dense and inhospitable tangle of trees and vines.

Our ambush on the party of Japanese earlier in the day had been frightening enough. Three minutes of terror. Death and blood. But this attack from the undergrowth was much more so. When I think of it now, the Japanese could have been lying in wait for hours, watching, waiting silently for the darkness to overtake us.

The rifle shots cracked and flashed in the dark, like the centre of a thunderstorm. I threw myself flat to the ground in fear. The blood pounded in my ears with each beat of my heart. I heard the screams of men – not the Japanese this time, my own men. The jungle was alive with screeching and screaming; men and creatures; birds and insects. I felt the sting of something bite into my calf, then the searing pain as if a hot poker had been pushed into my muscle. I

rolled to my left and dropped into a ditch. Leaves and branches fell on my face and chest. I grabbed at my leg – blood; warm, sticky blood. No pain now, just a pumping of blood. My fingers gripped the muscle and squeezed as the fluid soaked into my khaki trousers. I felt myself drifting off into a faint. Blood poured around my fingers. My face went cold. I wiped the sweat from my brow and along my upper lip. Blood from my fingers wiped across my mouth with the sharp salty taste and I lost consciousness for a few seconds. When I came round the battle was still raging. Flashes and cracks; shouting and chaos in the darkness.

I had fallen in a shallow ditch at one end of the clearing and by forcing my head up I could see silhouettes in the dusk as the Japanese moved between the trees ten yards from me. Japanese voices and British voices, screaming and shouting, and the constant screech of the jungle animals. I knew that I was supposed to do something, take command, but I couldn't think. Japanese voices again. Then I saw Sergeant Wharton, a shape against the soft grey of the sky between the trees. He was bigger than the rest of the men and much bigger than any Japanese. "Wharton," I whispered. "I'm hit. I'm..."

His frame loomed closer, searching the darkness for the source of the voice. "Captain, Captain...what the fuck?"

A hand found my leg and the blood. "It's all right sir, we'll...we should pull back to the river and make a break..."

I knew, even then, that his logic was faulty. We were trapped. The Japanese had us overrun this time. There was no way we could get the men out of this hell hole and across the lane to the river without being mown down in the darkness. I was responsible for the section and I had let them down.

A Japanese soldier moved behind Wharton's crouched form. A short shadow of a man half seen, half sensed in the greyness. I could make out the blurred shape of a soft cap with an odd peak and a rifle, long and menacing. Shadows, then a bayonet flashed in the

moonlight as the attacker plunged down. I could have warned Wharton, I could have pushed him to one side; for a second or two another life was in my care.

The moment passed and yet it would stay with me forever. The Sergeant's body shielding mine. I could have rolled him to the left and saved his life. I could have cried out a warning. But I did nothing. The scene plays and replays before my eyes, slowly, distorted and misty, but real. Now and for the rest of my life I would know that I had done wrong; that I was a coward. I was the small boy kneeling in Charter's Wood watching his brother attack the gypsy girl.

Sergeant Wharton died from the bayonet through his chest. I had felt the tip of it against my arm. I felt the weight of the body covering me and the gush of blood, blood from another man's chest soaking over me. Then the Japanese were moving among the trees again looking for survivors. I heard the single strangled cry as one of them sliced the throat of an injured man. One of my men. I was unable to move under the weight of Wharton's body, covered in wet leaves and blood. The pain had come again in my leg. I struggled to breathe. Only seconds now, I thought, before they find me and cut my throat too. They were killing the injured; taking no prisoners.

A dark shadow lifted Wharton's head from my chest and ran a swift knife across the throat. The limp head fell back against my shoulder. I almost moaned. I struggled to catch my breath against the weight and the blood in my face. Death, it seemed, had come to me too, in a dark corner of the Malayan jungle, one day's fighting, and I was to die here with all my men. I tried to reach up with one arm to prevent the attacker from pulling me free but he had gone back into the great darkness that enveloped them all.

Rainwater dripped from the jungle canopy above me and I fell back and lost consciousness.

I open the curtains and the long view of Lourne gardens – the grass, the rhododendrons and the roses – re-assures me. There are muffled

voices along the corridor now and below me one of the hotel staff, a waitress from the dining room, runs along the narrow path towards the sheds, a plastic sheet held over her head as if to protect her hair. I am comforted by the ordinariness of the scene. The rain, just a shower, is easing. Only now, as I move about the room picking up my clothes and putting them back on their hangers, do the nightmares recede.

## Chapter Eight

You're too young to remember the war, aren't you, Dr Kingston? So what did you think when I named places like Changi, Kanchanaburi or Bukit Merah? Australians are a well-travelled lot and I expect you've been to Singapore and, perhaps, Malaya or should we say Malaysia now? So you've probably smelled the odours and heard the sounds. In a way then, you can imagine some of my past. When I first mentioned the deserted fishing village you thought I meant a kampong on stilts in Malaya. But the village in my dream is colder and greyer, bleaker by far than anything in Asia.

Part of the dream last night was that village again. Not so much a nightmare this time – except it was all wrapped in the dream of Wharton's death – but unsettling, confusing. Nothing frightening about it in the light of day. It's the seagull that frightens me. I can't remember whether I told you about it or not, Dr Kingston. But whenever I see it in my dreams I wake in fear, bathed in sweat and today I also woke with the vague feeling that I knew where the village was. Or at least I knew enough to be able to make enquiries about it. My old barracks at Lower Leeming, where I'd trained back in 1939, were a bus ride from Lourne House and the fishing village, I felt sure was somewhere around there. So I left the hotel as soon as I was up and I felt relieved to be away from the place. I came to Leeming – no trace now of the old army camp – but I remembered the pub and the lane leading to Uffham and beyond that a coastal wetland.

I called at the pub this morning and the barmaid told me that the road once led all the way to the sea; to a village called Thorsby St. Giles. But no-one has lived there for almost a century, she said, and the road itself has sunk into the peat and, like the village it once served, been reclaimed by nature. Even as she said it my vague, confused memory of the place began to return and I set out to find that desolate spot for myself. An hour's walk for a young man she'd

said – but I am no longer a young man and it has taken me till mid-day to reach the place where the tiny fishing village once stood before the cold grey waters of the North Sea swept in and washed it away. My legs and back are stiff and sore. But this flat fenland country is easier going than the Yorkshire moors for an old man and I can feel the explanation to the dream, the nightmare that woke me in the night, lies ahead of me in the cold morning air. I know, too, that the lowest point of my life is here: lower than my incarceration in Changi, lower than the dreadful days on the railway, or the camp at Bukit Merah.

As I walk the familiar Fens the clearer my memories become. Moving from my sub-conscious, perhaps, disturbed by last night's dream. What would you make of that, Dr Kingston? Whatever I may have said, I have to admit that your method is working. Hiking across these flat marshlands to the south of The Wash is bringing it all slowly back to the surface.

For instance, I am certain that I first came to the remains of Thorsby in 1950. England was at peace and busily setting itself back in order after the war. The tarmac road, fragmented and hidden among the ferns or long since crumbled to nothing, is now entirely lost in peat and grasses and bracken. Today the weather is warm and the stiffness in my bones begins to clear, but back in 1950 I see myself stumbling on under the ever-threatening clouds of autumn.

When I came that first time I was in trouble. I can feel that; I was escaping from something. I wore an old army greatcoat with the collar turned up against the fenland winds, and I carried a shotgun. Why does that image come to me today so strongly? I can see myself dragging through the wet ferns, hoping to find some buildings still standing; somewhere I could stay until I thought of something better. And there had been a car...the Bentley...I see it stuck in a ditch a long way from here. Yes, I feel certain that I'd left the car miles away in Lincolnshire, and I was carrying what little I had: my shotgun and some cartridges... from the boot of the Bentley... enough money in my

wallet to live for...how long? A few weeks, perhaps longer if I could catch a rabbit or two, trap some eels in the ditches, or bring down the odd pigeon. What was I thinking? How did I feel that day? It's impossible now for me to imagine.

All coastlines change constantly: they evolve and grow or are torn away. Here on the edge of the English Fens, nature is entropic: a headland is dragged away, a creek is silted up, islands form in the sluggish rivers, or, after heavy rain inland, a swollen river tears a clump of sedge grass from its bank and drags it towards the waiting sea, snagging on the tree roots, shaking off the soil, sinking and resurfacing over weeks or months, only to deposit it in another spot, to begin building another headland, another tiny island. All this happens too slowly for the human eye to witness, or the mind to grasp. But I have seen it.

Nothing now remains of Thorsby St. Giles and for some time I walk along the low rise of the dunes thinking I have come to the wrong point on the coastline. My memory perhaps has fooled me after all, made the whole thing up. But this *is* the place, and the sea has finally taken the village forever. The shallow cliffs look harmless: little more than a slope of limestone rock, ten or twelve feet high with a muddy beach below.

I stood here once before. I know that. Standing here, staring down at the shallow sea, I remember. This place, Dr Kingston, is part of my great dark void; my unknowing. My body has brought me back but my mind still cannot fathom the reason. I remember standing here fifty years ago, and by what little remained of the miserly afternoon light I could make out the shape of two broken-down cottages and a small church tower, a crumbling school house with the tide lapping closer to the ruins each year and all else save these miserable piles of brick, lost to the encroaching sea.

Not exactly this spot, though. The rough dune I stood on that day must lie twenty yards into the sea from where I stand today, along the mudflat, beneath the dirty spume. That beach is washed away

and the creek silted up in nature's eternal rebuilding of her shabby coastline. Did I scramble down the slope to the dirty sand fifty years ago and pick my way through the strewn rocks towards the first ruined cottage? Did I stand, where now the flat thin sea lies, by a low garden wall where I could see the narrow tidal inlet to the north end of the beach? The water ebbing in the creek lay cold and black like a mudflat at low tide. There must have been crabs and eels in that creek and, as a child raised in the Fens, I would have known that.

The low stone wall once belonged to a cottage. A modest affair of two rooms; the slate roof at one end was still partially intact. Further in it was missing and everything inside was damp, the stone floor covered in a layer of wet sand with the eerie shapes of driftwood. There was no timber left of the doorway and only rotting fragments on the windowsills. Was that me, that isolated figure on the muddy sand kicking the pieces of jetsam looking for something dry enough to light a fire? Were there matches in the old greatcoat pocket still? But everything was sodden like the coat: soaked through from the constant drizzle and the wet bracken of the broads; my trousers stiffened by layers of peaty mud from the ditches I'd scrambled across; but the matches, I think by some miracle, had stayed dry, for did I not light my fire somewhere inland, some sheltered spot in these dunes?

If I had hoped the cottage would provide shelter for the night, I must have been sadly disappointed. What I can remember is that before the afternoon light failed altogether, I steeled myself against the increasing rain and walked the length of the beach to the inlet of King's Creek. The schoolroom walls were still standing on higher ground across the creek. But the wind and weather had taken its toll there too and I had neither the strength nor the inclination to wade across and examine it further.

I remember, too, gathering pieces of timber from along the upper shoreline that looked as if they would dry out sufficient to burn and carrying them back up onto the dunes to the relative shelter of the



bracken. One thing was certain, without windows or doors or roof slates, neither the cottage nor the schoolhouse would have provided me any protection and solace that night.

Finally as night fell across the last surviving remnants of Thorsby I climbed the low cliff to the marshy reaches of bracken with its few scrubby trees. Looking back at the ruined cottages and the crumbled schoolhouse across the creek, did I weep? I had come here to hide away from the world, to gather my thoughts, but could find no hiding place.

Perhaps this is where my madness began. It came slowly. The tightly coiled spring of sanity simply loosened until memories were buried deep like debris under the tidal mud. Memories which, even now, I am finding it hard to release from their cold, watery hiding places.

Today, over fifty years later, I can stand above the muddy creek, looking to where the remains of the schoolhouse once stood. Though today is warm and sunny and the sky blue, I feel the same cold, clammy dampness of that day, the total desolation of a village falling into the sea. The sadness of this place persists. My life, like the environment, must have been bleak and meaningless. Standing here again today I can see the figure I was then, torn by the need to survive and the longing to die or to disappear.

I seem to recall that in the last light of that cold, wet evening I walked into the bracken, towards the creek, perhaps to get a better view of the Fens inland from Thorsby. Here on the southern edge of King's Creek, at what must have seemed to me then like the edge of the world, I found a large concrete slab overgrown by the relentless ferns and low shrub. I scraped away at it with my boot not realizing at first that this was not a part of the old fishing village. This was a more modern fortification – a concrete support for a wartime device, a gun emplacement or searchlight stand, perhaps. The army had been here during the war: the Home Guard.

And there was a hut too. I remember that now, but I am having trouble picturing it in my mind. I had stood there, I think, on that concrete slab and seen the familiar low curved panel of a hut so beloved of army units everywhere. The arches of these simple designs had sprouted like mushrooms in the damp night of World War Two; on airfields and barracks all over the British Isles. I had slept in one at Lower Leeming. But this could not have been a large billet of a building, more a garden shed, barely reaching the height of the taller ferns and must have been almost lost from view under even the humblest of shrub that clung optimistically to the salty soil of the land.

Today the sea is closer to this spot and the beach has been eroded away. There is no sign now of any concrete block, and I wonder whether my mind has been playing games again, but then scratching around in the undergrowth with my feet, I find a few rusty fragments of tin, small pieces of corrugated metal, a length of angle iron that looks as if it had once been a bed-frame. I reach down and pull this corroded iron from the grass and soil and gradually I see it all more clearly. All those years ago I had pushed my way through the wet bracken to investigate a hut on this very place. It was a small building the height of my shoulder and perhaps three yards by four in area. A single door padlocked with a brass lock and rusty iron chain. I pulled at the chain and the corroded links pulled apart easily in my hands. The lock fell away into the soaking grass at my feet. The place must have been abandoned at the end of the war. I would have been the first person to stand there for five years. Over the slight rise behind me an artillery placement or, more likely, a lonely searchlight beacon had once pointed to the Norfolk skies in the long dark years of the war. But now the slab and the tiny hut lay forgotten. And today all that is left of them is a few fragments of rusting tin and a jagged piece of bed-frame.

I see myself as I was that day, a young man worn down by cold wet rain, prizing open the door against the ferns and grasses. By the dim

light of the watery sun I could make out a few sticks of furniture; a bedside table, a wooden seat and a metal bed-frame without mattress. The interior had remained sealed from the worst of the wind and weather. A patina of dust covered everything: dry and musty. I stooped and entered. It was the first dry place I had felt in almost thirty-six hours. If the rain stopped, the wind would soon dry my clothes. Here was the first glimmer of hope. And that Nissen hut must have stood here on this very spot where I stand today all these years later.

It is almost fifty years ago, but I can still feel some of those feelings that pathetic creature must have felt that day as he planned to hide out on these lonely mudflats. Today, with the warm sun on my back I can still feel the cold and damp as it was that night. I can see the pitiable man I was then slouching in a dirty greatcoat into the darkness of the hut, collapsing thankfully onto the rusty bed-frame. I had found my rock to slither under. Here I would be safe, at least for the night. In truth I would stay there in that forgotten village for almost three months.

Not one brick of the deserted village remains. Storms have torn away the dunes and carried off the last pieces of Thorsby St. Giles. I knew one such storm; it came in my final week here, it lasted all day and all night. It left a line of debris, a high tide mark; crab shells, fish pieces, seaweed and driftwood. And in this line of rubbish a broken seagull, neck awry and one wing spread across its legs.

I am piecing together the missing parts of my life. What I remember is that the winter of 1950 set in hard and I must have experienced little in the way of fine weather. I remember rain – seemingly constant rain. In those weeks at Thorsby I knew sleet and biting winds. But I must have adapted myself to it, fallen back on my own resources. I became again the prisoner in Bukit Merah; living one day at a time. Surviving. Surviving in spite of the fact that my mind told me it was pointless. The Japanese would get me in the end, just as they had

Daniel. Or the heat and starvation. Now, at Thorsby, the cold would as likely kill me. Or the world would find me; some local reed cutter walking these lonely Fens would discover a half-crazed hermit living in a disused army hut eating eels and roots like a pre-historic caveman.

In both places I withdrew from the real world: became incurious, numb. Perhaps in both places I longed for death, the great release from my torment – and yet I am a survivor. With every fibre of my body in Bukit Merah I had clung to life. So too at Thorsby. But no-one could live forever in the prison camp, and I doubt I could have survived a full winter in Thorsby. I had been saved in 1945 by the bombing of two Japanese cities – one of which no doubt destroyed Colonel Higa's bonsai tree, the crab apple tree of his great-grandfather. At Thorsby I was saved by the sad, brutal sight of a dead seagull.

What small matters filled my days in that lonely hermitage? Finding fresh water – this was the wetland of England, the Fens, there was a brackish but drinkable stream within a hundred yards of my hut. I found a rusting bucket in the deep fern near the hut and could bring water, sufficient to drink and wash. Could I light a fire and boil roots and leaves into a semblance of vegetable stew or soup? Had I fashioned a crude trap of willow sapling branches and caught the odd eel, as my grandfather has once shown me? I loathe the taste of eel and always have, but would I have been too hungry to care? Did I set wire snares to trap the occasional rabbit? Or, with the limited cartridges I had in my pocket, did I bring down the odd pigeon; roasting them over an open fire in the crisp, frosty autumn air of the Fenland? A romantic image, surely, of my hermitage. More than like I craved for pipe tobacco, or bread and cheese, or did I want for matches or the taste of real tea and had I yearned, in my saner moments, for something to read?

The storm that shook me from my solitude came up from the sea with little warning. I have no idea of the date, nor exactly how long I

had been there, but knew that the year must be drawing to a close and each night the cold crept further into my bones. I would no doubt have cast a disinterested eye across a darkening sky as I retreated to my tiny hut for the night. How many nights did the rain wake me, beating against the curved sheet of my shelter? The rain and the wind. The fragile door rattled and banged against its rotting frame. Rainwater dripped through the broken edges of the roof. I did what I must have done every night since I came to that lonely spot: I dragged myself further inside my army coat and tried to sleep. The gods could not touch me; I was beyond the power of heaven. If I thought that I might be destroyed, then I might have prayed that it would come swiftly.

The sun hardly seemed to rise the next day: so low were the clouds, so constant the freezing rain. The storm raged about me and I found myself, for the first time, trapped in that hut huddled in my coat, cold and damp, through the day and most of that night.

The storm must have reached its height, or perhaps it was abating, in the early hours of the second night. Had some change in the wind, some fluctuation in air temperature, driven me from my hide? Whatever it was I remember it now. Forty-seven years later I see myself railing against the weather. Had I really stripped off my clothes – certainly for the first time since I came to Thorsby – stripped myself naked and crawled out onto the low headland to howl like a wild creature at the wind and the waves? I was hot, the night was hot, but the monsoon had come and I had to reach the guard compound. There were bayonets. Rifles and bayonets and raised voices. Japanese voices. Screaming in the night, pushing me back. I had to reach Daniel...Daniel. But the cold northern wind and lashing rain brought me shivering back to reality. There was no monsoon. There was only the storm across the North Sea. When the sun rose that morning, and the sea calmed itself, the waves fell and the rain stopped, the whole violence of nature ceased as quickly as it had begun, it found me huddled, naked and cold, on the dunes, staring

down at the line of debris cast up on the beach before me. And, caught in the rubbish, with a line of salty scum curled around it, the seagull. Its one green eye staring back at me and its broken wing trailed across its legs like...

The byways of England in 1950 had no shortage of tramps, gentlemen of the road. Many of them, like me, must have worn the remnants of their uniforms. What drove them from their homes, what kept them at their solitary course, I cannot guess. How they survived the winters I do not know. Few, if any, I suspect, would be catching a bus that day, in late December, as I did, knowing myself to be at a turning point, yet not knowing where to turn. But I had little choice. If I stayed in Thorsby, nature would reclaim me as surely as she had reclaimed the cottages of those long-departed fisherfolk. Perhaps my madness abated with the storm, with the sight of the dead bird. One way or another I must have been thinking more rationally – or had I succumbed to a deeper madness? I left Thorsby and walked to Kings Lynn where I bought a hot cup of tea and some toast. I retraced my steps today and my memory of the town and that meal is now clear. That day I stood in the town centre and let the mud dry on my coat and the legs of my trousers, and brushed as much away as I could. Could I pass for a normal human being?

I must have felt strangely contented as I made my plan. In the town that morning I had walked among normal people and nothing had happened. I had bought tea and toast at a cafeteria in the main street of a place once so familiar to me, and the world had not ended. I would catch a bus to Cambridge, then a train to London. I had to get away from England. I know that now. Was I running from Thorsby or was it Lourn House? I may not have been sane, but I was not completely crazy either.

## Chapter Nine

Last night, after my walk to the coast, I came back to Lourne. My week here is almost finished and I shall be glad to be away from the place, although I can't say exactly why that is. This was once my family home after all, but I have not been sleeping well; too many disturbing images in my dreams for that. This morning I woke early with little chance of getting back to sleep so I went for a walk before breakfast; in fact I was out over the golf course before the first golfers were up. A low mist hung around the few remaining trees on the estate and a weak yellow sun struggled to break through. I had forgotten how beautiful this place can be on foggy mornings. The vegetable garden is gone now and so too the sturdy brick wall which sheltered it from the worst of the winter winds. Nowadays a rose garden leads directly onto the fairway of the third hole of the Dursley Country Club. This is where the fruit orchard once stood: apples and pears but they too are all gone now. Or at least I thought they had until I approached the sand traps flanking the front of the green and there to the left, in a clump of poplars, is an apple tree. Not a fruit tree but one of the crab apples. It's old and gnarled, but it's all that remains out there on that part of the estate which allows me to get my bearings. Most of the wild apples were cut down for firewood before the war, but somehow this one missed the axe. I walked across and touched it, as if for old time's sake, before turning back towards the house where I knew breakfast was being served in the main dining room. There was something about that tree, made strangely beautiful by its ugliness and its age. We have survived, this tree and I, though we are both old and gnarled. As I turned and looked back at the great house, with the last threads of mist dissipating in the thin morning sun, I remembered the bonsai tree – not my own feeble efforts to grow small trees in pots all those years ago, but Colonel Higa's tree before that, the fig tree in the bungalow at Bukit Merah.

I told you about Colonel Higa and his bonsai trees, how I was beaten by the Korean guard, didn't I? The night Daniel was held in the bamboo cage. I never told you how he died though, did I, Dr Kingston? It's fresh enough in my mind today; it was the image of the camp that woke me this morning.

I'm sitting up against the side of a hut. Night has fallen but there is an early moon and I can see most of the camp from here; makeshift buildings of canvas and bamboo throwing eerie moon shadows. My head throbs a little now where the Korean guard struck me with his rifle. The smell of Sandy Graham's empty pipe still hangs in the air, acrid but not unpleasant. He's come by to tell me about Hamilton but I know he's concerned about me too. I tell him I'll be fine.

"You'd better get to bed then," he says in that soft Scottish brogue. "Nothing more you can do tonight."

"How's the colonel?"

"Hamilton? He's dead I'm afraid." There's a worn sense of inevitability in his voice. "He would never have survived the operation anyway."

"And Daniel...?" I nodded across the compound into the darkness, towards the place where the Japanese had built the bamboo cage.

"They won't let anyone go to him."

The moonlight catches the attap roof of the guard's quarters and throws a deep shadow across the sand. I sit up and stare into the darkness. I can't see it but I know what is there: a small enclosure of bamboo, no larger than a packing case. It had been in full sun for twelve hours and whenever the moon broke through the clouds I could just make out the dark shape of Daniel slumped forward, his wrists and ankles tethered to stakes in the ground. But I couldn't tell if he was alive or dead.

"I must get to him...he could be..."

"No, wait until morning. You've done enough..." Sandy pats my arm. "Goodnight Alex." He stretches his back before walking off to his



basher for some well-earned sleep. I don't answer. I don't take my eyes off the patch of inky blackness where they've staked Daniel.

A few purple rain clouds gather over the peak of Bukit Merah and then the moon disappears altogether. The only lights are from the cooking fires in the prisoner's area and the sickly yellow glow from the guard hut. The guards will go to eat now; it is the ritual time. There is rain in the air. I can feel it, smell it. If only Daniel can hold on, the rain will revive him. I have to keep him alive.

I wait a few more minutes to make sure the guards are not still prowling around then I crawl forward, leaving the safety of my position between the huts, moving slowly, on hands and knees into the open compound. My ribs hurt and a pain shoots up my face, blurring my vision. I crawl under the wire separating the prisoners quarters from the guard's huts. As I reach the cage the first drops of rain are beginning to fall and the smell of the camp changes as it always does. I must get Daniel to wake up and open his mouth. He needs to drink. We have learned to welcome the rain on the work parties – welcome the rain and tip back our heads to let the water run into our mouths. He has had nothing to drink since...

"Daniel," I whisper. "You've got to wake up. It's raining. Try and drink."

He groans and I can see his hand move in the darkness. He is alive. Small reason to rejoice but my spirits lift. Great drops of monsoon rain splash around us now and I reach into the cage and pull his head back against the bamboo to let the water trickle down his face. His head moves and his mouth opens, but he is barely conscious.

The rain grows heavier and I know that a real storm is brewing. The air is still warm in spite of the rain. The floor of the cage is soon wet and muddy. A flash of lightning moves across the sky and illuminates the compound. By its light I see the dried blood washing off Daniel's legs in the rain. A lamp is lit on the verandah of the guard hut and I slump down behind the cage to avoid being seen. But there

is no-one there. The moon re-appears and I can see Daniel now, slumping forward again, and the rain growing even heavier in the gloom. I can no longer see the blood on his legs, only the shape of him. But I can smell the festering wounds. He is feverish but he is alive. I whisper his name again and he groans. If I can only keep him awake he might make it through the night. Then, in the morning, the Japanese might let him free.

It is a vain hope...all vain hopes...but I must cling to them. I cling to them then and it is that mixture of dashed hope and desperation that I feel now, remembering it today. I can't let it go...although I know how futile it is. Lightning crackles so close that the earth quakes and a mighty clap of thunder breaks across the sky and rumbles on for several seconds. More lightning. More rain. The gods unleash their fury on the camp. Suddenly there are rivulets of water running across the sand and great shallow lakes form around us. The wind is up and tugs pieces from the fragile huts. Then I see the shape of a Korean guard; hear his feet splashing in the water; the rifle with its long thin bayonet flashing in front of me.

Angry shouts and a raging storm. The bayonet reminds me of another scene: Wharton's death in the jungle. More soldiers now, more shouting, and a rifle butt hits my already bruised chest. I slither back in the mud away from the cage, back towards my hut even as the storm tears half the roof away.

As I crawl back under the blows from the Korean and Japanese guards I hear Daniel's voice in the darkness behind me gasping the words, "*Aquila electa juste omnia vincit.*" Maybe he really said it; perhaps I only heard it on the wind and rain, a memory from Premworth Court echoing in my brain above the howling monsoon.

This morning, standing beside the old crab apple tree at Lourne, I can remember the days in the camp as vividly as ever. I know how it felt to be weakened by tropical diseases, malaria and dysentery, how we dragged ourselves through the days. How working parties of

twenty or thirty men were sent out every day to clear the jungle for a new road. Others trucked out every morning to lay an airfield for the Japanese. More men were wanted each day; only the dying were exempt. Anyone who could stand, even those so weak they had to be supported, were made to work. More men would be sick. And for every sick man the rations were cut. No work, no food.

These images from my twisted memory I know are true. The week that Colonel Hamilton died we got a new Japanese commander, I became senior British officer, and Daniel Carshalton was staked in a cage in the full sun. But he did not die there. I had argued his case with the new commandant to no avail. Colonel Higa had told me about his ancestor's wild apple tree back in Hiroshima. These things are true.

Two weeks after Daniel died we took in a dozen prisoners from another camp somewhere to the east. Smithy must have been talking to them and it was from him that I learned the full story.

"Think I know why the Japs wanted him, sir," Smithy said. "One of them new lads from Palawan says he was with 'im...running sabotage and such." I remembered that Smithy had been with Daniel too, for a while after the rest of us had been captured. "They reckon he killed Ishigawa's son." That would certainly explain the vehemence with which Ishigawa had...Smithy was explaining. "Captain Carshalton managed to evade capture after they came down through Ipoh. Lot's of 'em took boats down that coast and 'is company was coverin' the inland route at a place called Bidor." I could picture Daniel living rough in the Malayan jungle, surviving on his wits, hiding from the Japanese. "A few of us melted away into the jungle and circled north behind the Jap advance," Smithy continued. "Not as how we could do a thing to stop 'em at the time, but gradually over the next few weeks we set up contact with other stragglers and started to harass the Nips from hideouts in the jungle. Stupid most of it. We dug up some of the

railway line near Batu Gajah. Burned some warehouses of Japanese supplies at Taiping. But there weren't much we could do, really."

"So how does Ishigawa's son come into the picture?"

"Ah. After I was captured, seems Captain Carshalton and the lads drifted over towards the east coast when the Nips got too active in Perak. Our beloved little Colonel Ishigawa," Smithy chuckled. "His son's a flyer. Zero's out of an airfield near Kuantan. Some prisoners from Palawan, were sent to fix the runway after the Australians had smashed it in the first attack. Smashed it with bleedin' hammers, can you believe that? Seems the captain 'ad given up most of 'is sabotage efforts by then, too bleedin' dangerous and he had no weapons or gear. Spent 'is time trying to evade capture and get food, and passing stuff from the villagers to the prisoners. Almost got caught plenty of times, by what these new guys are saying. One of the prisoners, a Canadian engineer, says the runway they were repairing at Kuantan sloped to the left at one end. Not enough to affect a good pilot on a clear day, but enough to make it tricky when wet, he said. Well, he got that message out to Captain Carshalton somehow, and 'is men had found some 44-gallon drums of oil in a dump further up the road...bin saving 'em to light a fire one day, I shouldn't wonder...but he must've thought...well, they rolled them through the rubber plantation up there to the edge of the runway and waited for the right day." Smithy fell quiet again and I could tell that he, just like me, was picturing the scene. "The Canadian got another message out when the job was done...the runway was mended...and a squadron of Zero's was expected the next morning, early, from Kota Bahru. Carshalton's men tipped six barrels on top of the new tarmac and left. I'd have loved to 'ave seen it, sir. You should hear these new prisoners tell it, sir. Went off like a dream, apparently. As luck would have it there was rain that night and the runway must have sparkled in the sunlight just like any wet tarmac would, 'cept this one was like a skatin' rink. First two planes skidded off into the trees which was probably all they would have expected really, but then a third plane

hit the grass and bounced into the first two and the whole bloody lot burst into flames. Two crew got out but Ishigawa's son was burned to death in his cockpit. You could see the smoke from the camp at Palawan, sir. After that, your friend seems to have disappeared into the jungle for almost a year; probably stayed with some native Malays in a kampong. But eventually he was betrayed and the bastards got him. He must've been the last person to get himself captured – I think the others are all dead now. Anyway, by the time they found him, the Japs would really have had it in for him, one way or another.”

“That's why Ishigawa had left orders for Higa about Daniel. And that's why he came back that morning to finish the job.”

“Reckon you're right there, sir.” Smithy moved off across the compound leaving me with the picture of that morning when Ishigawa came back. The day that Daniel died.

I knew something was different as soon as I woke up that day. At first light I heard the voices of the guards shouting across the compound and someone lifted my head and poured cold water across my face. The sun was just coming up and I was roused from my bed still groggy and sore from my beating the day before.

We were being called out, a muster before breakfast, the whole camp, and two men dragged me to my feet and helped me out into the daylight. A few low clouds clung to the upper slopes of the hill behind the camp. Debris from the storm, palm leaves and overturned cooking pots, littered the compound. Warrant Officer Sato barked orders at his Korean henchmen and strutted across the sand. All the guards were out so we knew something unusual was happening. They marched across the compound and smashed open Daniel's cage. His hands and legs were untied and he was dragged to his feet and bundled forward. The rest of us prisoners were hauled out to parade in the dawn light. Steam rose from the damp ground as the sun struck across the camp. The towering shape of Bukit Merah gradually came into view as a crimson morning streaked the sky. I

felt weak, hungry and thirsty, but whatever I was feeling, Daniel must have felt a hundred times worse.

I few men gasped when they saw the state he was in. Then the whole camp, almost a thousand men by then, fell silent and I turned my head to see the new commandant, Colonel Higa – the man I'd met and pleaded with the evening before, a man seemingly obsessed with his tiny tree in a pot, his sense of honour and duty – being admitted through the bamboo and barbed-wire gate, and with him was a sight none of us wanted to see: the old commandant, Colonel Ishigawa.

It was over in five minutes. The little Japanese colonel stood directly in front of me and shouted at us in Japanese. He was so angry his spittle hit my face, but there was no interpreter and we couldn't understand what he said. Then, as suddenly as he started, he stopped his tirade, pulled back his head with an odd twitching motion and moved across to Daniel who had been forced to kneel in the dust in front of us.

Ishigawa drew his sword and with one movement brought it down across the back of Daniel's neck. I tried not to look. I stared straight ahead but I saw the sunlight flash on the blade and I heard the whistle as it swung through the air and the crack like a whip. It all happened so quickly.

I looked down and there was blood, a lot of blood, great gouts of blood like water pouring from a broken standpipe. Then Daniel's body slumped slowly forward, his head lying face down in the dust.

The blood stopped pouring and spread slowly in a widening arc in the sand. I stared in disbelief. A thousand men stood silent behind me, unmoving: transfixed.

Today, for the first time in half a century, standing by the apple tree at Lourne, I let my tears fall. I don't know whether I am crying for Daniel or myself.

## Chapter Ten

Singapore seen from the deck of a hospital ship: the low skyline of the city across the water dull and uninviting under a humid haze. An afternoon squall swept over the oleaginous water and soaked the soldiers still embarking from the small liberties. I stood on the rail and watched idly as the business of loading and casting off went on around me. It was late 1945 and I'd been in the Far East for five years, most of it as a prisoner-of-war, yet I was leaving with feelings too complex for words. I was going home but there was no frisson of excitement at the thought.

After four weeks of rest and recuperation in Raffles I had been pronounced fit for repatriation and two days later I was standing listlessly on the deck of the hospital ship. My father had died while I was in Bukit Merah – the counsellors at Raffles had told me – and my brother had been killed in North Africa a few months later. So I was to inherit Lorne House and the estate. Somehow I didn't relish the thought. I'd been having trouble sleeping. I couldn't have known it then but the nightmares wouldn't stop when we turned west across the tip of Sumatra and the coast of Malaya settled behind us.

Six years later, in early 1951, I returned to Singapore. The skyline, from the deck of the cargo ship, looked the same. Even the louring clouds over the dirty harbour were unchanged. I'd signed as a deckhand on a rusting freighter from Marseille with a vague vision of disappearing into the exotic South Seas. I'd spent the last months of the previous year hiding myself away in a hut on the edge of the English Fens. But my dreams of a Pacific island were dashed in the Malacca Straits when something in the engine room of the old ship snapped off in a storm and we'd limped towards Singapore where the captain dropped anchor and paid off all his casual deckhands. So I was back in South East Asia, travelling on false papers I'd bought in the back room of a dirty London pub in the name of Arnold Price.

Did I tell you that I went back to Singapore, Dr Kingston? I may have been a bit confused myself. And the name, you never asked about the name, did you? I didn't call myself Price for long. I didn't exactly choose Markham either. I met him in Singapore; that's how I came to change my name a second time. I can remember most of that time, returning to the Far East in the early fifties, meeting Markham. But I couldn't have told you earlier. Now I think I'm ready.

Singapore, as a place to hide, was as good as any other, and I was familiar with its bustling streets and humid air. After two days I found work as a shipping clerk in the local office of Walker and Teng, a rubber exporter. Mind-numbing work but it gave me plenty of time to myself and freedom to roam about the streets as I went between the office in Outram and the godowns at the harbour checking goods. I took shabby digs above a shop off Rowell Road and ate most evenings in Soong's Bar on Albert Street. It was here, in Jimmy Soong's, that I first met the real Tom Markham.

Even before he spoke he was unmistakably Australian: the way he moved, the premature wrinkling at the corner of his eye, the battered slouch hat. Even so, we had much in common, Markham and I. He too was drifting, trying to get his life in order. But he was not a man on the run. He'd been a prisoner of the Japanese, though. Something in that gaunt look would have given it away even if he hadn't told me. Looking at Markham I wondered if I still bore those same marks.

He did not intend to stay in Singapore, he said. He had plans to move up country. Whereas I felt I had found my hiding place. After those months of depravation living on the cold wet coastline of eastern England, this regular job with regular pay and a bed every night and hot food, was at least some sort of life again. In Singapore I was surrounded by the debris of centuries, beached and half-buried and there to stay.

At least I thought I was there to stay. Reggie Walker, the boss's son, approached me several times about working for the company up-country, but I was not keen to go anywhere.



“We’ve got local chaps in KL and Ipoh,” he’d explained. “But we need someone to keep an eye on things. It’d be easy work for a chap like you. You’d be your own boss, an office and a car. Bigger salary, too, I dare say. Just up your street I shouldn’t wonder.”

It all sounded fine the way he put it and it was difficult to come up with an excuse for refusing. I hadn’t chosen to come back to Singapore but the place suited me well enough. I had no bad memories of this island; I’d arrived here before the Japanese came and I’d been treated here after they were defeated. No, my real ghosts were up country in Malaya and I just didn’t feel ready to face them again. Malaya was where my patrol had been ambushed: where I’d lost a dozen men. Where Sergeant Wharton had taken a bayonet in the back and I had failed to prevent it. And it was where Daniel Carshalton had been executed.

So for the moment I was not prepared to lose what little life I had in Singapore, with its anonymity and its one-day-at-a-time escapism. I had buried myself in it as surely as I had in the hermitage of Thorsby St. Giles the year before. But this time I was better fed and clothed. I had a job, regular pay in my pocket and a bed at night. I had a life now, not much of a life, and not my own, but it was better than freezing to death on the edge of the English Fens.

The last of the evening light was fading in Albert Street and the darkness brought the usual clatter of small stalls on the pavements. With the darkness, too, the heat was drawn out of the day to be replaced by a balmy warmth that closed around me.

I was at my usual table when Markham came in that first time. He paused for a moment at the door, peered into the gathering gloom, saw me and nodded in that way people have of recognizing one of their own, a kindred spirit. The sleeves of his white shirt were rolled above the elbow and his necktie was loose at the throat. Although pressed down by the heat like everyone else, he had taught himself to ignore it, to live with it. It was a trick I too had learned in my years in

the east, a skill honed in the prison camps, hauling bamboo through the jungles of Malaya.

“Mind if I join you?” his accent reminded me of the Australian troops in the camp at Bukit Merah. He stood over my table slightly stooped. “Tom Markham,” he said extending a hand.

“Arnold Price,” I said. “I’ve seen you around.”

He waved to the bar for a beer and pulled back a chair before easing himself down opposite me. He had that same easy way of those Australian diggers I’d met in the war and I could almost see him in tattered khaki shorts and slouch hat. Like me he was still thin.

Over a plate of *mee* he told me about his job supervising labourers at Government House.

“Only temporary of course,” he said with a grin. “I got no experience in that line.” He sorted a prawn from the noodles with his chopsticks. “Truth is I’m looking for something up country. Plantation manager or something. More my style I reckon.” After a short silence he added: “Draws you back, don’t it?”

“Sorry?”

“The East. The orient.” He finished the last of his noodles and pushed the plate away. “I went back to Queensland after the war. Thought I’d be buggered if I’d ever come back to Asia, not after what I’d been through...we’d all been through, eh? But here I am looking for work in the place I once thought of as the arse end of the world.”

That first evening we talked about our jobs in Singapore and our mutual dislike of our fellow expatriates, both British and Australian. I managed to steer the conversation away from any mention of the war. Although I was interested in Markham’s war I didn’t want to talk about my own.

Over the next few weeks Tom and I met in Soong’s perhaps three times a week for a beer and a plate of fried rice or noodles. He was a slow talker who obviously kept himself to himself. But gradually I heard his story. He had little or no family and as far as I could make

out had never known his parents. There was mention of a grandfather on a sheep station in Queensland, but Markham had been brought up by a farming family, an aunt, somewhere on the coast.

“They’re all dead now, course,” he told me one evening. “After the war I went looking for my grandfather but the place had been sold a couple of times since his days and no-one even remembered him.” Markham lit a cigarette. “That sorta set me thinking. All through the war I thought I belonged in the bush. Don’t get me wrong, it’s a great place but once I got back somehow I couldn’t settle. The old man lived all his life out there in the outback, small town and such like. Completely forgotten now.”

I nodded and waited. He ordered another two beers before continuing.

“Somehow I couldn’t see my future like that,” he said. “My mates... dead now, most of ‘em, and I just couldn’t settle back home. Four jobs in five years. Nothing wrong with Australia,” he grinned, “it was me. And perhaps this place, Singapore, Malaya. Like I say, it draws you back, doesn’t it?”

The cold beers came and he drank long and hard from his glass before he continued.

“Plenty enough reasons to hate it though haven’t we?” He looked me square in the eye, studying my face then smiled sadly. “Don’t know about you but I still can’t see a Jap without wanting to murder the bastard. But there’s something about this part of the world isn’t there? Fellow at Three Pagodas Pass, Englishman like yourself, he’d been a planter before the war and he told me all about it. Never thought I’d be back here within ten years looking for that kind of work.”

I’d never been to the pass on the Burma Railway where so many good men died but I knew about it. We all did. Markham hardly asked about my war. Perhaps out of respect or maybe he simply didn’t care. I seem to remember that with Tom Markham it was

difficult to know. But one thing I do know; I liked him, and I would miss him when he finally found a job and went up country. I was a man with few friends, always had been. After Daniel was killed I was even more reluctant to make close friends. Now here was this Australian drifter, a man so like myself that I couldn't help but like him, whatever I thought of myself.

It must have been about two months later that Markham found a position as a manager on a rubber plantation. "Outside Seremban," he told me a couple weeks before he was due to leave. "Just a little place, me and a Tamil overseer. Hope he knows what he's doing until I learn the ropes."

I suppose I was sorry to hear him say that but I was probably relieved too. I'd be safer again with him gone, I must have told myself. I could be alone again. I was lying to myself, even then, keeping my dark secrets. With him gone, I could keep my head down and do my work.

Reggie Walker was still pressing for me to take up the supervisor's job in Malaya but I didn't feel ready. Maybe Reggie knew that I wasn't who I said I was, but if he did, he never said anything. I just kept making excuses to stay where I was. That is until one afternoon I took a trip out to Kranji in the north of the island to see a client and collect a couple of signatures. While I was there I thought I'd look in at the new War Graves Commission cemetery and the war memorial.

Another overcast and steamy day: an ideal day for remembering the men who had died in Malaya, pay my respects to the dead. I figured that very few ex-prisoners would ever come back to Singapore, and if they did it would not be for years yet, and no-one else would ever understand what went on, not like we did. Those conversations with Tom Markham had shown me that. For better or worse, we were changed by the experience of our war years. I now felt I owed something to all those men I'd known who didn't go home. I owed one of them my life.

The rows of white headstones: the silent names. I recognized none of them, nor had I expected to. This visit to Kranji was symbolic. My own men lay two-hundred miles to the north of Singapore. But walking among the white graves made me review my own life and the mess I'd made of it. I wanted to tell these men we'd left behind that, even though I had survived the war, I was not untouched. It was an eerie feeling: I was closer to the men whose names marked those white headstones than I was to anyone else, except possibly Tom Markham, because he'd been through it too. He understood.

I think I heard the voice first, carried on the still, close atmosphere of the memorial: a voice harsh and unchanged since our days at Premworth Court, but I didn't recognize it, not at first. It just didn't belong there. He was about fifty yards ahead of me with a group of women, most of them middle-aged Americans by the look of them. He was still in uniform. Police. Probably British Military Police but maybe with the Malayan or Singapore police. I looked up sharply and saw his face over the heads of the women. Campbell-Frazer. It's all rather confused in my memory now but seeing him there must have sent a shiver down my back. How quickly I reacted and turned away before he could see me, I don't know. But I remember staring back at him for a moment in disbelief. He'd changed, of course. We both had. But he was unmistakable.

I can recall a row of headstones near the exit gate and I moved along them – did I run? I must have wanted to. No, surely, running would have attracted attention in a place like that. And what was so important, so evil that I had to keep moving? Whatever it was I knew I had to get away from Campbell-Frazer. But I couldn't resist glancing back from the driveway. His tall figure towered over the American ladies; he was fifty or sixty yards away from me and turned in my direction. I don't know if he saw me, or whether he was even looking my way. Surely he must have seen me from that distance. He raised an arm to shield his eyes from the sunlight and the painful white of the headstones and seemed to look directly at me. Had he recognized

me? The Americans were clamouring for his attention and I slipped behind the wall and made for my car as quickly as I could.

I was shaken and I drove back to the city through heavy afternoon traffic, checking constantly in my rear-view mirror. Of all the people to come across, why Campbell-Frazer? A military policeman. If he had seen me, could he find me in this city? One thing was certain, he would not turn away. If I'd been recognized, Campbell-Frazer would pursue me forever for his own sadistic satisfaction. I drove in a daze nervously looking over my shoulder. But I was not followed.

For the next two days I kept out of sight. I think I stayed in the office during the day, rarely visiting the warehouses or the clients, and ate alone at a little bar off Bras Basar Road. But I wasn't sleeping. At night I saw Campbell-Frazer's face in the darkness. I remembered the beating in the school pavilion. He'd enjoyed that. How much more would he enjoy himself at my expense now? He was a policeman and he was in Singapore. Whatever I'd done – and my memory of the previous five years was already confused – I told myself that, perhaps, I'd got away with it. But I wasn't convinced. I was running away from something and I had felt safe in Singapore up until then. Now I was exposed, vulnerable. I would have to move on again. I would have to leave as soon as I could.

Two days later I told Reggie that I would take the supervisor's position up country. He was delighted and the firm threw a small cocktail party in my honour. The move itself took one or two days to sort out and I would be leaving around the same time as Tom Markham.

“Better take the car,” Reggie said as we walked out of the office together. “Train would be more comfortable, I'm sure, but you're going to need some transport up country, aren't you?” The first drops of monsoon rain were falling and we hung back in the doorway and lit up cigarettes. “Watch the roads though, won't you?” he added with a grin. “Full of hidden dangers these days, eh?”

I knew what he meant. The communists had been causing a bit of trouble in the peninsular over the last few months, and several planters had been attacked, but so far, no-one had been seriously injured. For my own part I had other things to worry about - Christopher Campbell-Frazer. But I was moving on. I would find another place to hide. I went back to Soong's Bar that night to catch up with Markham. If I was driving up to Ipoh in the firm's car, maybe he'd like a lift.

## Chapter Eleven

When I told you about my return to Malaya it must have sounded vague. In my mind it was colourless, like an old film. But I've thought about it a lot in these last few days and now, if I just close my eyes, it's as if I'm reliving parts of it in all their tragic detail. You taught me that trick too, do you remember? I suppose you try the same thing with all your clients, but it didn't work very well with me did it? Not until now that is. I expect I thought you were going to hypnotize me and I fought against it. Or maybe, as you said at the time, I simply didn't want to remember. Only now am I remembering my time in Singapore and Malaya, when I went back after the war, so well that I can almost smell it.

The smells I remember are truly exotic: the frangipani blossom and the hint of spices driven by the hot winds from Sulawesi or Sumatra, the heady perfume of clove tobacco, or the musty smell of rice or kapok drying in the afternoon sun. And the unforgettable stench of the open drains and decaying vegetable matter on the fringes of the water, the oily mixture of fuel-spill, bilge-water and waste, carried in from the ocean reefs.

Today it all seems so far away from this English house; so far away from my life in Australia. What I remember of it I can recall vividly, but some of it is still lost to me...hovering just out of reach. But that's why you said I should come back to England; it wasn't just to remember my childhood, was it? Something here at Lourné holds the key to why I was in Malaya. Why I was driving north in an Austin Devon with Tom Markham.

Crossing the causeway from Singapore to the mainland Markham and I left the smells of the city behind, the cloying scent of human sweat, the honest smell of a working city, of raw latex from the godowns by the wharf, or of rattan drying in the kampongs to the east.



Memories of the war crowded in on me as I drove into the Malay state of Johor. As Markham had said, it draws some men back. But not me – my only need was to keep moving, keep hiding. In the two weeks since my visit to the war memorial at Kranji I had been jumping at shadows, imagining Christopher Campbell-Frazer at every turn.

Markham was a quiet sort and I don't suppose either of us spoke for the first ten miles or so. Perhaps we were both remembering the war, reliving our own particular nightmares. The Austin, on loan from Walker and Teng, loaded with our kit, carried us north along roads we must have passed before: in army trucks or on foot, as soldiers or as prisoners-of-war.

I don't remember now why we went the way we did, why we ended up where we ended up. Probably the roads on the west coast – our most direct route – had been washed out by flash floods and we'd agreed to detour through Kota Tinggi. Heading north-east through the sprawling town of Johor Bahru towards the east coast, we began to see the familiar regimented lines of rubber trees and the native trucks, the gharries, along the road, carrying Tamil tappers from the villages.

Markham commented that the country hadn't changed much and probably never would. I remember he sounded relieved, pleased at the familiarity of the scenery. We both knew we could be in any one of a hundred places in Malaya, any one of a dozen states from Johor to Kedah, sometimes the country would be hilly, even mountainous, sometimes there would be tin mines and pewter, jungle or open farmland, but there would always be something familiar about it. My Malaya was a palimpsest of meanings and images: the months before the Japanese invasion contrasted with the horror of the camp at Bukit Merah. Markham's war had been even harder: he'd been to the far end of the Burma railway. Few men had survived the nightmare of Hellfire and Three-Pagoda's Pass.

As I drove I watched him peering through the car window at the landscape, taking in the atmosphere and savouring his return. I probably thought at the time he was naïve and envied him his innocence; in some ways it was what gave him his freedom.

There had been trouble in the colony in the past few months. Communist guerrillas were active up and down the peninsula. Reggie Walker had hinted at it in his final warning to me. But I did not feel in any danger. Far from being naïve and innocent, Markham was obviously taking the situation more seriously and after a long silence as the Austin found its natural pace on the narrow road between Keluang and Labis, he stared straight ahead and asked quietly whether I was carrying any weapons.

“Of course not,” I probably laughed at his over-cautious concern. “This business with the terrorists isn’t likely to go anywhere. Local stuff. Village politics, I shouldn’t wonder.”

“Perhaps you’re right,” he said thoughtfully. “But something they said to me when I went for this position... they said that I should take up a couple of guns to the homestead as a precautionary measure. They knew I was ex-army, of course, and that was why they said it. I think that was why I got the position; looking for someone who could handle himself.” He paused and looked out at the trees. “And handle a gun.” He added with a smile. “Funny thing is, back then... in the army, I mean, working with guns didn’t feel strange at all. But it does now.”

“You mean you’ve got a gun with you now?”

“Oh yes, they gave me a rifle and a handgun and two boxes of ammo. They’re in my kit,” he pointed at the back seat with his thumb. “But like I say, it feels... oh, I don’t know, uncomfortable.”

I’d handled weapons in the war, of course, though little good they’d done me. But was I remembering, too, the last gun I’d fired: the shotgun I’d taken from the boot of the Bentley that night? Today I can hardly remember firing that shotgun during my time at Thorsby, but that day, sitting in the warm car with Markham and his weapons I

must have been conscious of it; those months must have been fresher in my mind than they are today. I think I laughed to hide my feelings but what he'd said made me consider the situation in Malaya a bit more seriously. Maybe I'd become too preoccupied with my own problems, perhaps I just hadn't thought it would ever affect me; although the Singapore papers had been full of it and matters were obviously getting worse. Markham's new employers, it seemed, took a different view, and now that we were travelling through plantations interspersed with jungle, I began to think that maybe they had a point.

In Labis we stopped to stretch our legs and Markham showed me the guns he'd been given: a revolver and a pre-war rifle, both British issue weapons he would be familiar with. But he was right; it felt strange as a civilian, in a country no longer at war, to be handling such things.

The plantation where he was to take up his new post was north of the main road and I had agreed to drop him in Segamat or Gemas where he could get transport and I would carry on into Kuala Lumpur. Markham was driving and the road was narrow and winding and the jungle encroached so close that it was like moving through a cool dark tunnel.

As the Austin struggled on the steep hills the damp smell of the jungle wrapped itself around us in an intimate cloak, this country was familiar to me; the camp at Bukit Merah had been a hundred miles to our north east, my section had been ambushed on the river north of here. Although I could not have been on this road before, I had been along many like it in the region.

The army was out in force and we passed several British military vehicles. Then a road block of military police checked our papers and asked where we were going. It was the first time since stepping ashore in Singapore that my papers had been examined and I had that familiar grip of fear, waiting to be caught out. Only this time my panic was worse: the sight of the military uniform, the MP armband. I

could only think of Campbell-Frazer. Could he have followed me this far already? The new identity I'd bought in a backstreet pub in London had got me this far, but every time it was checked my heart was in my mouth. Was this the moment my running would end? But my false passport went through this latest inspection without question and just as we were about to move away the corporal glanced into the back of the car and saw the rifle.

"I see you've prepared yourselves anyway," he said. "Just be careful how you use it and let's hope you don't have to."

Markham asked what had caused all the fuss. "Has something happened? The situation's not getting any worse, is it?"

The policeman stepped back slightly to let us pull away. "Gets worse every day as far as I can see."

The crisis in Malaya was just beginning, of course, and my memory of it today is coloured by what followed over the next ten years, but I don't know anymore how seriously I took it all at the time. The local press had reported a few incidents of villages being harassed; headmen being murdered by groups of communists hiding in the jungles. The British were calling it 'an emergency' and had deployed a couple of fresh-faced regiments to the region. The week before a news item had reported a plantation being attacked. The attackers had been driven off, but they were out there somewhere, hiding in the jungle. Perhaps I had been concentrating on the wrong threat. What if Campbell-Frazer wasn't my greatest danger after all? As it happened, I was to find the answer to that question soon enough.

Two miles further on and the road narrowed to one lane. If I close my eyes now and remember it I can almost smell the dank rot of leaf litter, and hear the branches on either side brushing the car. The road turned in a long curve to the right with a glimpse of a small river to our left, and trees further back, the beginning of another plantation with tall grass in the open spaces. The regimented rows of rubber trees, like a cathedral, with the delicate carvings of the tapper's knives, circled in the bark of each tree and drops of latex like

tears below the lines. The road swung to the left and back to the bank of the river, a brief glimpse of the rattan roof of a typical Malay house, then the car swerved sharply and braked. I was thrown forward against the dashboard, my face against the wooden fascia. A log had fallen across the road. No way around it. These things happened out here on the edge of the jungle, where plantations met rivers and roads. Then I saw that this was no accident; this was a branch from a native jungle tree while on either side of us lay nothing but rubber. My heart skipped with the realization that we could be in trouble. The log had been placed here to block our way. If not us then whoever was to come along this road. The terrorists wouldn't be concerned about who they caught in their little trap, they would be after a quick – and deadly – attack.

Without saying a word I reached behind to scoop up the rifle as Markham slammed the car into reverse. I scrambled to collect the magazine and a box of ammunition from the floor of the car, looking quickly around for guerrillas, although what I expected to see I can't imagine. They were unlikely to come from our left. The river was too close to the road to allow any hiding place and the slim boles of the rubber trees in their straight rows gave little cover. Then I looked behind us and the dark overhanging arch of jungle by the bend. If they were coming for us that was where they would come from. I loaded ten rounds into the clip with a feeling that this was not really happening, this was something that belonged to an earlier time, a decade before, in the war. I knelt up on the seat and raised the weapon towards the rear window. Markham was swearing and rubbing his bruised knee. All about us the jungle seemed oddly quiet. I'd sensed that same quiet elsewhere, too, ten years earlier. Just before the Japanese attacked.

Then I saw them breaking cover from the tree line behind us. Six of them but it seemed like dozens. My mind blurred and for a moment I was in a different place, facing an old enemy, gripped by a familiar fear. I screamed at Markham. "Stop the car! They're behind us. Go

forward! Go forward!” I was trying desperately to keep an eye on our rear and at the same time assess the size of the branch across the road. Could the tiny Austin push it out of the way? “Go ahead, ram the branch slowly and see if you can...”

Markham pushed the bonnet of the car among the leaves and branches. Behind us the men were closing in, running across the open country on either side of the lane. Then the first shots thudded into the car and the rear window shattered. Both of us ducked instinctively. The engine revved against the weight of the tree and the car slewed to the right. Our attackers were gaining on us and, receiving no return fire, they moved into the road, out into the open. I could see them clearly enough now through the broken window and I let off two shots. I felt the bite of the stock against my shoulder and saw one of our attackers fall to the ground. Again I imagined they were Japanese and that I was back in the clearing at Sungai Lambat with Sergeant Wharton and the platoon. Only this time I was no longer frozen with fear. This time I was fighting back.

The branch refused to move more than a few feet then dug itself into the dirt beside the road and brought the little Austin to a halt again. The engine stalled. Behind us the guerrillas had dropped back to either side of the road after my two shots. The grass was long enough to hide them but would give little or no protection. As soon as one of them moved I let fly with another shot. Two more heads appeared on the other side of the road and I swung my rifle in their direction and fired again. I hit another one. Then a man appeared from the rubber trees to my right, closer to the car. He'd rolled off the road into the grass and crawled along the ditch until he was almost beside us. The rattle of automatic fire raked along the driver's side and the glass and metal fragments shattered over us. I turned the rifle across and fired over Markham's shoulder. I couldn't miss this one. He stood square with his weapon at waist height spraying us with bullets, disregarding his own safety. Two shots from the Lee

Enfield and he fell back beside a rubber tree the last rattle of gunfire tearing leaves and twigs overhead that scattered down on his body.

Behind me the survivors were retreating. At least two lay dead or wounded, possibly three. I fired one more shot as they disappeared into the thick jungle then turned back to Markham. His head was down on his chest and his hands had fallen from the wheel. All around us that same eerie silence fell again.

“Tom!” I lifted his head and pulled him back into the seat – there was a lot of blood but nothing was registering in my brain. I needed to reload the gun and get us both out of there before the guerrillas came back. But first I needed to get Markham out of the car and onto the grass. I went round to his side of the car – moving like a man in a dream, swimming through water – only then could I see the extent of the damage they’d inflicted on it: a dozen holes in the metal and both side windows shattered. I took the door handle and pulled at the twisted metal. Markham slumped forward again. I gripped the material of his shirt – more blood – and hauled him free of the vehicle and lay him on the grass. Half his head had been blown away; nothing I could do now would help him. There was nothing anyone could do.

Another ten miles and I would have dropped him off at the road to Temerluh. By the next day he’d have started his new life as a plantation manager. But now there would be no tomorrow for Tom Markham. I went through his pockets looking for his wallet and any personal details. I intended to write to someone, let someone know what had happened. But he’d told me once that there was no-one, and nothing in his wallet gave me cause to doubt it. No photographs, no hints of a history. Markham was a loner, a drifter, ex-prisoner of war. I had known him for two months, but I probably knew almost everything about him that there was to know. His future had been here in Malaya. But now there was no future. In so many ways we were alike. We’d both been drawn back to the East, as he’d said, by something we couldn’t define; only I’d been forced back by fear.

After a few minutes I knew that the terrorists weren't coming back. I went back along the road and checked the two bodies they'd left to confirm that they were dead. Then into the rubber trees to check the third man with the automatic weapon. They were all dead. In another time or another place I might have felt proud of what I'd done. I'd defended myself. But I'd let my friend down. The man I had met in a bar in Singapore two months earlier, a man who seemed so enthusiastic about his future, was dead.

I went back to the car and took out his kit bag and his large leather satchel. I sat by the side of the road and went through the contents of his bags. A letter from the plantation people, and two from a London office, one from a Sydney employment agency. All these related to the new job. Then there were a few personal papers, a birth certificate and his passport. I looked long and hard at the passport photograph, grainy and unflattering. Markham had been almost two years older than me, but we were physically the same; hair, eyes, height. Except that now he was dead and I was alive. There was still no history, no personal letters from family or friends. He'd been interviewed by an agency in Singapore and the people at the plantation, who would be expecting him during the coming days, had never seen him. Now they never would.

I knew that I needed to haul his body back into the car and take him to the nearest town to report the attack but I was putting off the moment as long as I could. I thought perhaps there were too many ghosts for me here in Malaya, after all. Sergeant Wharton and the men of my platoon; Daniel Carshalton and the others who died in the camp at Bukit Merah. And now Tom Markham.

After some time I heard the sound of the trucks. At first I panicked. The communists coming back? Then I recognized the low hum of the military five-tonner, the Bedford engine. It was a British convoy, maybe half a dozen vehicles. I knew all this for a full two minutes before they appeared round the bend behind me. This was the moment I decided to act. Not before. Even when going through



Markham's papers, the idea had not occurred to me and I don't know why it should have struck me when it did. I gathered up his papers and stuffed them back in the leather satchel. Put his wallet in my pocket and put mine into his. Here, I thought was my chance of a real identity.

The British convoy was commanded by a major from a Scottish regiment and I made a formal report to him sitting in the front of his Landrover. Then he took responsibility for the body which I identified as Arnold Price, the name in the passport I'd put into Markham's pocket. I didn't know who the man, Arnold Price, had been, if he existed at all, but it didn't matter now. I took one last look at Tom Markham's body as they loaded him into the back of a five-tonner. One of the bullets had struck his left cheek and torn a gaping wound across much of his face, he no longer looked like anyone really. I later found out that Reggie Walker in Singapore had confirmed the identity of the body as Price, an employee of his father's company, and I wondered whether he had suspected anything was wrong. I could imagine poor Reggie, torn by remorse, no doubt, at having sent me up country on a mission that had proved to be fatal, unable perhaps to take more than a cursory glance at the corpse.

As you know, Dr Kingston, my fears didn't instantly leave me. I'm still being haunted by revenants from my past. But in those first few days after the ambush I expected the whole world to come crashing down around my head. Surely someone would investigate further. But Malaya was pre-occupied with a more important attack. Sir Henry Gurney, in a Rolls- Royce, flying the Union flag, was attacked by a group of communists at Tras near Frazer's Hill. Suddenly the emergency situation took on greater importance. No longer just a few village headmen in remote kampongs to the north, or some unfortunate tin miners or isolated plantation managers: the High Commissioner and his wife and secretary had been ambushed. It was reported to be the work of Siu Mah, a friend of Chin Peng. Rumours clattered about the peninsula for two days, like the time before the

Japanese landed, this was a momentous event in the history of the colony. No-one was interested in the death of an English clerk from a rubber exporting company in Singapore.

The next few months are not so clear in my mind. By the time Markham was buried as Arnold Price, I must have been working as a plantation manager at Temurluh for almost a month. I had found another suitable rock to crawl under. I was back in Malaya and biding my time. But I was never confident enough of my new identity to risk coming back to England. Not for another fifty years, at any rate, when you finally talked me into it. I must have felt happy enough, and safe in Malaya – ironic isn't it, Dr Kingston, that I could feel safe in that country after all that had happened? And when my time there ran out with the end of the British rule in the region, I went off instead to Australia. Not to Markham's home state of Queensland, but to Western Australia, as remote from his tropical outback life as I could get. In those days it was still possible to get a position on bluff and I taught history and English without any reasonable qualifications to do so. I bluffed for a couple of years; after that I must have proved adequate enough to the task never to be challenged. As Tom Markham I made a new life: a house near the coast, a succession of cars, holidays. I became Tom Markham. For forty years I was an Australian. I taught at Milton Grammar and paid my taxes, enjoyed my time in the sun.

Somewhere in those years I buried my past – or at least parts of it that were too painful for me to revisit. Finally, as I told you in that first session, I must have reached a stage of forgetting so total, so absolute, that I was content with my new life. What did you call it, Dr Kingston, repression or suppression? Some such fancy label. Whatever it was it must have worked. Then Richardson asked his facetious question: had I ever killed anyone? And the dreams started again.

## Chapter Twelve

The memories that had troubled me for so long, the memories of the war and the years after the war back here at Lourne, had once been distant and indistinct. They came to me in blurred images and visions. You said I was searching for connections deep in the faulty vessel of my mind. You'd be pleased with the progress I've made, Dr Kingston. Now the memories are solid things that flutter or rush at me like pages of a newspaper blown in a gale, striking my chest and wrapping themselves about my face, leaving me gasping for breath. Then they spread across the collage of my life: repainting and reforming the way I see myself.

The stables at Lourne were converted into garages during my father's time. They run at a slight angle away from the main house towards a small coppice of beech trees – all that remains of Charter's Wood. As a boy I could climb from my bedroom window onto the grey slates of the stable roof and look out over the flat surrounding countryside. This morning, woken by another nightmare from the war, I stood by the open window of my room waiting for the sunrise – they have put me in Rupert's old room, my own was two doors further along on the same floor. For a long time I must have stood shivering in the cold air with sweat running down my face and my hands shaking. From the window in the slow-gathering dawn I could make out the low shape of the Fens and I pictured the roads and villages I had once known so well; the silhouette of trees; the spire of the church at Lynford; the vague shapes of Duxton, half-remembered on the horizon; and beyond Duxton, unseen and brooding, the hexagonal tower of Ely cathedral.

The seasons here are marked by the crops in the field: barley for the breweries, potatoes for the dinner tables and beet for the sugar factories. It was here on the lane to Lynford that I saw the labourers scrattin' in the field, the day I went away to Premworth Court that first time. And she was among them; I remember willing her to turn

and see me, but she just stretched her back and stared resolutely at the horizon with the morning sun on her hair and the green in her eyes. This morning, looking down over the hedgerows and fields with the patches of early fog the memories again whispered in my ear. Some of them seem too real. But then I told you this might happen. That's when you gave me an ultimatum: if I really wanted to recover those missing years, you said, I had to come back here. Go and do it, you said, but don't be surprised if what you find there is not what you want to find.

I don't know how long I stood by the window this morning watching the dawn come up and waiting for the morning sun to melt the last shreds of mist from the poplar trees, but I was suddenly overwhelmed by the memories – and the nightmare I just couldn't shake off. It was a familiar dream – Bukit Merah and the Japanese sword blade, and Daniel's death, only this time I saw his face, terrifying in its clarity, and I needed to be out in the open, out of the house. I showered quickly and dressed and left the house to walk across the golf course, hoping to drive away the demons in my head, but the fresh air is still not enough to drive the horror out completely. The closer I am to Lourne, it seems, the more solid and reliable the memories and the more frightening. They will not be ignored, not now that I have gone to so much trouble to stir them up.

My first few days back in England have been busy and confusing. Was it only yesterday that I went to Thorsby St Giles? Coming back here last night to Lourne I caught the last local bus of the evening through those same lanes as far as Lynford and then walked back to my room. It was the first time since I came back to England that I'd seen Lynford but I still knew it well enough. Of all the places I have revisited – Prestondale, Thorsby or the house here at Lourne – Lynford village has changed the least. It is the same small agricultural hamlet it has always been, crossed by the same narrow lanes and populated still, no doubt, by dour Fenland folk. It is a place

that should have held no particular memory for me and yet the melancholy prospect of Lynford began to close the last gaps: the dark corners grew less dim, and I remembered the day I came home from the war.

I was the only passenger to alight from the train at Duxton that day in October 1945. For the people of England the war had been over for some time; the celebrations to welcome the troops home from Europe had come and gone and the country was struggling with the new peace, struggling to forget. There were no ceremonies for the late-comers who straggled back from Asia, no bands and banners, and I was glad of it. I felt stiff and uncomfortable in my demob suit with my greatcoat over my arm and my few belongings in a canvas kitbag; even the freshness of the English air – so different from the stifling humidity of the Malayan jungle – could not revive me. The platform was empty but Margaret, my sister-in-law, was waiting with the Bentley in the station car park.

Margaret was leaning against the car. It was five years since I'd seen any of my family and my sister-in-law, although still glamorous, had definitely aged. She was heavier around the waist and there was a tiredness about her eyes that hadn't been there before the war. We kissed each other lightly on the cheek and she stepped back to examine me with a disapproving frown.

“You've certainly changed, Alex.”

“I didn't expect anyone from the family.”

We had both spoken at once. Then after an embarrassing silence she looked at my face again and added: “You don't look well. I thought the Army was supposed to have fattened you all up before releasing you back into the world.”

Her tone should not have surprised me; this was, after all, her character: forthright, sharp. Nonetheless, I was shocked to hear her say this. I had grown accustomed to my drawn features, and had

thought my appearance was improved a little over the months since the gates of Bukit Merah had been torn down.

She opened the rear door and I threw the kitbag in.

“Well, I suppose we’ve all changed,” she said with a shrug and I wondered briefly whether this was a cue for me to compliment her on her appearance. If it was, I let it go.

I climbed into the front of the family car and asked after Owens, our driver.

“Owens is dead, Alex,” she said with that same matter-of-fact tone I recalled from before the war. Only then did I remember my brother Rupert’s death, killed in North Africa, and I stammered some weak condolence or other which was acknowledged by little more than a shrug of her shoulders. Then, after a minute or two as she started the engine and manoeuvred out of the station car park, she added. “Things are a lot different these days, I think you’ll find.”

I waited for further comment but none came and we drove on in silence. Margaret and I had never really liked each other. She had married Rupert in the summer of 1937 and after a long honeymoon in Italy they had returned to take up the east wing of Lourne. These were my years at university and I saw little of them, but I could detect, even then, a burning wish to be mistress of the house in her own right. This did not upset me directly, as the younger son I had been brought up to believe that my future lay out at West Farm and I was happy enough with the arrangement. But now I was returning to Lourne and its vast estates and Margaret was a widow. I had been told that she’d nursed my father through his final weeks – although I could hardly picture her as Florence Nightingale. And now she was staying on to look after my ailing mother. I had no problem with this. Lourne was a big place. There would be much to do getting things back in order, and, as a single man, I would have need of someone to run the house while the estate manager and I sorted out the farms.

“George is still around I take it.”

Margaret accelerated down the hill out of Duxton. “Still around and still running things as best he can. But he’s an old man now. Can’t go on forever.”

George West had been managing the estates since I was a small boy and I found it hard to imagine the place without him; especially now that I was responsible for it all. Not for the first time the thought of coming home to Lourne House must have depressed me. Things would have been hard enough even if I had come back full of health and enthusiasm, but I know that was not the case. I was lethargic and indifferent at best.

How did I feel, I wonder, watching the familiar countryside gliding by outside the window and trying to picture myself taking over the reins of the estate? The tiny village of Lynford flashed past as we swept through the long curve and onto the lane to Lourne. A few houses, a small general store and the garage with the solitary petrol pump fronting its narrow courtyard. Two strings of bunting had been draped across the front wall of the White Hart, although one had now sagged so low it almost touched the grass, and another along the side of the garage had tangled itself up in knots. These had been to welcome our soldiers home from the war after victory over Germany. They had flapped sadly in the wind for months and were already weathered and pale. Once again I was glad that no fresh flags or brass bands welcomed me, but the sight of the tattered bunting added nothing to my sombre mood.

Seen from the main gate on the north driveway, Lourne House is a magnificent structure and my heart lifted a little at the first view of it. But as Margaret pulled the car to a halt on the gravel beside the old fountain, I could see that the place had recently suffered from neglect. The fountain itself no longer poured forth water; Neptune and his grey stone mermaids stood dry and cold and streaked with green. There was a general air of entropy about Lourne that day which did not bode well for the future. It looked as if the estate would take more energy than I had to give.

Within the hour I had been up to mother's room and paid my compliments but, as Margaret had warned me, it was a depressing re-union. The woman I'd once known was merely a shell now and she examined me closely with moist, rheumy eyes full, not of love, but of resentment. I had feared she might not know who I was, but somehow this was worse.

Margaret said something about the shock that losing Rupert had had on my mother. "She's never really got over it." We were sitting in the morning room, where I expect a small coal fire would have been lit in the grate and Margaret was giving me the details concerning Lourne and its management. I wondered briefly if my mother would have been as upset if it had been me who had failed to return from the war.

"It's hard to imagine that this place once employed fifty people," Margaret was saying. "Just a handful of retainers now and many of them are old and frail like the house itself."

She made it clear that she intended to stay on in the east wing and would run the house as she had been doing. Even if I had any objections to this idea I was too weary, or too indifferent to raise them. And so, with an ailing mother upstairs, I accepted my lot and would take my place in the grand plan.

I remember Margaret trying to urge me into an active role in the nation's politics. "Naturally," she said, "you will be expected to take a position." Then in a softer tone she added something like, "Rupert had great ambitions in that direction."

"Yes, I'm sure he did...but...sorry to disappoint you, Margaret, but I have no intention of taking up politics."

"You are a man of some position in the community, Alex. The locals expect it of you." I remember how Margaret loved words like 'position' and 'community'.

"I think Lourne is far more important right now than..."

"Very well. Let's leave it...for now," she smiled sweetly and I remembered how she had handled Rupert in that same sweet



manner. Except it wouldn't work with me. I had known since my release from the prison camp the life that I could expect to resume on my return to England. I had joined the army at the beginning of the war straight from university. Perhaps those days, Premworth Court and Cambridge, were the best I would ever know, but one thing was certain, they were behind me now, replaced by a great stone of onerous duty and isolation. Not only had the war left me exhausted it had also made me an insomniac, and, as the weeks following my return to England soon showed me, I was incapable of living a normal life.

You asked me once how I felt coming home after the war, Dr Kingston. I'm sure I couldn't have remembered it all as clearly then as I do now; this house has brought back so many vivid memories. But I think I told you I felt disappointed, although it was hard to explain what I meant by that. Firstly, of course, I had never expected to inherit Lourné. But mostly, I think, because Lourné itself was changed, or at least the place I remembered from my childhood was no longer there. Strangely, walking around the gardens of the Dursley Country Club, I feel closer to the house as it was before the war than I felt when I came back here in 1945. I remember that I filled my days in running the estate, finding workers for the house and the farms to replace those who had gone off to war and not returned. I kept myself busy, Dr Kingston. But my feelings of anxiety, sometimes almost of panic, at being back in a place where I no longer felt comfortable, never left me. Perhaps I was drinking too much. Certainly I hid myself away, I'll admit that, but it wasn't an easy time.

I'm not saying that the place hasn't changed in the last fifty years. Of course it has. From the end of the stable block I can see how much it's changed now that they've built a golf course across the orchard and the home pastures. The fountain is gone from the front of the house, of course. That was one of the first things I noticed on the afternoon of my arrival. And the lake has been drained and now forms a deep depression in the fairway leading to the fourth green. It

is odd to remember this grassy dip in the ground as an expanse of water with reeds and tall grasses along its banks. The old lake always seemed so permanent somehow, and yet, unlike some of the changes, this one is not unpleasant and gives a couple of slopes to an otherwise level and bland view.

Whatever I felt about coming home, back in 1945, Dr Kingston, those early days soon fell into a familiar pattern. I can't remember much – the days were a blur and my nights were spent dozing in the morning room or drinking in the study. Apart from my limited duties around the estate and the farm, and occasional appearances in the local community, I was probably turning into a recluse. Looking back I feel the weeks had simply run into the months and the first years came and went without incident. Before I realized it the war had been over for five years and the house, though not fully restored to its former glory was, once again, a comfortable place. I dare say I had grown used to the pace of my new life, the monotony and boredom of it all.

They used to hold the fair over on the pastureland beyond the lake. Once, when Rupert and I were boys, it had been a small local fete with horse trading, agricultural competitions, ploughing, hedging, showing a few sheep or pigs. But by 1950 it had grown brasher, noisier. A mobile fairground had joined the rural show and with it came colour and music and roundabouts, hurdy-gurdies, and people: townsfolk as well as locals. This was the year after my mother died and I had been judging the chrysanthemums and awarding the prizes for the best goat in show, and was strolling along the row of stalls resisting the call of the spruikers to shy at a coconut or put a table tennis ball into the mouth of a yawning clown. Late afternoon, summer; the last of the day's heat hung cloying in the air making it a strain to breath. The noises grew louder, great clashing organ sounds, the carousel spun in front of me, bright horses bobbing and rising in a blur as they hurtled past on their silver spiralling poles. I turned away and moved back among the stalls but the crowds were

thicker now, voices raised, barking for customers. There were roll-a-penny ramps, hoopla, dolls and a squawking mechanical monkey. I caught a grotesque reflection of myself in a distorted mirror, the grass and the sky curling about my misshapen form. The place smelled of frying onions and candy floss. And everywhere there was music. Behind me I heard the familiar pop-pop of gunfire and I spun round instinctively, my nerves jangling, but it was only air-rifles firing small darts at paper targets. The colours and noises swirled about me and I was gasping for breath. I turned and half staggered between the canvas awnings of the side stalls, I had to find open ground... to break the surface... to breathe.

Then I saw her. She was walking on the grass between the tents and the lake. Her slim figure and long auburn hair caught the sunlight but only when she turned and I saw her emerald green eyes did I realize who it was. We held each other's gaze for a while before I looked down at my feet and moved nervously away. Was this the first I'd seen of her since that day I was driven away to Premworth Court? She had not looked at the car that day – almost twenty years before – but now she was back and even more beautiful than I remembered.

Was I unnerved by this brief glimpse of her after all those years? Should I have spoken? Would it have been proper or seemly to approach? In confusion I began to walk away then turned back towards the lake – the lake which is no longer here – but she was gone.

I don't know what happened then. Did I go back to the house, back to my study for an afternoon nip of whisky? Or did I venture back into the riot of the fairground, force myself to stay and face my demons. I can't remember, but sometime later – an hour or two, for it was dusk – I was drawn to the fortune-teller's tent. I was being drawn back by the face of the girl, by the green eyes and the haunting thin lips. I had once thought of her as the fortune-teller's daughter, a beautiful girl with dusty skin who flitted briefly into my life, a girl who had no name.

I lifted the heavy canvas flap and stepped into the tent. She was sitting at a small round table with a coloured scarf wrapped around her head and both hands lying flat on the white cloth in front of her. Out of the corner of my eye I saw a glass globe and a pack of cards on the table beside her hands. She looked up at me and a flicker of a smile crossed her lips. In that moment she seemed as young and lovely as she had when I was a boy of eleven. I opened my mouth to speak but could think of nothing appropriate. Her smile and the sparkle in her eyes were mocking me now. Had I always known that look in her eyes? Had I ever known it? My head reeled.

“Well!” she said softly and I realized with a start that this was the first time I’d heard her voice. “A visit from the big man himself, no less.” And now she laughed a small teasing laugh. “I don’t know as I can read your future...if that’s why you came?” Her accent had the slow-drawn vowels of East Anglia in every word.

I flushed under her sarcastic tone and, muttering an apology, I half turned to leave. But she just laughed again and reached up to pull the scarf off her head letting her long auburn hair flow free around her shoulders. She knew the effect she was having on me. Was this the way she had been as a young girl?

“I was sorry to hear about your father,” she said. “He was always good to us...and there’s plenty who aren’t so understanding.” I had turned back to face her and felt clumsy and awkward in the tiny canvas tent. “And your brother.” She added and the smile left her lips for the first time.

“Really?”

“No, not really.” She looked down at the table.

An awkward silence fell between us. I sensed that she had more to say, or perhaps I just wanted to hear more.

After a long moment she looked up at me and I felt myself drawn by her strangely hypnotic eyes. I opened my mouth to speak but could think of nothing to say. Finally it was she who broke the silence: “My mother always said that a man’s life is like a crystal,”

she smiled at me again. "A beautiful thing but fragile. And if you drop a crystal it shatters into a thousand pieces, don't it? Each piece reflects his life. But can't never be put together again."

I thought this an odd thing to say, but then she was, after all, the fortune-teller and the daughter of another fortune-teller. She had learned to speak in riddles. What she had said seemed, on the face of it, like utter nonsense, and yet, it made such perfect sense to me. I nodded and made to take some money from my pocket but she laughed again, breaking the heavy atmosphere that had fallen between us.

"That little piece of my mother's wisdom comes for free," she said. "But resolution of a troubled soul costs more than money."

I lifted the tent flap and stepped out into the bright sunlight. Nonsense images like shattered crystals and troubled souls – doubtless all part of her stock in trade – but strangely disturbing to me that afternoon. And her words stayed with me all that day and into the next. Was my soul troubled? Was that what she saw when she looked at me? In my heart I knew she was right. I was walking through the remnants of a life, even then. I had come home from the war but I had never really come home at all.

I am walking slowly back from the golf course, from the lone apple tree in the cluster of poplars, around the old stable block to the rear of the place and I have come to the old wooden doors of the potting shed. It is closed and locked at this early hour and a typed sign tells me that I may hire clubs at any time after 8 o'clock.

By 1950, the last year I was here, I had taken to spending my afternoons in this potting shed where I was attempting to grow bonsai trees; influenced no doubt by the one I had seen that night in Colonel Higa's bungalow at Bukit Merah. It has become a popular hobby these days, the growing of miniature trees, but then, in the early fifties, it must have seemed eccentric and exotic to those few people who knew what I was trying to do. Not that many people seemed to

notice what I did. I am struck by the thought that I must've been like a stranger in my own home: wandering about, keeping busy, growing older, more remote, and drinking more with each passing year.

I was in the potting shed a few days after the fair. Or could it have been weeks or months later? The time, like my memory of it, blurs. But it was still summer, I remember that. I was pruning the roots of a small shrub – a rhododendron or an azalea perhaps, I tried to miniaturize so many that year – when a shadow fell across the potting shed door and I looked up expecting to see the gardener collecting his tools or old George West come to find me on some matter of estate management. But it was her, silhouetted in the light so that I couldn't see those hypnotic eyes, only the shape of her figure, the way her skirt flowed from her hips and her narrow waist. I felt like a boy again, with all the foolish desires I had once known: the desire for a pretty girl I had seen long ago but didn't know; a woman now.

"Bit cruel isn't it," she said softly and I didn't understand what she meant; my thoughts were thrown back to another time.

"Bit cruel keeping them trees in such silly pots."

"Ah! Yes, I see." I felt gauche and foolish. "I don't think they mind really."

She stepped into the shed and looked around at the clutter of gardening implements, the dirty benches, the piles of pots and wooden crates in the dark corners. The shed was strangely different with her in it, like an old and complex oil painting, a still life. As she moved towards me her body swayed as if she was dancing and I looked down at her legs half expecting to see bare feet but she wore dark leather boots. My mind was spinning. Why had she come here? Was she on an errand or did her routine frequently take her across the gardens of Lourne House?

"You don't look pleased to see me," she said in that same soft voice. "Frightened I might steal a few chickens?"

"Chickens?"

“Mm. It’s what we do isn’t? Us gypsies. Steal things.”

“No. No, I wasn’t thinking that at all.”

She came and stood a yard from me and her eyes sparkled now, mocking me. It had been a long time since I had felt the need for a woman and I was confused and a little frightened by her, perhaps. Since the war I had thought that part of my life was over but now my chest ached with an unfamiliar longing. Eleven years old and in love with a gypsy girl. I reached out my arm to take her waist, but she swayed away from me and stepped to her left, her eyes lit up again with mocking.

You asked me once why I felt that the girl was important, do you remember? I couldn’t say then; I couldn’t remember this day, it was never a part of my dreams or my waking visions. Only now, standing in the converted stable yard staring at the closed door of a potting shed, does it come back to me.

I felt myself drawn towards her and again she danced away until her hip came against the workbench and she turned back to face me. Her left arm came up and found my right hand, then my forearm. My fingers touched her elbow and held her firm. This time, when I reached out to put an arm around her waist there was no attempt to move away; no teasing dance. Instead she pushed her body against mine and her right hand moved to the back of my neck, her touch cool on my skin. I felt the brush of her hair on my face, the firm press of her breasts against my chest, and the sweet smell of her breath as I leaned forward so that my mouth met hers. At first it was just a touch of lips, light – and for me – electric. Then I felt her mouth open slightly against mine and my tongue gently explored her lips and met with her tongue. Our kiss was suddenly fiery and wild, pressing us together hard. For the first time since the war I felt physically aroused. I wanted her in a way I had never felt before.

Then, as suddenly as it had begun, it ended and she drew herself away from me. I stretched to take her arm again but she danced to one side and evaded my grasp. I reached out to touch her face but

she stepped back, so close and yet unreachable. Then she was gone, leaving only a faint trace of perfume and the lingering sound of her laugh.

Could that be all? For a moment I felt strongly that I knew her. I felt I had always known her, but I didn't know her at all. She was laughing, vibrant, dancing, teasing, but what sort of woman was she really? I don't know. I realize now, all these years later, that I knew nothing about her. I stood breathless for several minutes and then went to the door to look for her but she was not to be seen. Just a breeze playing with the leaves of the poplars at the far end of the garden.

This image is so real to me today that I turn and look back towards the golf course, to where the lake used to be, as if she might still be there, running across the grass, running away from me, laughing. But, of course, she is not – just the first group of golfers strolling towards the tee – and I turn back towards the house and a breakfast I can't face.



## Chapter Thirteen

I only ever fought back once. I can still feel the cold wet leaves against my back and see the gathering darkness of the jungle night closing around me. The pain in my leg is excruciating and I am afraid. I have lost a dozen men to the Japanese. I am alone, I may be the only one left alive, and I hear the Japs moving above me in the low undergrowth, checking on us, making certain we are dead. Then Wharton's face looms close in front of me and I am no longer alone. I take his shoulder in my hand, my fingers digging into his flesh. He speaks to me; reassures me. Maybe we will be safe in the ditch, unseen. But, even as I think this, the figure of a Japanese soldier appears behind him and I see in that moment the long bayonet, already blooded, the strange, foreshortened view of the rifle and the cruel hands curled around the wooden stock. I see his face in the half-light, ugly and raging with anger, droplets of spittle collected at the corner of his mouth. He draws back in one swift motion and brings the bayonet down on Sergeant Wharton's back. I have let this happen so often. I have felt the force of the blade as Wharton's body falls across mine. I have known the hot gush of his blood on my chest, heard time after time the gentle sigh as his last breath leaves his body. These things I have lived, over and over.

This time I fight back. I see the Japanese soldier in the shadows and know what will happen, know what happens every time. But now I cry out, push Wharton away to my left and, with my free hand grasping the rifle just above the bayonet clasp, pull my assailant down towards me and grab his throat before he can react. The element of surprise is mine. He did not see me lying with my wounded leg in the shallow ditch. I maximize my chances. My elbow keeps the rifle away from our bodies, harmless, while my fingers tighten around his neck. Without easing the pressure of my hands I struggle to my knees and push him away with my good leg. He grunts and I can taste the fear in his breath. I squeeze tighter until his

breathing is cut off altogether. This time I will save Wharton's life. Suddenly there is a deep hollow in the ground behind him I have not seen before. And a rail stretched across between the trees. I am losing strength now and the Jap fights back before I can strangle the life from him. I am left with nothing but the rail and a drop into darkness. With one energy-sapping lunge I drive his body back against the rail. The timber shatters on impact and he crashes through and falls away into an abyss. There is a scream, a crunching sound and a thud as his body lands on hard ground. I fall to my knees weak from exertion and sweating, the night air suddenly cold against my skin.

Perhaps it's the house. I only know that the nightmares I've had here at Lourne have been worse than usual. Far worse. Last night I actually saw Daniel's face ... and now this. I'd been walking in the grounds – there was something about the potting shed, and the girl. She came to me once in the potting shed, you know, Dr Kingston. How did I feel, remembering that? That's what you'd want to know, isn't it? I don't know...I don't know how it felt. It should have been a happy memory, shouldn't it? And yet I knew there was something else; something that happened here at Lourne. Whatever it was I felt almost unable to come back into the house. Perhaps I've always known; the dreams should have told me. I recognize the staircase now, and the landing. I thought they must be familiar to me from my childhood, but there's this other image forcing itself on me... like a nightmare...only I'm not asleep. Perhaps I have dreamed this before; one more dream I couldn't tell you about. Today I am an old man. I feel old. This staircase, gives me a feeling of foreboding, an impossible image. An image I don't believe because I can't think of it as my own, not like the scenes from Bukit Merah.

“My God, Alex, what have you done?”

Margaret is standing below by the drawing room door pulling at the belt of her dressing gown. I shake my head to push the image away

and squint down into the light. To my right a section of the oak balustrade is missing where the landing begins its long sweep into the staircase proper. Spikes of freshly exposed timber contrast with the darker polished wood: fragments of banister rail. Below me on the chequerboard tiles of the entrance foyer a body lies crumpled into a grotesque shape, like the carcass of some dead thing caught in a pile of jetsam on a deserted beach. At first I look for the Japanese boots and the drab uniform, but, although there are boots, these are not the legs of a Japanese soldier. The image blurs and I can make out the flare of a pleated skirt and the long fan of hair, tangled in a widening pool of dark blood. Margaret is standing looking down. I see the top of her head and her untidy hair fresh from the bed and I think it strange that I have never seen my sister-in-law like this before.

I have spent the morning in the local library at Lynford with a microfiche machine reading the newspapers from 1950. I am still shocked by the vehemence of it all. While I was hiding in Thorsby St. Giles the whole country had been fascinated with the story, obsessed with my whereabouts. The fact that I had run from Lourné in the middle of the night, leaving the body of Carolyn di Pasquali – I never knew her name until today – lying on the hard tiles of the foyer to my family home.

The police assumed we'd been having an affair, and I sense the hand of Margaret in all this. Surely I would've remembered that...an affair, after all the other memories have come back so clearly. One thing is certain, my actions were believed to be those of a guilty man and not once, in three months of reporting, had my innocence been presumed. But that is perhaps as it should be. I had killed her, hadn't I? It was the one time I'd fought back but who were my witnesses? The Japanese soldier? The long dead Sergeant Wharton?

Perhaps it is the newspaper reports, perhaps it is the house. Maybe I was right, not wanting to come back, not wanting to recover all my

memories. But I came to you for help to do just that and this was your suggestion. Go back and touch the places, you said. I wish you were here now; it all seems so unreal. Sitting in the public library reading the files this morning I didn't believe it and that made me strangely dispassionate and detached, but not now, not here in this house. It's real for me again now after almost fifty years.

Margaret, woken by the noise, is standing below me on the black and white tiles. Beside her is a table with an arrangement of flowers – always flowers in the entrance to Lourne. At her feet, crumpled and broken...

It all seems like a dream, even today.

“Oh my God!” Her voice rises to a scream and both hands come up to her mouth. “Alex, she's dead.” Margaret turns her face now to look up at me and I stand shakily on the top step, half expecting my left leg to give way where the Japanese bullet has cut into my muscle. But there is no pain now from the wound to my leg and my head begins to clear. The war is over these five years. I am standing on the stairs at Lourne and the war is over...what, then, am I to make of the grim scene below me?

Margaret drops to one knee and turns the head of the crumpled body and I can see the strands of hair matted across the bloody face and the odd angle of the neck. “I know this woman...this is the fortune teller...from the caravan camp...Alex, you've...my God Alex, you've bloody killed her.”

“This is murder Alex.” Margaret was shouting now. On her feet and shouting into my face. “I don't know what you two have been up to, or how long this has been going on but...”

*You have reached the office of Doctor Fiona Kingston. I'm not available to come to the phone right now but if you'd like to ring back during business hours, or simply leave a message after the tone, I'll get back to you. Damn! What time is it in Australia? What day is it?*

It's impossible to tell what that word – murder – must have meant to me then. Britain still hanged men for murder. The very thought must have drawn my breath away. Even now I can feel the skin on my neck grow cold just thinking about it. I had killed her and the law would surely take its toll, exact its revenge. Did I panic? It would have been the natural thing to do. Had I woken from one nightmare into another? I don't know; I can't remember how I felt. I can only imagine it. What sort of man had I become? I was drinking to stave off the torment of my nightmares...but murder...and of the one person who must have held out some promise, some hope for the future. The police said we'd been having an affair. But how could that be? How could I act as I did if we'd been lovers? Did I care nothing for her, to leave her lying there like a broken bird with staring green eyes? Had I been more concerned for my own neck than I was for her?

I remember backing away towards the door, unable to meet the look of horror in my sister-in-law's eyes. I don't suppose there was a plan. My mind must have been a jumble of thoughts without coherency. I needed to get away. I needed to think. I unbolted the front door and stepped out into the darkness. The newspapers had called it a cold, moonless October night with the first hint of drizzle blowing in the air. I went round the house to the old stable block and pulled the two wooden doors open. Was I really so calm? Today I retrace my steps, out through the front doors of the Dursley Country Club, around the side of the house to the stable block where I had stood only this morning...but I cannot feel now what I must have felt that night. One moment I was thinking clearly, the next I was confused and afraid. I would take the Bentley and get away from Lourne. I needed time to think. Perhaps I intended to find the police in Wisbech or Ely and give myself up. I'm sure I couldn't have meant to run forever. And where was I going? Scotland. Yorkshire. I knew Yorkshire from my schooldays. Hopeless. If only I'd looked back at the house in the darkness, reconsidered my actions and turned back, thought more of the girl than I obviously felt for myself. How different

things might have been. Surely a jury would acquit me. Woken by an intruder in the night...thinking myself in danger I had fought back. Perhaps these thoughts came to me then, perhaps only now.

“Mr Markham?”

“Who the bloody hell are you?”

“Jackson. I’m the manager,” he’s a thin man, middle-aged. He’s not the estate manager. George West is the estate manager. I refill my glass with whisky. “And this is my office...and that’s my whisky.”

“This is where it happened,” I tell him taking another slug from the glass. “The police thought we were having an affair, you see.”

He comes round the desk to take the glass away from me and I let him. I don’t have the strength to fight anymore. “This is my study, you know. She must have come to me in the night.”

“I think we should get you to bed, Mr Markham. I’m sure it will all make sense in the morning.”

He raises me from the chair – not my old leather chair – and leads me like a child round the desk. “You’re in Room forty-three aren’t you?” He says and guides me through the door. “Let’s get you back to bed and then would you like me to call the doctor?”

“Doctor Kingston...is she...I’d like to talk to Doctor Kingston...yes.”

“Sit down and be quiet, Richardson.”

I can’t see their faces. I can’t see any of their faces. Richardson must’ve asked me... something... but I can’t remember what. Must get them back to the set text. Just a sea of white blank faces.

“Let’s get on, shall we? Where were we?”

“Did you, though, sir?”

“Did I what, Loebel?”

“Did you ever kill anyone?”

“Sit down both of you and shut up.”

Here’s an answer, then... Richardson...Loebel...here’s an answer to your question.

“I ran away, you see doctor. I took the Bentley and drove north into Lincolnshire. Probably I drove like a madman ‘cause I finally landed up in a hedge somewhere between Fosdyke and Boston. The engine stalled, you see, and I must have sat there for a long time in silence.”

He calmly takes my blood pressure and feels my forehead before taking my pulse while I tell him the story. I want to tell him...and the other man, the one who brought me back to bed who is loitering in the doorway behind the doctor. “I was crying and shaking, you know. Not just the crash...I suppose you see a lot of people in shock after crashing their cars...but I was in a real mess: the car was bogged in a shallow ditch with the bonnet stuck halfway through a hedge and I had no idea where I was going.”

“You’ve just had a bit of a turn,” the doctor says and I smile at the quaint phrase. “Now, Jackson tells me that you wanted to see Doctor Kingston? Is he your local General...?”

“She... Doctor Fiona Kingston...not a G.P. no... she’s a specialist...a psychiatrist...or a clinical psychologist...or something.”

“I see,” he says as if a light has come on inside his head and I instantly regret mentioning your name. “Maybe I should give her a call...just to be on the safe side.”

“Middle of the night in Australia,” I say knowingly. “But I’ve got her card somewhere if you want it...she’s awfully good.”

The doctor turns and says something over his shoulder to Jackson, the man who claims to be the manager...then back to me, “I’ve given you something to help you sleep and...” his words had been clear enough but how quickly now they seem far away and echo in my head.

“I walked to Boston an hour later...from the crash. I remember the dawn was just breaking over the town. I think I found a bench in a park and slept until the place started to come to life.”

Did my nightmares return to me in that shabby park in Boston? I can’t remember. I only recall waking unrefreshed and hungry – in

desperate need of my whisky bottle no doubt – unable to deal with the enormity of my situation.

“Don’t you think you should send for the police?” I ask the doctor. He stares at me vacantly. They’re trying to protect me from what I’ve done, this doctor and the man, Jackson. “I didn’t come back here.” I tell them. “I was scared. I don’t know how I got back here now...but I didn’t come back that night. I went to the car...it was still there in the ditch...maybe I planned to drive north. After that I had no plans.” I’m feeling very tired now. Something in that drink the doctor gave me. “But as soon as I saw the car I knew it was hopeless. It was stuck fast and... even if I could’ve coaxed a local farmer to drag me out with his tractor, the Bentley was far too noticeable. By then half the police in England would’ve been on the look-out for it.”

I opened the boot and checked what I had. Not much: my old army greatcoat and my 12-bore shotgun with a box of cartridges. I put the coat on and stuffed the ammunition into my pockets, then tucked the gun inside the coat through a tear in the lining.

Too difficult to talk anymore. But there’s so much more I want to tell them, this doctor and the other man. Too tired. For now I’ll just sleep.

Somewhere I had resolved to keep on running. Had I ever thought to give myself up? I’m sure I must have done. Certainly I could not have seen my future then. My mind was working on a smaller scale. Could I make it back as far as Spalding without being recognised? From there a train to...anywhere. I had a hundred pounds in my wallet. I could make it to Scotland with that. Or out of the country, even. Then I remembered Thorsby St. Giles, the tiny fishing village eroded by the North Sea. A place I had heard of but never seen. Someone must’ve told me about it before the war: a few old cottages, a schoolhouse and the remnants of a chapel, falling into the sea. I would go to Thorsby and hide out for a week or two. Hide out and think about what to do next.



## Chapter Fourteen

The taxi will be here soon. And tonight I'm leaving for Australia and home. Am I running away again? Is there some fault in me, Dr Kingston? Some vein of cowardice that trails through my life; the eleven-year old child cowering in the nettles in Charter's Wood, afraid to show himself, afraid to challenge his brother; and that same boy, grown to manhood running from the consequences of his crime?

It's been a difficult day so far. That man Jackson, the hotel manager, brought me coffee in bed. I never order coffee in bed. Can't stand it. But he said he was concerned for me...after yesterday. Asked me how I was feeling this morning. Very unusual that – I know there aren't many visitors in these cooler autumn months and, perhaps sensing my need for solitude, the staff have left me alone, but the manager himself bringing me a cup of coffee!

"Feel a bit hung over, if you must know," I tell him grudgingly. "Horrible taste of whisky in my mouth. Which is odd...haven't touched the stuff for over fifty years."

He tells me that a Doctor Dawson will be dropping in to check on me. I don't know any Doctor Dawson and I tell him so but he seems not to hear me. "Just to be on the safe side," he says. "If you really feel you have to go home today. It's a long way, after all."

I'm a little disconcerted by such solicitations from a hotel manager but there's no point in arguing.

I've spent a bit of time, this last hour, taking a final look around the house and I'm glad to be outside again. For a long time I stood at the top of the first floor landing looking out at the gardens. Still unmistakably Lourne House even though so much has changed. From that window I watched my brother retreating furtively across the grass towards the gypsy camp all those years ago. It was there too... on the landing that I sat looking down... the screams of my sister-in-law pulled me back and anchored me in the moment.

The study off that first-floor landing – my father’s study and later mine – is now the manager’s office. I looked in on him this morning on my way out. To thank him for his concern or to return to the scene of the crime? But it no longer resembles the room as it used to be: there are metal filing cabinets and golf trophies now. I noted with a wry smile the drinks cabinet behind the manager’s chair and remembered my nightly sessions with the bottle in that very room. Funny thing, as I told the manager earlier, I’m not a drinker anymore; an occasional beer or wine with dinner: never whisky. Not since that night.

Some of the other rooms are more familiar. The library still houses most of the family’s collection and several pieces of furniture that I feel certain were always there, though how can one be sure after all these years? My memory, as you well know Dr Kingston, has proved fickle and selective. Rupert’s room, where I’ve slept this last week is brighter and more modern, new pictures on the wall – I can’t find one picture in the whole house that I recall from my time here, which is probably just as well for they were a dreary conglomerate of hunting scenes and overcast oil-paintings – valuable, no doubt, but dull.

“Now how do we feel this morning?”

“Doctor Dawson?” I don’t remember the face but the voice has a certain friendly East Anglian brogue and the Harris Tweed jacket with leather cuffs seems oddly familiar.

“Sleep well?”

I assure him that I did. And he proceeds to check my blood pressure and pulse.

“I managed to speak to that doctor of yours, Fiona Kingston. She’s explained things very well. I suppose you’ll be seeing her again when you get back...to Australia?”

I am very confused but refuse to show it. I don’t know how the devil this country General Practitioner has got hold of your name and phone number...and I’m sure you wouldn’t have told him anything,

even if he had. I let him fuss with his blood pressure machine and his stethoscope.

“I’ll give you another couple of those tablets to knock you out for the flight, but you don’t have to take them if you don’t...” Maybe he’s confused me with someone else. Perhaps there’s another guest along the corridor he’s been treating. I say nothing and he leaves a small container with a couple of tablets on the bedside table.

There are two pictures in the drawing room that are so disturbing I felt at first they must date from my years at Lourné but I know I’ve never seen them before. I’ve been to look at them again this morning. Two small watercolours by an artist called Morag Clare. Although the name means nothing to me the scenes strike a chord in my memory: A Malay village or kampong, a bare cluster of wooden houses on stilts set to the left hand of the painting, half hidden against a fringing line of jungle. It is night. A full moon has broken through the cloudy sky and illuminates not the houses which are almost lost in the gloom, but a waterway, a shallow river or narrow section of a small lake, perhaps. The water is gentle, inland, slow moving, rippled only by a night breeze perhaps; its surface reflects green from the moonlight. Framing the water to the right, a group of bamboo plants and a taller palm reaching for the moon. It is a simple work, uncomplicated, but it is bleak and sad. When I came across it a few days ago it stirred the emotion of loss and loneliness in me. Except for the green light upon the lake, it is dark and forbidding. Don’t go into the jungle at night, it says. Don’t stray too far from the kampong. When the grey clouds move on the night breeze, it will be darker. The artist knew this and the watcher, standing as I did on the old polished wooden floor of an English drawing room, an age away in time and half a world in distance, knows it too. I do not know this village, this stagnant water, yet I know others like it: the damp jungle heat, the mosquitoes, the plaintive screech of tiny monkeys high up in the unseen canopy. The cool silence of the drawing room slowly recedes

and I am back there – is this the Malaya I knew before the Japanese came, or the survival days at Bukit Merah? I am waiting for the moon to set, as others have set, and for the dawn to come again.

My life has been chameleon; I change with my landscape. It is the secret of my survival. The shy silent boy who fished the Fenland dykes and rivers, or watched water fowl on the marshes, became the strapping youth hiking the Yorkshire moors or cycling the narrow lanes between dry-stone walls, with his friend Daniel. Somewhere in there, is the officer who let his patrol die in an ambush, the man who took another man's name and lived another man's life. Somewhere in there, too, is a man who killed a girl and ran away.

I nod to the concierge who takes my suitcase, with its QANTAS labels for Perth, out onto the front porch. He calls me Mr. Markham and I wonder idly what he would think if he knew who I really was. But then, he is too young to remember. He wasn't born in 1950 and has probably never heard the story. Does he even know this place, masquerading as a country club, is really Lourne House? No-one remembers now; only Emily Carshalton in her nursing home in Yorkshire. I would've liked to see her again before I left, but what would I say to her, what excuse could I give for visiting her a second time?

The taxi will be ten minutes now. I have never been good at waiting so I walk across the lawn towards the long drive leading to the main gate. The weather has changed today, cold and overcast and there are dark clouds looming over the roof threatening a rainstorm later and that is as it should be, that is how it must be in my memory. I shall not walk too far because my old limbs are aching. Just as far as the rhododendrons. From here I hope to see Lourne as it once was, a fine old English house. But the change in the weather alters my view of the place, as if a kaleidoscope has been twisted and the colours have all changed. In my memory it is always summer here on the drive, but today the sky in the east is wintry and unfriendly. Beyond the

house I can see the golf course and the cluster of trees on the fairway where the lake used to be: four tall poplars and a gnarled wild apple. By nightfall I shall be at Heathrow and twenty-four hours later I'll be back in Australia. But nothing can ever be normal again, can it? I can try to forget the bad things like rain clouds and storms but there will always be one memory remaining and it belongs to this house and to me.

A couple of schoolboys ask a question and the answer comes from a past I don't recognize. Perhaps you were right to send me back. I've found those missing parts of my life, but at what cost? You always said that this was one of the risks I was taking.

**Narrative Time and the War Novel**

**An Exegesis**

**By**

**Philip Silvester**

# 1. War Neurosis, Identity and Narrative

## Introduction

Both the novella and the exegesis seek to answer the question: How can temporal narrative strategies enable the representation of war neurosis in fiction?

The novella “The Wild Apple Tree” constructs a central character who attempts to reconstruct his identity by recovering memories lost as a result of trauma. A key element in the novella is its treatment of time. Through a range of narrative strategies for the representation of temporality “The Wild Apple Tree” attempts to position the reader to understand the disorientating effects of trauma, and the ways in which trauma undermines a coherent sense of identity in and through time.

In response to the same research question, the exegesis will outline three areas of research: the definition and symptomatology of war neurosis, with specific reference to its relationship to identity; the theorisation of the representation of time in narrative fiction; and close analysis of a range of war novels, looking at the ways they represent the relationship between trauma, memory and identity through their use of narrative strategies of temporality.

While the historical novel, by definition, deals with the past, novels involving war neurosis specifically focus on the effects of past events as they haunt the characters in the present. In this type of fiction the events are frequently related through the memory of a traumatised character. The memory may or may not be consistent or reliable; it may have been recovered after a period of repression; it may be presented in a dreamlike or nightmarish sequence, but in one way or

another it is connected, through narrative, to the construction of the character's identity.

Novels involving shell-shock, or Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), continue to appear regularly. These prose works use various narrative strategies to represent trauma and war neurosis. In this essay I examine the use of narrative strategies in the representation of shell-shock or PTSD in fiction and the way they are employed in a range of war novels to illustrate some of the effects of war on the traumatised subject. These narrative strategies are particularly important in the war novel because they enable a retelling of a past event while at the same time representing temporal disruption and the resultant changes in, or influences upon, identity

This exegesis examines a selection of novels which deal, at least in part, with the psychological trauma of war. It specifically focuses on narrative strategies for representing time, and analyses the way these have been employed in the fictional representation of victims of shell shock or Post-traumatic stress.

Before proceeding with the critical survey of the novels the exegesis discusses the symptoms of traumatic neuroses in relation to narrative and the role of narrative in the construction of identity. This chapter of the exegesis briefly surveys the terminology of shell shock and definitions of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, and explores the interconnectedness of trauma, memory and narrative before examining war neurosis in fiction. This chapter then explores temporal narrative strategies such as the manipulation of duration, frequency, order and tense. Chapter Two comprises a close reading of the novels: four by Pat Barker, including the *Regeneration* trilogy (*Regeneration*, *The Eye in the Door* and *The Ghost Road*) and her later work *Another World*; Sebastian Faulks' *Charlotte Gray*; Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*; and finally Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*. Where possible the exegesis relates the temporal narrative strategies to the possible functions of the war trauma narrative and discusses how the examples cited appear to fulfil a role in these functions. The



examination of the seven novels provides examples of the temporal narrative strategies and their effectiveness in representing trauma, memory and identity and the relationship between them in fictional narrative.

Chapter Three incorporates reflective comment on the writing of the novella, briefly analysing how the areas of research informed the writing process, and the problems of plotting and incorporating temporal narrative strategies into the creative component of this thesis.

## **Background**

This section discusses definitions of war neurosis as a recognised psychological entity, from its beginnings as shell shock through to the American Psychological Association classification of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in 1980. It provides a brief survey of war neurosis and the range of symptoms, such as amnesia, recurring images and nightmares, generally recognised in our culture as components of the phenomenon. This thesis is not concerned with the actuality of shell shock or Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, but with their fictional representation and the strategies available for such fictionalisation.

While the terms ‘shell-shock’, ‘Post-traumatic Stress Disorder’ and ‘war neurosis’ are not synonymous, the commonality of symptoms and the widely-held beliefs about them (in relation to their relevance and use in fiction) have meant that I sometimes use the first two terms interchangeably and use ‘war neurosis’ as an inclusive phrase. However, the early twentieth century connotations of ‘shell-shock’ or the post-modern associations of PTSD will sometimes be obvious from the context. ‘Shell shock’, a phrase arising in modernity, signifies a traumatic effect upon the modern individual, a singular entity. PTSD, on the other hand, is a post-modern concept and signifies an effect upon the subject (a product of language and

culture). Significantly for fictional representation, that effect is an incapacity to narrate (or to use coherent language) in the construction of a sense of a singular identity. This is an important context for a discussion of temporality and trauma fiction. When representing a traumatised subject, the present-day author will be influenced by postmodernist ideas of selfhood, drawing on symptoms that signify a problem in relation to coherent identity, whether they are discussing shell shock or PTSD. Throughout this thesis, then, I use the phrase ‘shell shock or Post-traumatic Stress Disorder’ at times because I believe that any differences between them are not relevant *in that context*, or because I feel that the point being discussed applies equally to both.

My exegesis is concerned not with the psychological aspects of memory and identity but with the narrative strategies available to explore the creation or re-creation of identity through memory. For this reason the exegesis examines the temporal structure of war trauma fiction. In what ways can an author use temporality in writing the difficult subjects of war and trauma? In examining the various uses of these terms, therefore, this thesis is not concerned with the veracity of the claims made for the clinical presentations of these disorders but with which aspects may or may not be represented in fiction, both my own novella and the novels examined later in this essay.

### **War Neurosis: from shell shock to PTSD**

The term ‘shell shock’ was first used in a clinical context by Dr C.S. Myers in February 1915. But Myers was later to reject it because the onset of symptoms was frequently so insidious as to negate the word ‘shock’ and because the effects were not directly due to shell blast. The term was officially abolished by the British Army in September 1918 (Shepherd 1, 31 and 55).

Peter Leese has made a recent study of the ways in which a mental condition, traumatic neurosis, and especially that induced by military combat, has been culturally shaped by soldiers, doctors and civilian society. But, as Leese points out, the history of shell shock/war neurosis/PTSD is complex and difficult to disentangle and the connotations of the terms vary with the time and context of their usage (161).

Although shell shock is frequently connected in the public imagination with the First World War and the advent of trench warfare, nervous disorders with similar aetiology had been observed in civilian disaster survivors and on the battlefields of the nineteenth century. Before the outbreak of the First World War several studies had been made of trauma neurosis following railway accidents and civil disasters such as the Morecombe pier collapse in 1880 (Shephard 16), but it was in the trenches of the Western Front with the rapid technological developments of the Industrial Revolution and advanced weaponry, where the hard edge of artillery and aircraft clashed with the softer texture of flesh and the mind, that the term 'shell shock' emerged.

Sigmund Freud wrote several papers on the subject of war neurosis which contributed to its definition. The first of these, written in early 1915, is more a social/cultural comment on modern warfare than a psychoanalytical examination (Freud "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death: The Disillusionment of the War"), but, in a paper published shortly after the war Freud analysed the symptoms of shell shock – repetitive dreams of the traumatic event – and described this neurosis as "a consequence of an extensive breach being made in the protective shield" which the human mind normally employs to protect itself from traumatic damage (Freud "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" 608). He also noted that trauma victims, unable to remember the traumatic event, are "obliged to *repeat* the repressed material" (602) and that "dreams recurring in traumatic neuroses have the characteristic of repeatedly bringing the patient back into the

situation of his accident, a situation from which he wakes up in another fright” (598). Freud’s writings were to be influential for psychoanalysts and novelists.

Jay Winter has explored the ramifications of the term ‘shell-shock’ and found it to be, under certain circumstances, a metaphor; located specifically in medical files and pension board documents, but also a representation of “central facets of the war itself”, part of a broader cultural understanding of the First World War (Winter 8).

In 1980, following extensive observation of Vietnam War veterans, the American Psychiatric Association produced the third edition of *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (generally known as DSM-III), in which they classified the symptoms previously attributed to shell shock (or war neurosis or battle fatigue) under a new category of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Shephard 367).

Evans and Ryan provide a useful description of the symptoms of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder which has significant utility in the representation of such a disorder in fiction:

[PTSD] manifests itself in persistent re-experiencing of the traumatic event, numbing of emotional responsiveness, and persistent symptoms of increased arousal, resulting in clinically significant distress or impairment in social and occupational functioning. There is often a long delay between the traumatic event and the manifestation of PTSD (Evans and Ryan 22).

Richard McNally’s examination of memory, anxiety disorders and PTSD in Vietnam War veterans, which found that they tended to recall autobiographical details in a very general way when prompted by cue words and exhibited difficulty “accessing specific memories exemplifying traits denoted by positive cue words (e.g. loyal) and negative cue words (e.g. guilty)” (McNally), is also significant for the project of representation of PTSD in fiction.

Judith Greenberg has examined narratives of PTSD analysing “how trauma gets expressed in narrative...” and notes that trauma often fragments identity (Greenberg 322), a phenomenon also

addressed by Judith Herman, who echoes one of Freud's findings that "the human system of self-defense becomes overwhelmed and disorganised" (Herman 34) leading to symptoms such as hyperarousal ("persistent expectation of danger"), intrusion ("the indelible imprint of the traumatic moment") and constriction ("the numbing response involved in the process of surrender") (342). The traumatic event leading to PTSD is only assimilated or experienced belatedly "in its repeated *possession* of the one who experiences it" (Caruth "Trauma and Experience: Introduction" 4), and one symptom is the repeated reliving of the trauma in dreams, a phenomenon which forced Freud to review his earlier theory that dreams were wish-fulfilment. But Greenberg, concerned with the way trauma is narrated, found that relating traumatic memories frequently revealed the fragmented nature of the memory, whereas normal memories have a beginning, middle and an end (Greenberg 322).

The psychoanalyst Dr William Rivers (the subject of Barker's *Regeneration* trilogy) noted at the end of the First World War the "importance of mental experience which is not directly accessible to consciousness" and that by dissociation and suppression "certain bodies of experience become shut off from the general mass making up the normal personality" (367). Because memory is constructed through narrative, and traumatic memory is so frequently associated with incoherent narrative, the links between trauma, memory, identity and narrativisation need further exploration.

### **Trauma, Memory and Narrative.**

"[M]ental health is a coherent life-story, neurosis is faulty narrative" (Brooks qtd. in Rimmon-Kenan *Illness and Narrative Identity* 12).

The narratologist Gerald Prince has argued that "...narrative is a structure and practice that illuminates temporality and human beings as temporal beings" (129). Sydney Shoemaker examined the link between memory and identity and how the two might be related:

are we in fact the sum of what we remember or are other criteria involved in personal identity? In her paper “The Story of “I”: Illness and Narrative Identity”, Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan uses the term “narrative identity” and considers continuity, “a chrono-logical linkage between three temporal dimensions: past, present, and future”, as the “basic constituent of narrative” (12). Given the unreliability of human memory, and the need for memory to be narrated, the construction of a fictional character with war neurosis requires complex narrative strategies which provide a sense of the inherent disconnection and fragmentation of personal identity. In a recent interview on ABC radio Dr. Paul Broks spoke about confabulation or the “inadvertent construction of an erroneous self-story, signifying the neurological breakdown of the storyteller” (Mitchell). Talking about language, memory and perception and how these things come together in the self he added: “... we usually think of ourselves as a kind of extended self. We have an autobiography. And when you get to that level of discourse the self is really an act of imagination, it’s really hard to get beyond that point and I think that’s where science stops and that’s where literature and the arts take over” (Mitchell). This re-iterates Dominick LaCapra’s comment on Cathy Caruth’s *Unclaimed Experience* that “literature (or the literary) goes beyond theory”, that literature can “get at trauma in a manner unavailable to theory” (LaCapra 183).

Kali Tal in *Worlds of Hurt*, examines three strategies for coping with trauma: mythologisation (“reducing the trauma to a set of standard narratives...”), medicalisation (the victim is seen as suffering from an illness), and disappearance (“a refusal to admit to the existence of a particular type of trauma”) (6). In other words, trauma survivors actively re-work language and narrative in order to cope. Tal later discusses the connotations placed on certain words, such as ‘blood’, ‘terror’, ‘agony’, and concludes that survivors of trauma have a different set of connotations available to them than other subjects do (16). It is also likely that if the traumatised subject has different

connotations for words they may also have different interpretations of time, fictional representations of trauma victims will therefore require unusual narrative strategies which distort temporality.

Narrative constructs identity, and that narrative is only available through memory; therefore, identity is only as reliable as memory. As Nicola King points out: “Consistency of consciousness and a sense of continuity between the actions and events of the past, and the experience of the present, would appear to be integral to a sense of personal identity” (2). And although it is usual to divide personal narrative into segments, such as childhood or puberty, or to differentiate between a time before a major event and a time after, such as marriage, “experiences such as war ... may make the relationship between the self ‘before’ and the self ‘after’ much more problematic”, (King 3) and I shall discuss a fictional example of this in Chapter Two.

Novels seeking to represent the subject traumatised by war often utilise the symptoms listed above. Of the symptoms of PTSD frequently used in narrative fiction, amnesia and anamnesia (the loss and recovery of memory respectively) are perhaps the most contentious, firstly because memory loss has become a clichéd plotting device, and secondly because the evidence for recovered memory is frequently challenged. In the recent acrimonious debate on repressed memory August Piper, particularly addressing World War II memories, has refuted claims by others (such as Karon and Widener) for repression and states that “no reliable or valid demonstration of repression exists” (Piper 476).

Much of the conflict regarding repressed memory in the latter part of the twentieth century involved not the repression but the recovery of possibly false memories of childhood sexual abuse. However, it should be noted that the Royal College of Psychiatrists (UK) has stated that “Repression, an unconscious dissociation of painful or traumatic memories from the conscious awareness so as to protect the organism, has never been empirically validated” (Lipian 1673).

Whatever the facts of this debate, amnesia and anamnesia remain useful themes in war trauma novels and their use in my novella also allowed for a range of temporal narrative strategies which would not have been possible if the protagonist/narrator had told his story chronologically.

Caruth, reiterating a point made by Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, agrees that psychic trauma is a:

breach in the mind's experience of time, self and the world – is not, like a wound of the body, a simple and healable event, but rather an event that ... is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in nightmares and repetitive action of the survivor (Caruth *Unclaimed Experience* 3).

Caruth's stated aim in that book is to "explore the ways in which texts of a certain period – the texts of psychoanalysis, of literature, and of literary theory – both speak about and speak through the profound story of traumatic experience" (4). The survival of a near-fatal event, as one important aspect of PTSD, is explained by Caruth as "a kind of double telling, the oscillation between a *crisis of death* and the correlative *crisis of life*: between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival" (7). Repetition and anachrony, two of the narrative strategies discussed below, may have direct relevance to this oscillation effect in the traumatised subject.

Theories on the topic of repeated memories of a traumatic event can be traced back to Charcot and Janet in the nineteenth century. In fact, Janet himself observed that "certain happenings would leave indelible and distressing memories – memories to which the sufferer was continually returning..." (qtd in Kolk and Hart 158). He also noted that the word 'memory' was perhaps inappropriate: "The subject is often incapable of making the necessary narrative which we call memory regarding the event..." (qtd in Kolk and Hart 160). This inability to create a coherent narrative of an event is of particular relevance to the fictional representation of traumatised characters.



A recent study argues that the sense of self can be imparted to a traumatised subject not just by narrative but by “the narrative recollection of place.” If there is amnesia following trauma, then there must be some “spatial and psychological displacement, what Roland Barthes...later called ‘atopia’” (Walker). Such ‘displacement’ is central to the way trauma may be represented in narrative fiction. In autobiographical material, for instance, the author gathers places from the past as well as people and events. In my novella the narrator visits places from his past in order to recall events and acquaintances lost from his memory. Billy Pilgrim in Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse-Five* travels backwards and forwards in time as certain places trigger specific memories.

### **Temporal Narrative Strategies**

[T]ime becomes human time to the extent that it is organized after the manner of a narrative; narrative, in turn, is meaningful to the extent that it portrays the features of temporal experience. (Ricoeur *Time and Narrative* 3)

Of all the narrative strategies available to an author, perhaps those relating to time are the most relevant to the topic of trauma and its fictional representation. In fiction – as in life – the past affects the present, but in narratives representing war trauma some events from the past, returning to haunt the present, take on special relevance.

Narrative strategies of time customarily include the way an author uses order, duration and frequency in the telling of the story and these are discussed briefly in the following sections. However, there are other aspects of time, such as tense, and the linkages or time-shifts employed, which also relate to the representation of trauma and the self or subjectivity in the war novel, and these will also require discussion.

## Story and Plot

Central to narratology is the relationship between story and plot<sup>1</sup> in which the story, or *fabula*, represents the events or characters as they occur or exist (either in reality or in a fictional situation) and the plot, or *sjuzet*, refers to the characters or events as they are represented in the narrative. Several scholars have described a three-part model for *fabula* and *sjuzet* (see for instance Gerard Genette's *histoire, recit* and *narration* or Meike Bal's *fabula, story* and *text*), but for the purposes of this thesis, while it is a simplification, the two-part model will suffice. One of the key distinctions within this model between *fabula* and *sjuzet* is the temporal relationship of the events and the narrative. Where events in the *fabula* occur chronologically, the author is responsible for organising or sequencing in the *sjuzet*, and can manipulate this chronicity by alterations in the narrative of duration, frequency and order.

Although any formalist examination of temporal relations between *fabula* and *sjuzet* will tend to privilege form over content, I hope to correct that tendency in this thesis by concentrating upon the narrative strategies available to, and employed by, the author in a particular context and relating them, where possible, to the representation of trauma and neurosis.

In this essay I am not concerned with the technicalities of the term *fabula*<sup>2</sup> except with regard to the sequential (and to some extent, the causal) nature of the events in the story and their reference to the sequence in the narration or *sjuzet*. I shall, therefore, concern myself with problems of narrative strategy employed to produce a fictional narrative from a fictional series of events. Neither am I concerned with scientific concepts of time or relativity or even 'clock-time', but with the more relevant 'text-time' or 'reading-time'.

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<sup>1</sup> Although sometimes relying on this nomenclature for clarity, I prefer to use the terms 'fabula' and 'sjuzet'.

<sup>2</sup> For an excellent discussion of the difficulties inherent in this concept see Walsh 2001.

The relationship between fabula and sjuzet can be seen from the writer's viewpoint as the narrative being created from the events: that is, from fabula to sjuzet, whereas from the reader's perspective the sjuzet creates the fabula: what Richard Walsh describes as "the virtual event-sequence 'reconstructed' from sujet [sic] information." (4). Although the discourse/sjuzet side of the equation may be non-sequential (that is, include anachronies and ellipses), the reader produces a "cognitive order of temporality" based on "holistic structures of narrative comprehension" (Fludernik "Chronology" 119). In other words, the writer, for whatever reason, may represent the events from the fabula out of sequence or distort their duration in the sjuzet, but the reader cognitively re-assembles them in 'real-time' (that is, fabula) order.

### **Order**

Literary texts may effectively utilize the fact that their material is grasped successively; this is at times a central factor in determining their meaning (Menakhem Perry 35)

Gerard Genette uses the term 'anachronies' to cover the various types of discordance between the orderings of the story and the narrative (*Narrative Discourse* 35). The two important topics here are analepsis (flashback or retrospective) and prolepsis (flashforward or foreshadowing or anticipation). Several aspects of both are discussed by Genette in his study of Proust, and by Rimmon-Kenan who defines analepsis as "a narration of a story-event at a point in the text after later events have been told" (*Narrative Fiction* 46). The reader is sent back, so to speak, to an earlier point in the story and provided with some information (about a character, setting or event) not previously revealed. The narrative from which the analepsis or prolepsis arises is called the "first narrative" and the narrative contained within them is "second narrative". Analepsis may be considered homodiegetic if the event or character mentioned in the second narrative is the same as that currently being discussed in the first. Conversely, a

heterodiegetic anachrony is one in which another character, setting or event is mentioned within the analepsis or prolepsis (Genette *Narrative Discourse* 50-51; Rimmon-Kenan *Narrative Fiction* 47-48).

Both analepses and prolepses can remove the story from its current position in text time to one within the time frame of the first narrative: this is internal analepsis or prolepsis. External analepsis or prolepsis, on the other hand, take the reader to a time before the starting point of the first narrative, or after its end point (Rimmon-Kenan 48). Genette also allows for anachronies which start outside the time-frame of the first narrative but later fall within it, and calls these “mixed” (Rimmon-Kenan 48).

Although prolepsis is less common in narrative fiction than analepsis, its use is the more interesting of the two devices. Like analepsis, prolepsis may provide important detail concerning an event, setting or character, but it demands of the reader that they store this information until some future moment in the reading when it will simply be fitted into its proper context. Prolepses, according to Genette, can also be categorised as *amorice* or *anonce*. The *anonce* is a foretelling of something which is yet to come in the text: an anticipatory announcement (Bridgeman, 126). The *amorice*, on the other hand, is simply a mention of something: “simple markers without anticipation, even an allusive anticipation” (Genette, 75).

Features of proleptic framing include its provisional quality and the need for it to be re-activated later in the text. Although Genette says that prolepsis is incompatible with suspense, Rimmon-Kenan finds that they merely replace one kind of suspense (what is going to happen?) with another (how will it happen?). The close readings which follow suggest that prolepsis can form an important narrative strategy by increasing the reader’s awareness and anticipation.

### **Duration**

In the fictional representation of the traumatised character, variations in the duration of a scene can increase the intensity of the

moment by altering the degree of horror described or assumed, or by moving rapidly from one scene to another to shock or surprise. Therefore, manipulation of duration, and use of summary or scene, are important narrative strategies in the representation of trauma and the fictional character suffering from war neurosis.

Genette considers duration a more difficult concept to analyse than either order or frequency (Rimmon-Kenan 51), because we have no way of measuring text duration. Apart from the time it takes to read a text (which varies) we have no fixed reference point. Rimmon-Kenan suggests one solution to this problem by relating the duration of events in the fabula to the “length of text devoted to it (in lines and pages) i.e. a temporal/spatial relationship<sup>3</sup>” (52).

Genette also uses “constancy of pace” (where a set period of time in the fabula is described by a set length of text in the *sjuzet*, for example, one year is one page) as a method of describing duration. However, he also notes that the “story duration” is not always obvious from the text. In fact constancy of pace is rarely found in literary fiction: the text either speeds up or slows down the passage of time. Rimmon-Kenan uses the terms ‘acceleration’ (using a short segment of text to relate a long time in the fabula) or ‘deceleration’ (using a long segment of text for a short time in the fabula). Maximum speed is ellipsis or omission where some story duration is represented by no text at all, while the slowest speed is found in the *descriptive pause*, where a passage of text “corresponds to zero story duration” (Rimmon-Kenan 53).

Another way to describe the range of speeds is in terms of *summary* or *scene*. The former is an example of accelerated text-time: where details are compressed into a short segment of text. In a *scene*, on the other hand, the duration of events in the fabula is considered identical to that of the *sjuzet*: as Rimmon-Kenan says, “story-duration and text-duration are conventionally considered identical”

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<sup>3</sup> Günther Müller had proposed this connection as early as 1948 (Rimmon-Kenan 52)

(54). Dialogue is considered a prime example of *scene* - although a close examination of any textual representation of conversation will show the fallacy of this connection.

In her discussion of time and narrative, Janet Burroway says that, "Literature is, by virtue of its nature and subject matter tied to time in a way that other arts are not" (178). Both summary and scene, as methods of treating time in fiction, are useful and frequently necessary. Summary provides information; fills in details of a character or setting; provides an explanation of motive or drive; fills in historical facts which might be relevant; and, as Burroway points out, can "alter pace, create a transition, leap moments or years" (178). She then breaks the category of summary into sequential (compressing the events but relating them in sequence) or circumstantial (relating or changing circumstances) (180).

Although summary may be useful, a story written totally in summary would prove tiring and unrewarding for the reader. Scene, therefore, is essential. "Scene is to time what concrete detail is to the senses; that is, it is the crucial means of allowing your reader to experience the story with the characters" (Burroway 178-179).

In discussing narrative time Burroway borrows the cinematic concept of *slow motion*. "When people experience moments of great intensity, their senses become especially alert and they register, literally, more than usual" (183). Therefore, she explains, if the author records the details of a critical moment in the narrative with special focus and precision, this will represent the effect of intensity, similar to the filmic technique of slow motion.

### **Repetition and Frequency**

In the novel, what is said two or more times may not be true but the reader is fairly safe in assuming that it is significant. (J. Hillis Miller, *Fiction and Repetition*, 2)

One of the important symptoms of war neurosis addressed in the previous section is the victim's repetitive recall of the event. In order

to represent this effect in fictional narrative it is necessary to understand the narrative theory of repetition.

Frequency relates to the number of times an event is described in the narrative compared to the number of times it may occur in the fabula. Rimmon-Kenan divides frequency into three groups: singulative, in which an event happens once and is mentioned once; repetitive, in which an event may only happen once but is mentioned in the text several times; and iterative in which an event is mentioned once in the text but happens several times in the fabula.

Deborah Cohn, discussing this strategy in the writing of Garcia Marquez, says:

Like refrains, the repetition of a thought or dialogue or the repeated narration of the same scene both prevents the narrative from advancing and precludes the linear reading of the text: the reader must read backwards and forwards at once in order to locate all of the iterations of a refrain and establish the relative chronological order (or contemporaneity) of the monologues in which they appear (64).

Repetition may involve just one word, a whole sentence or a scene or an image. It may also develop as a theme or leitmotif. It may even continue from one novel to another. In Chapter Two I shall illustrate each of these with examples from the novels under review.

### **Tense**

The writer uses available options of tense to create different effects. In the hands of a skilful author a change of tense can add a greater depth of temporality to the narrative. Few writers attempt the present tense for a novel-length work of fiction (a well-known exception would be Remarque's First World War novel *All Quiet on the Western Front*, and a more recent example is Pat Barker's *Another World*) but sometimes a shift in tense or the use of past and present tenses alternately, can let the reader differentiate the back-story from the 'present'. Of relevance to the representation of the sufferer of war neurosis in fiction, present tense adds intensity, or, as Burroway

says: “the emotional distance between the reader and character is diminished” (239). In a fictional narrative, such as the war trauma novel, where aspects of the past haunt the present, it is necessary to differentiate the various time frames within the narrative and to mix present and past tenses both to differentiate events in the framing narrative from those in the past and to vary the distance between the protagonist and the reader.

In this chapter I have examined the relationship between trauma and narrative and the theory of temporal narrative strategies. This leads directly to the influence of narrative on memory and identity and the link between temporal narrative strategies and the fictional representation of the traumatised subject. Chapter Two further relates these topics to each other by exploring texts which provide a range of examples of the use of time in the representation of trauma and war neurosis.



## 2. Temporal Narrative Strategies and the War Novel

The subjects of war narratives are the things men do in war and the things war does to them. But not usually as those things happened. Memoirs are retrospective, filtered reality, what memory preserves. Remembering is like looking at the sun at sunset, through the earth's atmosphere; it's still the sun, but the light of midday has been turned red. Time is like that, an atmosphere that alters what we see. (Hynes, *The Soldiers' Tale* 23)

This chapter examines seven novels dealing with war neurosis for examples of temporal narrative strategies in the representation of trauma and identity.

### An analysis of selected novels

Pat Barker's Regeneration trilogy (*Regeneration*, *The Eye in the Door*, and *The Ghost Road*) reconstructs the work of the anthropologist/psychoanalyst, Dr W.H.R. Rivers and his treatment of shell shock victims during the First World War. These narratives represent in fiction the way shell shock was understood, various ways in which it was treated, and some of its effects on the civilian population at the time.

Barker's later novel, *Another World*, involves a modern family in the north of England and its main theme is fratricide and (of particular relevance to this thesis) the trauma felt by an elderly character, Geordie, over the death of his brother on the Western Front over seventy years earlier.

The sub-plot of Sebastian Faulks' Second World War novel *Charlotte Gray* involves one man's trauma at the Somme in the First World War, a trauma transmitted to his daughter, who only recalls and understands its nature many years later.

Kurt Vonnegut in *Slaughterhouse-Five* and Joseph Heller in *Catch-22* represent the traumatic effects of specific horrors in the Second World War. Heller's central character, Yossarian, is gradually revealed to be a victim of shell shock (due to the death of his aircrew companion, Snowden) while Billy Pilgrim, in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, after the bombing of Dresden, escapes to the science fiction planet of Tralfamadore.

Barker takes historical facts and real-life characters and reconstructs scenes and conversations around them. Although Barker's realism may seem very different to the absurdist styles of Vonnegut and Heller, there are similarities. For instance, although Dr Rivers' pre-war activities as an anthropologist are touched upon in the first two volumes of the *Regeneration* trilogy, in the final book, *The Ghost Road*, we are taken, without explanation, to Melanesia (a world away in space and time from the hospitals in Scotland and London) for extensive sections of the book. Of particular relevance to this thesis, in these passages Barker gives the reader an impression of ghosts from the past haunting Rivers, who in his turn, and in a later time-frame, psycho-analyses traumatised officers.

These seven novels do not simply represent the horror of military conflict in an industrial age, or the trauma inflicted by it; each plot involves the recovery of lost memory and, therefore, the implied assumption that such a phenomenon exists. Billy Pilgrim is recovering suppressed memories of the fire-bombing of Dresden in 1945; Yossarian finally recalls the horror of Snowden's death; Dr Rivers works with several shell-shocked officers to recover traumatic memories of the trenches; Charlotte Gray carries a long-suppressed childhood memory only to discover it is part of her father's burden from the horror of the trenches; Geordie, in *Another World*, is tormented in his last days by nightmares of the First World War. Geordie has 'dissociated' himself from his brother's death for eighty years – just as Billy Prior in *Regeneration* cannot remember the event in the trenches which brought him to Craiglockhart Hospital

(Whitehead 145). One major difference between the trilogy and *Another World* is contained in the word 'regeneration'. Where Rivers' patients are encouraged to face their trauma, to talk about it and finally to reach a catharsis, Geordie has no such luxury and dies clearly distressed by his guilt. As noted in Chapter One, the theories concerning recurring dreams and the suppression and recall of traumatic events originate with nineteenth-century psychoanalysts such as Janet and Freud, but in analysing their use in narrative fiction this thesis is not concerned with the validity of this theorisation but with fictionalised representation of the phenomenon.

This chapter provides examples of temporal narrative strategies (order, duration and repetition) in the texts, before analysing their utility in representing a subject traumatised by war and how they relate to the memory and identity of the fictional characters.

## **Order**

As noted in Chapter One the order of events in the *sjuzet* may be very different to the chronology of the *fabula*. For the most part the reader is able to reconstruct a meaningful and logical structure. However, if one of the symptoms of the traumatised character is temporal dislocation, the fictional representations of this can be simulated by rapid and unexplained movement between time-frames which disorientate the reader.

Narrative switches between one time and another are fairly commonplace in the modern novel and are frequently carried out smoothly within the monologue of the narrator; as Lodge says, "either in the representation of a character's stream of consciousness ... or, more formally, as the memoir or reminiscence of the character-narrator" (Lodge 77). Conversely, the text may simply jump from one time-frame to another without any linking phrase or segue. This narrative strategy leaves it to the reader's cognitive skill to grasp the change, as Lodge says, "naturalized as the operation of memory" (77).

*Slaughterhouse-Five* frequently switches temporal contexts without providing links (producing in the reader a sensation of chaos), and even when Vonnegut does mark the passage of time with a linking phrase it is often an absurd link which, rather than clarifying the segue, re-enforces the effect of suddenness and immediacy. For instance, Chapter 7 of *Slaughterhouse-Five* begins with “Billy got onto a chartered airplane in Ilium twenty-five years after that” (112). Or: “Nothing happened that night. It was the next night that about one hundred and thirty thousand people in Dresden would die” (120). Sometimes the everyday tone of the segue makes a seemingly ridiculous concept appear normal; for instance “Billy traveled back in time back to the veterans’ hospital again” (77). These linkages (or their absence) serve to disorientate the reader in a representation of the thoughts of the traumatised subject.

This confusion of time-frames and absurd segues is further complicated by Vonnegut’s use of repetition and prolepsis in *Slaughterhouse-Five*. One event that is announced several times before it occurs is the execution of Edgar Derby. The warnings of this death are contained in sentences such as: “She was referring to the execution of poor old Edgar Derby” (89) and “Billy closed that one eye, saw in his memory of the future poor old Edgar Derby in front of a firing squad in the ruins of Dresden” (76) or “This volunteer was Edgar Derby, the high school teacher who would be shot to death in Dresden. So it goes” (71). Or simply, “Edgar Derby, the high school teacher who would eventually be shot ...” (99). Derby, who is almost never mentioned in the book without the adjectives “poor, old”, is finally executed on the last page of the text: “Somewhere in there the poor old high school teacher, Edgar Derby, was caught with a teapot he had taken from the catacombs. He was arrested for plundering. He was tried and shot. So it goes” (157). After so much repetitive prolepsis the reader cannot help reflecting on the futility of this one individual death among so many, and this may be the same effect the schoolteacher’s death has on the narrator.

Barker's use of anachrony in her *Regeneration* trilogy is less frequent, but one temporal disjunction which does represent the incoherent narrative of the traumatised characters is discussed by Middleton and Woods (87-88 and 117). At the first meeting between Sassoon and Owen, both men exchange anachronistic images from the trenches; Owen's from the past and Sassoon's from the future (*Regeneration* 83-84). Owen recalls that sometimes, alone in the trenches at night, he feels a sense of something ancient. The presence of skulls in the soil "like mushrooms" make it "easier to believe that they were men from Marlborough's army than to think they'd been alive two years ago ..." (83). Sassoon responds with an image of his own inspired by the sight of the limbers against the skyline at night: "What you see every night. Only I seemed to be seeing it from the future. A hundred years from now they'll still be ploughing up skulls. And I seemed to be in that time and looking back. I think I saw our ghosts" (84). These are things the men have seen and felt in the trenches and, although they are able to narrate them, the images are not chronologically consistent with the time-frame of the experience. The final disturbing sentence from Sassoon, which suggests that the past haunts the present (and, in this case, the future), is a powerful use of proleptic temporal strategy.

While *Slaughterhouse-Five* is a book about the trauma of war, it is also a book about time: "Billy Pilgrim has become unstuck in time" (17). Somewhere in 1944 the protagonist of this novel begins to travel to and fro through time. Because the most traumatic event in Pilgrim's life doesn't occur until 1945, it is possible that this date is premature and unreliable, but in view of the structure of the novel it makes little difference. For the most part Pilgrim moves from one time zone to another, sometimes in response to stimuli, sometimes for no apparent reason. In one scene "he was simultaneously on foot in Germany in 1944 and riding his Cadillac in 1967" (43). This narrative strategy implies that, like the alien Tralfamadorians, Billy Pilgrim sees the whole of time at once: he even accurately foretells the nature

and moment of his own death. The temporal disruption of this novel is characteristic of Billy Pilgrim's life; it represents the chaotic instability of time that constitutes his identity. This makes any discussion of 'memory' in relation to this novel impossible; if he can be said to remember the past then he can also remember the future. It also adds a sense of quietism and resolution to Billy's life; by constructing a character with little depth and no emotion Vonnegut creates a way of dealing with the trauma of the Dresden bombing.

Vonnegut distorts temporality to create the chaotic effect of trauma. At one stage, when Billy is "slightly unstuck in time" he watches a war film in reverse and provides an interesting description of bombers flying backwards, their bombs returning as if by magnetism to the bomb bays. "Over France, a few German fighter planes flew at them backwards, sucked bullets and shell fragments from some of the planes and crewmen" (*Slaughterhouse-Five* 53). Martin Amis later took this device (with due recognition to Vonnegut) and turned it into a full-length novel – *Time's Arrow*.

Barker also includes a section of text reversing the normal flow of time. In *Another World* the family visits a historical site in York, the Viking Jorvik exhibition, at which a "time wagon travels backwards, pulling them away from the present" (231). The exhibit takes the visitor back through the Second World War to the First World War and then backwards to the fifth century Viking village. This reversal, in both *Another World* and *Slaughterhouse-Five*, strengthens the sense of moving to and fro in time, which, as readers we can do – and sometimes must do – in both texts, in spite of our chronological, commonsense notion of time in real life. Lodge says that the effect of this reversal device (at least in the full-length version by Amis) is "comically grotesque at first, and then increasingly disturbed and disturbing ..." (78). These two shorter versions by Vonnegut and Barker hardly have enough narrative space in which to fully develop, but the effect is still unsettling.

Vonnegut, in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, frequently introduces a passage in a precise way, such as “The orchestration of the moment was this: ...” (21) or “Here is how Billy Pilgrim lost his wife, Valencia” (133). Or, “Listen:” (99). This may be the voice of the narrator or that of Vonnegut himself (if in fact they are two different speakers). However, on other occasions the author deliberately inserts himself into the text. For instance, while a group of captured Americans are being herded into railway trucks for transportation, the scene is narrated in the ‘normal’ voice but Vonnegut inserts the line: “I was there. So was my old war buddy, Bernard V. O’Hare” (49). In another instance a character described as ‘an American near Billy’ is afraid that he might be excreting his own brains during a violent outbreak of food-poisoning. This character wails: “There they go, there they go.” At which point the author says: “That was me. That was me. That was the author of this book” (91). Later, as the prisoners arrive in Dresden: “Somebody behind him in the boxcar said, ‘Oz’. That was I. That was me” (108). The effect of this narrative device is to bring the reader up sharply into the present; or at least into the writer’s present rather than the narrator’s.

Vonnegut’s interjection is an important narrative strategy. The unusually close links between the narrator and the author indicate that both are being torn through time and memory in the confusion of the narrative. The most remarkable interpolations into the novel are the first and last chapters. In the first (1-16) Vonnegut discusses the difficulty of writing about Dresden and in the final section (154-156) he talks about where he – the author – now lives *at the time of writing* and about his own family, as opposed to that of the fictional Billy Pilgrim. This chapter then becomes a hybrid of memoir and novel. The overall effect of this framing of the fiction is to blur the identities of the implied author and the character.

In *Slaughterhouse-Five* and *Catch-22* character identity is formed from a seeming jumble of remembered fragments, and failure to construct a coherent narrative means characters such as Billy

Pilgrim and Yossarian (in *Catch-22*) experience difficulty with establishing or maintaining their identities. Yossarian forgets (or at least tries to forget) Snowden's death; Pilgrim, on the other hand, remembers too much. Although characters in both novels are incomplete, superficial, and only revealed in short sections of text dispersed throughout the length of the novels, Yossarian's identity develops out of his trauma as anti-establishment, while Pilgrim's emerges as a peace-loving family man resolved to accept whatever life brings to him.

In *Slaughterhouse-Five* an everyday occurrence in Billy's life may be the trigger for his apparent time travel. One such event is the siren on the firehouse across the street from his office which "scared the hell out of him" and "Billy closed his eyes. When he opened them, he was back in World War Two again" (42). Or the trauma of being thrown into a swimming pool by his father as a young boy triggers the time switch: "From there he traveled in time to 1965" (32). But a few passages later Billy is moving rapidly from one time to another apparently without stimulus. "Billy blinked in 1965, traveled in time to 1958" (33). In another series of time switches he moves from a shower block in Germany "zoomed back in time to his infancy ... was a middle-aged optometrist again ... was strapped to a yellow contour chair ... bound for Tralfamadore" (61). All this is explained by the creatures from that distant planet to which he is transported, as being "[t]rapped in another blob of Amber, Mr. Pilgrim" (61). Pilgrim has such a blob of amber containing three dead insects as a paperweight in his office (55). Although several commentators have suggested that Billy Pilgrim suffers from schizophrenia because he communes with aliens from another planet, Veas-Gulani concludes that his symptoms fulfill the criteria for PTSD and that memories Vonnegut had long suppressed are slowly uncovered through his



fictional figure<sup>4</sup>. Vonnegut, in the preface to *Slaughterhouse-Five*, describes the problems he had writing about the horror of the Dresden fire-bombing and in a recent interview has said, “[b]ecause you can’t remember pure nonsense. It was pure nonsense, the pointless destruction of that city, and well, I just couldn’t get it right as I kept writing crap, as they say” (qtd in Montagne 1). The disconnected time-sequences of *Slaughterhouse-Five* seem to give the reader an insight into that traumatised world which might not have been possible if the sjuzet had followed the fabula chronologically.

As noted in Chapter One, it is usual to divide our lives into segments such as puberty or childhood. The trauma victim may further divide their life into before and after the traumatic event. Describing his fictitious heroine, Charlotte Gray, Sebastian Faulks writes: “She viewed life as a narrative, because that was how she experienced it. There was the time before an event, and then, the world changed, there was the time after it” (Faulks *Charlotte Gray* 38).

Variations to the real time chronology of these novels, their temporal and linguistic discontinuities, construct for the reader the sense of disconnectedness of the traumatised characters. For the reader, the way we understand the disorientation of identity experienced by the war neurosis character, is a result of the disruption and discontinuity of time in the sjuzet.

### **Duration**

By altering the duration of events in the narrative and alternating scene and summary where necessary, the author can foreground a traumatic event or its effect upon the character. The effect of trauma on the character can be addressed implicitly by longer, slower narrative passages, or it may be alluded to by shorter summaries.

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<sup>4</sup> This phenomenological approach is Veas-Gulani’s but in the case of Vonnegut and *Slaughterhouse-Five* the connection between Billy Pilgrim and the author appears inescapable.

One way or another the identity of the fictional character must be seen as a construct of their memories.

Dunbar, one of the characters in *Catch-22*, has discovered a way to make life longer by filling it with “periods of boredom and discomfort...” (46). Davis describes this as Dunbar’s “private temporal order” (69). An author, by the application of temporal narrative strategies, makes some passages of time feel longer to the reader than other passages.

Chapter Eight of Barker’s *Regeneration* begins with the sentence: “Prior had lost weight during his time in sick bay” (77). This statement compresses an unspecified length of time: Prior had been transferred to the sick bay in the previous chapter and the reader can assume that he has now been released. This sentence is ‘summary’ at its most succinct. The text then reverts to Barker’s preferred strategy of dialogue, in which Rivers encourages Prior to discuss a recent attack which had led to Prior’s amnesia. This dialogue, in contrast to the brief summary above, takes four pages and is a good example of ‘scene’. Dialogue acts to produce “the illusion of immediacy and presentness in the reader” (Mendilow 112) and the *Regeneration* trilogy depends heavily upon it. Dialogue is by its nature ‘scene’; theoretically involving the reader in an act of consuming the textual representation in a time span that matches the time lapsed in what is being represented. Much of the trilogy involves Rivers in conversation with one or other of his patients. Barker’s use of dialogue allows the reader to build an image of the doctor and his patients, while the narrative strategy of scene creates an identity for the traumatised subjects and the psychoanalyst.

A useful example of what Burroway (180) calls sequential summary (i.e. one in which the details fill in a past sequence), occurs in *Charlotte Gray*. Throughout this novel Charlotte suffers from depression, the cause of which is not immediately revealed. But early in the novel the author describes how bouts of the illness have struck over the years:

Its onset was often imperceptible: like an assiduous housekeeper locking up a rambling mansion, it noiselessly went about and turned off, one by one, the mind's thousand small accesses to pleasure. So gradual was its beginning, so quick her mind's ability to adjust, that she never saw what was happening: an unwillingness to admit that anything was wrong compounded the stealth of the disease. Sometimes the first moment she admitted to herself that she was suffering was when it started to get better. (64)

An example of circumstantial summary is found later in the book and relates to Charlotte's father who is eventually revealed as the source of her illness:

William Gray was not sixty years old, but he had not worn well since his return from the Western Front. He seemed to move straight from youth to late middle age, without passing through the vigorous part of his life; then, in the twenty-five years that followed, he had rapidly aged. His mental curiosity and his wiry body gave him a certain energetic presence, but it was that of a springy old man who is fit for his years (375).

Although this second passage may seem like a sequential summary, it presents a short back-fill to the story to describe the circumstance of Gray's life now, whereas the previous, sequential summary told the back story of how Charlotte's depression had presented itself over the years. Both summaries, however, go some way towards forewarning the reader of the trauma and its cause without revealing its true nature. This use of summary and its proleptic effect helps to construct Charlotte as a traumatised subject.

The shortest possible duration for a scene is to omit it altogether. Rebecca West (discussing Henry James, who was a master of this technique) thought that "if one had a really "great" scene one ought to leave it out and describe it simply by the full relation of its consequences" (qtd. in Glendinning 7). Vonnegut elides the all-important climax to his novel, the bombing of Dresden, mainly because his protagonist is sheltering with his fellow prisoners-of-war in a meat store beneath the slaughterhouse: "It wasn't safe to come

out of the shelter until noon the next day.” Then they find that, “Everyone else in the neighborhood was dead” (129). As the bombing of Dresden was among the worst bombardments of the Second World War this ellipsis and bland statement of fact are ironically effective.

In contrast to omitting a scene altogether, it is sometimes possible to slow the reading down. In cinema the effect of slow motion is achieved by altering the number of frames per set period of time. Burroway (183-184) suggests that the same effect is achieved in prose by slowing down the tempo of the text; describing an event which takes a short time in great detail so that the reader imagines (or sees) every detail as if in slow motion. In the war neurosis novel, as in film, the effect is put to best use in moments of extreme crisis or trauma. Here, Barker has Prior recalling the horrific event that led to his temporary loss of memory:

They'd almost finished when Prior shifted his position on the duckboards, glanced down, and found himself staring into an eye. Delicately, like somebody selecting a particularly choice morsel from a plate, he put his thumb and forefinger down through the duckboards. His fingers touched the smooth surface and slid before they managed to get hold. He got it out, transferred it to the palm of his hand, and held it out towards Logan. He could see his hand was shaking, but the shaking didn't seem to be anything to do with him. (*Regeneration* 103).

This scene could have been told in summary: for instance, “Prior had reached down and picked up an eye and held it out to Logan”, but its impact is due to the awful detail Barker gives us: “his thumb and forefinger” and “touched the smooth surface and slid”. These details position the reader to share Prior’s sensory experiences and heighten the intensity of the scene. The scene is a formative one in terms of this character’s traumatised identity, or, more accurately in Barker’s representation of it. In earlier dialogues he cannot recall this event, but when he does, and in so much detail, he regains not just a portion of his past but the narrative contributes to a coherent sense of identity.

Although this important scene is related only once, and probably creates its effect better that way, the representation of trauma and its effect on the subject are frequently suggested several times in a text.

### **Repetition**

As discussed in Chapter one of this exegesis, a trauma victim may experience repeated images of the traumatic event and, therefore, repetition in these texts is utilised to simulate that symptom.

Repetition can also serve to indicate a higher level of importance and can be proleptic or analeptic.

The phrase, “So it goes”, resonates throughout *Slaughterhouse-Five*. It reflects the Tralfamadorian philosophy of life and death and is uttered after every example of death: including that of insects, flowers, men, horses, pigs or even the end of the Universe. One effect of repetition, as noted by at least one commentator, is to introduce into the war novel – or, more accurately, the anti-war novel, a quietism, a sense of helplessness we share with the protagonist (Cacicedo). Interestingly, in Vonnegut’s novel the Tralfamadorians are able to see all of time simultaneously and are bemused by our (Earthly) concept of chronological time and our resultant stress when facing or remembering trauma.

Other instances of repetition in *Slaughterhouse-Five* include the term “Three Musketeers” to describe the three soldiers Pilgrim tags along with during the Battle of the Bulge. This is mentioned several times in this context (37,57) but it is also the name of the ‘Three Musketeers Candy Bar’ eaten by Pilgrim’s wife on several occasions (7,77,79). This repetition is another way in which the text constantly links the war – and particularly the horror of war – with the relatively calm domesticity of his post-war life.

Another phrase repeated in *Slaughterhouse- Five* describes the smell of ‘mustard gas and roses’ (3, 53). While the smell of ‘mustard gas and roses’ is almost impossible to imagine, the combination

conjures an image at once warlike and peaceful. In a similar way Vonnegut employs the image of a barbershop quartet after the war (112) who resemble the four German soldiers sharing the protection of the slaughterhouse in Dresden during the bombing (113). The quartet, while outwardly peaceable and calming, have the opposite effect on Billy Pilgrim when he sees them as German soldiers.

Another repetition is the juxtaposition of the colours “ivory and blue” used to describe the mottled effect of cold feet in two post-war scenes (20, 53), a cold hand in the boxcar scene (57) and again the feet of a dead hobo beside the railway track (107). Here the repetition gives a sinister tone to this seemingly innocuous colour image and links the everyday appearance of Pilgrim’s feet in his bedroom in America with two images from his war experience, in the same way that the barbershop quartet links war-time Dresden with peace-time America.

These repetitions arguably represent the victim of shell shock or post-traumatic stress disorder as constantly confronted by everyday objects or colours which stimulate a reliving of the traumatic event. If memory is a retelling of the past it is also a reconstruction of the identity; but repetitive memory may also be responsible for a false identity. Both the narrative and the identity may change slightly with each telling, producing confabulation through the construction of an inaccurate personal history.

Faulks introduces an intergenerational trauma into *Charlotte Gray* by the narrative strategy of repetition. Captain Gray (himself a minor character in an earlier novel, *Birdsong*) is the father of the eponymous Charlotte Gray in the later work. He and his First World War trauma are also the cause of Charlotte’s life-long neurosis (Reynolds and Noakes). This trauma theme is created through repetition as Captain Gray’s distress is first described by his wife, Amelia, Charlotte’s mother (in *Charlotte Gray*). She notices the difference in her husband as early as 1916 when he comes home on leave (the leave during which Charlotte is conceived). “It seemed to his wife that he was

oppressed by some unbearable secret ..." (*Charlotte Gray* 20). After the war, however, watching her husband's struggle develop, Amelia became "aware that the main casualty was Charlotte" (21). In one scene Charlotte as a young woman sits in front of a small gas fire in her London flat. Staring into the fire takes her back to a coal fire in her Scottish childhood nursery: "Fires always reduced her to the condition of childhood" (41). By moving the scene from present to past the author intimates that something in Charlotte's past – something perhaps in that very nursery, has affected her life ever since. The chapter ends with the sombre thought that "there was a pattern in her thinking which had become irksomely familiar to her over the years. She felt herself now entering this sequence, which began with a sense of powerlessness, then gathered into a positive despair ..." (42). This scene is the first to intimate that Charlotte's present may have been irrevocably touched by events in her past, but in a series of obscure scenes Faulks repeatedly allows the reader glimpses of how the past has influenced and continues to influence her present. As an adult, Charlotte suffers from depression which has "over the years worked itself out in Charlotte's life in a curious pattern" (64). She accepts a posting in occupied France "away from the doleful influence of her parents ..." (70). And, while in a flashback scene to when she was seventeen, she sobs with grief in a doctor's surgery in Aberdeen, the cause of the grief is not explained (78). Her training to become a wartime agent "stirred something unwelcome in her thoughts, though it remained just beyond the reach of conscious memory" (90). And at this point the text changes to present tense (adding a sense of immediacy to the scene): "She is in her childhood bedroom...It is night-time and she is playing in her dressing gown on the floor" (90). Charlotte recalls her bedroom in great detail. Then she hears her father "half shouting, half crying" and when she goes to him the image "explodes and fragments: there is the sensation of betrayal and violation" (91). This scene is obviously an important event in her past but she cannot recall what actually happened. The

reader, though, is left with a strong impression that it may have been childhood sexual abuse. Faulks adds weight to this scene by the narrative strategies of repetition, the use of present tense, and the slow-motion effect of describing the room in detail before rushing into the final image which is not described at all. However, we know that Charlotte is estranged from her father until she is finally reconciled with him when the true nature of this encounter is revealed in the ante-penultimate chapter of the novel. Charlotte's father asks:

'And this cruelty I forced on you. Do you know what it was?'

'I think so,' said Charlotte, very softly. 'War. The memory of war.'

...

'I must have asked too much. I asked a child to bear the weight of those unspeakable things, a weight that drove grown men mad.'

...

'...It was the sight and sound of your grief. Somehow you must have conveyed to me the horror of what you had seen. You told me about it. The millions of dead.' (383)

As mentioned above, Faulks employs the present tense at various points in this gradual unfolding of a traumatic sequence. Although Fludernik notes that "tense has little to do with time, or even with temporal categories *per se*, but serves as a textual and relational device" (125), I would suggest that tense may sometimes constitute a temporal narrative strategy. Barker, too, uses it extensively; much of *Another World* is written in present tense. This adds immediacy, especially, as Whitehead has noted, to Geordie's final words: "I am in hell" (246).

Heller uses the temporal narrative strategies of repetition and analepsis, especially of a seminal event in Yossarian's war. Frequent mentions of Snowden dying throughout *Catch-22* finally culminate in the traumatic scene of the young gunner's death, where Yossarian fails to notice Snowden's horrific wounds, but the reader is alerted to the severity of the situation by the victim repeating the words "I'm cold" twenty-one times during the one scene. Snowden's death is the



major horror in Heller's novel and, according to Paul Fussell the scene works "because it is undeniably horrible" (35) and because it "retains all its Great War irony" (34) "its dynamic of hope abridged, is what haunts the memory" (35).

The most remarkable thing about *Catch-22* is the structure. MacDonald has taken the theme of *déjà vu* experienced by one of the characters (the chaplain<sup>5</sup>), the "subtle, recurring confusion between illusion and reality that was characteristic of paramnesia..." (103). Yossarian reassures the chaplain that it "was just a momentary infinitesimal lag in the operation of two coactive sensory nerve centers that commonly functioned simultaneously" (286). MacDonald feels, with some justification, that *déjà vu* describes the method Heller has used in the construction of this novel.

Stark also takes *déjà vu* as the key to this novel, although he points out that "technically, the chaplain is suffering from Korsakow's syndrome, the condition in which temporal order is disrupted because of psychological causes, resulting in a confused comprehension of the succession or duration of events" (Stark 146). Heller uses the incongruities and non-sequential ordering as structural devices so that the reader fails to collate the whole picture until late in the novel. Time, in *Catch-22*, is marked by the number of missions flown and by reference to certain important missions, such as Ferrara, Avignon and Bologna. The feeling of *déjà vu* experienced by the chaplain is created in the reader by the repetition of scenes and images which frequently blur the temporal line between past and present, in order to "emphasize the psychological relationship between events and ideas" (Stark 147).

Heller's novel begins *in medias res* at the time that Yossarian first meets the padre. From this 'present' the novel seems to be a series of disconnected digressions except that most significant events are

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<sup>5</sup> For most of the novel this character is known simply as 'the chaplain', however, in the Jonathan Cape/ Reprint Society editions (e.g. 1963) he is named as Albert Taylor Tappman, while in the later Corgi editions (e.g. 1971) he is named as Robert Oliver Shipman.

revisited and the details are gradually completed. Snowden's death is a good example: Snowden is mentioned in Chapters 4, 5, 21, 22 but only makes sense in the long scene in the penultimate chapter. MacDonald describes the overall construction as "an interplay between present narrative and the cumulative repetition and gradual clarification of past actions" (MacDonald 105). This illustrates the way the characters themselves, mostly aircrew on active service, apprehend their world. Furthermore, using this structure, Heller "sets two worlds in opposition to each other: that of the powerful and that of their victims" (MacDonald 105).

Each chapter of *Catch-22* mimics the structure of the overall book, jumping backwards and forwards in time and relating events through a series of characters. Some of the time-shifts are noticeable; others seem to flow within the description of characters or events. Stark notes that this mixture of fades and cuts, and the "juxtaposing of incongruities" is a feature of the writing strategy employed in this novel (Stark 145).

In attempting to ascertain how the structure of a novel like *Catch-22* fulfils a function, Stark finds its essential significance in the cry of "Why? Why me?" represented here as well as in such iconic tales as Job and Oedipus, Hamlet and Lear. Yossarian, like Billy Pilgrim (in *Slaughterhouse-Five*), is trapped in an absurd world: "The conception of a stable world which once gave comfort to man is not applicable today" (Stark 158). So the chaotic, non-sequential structure of both texts serves to situate the reader in that same absurd world to increase his or her understanding and empathy for the characters.

So complex and intricate is the chronological structure of *Catch-22* that one commentator has decided there is not one, but two "distinct and mutually contradictory chronologies", the first focusing on Yossarian who "lives in a world dominated not by chronological but by psychological time" (Solomon 123), while the other sequence acts as a "counter-motion [which] controls the time of the history of Milo Minderbender". According to Solomon, the two time sequences are

chronologically incompatible, and Yossarian and Minderbender exist in two different time structures. However, Gaukroger, convincingly disputes this hypothesis and shows that Heller interweaves the two lives so skillfully that a single chronology is possible.

In this thesis I am concerned with what these readings of *Catch-22* (Solomon, Gaukroger) reveal about the narrative strategies Heller has chosen and the way they relate to memory and identity in representing the traumatised subject. Gaukroger, after a long and involved untangling of the story order, asks why the author spent so much time in obfuscation. He supplies two possible answers:

The most obvious is the effect created by treating all events as equally present. The intent is to confuse the reader's sense of order and to upset his basic assumptions regarding proper form and structure. The unorthodox treatment of time in *Catch-22* is both parallel to, and prepares the reader for, the unorthodox treatment of the subject matter. It is only fitting that a novel which deals with an apparently absurd and confused world should be written in an apparently absurd and confused style (Gaukroger 144).

The second reason for Heller's obfuscation, according to Gaukroger, is to allow him to deal with a large amount of humorous material in The Great Siege of Bologna, a section of the novel which Gaukroger admits is "vague (or even obtuse) as to the length of The Siege" (144). I find this second argument difficult to accept, given the fact that Heller inserts humour into the text throughout the novel, and most sections of the book are vague regarding the length of time passed during an event. In my opinion, the obfuscation (as Gaukroger says) confuses the reader and simulates the flyers' conception of time and the chaos of war. The identity of aircrew such as Yossarian in the novel are constructed by (or in response to) bureaucratic (in this case militaristic) pressures. There is always a catch. The characters can't control their own lives any more than they can control time. Heller's obfuscation and temporal discontinuity in the structure of the text allow the reader an insight into the

chaotic nature of war regardless of whether the characters are suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder or not.

Another way of representing dislocated time is to show a place before and after an event. Place can form part of a character's identity, and this temporal narrative strategy allows characters to be seen before and after trauma. For instance, Sebastian Faulks in his First World War novel, *Birdsong*, sets the first long section in Flanders on the river Somme before it became a battlefield. In an interview he said: "I've always been rather fascinated by this idea that the Somme was once a river without this awful connotation – just as Hiroshima and Auschwitz were just ordinary places, before anything horrible happened there" (qtd. in Reynolds and Noakes 13).

Vonnegut uses a similar (but much more succinct) before-and-after technique in *Slaughterhouse-Five* when he has Billy Pilgrim describe the city of Dresden: "...and the doorways framed the loveliest city that most of the Americans had ever seen. The skyline was intricate and voluptuous and enchanted and absurd. It looked like a Sunday school picture of heaven to Billy Pilgrim" (108) compared to the scene of devastation after the allied bombing raid in February 1945: "... the stockyards with all the fenceposts gone, with roofs and windows gone... the buildings that used to form the cliffs around the stockyards. They had collapsed. Their wood had been consumed, and their stones had crashed down, had tumbled against one another ..." (130).

Sometimes the structure of a novel may involve several plot threads running in series and the reader must follow each in relation to the others. In some instances the structure may be so complex as to almost defy temporal analysis, for instance, *Catch-22*. Sometimes the effect is subtler, as in Pat Barker's novel, *Another World*, where the underlying theme is fratricide, and the text constructs three separate, yet interconnected, examples: one concerning a modern-day family who move into an old house in Newcastle in the North of England; the second, a Victorian family who lived in the house a

century ago; and the third, the grandfather of the modern-day family, a centenarian war veteran. Geordie is 103 years old and dying of cancer. He has been recently plagued by nightmares of his time in the trenches in the First World War (a familiar theme for Barker and readers of her *Regeneration* Trilogy). In spite of his age and medical condition, Geordie is convinced that a bayonet wound to his side received over eighty years ago is killing him. But it is not this old wound that troubles Geordie's sleep; it is the death of his brother on the Western Front: a death in which Geordie appears to have played an active role. In this novel the narrative strategy of multiple threads means that the nature of Geordie's character is only revealed in stages (entangled with other threads). Geordie's nightmares stimulate long suppressed memories, but who he is, the man he became after his war in the trenches, is constructed from those memories.

As well as returning to the traumatic world of the Western Front, explored in *Regeneration*, Barker, in *Another World*, also returns to the subject of memory and identity. Where the earlier work uses the hospital at Craiglockhart, and in particular the real-life doctor, William Rivers, as the mirror held up to the horror of the past, in *Another World* she uses the domestic turmoil of the family to reflect and contrast with Geordie's past. As Barker pointed out in an interview with Alida Becker, "The reader is also meant ... to be comparing Geordie's fantastic memory, his belief in remembering the past and using the past as a guide to the present with [his violent and disturbed grandson] Gareth's ability to reinvent the past ..." (Becker 35).

Geordie talks to Helen, a cultural historian, about his brother's death, in a dialogue "reminiscent of the dialogues between Rivers and Prior in *Regeneration*..." (Whitehead 133-134) and during his last few months Geordie revisits the Western Front with his son, Nick. At the memorial to the missing of the Somme at Thiepval the two men are moved in slightly different ways. "If, as Nick believed, you should go to the past, looking not for messages or warnings, but simply to be

humbled by the weight of human experience that has preceded the brief flicker of your own days, then Thiepval succeeded brilliantly” (*Another World* 73). Geordie spends ten minutes standing talking to his dead brother before laying a wreath. “Geordie was attempting to graft his memories on to Nick – that’s what the visit was about – and perhaps, in spite of Nick’s resistance, he’d come close to succeeding” (74). This intergenerational transfer of post-traumatic stress disorder is similar to that represented by Faulks (and described above) in *Charlotte Gray*.

In *Regeneration*, Barker also disrupts the chronology by using several plot lines, requiring that the reader follow from one to another. A close analysis of the *Regeneration* trilogy for this type of temporal arrangement shows that Barker seems, at various points, to be relating the stories of Sassoon, Rivers, and Prior. While it is also possible to conceptualise the trilogy as a series of narratives arranged along the same sequential continuum, the analeptic time-shifts in the final volume describing Rivers’ pre-war anthropological research in Melanesia do not fit this model and possibly function to dislocate the reader from the fictional present of the primary narrative. They do, however, help to construct an image of Rivers as he was before the war and give some sense of his character during the war.

Although the purpose of this thesis is to examine temporal narrative strategies in the representation of trauma and identity in fiction, it is useful to relate this project to the functions of the war novel and how the examples cited above assist in fulfilling them.

### **Functions of the war novel**

Catherine Brosman noted that this genre of literature [the war novel] was “*a way of resolving, or attempting to resolve, war experiences whose recurring trauma must be relived, reexamined, and, through an apparent catharsis, accepted*” (90 italics added). One of the functions of the war novel, and especially novels representing the traumatised subject, then, is to examine the nature of the trauma and, if possible

resolve the problems it causes. This resolution may be for the traumatised character, or the reader, or both. In this thesis I am concerned with problems of memory and identity and the narrative strategies used to represent them, and for those purposes, Brosman has encapsulated the most relevant function of the war novel. But there are other functions and I shall examine them briefly here.

As Gary Sloan points out, one of the appeals of fiction is a kind of voyeurism – we enjoy reading about and watching, or at least imagining, the lives of the characters in the novels. From this, he claims that a distinguishing feature of fiction is “the representation of actions, and to a lesser degree the thoughts, of imaginary beings”, that is, “what furnishes the uniqueness of the fictional way of experiencing is not the words themselves, but their referents, the acts and ideas emblemised by language” (380). The values of fiction, Sloan adds, can be seen as informational, psychological and aesthetic. While more accurate information can be gleaned from factual sources, the war novel *per se*, that is the novel about war, where the author is usually at great pains to create an accurate picture of the scene, is certainly one source of information for the reader. This applies equally to the war neurosis novel where, however, other functions may be more important, especially if the statement by Brosman noted on the previous page is considered in relation to the statements made by Caruth, La Capra and Brooks (noted in Chapter One) regarding the greater capacity of fiction than other forms to relate trauma are accepted. We may well learn more about the mental and emotional processes of the trauma victim through fictional representations than through other texts. If the psychological function is taken to its limit as being a representation of an opportunity for catharsis for the reader, then the verisimilitude required of the text must be of a high level. This can be achieved by meticulous research and judicious construction of scenes. All these novels examine war experiences and seek to present the reader with a ‘realistic’ picture of war. That representation may involve narrative

strategies which disrupt the chronology in order to simulate the chaos of war.

Another function of the novel in general is aesthetic: the pleasure derived from the reading. In the case of war neurosis and trauma fiction, this pleasure may reside in the reader's emotional ability to empathise with the character's situation through their cognitive interpretation of the representation of the actions and temporality of the text, and thus eventually see the possibility of healing or re-orientation. Malcolm Bradbury, commenting on *Catch-22*, says "the book is about systematic denaturing, by society, military organization, capitalism, and death" and therefore it requires a similar "detached tone from the story-telling itself" (212). The use of various temporal narrative strategies discussed above facilitates that aim.

Brosman suggests that readers of war novels require a "subjective element": how do the characters feel, how are they transformed by events? (86). Her observation is probably true for most the novels falling into the war neurosis sub-genre. She also feels that the "aesthetic function of war literature, which is intrinsic to and underlines it, is not usually the artist's sole aim" (86). Other functions of war literature, then, according to Brosman, are: "memorializing great military deeds"; "setting the standards of military conduct"; inspiring a warlike spirit; demystifying war and the military discourse; supporting pacificism; and as I noted earlier, "resolving, or attempting to resolve, war experiences whose recurring trauma must be relived, reexamined, and, through an apparent catharsis, accepted" (90). The author of the war neurosis novel, then, must show the reader a dysfunctional world – in the case of *Catch-22* and *Slaughterhouse-Five* this might result in an apparent dysfunction of temporality in the text. If it is to show the reader a familiar world the author must defamiliarise it; mythologise where necessary, at other times demythologise.



On a more flippant note perhaps the last word on function should go to a fictional critic in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, who, in a roundtable discussion says that the function of the novel in modern society is to “provide touches of color in rooms with all-white walls” (150).

## Summary

In this chapter I have argued that the texts chosen to illustrate my thesis utilise complex narrative strategies on relation to time in order to construct the traumatised character whose comprehension of the world is disorientated. I have examined these fictional works for examples of temporal narrative strategies, listed some of the accepted functions of the war novel and linked these to memory and identity in the traumatised subject. I believe these examples support the concepts discussed in Chapter One of this essay, that a person’s identity is dependent upon a coherent narrative of their past and that fiction is often a useful medium in illustrating the dangers of fragmentation or faulty memory. I then asked whether these narrative strategies assist the text in fulfilling its function and if so in what ways.

By paying close attention to just one aspect of textual construction (temporal narrative strategies), I illustrated the range of subtlety found in the representation of one complex ramification of war, that is, post-traumatic stress or shell shock. Each of these authors deals with these ramifications in very different ways. Barker’s writing is mainly realist in style and her only noticeable use to temporal technique is analepsis in the recalling and re-telling of traumatic events. Occasionally she employs a tense change, and one novel, *Another World*, is almost entirely in the present tense. *Another World* has a complex time structure with three generations of the family in the one household, but the central character for my study remains the 103 year-old Geordie who, in his dying days is reliving the trauma of the trenches in nightmares. Another of the strategies discussed in this essay is the passing on of the horror and guilt of one generation

to another. Barker represents this in *Another World*, as does Faulks in *Charlotte Gray*.

Several authors are able to slow the tempo of the writing (and thus the tempo of reading) at those points where horror or trauma are described. One of the most horrific scenes in *Regeneration*, for instance, is Billy Prior retrieving the eye of a dead soldier, and it is told in slow and shocking detail. In contrast to this is the trauma of Billy Pilgrim in *Dresden*, which is never actually described.

All of these novels employ repetition in various ways: sometimes a phrase is used several times, sometimes a scene is similar to other scenes. Sometimes the whole structure of the novel takes the reader backwards and forwards through the same events in different guises: *Slaughterhouse-Five* and *Catch-22* are examples of this. This repetition reminds the reader that something is important or to allows the reader to circle around a key event in the narrative for some time before actually arriving at it. Trivial details being repeated (such as Vonnegut's 'Three Musketeers' or the juxtaposition of the colours 'ivory and blue') may contrast post-war peace with the stark horror of the war scenes, and also represent the constant visual prompts of the victim to recall the moments of trauma.

For all the temporal narrative strategies in *Slaughterhouse-Five*, the real key to Billy Pilgrim's trauma is probably contained in a quiet passage where he is recovering from the shock of confusing the barbershop quartet with the German soldiers. "He had supposed for years that he had no secrets from himself. Here was proof that he had a great big secret somewhere inside, and he could not imagine what it was" (126). This reiterates observations noted in Chapter One of this essay concerning confabulation or faulty memory constructing or reconstructing an erroneous narrative and possibly a false identity.

The chaotic order of *Slaughterhouse-Five* and *Catch-22* represent the experience of the characters during the war and also serve to defamiliarise the images of war which may have become clichéd in the reader's mind through a familiarity with B-grade films and war

novels. However, it is always possible that literature is better able to do this than science or theory. As Bradbury says of *Catch-22*, it “creates a world where things and men are depersonalized, where surreality exceeds reality, and where the human being is no more than a function of his absurd role” (213).

The major function of these war neurosis novels, as Brosman says, is to attempt to resolve, “war experiences whose recurring trauma must be relived, reexamined [...]” (90). The use of temporal narrative strategies is but one aspect of the creative process and I am aware that there are other aspects of the war neurosis novel which contribute to the finished product. However, as I stated in Chapter One, the construction of a war neurosis or PTSD character requires complex narrative strategies to reproduce a sense of the discontinuity and fragmentation of identity. This disconnection of identity and unreliability of memory play an important part in my novella.

In the following chapter I discuss the application of temporal narrative strategies in the creative component of my thesis.

### 3. Temporal Narrative Strategies in the Novella “The Wild Apple Tree”

It used to be said that we are what we eat. Today, if theory’s account is correct, we are being written by what we read, invaded by the textual virus...unless we deliberately choose, instead, to write what we read. (Damien Broderick *Theory and its discontents* 1).

The novella, “The Wild Apple Tree”, forms the creative component of this thesis and is a representation of the experience of a narrator traumatised by war. The novella’s structure utilises key temporal narrative strategies in the construction of a traumatised subject in order to represent the connections between trauma and memory, and the importance of coherent narrative in the maintenance of a reliable identity.

The general limitations of the genre of the novella, which must contain the whole narrative within a defined space and a restricted time span, complicated the structural composition of the narrative. The narration takes place during one week in 1997 but flashbacks range over several decades. This was achieved by beginning and ending the narrative at Lourne House (the Dursley Country Club) in the space of seven days. However, during that week the narration roams freely over the past sixty years and from England to Malaya and Australia.

The novella is narrated in a first person point of view that often makes it difficult to convey the illusion of presentness or immediacy (Mendilow 106), and the present tense is used in places partly to overcome this remoteness. However, the character of the narrator is deliberately kept at a distance to discourage the reader from being either sympathetic or antagonistic towards him and to allow an understanding of his identity as it unfolds. This was to avoid glorifying or denigrating his position or his actions, and to give

priority to the influence of past events on his present circumstances. It was also an attempt to represent how he feels at being 'shut out' from his own experience.

Because of the chosen thematic focus on trauma, memory and identity, the narrator of this novella was constructed as a man who has lost some memory of his early life. Although he established a new identity it is uncertain whether this is a false identity constructed by confabulation or merely a protective persona he has created and utilises opportunistically. The novella mobilises a range of temporal narrative strategies as devices to represent war neurosis, memory loss and memory recovery. In this case, the effect of the anamnesia or memory recovery does not appear to be cathartic; in the end the protagonist still seems unable or reluctant to construct a coherent narrative and therefore to re-establish an accurate identity.

As Antze and Lambek point out, if we say "I remember" then we are commencing a speech act, and to accentuate this the novella constructs a narrator who addresses his absent therapist in the second person singular throughout the text. This, and short references to some schoolboys, serve to provide a limited glimpse of his life in Australia. Other details of his life over the last fifty years have been deliberately omitted to facilitate a structure of events and recall in England and Malaya. Whatever happened in the intervening years, with the exception of those events implied by the conversations with his therapist and the analepses to the schoolboys, is simply not relevant to the narrative. The strategy allows the reader to collate an image of the narrator as he is today (in the framing narrative) and establish a picture of the man he once was, in the segments of recovered memory.

Although amnesia and nightmares might be a cliché in modern texts, and therefore should be avoided, the war neurosis novel is the exception to prove that rule. In this novella they form the central devices: the theme of "The Wild Apple Tree" is the narrator's missing memories, making it impossible to retell the story in chronological

order. The *sjuzet*, therefore, follows a complex time-line beginning and returning to Lourné House (1997, 1931, 1945, 1950) Premworth Court School (1931, 1997); Inger Moor, Yorkshire (1931, 1997); Barrowmere Nursing Home (1997); Malaya (1941, 1944, and 1950); Thorsby St. Giles on the Norfolk coast (1997 and 1950); Singapore (1940 and 1950); and finally ends back at Lourné (1997). This oscillation between the past and the present is designed to disorientate the reader and unravel the sequence of events in an unusual order – holding back the main event until the end. Certain scenes, such as the execution, are told in two or more segments several chapters apart. Given this temporal structure, the problem of “afterwardsness” (King 4) or knowingness must be avoided particularly in the use of *prolepsis*: not only could the narrator not know something until it happened, in this scenario he could not “know” it until he had “remembered” it. As discussed in Chapter One of this exegesis, Freud considered the recurring image of the traumatic event as one of the key symptoms of trauma neurosis. He also noted that these recurring images frequently came in dreams and the narrator of the novella becomes aware of forgotten events in just this manner. However, this information is not always integrated into his identity to complete his personal history until he is stimulated by a place to recall the exact details of the event.

Duration in “The Wild Apple Tree” is straightforward: the narrator’s movements between places and the time shifts are minimal, whereas important scenes – even if background to the life story – are told in more detail. The lead-up to the execution, for instance, is fairly detailed, but the execution, when it comes, is told concisely to indicate the shocking suddenness of the event itself. This withholding of knowledge is not intended to produce suspense, but to facilitate the reader’s understanding of the complexity of the narrator’s attempt at self-knowledge. The narrative strategy of omitting an important event from the *sjuzet* is utilised in the climactic scene with the gypsy

girl on the staircase which is related from within a repeated nightmare.

Certain scenes and images in this novella are repeated: the Japanese ambush and Sergeant Wharton's death; the dead seagull on the beach. As these link directly to the novella's climax they have been accentuated by repetition and the reader's interest will, hopefully, be aroused following the second occurrence of a scene. As central recurring events of the novella are the protagonist's nightmares (as a symptom of war neurosis) these are mentioned throughout the text to indicate that he is still suffering – or, more accurately, suffering again – from the effects of trauma.

The technique of describing places before and after a period of time is used for narrator's return to the school at Premworth Court, the ruined village at Thorsby St. Giles (now lost forever beneath the sea), and, of course, the house at Lourne. This strategy was introduced to add authenticity to the narrator's return visit and, more importantly to add nostalgia to his observations which are otherwise somewhat remote. Some of the places used to trigger the narrator's memory are not related directly to the place of the trauma. This is similar to Vonnegut's use of "ivory and blue" or the barbershop quartet. The title of the novella refers to one of two apple trees; an old tree in the grounds of the Dursley Country Club and a bonsai tree referred to by the Japanese commandant, Higa. As this bonsai tree is kept in the garden in Hiroshima it creates a peaceful image (from the perspective of the prison camp in Malaya), but, as the reader knows, the city will be dramatically destroyed by the first use of an atomic bomb.

Different time-frames within the novella are differentiated by present or past tenses. For the most part, the narrator's present day observations (in 1997) are present tense, while most of the analepses are past tense. Although I do not think this strategy alone helps the reader differentiate one time-frame from another, it does give the elderly voice a separation from his past life which would not

otherwise be possible. The use of tense as a temporal narrative strategy, then, solves problems of both theme and character.

Although the temporal structure of the novella is not as chaotic or experimental as *Catch-22* or *Slaughterhouse Five*, in the final two chapters several time changes are employed without linkages to represent a feeling of discontinuity experienced by the narrator on being confronted by his past. In effect, after the narrator discovers the nature of the major traumatic event, his narrative becomes less coherent rather than more. In the final two chapters of the novella it is unclear whether resolution of his amnesia has been achieved or not.

In summary, the temporality of “The Wild Apple Tree” is fairly complex, but the strategies outlined in the previous chapters of this thesis are those seen as the most productive in the construction of a narrative focused on a character whose identity has been undermined by trauma. The reciprocity between the two parts of the thesis means that the final version of the novella, written after the theoretical study, was considerably developed from the initial draft: the creative component was equally considered as research.



## 4. Conclusion

This thesis is comprised of two separate yet closely linked parts: a creative component and a theoretical component. Both answer the research question: How can temporal narrative strategies enable the representation of war neurosis in fiction? Therefore, it is necessary to consider them as distinct and yet conjoined parts of the one research project. In this essay I have examined war neurosis and narrative strategies of time. These were then illustrated by examples from a selection of novels addressing – in very different ways – the connection between time, memory, trauma and identity. The knowledge gained from this project concerning temporal narrative strategies was then employed to solve problems in the novella's structure. The creative component, employing a traumatised character as narrator, required close attention and subtle underlining of fictional techniques effective in the representation of disjointed temporality to simulate the traumatised experience.

This thesis is not intended to be a study in psychology or of time *per se*: it is an exercise in techniques of fiction making, and the process of creative writing is intimately connected to temporality. This relationship is unique to literature (as opposed to, for instance, music or sculpture) and the application of the theory to the writing of the novella was as important as the theoretical research itself. Texts like *Catch-22* and *Slaughterhouse-Five* provide numerous examples of temporal narrative strategies, but the more difficult task of relating these narrative strategies of time to identity and subjectivity (through the memory and remembering of the characters) proved to be the more useful intellectual exercise. Barker and Faulks, while providing less overt examples of temporal narrative strategies, on a deeper examination yielded very interesting and subtle uses of time in their narration, such as the possibility of trauma in one generation being passed on to the next generation as memories.

Temporal narrative strategies such as anachronistic ordering, repetition and variation in duration, at work in a range of war-trauma fictions, represent the traumatic influence of past events on the human subject. This is the key to the whole exercise: by altering the order and duration of events, to disorientate the reader and defamiliarise the material, the text allows the reader to come closer to the experience of the fictional protagonist. The outcome of this research was instructional in the production of “The Wild Apple Tree”.

In terms of subjectivity, personal identity depends upon an accurate representation to oneself of what “really happened”, that is the production of a reliable narrative; in the trauma victim this narration becomes destabilised. Fictional representation of war neurosis depends (among other things) on the use of temporal techniques. Alterations in chronology and movement of the text between various time frames, sometimes without explanation, allow the reader greater insight into the disconnected nature of the narrator’s memory, and without continuity there can be no reliable identity. Duration of scenes can be varied to increase traumatic effect while repetition of important images constantly reconstructs the protagonist’s history and identity: each repetition being in a different context, alters the significance within the growing awareness of the reader and the narrator.

The development of the novella from the first draft, written before the theoretical study, to the final draft, completed after, constituted a research project in its own right, and in writing this thesis I have come to realise that temporal narrative strategies are only one aspect of the war neurosis novel – but, in view of the importance of the past in this genre, temporality was the most significant aspect in relation to the project of “The Wild Apple Tree”.

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