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Holey Umbrella

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CONTENTS

page

1.	Attestation of Authorship _____	<u>3</u>
2.	Intellectual Property Rights _____	<u>4</u>
3.	Confidential Material _____	<u>4</u>
4.	Abstract _____	<u>5</u>
5.	Introduction _____	<u>7</u>
6.	Who am I ? _____	<u>7</u>
7.	What of my outcome ? _____	<u>8</u>
8.	What is my methodology #1 ? _____	<u>8</u>
9.	What of Postmodernism ? _____	<u>9</u>
10.	What is my methodology #2 ? _____	<u>10</u>
11.	What is my methodology #3 ? _____	<u>13</u>
12.	What is my methodology #4 ? _____	<u>18</u>
13.	Summary _____	<u>20</u>
14,	References _____	<u>21</u>

Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

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1. All intellectual property including copyright, is retained by the candidate in the content of the candidate's exegesis. For the removal of doubt, publication by the candidate of this or any derivative work does not change the intellectual property rights of the candidate in relation to the exegesis.
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Abstract

The creative outcome of my Masters Degree is an extract of my manuscript for a novel. The extract is 40,000 words in length and represents approximately one half of the completed novel.

Fissure is the title of the novel. It is a novel which is unconventional in relation to the mainstream understanding of what a traditional novel is. *Fissure* aims to be a novel which positions itself within a post modern framework. It consists of two primary narratives set apart in time. It is envisaged the two worlds will eventually enmesh in a dramatic conclusion in the last third of the book.

Fissure contains extracts of approximately 3100 words taken from an out of print publication titled *The Wonder Book Of Tell Me Why?* The intention of the inclusion of this material is for the text to act as an associative catalyst for the primary narrative flow of *Fissure*.

Fissure also contains a meta-narrative in the form of a graphic novel. The inclusion of this framing device is an intentional ironic gesture to emphasise the authorial voice, and further extend and blur the boundaries of fiction, autobiography and alternate “low art” literary practise.

Fissure is a novel born from my extensive research of literary practise and methodology from a diverse range of writers, from Plato to the recent efforts of Cormack McCarthy’s *The Road* (2007). It also reflects aspects of my life experience, and conceptual and aesthetic insights gained from my formal training as a visual artist and subsequent art practice.

Fissure aims to bear a number of attributes generally regarded as signifiers of post-modernist literature such as:

- 1 The negation or undermining of elements of modernist concepts which are totalising, such as the advocating of a master narrative or overriding concept to explain the cohesion of experience.
- 2 The challenging of literary norms which undermine or highlight notions of morality, taste and decency within the narrative.
- 3 The writing of meta-fiction which is aware of itself as fiction and its subsequent integration into narrative streams.
- 4 The prevalent celebratory use of irony, paradox, flux, pastiche and parody within the work of fiction.
- 5 The blurring, crossing or dissolving of borders between literary genres and high and low culture.
- 6 The experimentation in the use and structure of language, syntax, vernacular and the mixing of poetic forms with conceptual and formal language and text.
- 7 The acknowledgement within the narrative of concepts such as simulation and simulacrum and how it highlights the juncture between real experience and projected or simulated experience.
- 8 The regular mixing of the narrative point of view and past and present tenses.
- 9 The intentional cannibalisation of historical perspective and temporal distortion of time, space and place.
- 10 To employ the literary form of bricolage by throwing together heterogeneous cultural elements, motifs and symbols.

Fissure desires to be read and enjoyed and ultimately will be manufactured in a marketable form so as to be digested by as many people as possible.

Introduction

This is my full explanatory introduction. This introduction is divided into a series of questions and answers that will hopefully be informative and useful to readers.

Who am I?

I am a pakeha male in the name of Grant Robert Douglas Hall. I am of Scottish, English and Italian descent. I may have Maori heritage but my suspicion is the rumoured offspring between my Great-Great-Grandfather and a Maori woman during the Maori Land Wars in the Waikato region was swept under the carpet by subsequent generations. I have no idea which carpet but intend, one day, to look.

I have two children and currently live with my partner Sean. My sexual orientation, to a point, is irrelevant but I have been known to have a Queer perspective on certain issues. I currently work in Television, Film and Theatre industries as an Art Director and Set Designer. I have a BFA from Elam School of Fine Arts and have undertaken English papers at Massey University in Albany.

Apart from my academic learning I have had a full life of drama and also have had many jobs all over the world. Here is a long-list in no specific chronological order, for your information:

Truck Driver, Barman, Bush Fireman, Exterior Sign installer, Under-ground Mine Train Driver, Miner, Photographer, Silo Metal Worker, Assembly Line Spot Welder,

Vineyard worker, Community Development Officer, Kibbutz Volunteer Worker, Work Based Training Senior Supervisor, Art Tutor, Artist, Theatre Set Builder, Art Manager, Art Gallery Assistant, Sceneographer, Shipping Clerk, Bricklayers Labourer, Drain Pipe Layer, Underground Railway Line Worker, Builder , House Painter and Primary Caregiver.

What of my outcome?

My outcome, as stated in my Abstract is creatively practice based. It is an extract of my manuscript for a novel. The extract is 40,000 words in length and represents approximately one half of the completed novel.

What is my methodology #1?

Fundamentally my methodology is the actual act of writing a novel, the consequence of my life time of experience and learning. I am forty-nine years old.

Or put another way: The synthesis of my life experience, my academic learning in creative and conceptual fields, which, coupled with other sub conscious and cognitive driving forces that I cannot fully quantify, has compelled me to write a manuscript for a novel.

This novel, once completed will hopefully be added to the vast body of literature. Literature, an entity described by one of my favourite philosophic social commentators Roland Bathes as, “...*that ensemble of objects and rules, techniques*

and works, whose function in the general economy of our society is precisely to institutionalise subjectivity.” (p172) ¹

I have chosen to locate and rationalise my novel within the unwieldy and confusing umbrella, full of holes, of Postmodernism. Therefore before I embark on the further outlining of my methods pertaining to my methodological processes I would like first to offer a brief and inadequate definition of Postmodernism.

What of Postmodernism?

Postmodernism is a term which essentially describes a broad range of responses to modernism. The term is expansive and applies far beyond the domain of literary theory to other areas such as economics, philosophy, visual arts, media theory and sociology.

Patricia Waugh describes the character and function of Postmodernism well when she states “*Postmodernism tends to claim an abandonment of all metanarratives which could legitimise the foundations for truth*” (p5) ²

As far as I can determine, these metanarratives for truth can spring from the various religious doctrines of the world, from the ideas of Enlightenment and Post Enlightenment and from the numerous, often utopian, Modernist ideals. It is my opinion by advocating and or imposing a metanarrative as a means to subscribe to the definitive and absolute ideals embedded within it, as a way to sell a universal

¹ Barthes, Roland (1983) *On Racine*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Octagon Books)

² Waugh, Patricia (1992) *Postmodernism: Reader* (London, Edward Arnold)

understanding or truth, that it eventually succumbs as rigid doctrine. Therefore it is prone to be outmoded, too restrictive, out of fashion, and no longer adequate, palatable or sustainable to society.

Modernism was replaced by an alternate philosophical and theoretical framework in the form of Postmodernism. It is no surprise that Postmodernism has a healthy dose of scepticism in relation to the Modernist metanarratives and seeks to negate or undermine the absolutes proposed.

Jean-Francois Lyotard states "*Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity towards metanarratives.*"³

If I may add, Postmodernism by its very deconstructive and undermining nature will in due course be supplanted by another encompassing popularised "ism" for the academics, theorists, philosophers and societal commentators to subscribe to and debate over.

What is my methodology #2?

This question has been asked again. This does not mean my answer to the original is negated. I will simply continue to answer. My answer will not be a copy of the original.

I think it useful if I describe the developmental stages of the writing of my novel to date so as to reveal some aspects of my methods and processes.

³ Lyotard, Jean-Francois (1984) *The Post Modern Condition; A report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press)

Originally, as per my application to the MCW course I had envisaged a novel that would sit comfortably and traditionally within the 'Historical Fiction' genre. Over the period of the year 2008 my literary knowledge and skills base increased and as a result I was increasingly dissatisfied with the constraints of the genre. So the novel evolved into a large, dazed, but excited beast. This is what I did to create the beast..

1. I cut all specific geographic reference within the text. The avoidance of giving the *place* a name added tension and potential for disorientation of the characters within the narrative and for the reader.
2. I eliminated specific dates and years within the narrative which originally specifically stated a time period between 1800 and 1840. Instead, the challenge was to give a general sense to the period by way of description of objects and portrayal of characters, vernacular and the use of archaic descriptive language.
3. I introduced a second narrative stream in the Novel which is a contemporary story set within a loose timeframe of 1990s to present day. (And again there are no specific dates mentioned.)
4. I developed the idea of the narrator being unreliable in the telling of the story. This opened up potentials for crises of identity and the manufacturing of doubles, constructs and simulations.
5. I developed a process where I would adhere to a logical narrative stream (s) but would write the chapters in a way which would accommodate an adventurous system of inserting chapters of various lengths (Often these were short scenes, snapshot like) in a flux like manner at any point within the organic collection of mini stories.

6. I inserted text from an out of print publication called *The Wonder Book Of Tell Me Why?* I consider the book a 'readymade' in literary and visual art terms. The *Wonder Book* extracts function as an associative catalyst for the two main narratives.
7. I inserted an ironic metanarrative via the inclusion of a story told in the form of a Graphic Novel. The main protagonist within the Graphic Novel portrays thought processes similar to mine, and has features which may lead the reader to believe it is a representation of me, the author, if cross referenced by a recent photo of me.
8. I sprinkled historical literary reference and homage, mostly obscure, throughout the narrative. These take the form of object based; theme based or coded affirmative nods to actual texts and dialogue from selected novels and non-fiction which I admire. In one case there is a direct quote from Francois Rabelais' *Gargantua and Pantagruel*.
9. I abandoned the fashionably tight modus operandi of limiting the text to a single narrative point of view.
10. I experimented with a range of tenses in the storytelling and also increased the scope and range of word play and juxtaposition of different language modes such as poetic form, evangelical sermon, objective forensic description, associative and visceral narrative, archaic description and outdated modes of expression.
11. I introduced in the narrative, varying levels of literary self consciousness and at its most extreme addressed the reader directly within the story.

What is my methodology #3?

This question has been asked again. This does not mean my answer to the original is negated. I will simply continue to answer. My answer will not be a copy of the original.

The attributes of Postmodernist literature, listed in my Abstract earlier, are helpful in determining aspects of my methodology. *Fissure* aims to bear resemblance to these attributes within its content. I think it timely to go through some of this list and provide examples to support this assertion.

Central to my creative practice as a writer is the notion of play. It is my opinion all art is 'play', in whatever medium. My literary 'play' leads my writing to have a strong element of self consciousness. Within my writing there is an explicit message that this is 'make believe.' Due to this, often within the text is a heightened sense of drama and theatricality and portrayal of the absurd. This reminds me of Barthes exploration of the dynamics of wrestling in *Mythologies*. In 'show' wrestling the spectators are fully aware the wrestling is not a 'real fight', they are never deluded and are constantly reminded of the often ludicrous and comic theatricality of the spectacle.

*Only an image is involved in the game, and the spectator does not wish for the actual suffering of the contestant; he only enjoys the perfection of an iconography. It is not true that wrestling is a sadistic spectacle: it is only an intelligible spectacle.*⁴(p20)

⁴ Barthes, Roland (1972) *Mythologies*. Trans Annette Lavers, London .

This play, my play, creates symbols and archetypes and models of behaviour for the characters in my novel. Notions of artifice and artefact permeate the narrative, the effect being an exploration of possibilities as opposed to the description of the definitive. This runs incongruous to some of the Modernist concepts which are totalizing, such as the advocating of a master narrative or overriding concept to explain the cohesion of experience.

Fissure hopes to challenge literary norms which undermine or highlight notions of taste or morality, taste and decency within the narrative. There are wide and varied examples in modern literary history which press this juicy button and often from authors which are considered, and marketed as, postmodern writers. Kathy Acker is such an author. In her work such as *Empire of the Senseless* she deliberately uses pornographic description and experience as a means to undermine fundamental understandings of the self and societal moral metanarratives which the majority abide by. She also uses it as a vehicle for her thematic discourse of the human subject as an ethical, effective historical agent. If I may use this extract as an example of her theoretical play.

Fatty dove in, ground and pounded his cock up into the so tight it was almost impregnable asshole. He pound and ground until the brat started wiggling; then thrust hard. Thrust fast. Living backbone. Jewel at top of hole. The asshole opened involuntarily. The kid screeched like nerves. After a while the kid felt Fatty become still. After a few more minutes he asked Fatty if he had come.

'Shut up. Shut. Up.' As it dropped out the final bit of sperm enflamed the top of his cockhole.(p21) ⁵

My awareness of her work and others has given me the courage to write about often uncomfortable issues surrounding sex and sexuality and sexual morality. This self conscious exploration through the characters is not gratuitous; it is a method by which to explore the notion of identity and politics of literary expression.

When I decided to create metafiction within *Fissure* I did so with a sound knowledge of Postmodern literary historical precedents ranging from the works of Thomas Pynchon, John Fowles, Ronald Sukenick, Vladimir Nabokov, Kurt Vonnegut and Kathy Acker to name a very few.

A significant gesture was to include the Graphic novel narrative which becomes a humourous (I hope) but informative metanarrative for *Fissure*. It is a blatant, visual and subversive inclusion. It also undermines the hierarchical delineation of Novel genre. The Graphic Novel is generally seen as subservient to the heavily marketed objects which fill the bookstores, especially on the top twenty best seller lists.

Patricia Waugh in her helpful book *Metafiction* states,

Metafictional texts reveal the ontological status of all literary fiction: its quasi-referentiality, its indeterminacy, its existence as words and world....Metafiction fails deliberately to provide its readers with sufficient or sufficiently consistent components for him or her to be able to construct a satisfactory alternate

⁵ Acker, Kathy (1988) *Empire of the Senseless*. Grove Weidenfeld. New York.

world. Frames are set to be continually broken. Contents are ostentatiously constructed, only to be subsequently deconstructed.(p101) ⁶

This is the function of the Graphic novel insertion. It pretends to represent the Author, seeks to provide a rationale for its existence and the existence of other extracts within *Fissure*, those sourced from *The Wonder Book of Tell Me Why?*

As I mentioned previously in the summary outline of my processes I have purposely created a methodology of writing which is inherently organic and flux-like in nature. The eventual order of the chapters and various narrative streams will be determined by the nature and number of insertions into the text. This process reminds me of Barthelme's story *Snow White* ⁷, in which fragments of 'trash' American culture enter into the contemporary rewriting of the fairy-tale and he treats the narrative location New York as a collage.

In the case of *Fissure* it can be helpful viewing the work as literary collage. Or if you want a French philosophic take on the method ,view it as a form of Bricolage where heterogeneous cultural elements, motifs and symbols are thrown together.

In *Fissure*, objects, scenes, vague environments, events and incongruities are stuck together tenuously. Within the narrative are symbols and signifiers of other metanarratives such as the ancient Greek myth of Prometheus. As Jetsom and Flopsam the stories float around and are pulled forward by the tide of the evolving story. To support this methodology I would like to quote Barthelme,

⁶ Waugh, Patricia. (1984) *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-conscious Fiction*. Routledge. London and New York

⁷ Barthelme, Donald (1967) *Snow White*. New York. (London: Cape)

'The point of collage is that unlike things are stuck together to make, in the best case, may be or imply a comment on the other reality from which it came, and may be also much else. It's an 'itself' if it's successful...' (Barthelme, in Bellamy 1974, pp.51-52 taken from Patricia Waugh's *Metafiction* page 143)⁸

Fissure, like a number of examples in Postmodern literature seeks, through its methodology, to create a novelistic universe of uncertainty in terms of time, space and identity similar to Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughter House 5*, where an alternate Sci-fi world is constructed alongside a biographical world of the author. The central character ping pongs through different time zones.

This temporal distortion of time, space and narrative place is a preoccupation of *Fissure* and is a common trait in Postmodern novels.

The method of exploring, confusing and undermining the novels fictional characters, by heightening the anxiety of identity, exasperates the readers logical predisposition and need for context, identification and the act of *true* naming. In *Fissure*, the characters exhibit crisis and are often struggling for their right to a name, or have lost their original and are assigned or assumed another name. To support the dynamic of Identity Schick's statement is illuminating.

*'Identity is its own construction...and narrative is the medium through which that construction is realized. But the construction of identity is inseparable from that of alterity - indeed, identity itself only makes sense in juxtaposition with alterity.'*⁹

⁸ Bellamy, Joe David (1974) *The New Fiction: Interviews with Innovative American Writers*. Urbana and Chicago, Ill., London

⁹ Schick, Irman Cemil (1999:21) *The Erotic Margin: Sexuality and Spatiality in Alterist Discourse* (London:Verso)

What is my methodology #4?

This question has been asked again. This does not mean my answer to the original is negated. I will simply continue to answer. My answer will not be a copy of the original.

My general awareness of the discourses pertinent to and supporting the idea of, *simulacrum* is an important mechanism for the content and process of my novel. Although the concept of *simulacrum* was born in a dark platonic cave by Plato a long time ago, other commentators such as Deleuze, Jean Baudrillard and Roland Bathes have used the original to re-assert *simulacrum* in current critical discourse. Our advent into a world of simulacra has been described by Baudrillard in the following way:

*'All of reality(is) absorbed by the hyperreality of the code and of simulation. It is now a principle of simulation, and not of reality, that regulates social life. The finalities have disappeared; we are now engendered by models.'*¹⁰

Fissure plays with the concept within its narrative. The thematic simulation of the characters identities is an example of this play. It is also the treatment of the major objects within the story, crucially the representation of the ship *Promeatheus*, is literally a model of the real, the real *itself*, in turn, a mythological construct.

The eradication of the 'real' through the imposing of the simulacrum ideal has resonance within *Fissure* as well as a multitude of fictional works in the last thirty years of postmodern literature. Fredric Jameson, in explaining the new generic

¹⁰ Baudrillard, Jean (1988) taken from Wolfreys, Julian (2004) *Critical Keywords in Literary and Cultural Theory*. Palgrave MacMillan. New York

spatial logic applied to how we view the world and notion of reality through simulacrum in my opinion has captured the essence of the writers function and final product. He asserts the following,

*'The new spatial logic of the simulacrum can now be expected to have a momentous effect on what used to be historical time. The past is thereby itself modified: what was once ,in the historical novel ...the organic genealogy of the bourgeois collective project...has meanwhile itself become a vast collection of images, a multitudinous photographic simulacrum...the past as 'referent' finds itself gradually bracketed, and then effaced altogether, leaving us with nothing but texts.'*¹¹ (pp17-18)

¹¹ Fredric Jameson (1991) *Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of the Late Capitalism* (London: Verso).

Summary

In summary *Fissure* is an ambitious beast. It is comfortable with the fact it is unsure of itself. *Fissure* will expand, retract, and expand again as the literary collage is added to, edited and added to, over time. My hope is that it will be published and enjoyed by many a reader. In this exegesis I have attempted to put *Fissure* and my process in context and further provide a rationale for its existence. It's positioning under the holey umbrella of Postmodernist literature will assure it at least a partial drenching from the public and critic.

Time will tell.

Sooner than you and I may think.

We live in a cut and paste world.

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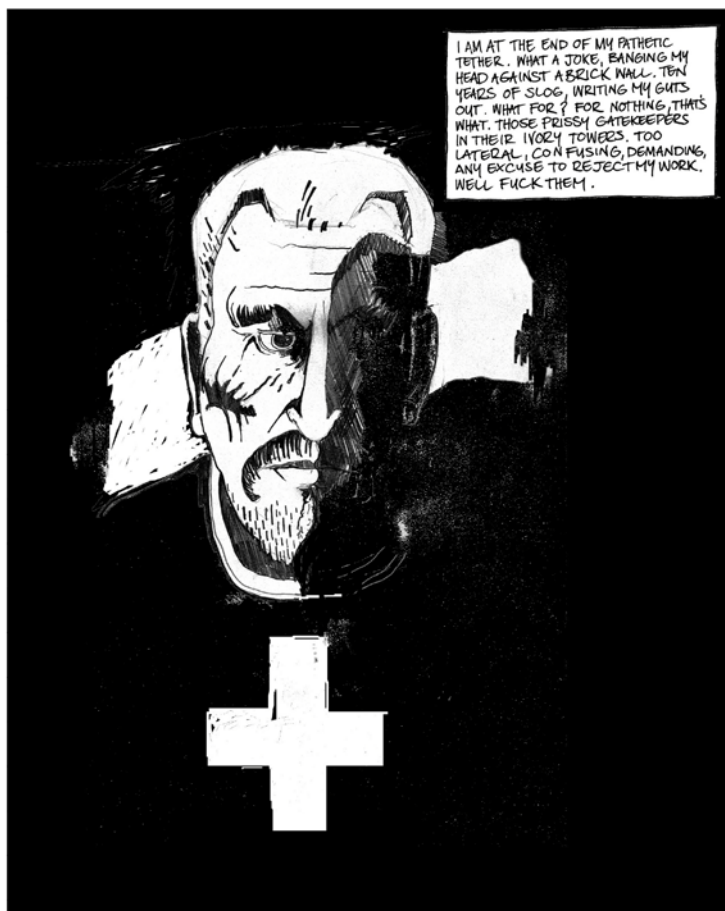
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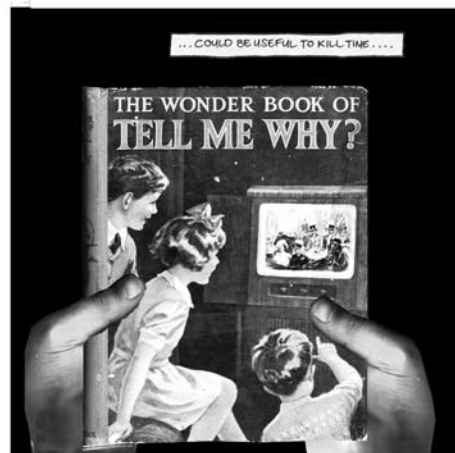
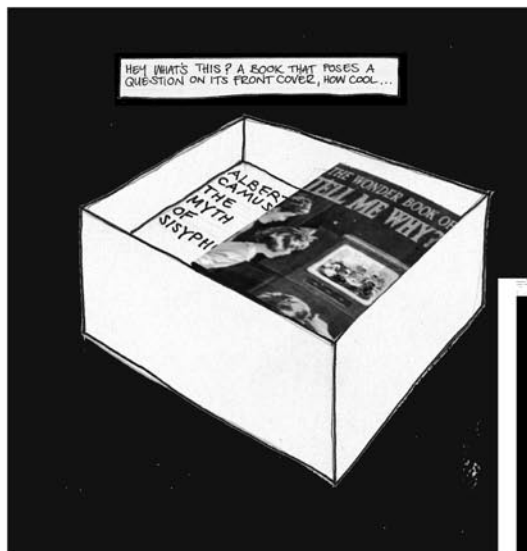
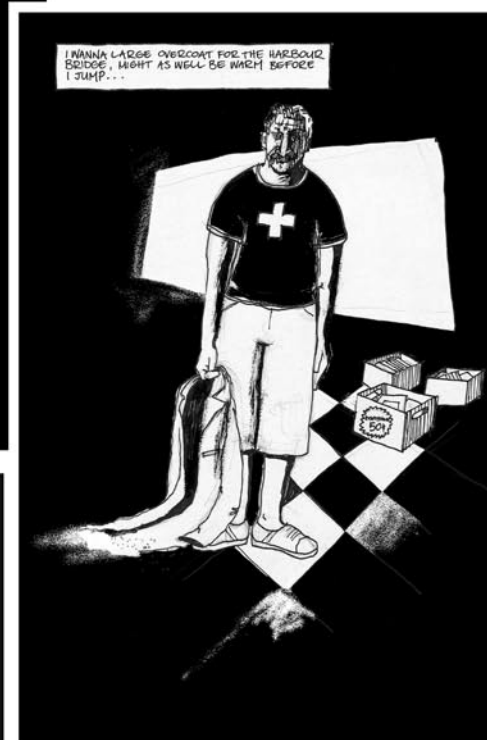
(an extract)

by Grant Hall

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From the very beginning, men and women, boys and girls, have been asking, sometimes with their lips, more often only with their minds, “Why? Please tell me Why? “

Sometimes the questions can be answered, sometimes they cannot, for there are mysteries of Nature of which no one knows the secret, perhaps no one ever will.

From The Wonder Book of Tell Me Why? (Page 13)

Inside Job

Greg calculates it had been four months since Annamarie’s elective caesarean and he is well pleased her vagina remains snug as a glove as their collective breath fills the bedroom like a swollen belly.

Adjusting his position he thinks that if she had her way, they would be living in a space devoid of life and functional object. Her ideal residence would be a place of exhibition, not to live in, as normal people. The house is littered with examples of architectural indulgence. These, he thinks, are of her making. Greg considers these gestures as an excessive and clumsy acknowledgement of the process of making. He questions the validity of the self conscious highlighting of certain raw materials and, often, the failure to integrate high tech manufactured materials within a seamless construct.

Vertical blinds allow for a bar of sunlight to illuminate a framed work on paper. Tracking back he remembers he had hung it with great difficulty. She was irritated

as six holes were created in her pristine wall. Two weeks prior he jumped at the chance to purchase because examples from this period are rare. During the negotiations Annamarie spent time submitting disparaging remarks and advocated they follow the trend of uninhibited clean wall space.

Let's leave them white darling.

Flotsam

This door is adrift and if one is to cast upon it an illumination this door will be described as an oak door with a tarnished bronze plate that bears the engraved name of *Captain.*

This first letter, the capital letter C, combines with other letters in a flourish of ornate script. This type usually designated for official documents and signifies to the visitor the occupier of the room is an individual of importance.

This sign, askew, hangs tenuously as three of the four clouts attached to the sodden oak are missing. This sign lays comical, above figurative interventions on the door's surface.

This drawing has the appearance of one that was carved into the surface by a sharp object, maybe a knife. This drawing consists of a mixture of angular and circular movements as well as the odd short stabs and dashes and scratches.

This section of the drawing, held together in a loose naïve quality is painted in with a type of red stain. This drawing's height is representative of a child's highest reach if on tippy toes.

This whole effect, this linear articulation, especially given its original physical and historical context, is subjectively comparable to a silent scream. And now, floating in space, it bares its tawny sea chest to this random passage, a dull reminder of impermanence.

If someone pricks you with a pin, you say, "oh!" In the interval between the "prick" and the "oh!" the sense of "touch" has passed the "feeling" to the brain, the brain has decided that it is a sudden "pain," and passes an order to your breathing muscles an organ of speech and you make a sound. The "current" which conveys these messages and produces the effect of "Oh!" travels at about one hundred and twenty-five yards per second. Other "time" reactions take about as follows: sight, one-fifth of a second; touch, a little less. Complicated "thinking" takes longer, of course.

From The Wonder Book of Tell Me Why? (Page 176)

The Crime

He times her new name with his thrusts. She likes him talking while they are fucking. They increase the tempo. They love it on all fours. He changes his position

and makes eye contact with Annamarie. They smile. He thinks it is like old times, like when they first met, before they got married, before she got perfectly sliced by the specialist. Distracted by the polished concrete wall he notices the satin finish. He remembers how they argued for a week over the nature of the surface. He wanted to gloss it over, but never mind. He touches the wall and feels how cool it is.

Greg talks real dirty to her and Annamarie suddenly cums on his fist with a lubricous viscosity. She slaps him and he slaps back. He disengages and twists her form onto her stomach and in quick movements he pins and handcuffs her and she says no. The contentious area of skin, a thin dividing space between lower and upper orifice; a line the prick slides over.

Oh!

Sorry, I got carried away.

He holds the hand mirror out with one line remaining. She weakly moves her arms and rattles the handcuffs.

Do you want some more?

No.

Why?

I need to go to the toilet.

Why?

Why do you think?

Greg clicks open the silver handcuffs. They are nice to touch, pink furry inners to tickle your fancy. He remembers she chose them in a delighted fluster, finding it risqué shopping in a designer adult concepts store. He smells her woman musk and remarkably a trace of her Gaultier summer collection. Annamarie painfully relocates to the ensuite and locks the door. He talks to the door and she says nothing to him from the freshly renovated interior.

How inconvenient the bathroom refitting and tiling was. He spares a parting thought to the tiler who had smelt of garlic. It took two months for him to fulfil his contract. The last third of the payment schedule he withheld till the man with eyes placed too far apart to be trusted finished a small corner underneath the stark basin. In this tiny discreet area the tiles are grout free and ugly as sin.

Greg notices blood and shit on the carpet. She has bled a trail of his destruction. He thinks he should mop up as it is hardly a job for the home help. The stains would persist if not cleaned away properly. They will remain between them, a dull reminder of his indiscretion and his moment of madness. What on earth was he thinking?

His whole life is one muthafucka cliché. Car, wife, baby, corporate job, internal garage, mortgage and yearly holidays to the same privileged shit hole in the middle of the Pacific Rim. He even went to his first facial and waxing the other day.

Back then cuffed and vulnerable, he thought Annamarie loved it. He was sure he felt her tell-tale tightening, an internal pulse or two and then the way her shoulders incrementally blushed red. She said no, but he knew it was in fact a code

of affirmation. Yes, sex talk. After all, last week she had initiated the discussion on certain aspects of their sex practice and he thought it would be exciting to at least try it in that way.

Greg hears the shower and guesses she is using her array of expensive skin care products. He smells lavender. With a shrug he gives up on the door, on his wife moaning a bit, on the baby bawling in the nursery and on the newly acquired trendy ducking succulents housed in concrete containers by the front door.

The Judgement

Greg's toes hook into the perfect lawn like a Futurist sculpture, jerking, this way and that. He steps into a circular spray of water and marvels over the dynamics of the source. They are programmed, not unlike his morning erection. They pop up and spray in efficient arcs.

The system is washing his sins away, or as many as they can. He would have to scrub hard to eliminate the remnants of the c words. There are lots of them. He ignored the clichés for the time being and began with the other c's. So he washes his cock-a doodle-doo and front torso free of them. Free of her, the cunt, and of his mum, and a few at the agency. He attends to an area on his stomach but he can't reach between his shoulder blades. He is sure there is some cunt there.

His neighbours start to gather at a respectful distance across the road. After all it's their Sunday afternoon too. The latest model slows to an almost stop, its

hybrid motor devoid of sound. The driver is gawking out the passenger window, her c- phone in her ear.

Yes, he is certain there still is resilient fishy c on his nose so he washes his face again. A cluster of kids point and laugh in his direction and he knows it is because of the remaining c's so he continues with renewed vigour. He looks at the crowd with their eyes that have popped out of their heads, so he washes and scrubs harder till black marks became bloody and blacker marks, till he is bloody sore.

Why don't you all fuck off?

Can't a man have a little privacy?

In response, a vaguely familiar individual breaks from the whispering chorus and walks towards him with reassuring tones and fingers splayed. He looks like his father and this man has a long unseasonal coat on. It has a faded two tone grey pattern on it and adds to his antiquated veneer. The man smells of decay so he tells him to go back to the Highlands or wherever the fuck he came from.

Turning his back on the neighbourhood he investigates his various crevices and doubles his efforts in his ass crack and finds a tiny bit of waste and washes it away, but he is frustrated with the jets of his Dolphin Dream Irrigation System. Tongue in cheek, Greg decides to get the hose and goes to open the side gate.

The gate that would.

One day contain.

Hope on the move.

So she can play.

Safe and sound.

In the backyard.

The Arrest

The siren signals the arrival of the boys in blue. Despite his effort to open the child proof gate, to get at the hose, the coppers, the cocks, with square jaws, are upon him. Not a fucking word by them, just straight in, boots and all.

You will never take me alive!

They flip him on his belly and the grass tickles him. He sees the funny side of things and he laughs out loud till his sides are splitting. They cuff him and he coughs up some c juice and a bit of blood which reminds him of the fuck of his life and splutters to the pool of water and lawn mud.

But she said yes! She said yes!

As Greg is being led away by the strong arm of the law he looks back at his wife Annamarie and Hope, his baby girl. They are still and inside the house, framed and dissected by the stacked louver windows. These he acknowledges as an elegant architectural counterbalance to the front elevation of large sliding glass sheets and concrete uprights. Quite a success story really. Though, with a surge of

irritation Greg notices a few cobwebs, indiscriminately cornered in those transparent rectangular louver planes. If he was in the position to get closer he was sure he would find a colony of trespassing spiders.

You cunts, I will get you.

Basket Case

Greg rots in the Jailhouse cell. The Copper still holds the Taser-gun and pulls at the wires every now and then so as to get his attention; the sensation being reminiscent of a pinch on the cheek by an elderly relative. The Copper's blue boy bum stuffier, the one with muscular hairy arms, drives like a maniac behind his desk.

If you saw four people of different nationalities, you would notice that their skins were of different colours – a Norwegian, “fair”; an Italian, “olive”; a Chinese, “yellow”; and a Negro, “black.” All skins are coloured and the colour depends on the deposit in the deeper layers of microscopical dark granules called “pigment.”

If a person has “pigment” deposited in small patches, instead of evenly you get the appearance called “freckles.” They occur mostly in “fair” or “red-skinned” people.

The Wonder Book of Tell Me Why (page 132)

The Transaction

Flynt held on to his name with a protective vehemence that eventually commanded a grudging respect from those who knew him or tried to further diminish him. He would turn his name around in forward rolls and savour his right to it. This was his only possession, a revolving mantra that kept him alive with a sense of dignity intact. The name of Flynt embodied a vague memory of a highland village by a country stream and the phlegmy desperation of his family.

From the slate emerged a structure of strange turrets and mechanical buttresses. Hissing and steaming flames licked at the grubby face of forced labour. Iron scything arms gnashed with rhythmic purpose as swathes of textile spewed from the various fissures of the factory. Emaciated children occasionally caught in the mechanics of production would be dragged away.

The Captain licked his lips as he surveyed the slight bodies. He seemed to hover around as though in a foreign pastry shop, trying to decide. A cacophony made it hard to hear the excited babble of the factory floor manager grovelling around him. The Captain was such a caricature of foreboding excess, the children would hesitate at their work and stand mouth agape at the wobbling thing.

The juggernaut, with a sweep of an arm, dropped coins in the managers grasp and pointed to a boy who looked to be nine years of age. The Captain, coping with a rare surge of pleasure in response to digesting a scene of such collective vulnerability and tenuous physicality, was momentarily speechless. His fat finger

wiggled at the end of his arm and indicated to the manager he wanted to talk to the boy with red hair.

The hair, a passionate brushstroke from the divine heavens, set this child apart from the grey desperation. It elevated the cupid above earthly concerns, reclining on clouds of steam. The green blue eyes framed by clusters of freckles looked up to the expansive visitor. He grasped between a forefinger and a thumb a fiery curl from the boy and gently pulled.

Not order but disorder, luckless one, it seems to be, and madness in your heart.

Later to the Captain's fatty back the boy said, in way of affirmation, his little voice only just discernable to a pair of chubby peeling ears,
My Name is Flynt.

Ignored, the boy was then led in the direction of the harbour and was overcome briefly by the wintry flush of a day extinguished.

About time

Greg leaves the Police Station and waves down a red taxi. It stops abruptly.

Take me to a whorehouse or a gambling den, you decide which.

The driver looks bemused.

Well, the Casino is across town and Pussy Galore is close, down there.

From the edge of the curb Greg peers into the driver's eyes. They are watery and grey. He looks to where the driver is pointing. There is a road lined either side

by trees. They nearly hold hands to form a natural tunnel, like in a school yard game. On the pavement, cracks have appeared to accommodate their root systems. He thinks it could be an issue for the civic authorities. Someone could trip over or fall in. Greg looks down at the driver. A tight row of identical pens feature in the pocket of his chequered shirt. The smell of stale cigarette smoke reminds him of his chain smoking grandmother. Stupid old cunt, it knocked ten years off her dour life.

Someone should write a letter.

What?

About the cracks.

The taxi driver scratches his head. Greg notices dried scalp detached from his comb over and flicks his full head of hair back and smiles.

I can recommend a product.

Hey buddy, I haven't time for this.

Greg stands back and watches the taxi do a u-turn and merge with the rush hour. He marvels at the skill of the driver in avoiding an oncoming truck. The sun is still high. It is daylight saving. Two seagulls land on a telecommunications dish. They squabble briefly for the most elevated position.

He searches for a coin to flip and fails to locate one. Even the shrubs which line the volcanic rock wall nearby do not bear fruit of gold or silver.

Not a brass razoo.

He chuckles at the expression made out loud. A gaggle of young commuters look sideways at him. Greg looks sideways at them. He walks sideways and looks sideways at them and laughs till one turns around.

What's up?

Nothing yet.

In peril he waits. It is stimulating. He lies down in a bus shelter and waits for one of the gulls to leave and occasionally catches a whiff of the ocean. He thinks about the group of kids in suits who had just left. They looked to be office workers, maybe shipping clerks. Everyone has to start somewhere. Greg thinks he needs to find somewhere to finish. He has to seek alternative shelter before dark, to move away from the shadow of the Jailhouse. After a while one of the gulls flies off.

About time Greg thinks.

We all know a noise when we hear it; but what is it ? Well, first of all it is a sound, but not all sounds are noise. A noise is really a complicated sound in which various wavelengths or sounds of different pitch have become mixed up. If you strike a glass, you hear a "pure" musical note, but if you drop half-a-dozen on the floor you will get a hundred different sounds that produce a noise.

Really, we can almost define noise by saying that it is sound out of place. A drum gives a musical note in a concert hall when it is played at the right moment, but if it crashed in at the wrong moment or is played by your next-door neighbour at

midnight, you would say “What a noise!” Some sounds which in themselves are not unpleasant produce a “noise” when they mix or fail to “combine.”

One thing we do know is that noise is bad for us. We may think we are becoming accustomed to it, but all the time it is doing harm. When a test was carried out, it was found that people working in a noisy room were, on an average, twenty-five per cent less efficient than people working in a silent room.

From The Wonder Book of Tell Me Why? (Page 218)

The Walk

Gone was the foul smelling claustrophobia of the factory with little natural light, barricaded from nature. Flynt entertained the notion that his life had been saved, spared the misery of forced labour. With shuffling feet, his desire was to avoid another beating or worse still, to be sent back to the horrendously noisy factory and possibly to the dyeing section.

Children never came back from there. It was rumoured some would suffocate on the toxic fumes; others drowned in vats of boiling coloured liquid. Rarer still, as myth had it, if they didn't work hard enough there existed a grotesque machine that would gather the idle transgressor up and slice and perforate the body in scores of odd shapes. Whatever the circumstance of death the children working in this tormented simulation of medieval hell would all agree that to be ordered to the dyeing section was to be given a notice of execution.

A sharp cold burst of wind slapped his red locks onto his freckled face and pulled back again in all manner of direction. The boys wide-eyed wonder at such change of environment and circumstance was not lost on the pumped up Captain standing next to him.

The Captain swept an arm over the port view as if he owned it, or somehow gathered it; brushing in a singular sweep the entire locality into the cushioned interior of his purse. This included all the bobbing and creaking industry, where forty ships lay, the gas lights and lanterns on shore unlit and aflame in random sequence. Collected also were the swarms of sailors, traders, hawkers and poor onlookers, shouting, pulling, and carrying to the squawk of seagulls.

Which ship is your new home little one?

I, I don't know sir.

Make a guess boy, which ship?

Flynt surveyed the mass flotilla, most moored to the robust oak wharves. There were all manner of trading ships and two built for war, prickly with iron cannon. Flynt needed to choose quickly as he sensed that this monster of a man, his benefactor, was not blessed with a high degree of patience. He was reminded of a cartoon he once studied from a discarded publication during his brief stay at the orphanage. It depicted a fat bulldog crushing a little bird and each had different flags draped about and they were on top of a map. He did remember he was eventually more fascinated by the notion and mystery of the map, more so than the blunt satirical interaction of the two animals.

Choose now boy.

The one with the sea birds sir.

No.

The voice boomed and was taken away by a gust, down through an approaching squall. The word No with all its finality and hopelessness disappeared without a sound. The word's partner in crime, the full stop, though not manifested in verbal terms, followed the Captain's sharp reply. Unbeknownst to the boy this rounded fortress that contained a black void, impenetrable and of immense depth, with a dash of imagination, if chased after and caught, could easily be the mechanism for which his short life could disappear into.

So, on the crest of the cobble ridge overlooking the bay and with diminishing light and sense of hope he closed his eyes and waited for the final act. The cartoon must have made an imprint. He was the bird but the bulldog had morphed into something vast and heavy and stood upright, was able to talk and was about to sit down. He felt certain this act of sitting down would result in the crushing of his limbs, bones and even his wildly beating heart. As a consequence the insides of his stomach and skull would experience the open air for the first time and twitch and groan together. His tongue would be squeezed out and his green eyes would squabble over who would be eaten first by an assortment of hogs, freshly escaped from their wind torn enclosure. Flynt visualised the poor road cleaners shovelling in scraping motions the remainder of his inconsequential flat body matter. Crows from the factory would look on and laugh their eyes dull. A beggar troop would play a discordant farewell to his unbelievable deadness. His name unuttered, the body dumped in a sewer and finally fed to the very gulls that in their trickery made him choose the wrong ship that belonged to his new master. But instead a candy was pressed into his small hand.

A New Buddy

In transit Greg bumps into Sarge. Greg met Sarge in the Jailhouse. The Sarge had processed his possessions, fingerprinted and photographed him. It transpires the old Sarge is soon to retire. He needs a bit of a nest egg top up. They agree on a transfer of funds. Sarge then “lost” Greg’s file and personally “transferred” him to another “station”.

He looks at Sarge. His Gallic nose, big stomach, football hands and a rugged face which says, I’ve seen it all, I’ve lived life to the fullest, I’ve been through hell and back.

Don’t ever cross me or you’ll be sorry.

Hey Sarge, lighten up, I’ve just transferred the money into your account.

How?

Greg waves his cell phone and perfect white teeth shine.

Telephone banking?

You got it.

Let’s have us some fun then.

Half way to Pussy Galore they accentuate their physical mechanics and zigzag down the middle of the street. The Council workers have packed up for the day, leaving the road works in a state of suspension for at least one more night.

Whoa there, watch out for the plot hole.

That's funny, Sarge. Good one.

Sarge is puffing and frothing slightly. Greg thinks his new mate is a tad unfit but appreciates his wit and how Sarge packs the front of his police trousers. It is obvious he has a big cock-a-doodle-doo and a mighty sexual appetite, ideal for the whorehouse.

Let's get pissed first.

Here?

Good as any.

The establishment was squeezed like a lemon between two inner city office buildings. Greg likes the decorative appendages and excessive decor. He is more dubious about the bar. It has an identity crisis.

The great shadow

He was in the great shadow of industrialisation. Close and half running to keep up with the Captain's surprisingly fast but lumbering gait, his view of what lay ahead was mostly obscured. He had little opportunity to register the port surroundings but in swaying jerking moments retained a mental picture of the Captain in his regal and extroverted best, stretched and covered by the finest, specially tailored cloth. Sometimes the light would catch the frilly embroidered cotton and silk. These bloomed out as though characters in a farce; entering and exiting repeatedly into the light from the gloom of stage wings. The silk especially,

perforated and lovingly stitched from his coat sleeves, accentuating his large hands. Flynt also noticed the Captain's long black cane used by the man with a familiar dexterity. It was a handy stabilising counterpoint to his current downward rumbling mass and seemed to be a fine appendage, the type gentlemen are often seen in possession of. The cane handle of curved silver was formed in the manner of a wolf. Open jaws and red eyes stared at him and then ran backwards and out of focus.

The sound of the cane's tip struck the road. It served as Flynt's metronome, the sharp silver point designed to wedge in between cracks of the inanimate or, when required, to the sound of the living.

His life had been bartered and assigned. The gentle husk of his body towed, led by the will of his new owner. All he could remember was his determination throughout, to stay with the Captain and to hold onto his candy.

Nearing the Ship, the Captain like an ornate barge parted the faceless port workers aside with his ego.

Everyone must have noticed that an ice cream soda has a way of frothing at the top. That is part of its charm, and the explanation is quite simple. Soda- water is ordinary water with carbon dioxide dissolved in it. That is why it is fizzy. But it contains a lot more gas than you normally see. Add some sugar to a glass of soda-water and much of the gas will come bubbling out. The reason is that carbon dioxide is less soluble in water containing sugar than in ordinary water. Sweetened ice cream, naturally, acts in the same way.

From The Wonder Book of Tell Me Why? (Page 212)

The Candy

Flynt was still dressed in factory garb and had a look of astonishment at his new surroundings. The Captain's abode on the ship was an array of erratically stuffed objects that confused the mind with sheer diversity and exotic eclecticism.

He was now alone, the Captain having just squeezed out through the cabin door, giving him a simple instruction of don't move. This was proving difficult as he wanted to turn his head desperately to scan the odalisque wooden draped room to its full perimeter. After what seemed an eternity he did quickly turn his head to the left and briefly viewed a bed that spanned the apex of the cabin. The two portholes above the bed were black and gave no indication of life outside. He quickly resumed his former head position fearful of the consequences and vowed not to move again.

Flynt was also struggling with his growing compulsion to chew the candy the Captain had popped into his mouth before leaving. This exquisite sweet object with rounded corners filled his mouth with fizzy sensation. The boy's saliva and tongue involuntarily conspired to force a motion of his once clamped tight jaws revealing the candies soft fudgy core, partially free of its hard boiled encasement. Flynt wondered if he should rapidly chew through and devour the candy with a succession of chewing and swallowing motions. Or another option was to suck and drain slowly the juices of the diminishing candy with shallow discreet motions located at the central and frontal portion of his scrawny neck.

Abruptly in came two men in crabbing movements with a large tub of steaming water. It briefly slopped on the Persian rug and, rough and sinewy, the sailors exited without a word. Flynt's eyes were heavy with fatigue. He hadn't eaten

since early in the morning and the effect of the candy had no physical long term benefit.

Pussy Galore

Where's the bar gone?

Front of house. How could you forget that?

Where's Sarge?

Who?

The big guy in a police uniform.

Sorry, I don't know who you are talking about, Richard.

Richard is not my real name.

Well Blaze is not my real name either.

Seriously, where has Sarge gone? Remember, he banged you good and proper with a foot of meat. You screamed for more. I was watching.

I think you are confused, Richard. It's just been you and me, honey. You have been asleep most of your stay here.

Don't call me honey.

In fact don't call me Richard either.

Okay, what's your real name? But first, I have to check, do you want to stay another two hours till the end of my shift?

Call me Rich Bastard and I will call you C.

I don't like that word.

Rich?

Or Bastard?

No, the word which you have implied.

You are a prostitute. How can you even retain or rationalise such a polemic ?

A what?

It doesn't matter. Do I have to get out of the fucking spa to give you money or do you trust me to be a Rich C?

I think you should leave. This isn't working.

He jabs at the various buttons. He thinks at some stage he should draft a letter to the management suggesting they replace the antiquated spa. Sarge laughed when they first saw it, drained violet with gold taps.

Okay, you win. No more of that word in your hallowed presence.

Why are you so angry, Richard?

Call me Greg.

Okay Greg, why are you so uptight?

He punches a button. Greg is sick of the water moving and the intrusive nature of the spa motor. He thinks through Blaze and shakes his glass.

Still fresh but not for long.

What did you say?

Nothing ... It's my drink.

Your time is up, honey.

Greg notices her red face and how her jet black hair almost touches her outer thighs, falling just short of the bed sheet. The ice slowly melts in his whisky and the fish seem dead still in the nearby aquarium. Greg inspects his hands. They are spongy and creased white. He studies his manicured nails for dramatic effect.

Why am I uptight?

Because I want you to open your fucking legs. Stay on the bed so I can see your pussy better. Fuck yourself. Put your fingers in. The way you would if you were alone.

The chameleon is a lizard with leisurely habits. Unlike its relatives that move so actively over the ground to capture flies from the sunlight, the chameleon has chosen to live amongst tree branches.

There it will remain for hours together, apparently dozing, with its prehensile tale firmly gripping a branch.

Notwithstanding its seemingly lazy habits, it has to capture active flies for food – which appears an impossible proposition.

Just as we are thinking this, things begin to happen. On the branch, some seven or eight inches from the chameleon, an unwary fly alights and proceeds to arrange its toilet.

The apparently sleeping chameleon flicks its right eye, which moves slowly round and carefully focuses the fly. The left eye then also makes its focus ; for the eyes work independently.

Then, either by direct effort of the creature, or owing to some kind of reflex action, there is a sudden flow of blood at the base of the chameleon's tongue, which instantly projects the tongue to its full length.

From The Wonder Book of Tell Me Why (page 227)

The Bath

The Captain licks his lips.

Can you read, boy?

A little sir.

Call me Captain in public and Father in private.

Yes Sir, Father I mean.

Take your clothes off.

Let's see the nature of your teeth.

Arms up.

Turn around.

Bend over.

Legs apart, boy.

Come closer now.

Let's see your hair.

Needs a good wash doesn't it?

Doesn't it, boy?

Yes Father.

Get in the tub, use that soap.

Do you know why you are here?

No Father.

You are here because it is your fate. Your fate has been prescribed and determined by me.

With that, the Captain drew his wall of facial flesh and pink lips away from the small face and let go of the cheeks, painfully squeezed, causing a temporary deformation and puckering of the lips.

I am not concerned with your life before.

Your life started when I purchased you.

Your name is boy. I will assign a different name to you when your balls drop.

Your life, as with great sculpture and art, will be created, moulded by me.

I gave birth to you.

I am

Mother Father

Brother Sister

God Creator

The Departure

The *Prometheus*, sodden ropes snaked on the deck, shook loose the stink of land. With groans and creaks and one last scraping moan the ship moved forwards. He was painted black with whalebone inlay which gaily reflected light back to the soot and salt pitted inhabitants who spilled over the edge and into the harbour. The Prometheus quickly manoeuvred into a bumpy squall and inner harbour backwash and bobbed up and down briefly. Then, sails billowing, the low slung vessel shot between various oncoming shapes seeking refuge from the considerable undulating swell around the corner of the isle.

The *Prometheus* was gathering momentum as the Captain, concentrating, was for now keeping the land sitting on the open outstretched palm of his right hand, therefore holding the ship on parallel course with the coastline. Fascinated at the force with which the rain and sea would manage to hit in a multitude of drops on his hand, the hand of what he considered to be, an instrument of a modified god. The Captain believed he was determining the nature of sensation, the direction, volume and speed of nature's stormy dialogue. This sensation, isolated, dwelled upon and fully accentuated at the smooth extremity of open skin, his skin; bathed in milk earlier, its nails manicured by one of his little helpers. Yes, the very nature of the drops when and where and how many and on and on towards a certain notion of eternity, all condensed within a few minutes. The Captain's significant bulk, oblivious to the

pitching of the vessel, stuck to the deck as if bolted. Or was he hovering in fact a few millimetres from the surface? This exultation, coupled with his perceived knowledge of the cosmos was known only to him, and played like a violin in a void; his fingers deft despite their disproportionate scale. The Captain privately acknowledged he had human qualities but also that he transcended the common label of it or a thing. To further elaborate, he had been known on occasion to say out loud in public that he was a living concept, beyond mere physicality, immovable, indestructible.

He was nature, he consumed it and in these glorious moments, especially such as this, when released from terra firma, and parting the open sea, he was above and beyond it.

So for twenty minutes past two hours through huge seas and high winds he continued to meditate and hold the same upright posture, feet planted and right arm outstretched from his side. Most significantly the same palm splayed skywards in static orchestration.

With the storm navigated through and the Prometheus suddenly becalmed, he considered his job done. Without a word to the crew he went below and all was comparatively still.

The common habit we all have of “winking” every few seconds or minutes is done, not by an effort of the will, but “involuntarily” - that is, by a reflex act, not by thinking. The surface of the eye is sensitive to dust and draughts and it must be kept moist. Invisible tears keep it moist, and the rapid “winking” of the eyelids “sweeps”

the moisture and the dust towards two tiny holes on the inner corners of the lids, whence it runs into the nose.

From The Wonder Book of Tell Me Why? (Page 78)

Undercover

Sarge sits on the inner cave ledge. He looks down towards the draughty cave entrance and suddenly is self conscious of his naked white body, alone in such a big dark space. The cave needs a bit of cleaning up; there is a lot of dusting to be done. There are deep scratches on the smooth walls. Sarge is proud of his attention to detail, his forensic acumen. As quick as a nod and a wink he can quickly ferret out a red herring and get to the bottom of a situation.

He wonders how long she is going to take. Annoyed, he picks at the loose polystyrene that clings to one of the scratch marks. In his considered opinion it was created recently as there are small white pieces immediately below, on the dusty ledge, where he is sitting and waiting. Some of the pieces are flat on one side and these sides have black paint on. He looks at the wall and briefly up at the roof of the cave with a pulley poking through the gauze. Sarge suppresses a sneeze and sweeps the polystyrene with his hand and creates two white mounds with fragile edges manipulated into rounded forms.

This will be the second time he has seen her in as many days. He just wants to talk and watch. He has already discovered lots about her. She is very young and Sarge imagines her to be just barely eighteen. She also has features similar to his

friends' baby daughter. He hopes his friends' daughter will grow up to be as beautiful and delicate as this girl, in front of him.

A pulley consists of a grooved wheel which can carry a rope revolving inside a frame and is designed either for transmitting power or for making the lifting of heavy weights easier. When weights are to be lifted two sets of pulleys, one fixed and the other movable, usually with a hook, are used. Each set of pulleys contains two, three or more wheels and the rope is carried continuously between them, one end being fixed. It will be seen that the loose end of rope travels much farther than the pulley carrying the hook. If there are three wheels to each pulley, the rope will travel six times as far as the pulley, and thus anyone hauling on the rope will be able to lift a weight which normally would be beyond him.

The Wonder Book of Tell Me Why (page 152)

The Face

Flynt had not been out of the Captain's cabin. The portion of meat and roughly round potatoes he consumed with Captain after being dressed the night previous had long been vomited up. The sail boat gently swayed as though a cradle. Flynt thought of his Ma. He closed his eyes, relieved not to be flung about and tried to form her face on his internal black slate. All he conjured up was a childish chalked circle with two dots and smiling horizontal line.



Determined, he tried again. He knew her face to be fine and white and smooth like on a fancy poster for a curative he had seen when transported south.

Boy!

The Captain's voice filled his ears. Loud and wet he burst through the door. With a heave he barrelled onto the vast bed and flung furs and blankets over him forming a rounded volcanic mountain of steam, rumblings and emission of foul sulphurous odour now circulating around his naked boots. A young girl was with him, she tried to shift his weight more centrally to the middle of the bed but the Captain's weight was such that a pulley would have to be employed to shift him.

My boots! Off with my boots!

The girl moved quickly to the boots and commenced to pull.

Don't stare. Help me get his boots off.

Are you mute?

Have you a tongue?

Later, as Flynt found his voice, they would talk but for now there was much industry to undertake and she was very quick and efficient, having after a brief absence materialised with a small basin of hot water. She showed him how to apply the hot towels and bathe the fungal feet of Captain.

Flynt got up on the bed and gently wiped the crystallised salt off the Captain's hairless red face. Flynt stopped in the area above the closed eyes, realising the absence of eyebrows and the boy whispered across the void.

Does he shave?

The Call of the Wild

Let me talk to Annamarie.

Some friend you are.

Just put her on.

Put her on.

I will do something stupid.

I can wait.

Hi, Annamarie can I.

Listen, all I want.

I didn't.

Just put Hope on.

To hear her breathing.

I want to talk to.

Why can't I?

Is she okay?

Wake her up then.

What?

What?

Fuck you.

Don't go.

I won't shout.

Promise, hope to die, die, die.

What about my pills?

Put her on.

Who?

What do you mean everyone?

Fuck the centre.

Fuck the police.

I don't care.

Somewheeeeere.

In a hoteeeeell.

Close.

Closer!

Almost, you're getting warmer.

Noooooooo.

Give up?

Rwanda!

It's a joke.

Don't be like that.

No.

It's too late.

Sorreeee can't do.

I have to go now, my credit is running out.

On a phone plan?

Am I?

Put Hope on then.

Fuck work.

What did he want?

Stupid cunt, why did you do that?

Annamarie?

Hello?

Greg swung around. The Pine trees loomed till they slapped the sea saw. Greg slid off his face and drank more vodka.

What do I do now Saaaarge?

Raised eyebrows

The wind had increased in speed again and so, in kinetic energy transference had the *Prometheus*. The sound of the crew up above and the voices of a few below penetrated the nucleus of the cabin and with each sound the two little protons were reminded of the fact they belonged to a larger metaphysical community, within a larger equally tenuous world mass.

For a while the two, with the now sleeping Captain between them, just looked at each other. She knew, through experience, it was now safe to talk and pointing at the missing eyebrows she giggled quietly.

He likes them painted.

Flynt laughed and looked at her nimble hands, birdlike in movement.

My name is Flynt.

She looked across and nodded.

Call me M.

I have to paint them on or the Captain will be angry but sometimes he is angry anyway because in his sleep they get smudged and are imperfect.

M sprung off the bed and was amongst the things Flynt dared not venture or even look at. Her long body craning over between tightly wedged stacked books and

quills, prints, maps, protracting instruments and vials of liquid. She finally fished out a mortar and pestle and other slim objects from the built in oak desk.

M unwrapped the brown paper revealing graphite sticks which she broke a small segment off and ground into a fine dust. She mixed in a fixative medium of sluggish liquid creating a black paint of subtle viscosity. M, careful not to spill the substance, applied eyebrows to the face now in a state of shallow breath.

The pair of arcs signified considerable delicacy on M's part and an artful example of dexterity given the movement of the ship when lightly stroked on the pudgy plateau. If viewed from above, in the context of the Captain's framed face, the marks added drama for what could be mistaken as a final feminine touch to a death-mask.

There are certain living creatures which cannot defend themselves and are liable to be eaten by their enemies. But near to them there are others which are so well able to take care of themselves, or are so horrid to taste, that these same enemies let them alone. Why should not the poor, defenceless creatures look like the others, so as to escape?

We can find at any time in the summer in our gardens the Drone-fly, which looks like a honey-bee, but it is not. The Honey-bee can sting, and besides that, its insect enemies do not like its taste. But the Drone-fly cannot sting, and is good for the birds which feed on insects. But these birds see them, and say to themselves: "We had better leave them alone; they are too much like those horrid bees."

The Wonder Book of Tell Me Why (page 106)

The Girl

The man's weight was fully on her and she knew it to be unnatural and too soon, and not correct. She could hardly breathe through the tight grip of his hand. The child held onto a horizon, one to the left of the man's forearm. Her unbroken spirit travelled to the horizon and stayed there as a shimmering light dawning on the line of a caulked oak floor. Before losing consciousness she took in the smell of straw.

When the girl opened her eyes it was to a dimmer light. The man had gone and in his place there was a boy. She initially recoiled further below deck but recognised him as the new cabin boy and eventually took the proffered hand and stood shakily upright, brushing herself. He was weeping and despite her pain she offered sympathy and told him her name. The boy spoke her name repeatedly and they hugged each other and eventually found a safer place. They curled up together in a foetal position dragging empty sacks over them, all the time dreading the sound of approaching footfall.

In this manner Flynt and M offered mutual comfort due to their proximity to each other and later M in an exhausted whisper spoke of how she came to be on the *Prometheus*. Flynt though, had become more withdrawn and stunned over the events and remarkably M kept talking, reassuring him that life would be better someday soon.

The Preacher

In a voice too high and uncertain Halfface recounted how he was mesmerised by this large black dog with yellow eyes to the point of bewitchment. Suddenly a female white wolf rushed from the darkness of the narrow city lane and set upon his face. Through blood and shock of pain he saw the white wolf position half his face at the feet of her master. Whereupon Yellow Eyes chewed steadily while eyeballing his backward and bloody mistreated form.

A short distance from the attack, he lost consciousness and was about to leave this world bound for hell when in his mind he spied one of his daughters with a head of a horned bird and snaking in between her beak a long lizard tongue, the colour of green algae.

In the face of his increasing ochlophobia, multiple replica daughters surrounded him. They crushed closer in forward crabbing pecking motions until upon him. With industry they pecked and tore and chewed and his member kept regenerating and it was in this state of eternal cyclical agony that he understood the basis of a myth heard by him long ago ; a story nearly as old as the breath of Zeus. And it occurred to him why they were in the likeness of his daughter and it was far too late to express his remorse for what he bore witness to between the age of her sixth year to her tenth whereupon she suddenly caught an infection and died noisily.

In a conscious state, Halfface was convinced it was the devil at play. The devil let him live, the dogs had no interest in savaging him further. For his sins he was spared his life only to be disfigured and repulsed by most.

Looking to the ocean he was eventually contracted to the *Prometheus* as a sail maker and assistant to the store, predominantly working below deck in the forgiving gloom. His name Halface was set adrift by the crew. By virtue of his constant sermons and lateral interpretation of holiness and scripture the new name of Preacher was applied to him, a man half full of intense white light, the other half struggling in a dark mood.

Blaze of Gloria

Greg is sandwiched between the twins in the front seat of Blaze's Charger. He is playing with his gun. They are parked up in an odd area of town. The parking area consists of parallel rows of diagonal lines to signify or infer where the drivers should place their cars if they want to leave them there. Greg sucks on a joint and looks over to the city park.

Maybe I could go for a walk from this parked people mover and look at the natural springs and let the aggressive swans peck at my hand as if I had the sincerity to feed the fat arrogant things, or drag the kids around and peer into the large shallow manmade pond and wonder if there are eels there and get pulled to the other side and play on structures for play and maybe fall off the ropes and slide her down when I shouldn't and hit some snivelled spoilt kid in the shoulders with toddler's feet and maybe say sorry to the dad who I want to just smash that prissy smug fucken smirk clean off his middle face, and no, we won't go to the zoo, with the last of the afternoon tea chimps, reading upside down B is for banana in her play cage, the

chimp she looks at me with her diabetic eyes and I am angry and maybe I say don't fuckin' feed the chimp ok and maybe I said that back then, with my daughter, the new born Hope and her cousin ignoring the cage sign.

Greg, post reverie, looks through the trees and hears the rumble of the motorway. The calumet is burning his fingers. He flicks it through the open window. The motorway cannot see him. He wants to go to the rail that lies beyond the trees and peer into the deep bitumen channel. Blaze and Gloria could accompany him to the ledge. Feel the wind, the rush of a passing double story truck or two.

All choked up

You straddled the lines.

I never park properly.

Greg glanced at Blaze. He thinks she is truly her sister's double.

Whose car is this anyway? Can I drive it?

Honey, you know you're not fit to drive.

I told you, don't call me honey.

I'm not some cuddly bear.

Look Greg, you know the rules, we can spend time together but only if you don't get aggressive. Okay honey?

‘And you definitely saw the lantern flare and the father has just turned it on and it was too bright and you are awake and the father sat down and his face was close to you and his breath of stale whisky and you know what you have to do, so you put your fingers on it and squeeze but not hard and like you have been shown before and your gun is out of reach and you know Gloria is choking and trying to get away, to open the car door and you are clenching and saying sorry and you cover your head and say it is never enough. What I do is never enough.’

I wonder if you know what “emotion” is? Well, it is a very overpowering “feeling,” caused by some unusual happening such as getting a beautiful present unexpectedly. Now, when you get a strong feeling like this, the natural thing would be to give vent to it by shouting, singing, laughing, or crying. But if others are about you, you will restrain your feelings, and then you will get a sudden “spasm” or “lump in your throat!”

From The Wonder Book of Tell Me Why? (Page 60)

The Pencil

They were in a tight gloomy corner of the storage hull, their legs laid out as if thrown in a pauper’s coffin. This place was chosen by M as the site for privacy and Flynt was led here so they could talk and think in private.

Show me yours or I will lay on you.

No.

Show me yours and I will give you a pencil.

Having never owned a pencil before, Flynt, feeling a lump in his throat, considered her offer seriously.

Let me see the pencil.

M manoeuvred on all fours and reached in a crevice and out came the lead encased in wood, hardly used, the tapered end as a result of sharpening, lighter in colour and shape, compared to the place where one holds it.

Give it to me first, and then I will show you.

No, no, no.

Flynt made his decision and sighed.

Later M decided, when observing Flynt squirm out through the orifice of her secret place, she liked this brave but hesitant boy. M wished she could suspend the moment they just had in order to be transported to an island with lots of food on trees and even a house and garden with an older girl and babies that didn't cry much. No men or wolves, no black dogs and meat. Flynt could stay as long as he remained hairless and a boy. If it grew he would be asked to leave by everyone, even the chickens. Then he would have to swim to the nasty mainland all the time fearing sharks.

Aftermath

They laugh in unison and it brings relief to the drone of vehicles below. Greg studies Blaze drinking a Coke Zero. He thinks she finally understands him.

You know I like it rough.

He strokes her discoloured neck and feels less ashamed. He leans forward with two dry lips. They touch the place where a faint purple line pulses gently.

I can wear a scarf.

Leave them free.

Like passing clouds?

Yes, like passing clouds.

The Book

Look at this picture, what do you see?

I see death, Captain.

Do you feel sorry for the man?

No, he is not real. It is but a picture.

Are you sure, boy?

If I told you he was real would you feel sorry for him then?

I don't know him, sir. His death does not affect me.

Good, it is healthy that you are sceptical over such melodramatic religious imagery.

What do you see in this one?

I see a ship on an angle, sir, and some crew are falling off. It is being drawn into a hole in the sea.

Does it frighten you, boy?

No.

Why?

The Sea Serpent is looking at them with only one eye, everyone knows that those type of sea serpents have two eyes, so it can't be true.

Hallelujah

The church was built over fifty years previous. Greg is distrustful. It is the issue of the carbon pitted concrete. Smoking disgusts him and there have been a lot of emissions from all those cunts driving to and fro.

The menopausal steeples are flushed with the folly of modernism. They puncture the sky as four giant thorns. Greg looks up again. He can see no evidence of a larger skin, no sign of blood. He sits down opposite the Catholic School yard. Girls in grey skirts jump to avoid the looping rope. He should wait till dusk. Maybe then he will see red. He feels no God upstairs, only the outer ring of the sun. It is hot and his shirt clamps to his back. He is hungry and craves a steak and egg burger.

You should enter, it's cool in there.

The Sermon

In the lantern flame the thin face half in shadow stared with an arched eyebrow at the boy.

I am the Preacher.

Hello, sir, my name is Flynt.

Hello Flynt, but excuse me young sir if I was misinformed - I heard your name previously referred to as Boy, by the Captain, no less.

But, in confidence sir, my real name is Flynt.

Well, young boy. It seems there is a predicament. A situation which would be uncomfortable for you. If such information, your little secret to be precise, would be imparted to a certain individual on the ship, I fear your world may be extinguished if this was to happen.

Should this happen to you, boy?

No, sir, I hope not.

I hope not also. Because young fellow, in the eyes of God you are indeed a boy. Your name is a product of the Captain's wisdom. He, being so in tune with divine matters, albeit in a rather off course egotistic way, has seen fit to subscribe a generic term to your personage. The Captain will no doubt seek counsel with me to decide on a true and correct date to formalise the naming of you, one of God's creatures, lawfully, and in a place of official, sanctified worship.

But

Unfortunately on this ship there is no such place. My humble quarters a mere temporary substitute. Even here though, amongst the fruits of my labour I do indeed

perform Godly ritual and counsel to crew and certain passengers who are that way inclined.

Anyway, enough of that.

So, why are you here? To impart your pathetic secrets?

Procure mutinous sympathy?

Blasphemy? To seek absolution?

What, boy? Confession?

Speak up!

Is it my disfigurement?

Don't be scared. Sit down, I will tell you a story.

Will you like to hear a story? Yes, of course you do.

One day, Jesus being hungry demands figs from a lone fig tree when it was not the season to bear fruit. Jesus is about to die. Only a few days remain to him. He no longer speaks. He then suddenly smites down the fig tree and it is reduced to smoke and ash.

And quite rightly boy, do you know why?

His gesture, in blasting the innocent tree of which he asks the impossible of, teaches us a valuable lesson.

Does it not ?

What would that be, boy? Do you know?

Then naturally I will tell you: Earthly human desire is just that, a desire to satisfy a need beyond the providence of nature. A desire for a fig out of season is the same as your misplaced desire for an inappropriate name.

The Preacher did not register the boy's absence. Instead he got thin twine and wound the spliced rope around and burnt and waxed and frayed the end and told more stories. Beyond midnight the Preacher spliced rope and sewed together sail only ceasing when the whale fat run dry. Sitting prone, his brittle tenor pitched into the darkness in a hoarse whisper of sound.

Long Black

Hey that's good. You have a natural acumen for drawing, a lovely tension between a line drawn with a rational authority, and on the other scale a line which is tenuous, delicate, fragile, unsure of itself. Combine the two and you have your line, personal to you, one which isn't trained, or even learnt, it's yours like a finger print, as natural as a finger print.

Turn it around so I can see it better.

Greg's eyes are saucers. He stabs his finger on the cafe table to accentuate each of his points. Greg believes in undiscovered talent. It appears that apart from her dexterity with cock-a-doodles, she can facilitate pictorial space, the delineation of

space via the drawn line into a pleasing and stimulating discourse on the very nature of representation, of an object, a concept, or both.

It's an affirmation!

What?

Look at this line there, it speaks of a desire to simulate the external world, but also the internal, subconscious, the shadow, the ether, the stuff that is outside the square, off the planet, not known, buried, outa this world, of the imagination, bird's eye, god's eye, eye of the storm, not of objectivity but subjective... profundity.

Greg, it's only one of my doodles.

Well I want it. Can I keep it? I'm going to frame it. Can you sign it? No that will break it up, undermine its raw integrity, and make it a commodity. Which it isn't, you're not famous, you have no qualifications or exhibition history, you're unrepresented, you're a hooker, a cunt for sale.

Anyway, how long will this last?

The trip?

No, the pen and lipstick, on the napkin, it's not archival.

I don't know ... you're the expert.

Why the sad face, don't be a bitch. Are you coming down already? You have a smaller body mass, but maybe you have a tolerance? Do you have a tolerance bitch?

Have you a tolerance ... for me ... already?

Gloria?

No.

Draw another picture then and drink your fuckin' coffee.

Give me that napkin.

The Cook

The Galley was a narrow room squeezed within the bowels of Prometheus. Cook diced the leeks and cut roughly the carrots. A Canary swung and sung and the Cook kept chopping, wiping sweat off his long sharp forehead. He pulled the skin off the limp hare, its eyes wide to the insult. With the pot boiling and whale oil smeared on the skillet he dropped whole cloves of garlic and sautéed just as the Captain likes them. The acrid smell holistically massaged his inner nostrils. Cook took a raw clove and ate it in full knowledge of its medicinal properties.

He was his happiest immersed within his culinary industry and whistled under his breath. Methodical and exacting he handled the assortment of knives with a familiar dexterity; as though somehow they were razor extensions of his long hands. His hands, like the hands of his father. His Father, who, near all his short life went underground, hauling the black lumps; the fuel for insatiable industry.

In winter, towards the end, expelling soot and blood he died like his neighbours had previous, in rows, buried beneath the grey fields of an unforgiving valley.

How long you been observing in the shadows, boy?

Not long, sir.

Step forward let me see you proper.

You are the new cabin boy?

Yes sir, Captain wants ale.

He can wait.

Do you desire a ship's biscuit? They'll still be warm.

Thank you, sir.

Call me Cook. You an orphan then?

Yes Cook.

Aye, the will of God is at times hard to fathom.

Have another as I seek the ale for 'is highness.

Dinner Time

Greg cried when his daughter was born. It was as though with new life, another focus, other possibilities of expression was embodied with her birth. He knew Annamarie's desperation for a child was a combination of her body clock and the knowledge their marriage needed more. It wasn't going to succeed if they continued the way they were going. No amount of corporate success and material possessions would fill the emptiness both of them felt.

It didn't happen easy. Hope was three years in the making and they were on the brink of fertility treatments. At one stage they even looked into adopting. At times he felt like a sperm bank on demand, during the peak times of her cycle, a relatively small window for which to deliver his seed. His natural allocations were on

average ten percent down in numbers and were slow swimmers but in the end there was success.

Greg looked down at the bassinette and further back at the upright Victorian porcelain doll he inherited a while back, her eyes blue and open. He felt Annamarie's breast on his shoulder. Annamarie had lost some weight, but looked tired as she had started work again at the law firm and Hope was still not sleeping through.

We did good, look at her fingers, how can they be so small?

Yes I have to trim her nails again, she scratches when I feed her.

Worth it though.

Greg strokes Hope's eyebrow lightly and with Annamarie they tiptoe out of the room.

Have you taken your pills today?

Please don't go on about them.

Greg felt a swelling rise of tension and residue of anxiety and thumps the grind into the metal cup of the coffee machine.

Flat white?

No, you know I still don't drink coffee.

Look I will line them up and you can video me taking them on my phone ... here.

The phone hung between them as a communication barrier. Annamarie declines and slumps into the dining table chair.

Sorry. I get paranoid about my liver.

Annamarie softens visibly and flicks back her hair.

Their eyes meet as Greg places the pills in a wonky row on the granite kitchen top. He smiles and thinks of Annamarie as a slight bird, sitting in human scale and breaking into bird language. He looks at the pills. Six of them with various functions, some of them to counteract the side effects of the more aggressive and physically intrusive pills. He likes taking the electric blue one as he knows this drug assists with his cognitive decision making processes. (A *descrambler*, if there is such a word.) This is important, to help him at the Agency and with simple things like going to the supermarket. He can decide what items to buy from so many possibilities and potential combinations. Greg decides that in the present time the pills are easy to take. Annamarie is right to make sure. He pops one into his mouth and slugs it back with a mouthful of milk from the carton.

Greg, you are such a teenager, get a glass.

Annamarie gets a tumbler for Greg and slaps his shoulder.

Greg studies Annamarie.

If you were a bird, what would you be?

Um, I don't know, what I would be or what I would like to be?

What you would want to be.

A tui.

Annamarie twirls and comically flaps her wings.

What bird do you think I am?

Greg studies Annamarie. She sways with hands on hips her long fingers splayed on her jeans. He watches her nipples harden.

I think you would be a slim delicate wader. You know, the ones we saw up North, with red beaks and sleek feathered behinds.

With the last of his pills a lump in his lower throat, Greg is quickly close and playfully whacks Annamarie on her rear. He smells her fresh breath and marvels over the depth of her blue eyes. He nibbles her ear.

The air changes between them and Annamarie demands attention and it is different now as she unzips him, and he pulls up her T-shirt. Greg knows he doesn't have to worry about erectile dysfunction at the crucial given time, the window of opportunity for parenthood when everything is in sync and ready to roll. Greg just wants to be inside her and Annamarie wants Greg inside her, right there on the kitchen table.

Later Greg cooks a meal of French onion soup and a big leafy salad, with large parmesan flakes on top. Annamarie sips a rare glass of Chardonnay. They drink and listen out for signs of a waking baby. Wax eyes jump between the flowered harakeke outside; the evening sun low and honeyed.

The Colony

As the *Prometheus* sunned itself in a remote bay, Flynt was above deck, his freckled knees prominent in the harsh light. M joined Flynt wanting to talk.

I used to live in the mountains. I was told the sea was red and you could float easily on it; like a piece of cork.

Can you float here?

No .

I can. I will show you.

Don't, there might be some sea creature that will lure you to the bottom and eat you.

I have a knife.

More fool you.

Please don't go in. The crew are watching. We might sail away.

I don't care.

The drifting anchor set the *Prometheus*, low with defecating cargo, closer to the deep hollow. Cacti, housing small birds with orange beaks randomly dotted the steep incline. The heat baked dry the periphery of the cavernous shade as peculiar eerie sounds whistled around the aquatic amphitheatre. Migratory birds cocked their heads and took flight as the nausea of the ship merged with the stink of the colony.

Look, there are creatures in that cave.

Flynt looked to the shore.

Where? Do they have black skin?

There was a sudden commotion on deck and between the rocks several slipped into the depths and the sailors brushed past and lowered a longboat. Men packed in with clubs and iron and oars and eventually waded into the gloom, with arms swinging and cursing.

We may see cork being formed almost any time when out of doors. Wounds are as dangerous to plants as they are to animals, and when a caterpillar in feeding injures a leaf, it exposes the internal plant tissues to bacterial and fungal attacks.

Almost immediately the antiseptic is applied. From a tissue within the plant, called callus, new cells are formed to close the wounded parts. These cells quickly become brown, and assume the nature of true cork. In a like manner we see young green stems, and buds, change to a brown colour, a layer of cork tissues being formed outside to retain the moisture within.

From The Wonder book of Tell Me Why? (Page 73)

Bedtime

Annamarie's parents immigrated from the other side of the world two decades ago and invested wisely in real estate. They've been comfortable ever since and could afford for her to go to private girls' school and the overseas trips and horses and tennis lessons flowed easily. Annamarie met Greg in the middle of a harbour. The legal firm she worked for rented out the ex ferry with limp festoon lights to herald the excesses of the age and signal a monotonous Xmas cheer. The decks were awash with champagne, underfoot capers and cream cheese. Dismembered slithers of salmon competed with stubbed slim line cigars, a few still smoking.

She remembers he was singing the M.C. Hammer tune, incessantly, between gulps. She asked for him to stop, that she didn't like the tune or the singer's baggy pants. He replied that he didn't care for her dress sense and even less about her disinclination towards certain musical genres. They both laughed over his various attempts at delivering his verbal counterpunch. The stuttering and failed reformation of the word 'disinclination' broke the ice.

Motley shags perched on rocks nearby observed the revellers. Salt spray crystallised within the gelled periphery of their expensive hairstyles. Annamarie and Greg shook hands and embarked on one of the longest one night stands in history. Those were the days.

Hope is waving her arms and trying to focus on the high recessed light in the bedroom. Annamarie spies her baby's profile in relation to Greg's. He is on his back and is snoring. He always does when he is on his back. Some things don't change, he snored the first night after their intense drunken marathon.

The smell of baby milk and baby fills her senses and brings her forward to the problem of Greg who struggles with an inherited chemical imbalance. She knows Greg thinks he can always push the limits, to go with nature, to go with what is given to him, without medical interference.

Annamarie butterfly kisses her baby's cheek. She stares at the archaic clock inherited from Greg's grandmother. It sits stoically on an ultra modern beside plinth. She remembers Greg said in all seriousness that this dull clock actually made time pass slower. There is more time and space between the tick and the tock. He asserts his grandmother's timepiece is slower. She really was in fact eighty years old and not the seventy two years of age the conventional apparatus informed them at the time of her death. Greg rambles about time when he gets high. Annamarie thinks the clock is symbolic of his imbalance. She wishes the clock to be in the garage storage area, bubble wrapped away with other objects of discordant histories to their current environment they live in.

Annamarie looks over to Greg and pushes his leg firmly a couple of times. This is her well worn message for him to roll over on to his snore free side which he does. She slides closer to Hope. The three of them are cushioned together in various states of awareness. Annamarie closes her eyes and whispers in darkness.

We will break the cycle together little one.

Memory Speak

Flynt was sure his recollection was accurate, being sound and true, even though in deep distress as a consequence of the recent death of his mother. He was upright in his church cloth with a rough shirt too small pinching his neck and shoes freshly cleaned as best as he could manage, but he could not disguise the poor holes in the sides, a thick woollen sock protruding out just a wee bit.

Ma was placed in the box, the blood specks he saw previous in her death rattle all wiped clean from her face. A face with foreign colour to the warm living; bereft of any pulse. Then Da who pays the man, bent over and dour, before the wagon is creaking up the hill with a clutch of village folk.

He remembers the sweet yellow flower of the gorse and the unseasonal icy wind from the north blowing off his Da's cap which makes plain his face as he stood mute listening to the minister. Clearly in memory, his Da folds and unfolds his hands in front of his sheer body and looks to the sky in a silent appeal for his wife's miraculous resurrection.

And later, after the silent men slapped the earth over her, laid stiff within the basic receptacle, Da paid the crooked figure, in fine city wear, a sum of money.

A thick gravel voice descends to the small boy.

Be a good boy.

I will come back to get you.

When I have made up a means to live.

Inchworm (Greg's dream)

Greg is in the field of his youth. He gets close to the grass and smells it where it lay. The blades tickle the underside of his nostril and cheek and he compresses them to the dry sepia earth. The flattened boy hides from his family as he covers his head. He is sure not a soul can see him.

A shadow passes over and the cloud is in human form. It has a thunder voice and rough hands grip the smooth Hickory shaft. A shiny sheet of metal falls down from the sky. Greg dares not look at the consequence of such intense pain. No glance above ground at the ribbed earth worm, one part severed and writhing. Nor did he venture a peek down the tunnel at the other half retreating, the sun's energy still housed within.

The owl is described as "a large-headed, small-faced, hook-beaked, large-eyed, soft-plumaged, nocturnal bird of prey." We might add to this that it is a bird whose cry we hear at night-time from some church-tower or barn or trees. But the most important thing to remember is the food upon which the bird lives. To get that food it needs its hooked beak and its large eyes in front, which can look down in the

dark and see things we should miss. The owl feeds entirely on living creatures such as rats and mice and birds and snails; and to find them it goes out at night.

But imagine this big bird with wings which made a loud flapping noise. All the rats and mice, and even the snails, would get a warning that it was coming, and would hide or escape. The owl is able, however, to move silently because its feathers are soft and light, and so constructed that the air cannot “whistle” through them as in other birds.

From The Wonder Book of Tell Me Why? (Page 22)

Next door for Sugar

Her world has shrunk to the cup of herbal tea in front of her. There doesn't seem much of a future. Not even the future foretold; no tea leaves in the gold rimmed teacup her mum gave her as part of a set when she left home.

She feels like a squeezed tea bag thrown in the waste master. Annamarie cancelled the home help, for privacy. The thought of concealing, and pretending, hiding in her house, was unbearable. Shortly after Greg's meltdown she went to the garage and retrieved the box with the china set. She supposes as a form of comfort, just one little gesture among many coping mechanisms. A family link sipping from the dead mother's cup as though she was there with her, prattling away and giving firm advice. Drinking tea and playing mah-jong a wet miserable night outside and the digital TV on mute. She thinks there is just too much going on.

Greg!

What are doing here?

Just thought I could borrow some sugar.

What a state you are in.

How's your arse hole?

Greg please, don't start.

Don't start what?

Please sit down, would you like a cup of tea?

No.

Please sit down.

No

Greg, you will have to try and be civil. Everyone is looking for you.

Like the police?

One of the neighbours rang.

Who? I wasn't thinking, I mean I was thinking somewhere else.

Please sit down.

What about a kiss?

No Greg, have you looked in the mirror?

All the time.

You have the same clothes on. It's been three days.

Is that cunt friend of yours here?

Get out!

Sorry.

Got any sugar?

What? No. Where are you going?

I'm going to cuddle my daughter, maybe take Hope for a walk.

Like hell you are.

I am right now. Look, I am walking one step closer.

Hooooope! It's Daddeeee!

Be quiet you will wake her up.

Hooooope!

Conversation Pit

The sunken in lounge area of Greg and Annamarie's house is a streamlined homage to the Seventies architectural philosophy as a conversation and recreation

pit. To groove away, talk sexual freedom and Jungian philosophy. Or sip on mulled wine and drown unsuspecting culinary morsels in hot cheese or chocolate. That was then, this is now, and the room was not as spongy and decorative, though the cushions had retro op art designs on them. Trudy and Annamarie sunk into the hard but soft surroundings.

Well where is he now?

I don't know, he didn't go near Hope's bedroom. Just ranted over the clock. I had put it in storage in the garage.

You have to get a restraining order, Annamarie. He might be dangerous.

I rang the hospital. They will co-ordinate with the Police so as to get him back there and stabilised.

So the clock and him disappeared into the rain?

Trudy started to laugh.

He's a nutbar. Sorry, I just have this image in my head.

Annamarie joins in and laughs. She has known Trudy since riding school when they were nine years old. Trudy hardly saw her rich parents and filled the void with equestrian pursuits and later with intense sexual experimentation with both sexes. She was a passionate and loyal friend. Annamarie remembered dressing up one time as boys with fake pencilled facial hair. Trudy with her strong nose, thick beard and pear shape was on top of her. Her hot breath smelt of corn chips and guacamole. She disgusts Annamarie with a tongue kiss which smudged her

moustache and a vigorous hump of her leg. (Nothing serious as they were only thirteen at the time.)

I sure picked a right one. I just hope Greg doesn't self harm.

That afternoon before his outdoor wash he was acting bizarre, wanting to handcuff me.

Really? And do what?

A sex fantasy.

Oh my god, really?

He waved the cuffs around, still in its packet, and mumbled on about forcing me to experiment with the other hole.

Really, oh my god, what, anal sex?

I suppose for him it was a last resort. He couldn't even get hard.

Really? God, so he didn't ... you know.

No, I took a shower and next minute he's doing the same, but outside in front of the neighbourhood.

Oh God, you poor thing.

Trudy put down her glass of wine precariously on the shaggy rug and held her. Annamarie felt safe with her friend, she likes how strong her nose is and how Trudy makes her laugh at the most desperate of times. Annamarie thought Trudy's hands

were quite masculine and she had a momentary vision of her friend brushing down her Palomino, the mare which got hit by a car twenty years previous. She remembers how with each loving Trudy-stroke on the animal's hind legs the flanks twitched appreciatively in the sunlight.

“Sunlight” consists of a number of different rays, and not simply of the white light by which we see. The rays which cause sunburn are the ultra-violet, which are much shorter than white light rays. Because they are shorter, they penetrate the skin surface and act on the cells beneath. The beneficial health results of mild sunburn are due to a chemical action which is caused by these rays with a substance called ergosterol, releasing vitamin D, so important in bone formation. The actual change in colour is caused by the formation of melanin, or brown pigment, in the skin, which serves to a certain extent as a protection against an overdose.

The Wonder Book of Tell Me Why (page 99)

The Rendezvous

Beyond the breakers could be discerned a long sandy beach and interrupted by a sudden channel of muddied brown water flowing out to the ocean with silt and palm and other distrustful matter from the dark recesses of the dense jungle.

Now the sun has gone beyond the central point of the vast curvature of the sky. His neck in sunburnt folds of flesh, the Captain could see the hole the distant

inferno creates in the white-hot metal of the sky. With spots swimming in his liquid eyes he casts back to the rendezvous point.

Look, boy, they gather in chained links.

Flynt saw tall black men and women shuffling along the beach in groups of two score. Men with long tails struck at their flesh, horses reared and the shouts and cries of these carry on the off shore breeze to his ears.

The Captain ordered the anchor dropped and the long boats lowered. But then a melee ensues on the beach with a tangle of bodies. Running slaves flee under the fiery sun and some still connected to their own kind and some free with broken chain try to gain cover within the writhing vines and river mangrove. The sharp wrap of musket fire dislodges a thicket of hanging bats to flutter in the other direction of dying men. Trying to rip away the forged links, some grabbing a stick or rock to defend against the might of horse and master and mastiff canines let loose.

What a show, are you sickened, boy?

I feel sorry for the stick men, sir.

Ah boy, there is no room for notions of morality in the face of extinction.

Will you help them, sir?

No, there is nothing to do but witness the carnival.

The Captain continued standing in his spot and occasionally pivoting, scanning a long eyepiece focussing on the partial destruction of his human cargo.

He watches till the sun is low and behind his back and till when there is minimal movement on shore. The crew also bear silent witness; no man wants to set foot on the death onshore preferring the slaughter to be total.

In his final circular vision, the Captain slightly shakes in response to his private magnified detail of a single slave trapped in the roots of a mangrove tree, on a bed of his personal offal, writhing in his final detested habit.

Crackle and Pop

Greg takes a deep breath; he is in a foreign boardroom with expensive and garish taste. Seagulls don't even fly this high.

So in summary we at *The Agency* will carry your image, your product, your vision into the next millennium. We will do it with what we term at *The Agency* as Crackle and POP. The Crackle is the creative and facilitatory skill of *The Agency*. The POP being the Poetry, Opportunity and Pragmatism we will bring to your set of Corporate and Marketing challenges within a world of change.

We at *The Agency* thank you for your time.

Greg felt a trickle of sweat sliding down his forearm. He made a point of looking each potential client in the eye with the most projected empathy he could muster. The account was worth four point two million per annum, *The Agency* in a three way secret pitch to the disgruntled Corporation who is about to sack their

current Advertising Agency. Greg thinks he has two executives on board. They stand and smile and lumber towards him.

Well Greg, food for thought.

Thanks to you and your team at *The Agency*.

Ms Fish-gill is looking down at an errant red hair on her suit jacket sleeve and remains seated. Greg knows she has a problem with him, something he said to her at the Orange Awards for creative excellence. Fuck, that was ten years ago. She has certainly climbed up the ladder since then.

I like the art on the walls.

Greg, I'm relieved; we totally redecorated to coincide with your visit.

They look a bit dusty, too well established, are you sure?

Yes.

Greg feels a little high from the presentation. He makes sure his body language is non-confrontational and steps sideways so he is at an angle to her. He thinks it would be a choice idea to stroke her long black eyebrows and push his tongue in her sweat resistant lips, all red and super glossed. But this fantasy is brief and dissipates with the hostile effect of her Barracuda gaze.

Celebratory Sushi

Howie is a cowboy. He worked his way up to the top of *The Agency* with the violence of a freshly branded bull. The main man who can sell his idea as the best around to anyone, anywhere. If it was someone else's idea from down the food chain, he snatched it and moulded it as his own.

Howie downs sake and booms out his single minded propositions, mostly to do with what he considered was his vast experience of Japanese culture, what they could do better, what little they do well, what he could do with a major brewery marketing contract; how to improve on the Sake bottle design in front of him.

Imagine kissing Geisha necks.

Um , okay Howie.

Ha, ha, no I mean why all that makeup?

Greg wishes Howie dead. Howie has made Greg's life difficult since he bulldozed his way to the top. He pictures Howie hitting a tree while driving his Porsche, his pink face smeared within the fabric of the bark, even a limb or two thrown into the next paddock by the force. Greg sighs and looks directly at Howie.

The neck make-up is an aesthetic, sensual application, ritualised and refined over centuries.

Howie shovels a wide slab of sushi into his mouth.

You can shove that art-speak up your arse, boy.

Greg feels Howie's rice wine breath on his face and he looks away at the bored waiting staff. They want to close for night. He wants to vomit.

It's because they have small cocks. Greg.

Sorry, I don't get the connection.

Howie jabs his finger downwards on the table.

The problem with you, Greg, is you don't connect. It was lucky for *The Agency* I was available to mop up after your presentation.

The big man droned and drank. He plied Greg with the warm liquid in small ceramic cups. Meanwhile, Greg mapped out the interior of the mangled Porsche. All that remained was Howie's belly squeezed into the various crevices of the air-conditioning and reconstituted gear stick.

Greg is mute. He stares fixedly at Howie's bulging belly; the shirt buttons strain to pull his mass in. A few black hairs emerge triumphant and wave at Greg. He can no longer look at his boss and instead revisits the one hundred and twenty mile per hour impact. Before they leave, Howie accidentally spills sake on Greg's sashimi. In the ambient restaurant light, they flounder, like a pod of freshly beached whale, pickled and shiny.

The whale looks like a big fish; it moves in the water like a fish; it has a big head and no distinct neck, just like a fish. But it is a mammal, a warm blooded animal; it has a heart in four parts and it breathes with lungs. The mother whale produces her young

alive and feeds them herself; indeed, she is a most affectionate mother. The majority of whales are harmless and even timid creatures. It seems certain that they have become so much more like fishes because they wanted to move through the water; the shape of the fish is the best suited to this movement. But whales are not now, and never were, fishes.

From The Wonder Book of Tell Me Why? (Page 37)

The Sea

The vessel was idle. It was bobbing off to sleep, barely alive. The crew were automatons, moving in listless gestures. They barely communicated between each other and even the petty disagreements were over before they began. It was akin to the experience of a half sleep. Increasingly the crew over the past two days had been more superstitious and edgy as it was known that ships just disappear in such conditions, without explanation.

M had taught Flynt the art of the knuckle bone game but even this recreation waned. The five knuckles, motionless and long devoid of activity, rested between them on the shaded side of the deck. They missed children's fingers throwing them, scraping them, catching them, massaging them.

Do you remember your Mother?

Yes.

What's your favourite memory of her?

She had this necklace on and it was made up of different coloured glass. She had a big smile which showed all her teeth to me and those she loved. It used to sway and whirl and catch light when she danced to music.

As if on cue the crew gathered from their collective lethargy and sat near with an accordion and commenced a slow mournful shanty which spoke of love and loss, the great lengths of time sacrificed at sea.

The ocean was still flat, with not a breath of air but the revived *Prometheus*, had a defiant pulse in amongst the glaring stillness. Flynt joined in and M started a slow rhythmic dance which reminded the crew that she was not a boy but a girl with a flat chest. Even Preacher came out of his shell and tried a jig of his own only to be pulled down as the youthful vitality of M's dance was being intruded upon.

Suddenly Captain lumbered up deck and shouted a jumbled verse. His voice silky and condescending reached every pore and crevice of the ship. It slunk over the sides of the vessel and created a film of projected ego on the ocean. His baritone thickened the sea air. The crew, on their rare period of animation and relative gaiety, were stifled into silence, the music last to peter out. Staring at every member in accusatory fashion his huge frame cast a shadow on the souls of the crew.

Cease now your recreation for I see wings under your jackets!

Art Gallery Visit

Hey, Sarge, is Hope all right in the back?

No, she should be strapped in.

It's only a short distance.

It is dangerous and against the law, that's what it is. I should run you in. Cuff you. Book you. Throw you in the slammer. Put the kid into State care. Throw the book at you.

Don't be like that, look, if you lay her flat she sleeps. As soon as I sit her up she will be awake and more likely to be upset.

Stop the car.

But we are almost there.

You have gone too far.

But what about the gallery visit?

Art is indulgent. I said stop the car.

Greg screeched to a halt. The bridge gently arched over a spaghetti network of motorways. Sarge slams the Charger door. Wind lifts his wispy hair sideways. Greg views him to be a picture of irrationality.

But Sarge, the gallery is air-conditioned.

Sarge gets close to Greg through his open car window. Hot humid air gusts into the interior.

I'm turning a blind eye to your stupidity, just this once. Get an official baby restraint for your car, you have twenty four hours.

Greg watches Sarge stride away. Sometimes Sarge perplexes Greg, but he knows not to push the big man into doing something he doesn't want to.

It takes forever to find a park near the Art Gallery. Greg does circuits around an inner city block. He is determined for the trip to be a happy one for Hope so he controls his anger and doesn't shout or even once emit an expletive.

Hope's face is impassive and her complexion has not changed during the trip. Her Victorian bonnet prettily frames her fine features, perfect in every way. Greg is relieved and cradles her in the foyer of the Gallery. Security staff and Gallery attendants loiter and huddle. They are a jovial lot today and measured laughter and open faces greet the visitors to the institution. Two young assistants seem very interested in Hope and ask her name.

Greg is slightly peeved as half the gallery is closed due to refurbishment and there is only the gallery's permanent collection on display. He reminds himself the trip is for Hope and just an overview of the art on offer will be plenty for one her age. He peers into her eyes. They are different, bluer than her new borne light grey. To Greg the pace of Hope's development is a source of continual joy. In no time she will be walking and talking. Greg believes in the power of art and views this visit as an essential step to the growth and nurturing of her cognitive and creative development. This was no different to his habit of playing Classical music to her when she was still in her mum's belly.

Greg held Hope up to various pictures and talks about them to her. She is being wonderful and well behaved and at times mesmerised by some paintings. His theory is she responds to simple primary colours and paired down strong compositions.

This is a painting by Reni. Look at the man. He is sad and in pain. Arrows stick out of his body. They are shot by people who are afraid, people who do not believe in the same things as he does. The man will be in pain for a long while and then he believes he will go up to a place called Heaven. Look at his skin, Hope. It is like yours, so smooth, so white, like porcelain.

Excuse me sir, please refrain from touching the painting.

Greg immediately steps back to a red line on the floor. The gallery assistant was nice enough. She was just doing her duty. He did not turn; he did not want to create a scene. Her voice recedes into the background as Greg quickly moves into another long wide exhibition space. He wants to put Hope on his shoulders, so she has more of a vista, to accentuate her experience of the grand tour. Greg knows this will come later. At this moment she is too small, too floppy as a baby for the ride to be possible. Instead he holds her in front of him with her back against his stomach, his hands acting as a support for her weight.

Let's go for a walk. This is a big painting. The artist designed it so you and I can walk in the landscape. It is a short walk in relation to the pictorial distance we will cover but very rewarding as he tells us poems along the way.

Look at how the landscape mutates and changes its mood and scope.

Tui

Tui

Tui

Do you hear the bird call?

Greg sits down half way, opposite the painted words :

A land

With too few

Lovers.

He thinks the leather gallery seat should be wooden and basic. That would be a nice touch, like the benches you find alongside Regional Park tracks. The journey has exhausted Hope. She is asleep, her long eyelashes perfect and regular. Greg is happy, this is a sign she has taken a lot in. He lifts her intricate petticoat and smells her bottom region as he is anxious she will need changing. Annamarie screamed at him when he visited and in the rush and confusion he forgot to grab her nappy stuff bag for their day trip.

Speaking generally, birds are made to fly. It used to be thought that this power came from the fact that their bones are hollow and can be filled with air, or because they have little sacs filled with air all over the body. But today it is no longer thought that

these sacs and air-filled bones make the bird able to fly. It is better to look at the way in which a bird is shaped. It looks like a boat with the breast bone for a keel; and if we think of the air as in some way like the water, we shall see how this keel helps the bird. Air, of course, has much less resistance in it than water; but the bird in the air and the fish in the water have much in common. With its wings the bird propels itself through the air, and just as a boat has a rudder by means of which it is steered, so the bird uses the feathers of its tail to steer its course. It has been said that in proportion to its size, the wings of a bird are approximately two hundred and forty times more powerful than the arms of a man.

From The Book of Tell Me Why? (Page 67)

The Lunch Break

The Art Gallery cafe is cleverly situated in the central part of the large building. It is set aside and does not intrude on the sanctified flow of visitors who forage through cultural artefact and signifier in twenty second bites. Greg manoeuvres through the thick glass doors careful not to bump his child awake.

He orders a bran muffin, a milkshake and a long black. There is a semi-covered balcony framed by evergreen trees. Dappled light form an abstract pattern over the carefully placed cafe tables and chairs. Near his chosen table and still with his plastic order number, Greg looks down and over the thick plastered balcony wall. At ground level a waterfall playfully bubbles around a robust, confident sculpture of stacked boulders which form a high organic Romanesque arch. The apex of the two

boulder columns are half circle strips of alloy steel. Holes which perforate the tubes allow the water to run down the boulders.

Greg is inspired. He is captivated by the Sculptor's powerful gesture and the considered civic placement outside the public art gallery. Greg notices Hope is awake again. He slides his order number into the sleek metal stand. He then sits Hope on the ledge but only briefly as with a sudden back arch she flies from his grip. As a consequence, her arms and petticoat briefly flap in space before she hits the concrete pavers, two stories below.

The Ascent

Flynt jumps off the row boat and waves to the already retreating backs of the sailors. He looks at M already foraging further down the beach. Their task is to collect water and fruit and it is obvious to Flynt they have to traverse the hill of the bay.

Under the hot sun they were soon scaling the steep incline and half way they looked down at the ship and their task seemed easy having all day before they had to return to the beach for collection. Flynt, his breath laboured, struggled to keep up with M's nimble upward negotiation. She was already nearly at the top, a stony sun kissed horizon defined by a cloudless sky.

M wait for me.

I will once on top.

Flynt was splayed for safety on a smooth slab of angled rock.

I am scared of slipping down.

No you are not. You just don't want me to be the first to see what is over this hill.

Flynt having pressed so closely to the stone imagined himself moulded to the larger shape. He visualised him there forever and not fearful and without movement; a crustaceous imp impervious to the harsh elements.

Flynt what are you doing?

M smiled at the boy spread eagled on the angled plateau and was reminded of the starfish you find on shorelines.

Are you frozen in fear?

Flynt was oblivious to her calls for he had closed off his last link to the outside world apart from the intense physical sensation of morphing into the rock itself and becoming one with it and even the gourd taking on the consistency of hard rock until it was one seamless lump. In this state Flynt was part of a larger more assured company of friends and family and wished that in time his friend who wasn't yet a rock would come down to him and lay next to him and wait till she too was solid. Hard and true they would lay and be further smoothed and bathed in the heat and wind and rain and not be concerned with the days or with time itself and certainly not to be worried or apprehensive over their comparative height from the shore and especially not concerned with a trite errand of water and fruit. But he felt a shake

and his imaginative construct fell to pieces as wordless M pulled him up to his uncertain feet and led up to the ridge like a mute donkey.

They were consumed by a fresh horizon. The expanse similar to the sea but grainy and faun coloured. The desert presented itself laid out in wavy undulations. And immediately M and Flynt sensed the primordial parallels between land and sea but couldn't put it into words. They stood on the edge of the dry sea and the wind whistled to them but no sound came from the lowland and the ship at their backs. Flynt realised he was holding her hand and suddenly self conscious. He scanned the stretch of land like some intrepid explorer. His hand now shaded his eyes and he had one foot on a bronzed boulder as if in monumental pose.

Amateur Forensics - Preliminary Notes of a Mad-man

The Head

Primary Observation 1

The head is detached completely from the torso. The head has evidence of physical trauma consistent with either :

1. Being hit with a blunt object with significant force
2. Direct impact of the head against concrete from a fall of a height of 8-12 meters or more.

Primary Observation 2

The neck has been severed cleanly and approximately 20% of total neck mass remains with the head. There are 5 probable theories to explain the location of the head in relation to the body.

1. The head rolls away from the torso at point of impact.
2. The head is propelled in the air from point of impact and lands in final resting position.
3. The head is severed by mechanical means and dropped or thrown away from torso to final resting position.
4. The head is torn from the body with great physical strength consistent with a large bear and dropped or thrown away from the torso to final resting position.
5. The head remains with the torso immediately after the trauma and relocated to final resting position by person(s) or animal unknown at a later time. (2 hour window.)

The Torso

Primary Observation 1 (expressionistic)

1. The torso has lost its head. It's been hit bloody hard and repeatedly by someone who doesn't like it.
2. It has fallen from a great height and it's neck got broke to the point of no repair because it broke off completely and it is lucky a dog didn't make away with it, the head I mean and it's lucky someone didn't fuck with the body lying there with the

dress all frilly and aged and crocheted and stitched and hitched up like it is. Greg's grandmother would roll over in her grave, her porcelain doll being messed up like that and its body all broken and twisted.

Out of her eye hole a coil that once existed behind the painted glass ball, to control weather the doll would be asleep or awake, or be awake always and sleep no more.

The Silver Star

Greg held the tickets in his hand briefly then transfers them to his wallet. Down the platform, the diesel smeared, soot laden tracks run away and parallel to the concrete and eventually swallow up the gloom of the tunnel. A rush of wind signals the passage of another train. Heads and torsos swish past. He thinks twice and decides it is prudent to give the tickets to Blaze when she gets back.

Have you any idea what the time is?

He sits down on a bench, his right leg shaking on its own accord. An old woman with a supermarket trolley is seated at the other end. She has an earthy trampy smell of damp rotting clothes and unwashed crevice. Greg opens his wallet. He is sweating and his hands shake. It has taken a great deal of energy to get to this station, this train. To leave this city.

Here's ten dollars if you vacate this seat.

A withered hand takes the money but the trolley lady does not budge.

Leave please.

Devoid of teeth she smiles and points to the security camera.

The Silver Star pulls in and a drone announces the arrival of the antiquated long distance train. The Diesel locomotive is orange with a black stripe down the side. Placed within tactical proximity of the decorative stripe is an outdated corporate logo. The letters have a clumsy slant on them as if the wind had moulded them into a more streamlined position. Greg makes a mental note to mention to the account executives at work to investigate who has the Transport Companies account as *The Agency* could well be profitably involved in the overhaul of their branding.

Greg is reminded of some of the train trips he has had. A memorable one was in a vast dry continent with a never ending mat of Gum trees and red earth. He, conjoined under a hippie poncho. Clickity-clack to Summer with bad teeth, strumming her guitar. Undercover, Greg plays sticky finger.

Through the silver loudspeaker the drone drones in working class vernacular. The train will leave in ten minutes. Greg looks at the red digital time as though it is a countdown to a bomb, in a thriller movie. He really needs to take a pill. His mouth dribbles and his hands are damp.

He finally transfers the tickets from his wallet to his trouser pocket. This way he will remember to give the tickets to Blaze, so there would be less likelihood of losing them.

People crowd into the carriages. They are young and old, skinny and fat, all these people from the middle of the road and of middle earth; in the middle of something. They were getting all the good seats, and placing their luggage in overhead nets with chrome framework.

Which part of the train is better in a crash to be in? Greg tracks back to the most recent examples of mishap, a sudden, cataclysmic ceasing of motion; accidents that filter through into the national news from across the globe. Like the recent news posting of four middle carriages twisted and torn and hurled from an iron bridge into a swollen river, the roof top inhabitants the first to drown. Oxen look on from a privileged viewpoint. Greg remembers the grainy satellite image; on four legs the animals seem totally oblivious, above the theatrical trauma of human scale disaster.

Greg recalls another miss-hap in the form of a tunnel collision due to driver error. Ignored the little coloured lights, he did. Had a bad hair day, made worse as he was emolliated in a fireball; the six front carriages (three on each train), cindered beyond recognition and similar to a lit match head crushed between two giant Gallic fingers.

A man wearing beige and yellow sits in between the trolley lady and Greg. He smells of Old Spice and peppermints. Greg has a sudden urge for something liquid sweet. The man has no such thing in his possession and somewhat arrogantly like a practiced commuter flicks open his newspaper and creates an instant informative shield. Greg is not Superman, he cannot see through the pages.

The drone drones, two minutes to departure. Greg decides to look for Blaze. Fuck, how long does it take to have a wee?

Greg runs and as a motivator, pictures Blaze's pussy all wet with piss. She is freshly shaved so the wetness is flattened out in the manner of a thin film of liquid with moderate sheen. As an alternative to this smooth pink vision Greg visualises her pussy all bushy. Her piss is encapsulated in the form of drops and pooled shallow puddles, caught in a matrix of thick pubic hair. Greg needs to form this alternate image as its clean shaven opposite and momentarily dwells on the juxtaposed merits of the two. He could not decide which he found more exciting.

He rushes into the women's toilet and shouts and bangs on the doors. There is one squeal of indignation.

This is a women's toilet.

Is that you Blaze?

Greg's mouth is close to the thin cubicle door of the squealer. There is tagging on the face of it. He wonders if there are peep holes. The voice sounds similar to Blaze's and she could be coming down with a cold, or throat infection.

Is that you, are you all right?

No, I'm calling the police.

I am looking for Blaze.

Greg bangs on the door in frustration and leaves and almost trips over a pram being pushed by a skinny thing. He thinks this skinny-thing-body would find it impossible to house the practical physiology and stamina of a normal mum. Greg does not ask if she is the baby's mum. He has no time to investigate. He has no more time on his hands. It's time to go. Time is not on his side.

Blaze emerges from the Kiosk and calls to Greg as he barrels out of the woman's toilet and a security guard is talking into his walky-talky. Greg grabs her arm and gives her a wet kiss on the mouth.

Hurry, the train.

Blaze giggles and pulls.

Don't panic, I got some yummy stuff for the trip.

The big man in a grey uniform with two crossed strong arms on a patch punched forward on his barrel chest moves towards them. The drone announces the imminent departure of the Silver Star and Greg and Blaze are still two hundred meters away. The security guard now has a mate and the pigeons scatter as they chase Greg and Blaze. The ticket person is looking up and down the long platform.

Blaze laughs and Greg hears a baby cry and a distant train gets closer. There are no more drone calls for the Silver Star and he could hear the conversation between one of the guards and his mode of communication and he senses it may have something to do with his visit to the women's toilet, or his exterior drug addled demeanour, or maybe his recent escape from institutional care.

The diesel engine roars into action and pulls the accumulated weight of a score of carriages along shiny worn silver lengths of steel pointing in two straight lines into the gloom, confirming a set framework for which the train and its passengers to speed along. Greg thinks fate willing it will get to the final destination without mishap and with the officially prescribed number of carriages as recommended by the Transport Company within their schedules and general operational guidelines. Greg's mind races and his legs pump and chug further down the platform.

Hey you!

He turns and the guards had made ground. Blaze is a rag doll and giggles. Greg thinks she must have taken more than a piss in the cubicle, and pictures her taking drugs in there, then leisurely making her way to the Kiosk in a psychedelic violet haze. Honey bees buzz and great shafts of warm light pour into the open transit space, the kiosk an island. Taking her time, his time, having the time of her life, ambling amongst the fuckin' magazine stands, trying on cheap sunglasses, perusing the sweetie stands and colourful packets of sweet and sour edibles. He can so see her there in one of those informal lines of consumers, impatient to get their tid-bits for the 5.01 or the 5.10, or to make bearable the protracted 5.35. And all the long while Blaze in front of the line, changing her mind, giving the guy with the turban the wrong credit card, opting for a hundred dollar note, receiving change, purchasing another handy condiment, the consumers getting impatient, one mumbling 'hurry up' under his bad breath. She chooses some quirky chocolate things and packets of Tingles and Sparkles and a slim travel packet of condoms,

possibly a lighter for the pipe and some *Rizzos*, a small travel packet of tissues. If history is anything to go by she told the kiosk guy don't worry about the magazine she had brought to the cluttered counter. It transpires she has read it, and sorry, they all look the same, she read it yesterday. She remembers the main headline story of a famous actress adopting her third child from Africa and how much they cost her to export from their birth country.

In mid stride Greg remembers the tickets and with one hand procures them from his pocket as the attendant on the platform gives a wave and a whistle which reverberates through the passage.

Hey Blaze, swap for something cool!

Blaze squeals and grabs the tickets from Greg as they run past the attendant overtaking the back carriages of the Silver Star.

Let's get on here.

No, it's safest in the fourth carriage.

Greg and Blaze eventually pull alongside the preferred carriage and she reaches in her shoulder bag and gives a chocolate fish to Greg who leaps onto the bottom step and opens the side door, its rubber seal well worn.

Come on! Grab my hand!

The open carriage door manually flaps against Greg's back. Greg's eyes are glistening and his teeth catch the light from the overhead platform lights. Blaze is

losing momentum her face no longer wears a laugh. Her shiny violet shoe slips off her right foot with a twist of her ankle.

Blaze!

Colourless Blaze falls and nearly slips under the thin space between platform and train and her bag spews out its contents. A glass bowled pipe is the first to hit the ground and shatters immediately in protest. The assorted confectionaries scatter as though to seek sanctuary from some higher authoritarian grasp.

Within this spontaneous quick sequence of events Greg notices the skin on Blaze's elbow is slightly chaffed and it commences to bleed black at the serrated extremity.

Ouch!

The train gains an assured momentum. He does not want to leave Blaze on the platform but now there is no platform for him to jump down on. Only chip metal, shades of grey and black.

The long noir shadow of the Security Guard looms. Sweat glistens on his contorted face, his jowls work overtime. From where Greg is positioned his eyes are two shrivelled raisins and they reduce in size with the passage of every second. They look down at Blaze on all fours trying to gather up her things.

A sudden blackness prevails as the train enters the tunnel. Greg turns a corner and in the gloom, he rocks with the forward motion and hangs onto the train. He feels a soft sticky sensation in his left hand which clutches the carriage exit rail.

Mmmm.

Chocolate fish.

The Oasis

From the ridge the children picked their way down to the volume of sand and made a sideways journey to the splash of green. As they were getting closer it was apparent the green had more detail and was dense and multicoloured and housed a thatch of tightly knitted trees and entwined within a mixture of exotic undergrowth with brown tentacles winding up trunks and along branches. Small rounded boulders sat there as if thrown by a god. All manner of vegetation was compacted within a relative small space. Flynt's over imagination told him this Oasis hid a variety of inhospitable creatures and nasty surprises. Human and feline forms lurk within the leafy recesses. With an up held hand he signalled a sudden stop and looked behind at M.

I saw something move in there. Maybe bandits or worse.

Don't be silly.

Bumping his shoulder on the way through M ran the short distance and with three or four playful skips, disappeared, without further word into it.

Flynt sat down, the remnants of the explorer clinging to him dejectedly. He noticed tiny flowers wedged in between the stones and wondered over their persistence. He considered them miraculous and stroked their little furry tongues. Suddenly he stood up and impulsively crushed the flowery pocket with his foot, feeling superior, like an armoured giant.

Following M into the Oasis he constructed a delicious scenario where M was lost and now alone and scared and cornered by bandits. They enslave her and give her little food. They get between her legs and move about and she has babies one after the other like a cat does. The babies are all different colours, but mostly pink and ugly. They constantly cry and have missing teeth and sharp nails and eventually M cries too.

The sun was now higher and all saturated with the heat and there was no breeze and no smell of the sea, but only heat waves with their constant fanning and distortion of space.

Flynt then went about investigating the coloured objects listlessly hanging waiting to be plucked from the various uprights springing upwards in hope of rain. He was far within his foraging when stepping back he heard the sound of a brittle crunching. Clamped on his foot, the skull now devoid of eye sockets, held on. With a little shout he attempted to shake loose the hollow vessel and frantically tries to kick off the devil sent slipper. In desperation Flynt reaches down at the points where there were once black ears and pulled and flung the object away against a wall of rock.

Greg saw it shattering in the manner of a distorted dream where timelines are fragmented and broken.

Composing himself Flynt looked back and studied the headless skeleton. M emerged and viewed from above. The connected bones lay asleep with undergrowth springing between its ribs. Now on her knees she grasped the forearm as if offering to help sit it upright and converse with. The whole structure collapsed upon itself and from the disorder M emerged with two silver bracelets and transferred them onto her upper arm. Placed in this way the rings shone, forged to fit on her and not the ancient desert traveller.

Stainless steel, as distinct from chromium-plated steel, is, like all steels, an alloy in which iron, carbon, nitrogen, cobalt, or some other metal is present. The “stainless” quality is due to the fact that the surface is protected by a thin “self-healing” film of oxygen. The film is so thin that it can be detected only by x-rays, probably fifty thousand times thinner than the paper of this page. The minute percentage of chromium in the iron is responsible for making the steel stainless. About eighteen per cent chromium and eight per cent nickel is found in most stainless steels, although the exact proportion varies according to the other qualities, such as the toughness or tensile strength which is required.

From the Wonder Book of Tell Me Why? (Page 80)

Ho-Hum

It is so quiet all she could hear are the various hums in the house. The refrigerator engine is a constant hum, despite its price tag. (She thinks it may be due to its multiple icemaker function; cubed or crushed.)

Crushed please.

The computer modem confidently hums also. Even with it being located a significant distance away from her in the kitchen, across the split level house, in the area he used to write or reconcile the household accounts. If she concentrates she can detect the regular thud of her heart beat. This is an aside as the sound is more of a beat but Annamarie thinks it as a hum, which ensures her continued good health and well being.

Corny as it sounds she is glad to be alive. Even if she is sad at the current state of affairs, with her husband's disappearance, her not coping with Hope, farming her out to her mother for a couple of days. She desperately worries about Greg. Flushes of anger consume her on occasion and it takes a great deal of energy to struggle through these intense emotional states. Work ironically helps. She is almost full-time at the Law Firm. She has increased her Yoga sessions and this helps to keep her body and mind in sync. It gives her a sense of real control.

The modem has switched gear and is much louder, the hum is in overdrive. Annamarie is certain that if she was to go over there and place her hand on the desk next to the computer she would feel the vibrations of such industrious internal activity.

So it's not totally silent she decides. In fact she hears a very slight distant noise of a rotating dryer which could be described as a HUM. This is embedded

downstairs within the utility area of the house. She remembers having an argument with the architect about the placement. She won. The hum which travels upwards to this main social area of the house from the dryer she would estimate as not being intrusive. Annamarie thinks she facilitated the correct placement of the Utility room within the house design.

She sips her wine and picks up a pen from the bench and clicks it. On and off. The point appears then disappears. In an instant it touches her arm then in an instant the tip recedes with the click and no longer has she the sharp sensation of the point. There is a thick blue dot on her tanned forearm. Annamarie attempts to wipe it off. It is now a smudge. Pen in hand she wants to write something and looks around.

Annamarie thinks she writes beautifully in an elegant script with well rounded, exuberant hoops and hooks. She likes her handwriting and thinks it is one the primary manifestations of her creative side. Frequently when penning comments on a report or recommendations of legal strategy she stops and privately gains pleasure in her flowing and clear words, often in direct opposition to the restrictive and formal content her handwriting relates to. Her friends and family have occasionally commented on her artful, aesthetically pleasing handwriting, especially in letters sent to them of a personal note.

She now writes a message next to the phone and fills the small bright yellow slightly off square pad. The sticky top end function on the underside of each leaf of paper pleases her. The sticky bit is *handy*. It is a good idea to have this additional function in a message pad. She sources the handy reminder note pads from her

favourite stationary place in town. Once written on and peeled off one can place the communication in a convenient easily discovered place for the writer as a remembrance or prompt, or a message for someone else in the household. At the moment the message she pens is just solely for her benefit. She peels it off and sticks it in the middle of the stainless steel refrigerator door.

HohumHohumHohumHohum

HohumHohumHohumHohum

HohumHohumHohumHohum

HohumHohumHohumHohum

HohumHohumHohumHohum

An earthquake is a series of waves which spreads out in all directions from a central source of disturbance. These waves, or oscillations, are land waves, or rock waves, just as waves at sea are water waves, and they can be caused by any blow or sudden movement of objects or materials. The slipping of surface rocks under gravity; the flow of molten rocks under the cool, hard outer crust of the earth; the multiple high-speed motions of the earth itself; sudden alterations of temperature and barometric pressure; storms and the tides. These things, and a score of others, combine to impose a terrific all-round strain and keep the earth's surface incessantly quivering like a giant fly-wheel.

It is not surprising, therefore, that over fifty thousand earthquakes are recorded every year, the overwhelming majority of which, happily, are small and harmless.

From The Wonder Book of Tell Me Why? (Page 39)

Leap of Faith

Later, Flynt left M spitting fruit pips and explored deeper within the Oasis. He circumnavigated a group of clustered rocks, higher than the upper mast of the Prometheus. Flynt noticed a worn section of hardened sand at the base of a single palm creating a constantly narrowing path between two walls of stone. He ventured into the shaded crevice to a point where he considered it to be a dead end but to his surprise there was a very narrow fissure which slit the rock; testament to an ancient quake of shifting of mass. He slid and gritted into this slit and sideways popped out. The light in a shaft illuminated the open burrow and Flynt realised this island of rock was hollow inside and possibly had more secrets to reveal. The base of the burrow was strewn with hardened droppings and he wondered what creature they were expelled from. He called out to M but the rock muffled any carry of his voice.

He investigated further and noticed a tunnel worn with nature's elemental friction creating a smooth slide underground. He took a leap of faith and sliding down into a cavern he came to a stop in a sudden plume of dust.

Carriage 4

Greg journeys through carriage four. He is conscious of his need to clean up the chocolate fish as some of it has been distributed onto his shirt. People settle in. Odd bags and suitcases are stored and placed strategically close to the sitter. People are wary of further communication; of direct eye contact. They collectively are in their restrictive worlds, having staked their ground, asserted their rights as ticket holders a portion of space on the train which will take them to their destination. As if to confirm this they look out the windows, at the passing landscape. They are confident the landscape will continue to pass and overnight the train will deposit them in another city, with a deep inner harbour the elevated houses precarious and corrugated on wind- swept hills. The Silver Star glints and shines in the sunlight. The train rocks and gathers speed.

Inside a pram is awkwardly collapsed by a thirty-something mother. The motionless silent baby is wrapped tight to the grandmother's chest. She has already claimed a seat. She views Greg with suspicion and stares at his dishevelled personage. She seems to clutch the baby closer and shifts further away from the aisle he travels down.

He is saddened by the collapsed pram. It seems to have a more profound relevance in its current state. Greg thinks it is perhaps symbolic of time being sandwiched and squashed. The air is pushed out by the mechanism of the pram framework. It is no longer a comforting vessel, a secure place where relative security and certainty is assured. Stored clumsily aside it is awkward and forlorn and a potential nuisance to the community of travellers. Greg accidentally kicks the hard

plastic wheel. The Grandmother swathed in strings of looped gold purses an angry expression.

Well really.

The pram is still upright but struggles to break free. Greg can tell it wants to open, be expansive, go beyond its enforced limitation. He looks at the woman's frown and notices the thirty-something mother join in with a fresher version of displeasure. Hands on hips her jeans are very tight, too tight with no room to breathe.

The air is thick with disapproval. He is in the grey area of their space. The pram slowly unclasps as if to beckon the child into its partially reformed interior folds. Greg is breathless; he smells handy wipes and a stale mothball fragrance from an elderly underarm region.

I smell death. It must be close, put the baby back, he can't breathe ... you hold him too close.

Well really, mind your own business.

Look, the pram!

The mum gave out a short scream. The pram sprung entirely back to its natural open form with a simultaneous click. Bright mobiles swing from the hooped shade. A smiley sun with arms and legs and a furry bear bounce against each other in a series of joyous body slams. The pram blocks the aisle. Greg is fortunate to be on the other side; he is off, away from the smell of death, away from the pram with a

mind of its own. He does not look back at the extended family with mouths agape and finally rubs out the residual image of the baby's mouth, a thin blue line. Greg finds it hard to believe; even carriage four is not safe.

The Underworld

Flynt adjusted his vision to the gloom and the cavern was large and he wished he had means to illuminate its interior as he could discern strange markings on the smooth walls. A shimmer of light was weakly bouncing off a still pool of water. Flynt wondered at the scale of the natural reservoir. The liquid fused into darkness and it could be a lake as he was not sure of the cavern's dimensions. He sensed this place was too old for visitors and he wished he hadn't slid down but the water was a bonus. He wished to share this with M and called her name. He got on all fours and took in a deep drink of the water and it was cold and pure. He knew this to be a special moment and lay back and dozed off. His short sharp dream was troubled having the continual sensation of being suffocated and was relieved to be awoken by M.

You found me.

I was thirsty.

They laugh and their voices fuse and echo and rebound back to them as if in a game.

They ran to the opening and looked up the tunnel and they knew it to be too steep.

After many attempts they lay exhausted on the cavern floor.

Flynt went looking for other escapes and paced the area in disorientation till bumping into history. Brushing off the dust he held up the larger object. It was rusty but flecks of gold emitted from the curvature with wing like flaps to protect the forgotten soldier's face. He put it on and it sat low over his head. Eyes in shadow he struck a hopeless military pose then he walked to the pool and sought his reflected image but it was too dull.

The varied colours of a soap bubble are one proof that light consists of waves, not unlike those of the sea. It is one of the characteristics of waves that two sets of waves can "interfere" with another. For example, if two stones are dropped close together in a pond, the crest of one set of waves can "interfere" with one another. For example, if two stones are dropped close together in the pond, the crest of one set of waves will in some places be reinforced by the crests of the second set, and in other places be cancelled out.

From The Wonder Book Of Tell Me Why? (page 192)

Clean Up Time

The train is in the light. It is sunny. It is gaining speed. Greg has found the compact toilet. The basin is now smeared with a dark brown substance. Toilet paper, scrunched up, is piled in the toilet bowl. The sticky pink fish inners lay heavy on the discarded paper. The dark brown chocolate infers an alternate primal gesture, another process of reconstitution. Greg stares at the mess. He flushes the toilet. It

is a vacuum drain and hardly any water emerges. Disappointed, he expected a maelstrom, a whirl of disinfected water and smeared confectionary, crumpled paper swirling downwards and funnelled, obliterated, sucked into a dark metallic space housed within the train's digestive waste system.

Hollow eyes and sucked in cheeks reflect back at Greg. His shirt has a sepia wet patch. He takes a pill and practices a smile and bars his teeth. There are coffee stains, close to his tired, off pink gums and he scrubs the area with his finger. He thinks about Blaze, her broken shoe, the graze on her arm, how her breasts sagged while on her knees. He feels his pulse run at a slower rate. The faux wood panels cease to undulate. He douses his head with cool water and pats down his hair.

Then he washes his face and hands in soapy suds, scrubbing till he feels totally cleansed, and the ripple effect being an inner calm. He now needs to be in control. These last couple of days have been messy. Greg talks to himself in ten easy steps.

Make this trip positive.

Make it a spiritual journey.

Slow down, keep calm.

Breathe deep. Meditate.

Be mindful of your breathing.

Feel the air around you.

Feel the tip of your toes.

Feel the top of your head.

Now the Buddhist-babe speaks in resonant tones. She is an imaginative figment but a pleasurable one for Greg. He lets her speak. Her words caress his essence. She is right behind him. He can feel her body close to his. He has his cock in his hand. He has a strong image to do with the Buddhist-babe. Someone tries the door.

Greg pops out of this moment, out of his private journey within a journey. The rattle ceases and immediately the Buddhist-babe is back for Greg, doing stuff to him. She leans forward and whispers in his ear a mantra, his affirmation to embark on a life of skilful living. Her citric scent wanders through the small forest of hairs within his nostril. The scent holds his hand, leading him to a warm silky place. A place where pent up desire is released in a guttural continuous chant.

The Diner

Blaze studies Greg's gradual weave approach to her small table. She is on the sunny side of the train. The light is intense. She smiles and waves Greg towards her.

You took your time trying to find me.

I had to freshen up in the loo.

Why did you race ahead like that?

Greg sat down. He was suddenly very tired.

To get to the fourth carriage, it's the safest.

If it wasn't for those lovely army boys, I would've missed the train.

Army boys?

Yes, they were running to catch the train like us. I tripped over and they helped me with my stuff.

Oh.

Greg was confused. He decides to let go of memory, for the time being. He takes a blue pill and smiles at Blaze.

They view the changing landscape together, their knees touching, rocking methodically with the train's motion. It is sharp. The trees look to be two dimensional against the solid cobalt blue sky. Every leaf, every stone had an acute definitive outline representing volume and mass. For Greg it became almost unbearable, he had to look away so as to reduce his awareness to objects and movement within his immediate proximity. He stared at the waiter. He is very tall and wiry. He has hollow eyes like Greg's, with pin pupils. Greg nudges Blaze under the table and nods in the waiter's direction.

I just hope mum and dad don't give me grief.

Greg focuses on Blaze. She is lean and pinched at the extremities. Blaze chews her lip.

He is your child; you have a right to get him back.

He won't even remember me.

Tears well, the Silver Star shoots through light industry. Greg touches her hand softly. He thinks Blaze is at her height of potential beauty when she exudes such loss.

Would you like breakfast?

Someone turns on a radio. R and B filters through the carriage. A baby starts crying, the mother tries to hush it up. The baby reminds Greg of Hope. He thinks fondly of the art trip he took her on, shortly after he buried Sarge in the forest. He hates R and B. He hates not being there for Hope. He can start again, with Blaze, he just needs to seal the deal tomorrow, secure the new business. He will take Blaze to the Orange Awards for creative excellence, collect his Perspex trophy, and then everything will be cool and as it should be.

The Cave

The Cook thought Captain irrational. He had been observing the activity on deck where the Captain had the crew in frenzied activity, lugging cannon ball and gunpowder. All directed at the cave. It seemed after each successive battery his intention was to annihilate the hole by collapsing it. He guessed the Captain had the

crew convinced there was some unknown force in the cave and every effort should be taken to destroy it.

It was a wasteful and ludicrous proposition. In his opinion the only function the cave served was to provide shelter for the seal colony the crew partially decimated the day before.

Captain, is this necessary?

Yes .

But why?

Fire!

Captain?

Fire!

The blinking Captain seemed to enlarge.

You are a bore Cook. Look how exquisitely the landscape of rock is altered.

Sir, all I see is the needless destruction of the cave.

Needless! Surely you can appreciate the transformative power of man over ancient rock? Look at the rock innards squinting in the sun.

Isn't it a waste of shot, sir?

Are you questioning my judgement, Cook?

I say this cave offers too much hope and mystery. It has to be smitten from the bay.

Captain , what of the boy ? He is late returning from the beach.

Not there ... swing the cannon to the left.

Fire!

Yes, Cook?

Regarding the boy ... Captain?

Ah, yes. Leave him to the night and retrieve in the new day. Take four men for the gathering of provisions.

Cook looked at the Captain kneading his chin.

But Captain, the night may kill him.

Precisely!

And Captain bore down on Cook and Cook felt his demeanour shrink.

Do you now understand what I am up against?

Cook looked beyond the Captain, or rather included the Captain within Nature's frame. His view depicted Nature toying with Captain, that she contrasted the smoky edge of blasted rock with a calm sky and continued to roll the sea onto the beach.

The All Day Breakfast

Bacon and Eggs please.

Brown or white bread?

Brown.

Poached, scrambled or fried ?

Just toasted will do.

No the eggs.

Poached.

What do you want, Blaze?

Greg was pretty sure that's how the discussion went with the waiter. The meal delivered in a hurry had a big breakfast feel to it. Sausages abut each other and swim in an oily substance. The hash browns are stacked to one side, they need HP if he is to pursue with the mammoth task of eating them. The scrambled eggs knotted in a tight pale yellow ball seem to suffer from an identity crisis. Greg shakes pepper on the ladled mush.

Here goes.

Blaze had found her confectionary; she chews and sucks and no longer thinks about her boy. She observes the passing landscape.

Cows and sheep are stupid.

Greg shrugs and continues to eat. He wonders what other sugar-fuelled banalities will spring forth from her gorgeous lips.

Look how green everything is.

Abruptly Blaze leaves the table and the waiter follows her. Greg knows what is up. He feels nothing. He stabs at his genetically enhanced tomatoes. He is determined to slice the mounds into edible chunks. He hasn't eaten in two days. Greg must get grounded. Have his feet firmly planted within a pragmatic reality. He has to be able to care for Blaze as she is struggling and vulnerable. She is straight now, clean. Blaze doesn't do the hard stuff anymore and she has turned her back on Pussy Galore. Greg will turn the tide for Blaze.

One Hit Wonder

There is barely room for two people in the toilet but they manage. Blaze sits on the lid. The waiter's uniform is so white and close to her face it dazzles her. She pulls down her sunglasses from her forehead and they rest on her strong attractive nose which shades her view.

They both emit a nervous laugh. The toilet smells of disinfectant and stale urine. Blaze peers upwards at his thin face and paper clip smile.

This guy is a freak she thinks. He is so tall he has to bend his head down so as to not to poke through the train carriage ceiling. Blaze is familiar with body types. She guesses he has a flat pale brown chest and is hairless. He would have no meat on his arse and thin spindly legs. Between them would be a pencil dick. Long and thin. To fuck it would be to attempt satisfaction via a gynaecological spatula. He

also might have a few tats scattered in ad hoc fashion on his body, a skull or dagger or indigenous motif, or something. Tats or not, whatever trade she makes with Pencil Dick, it won't include full sex.

Two fifty you say?

Um-yeah.

I've only one fifty in cash.

The pencil dick was pointing at her.

I'll blow you then.

Um, okay.

Let's have a taste first.

Yeah, right on lady.

Pencil Dick quickly laid out the mechanics of the session. His pipe had a long thin stem and small elegant bowl. The glass was freshly cleaned and only a faint discolouration of the bottom showed signs of recent use. He carefully laid out the small tinfoil square as though it was a sacred shroud. With a sewing needle he transferred the substance to inside the pipe bowl. It looked harmless enough.

Blaze and Pencil Dick take turns on the pipe and transform the sticky crystals. They eat the pharmaceutical smoke, hungry, greedy for more, their eyes predatory.

She could see a sliver of dusk, crimson, through a small open window. Pencil Dick was up in the clouds; his erection had long ago dissipated.

You should leave now.

Um, but.

I need to flush my Care-free, do you understand?

Ah, gross lady.

Flustered, Pencil Dick collects his things. He bends down to navigate through the unlatched door. His form is paper thin and to Blaze it seems to slot between the narrow space, reminiscent of a posted letter. She closes the door, rummages through her shoulder bag and pulls out a postcard which she has yet to write on. It's a Zoo animal postcard with three shiny new tiger cubs. Blaze is certain they will break into a furry smile at any moment. Eddie, her son, will love this postcard. She imagines his eyes wild with excitement. Blaze finds a pen and writes: Dear Eddie,

The sun rises and sets for the same reason that it is dark at night, namely, because we live on the surface of a rotating ball or globe called the earth. The rotation of the earth carries us now into the light of day and now into the shades of night. We are now on the side or hemisphere facing the sun and now we are on the hemisphere turned away and hidden from it. The moment the sun is above our horizon, we are on the hemisphere facing the sun and daylight begins.

The instant the sun disappears below our horizon, we are on the hemisphere turned away from the sun and night begins. The sun has been below our horizon (and night has already begun) eight minutes as we see it setting. The whirling earth

carrying us from the dark to the lighted side causes the sun to rise. Conversely, carrying us from the lighted side into the dark side causes the sun to set. At every single moment of the twenty-four hours, it is noon somewhere, midnight somewhere, sunrise somewhere, and sunset somewhere.

From The Wonder Book of Tell Me Why? (Page 142)

Trick of Light

An albatross above the waterline arcs into the head wind, almost stalling. The bird was interested in any offal or morsel that providence may offer from the deck of the sailing vessel. Its great beak speckled with froth and wing span seeming to stretch beyond the outer limits of the boy's imagination. Turning with the wind and casting a brief eye on the mortals on board it winked at Flynt. He watched as it flew away with the tail wind into dark clouds, the sun struggling to break through.

Flynt waved goodbye and then quickly put his hand down, the preacher splicing rope smirked at the boy's youthful romanticism, his demeanour a cold, hard, pragmatic grey.

A chasm of light blew apart the cumulus above the horizon. The golden shaft illuminated the seascape, transforming the *Prometheus* sails to a wheaten yellow colour and for a long while the boy stared out, forming creatures and objects from the cloud shadows skimming across the liquid mass.

Soon after Preacher had gone below, Flynt felt M beside him. She smelt of ship biscuit and Flynt new she had been with Cook or at least in the Galley and had procured a treat.

Do you believe in God?

Flynt eyed her. She was still taller than him; her smile which formed after her question was quizzical. Teeth shone white like the finest ivory. Flynt sensed she was about to teasingly tip toe around his naivety and further investigate his lack of experience in worldly matters.

God killed Ma.

The wind had lost most of its breath and the ocean quickly smoothed out in a reflective quality. A giant mirror was laid down before them, for which the children can look into, in a vain attempt to seek perspective on their physical nature and position within the ocean.

The sun sped to its destination on its daily ritual to the distant line which is half the visible world, but before it slipped under, a central beam of light concentrated the children's vision toward it like a magnet. His mouth agape, Flynt squinted into the light and in the distance he saw an Angel hovering with pink and orange wings spread out, her feathers white dashes fluttering independently and of their own accord.

His nostrils were full of the smell of the sea and this sea with the sky laid on top infused his being. He noticed M effected in the same way and their garments

where ablaze with the dusky glow of the benevolent Angel with sharp star eyes; her eyes all the colours at once but not black.

Each colour looked upon the children on the ridiculous man - made object bobbing in the watery escape, which tied their destinies with it, being dragged around and manipulated, their childhood ebbing, rubbing away with each passing full moon. The Angel smiled crookedly and her heart slit open suddenly and was blended into the far off dusky clouds, to a fine silvery pink dust.

But before the manifestation, born from a trick of light and elemental form, had dissipated, the aural figment whispered hope into willing ears.

Boys and girls are made up of living flesh and blood, possessing the power to grow, move, think and speak. Their bodies are composed of microscopical "cells," called "protoplasm," arranged so as to make: a "framework" of bone, "muscles" to move the frame, organs to digest food and, through the "blood," nourish other parts, organs to take in air and extract the "oxygen" which the body must have, organs to get rid of used-up material, and an organ to think, remember receive impressions and give orders to the body, also a "soul" or "spirit" which nobody can see or define.

From The Wonder Book of Tell Me Why? (Page 176)

The Reading

I hear you have bought back an artefact for my collection?

Yes sir, but it is due to Cook that I am here with the artefact.

Yes, I hear he plucked you from the underworld.

Let's see the helmet.

What of its history, sir?

It is Romanesque, lost armour from a colonial outpost of an empire long dust.

They used to flay, stone and crucify their enemies, did you know this fact boy?

No, sir.

Yes, they especially delighted in the crucifixion of the worshippers of the false Jesus.

Shall I crucify you boy?

No sir, I have no faith anymore.

Are you sure, boy? I heard that you were visited upon by an angelic apparition on deck in recent times; what did this do for your faith then? It is proof of God is it not?

It was but wishful thinking sir.

A sudden change of demeanour and attitude softened the Captain and Flynt sensed he may have survived a test of some description known only to his instructor and it was then the Captain wiggled his toes.

It is time. Manicure my toe nails. Be careful to cut straight and not bleed your Captain.

The sound of the clip was discernable above the Captain's mumbles as he privately read from a fat, old, leather bound book, a tale of two giants amongst other things.

This is Gargantua the Giant when he was but 5 years of age. I will share this as it may provide you with insight to your current limitations.

*'He pissed in his shoes, shit in his shirt, and wiped his nose on his sleeve: He did let his snot and snivel fall in his portage, and dabbled, padled and slabbered everywhere: He would drink in his slipper, and ordinarily rub his belly against a Panier: He sharpened his teeth with a top, washed his hands with his broth, and combed his head with a bole: He would sit down betwixt two stooles, and his arse to the ground, would cover himself with a wet sack ,and drink in eating of his soupe: He did eat his Cake sometimes without bread, would bite in laughing, and laugh in biting; Oftentimes did he spit in the basin, and fart for fatnesse; pisse against the Sunne, and hide himself in the water for fear of raine..'*¹

The Captain broke off his tale as he was continuously chuckling and Flynt saw another dimension to the Captain, but could only manage a nervous smile.

Well, what you think?

I am confused sir.

¹ Francois Rabelais, *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, 1st Book Chapter xi, (circa 1534)

This is as it should be, an excellent state of affairs. You are but a babe. Like the infant Giant in the story. I will now show you a reference to the outdated fashionable appendage known as the Cod Piece.

The Captain chuckled more, his eyes were watering and he crossed his legs.

Pass me that book over there, boy.

Flynt dutifully retrieved the dusty book from a shelf. The Captain flicked the old pages and stopped abruptly at a picture.

Ha!

See?

If you were to try to fit this thing over your minimal protrusion it would only be stuffed with air.

Mission Impossible

Steal my gun again and I'll blow your brains out.

Cool it, Sarge.

Whose car is this anyway? It is unwarranted.

Greg loves Sarge when he is butch. Sarge kicks the tyres as men are supposed to do. He pretends to shoot them out, and blows the imaginary smoke away after each crack shot. Greg feels comfortable in the pine forest. It's an hour

out of the city and serves to clear his mind. He's been here at least four times. He either comes to this sombre place alone or with a good friend, like Sarge.

My cell phone is dead.

Well, you know what that means.

Greg squares his shoulders and puffs his chest out. He bends down and looks in the side mirror of the Charger. In the reflective glass he registers the image of his rapid approach. Greg closes his eyes and feels the cold wet surface hard against his mouth. The force of Sarge flattens his face. Eye lids flicker. Light and dark alternate like lightning in a half sleep. Greg embraces his narcissistic tendencies without a trace of embarrassment. He reckons every adult kisses his or her own image at least a couple of times in their lifetime.

The shallow grave was difficult to dig. He kept hitting root systems and solid clay but eventually it was of a sufficient depth to accommodate the concept of Sarge, his misplaced friend. Later, in semi darkness, with the matter smoothed over, Greg with a fresh beer at hand, views it as a deeply satisfying exchange as he was again truly alone.

The Affirmation

Your past is just one of many stories. We all have at least one, some of us a few more in our lifetime. If your story up to now is a tragic, trashy story, just

discard it, like it's Friday, rubbish collection day. Put your sad arse story out with the rubbish. Make a better story.

The Sermon.

The crew looked on with shuffling feet and each held firm to the stormy pitching of the vessel. Each was in private meditation and each wondering over the Preacher's motivation as, with back turned, he addressed the liquid mass before him.

The Captain at the wheel had a fixed view ahead, ignoring the Preacher, holding the Prometheus on his prescribed course. The excited preacher's babble increased intensity, his whole taught physiology bent on delivering his sermon, with long arms outstretched, oblivious to the cold sea spray drenching him.

What a sublime memorial of the power that gathered together its waters! What a perpetual display of the omnipotence which confines it's unstable mass within its appointed bounds!

Symbol of the infinite!

Behold crew!

It holds us as by a spell in contemplation of its vastness and grandeur, reaching far beyond our utmost horizon, simultaneously lashing so many distant shores, and encompassing all the kingdoms of the earth. And when we view it as agitated into the violence and uproar of a tempest, and see its huge and far reaching waves, like floating mountains, rushing, leaping for the shore, as if to scale and overwhelm its

loftiest ramparts, yet each in its turn, as if suddenly awed, subsiding and retiring at the line decreed, we feel a sacred impulse from the magnificent spectacle to fall down and worship HIM who said, "Hitherto shalt thou come and no further; and shall thy proud waves be stayed!"

Behold!

It was then the Captain was next to him and in casual manner hauled the Preacher overboard. The crew, riveted in horror, dared not look into the impassive white face of the perpetrator and each mute at the retreating thrashings of the man cast suddenly from their community. Each closed their ears to the man's cries and lifted not one hand in assistance, until all sight and sounds no longer perceptible of him, the crew in a sudden, one less in number.

Part Of The Picture

The heat began to shriek between them and without a word Annamarie stares at her with dilated eyes. Their nipples graze and slip over each hollow. She gradually reclines on her back; Annamarie transfixed on a dark triangle. She slowly draws her legs up and leans forward. With a gentle spread of the knees the two women conjoin.

Armed and Dangerous

My private part has been hurt.

Who did this?

Flynt mustn't cry.

I wish I was big as they were. Next time I will have my knife.

Come over; don't let them see you weak. Hide here.

I have a knife. I will stick them in the belly if they try again.

Captain will be angry.

I don't care; he can throw me overboard like he did the Preacher. I will swim to your Island.

But the sharks.

I have a knife.

M?

Yes.

Will you come with me?

If you stop crying.

Say you will come.

The sharks - I am scared of the sharks.

But I have a knife.

M?

Yes.

I have a knife.

I know, all boys do.

Just Passing Through

The cylindrical Carriage 5, in forward motion, houses many eclectic object and human form in various positions of sleep, relaxation or reverie. In the meat of the journey, settled in, each individual forced to accommodate the various implications of prolonged inactivity.

Greg negotiates through the various outstretched limbs and men who snore and fart in the upper hammock. His foot gets caught in a mound of net and the cabin is a non-smoking cabin but a haze of pipe smoke lay a good measure below the damp oiled ceiling. He is tempted to smash the glass and pull down the emergency brake, to follow a set of clear instructions, but is fearful of the implications. He decides to push through the narrow passageway to the next carriage which in his mind's eye is illuminated and relatively normal. Not a word is spoke between the men and Greg, each fearful of the unexplained, as he passes through, this time, as if he a ghost.

The Hard Sell

Annamarie, fixing coffee for two, heard a persistent rap on the door and wonders why people insist they do this when there is a stylish door buzzer for them to depress at their convenience. She thinks the visitors are probably religious freaks doing their rounds; a pair of mammals fresh from the Arc.

She walks to the front door and imagines them adjusting their ties as divined by their private evangelical version of the dark ages. Each remembering their words of indoctrination, righteousness on their side, their greater purpose bathed in golden light, directed by the hand of their God. A strong, fatherly, white male hand; uncalloused.

Hello.

Oh, Howie.

Surprise, sorry I didn't call beforehand.

Given the recent events Annamarie allows Howie to lean forward and give her a perfunctory kiss of greeting on her cheek. She noticed his Porsche parked in her driveway; it was spotless and sits in the sun like an airbrushed lime Popsicle.

Can I come in?

Um.

He surveys the interior like a real estate agent with shiny shoes and red face. He seems over eager and poised to deliver his spin, to sell the premise of the visit.

Thanks. Great house, be worth a mint now.

What do you want, Howie?

To offer support ... from *The Agency*.

The three week's stress leave is all the support we need thanks.

Where's Greg?

Look, Howie, I have an appointment at eleven, this is not a convenient time.

I will take you.

It's a private matter.

But we are friends.

Howie edges closer to the kitchen where Annamarie stands. He smells fresh coffee grind and notices two cups.

Is Greg upstairs?

None of your ...

Trudy emerges from the bedroom wearing her watch.

Have you seen where I put my clothes?

There is a silence of a profound nature. Howie shrivels out, drops his keys, beeps his car and goes forward then back and waves with half a heart at the front door and bunny hops between the clipped hedges, the budding, stretched pollinated plants. Howie gawks at the shaded orchids with their vulgar display of reproductive

mechanics. They wave goodbye to him with a sexy sigh, his man sex completely withdrawn into its crinkly pink fold. Ah men.

The whole of our body is covered with skin, and beneath its outermost layer are millions of nerve endings, so close together that a pin-point cannot touch any part without causing a sensation of “touch,” “pain,” or “agony” – according to the lightness or depth of the prick.

Other little nerve points, not quite so close together, give us the sensation of “heat” or “cold” , which, if exaggerated, causes “pain” also. The skin, therefore, is the organ of “touch” and is our contact with the world outside ourselves.

The cause of pain is injury, inflammation, or disease affecting these nerves of “feeling”. WHY we feel “pain” is because the brain, which judges of the place and character of the sensation, tells us that something is wrong and warns us to take measures to put it right. People often say, “They hate pain, it is so cruel” ; and so it may be; but more often it is a kindly warning by Nature, so that, if we take notice of the “pain” this time, we may learn how to avoid it another. Or, if it is an “internal pain,” it may tell a doctor exactly what is wrong with us.

From The Wonder Book of Tell Me Why? (page 82)

Repeat Offence

It happened to M again, in a similar manner and by the same perpetrator. This time *he* trapped prey in the damp room that also serves as an occasional passageway to the food store. Amongst the smell of fish gut and sickly rum M attempted a successful struggle, and again unable to call to Flynt, and not able to make use of his knife in defence as it was hidden for safe keeps.

And M was left alone by him, to the swaying of the foul interior. Anger propelled her to a different part of the ship, oblivious to the inquiries of various crew. M found the knife Flynt had hidden for their fruitless benefit and eventually flew at the authoritarian door and beat and scratched at the door and cried at it with view to receiving counsel and support from the Captain, but was met only with silence.

So M got hold of the long knife and slashed and stabbed at the oak and smeared a personalised red pigment on the lower portions of the obstruction. And later M found a dark place and was inconsolable and sent Flynt away blaming him for his lack of foresight and general impotence in respect to the rape and hurt experienced beforehand.

After all, what good is the knife hid and separate to us?

The so-called "man in the moon" is the rude resemblance to a man's face presented by the moon's disc. It is, on the whole, wonderfully complete and well proportioned. The tip of his nose is always near the centre of the moon and his left eye, we rather fancy, keeps winking at us. Other easily-recognizable features are his dark eyebrows and big, smudged mouth. When the moon is a thick crescent, we are able

to make out, in a rough sort of way, his profile. All this, of course, is an optical effect only. The moon is a globe with a solid surface like the earth and the “man in the moon” is just mountain, crater, and valley forms, and nothing else; it is simply the aspect of the lunar scenery as seen by we earth-dwellers at a distance of two hundred and forty thousand miles, where a whole hemisphere can be scanned at once.

The Wonder Book of Tell Me Why? (page 107)

The Transfer Station

Pita imagined for the hundredth time how he would arrange his death. He has worked on the Silver Star as a waiter for ten years, since leaving school. His Dad, before he ceased breathing through a massive heart attack at the R.S.A, jacked up the job for him. The big man with a short temper laid railway lines in his relative youth, was a shunter in the city rail yards and for ten years before redundancy was a Diesel Train Driver.

He viewed his son with bewilderment, mostly over his height and lack of zest. Pita never really thought his father loved him. More like his old man managed a grudging accommodation as he didn't enjoy looking up to anybody, least of all his youngest, out of context son.

The train stopped with a metallic thump of buffers and a long afflicted sigh of brakes. The drug was wearing thin. Pita felt a ticklish volume invade his interior, which made him want to sneeze at the next instant; to expel his undeveloped spirit.

He puts napkins in rings. The diner is empty and silent on this ancient site of volcanic transformation. The four mountains outside are quiet also, but one, in protest, has a sneaky smoke. Pita knows this, even if he can't see her cone shaped in the great distance. The volcano fell into this habit, way before he was born, many moons ago, of smoking on and off, unable to quit.

Pita wants to quit. He would do it here at the transfer station, where they swap diesel engines. No-one will see. He would leave the diner in ten minutes, time for them to detach the engine. He would have a casual cigarette in the dull light of the platform. With a flick of the butt he would strip off his corporate uniform till naked and in the manner of a warrior, jump down from the platform and place a foot on a sleeper and a foot on the rail. At the crucial moment he would position his head against the cool metal buffer. The buffers eventually will shunt and slam together and a short lived iridescent bubble will go pop in the moonlight.

In every position of our bodies except that of lying flat on our backs, some of our muscles are in use: that is to say, are "contracted" in order to keep that position. Every movement we make is also caused by one or more muscles contracting. Movements may be gentle and slow or strong and quick, as in running, jumping and field games. All our muscles possess what is called "energy" or "power to act," and as more movements take place, this "energy" is gradually used up. If you walk twenty yards, you feel as fresh as when you started: if you walk twenty miles, you "feel tired" because the "energy" is used up and your reason tells you that you have done enough. But not only "used" muscles make you "feel tired." Looking too long

at a bright light, listening too long to musical sounds, or to the reading of a dull book, have the effect of tiring the nerves of sight and sound, and so you “feel tired.”

From The Wonder Book of Tell Me Why? (Page 62)

A Breath of Fresh Air

M had been withdrawn and sullen and speechless for two days since the assault. The lively optimism and sprightly step had gone and mechanically M went through the daily assigned chores as a zombie. There was rumour amongst the crew that the soul had been possessed by one of the ghosts in the fore quarter area, a female slave who poked her eyes out and died of her injuries. (Moaning and speaking in otherworldly guttural tongue she did.)

At least one of the Chorus knew of the source of M's misery but he be the devil, an immoral, violent man who would not speak of the truth for fear of condemnation and possible exile. All knew that Captain's little helper was his favourite plaything and all feared his wrath if he found out his pet had been overly abused.

But this morning had a bright air about it and the crew were in high spirits, knowing they were near a safe exotic anchorage where they would be able to partake in the pleasures exclusive to those on land.

M emitted from below deck and went past the Captain at the wheel and the gaggle of sailors all scanning the headlands for the opening to the harbour. The

dejected waif pitched over the rail and like a thin pale washboard slipped into the water, a cluster of small bubbles the only signifier of a suicidal determination.

Parting of Friends

The water was cold and deep blue as the child tread underwater. The bow of *Prometheus* disappeared quickly as the internal struggle took hold.

I will come with you.

No, I have to go to the Island now.

Why can I not come?

There is no longer any room for a boy.

But I can protect you.

Don't talk, you will swallow too much.

What of the sharks?

I have your knife.

The blade disappeared into the depths. Flynt's heart was about to burst and he felt M separating from him and he viewed her swimming deeper to grasp hold of it. He had not known that she was a deep sea diver and will not only have the stamina to get to her special Island place but collect pearls along the way. This made him

smile as M smiled her flash of teeth back at him and blew goodbye bubbles, her long graceful body swimming away for the last time.

As she disappeared Flynt was hit with the profound realisation that M was an imaginary friend of his and it is time to let go of her.

Then Flynt wished for a breath of fresh air so swam upwards to the light source and wondered if Captain had bothered to turn around and search for him.

Him, the boy who decided one day to keep growing so he be eventually a man and dictate his own terms for life. With the name of Flynt only, and known only by that name to all who knew him.

Reportage

At his final destination, the Central Railway station, as far south as one can travel by rail to the “bottom” tip of the large Northern Island, Greg reflects that nothing else of consequence happened on his train journey. It may have been different for Blaze but thinking back he was sure she was asleep for the remainder of the trip.

Hold on, Greg thinks. There was another note worthy detail, even worth the insertion here, that is, an account of an incident which was reported to him by the Diner Cook, regarding a waiter who disappeared at the transit station on the central plateau in the dead of the night. (His first name will always be Pita and it is premature to speak of him in the past tense.) Cook said the authority did not want to

delay the train and a cursory inspection of carriages revealed nothing of Pita, though the police were notified as his uniform was found on the platform. He added that it sucks; Twenty-four hours must lapse before a person is officially deemed missing by the Police even though this character Pita was definitely nowhere to be found in the near vicinity at that time.

The Diner Cook took a gulp of liquid from his L&P can and summarised more to himself than Greg.

He had a history of disappearing, quite often in a puff of smoke. He had depression, who knows, maybe he finally did what he was always threatening to do and went somewhere and topped himself?

So it goes.

We can study the sea anemone in an aquarium, but we need not go far on the seashore before we see some of these lovely creatures, which have been called sea-flowers. They are found everywhere and are famous for their solitary life and their beautiful colours. They can move about from place to place; one kind is carried on the shell of a hermit –crab. They are of many colours, red and green, and scarlet and tawny. Having no hard skeleton, they are able to change their shape quickly. They look, indeed, like lovely flowers, but their habits are not at all peaceful.

From The Wonder Book of Tell Me Why? (Page 15)

Homecoming

Hi Mum

Belinda, what a surprise, what are you doing here?

Its Blaze, my name is Blaze now, Mum. I've come to visit Eddie.

Blaze ruffles in her bag and her long arm shakes as she holds out a crumpled postcard.

This is for Eddie, I didn't have time to post it. It's hand delivered though, what service, eh Mum?

Not even a hug from you, eh Mum? Give me a hug, Mum. Can we come in? Oh sorry, this is Greg, he is my new partner. Greg, say hello.

Hello Mrs, gee sorry don't know your surname, how embarrassing. I've heard so much about you. Don't you city dwellers have driveways here? What a hike, I counted one hundred and twenty steps to your house from the road. Phew, what a workout, um, how do you do? Is that your Citroën L series opposite your post-box?

This is not a good time, Belinda.

Is it yours? The car. What a classic. Nineteen seventy? Ish?

My name is Blaze. It's Blaze, Mum.

How inappropriate. That's your working name, isn't it Belinda? Your father made some enquiries when you last popped in a year ago.

Mum.

With an indignant sniff Blaze scowls at the plain elderly woman who stoically bars her entry. With manic theatricality she shouts and stamps her feet in a mini tantrum.

Please Eddie. Eddie, come to me. Eddie, pleeeeeease come to Mummy.

At once we say quite rightly that butterflies are out in the day, flying in the sunshine, while it is at night that we see the moths drawn to the lamp-post or other lights. But there are other differences. Both have antennae, that is, feelers, but the butterfly's are fine but clubbed at the end. Both are caterpillars before they fly as we know them.

When a butterfly settles, it generally rests with the wings closed, that is, folded together so that top side touches top side, while a moth at rest either has the wings wrapped around its body, or folded to form a kind of roof on its abdomen, or spread out horizontally.

Both butterflies and moths are members of the same order of four-winged insects-known as Lepidoptera. Unlike moths, butterflies often resemble their surroundings such as leaves, bark, flowers, etc. This "mimicry" is intended to render them invisible to their enemies.

From The Wonder Book of Tell Me Why? (Page 55)

Dear Eddie

The boy hears his mum on his Grandparents' doorstep. Her sickly perfume odour signals her proximity and heavy handed application. Another smell pitches through the sweet citrus. It has an earthy muskiness which he associates with unwashed adults. As he shuffles closer to the front door along the ornate relief of the hallway wallpaper, there is another sharp foreign odour which has a power, a power which pulls him closer to the adults who argue. It is a compelling, mysterious smell and he wants to know more about it. Why does it come from his mother and man friend? Maybe it has something to do with how fast they are talking? Like bad breath in a hurry to effect people.

As his cheek rests on the soft velvet relief he decides not to emerge from behind the open door. Eddie screws up his face. His cheeks spew magma. He knows all about geology from a cassette Grandpa gave him. His face is baked super-hot from beneath the Earth's crust.

He sees through his mum, sees through her neediness, he is twelve now, he knows a few things, he knows all about his mum. His grandparents have filled him in. How she does dirty things to clients. She has what is called poly-addictions, HIV, STD and AIDS (Probably, said Grandma). All at once just like that and she will get her comeuppance she said of her daughter, over a cup of tea one day.

Eddie is huge; he mutates due to an increase in his anger levels. His green form fills the passageway. He wants to smash his AWOL mum down with his giant HULK fist and pump and jump on the man who pretends to be someone who he is

not. Yes, jump on the man, the liar, till he is a liar with no face, and jump on AWOL mum too, till all their features are smoothed into a white space with only evil squinty eyes left, like the pictures he draws in his imagination, the pictures he hopes to transfer onto paper one day.

Eddie realises he is thinking fast. He hears AWOL mum's cries and her calls to him, the volume he considers totally unnecessary as he is so close. It makes his ears hurt and everyone knows the ears are connected to the brain and his brain now hurts because the noise, which is a collection of sounds being heard was horrible and irritating and it fed into his brain from tunnels attached to his ears.

He guesses they haven't seen him yet. Maybe he is invisible? It is because he is the Stealth Master, a Ninja, a superior being who can transfigure through walls, or *be* the wall and sneak up on his enemies and cut them in half with his laser eyes and pummel them flat with his HULK fist he has on. Hulk roars every time it hits, he likes to feel the vibrations around his hand within its spongy interior.

Eddie hits the wall with his HULK fist and he hears the plaster board shatter and internal wooden framework twist and groan and feels the air rush against him as half the living room collapses. It lets in a cold southerly breeze and Eddie detects the bad breath of an arctic seal. He is aware of the firm grip on his arm of his grandmother who pulls him away from the visitors and into his bedroom. The slam of the front door still reverberates in his skull as it bounces forward and back like a ping pong ball rally he once heard on the sports channel.

Did I do good, Grandma? I smashed them flat.

Co-ordinates

Flattened out, repeatedly, signifies two decades of collecting. The butterflies catalogued and carefully preserved at the end of their short lives, saturated with colour, imbued with the tyranny of their seductive power, now suspended between the sheets, each soft wing, subtle antennae, furry underbelly an object of his desire. The steadfast and obsessive data of the idea of freedom and vulnerability, caught, categorised and contained by the Captain. His most prized object this bound prison of Lepidoptera.

What is your favourite, boy?

Ahh the ... *madeleinea lolita*.

Why do you fancy this one over the others?

It is nearly all black, sir, but if I look sideways it changes to blue.

It will be your first Tattoo. Cook does them, though we must wait for a calm sea before he embarks on laying an illusionary simulation of permanence on such wondrous white flesh.

But, Captain.

Captain was quick with the backhand and swept aside the childish subordinate. With a cut lip Flynt curled under the desk with maps scattered, which

unknown to him and the Captain, provided an accidental geographic model of their immediate vicinity within the vast ocean.

All tucked in

The boy stretches out in his bed. He likes being tightly tucked in by his grandpa because he tucks in much tighter than Grandma. So tight he thinks he cannot breathe, but of-course he can, otherwise he would die and Grandpa would have to go to jail.

He feels safe when tucked in and even safer with a pillow over his head. He does this after the click of the light switch when they leave the room. There is always a gap between the bottom of the pillow and the bed sheets. He imagines that he is peering through this channel of unobstructed air, like a soldier on the alert for enemy attack. Grandpa said he once saw a dead man in a bunker when he was army fighting in the jungle. He said don't tell Grandma that he told this particular tale. He also said the soldier had no features and no fingers. Just stumps. He added it was at that moment he knew war was bad and he tried not to kill anyone.

Eddie frees his arms and massages his eyes softly. It feels good. Sometimes, he puts marbles in the two hollows, but this is when he is happy with himself and the world. He enjoys freaking out Grandpa by being a glass eyed monster. Grandpa pretends to be cross but he knows by the tone of his voice that Grandpa finds it funny inside.

Have you ever tried to hit a tennis ball with one eye shut? Then you should know why you have two eyes. One eye receives a picture, but it cannot tell the brain how far away the different bits of the picture are. Only the knowledge that a tennis ball is of a certain size enables you to put your racket anywhere near it with one eye only to guide it. With two eyes, you get a view of the ball from two slightly different angles. It is an example of the process surveyors call triangulation. But the brain makes the necessary calculations automatically.

From The Wonder Book of Tell Me Why?(Page 25)

Flipper

He is light and free in the water. One hundred strokes and he is down the other end. The aquatic centre acts as a large sound shell. Splashes and voices echo within. Eddie even loves the chlorine. It has bleached him into an albino dolphin. That's what Grandpa says. Grandpa says that he swims like a dolphin and tells Eddie about a Dolphin called Flipper on TV. Flipper is not an Albino and isn't on TV anymore. He says Flipper is probably dead and the programme is old and wrinkled like himself.

Eddie feels his hands, they are wrinkled too. He has been in the pool a long time, most of his friends from the centre have got out. He hears his teacher aide talk to someone, but he doesn't know who. They are too far away, just murmurs in the darkness.

He holds himself against the poolside. Water laps onto his chin in choppy undulations. He catches a whiff of them, the liars with no faces. They must have unflattened themselves. He is Flipper and dips down to where there is only the sound of his heart beat and no smell.

Grandpa says that Flipper can stay underwater for at least twenty minutes. He can do this too, or at the very least he can try so when he finally resurfaces they will be gone and he will clap his hands and chatter in a high voice.

It is not hard to tell how the sound comes from a bird. It has a delicate organ in the larynx, through which the music comes. But what makes it sing? We know that it is the song of the bird to his mate. Birds also call to each other when they want friends to rally round, for many kinds of birds delight to be together in flocks. But it is scarcely possible to find a suitable explanation for the songs of the lark which we hear on a lovely spring day. Perhaps, as poets have said, they sing simply because, being happy, they can't help it.

From The Wonder Book of Tell Me Why? (Page 86)

Resolution

He sees her posing in her spot and she gets in a car. He waits twenty minutes till she is dropped off and steps back in her spot. The skinny C is mincing in

open air. A rouged for sale sign stinks and festers in her rubber G-string. Outside, no street light dull enough to cover the punctures; bruised stabs behind the knee.

Greg shadows her, close to the motorway off ramp he has been living under for a month.

Blaze, it's me.

My name is Gloria now.

Blaze, it's me.

I just want to say goodbye.

Well, goodbye.

You seen your kid?

No .

Gotta smoke Blaze?

No. Since when did you smoke?

I'm going on a sail-ship soon, Blaze.

Nut-case.

Farewell then.

Greg looks at the shadow of Blaze and is certain she is not much longer of this world. Even with a change of scenery. He wraps his overcoat tighter around

him as her shadow shimmers in a gust of wind. He turns away from her and steps into intense orange light. Her voice is an affirmative squeak.

Greg, Eddie got my postcard.

How?

I slipped it through his bedroom window.

A car pulls up and Greg hears the electric whine of the glass moving downwards of the front passenger door. He is shy now and is compelled to run. He can't be late. There is a spring in his step and he feels unburdened and cheerful. Greg pulls at his facial hair, his beard is bushy now and it bounces with each jolt. Yes, there has been a resolution of sorts and he is well pleased for Eddie and Blaze.

The earth we live on is a rotating globe lit up entirely by the rays from another and far greater self-luminous globe which we call the sun. It is dark at night, therefore, simply because only one half of the earth's surface can be illuminated at once, and at night we are on the un-illuminated side or half. The night, or dark side, of the earth is the hemisphere turned away from the sun, and when on it the solar rays cannot get at us — we are, so to speak, round the corner and out of their way. Our world is like a man turning round and round in front of a fire: first one side (half) of him is exposed to its light and heat then the other. The earth's turning, however, is nothing like as simple as this.

From The Wonder Book of Tell Me Why? (Page 136)

Orchard farm

The man has skinned all manner of things. He is clothed in fabric that hangs from his stocky frame and a welding mask is often on his head, flipped up, rain or shine. The ragged group of urchin follow at a distance and scramble for attention or food, or away from his hot anger.

When in season they pick the fruit and place the heavy citrus in beer crates, careful not to mark or squash as the man is particular. Next to the dilapidated farm house is a large barn and inside are four baths that have evidence of being lit from underneath. Rarely do the children venture inside, only to stack wood and when necessary, to drain the residue liquid of animal matter, the hair all stuck to the ceramic. Some are instructed to scrub the sides and throw hay on the pools of blood known to collect there in the vicinity of struggle. These bathing receptacles, a few built for the Victorians but long ripped from the Kauri Villas, where transported and dumped in this dim place, this wild place.

When you use one of your five senses, you are able to do so because the special nerve attached to that sense becomes “excited” or “stimulated” and carries the impression to the brain, which interprets and tells you of the result. Someone puts a finger on your skin; the brain tells you someone has “touched” you. Another puts a rose under your nose and the brain tells you are “smelling” a rose — and so on. Each special nerve can carry only the impression of its special sense. A “touch”

nerve cannot convey “sound,” or the “hearing” nerve “sight”; but if you damage one of them, say by pricking, you get “sight,” “sound,” according to which is pricked.

So if you get a smack on your eye, the sudden pressure on your eyeball “stimulates” the “sight” nerve, and the brain, getting the impression through that nerve, tells you that you see light ; and so you do, in the form of light specks which do not really exist – you “see stars.”

The pain you might feel at the same time is caused by the “stimulation” of the “touch” nerves in the skin about your eye.

From The Wonder Book of Tell Me Why? (Page 30)

Forbidden Fruit

This is the place where the wind flattens exposed vegetation. Precarious is this orchard in the gully where a dark stream dissects the trees in haphazard rows and tumbles down to the ocean for two miles west.

Greg collects the fruit with difficulty for the wind is strong and he is weak and disorientated. In the sun he makes a sack from the bottom of his shirt and collects nearly a score of fruit. He is about to set himself down with his opportunistic harvest when urchins appear and quickly encircle him.

The leader, a little older and taller than the rest, addresses Greg in a high voice.

You come meet Dad and drop the fr - fr - fruit carefully and we will take you to Dad in the big house, safe inside to the house and tell us of travels and have some meat foo foo food.

Dad has ordered wabbit and tatoes tonight and Dad enjoys ewe company. He leaves once every three moon-fulls to get stuff. Dad says this stuff is the st st stuff that will see us through the e e eternal darknesses that will eventually be - befall the earth. So- so- sooner than later, Dad says. Says this all the time, he- he does say.

You - you call me Co-Coat-tail. No, no, just Coat-tail.

The head urchin does a pirouette on a large flat rock for effect.

Do you see my suit itch?

I wear all ways.

Greg likes the idea of a cooked meal but is uncomfortable, he smells his armpit. He studies Coat-tail and the rest of the comical looking gang, some in frilly hand me down attire and gumboots with holes and gaffer tape to hold together their foot sheaths. All were adorned with detritus of the shoreline and objects from a smashed palace where they pick apart obsolete automobiles and farm equipment, long rusted and silent.

My name is Greg ... well, I think ... anyway.

He pushes against these slight human forms that have compacted closer to invade his personal space. He musters authority from the grey cumulus above.

Be gone, urchin! I only mean to purchase these succulent oranges and vacate this land in great haste as I wish to seek safe passage north by sailing ship.

The urchins break into laughter.

Coat-tail points at Greg's belly booty with his smelly finger.

But these are grapefruit and will sour your t - tongue, with many pips to lick- stick between your te te teeth.

The urchins pepper him with questions as the sky darkens.

Are you a man or a Robot ?

Dad does not like Robots.

Robots are bad. Are you bad ?

Greg scrutinises Urchin number 6 who is an imp boy, skinny beyond imagination, wearing a stretched balaclava with holes to accommodate his stick legs. His black woollen nappy sags with fresh waste, the pungent smell reaches Greg's nostrils. The Imp shouts.

Stick pig Stick pig

And now there is a chorus of seven and all chant with a thrust of their readymade javelins. Belly flat, he fell on his face Greg does, the befallen of ill will, as the urchin gang closes in.

Stick pig Stick pig Stick pig Stick pig

There are three principle reasons why we cook so much of our food. The first one is that good cooking brings out the flavour and makes it easier to bite and chew.

The second and very important one is that cooked food generally “keeps” better because heating it tends to destroy the disease germs which would make it “go bad.” If we eat bad food, we may incur food-poisoning and feel very uncomfortable, even if we do not become seriously ill.

And thirdly, cooked food generally looks more appetising and we are thus encouraged to eat a sufficient quantity.

It is interesting to recall that in the early days of man all food was eaten raw for the good reason that he knew nothing of the art of making a fire. Even today some primitive tribes are believed to lack this knowledge.

From The Wonder Book of Tell Me Why? (Page 239)

Invited to dinner

Greg looks at Dad, a large bear man wearing a welding mask flipped up. Dad contemplates Greg with bloodshot eyes and chews on his grey whiskers.

Greg is in considerable discomfort, exasperated by the H shaped wooden contraption which defines his posture. It has secured his head behind the middle

brace, his chin rests uncomfortably on the surface. Like a mummy cartoon character his arms are raised forward and tied tight at his wrists to the pair of rough sawn four by two lengths of timber. His fingers splay on the foremost end of these, the outer tips gripping the sides. The wood cuts into his shoulders and Greg wonders what to do about his full bladder as he doesn't want to piss all over the floor of the colonial dining room.

Dribbling on the wood, Greg decides it was Urchin number ... 7 who knocked him out with a flat river stone. He looks at him now, standing in an oversize oilskin coat, returning his gaze in a toothless grin.

A dull thud in his brain increases. One side of his head is wet and numb. He looks at his strange audience and spits blood.

What do you want of me? Do you know who I am?

Wordless, Dad cuts off a little finger and Greg's scream detaches and fills the Villa and escapes through the broken windows and is stuffed into the black night air. Wildly rooted to his bolted down chair Greg in panic wants to see evidence of the amputation, but loses consciousness.

For a while Dad plays a catching game with his flock throwing the finger from one to another. The urchins laugh and fight to catch the digit so as not to be the first to be spelled out as a robot. Suddenly Dad desires the finger to be in his procession and motions them still. Coat-tail hands it to him. He then puts the finger in his overalls chest pocket and picks his nose as, in ritualistic silence the urchins take time

to cut away Greg's clothes, and to prepare the soapy bowls, and to each select their favourite razor.

I must be naked and dive into the ocean

And grow scales on my lower half

Shedding the scent of earth

And wash off this scent in the sea

And sublimate on my transfigured form

The embrace for which

From head to tail

Earth to Sea

The freedom

I have long been yearning

A wave breaks because it has no room to bounce. When a wave advances to the beach, the water itself is not moving inwards. If it were, the beach would soon be flooded out. All the water is doing is to move up and down, the movement being handed on from one "piece" of water to the next, until the beach is reached. But some distance before reaching the beach the water has not enough room to move

freely up and down. So it breaks instead into the confused sort of motion that we call breaking.

Big waves naturally represent a proportionately bigger up and down movement and so they break farther out at sea. When the wind blows the tops off big waves and we see the “White horses” out at sea, we know its rough; but it is quite a different kind of wave break from that encountered on the seashore.

The Wonder Book of Tell Me Why (page 135)

Bath time

Greg woke up in the ceramic receptacle and he felt air all around him and prickly sensations on his smooth scalp. He looked down at his white body and was startled as it had been shaved clean all over. He is painfully aware of still being attached to the timber. Each length rested on either side of the baths opposing slightly rounded rims as his whole left arm was numb with pain due to the trauma of a missing finger.

Greg notices a figure deep in the shadows and he recognises the tall man. He sits cross legged in a casual manner opposite to where Greg lays helpless and alone in this cavernous barn with only a dim light emitting from a bulb down the other end.

Help me, sir.

Greg searches his memory for the chap's name, the train trip seems so far away from him, as though it was in a different lifetime, or in another, uncertain timeframe.

You are the Diner Cook aren't you?

Pita, eh?

Help me. Please.

Greg starts to weep and notices Pita is naked, his long legs fade into darkness as railway tracks entering a tunnel. Pita's manhood is long and impossibly thin. Greg, despite his discomfort, feels sorry for him and wonders about the reality of being in possession of such an awkward appendage.

For God's sake, fellow, get some clothes on and get me out of here.

Greg writhes around in the bath but it is hopeless as he is too weak to stand and he hears distant voices of the urchins. He arches his head around in the direction of the noise and with renewed panic addresses Pita but there is now only dark space, with no sign and visible tracks of this missing person.

Instead Coat-tail is in his face, and teases Greg with his severed digit.

Who are you you t t t talkin to any any ways b b bogey-man?

The urchin giggles and twitches and stuffs Greg's bloody finger up his nose to the hilarity of the rest of the group. Dad even manages a gruff chortle at the sight of the fingernail disappearing upwards. His nostril distorted and bulbous, Coat-tail leaves it to hang from his face.

The other little ones join in and play ring a rosy around the bath till the finger falls to the ground. A melee ensues but Dad raises a hand and they separate and some of the boys start to feed kindling and paper and all manner of flammable material under the bath. Others collect buckets and Greg hears them clamber outside and he hears their voices fade as they journey towards the distant gurgle of the stream.

We have no reason to think that insects pray, but one certainly looks as if it does. With its head bowed and its arms folded, the Mantis has the look of an insect worshipping. But we should be wrong if we thought it a quiet and kind insect at prayer. We do not say that it is pretending, because it cannot know what its bowed head means to us. As a matter of fact, it is thinking when it looks most quiet of the food it needs. It moves only slowly, and is not made for flight, so that it must use all its arts to get its food. It takes the colour of its surroundings, green, chiefly, or brown. It is rather a greedy insect and not at all merciful in its ways. It seizes its food with its shears, and bites its victims bit by bit.

When it is feeding, it is like a schoolboy eating an apple, and between bites stopping to watch it getting less and less. It is also very wasteful and thinks nothing of leaving half its victim uneaten and starting on another. Some think that when it has started killing, it likes it so much that it wants to go on, and does not finish one victim before attacking another.

From The Wonder Book of Tell Me Why? (Page 133)

Main course

In his delirium, they are all there in the children's seats; the urchins have put them in a jagged line. Mute and solemn with accusatory eyes, Annamarie, Blaze, Hope, Gloria, Eddie, Sarge and even Howie, post car crash, watch as Greg's life is stewed away.

He is sick of the screaming, sick of the pleading to his odd jury as Dad pokes a fork into his side. He has, without a doubt, missed his boat, condemned to participate in his grisly banquet.

The prongs stick easily into the soft rubbery skin and after a few expert administrations his liver is out. With sausage fingers Dad dines on the smooth wobbly organ. Greg's world liquifies into a maelstrom of colour. The jury melt off their seats, with Hope the last to go, her eyes hollow to Greg's predicament.

And later, the coiled stench of his lower intestines makes good effect as necklace and arm bands as the children eat and chatter. With offal blood smeared as red lipstick and rouge on cheeks, each are in wonder over the inner gaseous mechanics of Greg's body and its capacity to provide them with light hearted entertainment and protein.

To the urchins' surprise and Dad's consternation Greg, in his death throws, is miraculous in his escape. Gathering his organs Greg makes haste and runs towards the sound of the sea.

The white tail

The ship waits patiently moored off shore, sheltering from the gale force southerly winds. They were scheduled to pick up a Trader on the mainland but the crew are fearfully transfixed on a distant object, a mere dash, high in the sky trailed by a magically long white line, wispy at the ends.

There was heated discussion as to the source of the phenomena. Some viewed it as an airborne sea snake which had escaped its watery confines, others were of the opinion it was a sign for all from God, especially sinners, of the world's impending annihilation. Without a consensus they asked the Captain for his opinion via Cook who visited their reclining master. Without moving from his bed and chugging on a pipe he said that after careful consideration it was his learned opinion that what the men were experiencing was a mere crisis of faith. The Cook left with his message and conveyed it to the men but a short time later the Cook visited the Cabin again.

The crew are unsatisfied with your explanation, Captain.

Is that so?

Captain, I am discomforted also, as I have never seen such a sight before. It seems to be solid and dark at the forefront and moves slow, but it is so high up that to make such progress, it must be very strong and fast moving and always producing more of its white tail.

Tell them to set sail north and that their Captain is confident the thing that disturbs them so will go if viewed in a future time and with a different perspective.

The Cook resentfully admired the Captain's conviction in this matter. Later, his course of action was proven to be astute as the sky was clear again in the afternoon and no sign of the white tail was to be detected.

Rock Bottom

The vapour, colourless, has human form, in the manner of a certain man and this man, Greg, stumbles through the undergrowth and strips himself of a shoe and a sock and flings away his coat, across a stream, tepid and dull, pulls off another shoe, tears at his shirt, his singlet, his watch, climbs up the steep bush laden hill, snaps his fob watch, stamps on it and scratches and thumps at his skin, his trousers ripped and torn and flings into the gloom and mute with thin cracked lips he frames his clenched teeth, kicks out and pulls off his trousers, knees skinned and torso muddy he takes off his underpants, balls up and discards and remembers the porcelain doll he took that day, when was that day, it doesn't matter, he has shed his skin, bare to the world, there is no day, anymore, indifferent and unknown, no imprint on the world now, the half man, the incomplete man, the no man, the man of no consequence and he gouges at his eyes for which to alter his view, a no view, to disappear, like the very nature of light, at night, but not even a relation to night, a non associative, blackness, extinguished, and he momentarily squints in a blackness, there is no colour and no life and no judgement and no other living thing or object and he wills

his form to curl up, be nothing, not up or down, no blood, no shit, no flesh, no bone, no thoughts, no sight, no smell, no piss, no guts, no hair, no cock, no arse, no history, no back-story, no family, no mother ,no father, no children, no breath, no beat, no heart, no memory, no sight or sound emit, no god, no loved ones, no mind, no desire, no ego, no hope, but silence.

In this state he slips and slides, to the ridge, head first, down the other side, knocks his head, twists his form and finds a fissure below the surface and longs for such an enclosure, bearded wisp of a man, a hush up, a husk, a nearly life, a murmur, manoeuvres himself further into the ever diminishing furrow, as the no man, the naked man, a self buried man.

And the man weeps his last weep, and shits and pisses his final waste and ventures deeper into the tunnel that holds him in tightly, till there is no light or sound and he finds himself in a small space and wonders what previously occupied this interior, what manner of creature in safety and darkness and warmth, he decides it doesn't matter and nothing matters, he realises he now has space in this dead end to revolve and twist around with the possibility of escape but this does not concern him as it is not his plan or intention to do so, as he has no such rational facility, no plans, no plans made for him, now, as he gives up, he gives up on feeling, he gives up on pain, joy, light, future and he has arrived at complete silence and darkness and pushes the two artefacts of a past life away and casts them beyond his bleeding feet as they are of no consequence to him and he wonders why he bothered to bring them, it doesn't matter, and to let go of desire, let go of wonder, let go of will, let go of self, cease thought itself, put a stop to an expression of self, to not think, to not

think of not thinking, beyond meditation, beyond consciousness, enclosed by the crusty earth, almost airless his shallow breath.

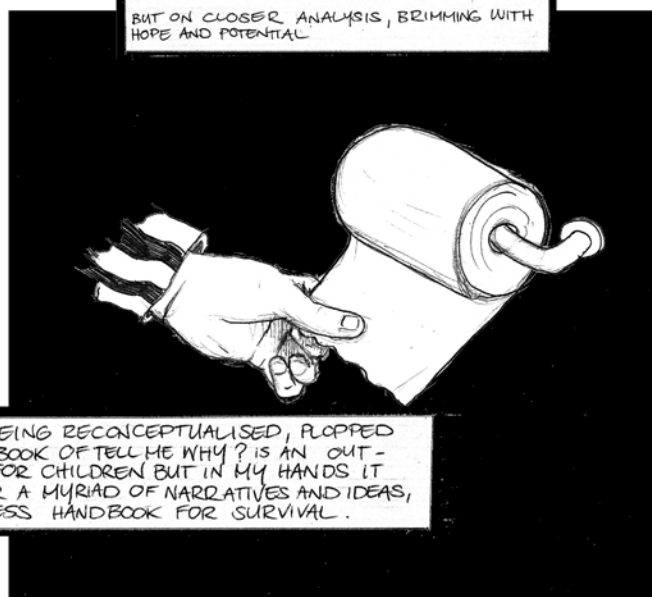
His smell a no smell and his touch a no touch, his voice a committed silence and he takes a bite of the earth wall and fills his mouth with a timeless gag, full up, unable to swallow he breathes through his nose, he merges with the soil in this underground receptacle, rock, stringent root bound maize and to his mind he ceases to exist, therefore invisible to the living and detached and finally still and laid down to all of the world.



THE WONDER BOOK OF
TELL ME WHY?

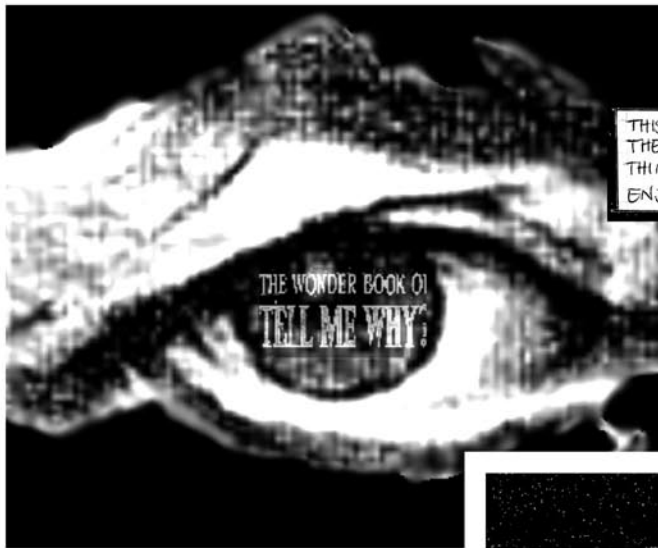


I KNEW ITS TRANSFORMATIVE POWER STRAIGHT AWAY. THAT OF A 'READYMADE'. IT SEEMED TO REFLECT WHERE I WAS AT THAT MOMENT. WASHED UP, UNDERVALUED, DISCONNECTED, REJECTED.
... JUST JUNK ...
BUT ON CLOSER ANALYSIS, BRIMMING WITH HOPE AND POTENTIAL



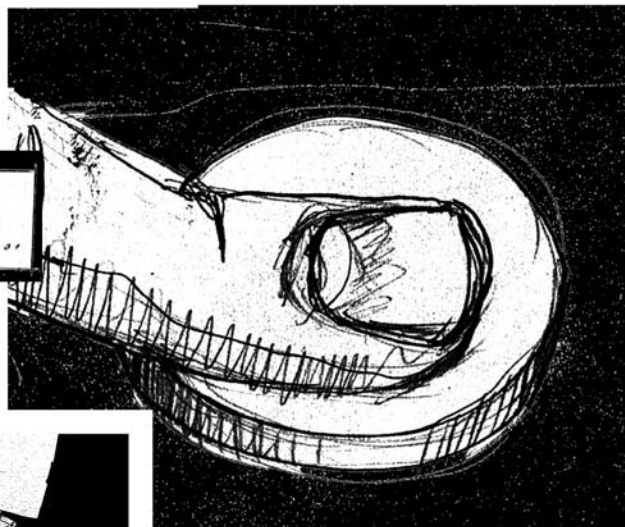
THE POWER OF THE READYMADE IS IN IT BEING RECONCEPTUALISED, FLOPPED INTO A DIFFERENT CONTEXT. THE WONDER BOOK OF TELL ME WHY? IS AN OUTDATED, REDUNDANT PUBLICATION WRITTEN FOR CHILDREN BUT IN MY HANDS IT IS AN ASSOCIATIVE GUIDE, A CATALYST FOR A MYRIAD OF NARRATIVES AND IDEAS, AN IRONIC SURROGATE BIBLE, A HOPELESS HANDBOOK FOR SURVIVAL.

THE WONDER BOOK GAVE BIRTH TO MY CHARACTERS. IT HAS INFUSED, INFORMED AND TEXTURED ASPECTS OF THE NARRATIVE OF MY NOVEL. IT DOESN'T MATTER IF THE ANSWERS ARE INCOMPLETE, OUTDATED, INCORRECT AND/OR CONFUSED. THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IS THE QUEST ITSELF, THE FORMULATION OF THE QUESTIONS, THE SUBSEQUENT STRUGGLE FOR UNDERSTANDING.



THIS CAN TAKE TIME, LIKE A GOOD CRAP.
THE IDEAL IS NOT TO RUSH, TO LET
THINGS GO IN THEIR OWN TIME, TO
ENJOY THE NATURAL PROCESS

SO I AM ALIVE AND KICKING AND
DAMNED IF I WILL BE FLUSHED DOWN
THE LITERARY GURGLER JUST YET...



Love don't live here anymore

They took me from the earth, I was hardly breathing there. All tight and warm and snug in my hole. How did they know where to find me? They have scouts everywhere. BIG BROTHER, 1984, SIS, FBI, STAZZI, CIA, IRA, El Qaeda, PLO, HAMAS and Tamil Tigers among others. They were all there lining up like over eager med students, in their culturally specific attire, twisting their dials, adjusting their beepers, wiring me up, downloading information.

The land gave birth to me. Men in sparkling white suits with big long surgical tools pulled me from the womb. The General in dark glasses un-wrapped the root systems from around my neck and wacked my dirty wrinkled arse. My face was purple, I nearly died down there, that's what I wanted, but they made me rebirth. But I have tricked them, they have the wrong suspect citizen. I am known by another name. It is secret; they haven't extracted this information from me yet. They never will.

Now in this cell I am chipped, bar-coded, processed by the state. I'm on their official secret files, have been since I was born. Definitely I'm now on the top of the most Top Secret of the Top Secret files.

I'm in here incarcerated. It's a long word. I once played it in a game of Scrabble, a long way back, when I wore a suit and talked too much and did everything too much, now I think and talk to myself. But not aloud to the world and their high powered listening devices.

I know they are coming soon; I have a knife, and a newly formed wall of sorts. They have scouts everywhere, Google Earth, The American War Against Terrorism. They think they will win, on the side of God and Good , GOODSIDE (This should be a Washington Suburb or at least a Street name.) Or “God that’s good”, a mere expression, like “Good God!”

Anyway, there are codes, everywhere, even in these seemingly harmless expressions; embedded within is their next move against me.

Look, I won’t go on, to summarise, since being plucked from the earth I have been held under duress for three days in solitary. I’m confined behind century old stone walls with not even a phone call. They had shown me my full slate, charged me with it, so I had to assume a new identity. Like those old video tapes erased over with the latest Reality TV show. I have some titles for these shows, figuratively, on the tip of my tongue. I’d like to pitch them, without speaking, to you. Can I trust you? The pick of the bunch are *Do you know this Man?* and *Citizens Gone Bad*. But the frontrunner is *Enemies Of The State - The Inside Story*.

But I had enough time underground to wipe their slate of me clean. I’m mighty proud, but scared, angry and tired. Here they come with their weapons of mass destruction and surveillance, and by smirk and jerk, trying to extract me from my sharp implement, its former life a Phillips screwdriver, the stub nosed kind.

Facing them behind my meagre barricade I know my singular right, I have a right to be silent and if I am silent I will hear what they have to say on the other side.

Prison Warden speak

Look at this fella. He thinks he is Indiana Jones.

Crazy mother fucker.

Yeah probably.

Notify the doc re assessment. I think he belongs down the road.

Why don't we disarm him now?

No, we need the doc here, to observe his behaviour.

Won't he self harm? He may hit an artery.

Just go and do what I say.

Will you?

Diary entry #

They gave me an injection in the meat of my leg to stop my body shaking. They zapped me with two thousand volts, three times, every twenty seconds for a week.

Feeding the pipe she looks at me with a narcotic veneer that was not unlike the idolatry busts of the praying Buddha.

Diary entry #

They buzzed me up into a silver cylindrical disk hovering one hundred meters up from the ground, outside in the exercise yard. The orderlies dressed in tutus punched and kicked me and put me in a choke hold. A nurse strapped me onto the bed and tucked me in till I came inside her. When the lights are out all the moans would conjoin into a hum which powers the refrigerator full of dead souls.

Remember on the Prometheus swaying dangerously? Black ink of the octopus pissing on deck, as it writhes with an all seeing eye.

Diary entry #

I heard there was an ancient waka moored nearby, or at least a sail ship with which to escape from.

I brought fire to these shores and now I pay.

Diary entry #

The walls are beige. Why not turquoise for these hospital walls? Because the resident loony Professor said turquoise was the colour scientists calculated the universe to be. He added they did their sums wrong and after a while assigned the true colour of beige to the universe.

Diary entry #

The devil tags more people in suicide than road-kill.

Diary entry #

Why stainless steel? Because the doctor said it can be easily cleaned and it was robust. Like my cock I replied and he immediately gave me an extra twenty milligrams.

Delirious I am, desperate with pain. Prostrate on this rock bound by a matrix of conspiratorial seaweed and a strong length of rope thrown to the sea gods. The albatross with beak and wing remembers my past misdeeds on the sea with no horizon. I am sure she is pecking at the innards of my very soul.

Diary entry #

They have buried babies here, still born, or not even born. Peter Piper has been here over seventy times. He has notches on his wrist to mark certain milestones.

Diary entry #

I shook hands with the Captain. His handshake was wet and spongy and not at all what I expected.

Blacker than this is the terror of no light, the horror layered with a tropical sheen of the savages sweat. Hysteria, hot and cold, the yellow shakes of malaria, blackouts and labyrinth of mangrove and mud, filth filling my nostrils to the squawk of some otherworldly parrot.

Diary entry #

I had a dream last night. I gave birth to Hope. I mooed like a cow and the anaesthetist injected me with muscle relaxant.

A piece of work he was with a penchant for collecting butterflies and young slave children.

Diary entry #

Hope lay with me and stroked my forehead.

The ocean is never the same. It is like a woman with her cycles and constantly changing moods.

Diary entry #

I had a dream last night. I had a dream once.

Diary entry #

Sleep is a relief, it is dead time. It is the waking up that is hard to swallow.

My pale fire is nearly extinguished, now just a single flicker of candlelight in some unknown platonic cave. I fear I am in delirium.

Diary entry #

If I twitch more times than ten in a row and in less than twenty seconds it means I am having a seizure and they will come and put a newspaper in between my teeth and order me to sit and pant and scratch my balls and then they will feed me and give me sugar free lime juice and a cup full of coloured sweets and I can watch the sparrows finish their dust bath. But I can't get too close as I might scare them away.

I have no time but what is on my shoulders. Incongruous grey fluffy clouds dreamily pass my aquatic deathbed. Silent and unconcerned they travel leaving me with my flimsy, weak death rattle as my only company.

Diary entry #

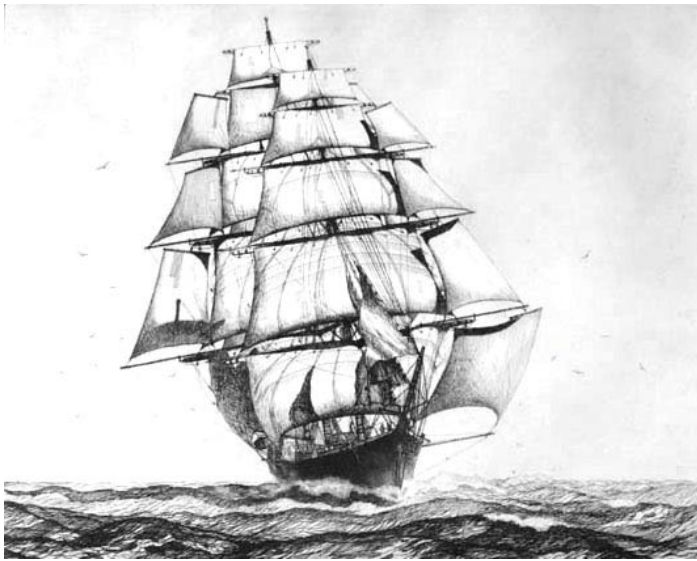
They let me have crayons. They ask me too many questions. I know they want to get to the underside of things. There is a lot of dust. Why don't you shave so your beard doesn't itch they say? And I ask how can a beard itch? I exercise my right not to do exercise.

Diary entry #

Once they asked me for a sample and pointed to a curtained off area, so I wanked into the 50ml plastic cup. They looked at me and I knew it wasn't what they had expected.

Diary entry #

I was the only one showering in this vast room full of communal shower heads.



The swollen ocean in its reflective benevolence waits patiently for me with time on her side. She accepts those who are certain and those who are not.

And so it goes, the black ship of Prometheus, resplendent with ingrained ivory continued to sail the high seas with great adventure and hardship for all on board under the bizarre, firm control of the Captain. Over the years the vessel ventured to the far icy reaches of the north and traded in the fur of the seal and across a vast Ocean to the equatorial mid reaches of the Dark Continent and the rocky heathen shores of many godless Isles.

Twas rumoured in these times of geographical and political turmoil the Prometheus lay down its intention of gunrunning having a brief foray into the art of whaling. Running parallel to the trade of muskets, the Captain forced upon good moral men the anxiety and

cruelty of the transaction of human flesh and bone which provided slave labour for the manufacture of commodity to the industrialised nations.

In telling of these daring adventures our main focus for this tale, for this book, on the face of it, at least superficially, is the life of Flynt, who, as is known to the reader, was plucked from slave labour himself when a boy and endured much hardship and abuse on the ship. He then over a period of at least two score years grew into a fine young man who gained the reputation of a skilled and hardened sailor and was known for his compassion and diplomacy in difficult situations of conflict.

Yes, and if the resilient reader could please imagine Flynt atop the loftiest perch of this vessel, setting sail to the South Sea Islands, his physical demeanour a tribute to the collective, sea faring determination of the Prometheus. Indeed, this proud ship is committed to its current task, which is to navigate afresh a new age of opportunity, therefore contributing to the supply of the latest technologies of warfare to the civilised and savage alike.

So now with this convenient summary at an end, the reader is put down in a position of relative comfort in amongst the narrative, on the signified ship, with our central protagonist in pursuance of the skilful manipulation of wind and ocean, as the Prometheus sights the southernmost extremity of an island which is in the throes of an arms race.

First contact

The native sailor reached out and clasped his hand on the forearm of Flynt who looked up at his strong grip then beyond at the smiling face of his rescuer. Being tipped from a long boat in strange seas is no laughing matter. Seeing something bordering on a form of kinship in his open face Flynt accepted his help, with his sparkling eyes and jokes to the other members of the hunting party. Now sprawled on the cluttered deck with cheers and jibes Flynt looked at him directly, searching his face for insincerity or mockery. A sudden silence befell the boat now rocking gently in the undulating swell. His face was pure; Flynt managed a smile and he extended his hand to the stout chap. He took the hand in his, (the contrast glaring) and still embarrassed Flynt pumped his hand in the formal manner as if he was back in England!

The native named Ake threw his head back in laughter as if in an offering to some pagan god. New to the group, Flynt took up his oar sheepishly, thinking that he would like to get to know this man better. Repositioned in front, the native clasped his harpoon as if it was an extension of him.

In Television we do not, of course, see the actual people and things at the transmitting end, any more than we hear the actual voices and musical instruments

when we listen to our ordinary radio receiver. In broadcasting the microphone changes the sound waves into electric signals which are in turn transmitted as radio waves through the ether to our receiver at home. The received signals are amplified, and made to operate the loudspeaker which vibrates, and produces the sounds we would hear if we were in the studio.

In a similar way, the television camera changes light waves into electric signals, which are sent through the ether. The television receiver changes the radio signals into light and shade, and builds up on a screen a reproduction of the scene we would see in the studio. The reproduction differs from the original not only in size but also in being black and white instead of coloured. However the time may shortly come when even the colour of the scene will be reproduced.

From The Wonder Book of Tell Me Why? (Page 18)

Comparative study

They emptied the traps of the writhing black eels with the silver grey underbellies and Ake triumphantly pulls a long eel from the writhing mass and smiles showing his teeth.

Tuna

Flynt smiles and looks at the native standing near naked in the stream; a cold wind wraps around them and breaks the surface of the black water. Ake chops off the head and spits it onto the bank.

It is good.

Flynt laughs at his gesture and points between Ake's legs.

Like your eel.

Ake covered half his face, fanning it in a parody of femininity. Looking directly into Flynt's face his mood shifted sideways.

At least I have skin to protect my ure ... where's yours?

Flynt uplifts his kilt and inspects his manhood rubbing the smooth head between thumb and forefinger. He holds Ake's gaze.

Cut away by a cruel god, I dare say.

Day Room

The Colour In Man is at it again. He colours the piece of paper with a black crayon. It is near completion. He looks up every few minutes at the mute Television positioned high in the corner of the Day Room.

He has a whole file of these pages, non-figurative colour fields in various degrees of exactitude. All of the pages are black or shades of grey. In some cases the marks and cross hatches are expressive and loose, revealing small white shapes of the uncovered page, often creating the illusion of TV screen static. The majority of his labour, though, is bent on producing a dense rectangle of black.

On occasions the nurses or one of the doctors would redirect him to another page or try and convince him of the virtues of drawing shapes in the likeness of things around him. But his determined insistence dictated the use of black and white crayons and access to a large quantity of A4 paper.

The Colour In Man waits patiently for the time he can be released into Community Care. His passive, non-violent approach is working. His economical use of words are selected and directed at the authority so as not to reveal his new identity, but to reassure the professionals that he is not a threat to the outside world.

Hey , why don't you try some other colours ?

No.

What about blue the colour of the sea?

Blue is a lie.

Why?

The sea is black.

No it's not.

Yes it is. You go look at the sea tonight.

Hollow of the back

The salt dissolved on Flynt's tongue from the hollow of the back of his mate. Pulsating, the cock appeared and made its way up to the dark recess. Later they drag on the pipe. A moth flies into the burning whale fat so naturally. Amused by the event Ake looks dreamily primal as if emerging from the ground itself.

Greg's prophetic dream in first person

The bundle floats past and I catch it. Inside this bundle is a brown baby with reddish hair. His eyes are mine and flutter in unison to the wings of ten exotic butterflies. Previously flattened they are now animated and detach from the bundle in awkward zigzags. I view the headland, the clouds cling to the hills without strings attached. Why am I telling you this? Because it's important to have more questions than answers, that way one can exist between the spaces.

Conversion

Naked, but for a French cavalry jacket he somehow picked up from traders, Ake wiped a sheen of sweat from his forehead.

This is against the law of your god.

I have no god, I believe in none. I am free.

I am not free, you are not free ... No man is ever free of the past ... of his shadow.

When there is no light, one has no shadow.

Your shadow is still there along with the dead, it is just not seen, and it always returns to remind you of who you are and who came before you.

Flynt dwelled on Ake's point of view and took a pipe and emptied it and tapped in thoroughly clean on his weathered knee. An eerie screech emitted from the dense bush outside. The smoke from within the bare hut made Flynt's eyes sting and a rainbow aura framed Ake's face above and close to his. Many men have been before us. I have seen them in book drawings of ancient vases. On these vases, black bearded men with erect ure chase each other in circles.

Flynt watches the face twisting into a smile. The eyes dance in the uncertain candlelight.

I'd like to drink from such a vase.

The remainder of the night was black and cold and the two men sought warmth in the small Raupo hut and entwined as though one was a Rata tree and the other the host tree. They awoke to mist and the sun trying to look through at them seeking evidence of their secret union.

A bullet from a modern military rifle leaves the muzzle at the extraordinary high speed of 2,440 feet per second, or more than 1,650 miles per hour. But wind resistance at such a high speed is very great, and although a bullet starts with a speed of 2,440 feet per second, it only travels 1,800 feet in the first second. In the next second the distance travelled is reduced to 1,200 feet, while in the third second

it is only about 900 feet. At a range of two miles, the bullet can do little more than drop on its target.

From The Wonder Book of Tell Me Why? (Page 24)

Wai

Wai took hold of the manhood and bit sharply severing it. The slave screamed and her counterpart clubbed him down to silent oblivion. Careful not to spoil the freshly carved moko he partly caved in the back of the head. The other slaves in a line whimpered and huddled close looking down at their feet.

Wai held Flynt's stare in open challenge. With a mixture of fascinated desire and disgust he looks away to the horizon, wondering how he got to this strange place, how he could be party to such savagery.

With blood on her lips she walked up close to Flynt.

Are you afraid of me white man?

Yes, you have sharp teeth.

You are afraid of woman. You have never bedded one have you?

Only in my sleep.

Your sleep?

Yes, opium sleep. A sort of half sleep.

Later with the slaves dispatched their heads in preparation for shrinking and trading, Wai led Flynt into the bush.

She took hold of his cock and wedged it within the dark mass between her legs. With a handful of his hair she spat out dirt, scratching him and laughing.

Push harder pākehā.

The brain is the great organ which receives and interprets impressions passed to it by the nerves of our five senses. It is made up of millions of tiny “brain cells”, special “areas” devoted to receiving sensations from the “sense” organs and giving orders to our “moving” organs, the muscles; and lastly, of a complicated system of communicating “fibres”—minute electric wires, as it were.

When a child is born, practically all the “cells” which have to do with “thinking” and “memory” contain innumerable little “granules”, but have no “impressions”

Soon after birth, the “senses” begin to “take notice” --- see, hear, feel, etc --- and the impressions are passed to the brain cells and make what we call “experience”.

As the years advance, the brain, by putting one experience with another, performs the act called “thinking,” and when someone asks a question, or a particular sight, sound or smell is conveyed to the brain from these senses, it is able, by communication between its “cells”, to recall other experiences – it “remembers”.

From The Wonder Book of Tell Me Why? (Page 68)

Under attack

Entwined with the Pākehā, Wai was stuck like the pork, a gush of her blood splattering the tree. Flynt managed to locate his knife and so slit the attackers face in vertical fashion and both life and death are merged into one movement. Mounting another back, Flynt wrapped his legs around the torso and slashed at a tattooed belly, now close, and then he was forced to the ground and the warrior on top bit his shoulder. All the protagonists were aware of their primal commonality, mixing their blood in the struggle for life and Flynt decided his adversary was too strong. He knew he had to stand up, so as to live.

Flynt was aware of Wai grabbing hold of the man's neck and she deftly poked one eye out, but not completely as it was looking around on the cheek-bone. But there were a few others approaching and Wai, naked and crazy with blood lust, and ate the hanging eye and cried out to her ancestors in delirious chant, dancing witchlike down the slope and picking up a severed arm.

When did that happen?

And thrashing at the attackers from a short distance and welding the severed limb, sticking her tongue out and rolling her eyes and taunting the men with her teke, inserting the foes dead hand in her and them, stopping in their tracks, believing she was an evil spirit and fleeing not quietly in a panic, crashing over the ridge.

Her face was affronting Flynt's and her eyes vacating still and she was panting as animal and he thought she might seek to kill him. A matrix of blood was running down from a gash between her breast and Flynt, his left forearm, broken hanging onto his cold musket.

In the fresh darkness, they were slipping out of that gully with morepork calling, coupling, as if to herald their union and Flynt intuitively retaining a belief he will have further union with this terrifying beauty savage; thrilling and previously a type of woman unknown to him.