

Chapter Five

Absenting the Chinese Man in The Ancestor Game

The novel retells again and again the story of the person who is marooned on some kind of island of metaphor and who comes upon the tracks of another self. But always it is the story of the isolated self seeking to transcend its isolation by becoming the other, the other self, through communication of the subjective reality of the self. When we were children we all asked someone close to us the awesome

question, What is it really like to be you?

(Alex Miller, "Chasing My Tale" 6)

In an interview, Alex Miller has said that The Ancestor Game was written for a Chinese artist friend: "I followed his experience. I wanted to validate him" (Ryle 1).

Notwithstanding that the character Lang Tzu Feng is at one point described as having a "mischievous, primate quality of cunning" (17), Alex Miller's The Ancestor Game (1992) has one of the more sympathetic representations of a Chinese man in recent Australian literature. Although it presents a sympathetic representation, The Ancestor Game is also predicated upon the displacement of that Chinese male subject by another. Representation, as Sneja Gunew tells us, involves two meanings, "on the one hand... as 'depiction' and on the other as 'delegation' (speaking for)" ("Playing" 87). Within this "speaking for" we can see representation is also an impulse to displace. In the second of these meanings a line of authority is assumed, a position vis-à-vis the one who is spoken for. However representation is also a practice in the absence of the one spoken for, and despite Miller's validating intentions of "speaking for", I will argue in this chapter that it is also possible to detect how ambivalent, limiting and marginalising this representation as depiction of a Chinese man is across the text, and how it is predominantly a practice of absenting the other. How also appropriate then that Miller's "central" Chinese male character should be named Lang Tzu, "two characters which in Mandarin signify the son who goes away" (Ancestor 116).

In the first chapter of The Ancestor Game the narrator Steven Muir, a writer, has returned to England from Australia for his Scottish father's funeral. When he asks his mother whether she wants him to stay with her in England she replies no. At the end of the chapter Muir then contemplates: "Was I returning to Australia... to continue my exile, or was I going home?" (Ancestor 8). The sentence encapsulates the dilemma faced by the central character Muir and a number of the novel's other major characters; the ambivalences and ambiguities of migrancy, feelings of dislocation, longings for return, and the possibilities of multiple geographic and cultural belongings. In Melbourne Muir meets and befriends the art teacher Lang Tzu Feng and the artist Gertrude Spiess. Gertrude, who is part Chinese, although her Asian maternal genealogy is deliberately elided from the story, is the daughter of Dr August Spiess, a German, Lang Tzu's former tutor/mentor, and the Feng family doctor, who accompanied Lang Tzu to Australia from China in 1937 in order to escape the Japanese invasion. Through this friendship with Lang Tzu and Gertrude, Muir becomes involved in writing a book The Chronicle of the Fengs, itself a parallel representational endeavour. Lang Tzu might well be the representation of the Chinese artist friend Miller had wanted to validate, however the novel is framed within Gertrude's preparations for a solo art exhibition and the novel concludes with the exhibition's opening. Within this structure are multiple movements of the Chinese male into western space; beginning with Lang Tzu's great grandfather, the first Feng as a ten-year old boy, and then Lang Tzu at a similar age in the 1930s. If the young are inherently incapable of representing or speaking for themselves then the line of representation through delegation might appear a more legitimate and authorised task. Miller's sympathetic representation of the Chinese male spends many more pages of the novel narrating the positions of the prepubescent first Feng and the young Lang Tzu, than the adult life and experiences of an adult Lang Tzu. When Miller does take to the position of the adult Lang Tzu, then we see that the representation is narratively limited by comparison.

The main conflict in The Ancestor Game is about resisting the cultural pull of one's ancestors and their demands. Lang Tzu's mother, Lien, sides with her traditional Chinese father. Lien, which means Lotus in the novel, also happens to be a homonym for the word to connect, to join, or to be in succession — thus in continuity with tradition. Lang Tzu's father C. H. Feng on the other hand has become completely westernised and all the more powerful, ruthless and masculine for it. Between the pull of these oppositions is a space that can, if only superficially, open up to others. Ien Ang has

stated that in the era of multiculturalism, “racially and ethnically marked people are no longer othered today through simple mechanisms of rejection and exclusion, but through an ambivalent and apparently contradictory process of inclusion by virtue of othering” (“Curse” 139, original emphasis). Ang draws on Ghassan Hage to assert that this inclusiveness is based in part on a form of “cultural enrichment” for the dominant culture (142), which in turn maintains a relational positioning of the self and the other, or in other words the dominant figuratively nourished by the difference of the minority. In The Ancestor Game we see this kind of inclusiveness in the character Muir recollecting that since his earliest childhood he believed that within himself, one day he would “come upon extensive and complex landscapes rich with meaning and mystery, waiting for [him] to explore”, and that the purpose of his “life would be in the exploration of these places”(10). He observes Lang and Gertrude and realises that: “The way I began to understand them offered me the outlines of a story... it seemed to me that Lang and Gertrude might occupy the vacated homelands of my interior, which were in danger of being colonised by the chanting spectre of my father” (17). Through a position of incorporating the other, the subjective self it would seem is then both sustained and strengthened.

It is not however to Muir’s interior that we have direct access, but to a specular (other) one. Most of the intrusions into the terrain of the other are performed by Muir himself. Muir through a number of furtive forays observes: “I witnessed myself penetrating more deeply into Lang’s domain. Leaving him, I could not resist the impression that I was becoming the person inhabiting the landscape within his mirror” (39). And again: “I had not retreated in confusion from his door... but had inserted myself into the interstice created by his momentary absence... if he wished to reinstate himself then he would have to read my signs.” (154). Like a good coloniser, the stability of place is disrupted through resignification, as if to disorientate the former occupier should he or she wish to return. The imposition upon the other extends not only to the Chinese male but also the female, as when Muir enters the house of Victoria Feng, Lang Tzu’s great aunt, and has at least the semblance of a spatial dialectics:

Placing myself at the place where she [Victoria] had first insinuated her own presence into the landscape, insisting on my own existence in the place from where she had observed the artist at work... Victoria had become the landscape. She had

determined the way I was seeing it, directing my attention towards the significance of certain features and away from others. (100-01)

Such passages indicate alternating occupations of the self into the space of another, so that nowhere is free of incursion; instead everyone is both a potential coloniser and exile. This exchange of places becomes an overriding state of universality in The Ancestor Game; Muir says: “My mother identified our caste as both refugees and colonists. But isn’t that, sooner or later, what everyone must become?” (109). The political character of refuge and colonisation in such landscapes becomes universal practice; ordinary individuals who may never travel and itinerant cosmopolitan citizens may practice it by design or unwittingly. But these instances of furtive “colonisation” and occupation of other places are surprisingly free of actual encounters; rather they are more likely to occur in the absence of the other. Why then does Muir enter the space of the other when the other is paradoxically absent? What is the purpose of this spatial clearing? James Moy states that it is “within an ideologically enforced space of absence that invites political manipulation” (qtd in Metzger “Example” 642). It is at this point that Miller is attempting not representation but appropriation of that minority space for himself, or at least his principal character Muir, and by extension still further for all diasporic subjects. Within such unfettered movements Alex Miller is himself a coloniser. Miller came to Australia from England as a young man and became a jackaroo in north Queensland in the early 1950s. It is not surprising then that Miller enlarges the diasporic condition of dislocation and exile to include such white European characters as Muir and Spiess. “Here” writes Spiess of Australia in his journal “the displaced are in place” (284)¹.

Whereas the concept of the diaspora might have once referred to the dispersion of Jews among Gentiles, and then more generally to the displacement or exile of groups of people of common national or cultural origin, William Safran has noted how currently the terms diaspora and diaspora communities “seem increasingly to be used as metaphoric designations for several categories of people — expatriates, expellees, political refugees, alien residents, immigrants, and ethnic and racial minorities tout court” (“Diasporas” 83). Revathi Krishnaswamy has also argued that terms such as diaspora and exile have been “emptied of their histories of pain and suffering and are being deployed promiscuously to designate a wide array of cross-cultural phenomena” (128). In the universality of diasporic dislocation and exile, one can then group together

Cambodian refugees of rural backgrounds with highly mobile professional Indian or Chinese Singaporeans in Sydney, or perhaps white English professionals in Hong Kong and Shanghai, glossing the disparate experiences that these groups encounter in leaving their places of origin or homelands. For anthropologist James Clifford there may be problems defining a “travelling term” such as diaspora (*Routes* 244), but the San Francisco based Chinese investor who says “I can live anywhere in the world, but it must be near an airport” (Ong 771) involves a kind of “pseudo-universal cosmopolitan bravado [that] stretches the limit of the term ‘diaspora’” (*Routes* 257). On the other hand, Julie Matthews is far more sceptical of global, transnational movements of people so loosely associated with notions of diaspora, and argues: “Mobility is not the condition of most of the world, or the defining feature of most societies and communities” (“Deconstructing” par 44)². Yet those who physically travel are not the only ones who feel the impact of travelling. It is difficult to image the contemporary populations in countries and regions such as Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Fiji, the Americas, north and south, and the Caribbean, as anything else but in the main predominantly constituted by historical colonisation and migrations from Europe, Africa and Asia. Perhaps the problem is not whether travel and mobility mark contemporary populations but more specifically identifying which groups or, broadly speaking, classes of people have greater mobility, and which groups are compelled not just impelled to move, and the ease or difficulties involved in such migrations, flights of asylum, business trips, tours, legal and illegal border crossings.

Travelling, or changing places, is nevertheless a positioning, and positioning for a theorist such as Stuart Hall is crucial given as he says, “all discourse is ‘placed’” (223). Sneja Gunew also argues that “Attempting to position oneself is an intrinsic part of situating oneself in a marginal sense... those who do not consider this to be part of their... writing performances have already positioned themselves in a centrist mode” (87). For Gunew however it becomes problematic when representation is performed by someone not ostensibly or intrinsically of that specific marginal position, such as when a male academic seeks to represent the positions of radical feminists, or perhaps in Alex Miller’s case a white male English migrant writer in Australia representing a male Chinese migrant artist, that is, in both cases someone from the centre assuming a position on the margins. As Gunew contends “It all hinges on constructing a certain ‘authority’, a right to speak ‘in the name of’” (89). In *The Ancestor Game* the construction of this “authority” hinges on an expanded diaspora definition that can

include white immigrant middle class males, and which is sufficiently commensurable with the position of the represented diasporic Chinese man. Representation may be the “natural” domain of the fiction writer, in the sense of depiction, but Miller is aware that he is also in the mode of “speaking for”, taking the minority position, or as Gunew characterises it: “the condition of a privileged group who are able to slum it occasionally” (89). My interest is therefore not in questioning the disparate meanings of diaspora but rather, in respect of taking the minority/diaspora position, to repeat the question that Gunew herself asks, “why do it?” (89).

The Ancestor Game is a narrative in which there are authorial advantages to representing the minority position when one has, or can claim to have, an authentic experience of commensurable dislocation. Constructing a line of shared experience through the trope of exile is one way of achieving this, but so too is bringing the minority position towards the centre and confusing the relationship between centre and margin. Thus the common positions of Muir and Lang Tzu can be described as both refugee/exile and colonists. The possibility that Lang Tzu can actually occupy the authoritative position of the centre however is doubtful even in relation to the indigenous figure, given the undeniable dominance of white European occupation. But as if to remind us of the fictionality of The Ancestor Game, its issues of authority and authorship, appropriation, representation, and authenticity, the character Muir warns that his writing is “Not China but an Australian fiction of China, like Gertrude’s Australian fiction of Germany” (108). The Ancestor Game is throughout a self-consciously written text that anticipates critical reading. Early on in the novel Miller figuratively warns the unsympathetic critic off the text. Describing an article written on Gertrude’s art, Muir ruminates: “The article posed as scholarly, but possessed none of the enthusiasm and generosity one hopes to find in a work of scholarship. It was disappointing... I understood the point of it was to transpose the locus of authority from the works to the discussion of the works. The writer had assumed the role of validating authority” (18). For Miller the validating authority is an ethical and negotiated one between the author and the represented. Muir is afraid that Lang himself might regret Muir’s version of his family chronicle: “How was he [Lang] going to recover his own version of those past events now? How was he going to rid himself of my images, so very nearly coincident with his own that he’d been forced to acknowledge them. But not his own. A distortion of his own” (108). For Miller it is primarily an admission, that one is not merely speaking in the place of the other but as Certeau argues also “keeps his concern for

protecting the knowledge which he supposes resides in the other... [and] arranges his admissions in order to preserve what he believes about the other.” (*Heterologies* 55).

The proposition of a common positionality is further explored in one of the central episodes of *The Ancestor Game*, which shifts the narrative to the time of Lang Tzu’s paternal great grandfather, known as the first Feng. The first Feng is an orphan, and blinded in one eye. He is given the name Feng, meaning phoenix, by Captain Larkins of the ship *Nimrod* upon which he sails to Australia. The captain says “There’s no point in being Chinese if you’ve no ancestors” (217)³. In Australia the first Feng is indentured on a Victorian farm as a shepherd, living in a single room hut built from timber he has hewn himself in an “Arcadian grove” (220). But the ideal of the Arcadian grove is also set against the “code of a fallen Adam” (220). Feng has two shepherding companions: Dorset, a Koori youth who had been taken from his tribe as an infant to be brought up and educated in England, the other is Nunan an Irishman in his forties. The three share a dislocation from their respective pasts, Feng from China, Nunan from Ireland and Dorset from his sense of Aboriginality. The three characters occupy degrees of marginality vis-à-vis the dominant English colonists in terms of cultural and class positions, but in the absence of a dominant figure they interact through a “constructed... lingo comprehensible only to themselves” (222) and live as “masters of linguistic make-do, their discourse rose upon it as it was elaborated, and they enjoyed between themselves friendship and understanding and harmony” (223). If there were any hybrid or syncretic cultural possibilities, Miller’s ironic use of terminology such as “constructed”, “linguistic” and “discourse” hints at an illusory vision of Arcadian pastoralism. The white landowners in any case seek out Dorset, on the assumption that Dorset being Aboriginal has innate tracking skills, which will enable him to find the killer of a white farmer. The landowners come across Feng sleeping in a gully and Feng realises in an awakening that corresponds to a transition of colonial space into fully white Australian space that:

The world had changed. He understood at the moment of waking that he was no longer in the place where he had gone to sleep... that there could be no regaining that former place... something had awoken in these mounted men the knowledge that they were of the same tribe. Some event had threatened their species and had stirred within them the latent memory of ancestral bonds, and, in becoming familiars of each other, they had become strangers to him. (225)

Dorset becomes for the landowners the personification of the “return of the repressed”, in effect they cannot bear the discomfort of him looking over their shoulders, the reminder of their own transgressions, and they have to murder Dorset. When Feng and Nunan attempt to bury Dorset they find “Dorset’s motherland resisted his internment. She refused to take him back. There was to be no reconciliation between them... he had declared himself free and free he would remain” (234). Dorset’s impossible reconciliation with the land might be seen as equally the unfulfilled reconciliation between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians. On the other hand Dorset’s own irreconcilability with the land tends to suggest an essentialist view of Aboriginality, one that does not account for changing patterns of identification. Furthermore if the notion of freedom from one’s ancestors, which in this case is also an alienation from the land, is the path to reconciliation, it seems a rather disconcerting solution for the indigenous population who have lost the most and have the most to recover.

Beyond indigenous reconciliation and native place the notion of homeland, or diaspora origins, becomes problematic in *The Ancestor Game*. Miller, through Spiess, would have us think of a “land imagined and dreamed, not an actual place. The ancients of all nations understood that we don’t belong anywhere real” (259). But the reckless figure of Spiess, the kind of orientalist collector of Chinese antiquities inured to the privileges of extraterritoriality in 1920s Shanghai, goes about in the Chinese city of Hangzhou as a naïve colonialist who strays too far from protected space and is assaulted by a teeming Chinese crowd bent on his murder. Rather than China as the place to which the young Lang Tzu should belong, the dubious mentor-figure Spiess tells Lang, resonant of Captain Larkin’s advice to the first Feng, “You are literally un-familiar here. But in Australia, which is I believe a kind of phantom country lying invisibly somewhere between East and West, you may find a few of your own displaced and hybrid kin to welcome you. China is not the place for you” (260). Within this construction Australia is also a utopian space, where positions such as east and west have very little representational stability or precise signification. Curiously lacking in this account of Australia, however, is the white Australia policy that would otherwise impede most Asians from entry.

Spiess nevertheless tells Lang “We’ve confused ourselves by allowing it to seem that intractable differences divide the East from the West” (259). If the character Spiess

has trouble dividing differences between east and east, Miller nevertheless stereotypically sets up sufficiently clear boundaries between the two positions within China. Lang Tzu's westernised wealthy banker father C. H. Feng lives in the International Settlement in Shanghai, is powerful and influential, lives completely amidst western furnishings, "had long meditated upon an aversion to the traditional cultures of China and was contemptuous of those who wished to preserve them and the memory of them" (29). Lang Tzu's maternal grandfather in the provincial city of Hangzhou on the other hand is an aging traditional effete literati painter, his traditional household is in decline, no longer powerful or influential. Lang Tzu's shifts between westernised Shanghai and traditional Chinese Hangzhou creates in him a dimorphism: "being at home while travelling was merely another aspect of the precious gift of dimorphism, of his lang tsze-ness" (193).

Australia, from Spiess's own European perspective, is neither east nor west, and therefore can be proffered potentially as a utopian space. However Spiess's facile envisioning of this space as unencumbered and utopian goes against indigenous claims, which themselves are neither east nor west. In this manner, The Ancestor Game appears to be frequently on the edge of revealing and eliding the dominant spatial practices of European occupation. Muir's The Chronicle of the Fengs and Miller's The Ancestor Game are each "a chronicle of recovery and exploration" (100) that draw attention to their own retelling. If we were in any doubt, towards the end of the novel we realise that Spiess's reckoning of Australia as utopian space is a misrepresented space, and that Miller, writing during a time of Aboriginal land rights momentum, is after all engaging in parody:

Here there is no pre-existing law that waits in the hinterland to reassert its rule against their [white] occupation... the indigenous inhabitants of this place are so thoroughly dispersed from their lands and discouraged from revolt that they have ceased to possess a jurisdiction to be reckoned with. Clearly, possession of ancestral links to the land confers no special privileges here... Here to have arrived a week ago, as I, is to be more privileged than to have arrived a thousand years ago... here the displaced are in place. (283-284)

Counter-discourses proposed in The Ancestor Game might only reaffirm the breadth or universality of dislocation. Victoria Feng summarily dismisses Spiess's

notion of the “lang tsze” (sic) — a son “who has gone away from home, who has gone away and gone astray, who has abandoned the customs of his family” (289). Victoria says “I do not wish to figure life merely as a journey... as travelling to a sacred place of understanding and returning fulfilled and forgiven” (289). Just as Muir is writing an Australian fiction of China, Victoria tells Spiess that she is not a traveller, not a “lang tsze”, that she has spent all her years “imagining China” from her garden in Kew. “It’s not China but the imagining that interests me. A Chinese would recognise nothing of home in my stories... I write of what it is to live among strangers... I do not write of what it is to be enlightened and redeemed” (289-90). Here the situation is not so much a discourse authorised by the other as one to be acquiesced by the other, and in that act the silencing of the other. Both Muir and Victoria Feng speak for Miller in his acknowledgement and self-assertion as author. Miller has himself been to China and spent some significant amount of time there, but aware of issues of representation and authenticity he is careful to make transparent his own fictional space. To emphasise the point, Miller signposts at various stages of the text his presence in the place of the other. Prior to declaring that this is “an Australian fiction of China” Muir shows Lang a chapter of his manuscript. Lang returns it to Muir and says: “You could have been there, Steven” (108). Muir thinks this is a begrudging acknowledgement, he sees Lang stand with his back to Gertrude and himself “on the outer edge of the mound looking towards the tremulous poplar” (108). Miller, with a constructed authorisation, has in effect from this point pushed the adult Lang from the centre of the narrative. Miller has literally turned Lang Tzu around, redirected his gaze, if not dispensed with him all together. From another perspective the turning of Lang Tzu’s back to Muir might well be a muted protest of his marginalisation.

By the end of The Ancestor Game Muir again professes an uneasiness about not having shown any more of his manuscript to Lang: “I was afraid of his opinion of them; and even more of his claims, of what his opinion and his claims might do to my possession of these unfinished pieces” (294). It is an admission that Muir’s fiction of China and a Chinese man might after all be seen as “spurious” and that “it was as if he were taunting me with his possession of a certainty he knew I wouldn’t be able to match” (295). But Muir, or Miller, deftly resorts to aesthetics rather than authenticity as ultimate authority: “Gertrude had embraced me and had generously understood all this and been careful to say nothing. Her acknowledgement had been important to me. For she was, as Lang had observed so often the only real artist among us — she had made

something her own” (295). It is the authority, and generosity of art then that allows Miller to presume to speak in the place of the other — standing in the place of the other yet caught in the dilemma of representation and the silencing of the response of the other.

Although assuming the place of the other, Miller has to vacate the space back to the other and look again at the Chinese man’s foreignness. After the death of Mao Zedong, which in the novel at least marks the re-opening of China to the west, Lang, “the son who goes away”, is excited by the prospect of returning to China. From his own position of dislocation Muir dismisses the notion that Lang was foreign, “it dismayed me to see him so described... An intimacy was available to me” (296). If modern dislocation and exile is such a common condition then why is the notion of foreignness any more disturbing? The transition between the self and the other is however sufficiently facile that whoever is speaking is momentarily disguised: “I got back to Hangzhou, somehow. It had been difficult. I arrived there on my own... I ran up to the doorway and hammered on it with my fists... There was no one there. The place was empty. They can never know I returned” (301). Again there is an absence. A failure of the encounter with the other. Rather than the return of Lang Tzu to his mother’s Hangzhou house, it is actually Muir who has spoken, who has made one more imposition upon the space of the other. Not surprising then that Lang is, according to Ouyang Yu, “more an idea than a character” so that the “image of the Chinese has transcended the mere physical description of racial and cultural particularities to become something so metaphysical... that the Other disappears to give place to the idea of infinite boundary crossing” (“Ultimate” 44). It is however the corporeal Chinese man who in effect is pushed towards a liminal space, while the space he has vacated has opened up to the “infinite boundary crossing” of the presence and voice of the self-exilic white male subject. *The Ancestor Game* concludes with the late arrival of Muir at the opening ceremony of Gertrude’s art exhibition. Gertrude and Lang Tzu are looking at a large triptych picture, a unified picture of a divided landscape. Muir’s own arrival at the exhibition is also a restatement of his own presence: “It surprises me to reflect that the dream of the red doorway is not his [Lang’s] dream, but is my own” (302). There is thus a final ambiguity and ambivalence — a desire to represent the other and yet a simultaneous desire to assert the place of the other as also one’s own.

Conclusion

The Ancestor Game is an exploration of the self in the guise of the other — the Chinese man — an exploration that is a practice of absenting the other for manipulative purposes. Rather than expanding the presence of other voices in his text Miller produces an effect that closes the space available to the Chinese male voice. The adult voice of Lang Tzu Feng I have argued is limited to the extent that within his circumscribed role there is room only for a muted voice of protest, given the central role he might have played. Instead the story of the adult Lang Tzu is relegated behind his younger incarnation. Even the first Feng, the ten-year old child, is given a more prominent role in carrying Miller's narrative of diasporic existence. Overall the relegation or the absenting of the older Lang Tzu creates a situation in which to interpose a discourse of European minority positionality commensurable with the dislocation, exile or diasporic experience of the "other", be the other an Aboriginal or a Chinese figure. Ultimately, this kind of representation mitigates the colonising presence of the European figure and lessens the historical viewpoints of Aborigines and Chinese when everyone is seen to share a common experience of dislocation.

Notes

¹ Miller has Spiess's journals end in 1937, effectively interrupting what might be a historical retelling of experiences of enemy alien internments during the second world war, or post war enforced repatriations of refugees that would counter the benign dislocations of The Ancestor Game.

² Matthews cites UN world immigrant figures of 100 million (including 20 million refugees) out of a total population of 6 billion. Such figures are inherently misleading when the figure only refers to first generation migrants; nor do the figures by themselves tell of the impact of migration on global and local politics, economies, social and cultural institutions.

³ The sentence is remarkably similar in substance to a line in Charmian Clift and George Johnston's High Valley in which an old man tells a young boy "there is no place in China for a Chinese without ancestry, without land, without a birthright, without a name" (11).

Conclusion

This thesis has examined representations of Chinese men in Australian fiction from the end of the white Australia policy up to the year 2000. Studies of representations of Chinese men in Australian fiction have been relatively under-represented in academic research. While there has been no lack of representation of Chinese men in Australian fiction I took the under-representation in academic interest as an appropriate point of entry. The era of the white Australia policy is sufficiently recent for its role in the national imaginary not to have been dissipated through the institutionalisation of multiculturalism and the impact of non-European migration to Australia. I have argued that an examination of the various texts would reveal representations of Chinese men that continued to be affected by a national imaginary of white Australia, and the dominant spatial practices of exclusion manifested in the texts in the forms of orientalisng, fetishising, abjection, incorporative confusion, movement inhibitions, and positional appropriations.

Common to the texts considered in Chapter One were representations of Chinese men which were still mired, even if self-consciously, in pre-multicultural Australian stereotypes of Chinese men and their continued marginalisation within Australian society. However the deployment of stereotypes in these texts was equally liable to escape their authors' control and resulted in not deconstructions of such stereotypes but often the reinforcement of them. An examination of the boundary work or social ordering that stereotypes perform also revealed the preoccupation of white Australians with racial narratives of white history, positioning, and the ambivalences of sharing space with Aborigines and non-whites. At another level the use of stereotypes manifested what Homi Bhabha considered a structural link between racial stereotypes and fetishism, in which there was an ambivalent recognition and disavowal of racial and cultural difference. It was argued in these cases that the presence of the Chinese male figure itself was a fetishism for the recognition and disavowal of Aboriginal presence, and in which the Chinese male appeared to occlude the figure of the Aboriginal person for which Alison Ravenscroft has said was a picture too "frightening" for white Australians to see because of past practices of dispossession and colonisation. In terms of spatial indications, the Chinese man's marginality was interposed between the centrality of whiteness and the extreme marginality of Aboriginality. In the face of a

national imaginary that so often lapses into a loss of visual acuity of minority positions, this kind of selective racial occlusion is forcing Aboriginal interests at times to contest visibilities with other ethnic groupings.

Since 1973 Australia has seen repeated avowals and disavowals of Asian immigration and multiculturalism as though such incorporative confusion should necessarily be repeatedly played out as a public health issue for the nation. In the presence of the freakishly small figure of Billy Kwan, white Australian subjectivity in The Year of Living Dangerously is confronted with the allegorical prospect of incorporating the Chinese man into the national body that for so long pleased in its own whiteness and purity. In the mid-1960s the world of absolute western dominance seemed to be diminishing, and the Vietnam war was already proving intractable to American military solutions. In the 1970s Australia could no longer justify its adherence to a racially discriminatory immigration policy, especially when the countries closest to it were newly independent Asian nations that had recently thrown off colonial domination and looked askance at such external examples of racism. For western countries like Australia new kinds of orientalisng discourse less obviously racial in character were needed in order to distinguish the “us” from the “them” and have since been carried along the lines of democracy, respect for human rights and the individual, the rule of law, environmentalism and religious tolerance.

In 1975 Indo-Chinese refugees from Vietnam began arriving in Australia, and social change increasingly crept into Australia. Of the novels examined in this thesis The Year of Living Dangerously is the one closest to 1973, which marks the end of the white Australia policy and the diminishing possibility of imagining a racially homogenous society. The Year of Living of Dangerously is also the text that most clearly exhibits the theme of loss and melancholy, and the confusion and ambivalence of attempting to incorporate the Chinese presence into white space. While the earliest of the novels, the themes of The Year of Living Dangerously endure as the most contemporaneous and important among the novels analysed in this thesis.

Separated by approximately twenty years, the representations of figures such as Billy Kwan and Freddy Chang in The Idea of Perfection deserve some comparison. Whereas the figure of Billy Kwan seems entirely unfamiliar and freakish in body, the figure of Freddy Chang is paradoxically familiar for the stereotypes he is compared to in the text and doesn't quite match except in the one aspect of being morally transgressive. This moral transgressiveness is the basis of the retribution he receives; an

atavistic replay of nineteenth century white perceptions of the corrupting, predatory influence of the Chinese man. Freddy Chang in the eyes of Felicity is unlovable, and Grenville in self-consciously attempting to dispel the stereotype gives us instead the subconscious image of the abject Chinese man who deserves punishment. In contrast to Freddy Chang the figure of Billy Kwan is all too morally superior, and despite his dwarfish, grotesque body Billy's narcissistic weakness turns out to be antithetical not only to carnival but significantly to the mythic egalitarian ethos of Australian masculinity.

If absurd racial stereotypes could still be employed in the late 1990s, from the perspective of the female Chinese Australian author production of cultural difference can take on explicitly gendered and geographical dimensions. The orientalist Chinese man follows everything that is oppressive, violent, undemocratic and cruel that can be characterised as pertaining to the "east", while everything that is liberating, safe, self-fulfilling, romantic and utopian for Chinese women is either western and/or in the "west".

In Love and Vertigo, situated in the diasporic Chinese communities of Southeast Asia, Hsu-Ming Teo's stereotypical male Chinese oppression and cruelty towards Chinese women compels the latter to seek refuge in the utopian spaces of western countries — in this case Australia after the end of the white Australia policy. For Chinese women it is not only the geographic coordinates of western countries but also the deterritorialised/global spread of western culture in the wake of colonialism and imperialism that seems to provide gender equality. The west, or more specifically western culture, provides western-style educations in Malaysia and Singapore, western professional careers, and alluring western discourses of various kinds ranging from poetry to love. Love and Vertigo however reveals that western space may be unreal, utopian, and potentially disillusioning. The lesson to be learnt in the movement from cultural and geographic east to the west is that the Chinese woman in company with her Chinese male counterpart must continue to contest Chinese patriarchy even in western space. But there is another lesson, with perhaps considerable exchange value and which helps keep the Australian woman in place; as Shirley Tucker says, "while patriarchy in Australia is bad enough, it seems that the excesses of Chinese patriarchy are an important reminder, at least to an Australian audience, that things could be worse" ("Beyond" 129).

In Brian Castro's Birds of Passage and After China, women are not the impetus for moving out of Chinese space and into the white space of Australia but form part of the west's allure and the cure for the Chinese man's lack of potency. Whereas Teo's novel conveys the resilient reach of Chinese patriarchy under the cultural guard of the west, Castro's two novels follow instead the Chinese man's uneasy, impeded movements into western space that require the aid of women to metaphorically bear him across boundaries of restriction.

In Birds of Passage far from the stable place of Chinese patriarchy, Castro reiterates the orientalist conception of China as feminised space, the nation and men emasculated through both the invasion of nineteenth century European colonialism and imperialism, and the attachment to stifling Chinese traditions. If there is any apparent contradiction in this orientalist perception compared with Teo's east/west discourse, it is merely that no matter how feminised Chinese space may be it nevertheless remains a relationship of domination of Chinese men over Chinese women.

In the early 1980s, those Chinese Australians who had been resident in Australia well before the end of the white Australia policy would have been familiar with the gold rush history of conflict between European and Chinese miners and the part this had in creating the white Australia policy. Castro, in his novel, is rewriting Chinese masculinity into this history to present an image of a robust Chinese masculinity although without reinterpreting that accepted history. In Birds of Passage the character Lo Yun Shan is forced to leave Australia; the supposedly redeeming aspect of this is that he has killed two white men. In a morally questionable tale, the satisfaction for Lo Yun Shan is that he is hunted as a murderer and not because he is Chinese and can be driven from white space like any other Chinese. The ambivalence, however, is the constant stance that Castro positions his main character Shan as continually distancing himself from other Chinese men, an act that repudiates a Chinese identity in order to search for an individual masculine potency apparently incompatible with Chinese masculinity.

In After China, Castro's China is an overbearing but predictable space where free movement and action has been restricted through several millennia of tradition and modern state repression. You Mun Bok arrives in Australia after the white Australia policy. Like Freud, who suffered from agoraphobia, the architect also suffers from a spatial phobia. The architect is unable to deal with unpredictable hidden hostility but when it does arise he deals with it, the same way that Freud could put to flight an anti-

Semitic crowd in the street. More generally, if Chinese Australians are aware of an underlying history of hostility towards them, and which they know can unpredictably surface stridently or even violently, what can be an appropriate response? Individual responses may vary but community responses to hostility, and discrimination are much more politically circumscribed and in turn depend on the political power a community itself can exert. Since the institutionalisation of multiculturalism, migrant and ethnic groups have always had to take the position that the cultural diversity they brought to the country was not going to threaten the mainstream society, its values and the Australian way of life. Like Chinese men it seems, perhaps minority communities also need to seek out means of political potency.

Alex Miller in The Ancestor Game attempted the most self-conscious of representations of the Chinese man. In Australia, British and Chinese migrants may all be simultaneously exiles and colonists. While some Chinese men may be comfortable appropriating the position of women, it seems Anglo-Celtic authors appropriating the minority position is also legitimate practice. Yet the practice of representing the other becomes in The Ancestor Game a practice of manipulation that also absents and marginalises the Chinese man. The Ancestor Game written in 1994 may however have reached its end game. Alison Broinowski has noticed, “Not only has the face of Australian fiction about Asia changed in the 1990s, so have the faces of those writing it. The new faces are predominantly Asian Australian, and female” (“No-Name” par 1). The implication means a greater degree of self-representation for Asian Australian identities. Brian Castro is no longer the sole visible representative of Chinese Australian or Asian Australian writing, and the emerging voices can be more heterogenous.

Not that this necessarily means Asian Australian writers will find it any easier to be published and recognised. In Ouyang Yu’s novel, The Eastern Slope Chronicle (2003), which was mentioned in the introduction, the Chinese character Furphy Warne declares to his estranged wife, who is resigned to, or at least accepts the positives and negatives of life in Australia: “I shall leave Australia, a hopeless country, a country that is designed for our unhappiness. I am sick of it. I just want to go back to China” (390). Such excoriating pronouncements would seem to leave little room for ambiguity yet leading up to this declaration, under the artifice of an “author’s note”, Ouyang inserts: “You would have thought that Warne hated China with all his heart but, believe it or not, he used to be very keen on going back” (388). Ambiguity however is suggested by the past tense “used to be”, implying the declaration to leave Australia is never carried

through, that a stasis of indecision and unresolvable ambivalence has also affected the Chinese man. Ouyang Yu himself keeps a presence in both Australia and China, since taking up a university position as professor of Australian literature at Wuhan University in China for a semester each year. Wherever the diasporic Chinese subject may be, at least there are now male Chinese Australian authors who can themselves enunciate and negotiate the cultural and racial boundaries that have existed to impede the Chinese man's movements across Australian space.

PART TWO

Prologue

Some years ago, after it was reported in the local press that a visiting Japanese entomologist had gone missing on an isolated stretch of the northwest coastline, for a period of half a dozen years I got into the habit of shifting houses every six or twelve months. I had moved into a shady house in the east on a leafy block of land on the side of a hill overlooking a bay in the harbour. There were two houses on the steep piece of land. The larger of the two houses was known as the top house. I had rented the smaller two storey maisonette called the lower house. One night I came home and found a small white frog sitting outside my door under the glow of the porch light. It wasn't a White's tree frog, which is green and native to New Guinea and Australia; this one was white all over. Nor was it a freak albino — this one had black eyes. I cursed and told it to leave me alone. It wasn't the first time I'd seen the white frog. The white frog has followed my life, at times it's validated me, more often it's churned my stomach and made me sick with anger and grief. Most of all it's been a portent of something — to be honest, I couldn't say exactly what except that it was always unpredictable. Worse still, it had many guises.

I came across it once in 1973 in my last year of high school. The Wilsons — two blue-eyed foster parents with two teenage brown-eyed Noongar girls — had recently moved into the house behind us in the next street, and in the middle of the night I was creeping around in their backyard.

Just before being in the Wilsons' backyard I'd been in my room besotted by Natalia Ginzburg's dialogue. Out back a dog had been barking half the night. Maybe a pygmy possum was up a tree — not that the dog bothered me, but I wouldn't have minded if the mongrel had stopped.

She must have come to the back door, opened the flyscreen, leant halfway out, one hand on the door the other on her thigh, peered into the darkness, and yelled for the fun of it, Shut up, dog! Then the laugh, the most wonderful unaffected laugh you could imagine. If I'd been driving on the highway, even a hundred miles away, I would have jammed on the brakes, screeched the car to a halt. Cars would have piled up behind me; scientific discourse would have stopped; sweatshops would have unlocked their doors; small business owners would have risen up with red flags; chemical companies would

have spontaneously combusted. I would have gotten out of the car, walked from the carnage, ignored the abuse and leaking fuel dripping on the asphalt, left it all behind me, gone looking for the owner of that miraculous laughter.

At that age I did a lot of daft things. I left the house in my jeans and t-shirt, rubber thongs, went to the back paling fence and jumped over like I was straddling a horse. I was lucky I didn't break an ankle landing on the logs stacked against the fence. I laid on my back dazed and long enough to see a satellite moving across the sky. For a while I stared up at the stars in the dark sky — the seven sisters, the southern cross. In those days, nights were purer and darker. If it had been now I would have recited some appropriate lines of poetry from Su Dongpo but at the time the only Chinese poetry I knew was Li Bai; how he mistook the moonlight at the end of his bed for frost, how he raised his head to look at the moon, lowered his head and thought of home. But the night was warm and there wasn't any moon.

After half a minute I rolled off the logs and got up. I could barely distinguish the shadows from the dark, but had a reasonable mental map of the backyard. On the high side of the block were two banksia trees but not much else, a little scraggly lawn in the middle, most of it bare patches of sand, the block sloped down to the right where there was a garage under the house. At the back door was a dim verandah light, but all the back rooms in the house were dark. I crept about crouched low, then felt a cool moist thing moving against my hand. I heard some snuffling noise, and in the darkness realised a medium sized dog was sniffing at my hand. I knelt down and patted the dog on the shoulders, said good boy, good boy. In return it nuzzled into me. Don't worry, I'm not going to bite you.

It's strange how I could let things, important events of the world, dogs and Sally Lavada dressed in her school uniform, just suddenly sneak up on me. What happened in 1973? What could you say about the Vietnam war? The deaths of W. H. Auden, Pearl S. Buck, world population four billion, the American-backed September 11 overthrow of Salvador Allende, the Yom Kippur war, the end of the white Australia policy — all these took me by surprise. And mid-year I'm the only student in the history of my school to fail art. In my father's eyes I was a no-talent destined for no future.

I imagined up to this point I blended into the darkness, almost invisible. I've never been afraid of the dark, it's where I'm most comfortable. In her own backyard Sally Lavada had the benefit of being there before me. She could be even more invisible than me, and so she loomed over me — overshadowed me in every possible way,

intellectually, physically, in spirit and ethics. I felt her presence before I actually saw her. She was smoking a cigarette. The tip of the cigarette glowed orange when she dragged on it.

She said, What are you doing on this side of the fence? What are you? Some sort of creep?

I didn't know you had a dog, I said.

She said it wasn't hers, that it belonged to a friend of her foster father. She said it normally savaged strangers to shreds, that it was trained to go for the vital parts of anatomy. I didn't know what kind of expression she had but she said this rather drolly. I took this as a sign that she didn't mind me being in her backyard, and I knew she greatly and unfairly misrepresented the viciousness of the dog. As neighbours we weren't after all complete strangers. Most mornings I saw her and her sister on the way to school. Sally Lavada was in fourth year. Her sister, Ruth, was two years younger. Once when we were converging onto the footpath and had a moment of eye contact Sally Lavada smiled and said hello. Maybe she didn't expect me to say anything. I said hello, and then she and her sister laughed in a pleased kind of way, as if they'd had a bet about me.

She asked whether I wanted a puff of her cigarette. If I wasn't going to kiss her that very night I thought sharing a cigarette wouldn't be too bad. She told me not to move, took the cigarette from her mouth and with her other hand found my face, steadied it, and then planted the cigarette between my lips. I liked the softness and warmth of her hand. She smoked a very strong brand of cigarette which probably didn't do her lungs any good. I coughed and asked whether her foster parents knew or approved of her smoking. I sounded like an uncle. She asked whether I disliked girls who smoked. I said whether a girl smoked or not didn't normally affect my judgment of her. She wondered what would affect my judgment. I mulled over the question a while, noticed the dog had disappeared into the dark. I said I didn't know what she meant. She said, Be more specific. This threw me totally off. How do you judge a girl? I took another puff on her cigarette then put it back between her lips. The tip of the cigarette glowed again. She coughed just like me. From inside the house her foster mother called. Sally. Sally Lavada.

She asked whether I wanted to finish the cigarette. I said no. She buried the cigarette in the sand. She said goodnight. I knew she liked me. Then and there I was in love with her. I said, I'll see you tomorrow.

She said, You've got a lot of explaining.

I watched her run back to the house. At the back door she turned around and waved to me. I realised she was waving me over to the back door. I ran over. On the back step she'd crouched down. Under the dim back door light she pointed to something on the step. Small and flat like a piece of white chocolate, but with sad sensitive eyes.

It was the white frog. I restrained my disdain and told her, It's a white cane toad.

Toads are noxious, have bumps and are ugly, she said, this one has smooth skin and is cute.

I looked around and found a garden spade. She said, Don't hurt it.

No, I'm just going to have a close look at it. I tried to pick it up with the spade, had it half on before it flipped off, made a loud croak, spat something which hit my lips, jumped away, and disappeared into the night.

She said, You shouldn't have messed with it.

Almost instantly I felt something strange was happening. I told Sally Lavada my lips were going numb, I couldn't feel a thing. She touched my lips with her fingers. It could have felt nice but I felt nothing but the dull sensation of her fingers pressing on them. Then she kissed me on the lips. I remember this kiss, relive it from time to time, feel its loss, but again I felt nothing, or superficially nothing but the trace of love it left behind.

She said goodnight again.

I was about to climb back over the fence when I noticed the dog was sitting on the grass in the middle of the yard. A soft yellow halo shone over the dog. It was a well-mannered, blue-tongued, brown Chow dog. It looked up at the sky and the stars, and ignored me. I never knew a dog that had so much sentiment. Somewhere in the neighbourhood a real dog began barking.

Back in my room I picked up Natalia Ginzburg. She was silent, her beautiful witch face unmoved. Ten or fifteen minutes earlier I'd been besotted by her, by her voice. Her moral strength and creativity inspired and drove me to recklessness, but Sally Lavada was more my age. On my bookshelf I made a little room and placed Natalia Ginzburg back between Camus and Kerouac. From my bed I admired her spine and practised explanations and stories that I never tried out on Sally Lavada.

Maybe it was possible that Sally Lavada and I would have lived happily ever after, but it wasn't to be. The following January she and her foster family suddenly moved out of

town, interstate or overseas. I gathered her foster parents were itinerant anthropologists. At the same time I'd been up the country baling hay or mending fences with my father. When I got back to the city Sally Lavada was gone, nobody knew where, and I didn't get the chance to say goodbye. I thought she'd eventually write or contact me, but she never did.

The Migration of Cuckoos

The voice of the King is on the radio singing “Edge of reality”. I go out onto the timber deck, shut the sliding glass doors behind me. It’s the middle of the morning, the air is warm and dry. In the afternoon the shade from three gum trees covers the deck. Two of the trees are blue gums. The other one is a boongul, eucalyptus transcontinentalis, native to the western goldfields. A good looking tree with a smooth white trunk, somehow it’s found its way three thousand kilometres east. I look beyond the boongul, someone in a red kayak is alone in the middle harbour. A swirling breeze in the bay points the yachts in different directions, or maybe down on the water there’s no breeze at all. Between the boats specks of light jump about on the dark green water and flash like bits of bright code. A big black-hulled boat without a mast and covered in grey tarpaulins is moored in the bay. One of the first things I learned moving here was that it was the old captain’s yacht.

A man in his sixties in a blue polo shirt and dark shorts comes striding up the driveway in bare feet with barely a flinch. Since he doesn’t look like a hawker I wait to see what he wants. From the deck I look down. Twelve feet below me the man says his name, which I immediately forget. He says he’s from the big waterfront house across the road. The first thing he asks is whether I’ve bought the place or am just renting. The man says the ship’s captain who used to live here had been very old, and had moved into a nursing home just before he died. The old captain’s yacht is sitting in the bay. The problem is the captain’s dinghy is in this man’s boat shed and is taking up a lot of room. He’s wondering what to do with it now.

Without thinking how it can get up here, I tell him he can put the dinghy under the deck. With his head tilted back, the man makes a sly smile, his hands on his hips and his feet in a wide stance. As if he is doing me a favour, he says it’s a bloody big thing I wouldn’t want having around. I have to shrug my shoulders, probably he can picture me on a cold early morning rowing to the old captain’s yacht, climbing on board, sailing out the harbour heads, getting as far away as possible. No, the irony is he doesn’t want me doing that, he would rather I was stuck here for eternity. I look at the black yacht

and it looks like an abandoned floating bier. Seagulls circle low over the yacht making clipped screeches. From where I stand they could be white flies.

There's a commotion in the trees. A big channel-billed cuckoo has landed in one of the blue gums. In spring this kind of cuckoo migrates down from Papua New Guinea. You can hear its loud kawking call in flight, like someone playing a bad note on a bugle. A pair of currawongs take turns swooping at it, snapping at it with their beaks, and making loud ringing cries. The last few days I've been hearing this noise and ruckus from across the bay. The cuckoo is twice the size of the currawongs and fends off the attacks with a wave of its wings and a thrust of its massive beak. The cuckoo has spotted the currawong's nest, is hopping from branch to branch getting closer and closer to the nest. Another cuckoo lands in the tree. The currawongs keep attacking, but it's the cuckoos that go in for the kill. The cuckoos disappear into the foliage. A few seconds go by, and then I see the cuckoos fly off into the cloudless blue sky across the water. One following the other, one of them with something bloody in its beak. The currawongs are quiet, so is the voice of the King.

I walk around the side of the lower house, look up at the top house. I go up some steps, walk halfway across the lawn and stand in front of the storeroom that adjoins the lower house. Dull green curtains partially cover the storeroom windows. A plastic container of whitener sits on the windowsill. The white paint on the window frames is flaking off. Outside the storeroom door is a ship's bell and an old wicker chair on its last legs. Nasturtiums with bright orange flowers grow everywhere. I look at the lower house, I've been here less than a week. Through the side windows I can see the blue punching bag I've hung from an exposed timber ceiling beam. On the wall is a pencil and ink drawing of the Rocks done by a friend. I had the picture remounted and framed with a dark brown mounting. The friend said I'd been brave to do it that way — but she agreed it looked better. Part of my bedroom is visible, but from where I'm standing the bathroom is obscured. Opposite the bathroom is an internal door into the storeroom. The door unnerves me, it's locked but I don't have a key. From time to time I test the handle. Of course, it never opens. I don't know why the storeroom wasn't part of the lease. I'd taken the house on one inspection, somehow I hadn't noticed the door to the storeroom even though it was directly opposite the bathroom. What I remembered was only a blank wall. Whenever the telephone rings downstairs I hear another ringing

coming from the storeroom. A second telephone line must be in the storeroom, sometimes I half expect someone in there to answer the telephone. Sometimes I'll wait a while before answering the phone, just to see what happens.

Up at the top house the sliding glass doors are opened just wide enough for a cat to crawl through from the balcony. On the balcony there's a glass table, some cane chairs. In the front room there are a few pieces of colonial style furniture, a table and chairs, a pair of carved wooden emus, a lamp with orange coloured lamp shade on a desk in front of a mirror on a wall painted purple. I walk past the storeroom up along the side of the top house, along the crumbling cement path which is lined with bushes of rosemary, more nasturtiums, stray clumps of parsley, spider webs hanging between the side fence and the house. I avoid looking in through the windows even though they are covered by blinds and curtains. Around the corner of the house, out in the sun, a pair of denim jeans and women's underwear hang on a folding clothes rack. Ivy is creeping onto yellow plastic clotheslines sagging in front of a red brick wall. The path is wet, a few withered weeds pulled out of cracks lie in a trail. An electric hot water system stands right up to a glass door. Water is dripping from a valve. Above the hot water unit the guttering is coming away from the roof. The air is ringing with cicadas.

I go up another set of steps to a path that leads around to the street front. A blue tongue lizard scurries off the path out of the sun and into a hedge of honeysuckle. The path has been recently swept. From behind a hedge comes the sound of water from a fountain or swimming pool. I look back down the path, two white metal chairs sit in the yard. Growing along the property line is a thick row of green bamboo. Down the back a privet tree is crowding out a mulberry tree. From the steps the lower house looks sunken into a ditch. Tree ferns grow out of the ditch, vines and branches dangle down from above. I walk up the path, there's a gas meter partly covered by honeysuckle. I need to take a reading of the meter but don't have a pen and paper, and don't trust myself to remember the reading.

At the end of the path, I find the letterboxes. There's a line of them sitting like covered baking tins in the sun, clustered at the end of this no-through road, the numbers 14, 14A, 14B and one with a sign that reads captain's mail. I look in the captain's letter box and there's a letter for the captain from a medical clinic with the names of half a dozen doctors on the envelope. It's probably a bill or a check-up reminder. Across the road a house is being renovated. Someone with sandstone coloured hair and skin, as

though he's just been excavated, gives me a nod. I nod back then look away. From here I guess it would take twenty minutes to walk to the beach on the other side of the hill.

By the time I've walked as far the next street I'm already puffing, and tight in the chest. My lungs are full of heat and the street is empty. The houses are big; some of them have gardens like the terraced hillsides in Guangxi province, some with flagpoles. What do they call the Australian flag? Not the union jack or stars and stripes, but something in between. Along the grass verges are trees you can eat from — loquats and mulberries. I walk by a garage and two little children sit in their strollers. The younger one is crying, the older one has his hand out and smiles at me. A woman comes hurrying down a garden path. I wish I had been on the other side of the street. By the next street I've recovered my breath, found a good walking pace, walk on the shadier side of the street. Eventually I come to the main road. The road leads to the city in one direction and the ocean in the other. Suddenly there's a lot of noise. Tall apartment blocks sit on the street corners instead of dainty houses and dogs. The traffic lights change and I parade alone across the road in front of the stopped cars, sticking out my chin and keeping my head up. On the other side of the road there's a funeral shop next to a surf and ski store. The name of the funeral shop is Wing On. A couple of white-winged angels are painted on the window as if it was Christmas. I wonder when artists started painting angels white. In Renaissance paintings they still painted angels in ordinary garments and the wings were the colours of sparrows. A hand written sign in Chinese is taped on the glass door. Maybe they could change the name of the shop. The sign reads under new management, but who'd know that?

From the top of the hill the harbour looks like a lake with a narrow gap between the heads. Beyond the heads a container ship is heading over the horizon. In the harbour a few yachts and a ferry cross the water. The road goes straight down to the beach. Cars come up the hill whining in low gears. I keep my eyes on the footpath, barely notice what I am passing. Halfway down the hill I'm thinking about sunsets on the west coast when I look across the road and there's a man walking up behind a woman. The woman is looking at the ground too, maybe she's thinking of sunsets on the west coast as well. The man comes up beside her. He's on her right, says something to her, raises his hand and does something to her face which makes her flinch. She raises her arm but doesn't hit him. The man says something to her. She ignores him, and looks across the road. For a moment our eyes meet. Half a second, half a glance. She's maybe in her late twenties. Asian. The length of her black hair, her complexion, her height, build, what she's

wearing, a plain tan coloured jacket that's buttoned up, black trousers and flat shoes. You think you can remember a lot from a glance. She looks as though she's going to a city factory where they manufacture biscuit tins and the machinery noise is deafening, or else she sews — sews forty-five sweaters a day. She could have looked anywhere, but she looks at me. I lose my footing and make a misstep. I could walk across the road, knock him to the ground, but I don't. There are a dozen reasons to explain anything; some are always humiliating. Before I know it the world hasn't stopped and it's too late. I sweat because it's suddenly cloudless. I walk on; resist the urge to turn around. The other man, he's walked on too, as if it's nothing, something he's done on the spur of the moment, as if it's just the sort of thing you do to a woman in passing. The woman trails behind the man, the way a woman would want to trail at a distance behind an unpredictable man.

For a fraction of a moment I see something rushing towards my face. I have time to duck my head, cover my chin with my shoulder, but the thing slams into the side of my head. Before I know it I'm on my back on the ground. Out of instinct I roll over, cover my head. I get hit again, on the hand covering my head, then nothing more. I'm dazed and my head throbs. Maybe I've lost a few seconds. I open my eyes and minute stars sparkle before me. I get to my knees, look around. It's just as well I went down on the grass verge. A black Labrador has come out of a driveway to sniff me, to see whether I'm okay, to lick the side of my face. No one else is near me. I get to my feet, wobble about a bit. Someone in a silver Mercedes goes by and honks her horn as though I'm a drunk staggering on the side of the road ready to throw up. I look up the hill. I don't know what hit me.

I walk down the path from the street. A woman with a pair of hedge cutters is hacking at ivy and wisteria that's growing over and down the wall. She's on the other side of the wall, maybe on a ladder. I see her from the shoulders up. She says hello, asks whether I've just moved in. I tell her I've moved into the lower house. The old captain's place, she says. She has a peculiar appearance, her face makes me think she's in her late fifties or early sixties, but there's something about her, perhaps the way she wears her auburn coloured hair long that makes her seem a lot younger. I wasn't expecting to get into a conversation with her, but there's something cheerful about her that stops me in my tracks. She has a wonderful smile. Even though I have a headache, it's hard to fault someone who smiles the way she does. She has on leather gardening gloves, she says

she's seen enormous rats dancing on the clotheslines, swinging on the ivy. You wouldn't guess with all the good houses around that there'd be rats running around everywhere. She doesn't say it, she laughs, the tone in her voice giving the impression the top and lower houses should be bulldozed. She asks how I like the old captain's place. It's okay, I tell her. A bit cramped, more like a houseboat resting on the side of a hill than a flat. Now and then birds and animals seem to spill out of it. The only thing that bothers me is the bathroom. She nods, makes a sympathetic expression with her beautiful hazel coloured eyes, she says the captain was a sweet old fella, the house has been empty for a long time. Recently they'd been renovating and painting. I realise they must have stopped fixing the place as soon as I signed the lease. It felt a bit like that. I had the shower recess waterproofed, filled in gaps, bleached the bathroom floor and toilet to get rid of the rank smell, rehung doors and adjusted cupboards. She says if I need anything just to come up and ask. Her name is Marguerite, and I notice a trace of foreign accent. I ask whether she needs help with the hedge. She has a little chuckle, which means a lot of different things. She's the kind of woman I could spend hours chatting with over the wall or on the telephone. I forget about the brick wall I've walked into.

The sound of Prokofiev's classical symphony comes through the telephone, at the same time I'm looking out the window. The music stops abruptly, the tone switches and a woman speaks. I'd like to have the gas account put in my name, I tell her. She asks for my address, and whether I've taken a reading of the meter. I tell her that there are two separate houses under 14A but that I could only find one meter. She says the account is currently under the name of someone called Jim Arthur. I ask whether there might be a second gas meter. She tells me there is only one under this address. But there are two houses, and if there is only one meter I don't want to be paying for both households. She says hold on. I wait, there's no music, I look at the back of my left hand, which is bruised, and blue. I've covered it in arnica but it still aches. After thirty seconds she says the only meter is along the boundary line by the path going up to Possession Street. Yes, I found the meter along the boundary and I've taken a reading, but could there be another meter somewhere else that serves the lower property? There are separate electricity meters and I presume that there should be separate gas meters. She says there is only one meter. If the lower house has gas then the top house doesn't. I'm worrying for nothing, she tells me. It's no trouble for her to change the account into my name. I

question whether she's allowed to do that. She says I'm worrying over nothing. There's no gas to the other house. Do you get it? I can picture the steam coming off her topknot, the heat in her breath. I don't find what she says convincing but I sigh and give in, tell her my name and give her the meter reading.

One night I arrive home and see my neighbours — a man and woman. The lights from my car shine up the driveway and two figures stand beside a red Toyota under the carport. For a moment they look in the direction of my oncoming lights. I veer my car left under the deck, park, and take my time getting out of the car. There's a radio program with a segment on the American songwriter Milt Gabler. I listen until the segment is over and by the time I get out of the car the neighbours are gone. I've seen the woman a few times, but never clearly. It's the first time I've seen the man, though I didn't get a good look at him this time either. She looked a bit familiar. Occasionally, if I was on the deck I might catch a glimpse of her in the morning when she came down the path to her car. The old captain had railings put everywhere but she takes her time going down, watching her steps carefully. I've swept the path a few times to get the leaves and branches out of the way. The thought has crossed my mind to cut back some of the privet trees and shrubs along the path. But a pair of frogmouths has been using the trees for cover during the day.

I leave the lower house and walk up the path to the top house. The smell of honeysuckle has mixed with blood and bone along the side fence. I'm not sure whether to inhale or hold my breath. A spider web across the path has caught my face. I pull the spider web from my face and keep walking around the top house. At the hot water system, I stop to check whether it's a gas or electric heater. I go by the kitchen window. A few dirty dishes sit in the sink. A little pot of spring onions sits on the windowsill. The window frame needs sanding and repainting. At the front door the flyscreen has a gaping hole big enough to let in a poodle. The whole frame trembles in a warped way when I knock on it. While I wait, a big bluetongue lizard walks between the door and me. It either doesn't see me or doesn't think I'm interesting. I knock on the door again; maybe the door will fall off its hinges. The telephone rings and I hear footsteps, creaking timber floorboards. From the hallway I see a woman coming. As she reaches for the telephone in the hallway, she looks at me a moment and then picks up the receiver. She looks like the woman on the hill. Now I regret coming up. But since it's too late to back away, I

notice she's dressed in a knee length printed cotton skirt, a peach coloured blouse. On her feet are embroidered black Chinese slippers. She talks not more than ten seconds, puts the telephone receiver down and comes to the entrance. She opens the flyscreen with a slight push with her fingertips. I step back to let the door swing open.

I say hello and tell her I'm from the bottom house. She leans against the doorjamb, says she's seen me before. I feel uneasy — is she the one? Is she talking about the day on the hill? Today she seems relaxed and friendly. She smiles and seems almost shy, almost happy to see me. She says, You've got spider webs in your hair. And then she laughs.

I tell her I should have brought a stick with me, and then regret saying it. She steps closer to me and removes some of the webs in my hair. I want to back away, but think the better of it. It's encouraging that she does this. Instead she steps back and covers her mouth with her hand. I look down and see the bluetongue lizard at my feet. She backs away from doorway. I look at her and say it's only a bluetongue lizard. Bobtail, she says. They're not dangerous, I tell her. She knows it, but still, she doesn't like things crawling around at her doorstep. Our eyes meet, why does she look at me this way? Have I just caught a fly with my bare hand? The lizard slides quietly away down towards the ditch and the lower house.

I want to ask about the gas.

She says, I saw you the other day — up along the garden path. I was in the garden, you didn't see me. What were you doing?

I probably looked a bit strange, hunched down, as if I was hiding from someone... No, I wasn't hiding; I was crouching, just reading the gas meter under the bushes.

You must have had a good memory.

Why do you say that?

Did you memorise the reading?

Yes, I did.

I remember faces better than numbers.

The gas account — I had it put in my name. The previous account was in the name of someone called Arthur. I'm not sure, maybe Arthur is your name?

That's a silly thing to say.

I was wondering whether the gas meter covers both houses.

It does, but I hardly ever use the gas... he probably won't pay any of the gas bill.

I guess she is talking about Jim Arthur, her husband, partner, whatever. In any case, she wants me to believe she uses the gas stove no more than once a week. She doesn't cook. She heats up things in the microwave. It's more likely I use most of the gas. I'm the one with a gas hot water system. The one up here is electric. I'm not sure what to say now. I feel like saying if she can't cook I can teach her. I'm not looking for an argument, I only want to know the situation with the meter, but she's getting a bit awkward for no reason. There's a lot she can explain. She tells me to contact the real estate agent, or the Residential Tenancies Board. I look at her, thinking all the reasonable things that I can be discussing. Of course, she remembers me from the hill. Our eyes meet. I wouldn't blame her for having some doubts about me. I can explain some things myself. Finally she asks whether I am Chinese. It's been on my mind whether she is Chinese too, but neither of us seemed to want to come out with it. I answer that I am. How about her? Of course. From Beijing. She says the usual things about me not looking Chinese. There is something strange about my face, more likely my nose, with its high bridge, maybe it's my eyes, or my front of excessive politeness. I don't think she looks Chinese either. We have that in common. We start speaking half Chinese, half English.

She says, Are you sure you're Chinese?

Yes, I'm sure. Both my parents were Chinese, so that makes me Chinese too.

She says, You must have some mixed blood.

I don't think so. I look Chinese.

I see hundreds of Chinese people everyday, none of them look the way you do.

I don't have a good reply to that.

Do you want to have a look inside?

I wasn't particularly interested in looking or going inside, even from the doorway the house smelt and felt old and dank. She gestured with her hand like a hostess in a red dress at a bar or an overstaffed restaurant. Come inside, she says, and have a look at the dump I live in.

She shows me the kitchen, the rarely used gas stove is interesting because of its age, grimy and dirty the way it would look after fifty or more years. For someone who doesn't cook she has a similar tendency not to wash dishes. Dirty dishes and saucepans sit in the sink and on the pink laminex bench tops, there's half a packet of plain flour on a wooden kitchen table, a rolling pin that looks like an off-cut from a broom handle and a bunch of wilted spinach. She apologises for the mess. Kitchen spaces were designed

to kill women, she says. She points at the microwave. That would kill her for sure. She leads me out of the kitchen through a hallway to show me the bathroom. Being on the north side of the house it's bright and has a large frosted window. It's the only renovated room in the house, has gleaming white ceramic tiles on the floor and walls, a clean and clear glass shower screen. I could do with a bathroom like this.

I make no comment on the bathroom. She walks down the hallway, points to peeling paint, water stains in the ceiling and rising damp in the walls. This is my bedroom, she says and opens a door to show a twelve by twelve foot room with a double bed, a small dark brown desk, and a metal framed chair with a blue cushion. It's tidy, the walls are painted a budgerigar blue, a colour I've never liked, the bed is made up and there's a sweet smell like oranges. The window overlooks the side path. I can see the honeysuckle growing on the fence, part of a spider web that someone has carelessly walked through. She goes into the room turns around and sits on the bed. It's the best bed I've ever slept on, she says. The bed is basic, some timber planks and some bedding. I stand by the door, don't say anything, I like a firm bed too. She stands up and leaves the room.

She points at a closed door, says it's her ex-de facto's room. He's moving out soon. A foreigner, she says in Chinese with a little more emotion than when she said ex-de facto. Again I have nothing to say. She is showing me the house but, even if the ex-de facto is moving out, I'm not a prospective flatmate — even if I wasn't a foreigner. At least I don't want to push the subject. She shows me a hole the size of a fist half way up the plasterboard wall. She makes a fist and puts it into the hole. She looks at me and waits for me to say something. When I don't say anything she talks about the flaking paint from the ceiling which has been tested for lead. So what do you think of the house? she says. It needed a lot of work. If it hadn't been for the view of the bay she probably wouldn't have moved in. She takes me through to the living room which is the room I can see from down below. It leads out onto the balcony. This she says is the best place in the house. A view of the water. It's probably the only reason she has stayed. In fact, outside is better than inside. But you can't live outside all the time.

She steps out onto the balcony, looks at the harbour. I follow her out. From the balcony I see into the side of the lower house. I'm glad I keep things tidy. The balcony is sunny, smaller than my deck, and the trees are far enough down the block not to affect the top house. She sits down on a chair. I sit opposite her. She pulls up her right leg, drops the slipper from her foot and rests her foot on the chair beside her. I notice

she paints her toenails bright red. She tells me she'd had a look at the lower house after the captain died — when they started fixing it up and put it out for lease. It's not much, is it? she says. It's too small for the price they were asking.

I'm surprised by what she says, after all she called the top house a dump. Maybe for the price she thinks it's better living in a dump with her ex-de facto. Even if the lower house bathroom stinks occasionally, the house itself is clean — the woollen carpet downstairs is new, so is the timber floor upstairs. It's quiet, apart from the occasional rat scratching in the ceiling and the possums that run on the rooftop at night. So far there haven't been any real problems, maybe the gas meter could get sorted out, but at least it's liveable, at least it's not a dump.

I ask, Did you know the old captain? She says she met him a few times, but he was really old and moved into a nursing home not long after she moved in. Marguerite told her that the captain had been a member of the communist party, had been to China in the mid 1950s, had met Zhou Enlai, that he owned the black yacht in the bay. She wonders how much I think a yacht like that is worth. I tell her I don't know anything about yachts but I guess a hundred thousand dollars. I ask whether she likes boats. So long as they don't sink she likes them.

Her expression changes — is she aware of the hard look she's giving me? She looks as though she is still standing on the other side of a road waiting for me to do something. I look at her wondering why she's invited me in. I want to get out before getting into an awkward situation. We give each other careful exploratory looks without questions. A bird is making a raucous call. What's that? she says in a way that suggests she knows the answer.

A big grey bird is flying across the bay chased by two small miners. It looks like a cuckoo.

There's suddenly a strange look on her face, her eyes are wide open and the pupils dilated, as if she's somehow caught in a moment of indecision. Is that the shadow of a passing cloud? For a moment I think her face is rather soft, baby-faced, and desirable.

Cuckoo?

They lay their eggs in the nests of other birds.

Do you think cuckoos ever feel homeless?

Only as they get older....

She turns her head to look at her left arm and scratches hard along the inside of her forearm. There are small red marks — from mosquito bites or sand flies.

The trouble with Australia, she says, is that the mosquitoes are too quiet. You only know they're around after you've been bitten.

I nod. She scratches harder. The best thing for mosquito bites is hot water. It'll stop the itch and doesn't leave any marks.

She doesn't seem the least bit sceptical, My ex-de facto says hot water fixes sunburn.

Yeah, I suppose that might work.

She gets up. She looks at me and says, Hot water?

Hot as you can bear.

She goes to the kitchen. I follow her. In the kitchen she runs the hot water. I test the temperature for her until it's hot enough. Try it now. She puts her arm under the hot water until it's too hot to take. After a few times repeating this she turns off the tap. The forearm looks nice and red all over, she gives me a smile. It feels better, she says.

Now that we're in the kitchen it's a short distance to the front door for me to leave. Thanks for showing me around the house.

She walks me to the door. At the door I ask, Would you be interested in going to a fund raising dinner in Chinatown.

Fundraising for whom?

The Labor Party.

She crosses her arms and leans against the doorjamb. It seems a position she likes to take. How did you get mixed up with them?

I looked into her eyes and feel as though I'm doing missionary work. I'm on their mailing list.

Are you a party member?

No, it's just a long time ago my grandfather was friends with Arthur Calwell. He helped our family a lot...

Who's Arthur Calwell?

In the late 40s he was the immigration minister in the Labor government. He was famous for saying two Wongs don't make a white.

So he was a racist. How then could your grandfather be friends with him?

Maybe Calwell was a racist, maybe he wasn't. He was a politician. He had to think about votes. In public he didn't like Asians, in private he might have liked Asians. Or maybe he didn't like Chinese but liked my grandfather. He was a Christian...

People usually have mixed feelings about a lot of things.

I suppose so... I'm not sure that my grandfather liked white people that much, but he and Arthur Calwell had some kind of friendship. Arthur Calwell helped one of my uncles get his first job on the wharves...

She shifts from one side of the doorjamb to the other, a polite gesture that she is about to interrupt me. So what's this function about?

It's just a Chinese community thing to show support and help raise money for the Labor Party.

She has a little disconcerting chuckle. So they're not really asking for help, or advice, or political strategies, all they're asking for is money?

I guess that's the whole point of it.

What kind of people do you meet?

All kinds. Chinese people of course. Some white business types to make up numbers and look responsible.

Do we have a table of our own?

I guess they might make us share a table with other people.

Who will I sit with?

Me I suppose. Maybe the State party secretary, he's a nice man...

Who else? What happens if it's some white old fart from an accounting firm, or drug company who's going to want to talk to me, ask me all sorts of personal questions and give me his phone number?

Just say, no English, and leave the table.

Is that what you'd do?

I think back to when I returned to Australia in 1960. I look at her lips. I remember how it seemed to take years before I could pronounce the word yes correctly. I often said no when I meant yes. I meet her gaze and say, Those types never ask for my number. Even though I take a long time to answer her, it doesn't derail her line of questions.

What happens if he doesn't care if I say, No English? What if he starts telling me how he's not a racist but his best friend is, how he really likes Chinese women and their small neat bodies, and thinks Chinese women have greatly contributed to the local restaurant scene? What if I give him the benefit of doubt and start conversing in English and say what's-his-name doesn't know how to say sorry to the stolen generation? What happens if he really votes for the government, turns blue in the face and says, What's-his-name has nothing to apologise for?

You could stand up, point your finger at him, then call him a racist sexist rightwing scumbag pig dog.

Wouldn't that embarrass you?

Hard to say.

She makes a slight smirk as if I've made a good enough answer. I'm not yet annoyed but wish she would just say yes, she'd like to come, or no, I'm busy, but she has more questions. Will they have a raffle or an auction?

An auction probably.

What kinds of things will they have?

I'm not sure. Paintings of the harbour bridge, swimming pool supplies, signed Australian rugby jumpers, vibrating massage chairs, H&R Block gift vouchers, that kind of thing.

What about an original Olympic torch from the Mexico games? With some poor little old well-respected Chinese community leader dressed all white running around the restaurant demeaning himself? Two dollar... I want two dollar.

It's possible.

I suppose they'll drag out all the oldies, Gough and Margaret, Bob and Blanche.

Hope so.

What about a chance to have lunch with the Premier?

Could be.

Do you think they'll get a lot of money for that? What if I make a bid of five thousand dollars? Do you think they could resist that?

It's only a stunt.

But I'm serious... I'll make a real bid. The party people they know you. Won't they give you that look: Hey, this is not for real. Is she with you? Don't just sit there! Do something! Some party hack, some nervous Chinese suck-hole, has to give a fake bid of ten thousand and then it's finished — just like that. Auction over. Even the pretence is over. But I'm going to look at you. I'm going to be angry. I wanted lunch with the Premier. How can you betray me? Why did you do that? What kind of democracy is this? Whose side are you on, anyway?

You either have a good imagination or you've been to one of these fundraising things before.

I have. My ex-de facto — he belongs in the Labor Party.

I leave her and I'm not sure what to make of her. Perhaps she's a little whacky. If the ego is a projection of a surface, as Freud says, then she's akin to a slippery slide or roller coaster. I should stay out of her way but she's interesting in a curious way. I go back to the lower house, brush aside the spider webs as I go along the side path. I didn't ask her everything intended, found out less than needed, and didn't talk her into paying half of the gas bill. She told me to call the Residential Tenancies Board: I was entitled, if there were two houses and only one gas meter, not to pay anything. She was probably right but I wanted to have it cleared up, I'd have to approach the agent first. She could have told me whether she'd been paying the gas bill, and how much. She must have used some gas, had copies of previous accounts, probably she used more than she was willing to admit. But actually I don't care if she pays for any of the gas or not, I don't blame her for taking advantage of the situation, the agent should have told me everything beforehand. It's really the landlord's problem — but obviously he's too stingy to install separate gas meters. I decide it's better to give the fundraising dinner a miss.

I'm sitting outside on the deck drinking tea, looking at the yachts in the bay. On any day when there is nothing to do I'll sit and look out at the water and the boats. There's a path, a steep line of at least a hundred steps that goes down the hill to a small public jetty and the water. At the bottom of the path a dozen or so dinghies are chained up to trees. Occasionally someone is fishing from the jetty but most of the time it's someone getting on or off a boat. I've taken the walk down to the jetty a few times just for the exercise. An angry mongrel dog in the mansion next to the path barks whenever I take the walk down to the jetty. On the other side of the path is a small reserve with casuarinas but mostly overgrown with native bushes and weeds. A garden hose from the mansion runs across the path and connects to a council tap in the reserve. The two storey boathouse down from the mansion is as big as my maisonette and has a wraparound balcony. From the jetty I have a closer view of the captain's black yacht. I could have had a dinghy. If I wanted to, I could at least swim out to the black yacht.

I'm on the deck drinking jasmine tea, looking at the boats. She comes down from the top with a cake. It must have taken her hours to make. I don't normally eat such things but I can't tell her this. Our neighbourly relationship has been steadily improving these last few weeks, but she should look after her diet and health more. This isn't the first

time she's brought something for me. She started with a bowl of jiaozi. I liked the way she used dill in them. She doesn't normally linger to watch me eat, or try to get into any long conversation. This time she is getting more fancy. For sure it hasn't been heated up in the microwave, but I never mention the gas again. I get her a chair from inside the house, another cup, and a knife to cut the cake and forks to eat it with. The cake is quite something, with liqueur and mascapone. She doesn't seem so eager to leave this time. She wants to see me eat it, except that I'm not really interested in eating. Maybe I've even told her I don't eat sweet things. Nor do I eat pork, or smoke cigarettes and only drink alcohol occasionally. It's the middle of Sunday afternoon. I like the cake. It has a rich coffee taste to it.

I pour her some jasmine tea. She says it's very good and asks where I got it. I go inside to get the container it comes in. She follows me inside, leaving her shoes at the door. She takes a look around and says I keep a tidy house. The tea container doesn't seem to interest her, not even the fact that it's organically grown, instead she looks at the things I have in glass jars — soy beans, red beans, sorghum, millet, sunflower seeds, Longbin, Jinhuangtai, and Maotai.

On the kitchen table I have two books. One is the novel The Woman in the Dunes, the other is an English language travel guide to China with a strange picture of a large bell on the cover. She picks up both books, weighs them in her hands.

Do you need something to read?

What have you got?

Fiction and non-fiction. They're mostly upstairs, if you want to have a look.

Show me.

She follows me up the stairs. Once upstairs she takes a long look around the room. She thinks it's cosy the way I've arranged the furniture, my desk, bookshelves that double as a screen, my bed beside the windows. From the window she looks over the roof-lines. Without asking, she slides open one of the windows and leans out. She turns to look at me and says, It's good you put your bed here.

It gets the morning sun. When it rains I can still open the windows and get the fresh air. Not a good place to work, though, it's too distracting.

You work in bed?

No, it's too distracting. She smiles, I guess she must like this kind of answer.

It's like the bridge of a ship up here. She touches a plaque with a wooden carving of an anchor above the lintel.

She looks at my punching bag. Do you fight?

No, it's just for exercise.

Can I have a go?

Sure. She faces up to the punching bag with a left leading stance, gives it some half dozen fast crisp punches that smack into the bag all within a second and a half. She doesn't bend her fists at the wrist, she looks like she knows a thing or two. She steps back, hitches up her skirt, she's not tall but kicks the bag high up and hard. The punching bag swings wildly, rattling the chain it hangs on.

Don't destroy it, I tell her. You've done this before...

Just for exercise... I've seen you do taiji on the lawn. She makes a slow graceful circular movement with her arm, looks at me and says, You look nice — nice and well balanced.

You do me too much honour. In a real fight, maybe I could give her a run for her money.

I show her the books, some old university textbooks on anthropology, history, basic Chinese grammar, science and medicine in China, a Marxist reader, Edward Said's Orientalism, which I bought in 1978 but didn't get round to reading until twenty years later.

She says, You read a lot of Chinese writers — Lao She, Ding Ling, Yu Dafu, Lin Haiyin, Mo Yan, Can Xue and Wang Anyi.

I've also got Honglouloumeng, and Xiyouji.

She takes a book off the shelf, a book I picked up at a market, Journey to a War. She opens the book and flicks through the pages, reads a few passages to herself, looks at the pictures at the end of the book. She puts it back on the shelf, and asks, What about American writers?

I point along the shelves. Toni Morrison, Simon Ortiz, Ralph Ellison, Leslie Marmon Silko, Jhumpa Lahiri, Jessica Hagedorn, Gus Lee, Catherine Liu, Frank Chin, Karen Tei Yamashita, Fae Myenne Ng, Nieh Hualing, Wendy Law-Yone, Max Yeh, Nina Revoyr...

So many strange names. She says this with a strange smile.

She has a wonderfully shaped mouth, I love the faint lines of her lips; palm readers say your emotions are in your hands but the truth is your mouth says a lot more.

F. Scott Fitzgerald.

She raises an eyebrow, and says, What did he write?

The Great Gatsby.

That's really strange... I've seen the film version. My ex-de facto calls you Gatsby.

Why does he call me that?

He says whenever he sees you, you're always standing on your verandah with your hands in your pockets looking across the water.

I think your ex-de facto is crazy... I'm not a gangster and I don't throw big parties.

It's the romantic stance — but he's scared of you.

The first part of what she says is interesting and beguiling — maybe what the ex says has something worth thinking about — but for some reason I respond only to the second part of what she says, Why?

Angry men are always scared of something.

I look at her, I should have a reply to this, she returns my gaze and is waiting. I'm not sure what to say to her. The image of an ugly man, raggedly dressed, trousers falling down his hips, unshaven, talking intimately with a beautiful well-dressed woman suddenly crosses my mind. The man has his arm around the woman's waist. The woman is listening intently, her eyes are looking down, she nods her head, and smiles. It has nothing to do with wealth or power... I have to think of something to say quickly.

What can you do about it?

I don't know, perhaps read some books, she says.

I've got some Australian books.

Who have you got?

Merlinda Bobis, Robert Bropho, Brian Castro, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Ding Xiaoqi, Hoa Pham, Adib Khan, Lau Siew Mei, Melissa Lucashenko, Lillian Ng, Ouyang Yu, Kim Scott, Hsu-ming Teo, Beth Yahp...

They sound like American writers, she says.

No, as far as I know they're all Australian...

Are you sure?

Sorry, anybody can make a mistake, Hak Kyung Cha is American.

So what book do you like?

Honglouloumeng is good.

I mean one written in English.

For some strange reason I have a strong attachment to this book, Natalia Ginzburg, Family Sayings, translated from Italian into English.

It's got a nice cover, let me borrow it.

Go ahead, take it.

After this she wants to go downstairs, drink another cup of tea and watch me eat more of her cake.

She is watching me as though I'm a newly married traditional husband returned home late from a day's work to eat his supper. I eat it all to show my love and respect for her. Outside two crested pigeons land on the deck in a noisy flutter of wings and whoops then strut around pecking at things.

When I was young I used to make traps and catch doves in the backyard.

They must taste nice, she says.

I was thinking the same thing... They get fat on the sunflower seeds I feed to the lorikeets.

The pigeons fly up into the trees and we sit out on the deck and talk about how she came to Australia, her life in China. She's involved in some trading business with her ex-de facto. They met in China, and he sponsored her out. She's become an Australian citizen. She said they'd only recently split up. He'd done something illegal and was serving a term of weekend detention, the term was just about over. She doesn't seem to mind talking about him. I'm not really interested in hearing about him. I ask whether she is staying on after her ex-de facto moves out. She says she isn't sure. It depends on whether she can find someone to share the house. She repeats it's a dump.

She says, Your Chinese is pretty good considering you're of mixed blood. She's probably repeated that a few times recently.

Your English is pretty good for someone of mixed blood too.

No, not so good, she says. The other day I went to the bank to withdraw some money and the bank teller said, How do like your money? At first I didn't know why the teller would ask such an impertinent question, so I said, Yes, I like it very much.

We're quiet for a while looking at the boats in the bay. She points out the old captain's boat to me, asks whether it would be difficult to sail such a boat. It's a big boat, I think at least two people would be good. She seems to be thinking about it, then asks whether I've been married. I say, Yes, for a short time.

Are there any children?

I pause and think about the answer, then say, No children. How about you?

She looks up into the gum tree and one of the crested pigeons falls spiralling out of the tree and lands dead at her feet.

Did you do that?

No, not me, I think you did it, she says. The way she looks, she looks so innocent and incredulous; she would make a great actress.

Me? I was only thinking it'd taste nice, I didn't say I want to eat it.

Is it still alive?

I bend down to pick up the pigeon and the other pigeon drops onto my shoulder. Shit.

I look at her and she shrugs her shoulders, a disconcerting gesture she must have picked up from her ex-de facto. The pigeon in my hand is still alive, a slight flickering in its lidded eyes, the other one looks already stiff. I examine the pigeon in my hand, something has maybe mauled its neck, it's bruised and lost some feathers. I whack its head against the deck railing to make sure its dead. At times you just have to be cold-blooded. In any case if offering food is a traditional approach to beginning a relationship, it's even more effective when you can make food fall out of the sky.

Do you want to stay for dinner?

Can you cook pigeon?

Yes, of course.

I go inside with the pigeons, put them in the sink, boil water. She watches me get some incense sticks, come back onto the deck, light the incense, make a prayer and bow three times, put the incense sticks into a pot of flowering jasmine.

Are you religious?

Not really. I just feel better when I do.

It's feudal, she says.

At least it's not reactionary...

Luckily I don't have to keep talking about religion, feudalism, and what's reactionary; the kettle boils and I go inside the house. It's been a long time since I've had to pluck feathers off a pigeon, cut it open, clean out its insides, deal with the mess, smell it. I hold the kettle over the sink, I don't know why I hesitate. Maybe she whispers, Go on. I catch a glimpse of her hand in the corner of my eye, the kettle tips over, water pours over the birds, I feel the steam and heat on my face. Standing side by side she helps pluck and clean the pigeons.

My oldest brother called and asked me to look after our mother for the day. A year ago she suffered a stroke that's affected her speech and movement. I spend an hour driving south and arrive at his home at ten o'clock in the morning. It's a duty I perform every month or so whenever my brother and sister-in-law need a break or have some social occasion to attend. I do it for the sake of my brother as much as for my mother. My mother has been a widow for twenty five years ever since my father died of a heart attack. While I wait for her to get ready my sister-in-law makes me a cup of black English tea. It's a mystery why our mother wants to live with my oldest brother. Ever since she threw him out of her home, for more than thirty five years they've had minimal contact. When he was young, my eldest brother always bore the brunt of our parent's rocky marriage. It was because of his appendicitis that she discovered her husband's infidelity. One morning my father told her he'd be spending the whole day with his accountant, but secretly went to meet his lover. My brother came home from school with a severe pain in his side. When she telephoned her husband's office they said he wasn't in the office and nor was he with the accountant. She was scared and felt helpless. She contacted her sister-in-law who came by car and took my brother to the local hospital. It was after the discovery of this betrayal, after ten years of marriage, the birth of four sons, that she decided to leave my father and take me, her youngest bouncing boy, to Hong Kong.

I help her out of the car. Instead of thirty seconds, it will take her ten minutes to walk from the car up the path to the house. With almost every step I have to urge her forward, to tell her, Big step, walk, come on. As we move up the path sometimes she seeks out my hand for support other times she'll push it away. Halfway up the path she stops and wants to take off her cardigan. I tell her to do it when she gets up to the top, but she won't move until she gets it off. It's early in the day and I haven't lost my patience so I help her out of her cardigan. As soon as we're inside the house I know she will probably want to put it back on. All her life she's been both stubborn and indecisive about the most trivial of matters.

My mother's grandfather had been a deputy governor in Hunan province during the Guomindang government. A photograph of her grandfather dressed in traditional long gown standing with uniformed Chiang Kaishek used to hang in the main hall of the family home. My mother occasionally told the story of how her grandfather sold all the

family lands for the price of six Russian mink coats just before the communist liberation. If my great grandfather was a Confucian scholar I wonder what were the ethics of this transaction, the kind of dilemma he had to manoeuvre around. But apart from this I know very little else about this side of the family. I know in recent years she helped her brother, sister and their families migrate to Australia. They live in East Brunswick. I met my grandmother only once before she died. I was happy she wasn't like my mother — I could see their physical likeness but that was all. Living in Australia changed my mother, made her distant, and lonely. In 1950 at nineteen she sailed third class on the Changsha and arrived in Australia with her first son, disembarking in Sydney to be met by her husband who was still not allowed to be an Australian citizen. She never adjusted to life with a barely educated but canny merchant. After more than fifty years she never learnt to speak English with any ease, to feel the comfort, like my father, of conversation with a stranger. I know after fleeing back to Hong Kong she'd learnt to drive a car, took piano lessons, had a circle of acquaintances, did some work in a shipping firm, but I wonder how much or whether she later regretted resuming life with her wayward husband in Australia.

Late in 1960 she and I returned to Australia on a Qantas aeroplane. I was five years old and we had been away for two years. My brothers took me for a foreigner. Maybe it was the very first night back; in the middle of the night I felt a weight across my body, the bedroom light was on, the door was closed, and second brother was sitting on my stomach drawing the point of a knife across my throat. By the bedside third brother waited wide-eyed and grinning. I knew straightaway I had landed in hell and would never escape.

I settle my mother into a chair, get her a foot stool and a cushion for her back. She waves away the cushion. With her hands she measures and gestures for a larger one. I grumble under my breath and get her a bigger one, the one she had last time. I make her a cup of tea and pour her half a cup. She does not like a full cup, she drinks slowly and by the end the tea will be cold. If I owned a television set I would switch it on and leave her in front of it. For the time being, she can look out the window and watch the scenery, the boats. Occasionally lorikeets will land on the balcony looking for something to eat, some seeds I scatter about on the railings. She doesn't look out the window, she observes me. Without moving her head, her eyes follow me from one side of the room to the other. If she's not watching me she stares blankly at whatever is in front of her. The thought that she's developed dementia on top of her stroke crosses my

mind. I don't want her to just sit there, I get her a copy of Lin Haiyin's novella Memories of Old Beijing. She takes the book and studies the cover, turns through a few pages. She looks at me and says in her slurred speech something which I interpret as, Have you read it? I tell her I've read about a quarter of it, that it takes me a long time to read. It's nostalgic, perhaps it's a bad choice. She seems more curious that I've read A Dream of Red Mansions. She knows the story; she's seen the decline of family fortunes across two families but she isn't a Lin Daiyu or Xue Baochai figure. I remember she was a frequent letter writer to her family in China. For a time I used to encourage her to write about her past, her life in China and Australia, but she isn't sentimental about herself or the collective past. She's not interested in reminiscing, nostalgia, passing on stories. She looks at me silently and I know she's not dislocated from her own past, and doesn't long for it. She's experienced enough of return, reliving, and there's no talking cure for her condition. She complains enough, but never mentions her regrets. She's waiting to die. An exchange of glances and she knows I'm not about to ask her questions. She puts aside the book, she understands my weakness, the past as medicine, and she knows I won't pry into her life without permission. So it's a small morsel of information she gives to me. Everyone knows one of our ancestors came out as a poor gold digger, struck it rich after six years, but just about no-one remembers his name. She tells me, Uncle Ed is dying. He knows your great great grandfather's name. See him, he might tell you....

I catch a morning flight to Melbourne. The woman from Variety Travel has booked me a hotel. Although she tells me the name of the hotel it's not until I arrive that I realise it's the casino hotel located alongside the muddy brown river. I'm not a gambler, not because I'm averse to it, just because I've never been keen enough to learn how. Instead after I settle into my room I take the short stroll to the art gallery. Along the way there are street stalls selling all sorts of trinkets, hats, silver jewellery. A clairvoyant is giving good deals on the future. A downcast looking man on a short wooden stool is selling black and white photographs of ghost gums, Vietnamese women in traditional dress, pensive Aboriginal children. It's been quite a few years since I last visited the art gallery. The gallery entrance is like a hole in an ancient Chinese city wall. Within the entrance a dark waterfall obstructs the entry and forces visitors through side doors. It's like entering the Forbidden City without the awe, or a penitentiary without the fear. Once inside, I'm momentarily disorientated, to get to the exhibition rooms on the next

level I have to choose between either taking the elevator or walking up some narrow stairs that look like the fire-escape. I take the stairs and get up to the next floor, I'm a little bewildered that I'm in a canteen. I find my way out of the canteen and into a permanent display of Asian art. What they need is something by Zhu Da to liven up the collection. I walk up a disconcerting glass ramp to an exhibition of prints of the Yoshiwara. The prints are colourful, I take a quick look around, go down the glass ramp, leave via the canteen and fire-escape. I'm thinking woodblocks by Balkan artists — now that would be an interesting change.

I get back to the hotel and make a call to my Uncle Ed. My uncle is actually my father's younger step-brother. My father was an adopted first son. My grandfather and great grandfather were also adopted sons. As far as I know my oldest brother is not an adopted son, nor are my other two brothers, on the other hand whether we're all brothers is another matter. In any case since the gold rushes the family line of six generations runs all over this adopted country. My Uncle Ed's son, my cousin, answers the telephone. I say who I am. My cousin is surprised to hear from me. I tell my cousin I've heard his father is not well. He says, no, he didn't think so. His voice sounds a little impatient. I say sorry, it must be a mistake. I blame my mother. I then ask to speak with Uncle Ed. These last few years my uncle has fallen on hard times, some bad investments have made him destitute and dependent on his second son. I haven't seen him for some years, not since his wife died five years ago. He seems at first somewhat muddled when I tell him who I am, then slowly the name gels, he laughs, and sounds happy to hear from me. He asks where I'm staying and chuckles gleefully when I tell him. I mention that my mother said he was not well and that I've come down to see him. He surprises me when he says he'll come over straightaway. This confirms he's not exactly on his deathbed. I offer to go over, or pick him up and take him out. Since I'm not very familiar with the city he thinks it's easier if we meet at the hotel where I'm staying.

Years ago, back in the mid-1960s, he lived with my grandparents on their farm. My grandparents ran chickens and had some turkeys. They had a farmhouse of four old army barracks rebuilt into the traditional Chinese style of facing buildings around a central courtyard. It was a small farm surrounded by other small farms, woodlands, clear creeks and billabongs. On the next property was old Mr Thompson who put up with his Chinese neighbour's grandchildren who liked to spend afternoons sitting on his back porch making themselves at home, or crossing his farm on their way to the creek

or billabong with the grandfather's German shepherd dog to catch yabbies and catfish. Once I'd spent a few days on the grandparent's farm, and at the end of the stay Uncle Ed was driving me back at night to the city. As we pulled out of the driveway and headed down the dirt road Grandfather's dog loped in front of the ute, kicking up dust and stones. Uncle Ed honked the car horn but the dog kept running ahead of us until the windscreen suddenly shattered and turned opaque. Uncle Ed made a hole in the windscreen with his fist, turned the car around, drove back to the farm and went to his room. I always remember his room as cluttered with easels, life-size paintings of nudes, tubes of paint, brushes in jars, as well as his rifles and live cartridges which he used to line up on his dresser like women's lipsticks. He came out of his room with a .303. When the dog came into the yard Uncle Ed killed it with a single shot. I don't remember what they called the dog, at any rate I didn't get home that night and the next morning I saw the dog lying in a wheelbarrow.

Uncle Ed looks well, he's dressed in a dark well-fitted suit and clean shaven. He's seventy-two years of age, has all his hair, is slightly tanned and much leaner than other times I seen him. He doesn't look ill at all, and I wonder what my mother was thinking. His son has just dropped him off in the front of the hotel. I ask Uncle Ed about my cousin. Uncle Ed says my cousin is fine, apart from recently divorcing, that his own grown-up daughters are not on good terms with him, that he has to look after his father, he's fine. He asks how my mother is going. I tell him she's okay. He says, She's a strong-minded woman. I say, She's stubborn. He's taken aback that I talk this way about my mother, and I suppose he knows a different kind of person to the one I know. I ask him about his own health. He says he couldn't be better, and says it in a way which makes me believe him.

Have you eaten? he says. I tell him I had an asparagus sandwich on the aeroplane. He gives me the choice of getting something to eat in Chinatown or going into the casino. I don't mind something to eat in Chinatown but I leave it up to him. He says, Let's go into the casino.

Do you like a bet? he says. How about the pokies?

The casino is cavernous, dark like a Mexican restaurant, the smell of cigarette smoke is almost strange, but I can see he's comfortable even excited at being here. People mill around the slot machines, gambling tables, sit in chairs looking at the latest Keno numbers. I follow Uncle Ed around a station of poker machines, he circles around them slowly like a wolf looking for a weak and vulnerable victim. Uncle Ed is a

gambler of confidence. He comes to a particularly garish poker machine with purple coloured rabbit motifs and slips a few dollars into a slot, presses a button. Carrots and other vegetables spin around, he presses again, and then again. Incredibly a small heap of coins comes rattling out of the machine's mouth. In less than thirty seconds he's won forty or more dollars. He looks like a contented man, as though he's stolen money from a big-time thief.

Aren't you going to have a go? he says.

Isn't it a mug's game?

I always pictured you as a gambler, he says.

It could be just an old picture.

He asks what I've been doing lately. Running a business importing and distributing Chinese herbs. He thinks this is a respectable business, keeping up our cultural heritage. I tell him it's a greatly misunderstood business. He gives me a knowing nod, Yeah, everything's meant to be an aphrodisiac. In any case it's enough to scrape together a living. His thoughts drift, distracted by the sounds of the poker machines, the tumbling of other risks. I wonder what kind of medication he is taking. He mumbles half to himself that his kidney energy is low.

As we move around the casino, he stops at a table where an Asian woman has just begun a one on one game of blackjack with the dealer. Half a dozen deals go by and the woman is winning more than she is losing. She holds an impassive expression, concentrates on the cards and pays no attention to people watching the game. A man in his forties, dressed in a brown suit and open neck shirt joins the table, he watches the game and has some coloured chips in his hands but hasn't had himself dealt into the game. The woman splits her cards on two eights, wins on one hand and loses on the other. The man in the brown suit lays some of his chips in front of her. I don't know what this means but neither the dealer nor the woman look up. I look at my uncle and he has a blank stare. For a moment he reminds me of my mother, I put my hand on his shoulder and he looks at me with sudden surprise.

I'm hungry, he says.

I lead him out of the casino, suggest that we catch a taxi over to Chinatown and have something different. In front of the hotel we get into a taxi with a driver named Stevo. In the short drive to Chinatown, Stevo tells us Europe will one day destroy America, that Europe has secret military technology, that Europe and Asia will eventually join forces politically and militarily because it's one single land mass. The

British being islanders are cut off from Europe, the British are just Armenians, although I think he meant Americans.

Somewhere along the main Chinatown street our family once had a store. The Lingnam, south of the mountain. As far as I know the store was started by my great grandfather some time after he found a single gold nugget worth three pounds — it must have weighed about an ounce. It had been enough for him to buy some goods and start hawking in the city outskirts until he had enough capital to start a shop. I ask Uncle Ed where was the old family store. He looks around, turns on the spot as though he's suddenly disorientated. This is it, he says. We're standing outside a narrow colonial building painted lemon yellow. It's a Chinese furniture store, cluttered with rosewood chairs and tables, camphor chests, jade carvings, dragon pots, stone lions, ancestor paintings, and decorated with red Chinese lanterns hanging from the ceiling. I think this is it, he says. I realise he is unsure, not because he doesn't know... A look of pain crosses his face, now he looks gaunt and elderly. My memory is not what it used to be, he says.

We're in a restaurant set up like an old style inn, we order a steamed fish, fried beancurd with vegetables, a dish of emu. I have a lot of questions to ask him. It's not answers to big questions like how we managed to survive, why as a family we endured it here as outcasts, what was the point of it all, I only wanted some names to begin with... Maybe there are some barely hidden lines of grievance — relationships on non-speaking terms, but were we a dysfunctional extended family? I didn't want to get into this. But for some reason I don't seem to be able to come out with any of the right questions. Perhaps I'm afraid it'll show what I'm up to — or the realisation that his memory is fading, that I have barely any, that I'm just kicking it the way you would kick something useless and old, and maybe after all this is not the best time to be asking. So if, as Buddha says, everything is impermanence, then loss must be an exception.

I don't remember you much when you were young, he says. You were away a lot. You must have spent some time in Hong Kong or been in the Snowy Mountains with your father.

I was around, but just a quiet kid.

Do you remember the old farm? I remember taking you home one night. The dog ran in front of the car and smashed the windscreen. Do you remember I shot the dog?

Yes, I remember.

I had a bad temper in those days.

I never thought so....

I see Uncle Ed off home. He invites me to come in and stay a while, but I make an excuse that I'll be catching a flight early in the evening. My cousin opens the front door. He is a man ten years younger than me, bulky but fit looking, with receding hairline, glasses, a patch of dark discolouration on his forehead, and spots on his puffy cheeks. We say hello politely. He doesn't invite me in. For a moment we step back thirty years or more, when we might have been recognisable. My uncle disappears inside, I say goodbye to my cousin, get back into the taxi and go back to the hotel and ponder why I didn't ask what I intended.

In my hotel room I begin reading a copy of Li Zhisui's Memoirs of Mao Zedong's Private Physician which I'd bought at Mascot airport. Some months ago in a fish and chip shop I'd been talking to the owner who mentioned the book and said it was worth reading. I'd seen the book often enough in bookstores in Hong Kong along with biographies of Jiang Qing but until recently had always resisted reading it... I must have fallen asleep. The book has dropped to the floor. The film Cabaret is on the television. It's strange but I don't even remember turning on the set. I'm restless, still half asleep, and decide to go out for a stroll.

I make a visit to the casino but still don't have any urge to gamble. I leave the hotel and after walking some way the streets get darker and quieter. The darkness suits me fine, although up ahead there are some dim lights. It's a little local night market, an odd hour for a market, it must be two or three o'clock in the morning, but I keep walking towards it and can smell the fragrance of cooking. In the first stall a man and woman are preparing curries with coconut milk, the place next to it is selling pajeon. A few stalls along they're displaying counterfeit brand clothing, Burberry trench coats, scarves, Chanel shoes, Louis Vuitton handbags. People crowd the stalls. I keep my hands in my pockets, move slowly. Everyone seems so small. I'm not tall but tower head and shoulders over the tallest in the crowd. The stall owners in their out of town accents call me flagpole and gesture for me to look at their goods. I've stopped to look at an antique jade bowl blackened with shoe polish. At an adjoining shop two women with mid-western American accents are looking at shoes. A crowd of Asian shoppers minding their own business push and mill around them. One of the women says to her

companion, I think we have an audience. But actually its only me paying attention. I walk through the counterfeit market, then stroll by stalls selling all kinds of vegetables, fruit with flesh like boiled egg yolks, I smell slaughter, freshly butchered meat, half carcasses of pigs, tripe, chicken giblets, a pen of bamboo rats with heads like guinea pigs. European carp and river prawns swim in big basins of clear water. Here the people seem to be getting taller and taller, otherwise I am shrinking. I walk down a street with brightly coloured banners hanging overhead on wires. The street gets darker and quieter the farther I move away from the market. I'm not sure where I am and where I'm going. The street is deserted and in the middle of the road I suddenly come across a friend I haven't seen in a long time. We've known each other since we were ten years old, when we met fishing on a jetty. Later we went to high school together, played football in the same team, dropped out of university, went east, and for a time lived in the same house. He looks exactly the same as the last time I saw him twenty years ago. He's astonished and nervous to see me on the street.

You better get off the street, he tells me. Hurry.

What's the problem?

Can't you hear what's coming? he says.

Hear what?

There's a crowd coming. You hate crowds. Why don't you get away?

I begin to hear distant voices; voices shouting slogans. Foreigners out. My friend suddenly runs down the road, disappears into the night. I wanted to talk to him about old times, why we had a falling out, but he's gone. Although the voices are growing louder I keep walking steadily. Other people run along the street, a man, woman and child, running for cover, vanishing into the darkness. The voices are getting closer, sounding more threatening, turning the corner behind me, a large mob with some unfathomable anger. Someone shouts, Get him. I run down the street, surprised at how fast I run, feeling strangely exuberant. I turn at the first corner and go into the nearest large building. I find myself under a brightly lit loggia. It's wide open and not much of a place to hide. The angry crowd hurries past the building. Someone has quietly joined me seeking refuge in the same place. We look at each other. She's been running and is a little out of breath, she brushes the hair from her forehead. Sally Lavada is still young, after all this time she recognises me. Now she stares at me hard and silently. I'm first to speak, I'm sorry I didn't help you look for your parents. She smiles, tilts her head to one side, and says, You've gotten much older. She reaches out and touches me gently on the

arm. I'm going upstairs, she says. I nod and remember how in the middle of the night we'd meet at the top of the street or down in the middle of the football field. She goes up the glass steps that spiral up within a tower. I follow her but lose sight of her by the time I reach the next level. I come out onto a broad terrace that overlooks the ocean and across a vast dark gulf where the distant lights of a city glow on the horizon. On hot summer weekend nights Sally Lavada and I would drive to Cable Station beach where we would swim in the surf or lie together on the sand. No one is here now. I know I'll probably never see Sally Lavada again.

The sky is dark, filled with stars, bats fly low across the night and much higher seagulls circle round and round. I go to the edge of a swimming pool lined on either side with palm trees. The swimming pool is lit by underwater lights. On the bottom are the black shapes of killer whales and seals. A white frog and a cicada float together in a corner of the pool. The cicada's wings vibrate, ripple the surface of the water. The white frog kicks its legs, bumps into the pool wall, tries to get out of the pool. I look around, find a net on a long pole used for getting out leaves, catch the cicada and white frog in the net, tip them out on the ground. The cicada and white frog lie motionless. I bend down to take a closer look but they begin to blur in my vision. The white frog sits up and suddenly jumps away into the dark. When I look again the cicada has gone too.

At the end of the row of palm trees there's a large bonfire. A small group of people are throwing fence posts and palings, wooden crates, and books onto the fire. Flames and sparks fly up into the night. Outside a brightly lit house children are running around, lighting firecrackers, setting off rockets that explode overhead. The house is crowded with people. There's a celebration, a wedding or birthday. The house is familiar, like the home of my grandparents. I step onto the verandah, the doors are wide open, I go inside. People are in groups talking, laughing, and dancing. A Chinese woman is playing the double bass, a blonde woman is listening to her at the piano. On the walls are Chinese paintings of dark craggy mountains shrouded in mists, small sail boats floating in the air, tracks that lead from a riverbank to a small rustic pavilion, two old friends drinking cups of wine. I know this house but strangers walk by me, women in long white gowns and gloved hands, men in black dinner suits, I recognise no one but the place is familiar. I go through other adjoining rooms, empty rooms with beds covered by mosquito nets. In the kitchen I find traces of a feast that's left the room; left behind scraps of meat, sinews and bones, discarded cabbage leaves, potato and carrot skins, orange peels. A strip of flypaper dangles from the yellow ceiling, twirling slowly

with the movement of the air. Through French doors I leave the house and come out into the central courtyard where there are two peach trees in pots and a fish pond with lilies. In the middle of the pond there's a small island and in the dim light I can make out the shapes of miniature stunted trees, ceramic pagodas and buildings. A bearded figure has his fishing line in the water. The moon is floating on the dark water like a bright round silver leaf.

Someone is behind me, watching me from inside the house. A shadow is moving about. The wind is in the trees. For a moment I try to see who it is, but nothing moves. I go into the house back through the kitchen. A man is standing in the dark corridor. He must see me but he walks away. I've walked along this corridor many times. I know its polished timber floorboards, its rubbings of beeswax, the happiness of its length, the place of feigned injuries, this corridor to many rooms, family gatherings, the private apologies whispered here. Uncle... Uncle, is that you? He stops and turns around. I am closer and see his face. I know the abrupt bitter anger in this voice. I know his love of relentless toil, his American sayings, his moments of humour and disappointments, his shyness, the ambivalence of his familial duties, I'm not your uncle, he says, I'm your father....

Waking is always a realisation of life. It's taken almost a month, her ex-de facto has come down from the top house. He knocks on the door. I'm not surprised that he has finally shown up on my doorstep, but I'm a little annoyed that he's interrupting at this very moment when I'm listening to Gary Foley on the radio talking about the influence of American culture on his sons. I turn down the radio and open the door. He introduces himself and we shake hands firmly with steady eye contact. It must be a coincidence that we're both not at work this day. Up close he doesn't seem a dislikeable sort. He says hello in Mandarin with an Australian accent, asks whether I've eaten yet. I say yes, I've already eaten. I know he's taught English in China for a year, something he's also done in Korea and Japan. Standing in the doorway I ask in a business-like way how can I help him. He says he wants to talk to me about her — up there. Of course she wasn't at home. I know he meant her, but I thought he'd at least refer to her by name.

I'm not sure why I allow him in. In a perverse way, curiosity gets the better of me. Why did she get involved and live with a man like him? What's his history? Was some distant ancestor of his a naval captain in the opium wars. I tell him to take off his shoes and leave them at the door. We sit stiffly around the kitchen table. First of all he says

he's moving out soon. The next thing he says is that I have some explaining to do. I think to myself that I can either laugh in his face, get violent, or not react. Usually the third option is best. He says, I know she likes you. She'll probably move in with you at the first opportunity, but she's still married to me.

He probably thinks this will surprise me, I can understand why he does this. He chuckles in my face, but I don't say anything. I know by the way he speaks with such restraint he probably wants to kill me. I haven't done anything wrong, but hear him out patiently, don't interrupt anything he says. I don't want to act smug and supercilious, since I've made enough mistakes in relationships of my own without needing to take the credit for his as well. Close up he doesn't look at all threatening, if anything he looks jaundiced and dark under the eyes. He puts both hands, palms down, flat on top of the table. Either he's overconfident laying his hands down prone or instinctively nervous. Someone so unpredictable — I wonder whether she's safe up there... He doesn't take long to get fully into his interrogation, he wants to know about my work, my past, how I'm going to look after her. Not surprisingly, he understands nothing of our relationship and I'm not about to tell him anything. I make some short answers after thinking some long chess-like solutions about what to say. The answers come so slowly he probably thinks I have difficulty with English expression, a fear of malapropisms, that English is a foreign language. The longer we sit face to face the more erratic we become. He says something, and then I respond to it when he's already onto something completely different or else I give some unrelated illogical answer to an impertinent question. It's as though we are in the same place but two minutes apart. For all I know the questions might not be important to him, he just wants to hear me say something which will give him an excuse to be angry and start brawling.

I don't know why I feel so hospitable, maybe because I forget his presence in the house. I look and he's not there, just the trace of a recurring memory. I get up and get myself a packet of watermelon seeds, some hickory nuts, settle down to a relaxing afternoon and try not to think about pigeons. After a while nibbling on these things I become hungrier and out of the fridge get some leftover jiaozi that I'd made in the morning. I begin reheating them in a saucepan of water. Suddenly I find him behind my shoulder. He wants to know what I'm cooking, then he says, Those things, did she make them for you? I tell him to sit at the table, and forget whether I answer his question.

Now that I have the food ready I get a bottle of Maotai and pour myself a cup. He's still there sitting at my table. He gives me a silent dog-eyed look and so I get a

plate and cup for him as well. He seems to appreciate this gesture. There are protocols to having this kind of wine, but with him I don't bother sitting on ceremony, at least I've found him a cup. It doesn't cross my mind that he might know anything about such things even if he has been in China. He can sip it like a stranger or knock it back in one gulp, it doesn't make any difference to me, although on second thoughts maybe I prefer that he sip it. After the first cup I'm almost able to forget he's there, even though he wants to stare at me. He's talking again, as though he's a masculine incarnation of Scheherazade and is going to spend the whole day and night keeping me awake. With a pair of bamboo chopsticks he manages to eat four or five jiaozi without interrupting his story about some indentured Indian banana plantation workers. Really tasty, he says politely, and tells me he's never eaten jiaozi made with Chinese radish. He seems a bit more distracted when he's cracking open hickory nuts with the nut cracker I've inadvertently left on the dining table. Now and then he stops talking to pick out small bits from the shells with the ends of his fingernails. Most of the time I look out through the windows, the day is cloudless and the sky is blue except for large plumes of dark grey smoke coming over the horizon from the national park. The boats in the bay barely move, and I watch the seagulls circling above the old captain's yacht while stray thoughts go around, slip in and out of my head.

It's getting late, two thirty, I have to start thinking about making dinner. He begins talking about his childhood up north in Queensland. The Maotai has unhinged his tongue. He has a half dozen sisters and a half dozen brothers. His father fought in the second world war in New Guinea. He says he's pinpointed the location of his old family home in Station Street on Google Earth — except that a new house stands in the same place and the big mango trees have gone. When he was a boy he says there used to be farms in the area. Sugarcane and banana plantations. Something he says finally catches my interest. When I was a young kid, he says, I once pissed on a Chinese boy's leg.

I break out into a laugh, for no other reason than from the effect of the Maotai, then feel obliged to ask, Why did you do that?

His eyes and complexion seem to light up, he scratches both arms as a kind of preparation. Now that he knows he finally has my attention, he leans forward across the table and confides, Because he was a bastard.

What kind of bastard? A real bastard or a serious asshole of a bastard?

Yeah, the second... What did you say? A real crazy bastard...

Yeah, crazy mad with power bastard.

The ex-de facto isn't affected by my scepticism. He lifts his head, leans back in his chair like a grinning schoolboy, one hand flat on the table and with the other this time scratches himself under his chin.

The story is that one Sunday around noon he went to Mrs Mac's, a milk bar opposite the local caravan park. At Mrs Mac's you could get a really good milkshake, or a deep fried waffle pie, which was an uglier version of a Chicko roll, which was a larger Australian version of a Chinese spring roll. There he spent sixpence on a bag of hot chips, ate them, then strolled down the road. Using a private gate through the caretaker's residence he sneaked into the Gardens, the local swimming pool. The Gardens was run by a family of Chinese, a grandparent couple in their sixties, their oldest son and daughter-in-law, and five grandchildren, one of them a midget boy and another a giant beautiful sixteen year old girl. Apart from its three swimming pools of various sizes, the Gardens had some rare and not so rare animals, pangolins and gibbons from China, a Romer's frog the size of a sixpence, giant centipedes, the world's smallest scorpion, red kangaroos, foxes, a musk deer, and all kinds of big and small banyan trees, giant teak trees, rainforest orchids, and edible mountain-side fungi. He spent an hour or so swimming and wading in all three murky swimming pools. Later he walked around the gardens then climbed up the back wall of the women's change-room and spied on women and girls getting undressed. By the middle of the afternoon, he decided to go home along the dirt road past the sugarcane fields. There was no traffic along the road and he walked down the middle kicking dust and yellow stones. Nobody was around, just the sound of some dying crows...

He breaks off his story and asks me whether I know what it's like swimming alone in the ocean at dusk?

Sure.

It's like that, he says.

He had a feeling that he was being followed. Now and then he turned around but the road was always empty and no one was behind him. Halfway home he should have known better and made a run for it, then the Chinese boy...

Just let me call him the Chinese boy, he says.

The Chinese boy suddenly came out from nowhere and stood in the middle of the road. It seemed like *déjà vu*. It wasn't the first time he'd been caught alone on the road. The Chinese boy was twelve years old, a year older than him, solid for that age, but not

small and not big. Normally he was away at some boarding school a couple of hundred miles away, but it was during the summer break. The boy carried with him an old machete and had a small rucksack on his back. He knew he couldn't outsmart, outrun, or outfight the Chinese boy. The boy had a fixed expression, though you could never guess what he was thinking. If you had something you'd give it to him, otherwise he'd rough you up. You'd give him something like a shanghai, threepenny banger, a bearded dragon.

This particular day the boy motioned him off the road towards the sugarcane, told him to follow him. There wasn't now any point running. He said to the Chinese boy to let him go and he'd pay double the sixpence for getting into the swimming pool. The Chinese boy pointed to the sugarcane with his machete, so he obeyed the boy and went to the edge of the sugarcane. There was an opening through the sugarcane where the boy had already hacked away with his machete. The boy pushed him through the sugarcane, which turned out to be no thicker than a wind break. They came out into an open field where there was a dam about fifty yards across. The boy took him around the banks of the dam. The boy stopped, picked up stones and for a while skipped them across the water. The boy then walked around to the other side of the dam, followed a track across an empty paddock, through stands of dead gum trees. They went through a swamp, walked along the trunks of fallen trees, crossed several more paddocks and over barbed-wire fences. They walked over a lightly wooded hill, came down to a place where there was a billabong. The boy made a loud whistle, and got a whistle in reply. A family of Kooris sat on top of a giant boulder and watched them go by. They walked on until they came to the back of old rundown farm house.

The house was dilapidated and abandoned, half the roof had fallen in, doors were missing, windows were broken. On the back verandah was an old kerosene refrigerator, some wicker chairs. Along a window sill were three black and white photographs. One was a picture of a group of near naked Aboriginal men linked in chains. Another photograph showed a young Chinese man carrying a bunch of bananas on his shoulder. The third photograph was of a Chinese soldier looking out over a mountain range. The soldier carried a rifle and used a paper umbrella to shade himself from the sun. On a small table covered by a map of the world was a carefully arranged collection of Chinese pottery, glass bottles, clay figurines, sticks of incense, gnarled bits of wood, rocks and crystals. The boy told him not to touch anything.

He asked why he was brought here. The boy got out a pint-sized bottle from his rucksack. The bottle was filled with kerosene. He walked out into the middle of a paddock with the kerosene. There was some kind of wooden lid about four feet by four covering the ground. The boy lifted up the wooden cover and told him to have a look. It was a deep shaft or pit of some sort. A rope tied to the wooden lid went down the side of the shaft. He couldn't see very far down, the rope hung down disappearing into the dark pit. The boy said wait, he pulled on the rope until eventually a wire cage came up on the end of the rope. Inside the cage were a dozen or more enormous cane toads. The boy emptied half of the kerosene over the cage and toads. Then he put the rest of the kerosene at a safe distance, came back and told him stand back. From a safe distance the Chinese boy lit a bundle of matches and threw them at the cage. The cage went up in a huge sudden flame. The cane toads jumped madly around the cage, engulfed in fire, exploded like giant popcorn....

At this point I interrupt the story. So is this the part where you whip out your willy and pee on his foot?

Now that you mention it, not yet...

The Chinese boy didn't jump about like a voodoo witch doctor, making spells, but stood back silently, smiling calmly, watching something carefully crafted go up in flames. The fire died down and there was only the black withering smoke and a stack of blackened bloated cane toad bodies. He didn't know why the boy had brought him here to witness this great cane toad immolation. After this he followed the boy back the way they came. On the road the Chinese boy left him without a word.

A few minutes from his home he saw a group of boys running around a house, shouting, making noises like American Indians. Among the boys he saw the Chinese boy's three younger brothers, two or three of his female cousins. They were running around Roland Keogh's house creating a siege, shouting his name, calling him out. Roland Keogh was an only child, his father had been killed in the Korean war, his mother went to work somewhere in the city.

He didn't know what was happening but stood in the middle of Roland Keogh's front lawn watching the other children run round and round the house. One of the windows at the front of the house opened up, he saw Roland Keogh lean his slight torso through the window. One of Roland's eyes was shut tight in his freckled face, one arm extended straight out and the other was cocked back close to the chest. In between Roland's untrained hands was a bow and arrow. He would have liked to have said hello

to Roland Keogh and ask what was happening, but in that moment of bewilderment he watched the release, heard the tight twang, the dip of the bow, detected the arc of the trajectory, the arrow aimed indiscriminately between his eyes. He didn't move, closed both eyes, felt a wisp of passing feathers. He suddenly wanted to pee. The arrow nicked the side of his face and landed on the other side of the street. The other children stopped and stared, then ran away. Roland Keogh drew back into the house, closed the window and let down the blinds. The street was quiet again. A day so quiet nobody would have died.

I might think nothing of this story, might just pour another drink, keep eating seeds and spitting out husks, just sit it out until he's too drunk, has talked his head off, or fallen asleep with his head on the kitchen table, but he wants to keep pushing the story further as if everything depends on it, that it's going to get to me in a bad way.

After this he ran home, when he got home his father saw the trace of blood on his face. He told his father what happened, how he was coming home from the swimming pool and went into the bush to have a pee, he didn't see one of the Chinese boy's younger brothers, LJ Lee, crouched behind tall stink grass. Suddenly he heard loud swearing, LJ Lee sprang out from the stink grass, landed a punch right on his nose and raced off. His father was angry and went looking for LJ Lee. The father found LJ Lee with his older brother in the middle of a paddock. The younger brother was wearing an old army helmet from the second world war. The father marched towards the Chinese boys through the long grass. The sun behind the boys was bright orange and low on the horizon, sitting above the line of green waving sugarcane. The father had the sun in his eyes and LJ Lee might have made a run for it, but the older brother told him to stand still. The father got close enough to tell the younger brother to take off the helmet.

The funny thing was, in the middle of the open paddock the older brother was liable to get dizzy. After attending boarding school he wasn't used to open spaces — if he was alone he couldn't have crossed the paddock. When he was ten, in another state, his father forgot to come down from the mountains to collect him from the boarding school at the end of the term. He was still there standing by the school gate long after all the staff and students had left. A farming couple passing by in a utility saw him, stopped and offered him a lift. He hesitated at first but took a chance, and following his directions, they drove him all the way up to the mountain village which didn't appear on any maps... Sometimes you'd see him put out his hand as if he were about to fall over. This time he picked up a machete from the ground and held it ready. It was hard to say

who was the angrier of the two. The father said, Put it down. I killed your kind in the war....

Is this all it comes down to? There were any number of ways he could have ended this story. At this point I might be blocking out what he's saying next and I know he's having trouble thinking how to provoke me into some act like kicking him off his chair. Instead I pour a little more Maotai for both of us. I know he hasn't made up the story, maybe he learnt it from someone, parrot fashion with all the nuances copied. Maybe she told him telepathically. I suppose he has his reasons for retelling it. For some of us, after all these years it still has a ring of the familiar, or maybe I mean the unfamiliar. By now the ex-de facto's face is even more flushed, I'm sure he's inebriated but whether it's the wine or some deep down repressed anger seeping to the surface I'm not so certain. I feel a bit drowsy myself, it's the Maotai for sure. Otherwise I don't feel too bad. Normally I wouldn't be drinking alcohol with someone I don't like, but he's a strange kind of bloke.

Maotai, Longbin, are the only spirits I can drink without them changing my mood for the worse. At the moment I can hardly talk, even my thinking is slurred, but given the circumstances I'm as comfortable as I'm ever likely to get listening to him. Just as well his memory is suspect and hasn't affected me. He thinks he's done a good job on the story, but it isn't the way I would have told it, and maybe it isn't the way I remember.

He seems to sense that I'm about to kick him out, he sits up straight, then leans forward slightly and puts his weight on his elbows on the table. You know, he says, she's an illegal immigrant. I could go to the immigration department and have her deported. I'm about to tell him to get out when Cai'er appears at the side glass door. She comes around to the front of the deck and I open the sliding doors. She's just come back from work. I can see straight away that she's angry. I'm not sure whether she's angry with me or him. She stares at him and says, What are you doing here? How come you're not at work? He looks at her innocently, leaning back in the chair, then gives me a glance as though I'm his friend. I've just been telling him the story of your name, how it's pretty close to Tang Sai'er, one of those dangerous woman warriors from the white lotus rebellion in the Ming dynasty.

Her voice is more relaxed than the expression on her face. I'm sure he knows the story better than you.

Well, actually he doesn't, he says. He doesn't know what happened to Tang Sai'er's husband. Do you, mate?

Her husband was probably the one who betrayed her to the emperor, she says.

Yeah, maybe he had a good reason.

They look at me, waiting for me to reply. I think of history textbooks I've read, biographical dictionaries of important Chinese women, garrulous tourist guides I've endured and listened to on crowded tourist coaches racing across the endless sad Chinese countryside towards another souvenir and gift shop.

There have been more peasant rebellions in China than any other country. Tang Sai'er was a leader of the white lotus rebellion during the Ming dynasty. She and her armies captured several counties and walled cities in Shandong province. The emperor sent his imperial armies against her but she held out against them for more than ten years. She was a religious adept, her followers called her the Buddha mother. She studied a secret sacred text, had magical powers, a talismanic sword, and could turn paper cut-outs into fighting soldiers. The imperial forces eventually defeated her armies but never captured her. There's some story that one day she appeared strolling through the emperor's palace. The emperor had her imprisoned but when they went to execute her she wasn't in her cell and she was never seen again.

There, you see, he does know.

I said he didn't know what happened to her husband.

He got killed.

There you go.

Would you like something to eat or drink?

She says, Your face is red, you look as though you've been drinking all afternoon. You don't even like drinking. Why are you drinking with him?

Well, he came down to talk to me about how I'm going to look after you and that maybe he could have you deported because you're an illegal immigrant.

I'm not an illegal immigrant, and I'm not the one who needs looking after. She says this more to him than me, and sits reassuringly on my lap so that I can't see either her face or the ex-de facto's. I can imagine the angry silent looks they exchange, how the way she sits on my lap must annoy him, and it's just as well that I don't know what's happening.

You disappoint me, she says, I can't believe that you'd barge your way into someone else's home uninvited. You're so shameless you won't even share the gas bill, and then you complain about people taking advantage of you.

Since you've got company, mate, I better go, he says. At the door he turns around and says, Hey, did you watch the Tigers win the grand final?

Yes, I did. It was a good game.

Talk to you later, he says.

Without seeing him leave I say, See you later.

She gets off my lap, sits opposite me. She gives me penetrating eye contact, it's mesmerising, and she wants to know everything he's said. I feel like sleeping, and lie on the floor. She takes a cushion from the couch. Maybe it's for under my head or to smother my face.

Tell me what you know and I'll spare your life, she says.

I close my eyes. I'll tell you whatever I remember, but don't expect me to explain anything... And don't expect any pictures...

Just say what you know, and don't try to make anything up.

According to him, but this is what I really found out, there was a woman and she was looking at the cover of a book — a blurry monochrome picture of a thin waiter serving espresso and mineral water at a sidewalk café. She opened the book... The sunlight was so bright it seemed to bleach the pages and make her blind to the words in the book. Her dark eyes squinted at the blank page until print began to appear. Words moved back and forth and crawled like lines of ants. She put on her sunglasses, leant back against the wall, one leg crossed over the other. The sun was hot on her face. Her eyes looked up from the page. The morning was always warm — perspiration formed on her brow. She reached for the raffia hat that lay beside her. Book in one hand, she felt the skin on her face — the heat and itch had gone and this morning the skin felt smooth. She was waiting, shouldn't have been reading, but she could get away with it — if he came she knew he would be late.

She looked up from the page. Two swallows flew around in eccentric circles and skimmed the surface of the water. The pool was quiet. She looked up and down the 50 metre pool, there was barely a ripple. The outer gates had been closed and she had the swimming pool to herself. On other days the pool would have been crowded with swimmers, usually there was just enough room to stand.

On the other side of the pool was a grey wall made of cinder blocks. The wall was at least two metres high. The only things visible on the other side of the wall were six tall palm trees. Occasionally a tree dropped a branch onto the pool side of the wall. In summer the fruit from the palm trees would drop to the ground, and some would find their way into the pool to bob among the swimmers or get sucked into the filter system.

She liked to think the book was given to her. The dust jacket had an appeal to her. Wherever she went she liked to take it with her. She turned the pages back from where she had read to, back to the author's preface. A book of family sayings, the beginning impressed her: "I have invented nothing."

It was hot — she tugged at the sleeve of her white t-shirt to let through some air, pinched the front of her t-shirt away from her body, looked down and saw her bare breasts, a streak of perspiration ran down between them. Early in the morning she'd been running up and down the hillside, running through the jungle of trees — through the tall bamboo, giant mango trees, the lovely twisted banyan trees, the rare fragrant agarwood. The ringing of cicadas distracted her, reminded her of all kinds of things — broken window panes, far off hot listless days lying on timber bed planks, the shedding of clothes and skin... She couldn't concentrate on her book, she placed the book beside her, took off her sunglasses and hat, crossed her arms in front of her and took off her t-shirt, then hitched up her one piece swimsuit, the top half which had been rolled down to her waist like a weightlifter's, back up and over her shoulders. She stood up, shook her thighs with her hands, flexed her right knee, performed a few gentle windmills with her arms.

She left her rubber slippers by the wall and went barefoot to the edge of the pool. The water was perfectly clear. The bottom of the pool was a pale blue. Wide black lines marked the centres of the lanes. A thick plastic vacuuming hose floated around in the pool, moved slowly like a giant white serpent. She knelt down, put her hand in the water, scooped up water to splash her face. The water was cool. She thought of falling into the water like a stone. She closed her eyes, shook her head slightly. A feeling of nausea began to rise from her stomach. For a moment she seemed to drift forward, she got to her feet, her body swayed but somehow felt suspended in the air, she gripped the edge of the pool with her toes.

An engine noise came from the other side of the wall. The gardener was slashing into shape the indecorous hedges with a power hedge-trimmer. She opened her eyes, stepped back from the edge of the pool. It was a familiar sound — chaotic like splashes.

Swimmers — she recognised swimmers, they swam up and down, she knew them by their swimming costumes, the shapes of bodies, swimming actions, the way the hands plunged in the water and came out, or the way the chest breasted the water, tumble turns, the symmetry of kicking actions, turns of hips. She watched good swimmers and bad ones, noticed which ones improved over time, how many laps they would swim, the quickest and slowest, the ones that got in the way, the ones that swam over the tops of others, the ones who were hotheads with white caps and needed her cooling down, the ones that annoyed her with their lousy swimming strokes that got them nowhere.

There was another familiar sound, the long howl of a black gibbon. The gibbon was in the tops of the giant banyan trees. Listening to the howl made her hair stand. Penetrating, dark in the canopy, it seemed to rattle everything, bring attention, raise white birds into the air, it was wild — escaped from a zoo — it howled all morning calling for its lost mate.

Someone dived into the pool. The splash startled her. The black gibbon would have seen the swimmer. Did someone stumble out of the forest? In the banyan tree sitting with the gibbon she'd have had a good view. She looked up, the gibbon jumped from branch to branch, jumped further than it seemed possible, grabbed at the tips of other trees. Long howls floated over her head, urged her to get up into the trees. She looked again at the pool.

Ripples spread across the surface of water. The swimmer was under water. She watched for the swimmer to surface. And then he appeared, breaking the water with his fingertips. He swam leisurely up one of the centre lanes. He swam well if not totally balanced, turned on both sides for breath, had elegant relaxed strokes, a kick that wasn't overdone. The swimmer was familiar, but he was breaking a rule too obvious that it didn't need mentioning — no swimming naked.

She looked over at the wall on the other side of the pool, his black clothes and shoes lay in a small heap on the seating.

Her hand stroked the water several times. She brought her hand up to her face, wiped water at her temples. She walked back to her place by the wall, sat down and picked up her book. She didn't care if he swam naked, it would be his own business and there was no one else around.

At the first page she couldn't help closing her eyes again, feeling suddenly drowsy. When she opened her eyes, she looked at the lone swimmer swimming

comfortably. She watched him tumble naked and turn at the wall, push off with his legs as though he were in for the long haul. She timed him off the wall clock in front of the change rooms. He might have swum the 50 metres in a leisurely 36 seconds, but he didn't touch the end of the pool. He tumbled around but didn't kick off the wall, was more than a metre from touching the end. He swam up to the other end and once again turned around awkwardly without touching the wall, coming short of swimming the full length by almost two metres. She watched him swim another ten laps until at last he was caught in a kind of aquatic somersault in the middle of the pool. Maybe he was having some kind of fit, she walked to the edge of the pool, shouted at him. He must have heard her, because he stopped. But then he sunk silently to the bottom of the pool, leaving bubbles of water on the surface. So now she had to dive in — dive in to see whether he was diving or drowning... She closed her eyes, swore repeatedly, clenched her fists, wanted to scream... At that moment, maybe she blacked out, fell forward, or maybe it was a dive, her arms reached out, her feet left the edge of the pool, and her mind somewhere else, another time again.

It's possible that she'd been with a flock of migrating birds and had fallen from the sky. But I don't think she was like this, she didn't fall from grace from the sky, the sea, or even a foreign businessman. It's true just the same that she found herself on a small overcrowded boat in the middle of the ocean as it began sinking. She closed her eyes and cursed her luck, when she opened her eyes the sun was overhead and the sky was more silver than blue. She kicked her legs gently, closed her eyes again. The sun was hot on her face. Water ran over her face, but the water didn't feel cool. She raised an arm out of the water and stretched it back behind her head. The water ran from the arc made by her arm. The water around her was smooth, a slight swell and current moving her south. After a minute she rolled back over onto her stomach. For an hour her arms reached out, grabbed the water in front of her and pushed it behind her. On an invisible line to the shore, she was no longer thinking whether she could reach the shoreline, she was swimming, her mind fixed on her strokes, the turn of her body, the way her legs kicked, the turn of her head for breath.

The shore was closer, within reach. That morning, from the deck of the boat, she'd seen the shore, or perhaps she had imagined it, a slight abrasion on the horizon wearing down the sky; she didn't shout, I see land, no one that morning talked about land —

water occupied them all. The deck-hand shouted to jump and swim. Most of the others couldn't swim, couldn't float, and there weren't lifejackets or a life raft.

Two days earlier, the deck-hand caught a small shark a metre and a half long. Some of people on the crowded boat got very excited. But in the morning the thought of sharks made them baulk too. There was one who'd spent all his time leering at her, trying to make conversation and getting close, he jumped in after her, told her to stay together with him. He was still thinking of her, thinking he could get her in the water, or maybe he knew she could swim, that he was hopeless, that she would help him — someone to cling onto like a life raft. She swam away from him, he wasn't a good swimmer, he looked frustrated, angry, swam towards her, for a long time, almost reached her, until he was exhausted, wasted his strength, swallowed too much water, gave up, and when she looked around he was gone — gone like every one else.

She put her face under water, everything beneath her was dark. She'd never been in the ocean. It had frightened her in the beginning, not being able to see the bottom of the ocean. She saw something as big as herself swim under her not more than a body's length away. It swam slowly and paid no attention to her. Even when she knew it wasn't a shark she'd still been frightened. Its dark roaming solitariness unnerved her like loneliness. But now she found some kind of rhythm, just as if she were swimming in a swimming pool. One lap after another, barely anything crossing her mind, just the constancy of gliding forward, the sound of her breathing keeping company.

The shoreline didn't seem much, just a dark featureless line on the horizon, but it was getting closer. Every so often she stopped to rest, to look ahead, to look for the shoreline. She moved forward, the current and swell helping her towards the land, the land that rose and fell from sight, vanishing momentarily in the spray on the back of cresting waves. The water was blue like the sky minutes before dusk. Water would fill her mouth and she would cough and spit it out. But the sun in the sky was directly above and even in the cold water she felt it hot on her face. Her inner thighs tired and she changed strokes. She could hardly kick anymore. But the ocean surprised her — was kinder than a crowded boat, and the listless day after day of nausea, the seeming endlessness, was somehow softer than she had ever imagined. Now there was nothing to think about but the shoreline, the beach, the white frilled line, the froth at the skirt of the hard ground. Her feet on firm land, had no sense of depth, that was why in the past she was always moving — floating was different, strangely full of depth, the depth full of darkness like space.

The shore got closer, and what she left behind she didn't need to look at. No one was behind her. Some had grabbed things to help them stay afloat. Others had gone into the water at the very last moment, easing into the water slowly and disappearing with their arms over their heads as if their clothes were coming off. In the beginning she was afraid sharks would come. And again, to her surprise, there hadn't been any sharks — only a giant turtle that startled her as it raised its wizened head out of the water. She said to it, Help me, help me get to the shore. And then, in the distance, a ridge of low sand dunes bare of vegetation lined the top of the water. She was tired, and her arms and legs were heavier and she could be sinking. She had to stop dreaming in the water.

A sudden swell rolled and dropped her. She closed her eyes tight but couldn't resist opening them to see the bubbling violent whiteness around her. After a moment she surfaced, was pushed onto the beach, the waves turned her around, she faced the sea again and in-coming waves swamped her, pushed her arms over her head, rolled her hips. The water suddenly rushed away from her, left her stranded on the beach. She clutched the sand, anchored herself to the shore, crawled up the beach. Above the high tide mark. She lay in the scattered clumps of seaweed. She didn't try to stand, but lay breathing deeply, looking up into the blue sky. Seagulls flew over her. The sun stung her face. She closed her eyes, covered her face in the crook of her elbow, she turned over face down, away from the intense glare. The sand was hot, and she was thirsty, exhausted, overjoyed, wanted water.

For a while she fell asleep on the sand. When she woke her thirst was unbearable. Sweat and sand covered her face. The breeze coming up from the ocean was cool at times then strangely warm as if the breeze had suddenly come from another direction. Her face caressed the sand. The sand was pure white and incredibly fine. It was quiet here, desolate, a loneliness different from the ocean. So perfect here, she could lie forever on the sand undisturbed. Only hunger, thirst and maybe sex, would ever ask her to get up and walk with them up the beach into the dunes to eat, drink and make love. She felt unable to move, perhaps her body would find sustenance straight from the sand. The sand stretched far into the distance. Now and then, the wind kicked up the sand. The body of a dead cormorant lay not far from her. The wind dusted it with sand. It was barely black, bleached, most of its feathers gone.

A smell like salted duck came over her, it pressed her down into the sand. Hands turned her over. Her arm fell away from her face, and then a shadow fell over her. She

saw a man standing over her. A man under a brown hat, with a red face, a small mouth, thin lips, cement grey hair. He was bent forward at the waist, his hands on his hips. Their eyes met. His eyes pale blue. She wanted to speak but couldn't open her mouth. She wanted to scream but her body seemed in a state of paralysis. He looked down at her as if he'd found something he'd been looking for all his life. She managed to shake her head and then brought her hand slowly to her mouth. She gasped.

Apart from his whiteness there was something very ordinary and common about him. He didn't look threatening. He might have looked totally harmless on a city street or on a bus. Behind him, she saw seagulls flying low and fast as if spearing through him and coming out the other side. He said something unintelligible. A growling ghost talk with awful breath. He straightened up, pulled his shirt out of his khaki coloured shorts and began to unbutton the waist of his pants. The skin was pale. The sun ran off him like water. How long had he been here? A few minutes, a day, a week, two hundred years.

He got down on his knees at her feet with his pants low on his hips. He grabbed her ankles. She didn't resist. For some reason he waited for her, waited for some reaction, his hands clench on her ankles, his teeth set. There was a look on his face she recognised. She brought her knees up, her legs parted slightly. His hands followed the movement of her legs, he didn't restrain her. His hands gripped her ankles then for some reason he smiled and released his grip on her ankles. He lowered his head, his eyes on her body. She saw a seagull hovering over them. What was it after, a bird so clean, a slender slightly curved beak dipped in bright red, perfectly balanced in the air, a pure grey witness after a morsel. She brought her knees up further till they touched her chest, she kicked him in the face. His head went back, she kicked again, hitting the throat. He toppled back with barely a sound.

She rolled over, away from the body. She staggered to her feet. The man's face was covered with blood from nose and mouth. He was moaning, may have been choking or drowning, blood caught in his throat. Her heart raced, she was desperate to get away. She walked in small circles, looked at the horizon, the land, the ocean, waves and sand dunes, unsure which way to go. Beside the man was a rucksack, she picked the bag up, opened it and pulled out a large fishing knife, a plastic one litre bottle of water, a red apple. She twisted the top off the bottle. Good, he hadn't drunk any. She drank the water, then poured some on her face.

She wiped her hand across her face and through her hair, stood still a moment, looked around her. No one was around, no witnesses. Someone would have seen how vulnerable she was, it was out there in the open and there was nothing to hide behind, she was there — visible on the margin between land and sea, where waves could have pulled her back into the ocean. She looked up at the sky. The sky was blue, a few thin clouds indifferent to anything but rising and sinking air. No one was around. She looked at footprints along the beach and saw a trail that led off into the distance along the shore. The man was beginning to make louder noises — noises like growling, maybe he was having a heart attack. He looked much thinner now. His hands were moving about. She might have to drag him into the water. His blood would attract sharks — the sharks would clean him up... Her head felt heavy, still unsure what to do. She wanted to hide him, put him out of sight, somehow disguise him, dig a hole.

She cupped her hands with sand and threw it onto his face. The sand barely disturbed him, instead it made him more grotesque and frightening. She picked up the rucksack, put back the water, apple and knife. She changed her mind, took only the apple and knife, and dropped the bag beside the man. The man opened his eyes, blinked, his face covered in sand and blood, looked straight up, not at her. He let out a deep sigh. She dropped the apple on the sand then picked it up again.

Behind her waves clapped on the beach. The breeze was suddenly cool on her neck and shoulders. She wanted to collapse on the ground, but had to escape. Her body swayed, and she felt dizzy, realised it was the effects of the sea. Along the beach flocks of seagulls and terns sat motionless, facing the ocean. The beach was long, almost endless. Farther up from the water, a hundred metres away, the beach formed into ridges of sand dunes. Low scrubby bushes dotted the dunes with clumps of grass and pigface with yellow flowers. She walked up the sand dunes.

On top of the sand dunes she looked back, the brilliant blue water, the waves, the shore an endless whiteness stretched out, the sea birds, the ocean. The ocean at a distance looked beautiful. So isolated.

Beyond the dunes the land turned red, clumps of spiky grass and scrub covered the ground. Remnants of barbed wire and rotting stumps rose and fell along the red earth. The skeleton of an animal lay partly covered in the rust coloured dust. The land seemed empty but it had been marked out, she could feel it, even without the disappearing fence line. There was a road, and unsealed track. And then she could hear the sound of an aeroplane, spluttering in the sky coming down, flying directly overhead.

The aeroplane was flying low towards the south. She could have followed the plane, walked along the dirt road, walked south, but instead she crossed back over the dunes and onto the beach again. The man lay on the beach, but now he was farther away, a small body in the distance getting smaller, as if he'd gotten up and walked along the beach then lay down again, his bag still near him. She went down to the water and washed the knife and apple. The water was cool, she wanted to immerse herself totally in the water, close her eyes, and sink. She looked out at the ocean, the ocean had its own directions, its own currents, giant sweeps that curled around islands and continents, and the land had its own contours that could be followed. She remembered that the earliest compasses pointed south not north, and they were called guides.

So she walked south, stayed along the tops of sand dunes, now and then looked back at the diminishing man in the distance. She imagined him finally getting up, standing on shaky legs, finding his feet, looking around himself. He'd pick up his bag, look inside and find water to drink, at least she left him that, then he'd know she took his apple and knife.

In the dunes, in the sun, she would rest and sleep. Later, clouds rolled in from the ocean and it rained. She smiled feeling the different elements, the heat and sun, the clouds and rain, the changing earth, the sound of waves. Under some bushes she found cover in the depression between two sand dunes and rested.

She fell asleep then woke late in the day. The sky was covered with clouds, drops of rain fell on her face. Someone picked her up in his arms, carried her in his arms for a long time until he was puffing and his arms must have ached. He put her in the front seat of a car. Children piled into the back seat, there was laughter, squeals. He drove wildly, bouncing around on the rough track to town, and she looked out the window at the scenery, the low hills, red earth, so plain and beautiful she fell asleep.

She held her head in her hands, looked up at the sky, the sky was pale, barely coloured, she groaned, then laughed. It was no way to act as a lifesaver, in future she'd have to stop the bouts of hallucinations... So far from that ocean, the man in the pool looked a better, stronger swimmer. It seemed like she'd let him carry on for too long, probably it was years she'd kept an eye on him, now was enough.

I stop talking and look up at the ceiling, a small red spider is directly above me. The ceiling must seem an immense white expanse to the spider. Cai'er is sitting on the

couch, she looks comfortable. She says, Go on. Don't stop now. Tell me what happened to her — the woman at the swimming pool.

Let me first mention Kai Tak airport, runway 13... The Cathay Pacific Boeing 747 was dropping down, I looked into the passing apartment blocks. A woman stood by a window, fanned herself with a paper fan painted in the scholarly style with a narcissus and a snail. She wore black pants and a man's white singlet, torn on one side under the arm, she caught me looking at her through the passing window. Behind her four women dressed in brightly coloured cheongsams played mahjong at a table covered by a green cloth. The women, they looked all the same but couldn't be. The woman by the window seemed to mouth the words "out of order". I thought she raised her eyebrows, but actually I was far away, just a blur — descending, or sinking into the past. Kai Tak used to be my favourite airport, but I like the new Chep Lap Kok airport.

I disembarked from the aeroplane and felt relieved. Hong Kong is still like a piece of stolen property. I went through the same old immigration formalities. It was quick and efficient. I waited for my single grey suitcase to come round on the carousel and looked at the airport workers, flight stewards in their bright red uniforms, serious expatriates returning to work. I was glad that I'd arrived. After a few minutes my suitcase came into view and I grabbed it. It wasn't heavy, almost empty inside.

Out of customs, I walked past crowds of people that came to meet relatives or friends. I half expected someone would start waving his or her arms at me, Ai! choose me, me, me, I knew your father, long-time-no-see, but some quick eye contact and then I averted my eyes to the ground, kept walking and nothing like that happened. I thought about taking a hotel bus, or the express two stop train to Kowloon, but settled for the more expensive taxi alternative that would get me right to the hotel. I stood looking for signs, tried to work out where to get a taxi. A well-dressed woman eyed me from a distance and her face was fixed in an angry expression, eyes narrowed and jaw hardened. At twenty paces, she lined me up, strode straight towards me, loaded up, a black suitcase in tow and a parcel under her arm, head down. What had I done to deserve this? Did she know me? I pondered whether to move out of her way. What was she thinking? These weren't colonial times. As a compromise I turned sideways, drew my left hand up to the hip the way cowboys draw a gun, defensively stuck out my elbow. She barged straight into me. We got into a momentary tango of arms and legs, hands touched, toes were

stepped on, luggage went flying, a quick twirl, became matador against mad cow. I heard the clatter of hooves on concrete dance round me, the huff through nostrils, the intense heat, her L'Oreal scent of rushing blood, she was so intimately close. She said shit in a barely audible and unusual manner, whispered in the past tense.

Inevitably she said, Why don't you look where you're going? Are you blind or something? She seemed a bit bewildered, as though she really didn't see me, as though I were an apparition that suddenly reified. My elbow might have hurt her. She clutched her middle. I told her she should have looked where she was going, I was standing here first, she had the rest of Hong Kong to walk around me. Her imperious colonial demeanour returned in a flash, or flashback, she put both hands on her hips. In her high heels she stood on her toes, tried to stare me down. For my insolence, I could see she wanted to slap my face and call me boy, something insulting. Instead she gathered her parcel and suitcase and marched off. Thankfully she went in the opposite direction to where I was going. I thought I had the last word. As she went I heard her say, Arsehole Australian male. She must have thought that I'd be offended by that, but I wasn't.

For a little island the airport was vast. Somehow I found the taxi rank. People in Hong Kong queues were so polite and refined, maybe it was a British legacy of oppression, or the results of democratic science. Pushing and shoving used to be a martial art on the mainland, but I'd notice things had changed. While I got on the end of the short queue, someone from behind bumped into me hard enough to unbalance me. I turned around and a woman tried to hand me a plain white paper carry bag with some kind of parcel inside. My first reaction was, It's you again, and refused to take it. I heard her stamp her foot on the concrete. I felt the reverberation, a rising timbre from the ground up through my legs. I put my hands up as though I was surrendering.

Take it, she said, I want to sneeze. Her eyes squinted strangely and her nose wrinkled at the bridge. I took the bag from her. She grabbed a tissue from her jacket pocket, covered her mouth, and made a noise that might have passed for an insignificant sneeze.

Excuse me, she said in an accent that sounded as though she might have been from London or Cornwall, which either way was quite pleasant on the ears. But I wasn't sure, she didn't sound this way before. Memory was a strange thing, short term memory was less reliable than long term memory, and someone else's memory was even more unreliable than your own. I'm sure she didn't look this way before either. She must have freshened up pretty quickly. I didn't even notice her get in the queue behind me, or

perhaps she'd been queue jumping. Now that I looked at her she was quite unlike the woman who ran into me. It was possible she'd deliberately run into me, she could have been following me — it was no mere coincidence. Either she had designs on me or it was just a case of mistaken identity.

She was a woman with dark hair cut short, pearl earrings, dressed in a well-cut greyish blue Canton crepe jacket, white blouse, and grey knee-length skirt, smart black high-heeled shoes. The shoes I remembered, but the toes of these ones had shiny brass tips. Her eyes were a cognac brown, her face was strikingly and noticeably affected by a rash or hives, the complexion was dark and reddish at the same time, puffy so that it almost hid her eyes or gave her the appearance of being Siberian or northern Chinese. She might have had an allergic reaction to penicillin. The skin around her ears was peeling in small patches. She scratched her face lightly just under her lips. She had the most charming mouth. Her skin must have itched terribly. I looked at her hand and noticed that it was also red, skin peeling, and wrinkled like an elephant. My eyes drifted down at her legs beneath the hem of her skirt and noticed there was swelling around her ankles. If her skin bothered her she didn't show it. She looked so different maybe she was a different person. I didn't remember she looked this way. I wasn't perverse, but even with her skin like that I thought she was very attractive. At a guess, the way she's dressed, she was a business traveller. She wore some kind of curious perfume that chemically but pleasantly changed the smell of the air and probably lowered the temperature by a few degrees. But like Hong Kong she made me perspire.

I told her it was okay, I'd forgiven her importune behaviour, I believed in forgetting slights and remembering kindness. I didn't know why, it could have been amnesia, she acted as though she hadn't run into me, as though this was the first time we'd met. I tried to give her back the parcel. She put her hands behind her back and ignored the outstretched bag that belonged to her. Maybe she'd given me a bag of opiates or something incriminating. I thought of the terrible cortisone she was probably using for her skin, it was one of the great dumb medicines of the world — maybe the parcel was full of other illegal steroids or ecstasy tablets.

Australian? she said. Her narrow eyes stared straight at me with their conquering intent. No, I wouldn't be identified that way. I averted my eyes. I had a passport but that didn't mean I had to carry around my nationality, even if that didn't sound original at least that was the stance I tried to adopt.

Yes, against my own will I said, Australian. Maybe she was police. I was being followed. To think that I'd gotten this far for so long.

You don't sound like it.

I realised whatever she asked in her light conversational manner I had to think carefully, going through all the possible responses I could have made, such as, I was really more worldly, or somewhat cosmopolitan, or I was more of a hybrid type, or even, and I hated this just as much, I occupied a third space. I just sounded Australian was simpler, or what was Australian when everything could be made in China? No, I wasn't a banana — yellow on the outside and white on the inside — I'd never seen a banana that was white on the inside, and I wouldn't have eaten one that was... eat a banana? The ethics of cannibalism and organ transplants was a strange one. Taking someone's heart and passing it through the alimentary canal was generally regarded as reprehensible but not so when the foreign heart was surgically imbedded into the body. In the former the ingesting body had no problem, in the latter the receiving body wanted to reject it. Yet ethically it was the former we rejected and the latter we accepted... After a dozen seconds, I managed to say, It depends, and this strangely seemed to satisfied her.

I waited for her response, the taxis came and went, I stepped some twenty paces along and away from her as the queue moved on. She turned her waist and shoulders a few times with her hands still behind her and said, What is it — dual nationality? No, nothing like that. I had one nationality, it was my passport that allowed me to cross borders. She asked whether I was heading for Hong Kong island, Kowloon or wherever. I told her Kowloon. She wanted to know whether I was staying at a hotel, whether I had friends here. I hesitated as usual, finally said, Chungking Mansions. Oh, great, she said, that's close to where I'm staying. Let's share a taxi together. If she weren't so up front I would have said let's share a life and a house together.

Okay, I agreed. Share her company at least came to my mind before caution. It might have been the heat and humidity, I began to sweat, wiped the perspiration from my temples with the back of my hand — otherwise it was because I'd lied about where I was staying.

She shook her hands as though she'd just touched something hot, or the way women shook their hands straight after painting their fingernails. Here, she said, let me carry that for you. She revealed her wrinkled hands to take back the bag. Behind her was a small black suitcase, she tugged it forward as we moved to the front of the queue.

A taxi came, I put the suitcases into the boot, then got into the back seat with her. Before I had a chance to tell the taxi driver the destination she leant forward and began talking to the driver in what sounded like reasonable local Cantonese. The taxi driver, who had a little straggly black beard, turned his head and looked at me and had a little strange smile. In no time he got the taxi moving into the traffic. After a moment she slumped back into the seat. She placed the white bag on her lap and held it steadily between both hands. I knew at some point I had to tell the taxi driver to take me to the Prince Hotel at the end of the shopping complex on Canton Road, and not Chungking Mansions on Nathan Road, but I decided to wait until the last minute, that way there'd be less need to explain. I looked at her and said, You speak fluent Cantonese.

Not really, she said, I just give good directions.

Do you live in Hong Kong?

Yes, I work here.

I stopped suspecting she was police and felt I ought to make some kind of conversation with her, but on the other hand I didn't have any reason to get to know her, apart from the fact I found her attractive and interesting. In a short while I'd probably never see her again.

While I looked out the window at the passing scenery, still thinking of something to say she said, Come here often?

This I thought was a fairly safe conversation. I told her every year or so... I lived here when I was about four or five. She asked such questions as: When did you leave Hong Kong? I told her way back in 1960. She said, Wasn't there a white Australia policy? I told her I was born in Australia so legally they couldn't expel me but, yes, there was such a policy... there were some exemptions for merchants and pearl divers. Apparently white men weren't suitable for diving, and the pearling masters had long stopped using Aboriginal women as divers because too many had drowned. I told her I didn't mean to make propaganda out of it. She said sweetly, It must be hard being Chinese. I wanted to tell her I felt like an exile from Australia, but didn't. I looked at the swelling around her eyes, thought how bad her skin was and what it must look like when it wasn't ravaged this way. She looked sadder when she was serious.

She turned her head sharply as we went past another taxi, she looked ahead again, gave me a side glance, silently mouthed something, then nodded her head a few times. I wanted to change the subject from me to her but she asked if I was born in Australia what was I doing in Hong Kong when I was four. I didn't really want to tell her that my

father had an affair with someone down the road and disappeared with her for a good while on a lonely road in the mountains, that my mother then left my father and took me with her. My mother always said it was to see her father, a minor government official who escaped to Hong Kong after 1949. I told her my mother wanted me to have some Chinese education. I went to kindergarten here. It was the best school year of my life, then my mother changed her mind.

I asked her whether she'd been to Australia. She said yes, a long time ago, a sailing holiday in the north west. Swimming and diving, seeing turtles, a whale shark, coming to shore, camp fires on the beach, watching the sunset over the ocean. The desert was beautiful, you could spend days on end without seeing anyone, could easily get lost and not get found for months.

So what brings you here now? she said. A holiday? To see your mistress in Shenzhen, or check out your sweatshops? She said this nonchalantly, as though I wouldn't be offended, or that I actually might answer yes to one of them.

I don't have any factories or mistresses, but either would be fine if I was an unscrupulous capitalist pig dog.

She was persistent with this line of enquiry. And no wife?

No.

Come to visit an old flame?

What makes you think that?

Something about you... It's okay, she said, you can never change ghosts, it's too late. As she said this I rubbed my eyes. I thought how a month after my father died I dreamt I met him at the airport, he wasn't sure where he was going... I told a friend about the dream and she told me to light some incense and tell him which way to go. I did as she told me and after that I didn't dream about him again, not for a long time.

Hong Kong is a transit lounge, she said winding the side window down. How long are you staying?

A few days, maybe.

Why don't you stay longer? she said.

I wasn't sure how to respond, there was a rolling ballot of answers I could have chosen from. Eventually I told her, It's crossed my mind... the last time I was here I went to the immigration office to ask about getting residency. The bloke at the counter said why don't you go back to your own country...

She laughed, looked out the window again, and pressed her lips together. She raised her hands to her face and made gentle slaps around her cheeks. Excuse me, she said, I have a little skin problem, it's the itching. I'm not meant to scratch, but the slapping makes it a bit more bearable...

Try some Chinese herbal medicine.

Are you a Chinese doctor?

No.

Chinese herbs are bitter... Do you think I look bad?

No, you don't look bad. You look good. Bitter is good for sadness, the heart.

Maybe you could try hot water when it gets itchy.

Is that a good idea? The doctor, she gives me gypsum, talc stone, linseed, cicada shells, sometimes snake, all sorts of barks and flowers...

Hope you're not vegetarian?

Did you know cicadas are good for when you lose your voice?

No, I didn't know that. They're normally very shrill in the middle of a hot day.

Somehow I don't picture you that way.

The Chinese doctor says I have to vent the rash instead of hiding it.

You don't look too bad. It's true. You don't look the worse for it, actually more intriguing, like a chrysalis before changing into a butterfly.

Thank you. It's the sort of thing that could make you feel a little self-conscious... I mean uncomfortable.

I can't imagine you self-conscious.

She looked ahead at the approaching bridge we were about to pass over, Do you speak Cantonese.

Not so good. I used to speak it when I was younger but I've forgotten most of it. I'm better with Mandarin. How about you?

I once lived with a family that only spoke Mandarin. She looked at me and said, I think I saw you on the plane, you walked right past my seat.

Did you come from Prague? I said this because it was the first city that crossed my mind, I don't know why I didn't tell her the truth.

Prague? What were you doing there?

I didn't have a ready answer but came up with, Visiting a friend who worked for the Russian language service of Radio Free Europe.

How rare, she said. Oh well — it must have been someone else. Have you been to Berlin? By the way, what's your name?

Christopher Isherwood.

Come on, she coaxed, laughed, raised her knees together and bounced the bag on her knees.

I said, Sorry, I don't even know why I said that. I must be tired... It's Frank Lee. I half expected she might make a joke about my name, I took you for an Honest Lee, or Innocent Lee, she might say her name was Mary Lee, but she didn't.

I'm Pascale Romantsova. She extends her hand towards me.

I shake her warm firm hand. Pascale Romantsova, is that Romanian or French?

Russian, she says. So what about Berlin?

No, not Berlin. But I like that film The American Friend a lot. Now that she mentioned it, she spoke English with a husky Chinese accent. She didn't look Chinese, although Siberian Russians look Chinese, or perhaps she'd lived too long among Hong Kong Chinese.

She looked at me with an expression that suggested she didn't make the connection between The American Friend and Berlin. I wasn't sure myself — and not sure why she wanted to talk about Berlin. American Friend, American Graffiti, American Pie, Quiet American, Ugly American, American Beauty. I began to feel I was conversing just like her — like a pulse that was fast and slippery.

I've always liked the film Malu Tianshi, she said. Some people say Zhao Dan was Jiang Qing's lover... You know about Chinese cinema, don't you? The thirties was a good period for Chinese films; especially the leftwing studios...

Chinese films from the thirties weren't ever popular in Australia... maybe some of the recent ones are.

Do you know any Americans? She said this with a smile that effectively concealed the discomfort she must have felt behind her small puffy eyes.

It was a crazy question but I answered, Yes, sort of... once... She lives in Los Angeles. She's actually Canadian.

Is she a close friend?

She used to be, but in the last few years we've drifted apart.

On different continents?

Yes, a long way apart, very slow and painful.

Where did you meet?

In Toronto. I was trying to migrate to Canada. I thought marrying a Canadian was a good idea if I wanted to get to America.

You were using her?

No, I was very fond of her.

So it didn't work out?

No, she went back to her husband — or her husband went back to her. It was very confusing. I think she thought I didn't live up to her expectations.

She seemed to sigh.

Suddenly I felt ridiculous revealing these things to her — it wasn't an attractive admission.

Why would you think about leaving Australia?

I've had enough of it. Or it's had enough of me. It's difficult to get over the effects of some things, hard to move on, without literally moving on, or feeling that you are... I know this contradicts what I've been saying but I go on.

But Canada is like Australia.

I should have told her about the Australians I loved... Getting into a conversation with her wasn't a good idea. It would have been better looking at the new road, the new bridge, the muddy green waters under the bridge, seeing if there were any white dolphins, the half denuded hillsides, thinking about sex the way men were meant to be every fifteen minutes, which was close to the truth. I told her, China doesn't have an immigration policy. You can't migrate to China...

Isherwood and Auden went to China, she said.

I thought they migrated to America.

They reported on the Japanese invasion of China. Didn't you know?

No I didn't, I told her. I did but I'm lying only because I'm beginning to like the way she's so voluble. I kept Journey to a War on my bookshelves, a copy I found at a Sunday market along with Natalia Ginzburg's Family Sayings. I didn't read all the poems. I preferred Isherwood's easy prose and narrative to Auden's more difficult poetry, either way, I saw China through Englishmen's eyes — well, who hadn't? In any case there was an element of truth in the way Isherwood said, In China everything could be everything,

Isherwood and Auden, she said, went from Shanghai up to Wuhan and Zhengzhou and back. And then they wrote a book. Isherwood wrote a kind of war journal and Auden wrote some sonnets. You should read it, she said. They met Zhou Enlai and

Chiang Kaishek, a lot of Christian missionaries and western doctors. They weren't really war correspondents. There wasn't anything particularly graphic, not much misery, death, nothing shocking. Not like reading Han Suyin. They used to read her in the west...

Is it good? I mean the Isherwood book?

I don't know. I've never read it, I hate English colonial literature. It's ironic they went to see the Japanese invasion a hundred years after the British invaded China. But I met a very old Chinese man who claimed he travelled with them acting as their interpreter and general dog's body. He said in the book there's a photograph of him sitting on a horse. He lived in Hong Kong somewhere, or Shanghai. I met him in Nanjing.

How interesting that she said dog's body. Some people deny the existence of the infamous sign, No dogs or Chinese allowed, in that Shanghai park in the international settlement. As usual she moved the conversation along. So did you get to America?

I've been to New York. A few years ago, just once when I caught the train from Toronto to Penn Station or whatever they call it...

After you left your Canadian friend?

Yes, at Niagara Falls.

Did you enjoy the train trip?

Yes, I was surprised how uninteresting the terrain was. It was the middle of winter. There wasn't that much snow and there wasn't much to see... Buffalo, Syracuse, Rochester, all those cities along that line, until you get to New York, are really quite small, you pass through them in no time at all, and then you start wondering did I miss America.

You saw the World Trade Centre?

The buildings were still there, but I missed it.

Missed it?

It never occurred to me to visit it...

How about the Statue of Liberty?

No, it was Sunday and I missed the last ferry, my watch was one hour behind...

So what did you do in New York?

Just wandered around, saw some museums, art galleries, Museum of Modern Art, Central Park — mainly Chinatown.

You went Chinatown?

Yes — it's kind of grubby. All Chinatowns seem to be grubby, crowded. Some of the restaurants served good food... plus I've heard it's good practice to visit a Chinatown wherever you are.

Why is that?

It's meant to make you feel grounded.

Tell me, why do you like Hong Kong?

I suppose there's something Chinese about it.

She shakes her head, says, If I weren't listening carefully I'd dismiss that kind of answer, but obviously you mean a bit more than that — don't you?

Maybe... I sort of feel Hong Kong is my hometown. I've just got a sentimental attachment to it. Maybe I'm infatuated with the east, the idea of Suzie Wong, or Nancy Kwan...

Honestly.

I'm sorry, I can't be honest about it... Why are you here?

She looked at me steadily, the kind of gaze that was usually a prelude to an embrace, the kind of gaze that forgave short answers. She said, You're really unsteady. Not quite floating but — unstable. You probably don't sleep enough, that's why you're the most disingenuous man I've ever met. Maybe she saw my eyes were misty with incomprehension, which is a kind of loss, a loss of meaning — incomprehension that she had the nerve to talk this way. She changed the subject, Have you been to mainland China?

Yes, regularly, a few times to Beijing, but I still haven't see the Forbidden City or the Great Wall. I'm a bit strange...

Not that strange — I would have guessed you weren't a typical tourist.

I guess not. I could have told her I'd been to the Vatican City and not seen the Sistine Chapel, Niagara but not the falls, but then I thought what was the point. Most of my life I'd spent in Australia but not in the heart of it. While I was off on my own thoughts she murmured, Would you enter a woman's private room and only talk? Maybe it was my tired imagination. But yes, only talk... if I were alone.

As we got into the streets of Tsimshatsui, I remarked how she seemed to have travelled a lot through China. She told me she was a feature writer for local magazines. Which must have explained her worldliness. At that point I told her I wasn't really going to Chungking Mansions.

She said, I was wondering when you would tell the driver that.

How did you know?

You don't look that indigent or that tough, she says.

I did mean to say the Prince Hotel, but lately, I don't know why, I just say things I don't mean. Words get scrambled on their way from my brain to my lips. I'm not really a liar.

That's good, she said, I thought you didn't trust me.

I have no reason not to trust you — really.

She looked at me with a wry smile. I was glad the taxi ride would end soon. She'd asked too many of the questions. And I hardly knew anything about her. It might have been the long flight, I should have enjoyed her company more. I couldn't understand it — something had dislocated my gyroscopes. I looked at her and there was something about her that reminded me of someone else. I imagined her naked body under her smart clothes, the motley, heterogenous dark and red patches around her breasts and abdomen, it wouldn't have made her less attractive... I rubbed the side of my chest, there was a sharp pain, maybe I had some intercostal inflammation.

She said, You'd probably enjoy living in Hong Kong. She waited for me to say something. I thought we'd just talked about this. Did she want to marry me? Was this the kind of thing that would give me residency rights in Hong Kong? In any case I felt fixed to my country of origin, a hard place to escape, although I wouldn't necessarily say no to China, or even no to Chineseness, the government of China was another matter, there were many other things I could say no to... In any case this westerner, she seemed to think she could help me. She had contacts with people in the right places, not necessarily corrupt or illegal. What she proposed she didn't spell out. It was the way she nodded and mused with her index finger on the side of her darkened cheek. Would you like to meet me tomorrow?

I wouldn't say no to that... Where?

I'll call you, she said.

Maybe I had a cynical expression on my face, she looked at me as though she'd narrowed her eyes but it was hard to tell. Well, she said, where would you go if you were a tourist?

I usually avoid crowds and skip the tourist spots.

You need a tourist guide... how about a map?

A guide would be handy, I said.

Move around, don't spend all your time in the hotel. She said this looking at me directly, touching my arm.

Usually I was susceptible to people who did that to me; people who conveyed their sincerity through their touch, people who touched me with their looks, but I thought maybe she was just fooling around after all, or making a wild promise. I told her I had an appointment to see a solicitor the following day. She leaned forward, told the taxi driver to go to the Regent Hotel. At the Regent Hotel she got out. The taxi driver and I both got out to help her with her luggage, she talked rapidly in Cantonese or Russian with the driver, shook her head, closed her sharp small eyes, shared a laugh and gave him more than enough money to cover the fare and beyond. From the sidelines I told her I'd pay the fare.

She threw me a glance, said, See you tomorrow, make sure, okay. Be there. She strode off into the hotel and suddenly she was gone.

Be where?... Well at least I knew where she was staying. And just as well she told me her name.

I got into the back seat of the taxi and noticed that she'd left behind her parcel. I took the bag and told the driver to wait. The driver turned to me and said in a mix of Cantonese, Mandarin and English, words to the effect that she wanted me to look after it for her — bring it back to her tomorrow. But I might not see her tomorrow. He had a bored expression on his face that suggested this kind of thing happened all the time, then he sucked his teeth. I looked at his face and thought the driver didn't look much like a local, more like someone from Xinjiang province, it was the short grey hair, the stubble on his face, the boxer's nose, the ruddy complexion, the drooping eyelids, he looked like an ex-merchant seaman who had too many trips to Morocco and wrote short stories in his spare time. Well, if he wasn't worried... He seemed to know what was going on more than I did.

What is it?

The driver sucked his teeth again, Be careful, be gentle, it's very delicate... You want your hotel now?

At the Prince Hotel, I got my luggage out of the back of the taxi and took Pascale Romantsova's white bag. I offered the driver a few more dollars but he refused and said everything had been looked after. As I went up the hotel steps I turned around in time to

see the taxi driver hunched over his steering wheel, racing off with a gleeful smile on his face.

The hotel was in a convenient position. There wasn't much of a view but it was comfortable and the rooms were good, much better than the dives in Chungking Mansions, but then they were twenty times the rate. I checked in, went to the twelfth floor, a non-smoking floor, carried her bag with me to the room. The bag was very light. When I got into the room I put Pascale Romantsova's bag on the writing desk. I sat on the bed and stared at the bag. For a few minutes I just sat and didn't move, then there was a knock on the door and my suitcase arrived. I gave the happy faced porter a tip. The room was quiet and comfortable, had a good size bed that was softer than I was used to. The window looked across a short distance to the rear of another building, a commercial block of offices called the Gateway — it obscured the view of the harbour but it didn't matter to me. I ignored the white bag and turned on the television after struggling to master the remote control. The volume was as loud as it could get and I hurried to turn it down to something just audible — so the actions on the television didn't just speak for themselves. After a run of advertisements, dish washing liquid and Lexus cars, a Cantonese program came on, some kind of variety show with a stout woman with glasses and a man with a thick black moustache. I'd seen them before, it looked like a rerun, they never seemed to age, whenever I happened to come across a Hong Kong magazine or newspaper at least one of their faces was sure to crop up along with the actress Maggie Cheung, the singer Wang Fei or some male singer or actor with the surname Cheung, Chow or Leslie.

Whenever the cameras changed angles, focused on a different face, I glanced at the bag on the desk. Half a dozen police could have burst in through the door and found the bag full of drugs — or worse, a bomb, letters to an American university. I wanted to go over, put my ear close to it and listen to whether it ticked but I felt nauseated from the long flight. The bag made me curious and anxious at the same time. In the end I couldn't move, fell into a paralysis, couldn't raise my arms.

From the corner of my eye the television benignly distracted me, the paper bag came back into focus and then a shift to the face of a pretty young woman on the screen to discuss a protest march in the streets. My Cantonese was never good, other images came at me in black and white, a historical shot, police in black uniforms, some of them probably English. An angry woman dressed in black, with a fierce expression and long hair, screamed without sound, looked at the police officer with an accusing glare, her

hands behind her back. I realised it was old news footage, an old communist protest, bobbies at the barricades with long sticks.

I switched the channels between BBC and CNN, then settled on CNBC and went into the bathroom to have a shower. I kept it short, shaved and brushed my teeth while still in the shower letting the water run over my head. After I finished the shower and before I dried myself, the telephone rang. I answered the telephone and sat on the toilet with a white towel around my neck. The voice on the other side said, Hey, it's me — Pascale Romantsova. Have you opened the box?

The box? For a few seconds the name Romantsova kept going through my mind.

Yes, the parcel I left you.

No, I haven't. Should I?

She sounded impatient, Don't let the poor little thing suffocate. It should be waking up by now.

What poor little thing?

The antechinus, she said. Go have a look.

Antechinus?

Yes, she said, antechinus. You should know all about them. They're an Australian animal after all.

Is it some kind of spider?

I hear her laugh, she didn't laugh this way in the taxi, it was quite unaffected, then she said, No, silly, it's a carnivorous marsupial. I got it from Australia.

How did you get it out of Australia? Isn't it illegal to smuggle out Australian animals? I don't really go along with animal smuggling...

I didn't say I took it out of Australia... In some places it's illegal to be an asylum seeker? Whose side are you going to be on anyway? Don't get carried away. It's perfectly fine... Anyway, they're not even endangered. They're quite common on the east coast. But be careful with it. It's a male and — how should I put it — prone to aggression and anxiety, especially around competition.

Aggression? What type of competition are you talking about? Will it bite? How big is it? What are you planning to do with? Why did you have to leave it with me?

Well, it won't bite if you don't put your nose up to it. And it's only little — about the size of a big mouse... Actually it'll eat a mouse for breakfast... Well, you didn't think I could carry it into a five star hotel did you?

Do I need to feed it?

It's got some food, but you might need to give it some air and water. But don't let it out of its box.

Why didn't you take it with you?

It's a very valuable piece of property, if I didn't give it to you, do you think you'd come looking for me? You're the type to return things to their rightful owner, aren't you? That's why you're here, aren't you?

Why don't I just go over to your hotel and return it to you now?

I heard her sigh, she sounded piqued. She said, Don't be so puerile...

Me? Puerile? I'll be happy if it's really an antechinus, better than a kilogram of heroin.

I'm not staying where you think I am, she said, so don't waste my time going there.

I pleaded with her, Just tell me where you'll be — please, or tell me your mobile phone number.

Mobile phone? Never — it affects the way you think. She asked whether I liked her. Like her? What was she thinking?

I think you're nice.

She'd reached the end with me, told me just to get the antechinus to her the next day — otherwise she couldn't guarantee to help me. See you. She hung up. I suppose this was the kind of excitement you needed in a dull life, it wasn't like going off to fight a distant guerrilla jungle or urban war. But I didn't know what kind of trouble it would bring, whether I'd be arrested and thrown in gaol.

I put down the receiver, left the bathroom, looked across the room at the paper bag on the desk. I hoped it was what she said, and then didn't. Maybe it was a harmless practical joke with nothing inside. But an antechinus was better than heroin.

I went over, pushed down the sides of the bag. There was a box covered in paper wrapping with pencil-thick holes in the top and sides. I took out the parcel and carefully unwrapped it. Inside was a kind of perspex container with a hinged lid that had holes in the top and sides for ventilation. And there it was, looking up at me with blinking sleepy eyes, wrinkling its nose and shaking its whiskers. It looked like a mouse with a long nose, brown grey fur. I wasn't sure what she saw in it. It was just a little Australian rat smuggled out of Australia. It looked ratty and cheap; for value a red-tailed black cockatoo would have made more sense. How did it feel to be out of place? I opened the container, the antechinus wobbled around looking for cover. There was water in the tiny

water dispenser but most of it had spilt over the bottom of the container. Lying in a pile of finely curled wood shavings was a dead preying mantis. I closed the box and covered it with the wrapping paper. Tomorrow somehow I'd give it back to Pascale Romantsova, although I wasn't convinced of it. I shut my eyes, tried to put it out of my mind. She'd find me; what was I worried about?

I got dressed. It was only early afternoon. There had been something very dull on the flight for breakfast and I felt hungry. When I looked at the time again, I notice it was actually almost evening. Somewhere I'd lost about six hours. It must have been a much longer ride from the airport that I expected, otherwise I'd fallen asleep without noticing. I made myself a cup of English tea, looked at the television a bit more. There was some local sport, tennis, the rugby. I finished the tea, went to the bathroom, washed my face again, then left the room and took the lift down to the lobby. Out on the street it was simultaneously dark and gaudy with neon lights. People were looking for somewhere to eat, somewhere to shop, somewhere to have a good time in a hurry. Surprisingly there weren't many western tourists strolling the streets, the few that I saw had their small digital video cameras, looking for something colourful and sleazy, something to make the perfect framed vacation photograph. I wondered whether Pascale Romantsova did this kind of thing. In a side street, a woman outside a small restaurant beckoned me. I went inside the restaurant, ordered a meal of noodles, and some bean curd. Maybe Pascale Romantsova was going to write an article about animal smuggling. I hoped I wouldn't be in it.

After the meal I wandered the streets again, walked beside the harbour, even went by the Regent Hotel, I looked through the big windows, it would be good luck if Pascale Romantsova was sitting in the restaurant there. I went in and out of shops and arcades. I looked at the faces that past me, no one noticed me, despite the security cameras at last I felt unwatched — it felt good. I entered the labyrinth corridors of a shopping complex, I saw a Lin Fengmian painting hanging in a store display, a man about to mount a horse, the title "Many manifestations of life", I wondered if it was a copy or genuine, eventually I found myself in the foyer of my hotel.

By the time I got back to my room I was ready for sleep. I must have had a deep dreamless sleep. The following day when I woke up I got straight out of bed. There were things I had to do. The room was dark, heavy curtains covered the windows, I looked at the digital clock and saw that it was a little after six o'clock. The room was

cold, I listened to the hum of the air conditioning, closed my eyes. The antechinus was making little mousy scuffling noises, ready to jump out of its box. It must have been hungry — the preying mantis probably hadn't survived the night in one piece. I remembered Pascale Romantsova said it ate mice, I could find a pet shop and buy it a mouse to eat or be friends. One mouse should last it a couple of days — as food or friend, and they weren't mutually exclusive. The previous night I should have gone to an internet café and done some research on its natural habitat and eating habits.

On the other hand I should have taken the antechinus to the park behind the Kowloon Mosque and let it go into the bushes. It could have had a home among the banyan trees, climbed in a weeping forsythia, spent its lonely days watching people doing taiji and qigong. Better still, I could have crossed over to Hong Kong island and either given it to the people at the Zoological and Botanical Gardens or just let it go in the grounds. Maybe they already had an expatriate community of antechinuses... Maybe they didn't want another antechinus in Hong Kong. They might have reported me to the police, I could have been arrested for harbouring an illegal marsupial. I suppose there was mandatory detention for such crimes. And what if I didn't find Pascale Romantsova? Nothing was going to happen to me, I'd just go back to where I came from. That would be the end. I didn't even know her — although there was something about her which reminded me of someone else. It was something strange I'd gotten into. I didn't have any obligation to her. If she had been serious about getting her antechinus back she wouldn't have left it with me in the first place. Fostering a marsupial mouse wasn't the reason why I came to Hong Kong, nor was meeting strangers.

I had an appointment at 11:00 over at Causeway Bay. This was the real reason I had come to Hong Kong. I had received a strange letter from a solicitor by the name of Pavel Gingis informing me of a legacy bequeathed to me. An airline ticket and accommodation would be arranged for me to travel to Hong Kong to receive the legacy, sign documents etc. The letter however didn't mention who had left the legacy and what it was exactly, but I could only think of one person who might have done such a thing. I contacted my mother and asked whether she had recently heard from my godfather, Zhou Yan. She said she hadn't heard from him in many years. This wasn't surprising, people came in and out of her life very easily. After some further correspondence with the solicitor I decided it wasn't some joke or scam despite it being a little suspicious and

unusual. Zhou Yan had escaped from the mainland after the communist liberation. In Hong Kong he had survived by running a street stall selling vegetables, live rabbits and frogs. At the time, he occupied a small apartment on the same floor as ours. He lived in a de facto relationship with a woman from Shanghai. They didn't have any children, and for a time I must have been their surrogate son. Later when he was better off he moved into an apartment in a new building. Although I remembered him, for the last forty years we've had no contact.

I went to the window. Nothing had happened over at the Gateway building. It was too early for any activity. I looked at my marsupial charge and saw it dozing peacefully. It wasn't dead — I could detect its body palpitations. The box seemed to be getting messy and musty. I got the telephone directory and looked up the Regent Hotel and dialled the number. I ask whether they had a guest by the name of Pascale Romantsova. After a quick check the receptionist told me there was no such guest in their hotel. I wasn't even sure whether they gave out that kind of information anyway.

I covered the antechinus with one of the smaller towels from the bathroom and left it on the desk and hoped the room attendant wouldn't discover it when the room was tidied. It was early when I left the hotel. I walked through the adjoining shopping complex which went all the way to the Star Ferry. The shops were all closed, a few people walked around looking lost, otherwise the place felt empty. A security guard looked through the shop window of a clothing store.

Eventually I got out onto the street near the Star Ferry. Outside the weather was warm and it was probably going to be a hazy kind of day with clouds or smog in the air — the sky barely seemed blue. The streets were quiet. As I walked along Canton Road it was already warmer than I thought it would be. At Haiphong Road I made a turn. When I got to Nathan Road, the traffic was heavier. People streamed in and out of the MTR station. Across the road was an old building with a new sign that read Chungking Mansions.

The back streets between Nathan and Chatham Roads were quieter. Maybe there was a chance to find a place that served a decent breakfast, but there weren't many places apart from McDonalds. I stare through the window of a place where a few customers are reading newspapers, eating macaroni soup with pieces of ham, or fried eggs on toast, drinking dark glasses of Fujian tea. The waiters beckoned me to come in and eat, I looked at the menu in the window. Cereal with egg didn't appeal to me.

My logic might not have been sound, but probably it was too much of a tourist district — tourists usually ate their breakfasts in hotels. I decided to go to the Star Ferry, there was sure to be something better over on Hong Island. Plus I enjoyed the ferry ride which was like taking the ferry in Sydney but cheaper.

At the Star Ferry I got a ticket for the upper deck across to Hong Kong Island. For no reason at all I wondered whether I might run into my ex-wife. I hadn't seen her in what seemed like twenty years since our divorce. She could be sitting on the same seat. If the woman next to me was her and I leant forward and turned to look — I wasn't sure whether I would still recognise her. She wore glasses and sometimes contact lenses, sometimes her hair was permed, or straight, streaked, sometimes she lost weight or put it on. She could make any piece of ugly clothing look nice on her. Her face was always round, her eyes small, her lips full, the kind of lips that got onto the covers of fashion magazines, the kind that women with thin lips found desirable. We came to Hong Kong for our honeymoon, took bus tours out to the new territories, visited Lantau Island and temples, went to the Peak, Aberdeen floating restaurants, Stanley Markets, Repulse Bay. All those tourist spots that I could have retraced. After we separated she came back to Hong Kong, although she was originally from New Zealand. I envied her this little bit of place — that she was able to live in Hong Kong, had her Australian citizenship, thanks to me, that she spoke perfect Cantonese, that she was here working the last time I heard in the tourism industry. Other than that, I didn't have any strong feelings about her, I didn't know whether she had remarried and had children, whether she was happy or unhappy, she was simply someone I shared a short time of my life with, and the relationship came to a complete end. Coming so far, a lot of my relationships seemed to be at an end. Even my passport was about to expire.

On Hong Kong Island I left the Star Ferry. A waif-like girl with a pixie face was wandering around looking for early morning business or perhaps somewhere to get a cup of tea. I caught a tram to Wanchai, got off somewhere unfamiliar and became disoriented. Without a map the more I walked the more I found somewhere to go. A Hennessy Road street sign gave me more direction, and then I walked along a street called Jardine's Bazaar. Three small restaurants were open for business. Out on the footpath a woman was cooking on a gas cooker and griddle — cooking what I'd been looking for. Inside the restaurant, behind a glass wall a man was preparing vegetables. Next to him dumplings were cooking in bamboo steamers. The woman was speaking or

singing loudly in Mandarin to the man behind the glass. She had dark smudges under her eyes, maybe she was originally from Shanghai or had some liver problem. I said hello to her in Mandarin and tried to order something. She gave me a surprised look, raised her eyebrows, parted her lips slightly, and said, I thought you were a foreigner. Almost immediately she then said, You have lovely eyes. But it wasn't that — I knew what she meant. It was the eyebrows that lay close to the eyes like a westerner's, too many years squinting under the Australian sun or maybe a hint of mixed blood — whatever that really meant. She asked the inevitable question about my bloodlines. I'd had the question asked of me many times. I never found it offensive. No, I tell her, my parents were both Cantonese. She scoffed and smiled, I see thousands of Cantonese everyday, none of them look like you. How many times have I heard that?

I took a seat inside the little restaurant where there were about eight sets of tables and chairs. The mirrors along the walls were written over with the restaurant menu and specials in red felt pen or lip stick. The woman brought me congyou bing, jiaozi, and a pot of tea. The restaurant was quite busy, but she kept an eye on me. She came and refilled the teapot, asked whether I wanted anything more to eat, and said I was skinny. The congyou bing needed more spring onions but it was still good. When I finished I paid the bill and ask her whether I was in Wanchai. She shook her head, and told me Tung Chung Wan. I asked how could I get to Percival Street. She wasn't used to hearing the name of the street in English but after a moment said it was only a few streets away.

I left the restaurant and she politely said, Come again.

Yes, I certainly will.

After walking several blocks I found Percival Street, intersecting Hennessy Road which was getting busy with traffic. I didn't expect the number 12 that I was looking for would be the same as forty years ago. In all the years I had been coming to Hong Kong I had never tried to find the place where I had lived. The surrounding buildings made no impression on me, the façades I recognised were the ones archived in The World of Suzie Wong or Love is a Many Splendoured Thing. Nevertheless a small section of the street still had a certain remote colonial feel that could probably bring a nostalgic pang to the Prince of Wales. The street was quiet, I recollected a busier and livelier place, but it was still early in the morning. On a corner a woman was helping her mother or grandmother across the street. The older woman walked slowly and her face was covered by a large bandage over her left eye.

I looked for street numbers and the first number I came across was number 24. Moving down the street I found where the old building used to be. It was farther from the waterfront than I remember, pushed back from the harbour edge by land reclamation, and now it was a new office block, probably with proper plumbing, windows that never opened, security guards in neat uniforms by the elevator — an elevator that went all the way to the top floor. The new building was called the Sino Plaza and occupied where numbers 2 to 12 would have been. Now it had offices and restaurants. Down the other end of the street, across the road, maybe they were the places where I used to have my head shaved, and the waiters in the restaurant cut long noodles with big pairs of black scissors.

I wasn't really disappointed. I would have felt bad if it were still the same building, crumbling down, covered in grime, dark green slime, leprously eaten away by another forty years of neglect, turned into a place to stash away ailing old men or women.

I managed to find an MTR station and got a train back across to the Kowloon side at Tsimshatsui. The train was clean, crowded, but the ride was pleasant for its short duration. Back on the Kowloon side, on the footpath I saw a limping cockroach and thought about the antechinus's breakfast. I was tempted to pick it up but decided it was struggling around half dead sick with pesticide. This reminded me — what did I know about the antechinus? Not much. I should have found out what to feed it.

In my hotel room I checked the antechinus and it looked okay, sitting quietly with its hunched shoulders. I got out the yellow pages and turned to pets and pet shops. The listing wasn't particularly long, but I found a pet shop in Mongkok. I telephoned the shop but no one answered. I tried again later and this time someone answered and said, Yes, we have mice.

I went out again, caught a train to Mongkok. The pet shop was off the main road and located between a western-style pharmacy and a shoe shop. The street was wet and smelly. Farther up the street were jewellery and camera shops, restaurants and small cafés. A fish monger was spraying the street gutter with a thick black hose. The pet shop was small, with the usual line-up of pets. A pair of mongrel pups played in the window among piles of shredded paper. Several aquariums had gold fish or guppies, and there were overcrowded cages of budgerigars and canaries. Toys, dog leashes, rubber bones and hoses, bird cages, chemical water conditioners, fish food, plastic fish

bowls, things jammed onto shelves or hung from the ceiling like a Chinese temple. The only thing missing was the incense, but then tucked away at the rear of the shop was a small red altar with burning incense. I found what I was looking for. In a small glass tank were some mice. One of them was exercising on a tread mill. I chose one that wasn't over active and running about. The shop owner deftly caught it by the tail and put it into a cardboard box. The mouse cost me \$12. I wasn't sure whether this was cheap or expensive, and didn't think to bargain the price of it.

The pet shop owner had a friendly manner and asked was the mouse for my son or daughter. Absentmindedly I answered, No, I'm using it as food. The pet shop owner's face turned blank as though he hadn't understood what I'd said. When I left the pet shop and walked down the street I realised, yes, he didn't understand.

Back at the hotel, my room had been made up. The antechinus's box was still sitting undisturbed on the desk. I opened up the box and peered inside. The little animal was sitting quietly — perhaps forlornly. I said breakfast was ready, up-ended the mouse box and the mouse dropped into the marsupial's den.

The mouse I'd chosen was rather good looking, predominantly white in colour with a light brown spot and a dark brown spot on either side of its little body. The mouse scurried to an unoccupied corner of the box, cringed in its new surroundings. It smelt danger. The antechinus was calm, wrinkled its nose, felt the air with its whiskers, summed up the situation, a small serious-minded predator with a few ideas to contemplate. Was he hungry or was he not? It didn't look like a mismatch. The antechinus was barely bigger than the mouse. It stared at the cornered mouse. I half expected its eyes would suddenly drop out of their sockets. Then the antechinus made a slow parade from one side of the box to the other, its head turned slightly at its prey, the way lions nonchalantly swish their tails and walk by zebras pretending not to be interested.

I decided to avoid the spectacle, but as I closed the lid on them, the antechinus leapt across the box and went for the mouse's neck. It was savage and horrible, like witnessing the work of Dracula without the eroticism. The antechinus had its grip and its fix. There was a momentary thrashing and then the mouse's legs went limp, dropped to the sides, a slight trembling. What a beast was all I could think.

Impatience crept into my attitude towards the antechinus, not because of its predatory ways, but being in my possession it had subtly undermined my autonomy in a minor way, redirected and manipulated me into treating it as more than just an

unassuming marsupial. It had made its own little impact. It was figuratively out of its box without taking a single step. Perhaps this was trite, but I watched it carefully — and I guessed it watched me too. On the other hand when I thought about it a little more I realised at least the antechinus gave me a connection with Pascale Romantsova that, to be honest, I was interested in pursuing. If I couldn't find Pascale Romantsova I had to let the antechinus go somewhere, I had other things to do, it wasn't as though I could carry it around with me all over Hong Kong, or even take it back to Australia.

As I was mulling over the likely exiled life of the antechinus in Hong Kong the telephone rang. It was Romantsova, she said, Come now. Come now with the antechinus. I said, Come now, where? In the background was a lot of noise, she was using a mobile phone, I managed to hear her say, That's disgusting, as though she had turned her head and was talking to someone else, and then for ten or so seconds there was a lot of background noise and incomprehensible conversation between Pascale Romantsova and someone beside her. I said, Hello, and then just before she hung up I heard her say, Get on the ferry.

Instead of introducing the antechinus to the Hong Kong environs, I got out of the hotel and walked through the shopping complex to the Star Ferry. No one in the world could have detected that I carried a small Australian carnivorous marsupial in a plain white paper bag. But it was good to get the mouse out of the room. I always had the idea that marsupials were timid creatures prone to anxiety. But the antechinus had gorged itself and was looking pleased and drowsy, it rested, had the face of quiet satisfaction lying on its back — chin on chest.

I caught the ferry across to Hong Kong Island. The ferry wasn't particularly busy, a few groups of tourists and some elderly men and women — an American was making sketches. I expected Pascale Romantsova would be on the ferry, but I didn't see her. I decided once on the other side, I'd follow one of the tourist groups. At least I presumed they were tourists.

One of the groups was a family of African Americans — I could tell by their accents. They were a family of sisters, daughters, nieces, and sons, whatever. A woman in her late thirties seemed the head of the group. She didn't carry a map, or camera, but looked around calmly as though she's seen it all before. I heard her mention the sordid opium wars which the English instigated and the trading hongcs, how the trading houses started in the western part of the island and gradually moved eastward. Covered in black scarves and clothes was another group of four women. They wore beautiful leather

shoes. I saw flashes of gold jewellery on their hands. Maybe they were wealthy Iranians. Some of their men, dressed in well-cut western suits, sat apart from them. Two Asian men with foreign accents sat together in front of me, both were dressed in short sleeve white shirts, khaki coloured trousers, and hiking boots. They could have been archaeologists or bird watchers planning to do one of the walking trails around the island. They sat with their legs crossed close to each other, their arms around each other's shoulders and behind the backs of the seat. I heard snatches of conversations — the great dividing range, great barrier reef...

The ferry reached the other side and the passengers disembarked. I saw no sign of Pascale Romantsova. The crowds were suddenly thicker and the pace on the footpath had quickened. The girl from the morning had either found business or gone home to sleep. On the side of the road was a line of buses. I couldn't decide which group I wanted to follow, and it took me no time at all to lose sight of them all. That was what happened when all you wanted to do was follow — you got stranded on your own. Pascale Romantsova could have been watching me. If she had been, I wished she had just come and taken her animal from me.

Crowds, cars, and trams went back and forth. There were banks everywhere, people stood around waiting to withdraw money from automatic bank tellers. I could have been having a good time, but I was standing on a street corner, the sun beating down on my head, a paper carry bag at my side with an antechinus that didn't know where it was. The antechinus was probably wishing it was sitting on a fallen forest log sunning itself with some comrades or tree frogs. I suddenly realised the antechinus was probably roasting or being asphyxiated. Nearby was a café. It looked cool enough, and I needed a drink.

The café served western style food such as smoked salmon bagels, Turkish bread with roasted eggplant, heavily sweetened foods such as cakes and muffins. As I waited to be served, I looked at the people in the café — a table of college women with shoulder bags and books, some business types in dark grey suits. A man in a suit was complaining to his companion about the price of tinned imported ox-tongue since the handover. I immediately thought of mad-cow disease. I ordered Irish Breakfast tea. There was nothing for the antechinus, but I doubted whether it was hungry after the morning meal — it's leftovers I had discreetly put in the hotel room bar fridge.

While I waited for my tea to arrive I checked on the antechinus. It still looked alive but somewhat harried and fragile, maybe it wasn't getting its sleep. Its little heart must have been racing away like mad. It was good there was air-conditioning in the café. I knew it would attract attention, and not a smart thing to do, but I took the antechinus out of the bag and set the plastic box on the chair next to me. My tea arrived, the absentminded waiter didn't notice the antechinus. The antechinus rolled around on its back like a very small horse — I guess it had revived. It then sat up and rubbed its nose with one of its front paws.

One of the young women I noticed now looked at the mouse and me. She got up from her chair and skipped over with a smile on her face. She stood in front of me, bent down a little with her hands on her thighs, and looked at the antechinus. In a mix of Cantonese and Latin, she said, Is it an antechinus flavipes?

I was taken by surprise. She repeated the question. I managed to say in Cantonese, I'm not sure.

She put her finger to her lips.

In English I said, Yes, an antechinus.

She said, *Antechinus flavipes* — yellow-footed antechinus. You can tell by the grey head, orange-brown behind and feet, and the black tail... Is it male or female?

I told her I wasn't sure. She asked whether she could have a closer look. I didn't object. She opened the lid and managed to pick it up. I was surprised it didn't jump out of her hands. It looked suddenly very docile and tame. She pushed and prodded it between the back legs and then said, Oh, boy — poor boy.

I said, How do you spell antechinus? Is it with a nus or nes?

She hesitated, A-n-t-i... something like that.

I looked at her, she was in her mid-twenties, small rimless glasses and bright eyes, a little pink gloss on her lips. How did you recognise it so quickly?

She said, By your accent, you must come from Australia.

I said, Yes. You sound a bit Australian too.

I studied zoology at Melbourne university.

So is that how you knew it was an antechinus?

Not really, it's just the sort of thing you come across in reading... It has strange mating habits... She turned around to her friend and waved her over.

What kind of strange mating habits?

She raised a finger to her lips, put on an almost serious face. She looked me in the eyes, The males become aggressive around mating time — it's the old story, the strongest one prevails and gets to mate with the female. But after mating the male always dies; so it's actually the weak males that survive longest. Interesting, isn't it?

Yes, it is. But mine's probably the only male in town, so maybe it doesn't have to prove itself. The young woman stood up straight, and a little smirk crossed her face. There's no glory in being neutered.

I asked her whether she worked as a zoologist. She said, No. I work in Citibank as a branch manager. She gave me her business card. Come see me if you need to open a bank account.

Her business card was so heavily scented I might have followed her back to her bank. Instead I left the café knowing a lot more about the antechinus, but whether it made me feel better was another matter. It was annoying that I still hadn't found Pascale Romantsova, or I was more annoyed she hadn't found me. It was about time she showed up, otherwise I'd have to open the antechinus's box and, even if this wasn't the proper thing to do, let it loose in Hong Kong. I walked around with the antechinus under my arm and got onto an overhead pedestrian walkway and we went round and round the Hong Kong stock exchange looking for a way to get to the Star Ferry. The ferry terminal for Macau was much closer but I didn't have a visa to cross the border. I wasn't actually lost, but I didn't have a good idea how to get to where I wanted to be. A few people walked past me going the other way, but they seemed to skirt around me as far away as possible. It was probably only my imagination. For such a densely populated city this elevated concrete maze was eerily desolate. I eventually stumbled down to the street level. The street was strangely empty of traffic, and with nothing to tout on the kerbside, not knowing what I was doing, I felt as though I was stranded in a Jeffrey Smart painting.

By chance I found my way into an MTR station and got on a train back to Tsimshatsui and my hotel. My room had already been made up and I put the antechinus in a corner of the room where it wouldn't be disturbed. The time was almost 11:00am. I would be late for my appointment. I picked up the telephone and made a call. The phone rang for a long time, I let it ring and began to suspect that no-one was going to answer. At the point of putting down the receiver I heard a woman's voice answer in a pleasant Spanish accent. I asked to speak to Pavel Gingis. The woman told me Mr Gingis was not at home — she meant in the office — at that moment, and would I like

to leave a message? I told her I was meant to have an appointment with Mr Gingis at eleven. Oh, she said, sorry to disappoint you. I asked when Mr Gingis would be back in the office. She said she had no idea, she was just cleaning the apartment — she meant office. I was about to say I'd call again when she said maybe I should speak to Miss Yip, his secretary. Yes, okay, I said. I next heard a young Hong Kong woman's voice.

The young woman, said hello, announced that she was Miss Yip. I told her who I was and that I was meant to see Mr Gingis but couldn't make the appointment on time. Perhaps since Mr Gingis was not in his office he had forgotten the appointment as well. There was a long pause, then she said, Mr Gingis was called away on an emergency. One of his clients was in a little trouble over the importation of a shipment of spices. Did she know when he'd be able to see me? In a relaxed voice she said, Mr Lee, you've come from Australia. You're probably very tired from the trip. Don't worry, I know about your case. It's quite a simple matter. But, I told her, I don't have a lot of time in Hong Kong and there are some other things I would like to do before I go back to Australia.

She knew I was staying at the Prince Hotel, she could come over and pick me up and bring me to the office, by that time Mr Gingis might have returned to the office. At first I thought it unnecessary, but since she insisted, I supposed it was a good enough idea and agreed to meet her in half an hour in the hotel lobby.

I went downstairs, wandered around a little into the adjoining shopping complex to look at the Lin Fengmian painting. When I returned to the lobby I took a seat and waited. In one corner was a piano. The previous night there had been someone on the piano singing an off key, at times sinking, rendition of Moon River. Audrey Hepburn was no great singer, but she still sang it better.

I felt like smoking a cigarette, although I hadn't smoked in over twenty years. My hands were empty, they needed something to grasp. Some cravings you could ignore for years, then suddenly they returned for no reason at all, or for reasons you wanted to ignore. While I waited I imagined what Miss Yip would look like. She had a pleasant telephone manner. I knew you couldn't tell anything through a telephone line but I still imagined she must have been in her early twenties, petite, black hair and brown eyes, perfect complexion, intelligent, serious expression.

Exactly on time Miss Yip arrived. Somehow Miss Yip recognised me immediately amongst the other guests in the lobby and waved to me as she came through the hotel lobby. I waved back assuming she was Miss Yip. She was accompanied by a tall solidly

built man I guessed to be about ten years younger than myself. She was taller than I imagined, maybe five feet seven. She wore a short black leather dress that showed off a lot of her legs down to her feet in sandals. She had a black leather bag over her shoulder, wore a floppy denim hat pulled down tight over her head and wore large dark glasses. She cut a different figure to what I expected. She didn't look like a legal secretary. She looked as though she was moving around incognito, trying not to attract attention, which made her all the more intriguing. Either she was a young woman with depression or had something serious to hide. Perhaps she worked for a female detective agency part time.

Politely she took off her dark glasses, revealed her true brown eyes, but left the hat on. She said my name, and introduced herself as Mr Pavel Gingis's assistant, Miss Yip. We looked at each other. She was thinking something about me. She had that look which suggested she was trying to remember where she'd seen me before. I didn't recognise her. She looked like a dark complexioned, petite sixteen year old schoolgirl, but I gathered she was not. There was something mature and husky in her voice. Did she know anything about me? She stepped forward, she leant to one side as though she might kiss me on the cheek but then extended her hand and we shook hands cordially. She repeated my name. Mr Lee, pleased to meet you.

Her male associate wore a chauffeur's cap, clean shaven and dressed in a dark grey suit. There were scars over his eyebrows and in the middle of his forehead. He had a slightly round face and his eyes were attentive to everything around him. Nevertheless he gave me a slight nod and a phlegmatic smile. Miss Yip introduced him as Zhonglin. He looked like her bodyguard. She laughed a little. Zhonglin used to be a Shaolin monk. We shook hands. His hand was dry, soft in a strangely elusive manner, but not weak. He's in love, said Miss Yip prosaically, that's why he's not a monk anymore. She was teasing him, or me. I wondered what romantic thoughts travelled so fluidly in his mind, thoughts that led him away from the middle path and that other nirvana. Not thoughts — feelings. Personally I was for romance — even the fleeting kind at the margins. He didn't say much himself, and he didn't bat an eyelid at anything I was thinking.

Miss Yip took a mobile phone from her bag, it quaked in her hand then began to ring. The shape of the eyes, the nose, the line of the jaw, the expression, she reminded me of someone I once knew. From the one-sided conversation I got to hear it was Mr Gingis on the other side. She told him she was with me, and that she would take me to the office soon. She looked at me as she conversed, tilted her head this way and that,

working out my features. Yes, he does, she said. I'd say there was some similarity. No, there is nothing to worry about. Now and then she looked over at Zhonglin and smiled.

An uneasiness took hold of me when she did that — when she looked at me, then at Zhonglin, and said things on the telephone which might have been about me. The call ended and she put away the mobile phone. She passed on Mr Gingis's apology. He was waiting to see me in his office.

I wondered whether she could help me with another problem. I told her that I'd been left in charge of a little animal in my room and that I didn't know what to do with. What is it? A mouse? Was that a guess? She said, yes, lucky or something like that. She said I should complain to the hotel and get them to remove it or give me a better room. But, no, it wasn't the hotel's fault. I brought the animal into the hotel myself. But it didn't actually belong to me either. Could she help me?

Sure. I took them up to my room. Once in my room Miss Yip removed her hat, she had shoulder length hair that was bleached to a dull golden tint. It didn't suit her. Her natural colour was dark brown or black. I took the antechinus from its corner and placed the box on the desk. Miss Yip and Zhonglin looked at it with little reaction, maybe a slight movement in the corner of the mouth. It was just a common looking mouse to them, not exotic at all. It's an antechinus, I said, from Australia — a mouse-eating marsupial... An Englishwoman, at least I thought she was English, by the name of Pascale Romantsova left it with me accidentally. Miss Yip asked where this Englishwoman lived. Do you know where to find her?

I didn't know, but I'd been looking for her. I gave her a brief run down of the story and that Pascale Romantsova left me in charge of the antechinus.

Miss Yip tilted her head, said, How strange. Uncle, you should be careful with whom you meet and what you get involved in. Did she ask you for any money?

No... It was strange that Miss Yip called me uncle. But then she was a young woman whose looks and voice were a bit deceiving too. I said no but saw from her furrowed brow that she was probably thinking I was a bit goofy. She thought it was a good idea if I just forgot about the matter. It might be something criminal, at best it was highly suspect. It had crossed my mind too. On the other hand she warned me that I might now be being followed, it sounded very suspicious.

It was a bit unusual, I admitted, but I wasn't sure what to do with the antechinus. I wanted to give it back to Pascale Romantsova, but if I couldn't, it wouldn't be possible to take it back to Australia, the customs and quarantine people wouldn't let it through

immigration — even if it did originally come from Australia. I understood that much. Letting it go in the local park or botanic gardens didn't seem the responsible thing to do either, it might cause havoc on the local mouse population. Giving it to the zoo might arouse suspicions.

Miss Yip said she'd help me find Pascale Romantsova, the Englishwoman, but in the meantime she would need to consult with Mr Gingis about her hours. She turned to Zhonglin and spoke to him in Cantonese. He answered her in a mix of Mandarin and Cantonese. His cousin, an animal lover who worked for a forestry firm that operated illegally on the border of Burma and Yunnan province could look after it temporarily or find it a proper home if we couldn't find Pascale Romantsova. Zhonglin then made a call. The telephone conversation sounded mostly Shanghainese and while I didn't understand any of it, Miss Yip told me Zhonglin's cousin would meet us at her office and take the antechinus away to look after.

The plan sounded okay so I agreed. On the other hand I worried that so much movement might badly affect the antechinus. For a legal person Miss Yip didn't take too much notice of my duty of care. She asked whether I had a camera. Yes, I do. Bring it along, she said. We left the room, and Miss Yip put on her dark glasses and pulled her hat down on her head. We caught the elevator and went downstairs. Miss Yip and I waited by the side of the road as Zhonglin brought around the car, a big black Mercedes that looked like the latest model. Miss Yip and I got into the back seat. On the trip over to Hong Kong island we talked about my flight from Australia, the Sydney Olympic games, the handover, Belgrade in winter, skirting around subjects and places that were neutral. I asked her how long she'd been working for her boss Pavel Gingis. Gingis sounded like a Russian name. Could be, she said. Her job with Pavel Gingis was only a part time position. Pavel Gingis the solicitor, she informed me, had only been operating for a short time and hadn't yet established himself although he was gradually developing a reputation as a litigation lawyer. At night Miss Yip worked in a bar in the Wanchai district. I wondered what her parents thought of her night time job, and whether she had even finished school yet. She was slightly amused that I thought she was only sixteen. She had that kind of energy. No, she insisted she was much older, had a degree in geography, but was coy about revealing her real age. She said she didn't know what her father thought about her career trajectory, maybe he wouldn't approve, she had never known her father. Her parents separated before she was born. After this I

apologised for prying into her affairs. It's okay, she said, life has a lot of questions and answers.

In no time we were somewhere on Hong Kong island. The streets were narrow and busy. There were small antique shops, Chinese herbalists in the alleys, and roadside stalls that sold fresh fruit and drinks. Zhonglin stopped the car outside a ramshackle grey building, with iron grills over windows. Miss Yip and I got out of the car while Zhonglin went to park the car somewhere. The building looked like the Chungking Mansions, there was no directory of commercial tenants in the foyer, although there was a security guard sitting at the back of the narrow corridor behind a little desk near the lift. Miss Yip said hello to the guard and he gave a polite nod and smile. Standing by the lift I could smell the stink of sewerage that rose up through the elevator shaft.

The lift opened, Miss Yip and I went in and she pressed the button for the eighth floor. The elevator was slow, I looked at the stainless steel sides of the lift, thought of Norwegian sardines, and took a look at the antechinus. We came out of the lift and walked down the corridor to an office with an iron security door. There was a dull finger-marked brass plaque with the name Asia Amur Attorneys. Miss Yip took out a key and unlocked the security door and we entered. The office was very small, not much larger than 12 square metres. There were two doors that lead to other rooms. Mr Pavel Gingis was sitting behind his desk. He stood up, said hello and shook my hand firmly. Mr Gingis spoke English with a Russian accent. It was funny how I met a lot of Russians. He invited me to sit down on an orange coloured plastic chair, offered me a cup of hot water from a flask on the desk. I said no to the water, but sat down with the antechinus on my lap. Miss Yip sat behind me on a small Italianate leather lounge suite. He begged my patience as he got all the files regarding the legacy in order. As he got prepared I looked at the wall behind him. There was a framed copy of his law degree from Hong Kong University, and a membership of the Hong Kong Law Society. Next to these was a diploma of hypnotherapy from the Western-Pacific University of Southern California. On another wall was a framed print, a beautiful woman dressed in black, at a guess the original was by Goya. On his desk was a black and white photograph of a couple standing in front of a train carriage. The man in the picture was a serious looking young man in military uniform which I suspected was Pavel Gingis. Standing close beside him was a Chinese woman also in uniform, neither of them smiled at the camera. A pair of romantic commissars from a bygone age.

The Pavel Gingis I saw in front of me was a robust man, avuncular in manner, perhaps in his mid sixties. He began explaining how this legacy had been left to me by an anonymous benefactor. Without much preliminary lead up, to my surprise he informed me I had been left some property — a small apartment. I asked where the apartment was located. Southeast of Kowloon. I hadn't owned my own home since Australian interest rates were 20 per cent. My hand shook but I signed blindly whatever transfer documents Pavel Gingis put in front of me. He congratulated me as though I had won the lottery. Miss Yip also congratulated and shook my hand warmly. There was a distant look in her eyes but the gaze was penetrating for its proximity. But who was my benefactor? Why the mystery? Unfortunately it was a condition of passing over the title to the property and inheritance that I didn't know the name of my benefactor. It ticked through my mind that any serious effort at investigation would probably find out the former owner of the apartment. But what did I know about the law and, on the other hand, maybe I should gracefully accept the wishes of whoever had left me such an inheritance.

Zhonglin and his cousin came into the office. The cousin was a young man with short spiky cropped hair. He looked as though he'd been running and was out of breath. He gave a perfunctory greeting to Miss Yip and Pavel Gingis and immediately asked for the antechinus. I picked up the box and handed it to the cousin, he looked at the antechinus, cooed over it as if it was a cute baby. Pavel Gingis came from behind his desk and looked at my antechinus. The antechinus jumped over to the side of the box where it could see me clearly and stood on its hind legs as if to say, What are you doing? Do you know what you're doing? I tried to reassure it, This is just temporary, you'll be back. Pavel Gingis stroked his chin with his thumb and forefinger. Perhaps he was too discrete to ask what this was about. The cousin also asked no questions. He took the antechinus and left the office as quickly as he came. I felt strange to let the antechinus out of my hands, somehow in a strange way I'd grown attached to it. What did people say? What doesn't kill you can only make you stronger. It suddenly struck me, how was I going to return the antechinus to Pascale Romantsova if I didn't have it?

Miss Yip said the cousin would look after it well. I shouldn't worry. If Pascale Romantsova made an appearance I could rely on him to deliver the antechinus. Meanwhile Pavel Gingis handed me keys to the apartment. Could it be that simple? He suggested for the time being that I leave the title deed in his safe keeping. Miss Yip told her boss Pavel Gingis she was taking the afternoon off. He didn't seem to mind. She

suggested that she take me to have a look at the apartment. Zhonglin could drive us across to Kowloon. Pavel Gingis then remembered there was a tenant still living there under a short term lease. In any case, she could show me the building and the neighbourhood. He shook my hand again. Miss Yip, Zhonglin and I then left.

In the car we travelled across to Kowloon under the harbour tunnel. I used to be good with directions, but on the other side, out of Kowloon, I couldn't tell east from west. Soon there were fewer houses and the scenery was greener. Miss Yip said it wasn't too late for some lunch, if I wasn't in a hurry they could show me around. After lunch she'd take me to the Tai Mu Temple. In her husky voice she said relax. She touched my arm lightly. I was curious to see the apartment, but she seemed more intent on showing me other things first. Maybe we'd run into Pascale Romantsova taking it so easily.

Miss Yip asked whether I knew Hong Kong well. Even though I came to Hong Kong not infrequently I rarely strayed from the main areas of Tsimshatsui and Hong Kong island itself. She knew of a fishing village close to where we were going, she said we could have lunch there.

It was a pleasant drive around the hillsides, the coastline, the bays, headlands, and down below to a little fishing village with sampans and what looked like houseboats moored in a bay. It was a leafy village with banyan and banana trees growing about. Zhonglin parked the car on the side of the road, and we walked down a path to the village proper.

In a wide courtyard, which was also a basketball court, a group of children played a game of chase. We went by some houses and along a narrow alley. A man suddenly appeared from the back door of a building and touted for his restaurant. Zhonglin said okay and we followed the man to the restaurant, which was right at the waterfront with a verandah wrapping around the sides and front of the premises. The man said we were lucky to arrive at that time as it would soon rain. I looked up at the sky, it was overcast but didn't yet have that feel of impending rain. We took a place outside the restaurant. A group of a dozen people were having their lunch under the cover of a broad awning. Inside were large glass displays of live fish, some that looked like coral trout, several varieties of crabs, large cuttlefish, abalones, clams, and scallops. I waited at the table while Miss Yip and Zhonglin selected our lunch.

A waiter came over, set the table and served jasmine tea. I looked at the houseboats, which look more like little rundown floating shacks, or small floating

warehouses in the middle of the bay. A small brown dog that looked like a dingo wandered around on the pontoons that surround the houseboats. Rows of colourful clothes hung on bamboo poles. Rowing to shore was a man standing up in a small boat using a single long oar fixed to the back of the wooden craft.

Along the jetty a frail old woman, in her eighties or nineties, in black pants and brown jacket, grey hair tied in a bun was apparently waiting for the man. I assumed the man had come to ferry her back to one of the houseboats. She carried a plastic bag that must have been her shopping. The man rowed against the current across the water and reached the jetty. Meanwhile the old woman slowly and gingerly came off the jetty and climbed over a number of small boats to get closer to the boat coming across to get her. She greeted the man who was probably related to her and climbed over into the boat. The man got off the boat and climbed up over the other boats and onto the jetty and walked up to the village. The old woman took control of the boat turned it around, stood upright, used one arm only and quickly rowed back across the water to her houseboat.

Miss Yip and Zhonglin come back to the table and I heard her say, It's not fair. I saw them look at me and they both laughed.

Sporadic heavy drops of rain began to fall. Several waiters came out and took away chairs and covered tables with plastic sheets. As we waited, Miss Yip pulled out a book from her bag. I liked the way she wasn't moved by the rain.

She said, I brought this along to read just in case there was some quiet time... I hope you don't mind. Uncle, have you read it? She showed me the cover of an Australian book which had a picture of a woman who appeared to be drowning.

I answered, Yes.

She said, I haven't quite finished but I'm a bit upset with it.

I said, Why is that?

She pursed her lips, looked across the bay.

I looked at her, her features seemed more sharply defined than earlier on in the day, or perhaps I'd now had a good look at her. Her forehead and chin were nicely contoured, but I'd say the eyes and mouth, come to think of it — looked a little like mine. No wonder I thought she might be of mixed blood.

She smiled, shook her head, forgot my question, put her head down and began reading. Zhonglin refilled my cup with tea. I smiled at him, but didn't know how to initiate a conversation with him. Maybe it was a language problem after all. He was

minding Miss Yip, but he must have been observing me as well. For a moment we sat together silently thinking about each other. On the outside he looked calm, just like me.

The waiters brought our food, a bottle of Maotai. Miss Yip put her book down on the table. There were several vegetable dishes. Although Zhonglin kept to his vegetarian diet, it looked like he'd taken up alcohol. Miss Yip poured three glasses of Maotai. That Miss Yip drank hard liquor like that surprised me. Worst of all she stood and raised a toast to me. One could admire a woman who stood and drank. Miss Yip stood looking slight, but the way she held up her glass was quite challenging. I took my glass, stood, clinked glasses with Miss Yip and Zhonglin, and drained it in one go. It dropped hollow to the pit of my stomach, I sat, ate some rice. The wine was smooth and very good, it hadn't meandered down nicely but drilled a hole in me. Zhonglin proposed another toast, we stood and emptied another round. I felt as though my stomach had been dropped on a pile of river rocks. In no time I was feeling more relaxed. I was happy. Odd drops of rain kept falling. Miss Yip stood again. I didn't mind if it rained all over me. The wine seemed not to affect Miss Yip or Zhonglin. My face was flushed, they laughed at me. They asked me about my life in Australia, did I swim in the ocean, did refugees land on Bondi beach, what did the phrase swim between red flags mean, could Chinese own land, were there many Aboriginal laws that non-Aborigines had to obey, was the desert far from where I lived, did Australian men really eat baby kangaroos to cure sexual impotence, what kind of music did I like.

At the end of the meal Miss Yip rummaged around in her hand bag and took out lipstick and a black compact. She applied pink lipstick with the help of the little mirror in her compact. When she finished, Zhonglin asked for the compact. She handed it to him and he opened it up. He held the mirror so that I could see myself. Is this Mr Lee?

I saw myself, ragged and motley faced, nodded, and said, Yes, it's me.

He smiled, shook his head, and said, No, it is not Mr Lee...

Of course, he was right. It wasn't me. Perhaps in his days at Shaolin temple between martial arts practice and meditation, they discussed the Dao, and psychoanalysis, too. He gave the compact back to Miss Yip who put it away and smiled at me...

She smiled a lot. I liked the way Miss Yip smiled. Some people will hate you for smiling too much. My ex-wife said I found everything amusing. You laugh at my clothes, you laugh at my pictures, you laugh at my face, you even laugh at my dog. One winter, the rain drizzled, poplar trees grew along the side of the road, I squeezed her

hand to hurt her. She shook off my grip, called me the worse names, kicked my leg. People in cars honked their horns.

The meal had been good. Rain started to fall steadily, we took shelter inside. I didn't mind staying put. My mind was numb anyway. I made an effort to pay for the meal but Miss Yip said, Put away your money, Uncle, I've already paid. I thanked her for the lunch and told her she didn't have to call me Uncle. She laughed and said, I guess you're not like an uncle, but what else should I call you? Mr Lee?

Yu, I said, that's my Chinese name.

That doesn't sound right in English, she said.

In Chinese it's different.

Which Yu is it?

What's your first name?

Queenie, she said. Do you like it?

Yes, sure, it's unusual and kind of theatrical.

I'd already forgotten how we left the village. My eyelids were heavy, I could have fallen asleep. Zhonglin drove us up a hill to the very end of the road. At the end of the road were tall iron gates and the driveway entrance to a golf club. Could my apartment be up here overlooking the South China Sea? Zhonglin parked the car and we got out. The rain had stopped. Miss Yip told me it was where her mother played golf. Miss Yip herself didn't play golf. I tried to picture what Miss Yip's mother must have looked like. Probably she didn't dye her hair bronze. She could look only thirty years old. In golfing attire she probably wore a floppy white hat that hid her face.

There's a temple down the hill you should see, said Miss Yip.

To the right were two steep paths separated by trees and bushes that led down the hill. Miss Yip took me down one of the paths, Zhonglin led the way. I heard something on the hillside that could be either bird or animal, a kind of low howling noise. Halfway down the track under the shade of trees was a large moss covered boulder with a sheet of perspex in front of it. Lines of calligraphy had been carved into the rock. Nearby a brass plaque explained that it was the oldest rock engraving in Hong Kong dating back 800 hundred years to the Song dynasty. Despite the fact that the surface was covered by dark mould and slime, the engraving seemed in such good condition that it might have been done only recently. I expressed my surprise at how poorly the engraving was

looked after. Miss Yip said at least they made a small effort, otherwise they would have cleared it for a helicopter landing pad.

The path separated again in two directions, we took the path to the right, outside the walls of a temple two women sat on small wooden stools and tried to sell us dried cuttlefish, prawns and scallops.

The temple had a wide forecourt, a clear view across the bay and the sea dotted with a small island. A rim of mountains surrounded the bay. The sky was white and hazy. The sea was dark green and calm. Down below people fished along the small strip of beach, on a small jetty, and on outcrops of rocks close to the shore.

Miss Yip took my camera and asked Zhonglin to take our photograph with the sea in the background. She surprised me by linking both her arms around my waist. Zhonglin took the photograph, and then she had us pose for another picture in front of the temple.

A few steps inside the temple, in the middle of the entrance, a group of people sat around a small low table and played cards. The card players ignored us as we walked around them. Miss Yip led the way into the temple. The temple was dark and smelled of incense. Shafts of blue hazy light came in through the sides of the temple. Two wooden models of ships about nine feet long and painted turquoise sat within the temple. The temple was built to honour Tian Hou — protector of seafarers. Miss Yip said the temple was originally built in the Song Dynasty by two brothers from Fujian province who survived a storm out in the bay.

In the middle of the temple were three large brass censers. The main altar was lit with flashing coloured lights, and glowing electric red candles. The goddess Tian Hou stood in the middle accompanied on either side by two female attendants. Tian Hou seemed to be made of porcelain and had a white face, bright red lips, and narrow slanting black eyes like those in a Lin Fengmian painting. Tian Hou looked cold and serene at the same time.

It wasn't a Buddhist temple, but Miss Yip asked whether I was a Buddhist, and I answered no.

No religion? she said.

No religion, but I don't mind lighting some incense.

Miss Yip asked Zhonglin to buy some incense. Zhonglin asked one of the card players. A man stood up, took a few steps towards the side of the temple and shouted out for incense. A few seconds later a girl came out with a packet of incense. I tried to

pay for the incense but Miss Yip won out again. She divided the packet of incense in two and we lit them together.

Miss Yip closed her eyes, seemed to make a prayer and then began putting incense into the burners. I'm not sure whether I actually prayed but I also closed my eyes and bowed. When we finished I asked Miss Yip whether I could take a photograph of Tian Hou. She didn't think it was wrong to photograph a goddess. Some goddesses wouldn't pose for you, this one looked content to stand still and be gazed at. I looked over at Zhonglin who'd been watching and he gave me a slight nod.

I aimed my camera at Tian Hou and took her picture, then took a photograph of Miss Yip standing beside one of the model ships.

Adjoining the main hall was a small room with a bed covered with a mosquito net. I guessed Tian Hou might have slept there. Miss Yip said, If a woman touches the bed it will help her get pregnant.

What will happen if I touch it?

Are you interested? I couldn't answer, and we left the temple through a side exit. The hawkers tried again to sell us something. Zhonglin and Miss Yip went up ahead. I dropped back a little, crossed over to the other path that was separated by bushes. On the other path I saw a group of people — men, women and children. They didn't look like locals or tourists. They carried small bundles of belongings. Some of the women wore scarves over their heads. One of them saw me and said something to the others. For a moment they stared at me, the younger children hid their faces and pressed into the bodies of the adults. They turned their backs and hurried to get off the path and disappeared into the surrounding bushes. I tried to follow them into the bushes. They made a little track through the scrub, but I lost sight of them. After about twenty metres I decided not to go further. Obviously they didn't want me following them. When I tried to get back to the path I found myself tangled up among vines. Out of my own desperation I began calling out to Miss Yip.

I heard Miss Yip call my name. I got untangled from the vines and made my way back to where I could see the path. Before I made it out of the bushes I saw a bottle on the ground. It was a glass bottle that might have been dropped by the group that disappeared into the bushes. Inside the bottle, filled with a clear liquid, was a man, six inches long, just about perfectly formed, a Caucasian man, he wore a little pair of glasses on a thin long face. I think he was dead, but then he wriggled like someone swimming underwater with his hands by his sides. He opened his eyes, blew a few

bubbles. I dropped the bottle, hurried out onto the path, almost ran into Miss Yip. She wondered where I'd been.

I got lost in the bushes.

Zhonglin walked off the path, he picked the bottle from the ground. There was something in the bottle but it wasn't a man, only a large white ginseng root. Zhonglin handed me the bottle, said it could do my liver good. I took the bottle, held it behind my back, followed Miss Yip and Zhonglin closely along the path. They must have thought I was drunk. Maybe I was. At the top of the hill, a group of young people came down holding fishing rods. They were talking, joking, in a good mood. I remembered it was Easter Sunday, a holiday.

We got in the car and Zhonglin drove to Sai Kung. Miss Yip talked about Hong Kong walking trails, reserves and parks, the conservation of areas for plants and fauna, pangolins, leopard cats, Chinese porcupines, and the two centimetre long Romer's tree frogs that didn't like to climb trees. She asked me about Australia again, was I comfortable living there.

We pulled into a car park, I put the bottle under the front seat and got out of the car. As always Zhonglin led the way, we went by a playground where an Englishman pushed his daughter on a swing. I wondered whether the apartment I'd inherited was here, for some strange reason Miss Yip didn't seem in any hurry to show it to me, but I didn't ask and simply let Miss Yip take me wherever she pleased. The Englishman was loud, a few Chinese parents with their children stood and watched silently. I could understand the Englishman's over-exuberant voice was just to stake out this little bit of territory as temporarily their own — as if the silent masses worried him for time. For the moment, for the sake of the child, and notwithstanding the last colonial government, he wasn't yet ready to hand over the swing. Miss Yip told me expatriates had moved here because it was less crowded, leafier, cheaper to obtain housing. The wealthier, more ambitious ones were up on the peak and some had already moved on to Shanghai.

Miss Yip insisted I see the waterfront, the fishing boats, the restaurants. It couldn't be that she was hungry. She seemed to like the sight of boats, things swimming in tanks, fish, lobsters, ghost crabs, cuttlefish. I walked over to the edge of the waterfront, small fishing boats, sampans bobbed up and down. The water was a dark jade green, it reminded me of Hong Kong forty years ago.

Miss Yip asked whether I was okay. I said I felt a bit nauseated — but not sure from what. She said I should keep moving. A stroll would cure motion sickness, she said. We walked past a real estate agent, a clothing shop, a furniture store that also had table lamps, vases, art prints, and such things. Miss Yip went in, said she was looking for a rosewood stool. Zhonglin stayed outside gazing at the harbour. I followed Miss Yip inside the shop, saw in the front window a large glass bowl with two small turtles in a little water. It could have been good fengshui.

She didn't find what she was looking for, and so we left to stroll a bit more around the streets. As we walked we talked about travelling in China, how she met Zhonglin. We came to an elegant shop front with antique rosewood tables, chairs, ceramic vases, Tang dynasty horses, Han dynasty terracotta clowns, modern wall hangings and scrolls. I followed Miss Yip inside. A small ceramic jar with a white glaze caught my attention. I picked it up carefully and a little sticker under it gave the price and its estimated date of crafting in the Qing dynasty, late 1700s. I asked Miss Yip whether she thought it was genuine. She asked whether I liked it. I said, I like it — it's \$1,880. She said, If you like it, and the price is okay for you, then buy it. Never think too much about whether it's real, so long as you enjoy it.

Nevertheless I couldn't ignore my doubts, it was a nice piece, the young shop assistant was enthusiastic, but then it wasn't the kind of thing I collected. I put it down, and didn't regret it.

Zhonglin told Miss Yip it was getting late and maybe we should head back to Kowloon. It was after four o'clock. I hadn't seen the apartment building. Miss Yip said I probably needed a rest, she thought the best thing was to take me back to my hotel, but in the evening she wanted to take me out again. Somehow, for some reason, she had taken on the task of looking after me, she took me places to visit and see, selected what I ate. She had become my unofficial guide. It was nice of her to do all this for me, and I didn't question why she did it. Perhaps I had inherited her along with the apartment. It was a real possibility. She would pick me up for dinner at around seven and then take me to a show in Wanchai. I ask what kind of show. She said it would be a surprise. As if I hadn't had enough surprises. She promised to take me to see the apartment block the next day. She thought it would be a more auspicious day.

On the way back to the hotel we talked about looking for Pascale Romantsova, why someone would want an antechinus in Hong Kong. They dropped me off at the hotel

and I went alone up to my room. I put the bottle in the bar refrigerator, the little man still looked like a pale ginseng root. He had gone to sleep with his arms folded in front and knees drawn up. His disguises didn't fool me, and the way he followed me even when I was overseas was going too far. When I left Hong Kong I'd leave him in the fridge. A frigid frog was what he deserved to be. As I rearranged the drinks in the fridge I came across the antechinus's leftovers.

At 7:00pm I was picked up by Miss Yip and Zhonglin. Miss Yip no longer wore dark glasses and a denim hat. She'd changed into another black leather dress but of a different cut. She seemed more herself, undisguised. I got in the back seat with her. She said we'd have dinner at a Vietnamese restaurant.

The night was warm but it also began to rain. The restaurant was an unpretentious place with lime green table tops and pine chairs. Zhonglin dropped us off and went to park the car. It was crowded and there was no room available inside. The rain was getting heavier. A waiter took us next door to a place that looked like a dirty loading dock or a garage set up with tables and chairs. A waitress wiped over a table and set a number of places for us. A group of four elderly men in singlets, short pants and rubber slippers sat at the next table talking in loud voices. One of the men had an extremely pitted red nose. Miss Yip looked at the menu and ordered.

She asked what I thought of Zhonglin. I guessed there was something more to this than wanting to know what I thought of him. I said, He's fine. She was glad I thought that... She became serious, looked out at the rain.

Zhonglin arrived, he had an umbrella but the rain had been heavy and he looked a bit wet. Miss Yip mopped him with serviettes. The meal arrived at our table. The old men at the next table were getting noisier and used the worst profanities. I looked at the waitress leaning idly against the wall watching the torrential rain that was about to flood onto the footpath. She was either oblivious or simply inured to the foul language. I looked at Zhonglin and he held his bowl of rice to his mouth, his mind also elsewhere. Miss Yip looked at me. I smiled and she smiled back. I felt happy in her company. Even the foul-mouthed men behind me couldn't disturb the simple pleasure of the moment.

When we finished the meal, I managed to pay the bill. Miss Yip called me old-fashioned. Zhonglin went to bring around the car. I'd become attached to calling her Miss Yip and couldn't bring myself to call her Queenie, in the same way she kept calling me Mr Lee. Miss Yip said she had some bad news about my antechinus.

What is it?

Zhonglin's cousin was walking along the street, someone came along knocked him to the ground and ran off with your antechinus.

Was the cousin hurt?

No, but he's sorry and embarrassed about losing the antechinus.

It's not really my antechinus, and it doesn't really matter. It's the last thing on my mind now, or should be. In a few days I'll be back in Australia. Who knows... It's been a nice day. Thanks for spending so much of your time taking me around.

It's a pleasure, she said.

We went through the harbour tunnel and arrived somewhere in Wanchai. We'd hardly said a word since the restaurant. Once again Zhonglin dropped us off and went to park the car. The rain had eased off, but the street was deep in rushing water. People hurried along the crowded footpath. We were outside a building with a narrow door lit by a dull lamp. At the entrance was a poster with some words in English and a picture of a young woman. I stopped to read the poster, Queenie Lavada, I looked closely at the picture and recognised it was a picture of Miss Yip. Miss Yip grabbed me by the arm and took me up a long flight of stairs where two tough looking doormen stood. The doormen let us pass into a crowded bar. She found me a place to sit, asked whether I needed a drink. I said no, I'm fine. She said, This isn't the time for explanations. She pointed at a frosted glass door. When the music starts, go through that door.

Is Sally your mother?

That's not the right question. I'll tell you everything later. She surprised me with a hug, her arms around my neck, and then she disappeared through the door.

A steady stream of people came in to drink and banter at the bar. Young women drank champagne. The crowd was mostly Asian, but there were also Europeans. A gin and tonic was set in front of me. I drank it quickly without much thought. I didn't know why I drank. A lot of people went through the frosted glass door. It occurred to me that Zhonglin hadn't made an appearance. I restrained myself from going through the door before the music began. There was plenty in the bar to occupy me, to think of Miss Yip, Sally Lavada. I was both numbed by the gin and the realisation that Miss Queenie Yip or Queenie Lavada and I had some connection. What had happened?

I finally heard music and made my way through the door. Once through the door I could see a small stage with a band of four male musicians with electric guitars, and

drums. One of the band members appeared to be a Koori and played the didgeridoo. Queenie was up on the stage singing in Cantonese. It was an amazing mix. I should have guessed she was a singer.

Her voice was wonderfully strong, the music was loud, sharp hard rock'n'roll, with the haunting underlying sound of the didgeridoo. I'd always thought Cantonese was too soft and sentimental for hard rock'n'roll but she made it sound full of depth. The room was small and everyone stood squeezed together. I stood at the back of the room. Young women beside me waved their arms over their heads and bounced to the beat of Queenie's song. If I hadn't been so mesmerised by Queenie's singing I might have felt out of place. Instead I wondered how and why Queenie was living in Hong Kong. I thought about her mother, Sally, and the air in the room became suddenly hotter. Queenie had the crowd jumping, she began a song in a Noongar language.

When she finished the Noongar song the crowd cheered, whistled, clapped wildly. She sang one song after another, sometimes played the harmonica. The woman next to me looked around at the man behind her and curled her lip. I had very little idea what the song's lyrics were but they were full of emotion. The next songs she sang in English. I didn't understand much about music but I was amazed at how strong her voice was. She sang hard, now and then she sang in a way that couldn't have done her throat a lot of good, but it seemed to come out effortlessly. I didn't know how it came about but I knew she was a Noongar-Canto-rock singer, and I was sure she was one of a kind. Her voice was beautiful, every song was wonderful, I hoped she would never stop singing.

She made a change and sang a softer melody in Mandarin, a song that seemed familiar and might have been from a Hong Kong film. The young women beside me swayed their bodies. The woman standing next to me screamed. She felt behind the back of her jeans, she looked at her hand and there was some kind of sticky slime on her fingers. She showed her friends. She looked at me. She turned around and shouted at the young man who had been behind her. The man raised his hands and pretended he hadn't done anything. Her friends began abusing him. She turned to me again, a plaintive look on her face, and I had the impression I should have been defending her honour. The man tried to get away. I lunged and grabbed him by the shoulder but he shook off my hand. He pushed his way through the crowd and went out of the room. I chased him and the women followed me shouting. He reached the exit and raced down the stairs. I flew down the stairs and caught him at the bottom, Did you do that you filthy stupid prick?

He shoved his hand into my face. I threw two right hand punches that landed flush on his jaw and I saw him reeling back and his legs buckle. I was probably more surprised than he was. I heard the women scream or cheer. The doormen belatedly came down the stairs to investigate the commotion. I looked around and saw for an instant the face of an impassive Pascale Romantsova looking at me from the footpath. Somehow she looked different, changed. Something hard like a wooden mallet smashed into the side of my head. The fleeting image of Pascale Romantsova vanished. Stars bounced around in the darkness of my head. I felt like an astronaut confronting endless space and darkness — a darkness full of gravity. If I had known which way was up I would have known whether I was floating or falling.

Pascale Romantsova lay beside me. She was asleep but even in the half dark of wherever we were I could see her face had changed, that her skin had become smooth. The unblemished Pascale Romantsova didn't surprise me. Under the layers of her peeling skin she was someone I recognised.

The room was large and slowly filled with light. Curtains parted slowly of their own accord. The ceiling was high. The walls were plain white, without paintings or mirrors. The air was honeysuckle sweet and warm, or perhaps it was Pascale Romantsova. It was hard to breathe. She opened her eyes. Her eyes were no longer small sharp slits, they'd lost their intensity, in fact she looked wide eyed and said, Oh, good, you're awake again.

I struggled to sit up in the bed, my back rested against the headboard. My mouth was dry but had the taste of blood. I ran my tongue around my mouth. I touched my lips and smeared the greasy dark blood onto the back of my hand, felt my head where there was a swelling on the left side. Pascale Romantsova closed her eyes and seemed content or perhaps wistful, but whatever it was it was also excruciatingly uncomfortable, painful, pleasurable. I didn't bother to ask anything as sublunary as where were we, how did we get here, or what we were doing.

She was breathless. She kept her eyes closed in a focused way and said, Be careful. I tried to remember whether I'd heard that before, I tried to remember anything, anything from the past that might make what was happening seem to make sense. I felt as though I'd spent the whole night in the performance of my life. On the other hand my right hand was swollen and painful, the crook of my elbow felt sore. I stretched out the

left arm and saw a dark bruise along the inner forearm. What had happened recently? What books had been read in the past weeks?

There were thick bars over the window, the daylight was grey — it was morning. I vaguely remembered seeing someone standing over me. She had a cigarette in her hand down by her side. It must have been Pascale Romantsova, but everyone seemed to look like Pascale Romantsova. I wanted to tell her, can you stop a moment. But she was distracted and urgent, her hands behind her head. I banged my head against the wall behind the headboard, a paralyzing sensation went down my legs so that in a kind of momentary relief I felt nothing in my lower body, nothing of what she was doing. Some seconds later the feeling in my legs and lower parts gradually returned. It could be that things repeated themselves, I fell asleep and woke up, sometimes she was there, sometimes she was not, sometimes I saw more than one of her talking to herself in the corner. Then she became quiet and she slumped against me, came to rest. I heard the voice of Queenie Lavada singing. Her voice was beautiful. One of her hard songs, loud, but it seemed never to stop, no matter what I was thinking the song was there at the front of my mind, thumping it, making a place of its own, and as much I loved her singing it was impossible to keep her silent. Fatigue made it insistent and made me listen. Queenie sang hard. I had been deaf to her, hadn't responded in time, I should have found her earlier.

Ointments, small vials of medicine, a tube of something with the words, white mask, a needle and syringe, a few silver wrappers — white chocolate frogs lay on the bedside table. Maybe Pascale Romantsova had drugged me, maybe it was the gin and tonic, I thought of subliminal suggestions. At last, she might be sated, she was detached, it was difficult to know what she was thinking. She seemed distant. I studied her. Her face had become very smooth, as though a very fine powder of pearl shell covered her skin or maybe she was pregnant, her pulse jumpy and slippery. She lay beside me, smiling, not saying a word. Perhaps at times she averted her eyes. I thought her eyes looked tired, slightly red, she probably hadn't slept much... She ruffled my hair, she moved in close, kissed. My lips felt numb. There was a smear of blood on her lips. She got out of the bed and left the room.

I'm sorry I didn't give you back your antechinus. I watched her walk away. There was something exquisite when she gathered up her hair and revealed the back of her neck. For a second or two I lost sight of her and the room became momentarily dark then light again, as though an eclipse of the sun had occurred. I might have fallen

asleep, dreaming. But there was something wrong in all this. This Pascale Romantsova seemed too remote, or else I hadn't been close enough to knowing her, and how close could I get to her? She hardly said a word, and was barely audible above Queenie.

She went into the bathroom, left the door open. I closed my eyes. Women crossed me in a town square and ran away through a narrow street, red ribbons in their hair, leaving the echo of their footsteps and voices. A mouse chased them across the square. I dreamt of geography, headlands and foreshores. A yellow haze covered the land. On the sea was an Arabian dhow taking bearings but unable to decide which landmark it was looking for. I kept it at bay with my own indecision, my failure to know where I was. A large map of the world lay spread out on a table, part of the map hung over the edge of the table. I saw my Arabian boat dangerously close to the edge.

There was a pain in my chest and I couldn't move, couldn't breathe, but after a while the pain drifted apart, as if I had my second wind — it couldn't be anything serious. I tried to remain calm while Queenie sang another song, in a way I was glad the song was hard, constant, but I wished she would stop a moment and give me some rest — so I could have talked to her. I knew she wasn't in the room, but I wanted to ask her more about her life and Sally.

Pascale Romantsova showered, I heard the sound of running water, and maybe she sang something too. Minutes went by and then the shower stopped. Queenie's song became gentler, the shower screen opened and closed, the sound of a hair dryer droned for the length of a song. I closed my eyes, saw Queenie, then Sally standing on a beach, I was trying to kiss her, she was only sixteen — we ran along a pier, a ferry was leaving, I leapt across the water from pier to ferry. We waved goodbye, and at last I was awake. The room was quiet, and smelled of incense and women.

Pascale Romantsova came back into the bedroom. She winked at me, I read her lips, she said, You're gorgeous. She dried herself with a small white towel then threw it across the room onto the bed. I reached for the towel, it was soft, moist, warm and had her smell. She put on black swimwear, a white t-shirt, white tracksuit pants, and runners. She sat facing me in a cane chair, she looked like an apparition or an angel. She might have been the goddess Tian Hou in another guise, down here for some mortal pleasure. When she was finished she'd fly out through the windows. From the bed I watched as she brushed her hair for several minutes, and at the same time she gazed silently back at me. At last she put away the brush, picked up a white bag that looked familiar, twirled it from the rope straps.

Don't go, I heard this in my head competing with Queenie, but out of my lips it was something unintelligible and garbled. Pascale Romantsova came to the bed. She gave me a kiss, then ran her hands over my eyes. I closed my eyes. There was a moment of silence, then her footsteps crossed the room. Small scuffling noises followed her, a door opened and then closed. Queenie sang, Bye bye. It was all I understood of her.

Maybe an hour passed, or only a few minutes. The room was hot, and the window must have been closed. I needed to move and opened my eyes, I was alone, but was this the end? Was I all over with Pascale Romantsova? As a man, didn't I get a second chance?

Instead of lying down, there was no harm inching my way out of bed. I saw a telephone on the table, made my way slowly towards it. A hard heavy pain stuck in my chest, I perspired all over but it was a pleasant cool sweat. I picked up the telephone to call Queenie, she'd given me her number written on Pavel Gingis's business card. Out of sentiment I'd remembered it by heart.

I was lucky, she answered the phone. I'm very sick.

She said, Who's speaking?

This is Frank Lee. Is that Miss Yip?

She said, Sorry, there's no Miss Yip here. I think you have the wrong number... How sick are you?

I think I'm dying.

Go see a Chinese doctor. The telephone line went dead. I guessed the line had been cut, otherwise it was me. I tried to call again but there was no dial tone. Did I call a wrong number? The voice sounded like Miss Yip or Queenie Lavada. I wasn't sure who she was. Dreaming again was a possibility. Maybe I'd remembered the bank manager's number.

My clothes lay beside the bed on the marble floor. I picked up my clothes, my socks, underwear, trousers and shirt. My clothes smelled of cigarettes. It took a long time to put everything on, my joints ached all over. I found my shoes and put them on. It occurred to me that all my clothes were black, from shoes, socks, underwear and everything else.

Scattered over the floor were cicada shells and pieces of discarded snake skin. Beside the cane chair I accidentally kicked a box of some kind. I took a closer look, and opened the box. It was my antechinus, I recognised its markings. It lay on its side, its heart was racing, maybe it had had its night of pleasure and was dying too. Somewhere

there must have been a contented female antechinus. It was a mystery how the male got here, but I was glad to see it alive. I clutched the box under my arm and walked hunched over to the door and left the room. There was a long dirty corridor with half a dozen closed doors on either side — I'd come through one of them but when I looked behind me I wasn't sure which room it had been. A swarm of flies came immediately to investigate me. They must have smelt death, but a few brushes of my hand and they went away down the corridor back to a couple of stinking enamel pans outside closed doors.

I made my way along the corridor, the walls were painted halfway up in turquoise, and white above. Dirty marks covered the walls, the tread of boot prints showed where someone had run up the wall and done a somersault. I went down some stairs at the end of the corridor, went out a door, and out of the building. A narrow dirt path led away from the building. I looked back at the building, a kind of red brick colonial barracks basking in a grey haze. Behind the building was a bare rocky mountain. The path led through a grove of tall bamboo. On one side of the path was a wooden railing and I used it for support. Through the bamboo was the sound of rushing water and some calls like those of whipbirds or lyrebirds. Faint breezes and the shade of the bamboo made the air cooler. I followed the path to a small stone footbridge that crossed a stream. My eyes blurred and I couldn't tell whether it was the water that rushed by or the ground that I stood on. I looked at the antechinus, it could have been dead but maybe it was just in a deep exhausted sleep.

A small misstep and I was off the footbridge and into the water. I'd had this problem for a long time — suddenly needing to work out how to take the next step. But the water cleared my head. I took up some water and made a few drops fall onto the antechinus to see whether it would revive. Whether it was the water or not, its heart was still beating — not broken.

The path abruptly ended at the footbridge and on the other side of the bridge was dense bush that needed a machete to get through. It seemed strange to build a bridge that didn't bridge anything. With the sound of Queenie running through my head I followed the stream, walked in the water until there was a place I could get up onto the bank. The more I walked the better I began to feel and eventually I was walking slowly but upright. Sunlight flickered down through the trees. I rested against a very tall and thick bamboo. It was the kind of place court officials in imperial China probably took excursions to eat, drink and make poetry.

The bamboo forest eventually fell away, became a clearing behind houses at the base of a mountain. I went down a grassed area and got onto a paved path. The houses were three storey villas that seemed new but roughly finished. Building materials, debris, timber planks covered in paint and cement, rusted steel mesh, and bamboo scaffolding were strewn along the track, thrown among the weeds, vines, bauhinia and banana trees. The sound of cicadas rung in the air. The banyan trees looked familiar like the ones in Australia. A maze of hedges suddenly towered over me. For a moment there was a frightening vision of a man, walking ahead of me in the maze. He looked quickly over his shoulder, he looked annoyed, his brow furrowed, like a man who didn't want to be followed. I lost sight of him and broke into a cold sweat. I wasn't following anyone after all, and although it had looked like a maze there was only an ordinary garden hedge lining one side of a zigzagging path. Small flocks of sparrows flew across the path in front of me. I heard the sound of an axe. Someone was chopping wood. There were some loud anxious voices, and the axe became silent. A dozen paces off the path was a tree badly slashed around its base. The tree was tall and straight with smooth grey bark. It was flowering and a faint sweet fragrance was in the air. Not that I recognised it straightaway, but by the way it had been mutilated was enough to know it was a chen xiang. It used to be a common tree, but was becoming rarer. Someone had cut it enough so that it would produce a resin for medicine. Impregnated with resin, the dead wood would sink in water. Maybe it was a good name for Hong Kong.

A long low howl drowned out everything else except Queenie. A trail of flagstones led to a dozen stone steps which I went up and saw a big swimming pool surrounded on three sides by grey walls. Again the howl swung from tree to tree. A large clock was on a wall at one end. A woman was reading a book sitting alongside one of the walls. I went to the other side of the swimming pool, put down the antechinus. Maybe it was alive, or maybe it was dead. I took off my clothes and shoes, and covered the antechinus with my shirt. The water sparkled, the last thing I could do was dive and swim.

The woman hadn't noticed me. Would she kick up a fuss if she saw me naked? Maybe she was the kind who wouldn't let a naked man distract her reading. I walked over and stood at the edge of the pool. The woman got up, she stretched, put her arms over her head, swung her arms back and forth. She didn't notice me. Maybe I was invisible at the edge of the water. She came over to the pool, looked at the water. The water was clear, maybe there was a reflection, she closed her eyes. I dived, stayed under

the water as long as I could and then came up. The water cleared my head. Queenie's voice grew quieter, then I began to worry about her. Could she be my daughter? She would be in her early thirties, not sixteen. But I'd lost the sound of her voice. I heard my own breathing, the water around me. I swam, followed the black lines on the bottom. I swam up and down the lanes. The water became deeper and deeper, darker and darker, until I no longer saw the bottom. I felt a current behind me, the whole movement of an ocean swept me in a direction I didn't want to go. It was better to get away from the current and dive down — as deep as I could and not come up.

The deeper I dived the brighter the bottom seemed to become — it was clear like the blue sky. It seemed effortless diving to the bottom of the sea, I wasn't holding my breath, no pressure on my lungs, ears, or eyes. But something was coming close to me, a shadow getting closer, it moved fast, full of power. It took me under the arms, pulled me, twisted me around, spiralling down, down to the very bottom — light inverted into darkness, and at the pit of this darkness light escaped gravity. Clouds and palm fronds wavered over me. I looked up. She was breathing heavily. Water dripped from her face and hair. She slapped my face lightly.

I gazed up at her, You saved my life.

What are you doing?

Swimming.

You need lessons.

I remember you. What's your name?

I am not who you think I am — but don't say anything more.

Who do you think I think you are?

I was speechless for a long time... I wake up and see Cai'er outside on the deck with a bucket watering some orchids she must have brought down from the top house. She turns around and sees that I'm awake and smiles at me. She makes a gesture for me to go outside. I get off the couch and go out onto the deck to see what she wants. I stand beside her, she crouches and points at some new shoots coming out of the orchids.

Did you have a good sleep? she says.

Did I fall asleep?

You were talking in your sleep.

What did I say?

You talked a lot — something about, south-west is Noongar territory. You sung something strange — the ants come marching two by two.

I don't remember any of that.

And something about your daughter. You said, I'm meeting my daughter at the airport... You never told me you had a daughter.

I must have dreamt about her.

You laugh in your sleep.

At least I woke up.

Let's go down to the jetty.

Let's stay here.

The sun is going down.

Did I tell?

Tell me what?

Yesterday, three men came in a removalist truck. A man in his sixties and two young men. They came up the path to the storeroom. They opened the storeroom and took everything down to the truck. I think the older man was the old captain's son. I heard them moving things in the storeroom. They went past my window with paintings, a roll-top desk, a Buddhist sculpture, tribal spears, an antique gramophone, a face mask from the Trobriand islands or upper Sepik, an etching of a breadfruit tree, something that looked like a grandfather clock but might have been from an old amusement arcade, the kind of thing you put in halfpennies just to see a ball bearing go round and round... All the things the old captain collected from a lifetime of sailing. Probably they'll end up at a second-hand store or in a museum. Just before they left, someone tested the doorhandle from inside the storeroom. Maybe they were bothered because I was on other side of the door; maybe that's why they decided to clear it out.

After they left, I tried the storeroom door myself. I half expected it to open, but was still surprised when it did open. Inside was an old freezer they left behind, but just about everything else was taken away. The curtains had been pushed to the corners of the windows, and the room was full of light. A map of Australia was left stuck with tape to the wall. I found a school exercise book lying on the floor half under the freezer. It was old and dirty, on the back cover were all sorts of tables, imperial measurements, four noggins to the pint, avoirdupois weights for all goods except gold, silver and jewels, a sterling money table, four farthings to a penny, apothecaries weights, 20 grains to a scruple, a table of motion, two steps per wight. The book was badly water stained.

It'd been left in the rain or soaked at sea. I guess it was the captain's. It had some diagrams, drawings of masts, riggings, pages of calculations. The old captain had very neat copperplate writing done with a fountain pen, but the water made a lot of it unreadable. Some of the writing was about loading cargo, buoyancy, the affects of motion on bulkheads. It didn't make much sense to me, but I remembered some of it.

In hazy weather at night the steep hill of Ras Hafan may perhaps be dimly seen from the vessel and when it bears southward of 270°... if Ras Asia is not sighted, as often happens through haze being thickest at sea level and the light colour of the hills rendering it difficult to see, Ras Hafan may be mistaken for Ras Asia and under these conditions the course has been altered westward towards the low... of Wadi Tahan Bay and the vessel lost...

I looked on a map for Ras Hafan, Ras Asia and Wadi Tahan Bay, but couldn't find them, maybe I misread them, the writing wasn't clear, but I think the old captain was sailing towards the Gulf of Aden from the Arabian Sea. Just like Sinbad the sailor.

Maybe, Cai'er says, he was sailing the other way — heading east across the Indian Ocean... Let's go down to see which way the captain's boat is pointing.

She takes me down to the jetty. She wants to go swimming, but isn't dressed for it. She wants to swim out to the captain's boat, but it isn't a good time for swimming. The water is murky, the tide is in. It will be dark soon, and there are sharks in the harbour.

Don't worry, she says, there aren't any crocodiles here.

I'm not scared of crocodiles.

There's something about you. I think I've met you just at the right time and place...

I think it's gone.

What's gone?

The captain's boat.

Where's it gone?

I don't know. The old captain's son must have sailed it away.

We could still swim.

Aren't you surprised it's gone?

No. Do you think I'm sentimental?

No, I think you're practical — in a funny way.

When is your daughter coming?

Tomorrow.

What about her mother?

She's a photo-journalist. At the moment she's in Hubei at Shennongjia to photograph the white bears, white monkeys, white snakes, and white frogs in the forest. There's also some kind of wild man in the forest.

Maybe he's white too.

It's a myth.

Look at the water.

It's calm.

Don't you want to swim with me?

This is her idea of romance. She doesn't think of the risks. I think of penguins in Antarctica standing on the edge of the ice working out which sucker will be the first to dive into the water. Waiting under the ice there's a penguin-hungry leopard seal. One goes in, then all the rest follow. But here there's only the two of us. She doesn't think I'll take a dive. She pushes me into the water. The water is as deep, dark and cold as I imagined. I'm under water for such a long time I must have sunk a dozen feet. I rise to the surface and think I hear Queenie singing. Cai'er is standing on the jetty, she jumps in making a big splash next to me. She comes up laughing, Swim, she says.

Someone is howling from the shore, howling like a desperate gibbon. The ex-de facto is racing down the hill, down the steps, onto the jetty. I look at Cai'er and she's laughing. Quick, swim, she says. I hear his crazed yelling getting closer, his pounding footsteps on the jetty, rattling the old timber planks. His face is contorted in anger or uncontrollable glee. It's impossible to tell. He reaches the end of the jetty and leaps, sails, into the air. I see the soft white underbelly, the mad bastard white frog goes clear across the bay.

I look at Cai'er. She touches my lips — they feel numb again.

PART THREE

Bibliography

- Ahearne, Jeremy. Michel De Certeau: Interpretations and Its Other. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995.
- Anderson, Benedict. Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism. London: Verso, 1991.
- Ang, Ien. On Not Speaking Chinese: Living between Asia and the West. London: Routledge, 2001.
- Ang, Ien, et al., eds. Alter/Asians: Asian-Australian Identities in Art, Media and Popular Culture. Sydney: Pluto, 2000.
- Ang, Ien, and Jon Stratton. "Multiculturalism in Crisis: The New Politics of Race and National Identity in Australia." On Not Speaking Chinese: Living between Asia and the West. London: Routledge, 2001. 95-111.
- Apter, Emily, and William Pietz, eds. Fetishism as Cultural Discourse. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993.
- Auden, W. H., and Christopher Isherwood. Journey to a War. New York: Octagon, 1972.
- Bachelard, Gaston. The Poetics of Space. New York: Orion, 1964.
- Bail, Murray. Eucalyptus. Melbourne: Text, 1998.
- Baker, Karen. "The Artful Man: Theory and Authority in Brian Castro's Fiction." Australian Literary Studies 20.3 (2002): 231-41.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. Rabelais and His World. Trans. Helene Iswolsky. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984.
- Bal, Mieke. "Telling, Showing, Showing Off." Critical Inquiry 18 (1992): 556-94.

---. Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997.

Barthes, Roland. Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography. Trans. Richard Howard. London: Vintage, 2000.

---. Mythologies. Trans. Annette Lavers. London: Vintage, 2000.

Baudrillard, Jean. "Fetishism and Ideology." For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign. St Louis: Telos, 1981. 88-101.

Benjamin, Walter. "Unpacking My Library." Trans. Harry Zohn. Illuminations: Essays and Reflections. Ed. Hannah Arendt. New York: Schocken, 1968. 59-67.

Berry, Chris. A Bit on the Side: East-West Topographies of Desire. Rose Bay, NSW: Empress, 1994.

Bhabha, Homi K. The Location of Culture. New York: Routledge, 1994.

Bourdieu, Pierre. Photography: A Middle-Brow Art. Trans. Shaun Whiteside. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990.

Bourdieu, Pierre, and Jean-Claude Passeron. Reproduction in Education, Society, and Culture. Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage, 1990.

Brennan, Bernadette. "Brian Castro's Tokyo: Schizophrenic Semiotic." Southerly 60.3 (2000): 168-77.

Broinowski, Alison. The Yellow Lady. Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1992.

---. "The No-Name Australians and the Missing Subaltern: Asian Australian Fiction." Asian Australian Identities Conference, 1999. Available: http://eprints.anu.edu.au/archive/00000486/00asia_fiction.html. 30 September 2005.

Brooks, David. "The Scheherezade Motif in Recent Australian Fiction Set in China and Southeast Asia." Interactions: Essays on the Literature and Culture of the Asia-Pacific Region. Eds. Dennis Haskell and Ron Shapiro. Nedlands, WA: University of Western Australia Press, 2000. 75-85.

Brownell, Susan, and Jeffery N. Wasserstrom, eds. Chinese Femininities Chinese Masculinities: A Reader. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.

Buchanan, Ian. "Writing the Wrongs of History: De Certeau and Post-Colonialism." Span 33 (1992): 39-46.

Butler, Judith. Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex". New York: Routledge, 1993.

Campbell, Felicia. "Silver Screen, Shadow Play: The Tradition of the Wayang Kulit in The Year of Living Dangerously." Journal of Popular Culture 28.1 (1994): 163-69.

Cao, Xueqin, and Gao E. A Dream of Red Mansions. Trans. Yang Xianyi and Gladys Yang. 4 vols. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1994.

Carey, Peter. Illywhacker. St Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press, 1985.

Cass, Victoria B. Dangerous Women: Warriors, Grannies, and Geishas of the Ming. Langham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999.

Castro, Brian. Birds of Passage. London: Allen & Unwin, 1983.

---. After China. North Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1992.

---. "Heterotopias: Writing and Location." Australian Literary Studies 17.2 (1995): 178-82.

---. Looking for Estrellita. St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1999.

Certeau, Michel de. Heterologies: Discourse on the Other. Trans. Brian Massumi. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986.

---. The Practice of Everyday Life. Trans. Steven Rendall. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.

Chanady, Amaryll Beatrice. Magical Realism and the Fantastic: Resolved Versus Unresolved Antimony. New York: Garland, 1985.

Chang, Robert S. "A Meditation on Borders." Immigrants Out! The New Nativism and the Anti-Immigrant Impulse in the United States. Ed. Juan F. Perea. New York: New York University Press, 1997. 244-53.

Charnon-Deutsch, Lou. "Racial Fetishism in the Nineteenth-Century Illustrated Magazine." Hiperfeira. 1. 2001. Available: <http://www.sinc.sunysb.edu/Publish/hiper/num1/art/lou.htm>. 1 June 2005.

- Chen, Anthony S. "Lives at the Center of the Periphery, Lives at the Periphery of the Center: Chinese American Masculinities and Bargaining with Hegemony." Gender and Society 13.5 (1999): 584-607.
- Chen, Kuan-Hsing, ed. Trajectories: Inter-Asia Cultural Studies. London: Routledge, 1998.
- Cheng, Anne Anlin. The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Chiu, Jeannie. "Melancholy and Human Rights in a Nostalgist's Map of America and *Midnight's Children*." LIT: Literature Interpretation Theory 16.1 (2005): 25-39.
- Cho, Lily. "'How Taste Remembers Life': Diasporic Memory and Community in Fred Wah's Poetry." Culture, Identity, Commodity: Diasporic Chinese Literatures in English. Eds. Tseen Khoo and Kam Louie. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005. 81-106.
- Chow, Rey. Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Cultural Studies. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993.
- . Ethics after Idealism: Theory-Culture-Ethnicity-Reading. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998.
- . "Fateful Attachments: On Collecting, Fidelity, and Lao She." Critical Inquiry 28 (2001): 286-304.
- Chua, Beng-Huat. "Culture, Multiracialism, and National Identity in Singapore." Trajectories: Inter-Asia Cultural Studies. Ed. Kuan-Hsing Chen. London: Routledge, 1998. 186-205.
- Clifford, James. The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988.
- . Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997.
- Connell, R. W. Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics. Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1987.
- . Masculinities. St. Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1995.

- Cooppan, Vilashini. "Mourning Becomes Kitsch: The Aesthetics of Loss in Svero Sarduy's Cobra." Loss: The Politics of Mourning. Eds. David L. Eng and David Kazanjian. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003. 251-77.
- Curthoys, Ann. "An Uneasy Conversation: The Multicultural and the Indigenous." Race, Colour and Identity in Australia and New Zealand. Eds. John Docker and Gerhard Fischer. Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2000. 21-36.
- D'Haen, Theo L. "Magical Realism and Postmodernism: Decentering the Privileged Centers." Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community. Eds. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris. Durham: Duke University Press, 1995. 191-208.
- Dai, Yin. "The Representations of Chinese People in Australian Literature." PhD Diss. Murdoch University, 1994.
- Daniel, Helen. "'The Liar's Lump' or 'a Salesman's Sense of History': Peter Carey's Illywhacker." Southerly 47 (1986): 157-67.
- Darian-Smith, Kate, Liz Gunner, and Sarah Nuttall, eds. Text, Theory, Space: Land, Literature and History in South Africa and Australia. London: Routledge, 1996.
- Davis, Robert Murray. "West Meets East: A Conversation with Frank Chin." Amerasia 24.1 (1998): 87-103.
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature. Trans. Dana Polan. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986.
- Deves, Michael. "Brian Castro: Hybridity, Identity, Reality." Land and Identity: Proceedings of the Nineteenth Annual Conference 1997, ASAL. Eds. Jennifer McDonnell and Michael Deves. Canberra: ASAL, 1997. 220-25.
- Donald, Stephanie Hemelryk. "Seeing White -- Female Whiteness and the Purity of Children in Australian, Chinese and British Visual Culture." Social Semiotics 10.2 (2000): 157-71.
- Drewe, Robert. "A Cry in the Jungle Bar: Australians in Asia." Meridian 5.2 (1986): 133-39.
- Dyer, Richard. "White." Screen 29.4 (1988): 44-64.
- . "The Role of Stereotypes." Matter of Images: Essays on Representation. London: Routledge, 2002. 11-18.

- Edwards, Penny, and Shen Yuan-Fang, eds. Lost in the Whitewash: Aboriginal-Asian Encounters, 1901-2001. Canberra: Humanities Research Centre, 2003.
- Eng, David L. Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America. Durham: Duke University Press, 2001.
- Fang, Jincai. "The Crisis of Emasculation and the Restoration of Patriarchy in the Fiction of Chinese Contemporary Writers Zhang Xianlong, Mo Yan and Jia Pingwa." PhD Diss. University of British Columbia, 2004.
- Fanon, Frantz. Black Skin White Masks. New York: Grove Press, 1967.
- Fletcher, M. D. "Post-Colonial Peter Carey." Span 32 (1991): 12-23.
- Foucault, Michel. "What Is an Author?" Textual Strategies: Perspectives on Post-Structuralist Criticism. Ed. J. V. Harari. New York: Cornell University Press, 1979. 141-60.
- . "Of Other Spaces." Diacritics 16.1 (1986): 22-27.
- . The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences. New York: Vintage, 1994.
- Freud, Sigmund. "Repression." Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Ed. James Strachey. Vol. XIV. London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1915. 147-58.
- . "Mourning and Melancholia." Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Ed. James Strachey. Vol. XIV. London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1917. 243-58.
- . "The Ego and the Id." Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Ed. James Strachey. Vol. XIX. London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1923. 19-27.
- Fung, Eileen Chia-Ching. "'To Eat the Flesh of His Dead Mother': Hunger, Masculinity, and Nationalism in Frank Chin's Donald Duk." LIT: Literature Interpretation Theory 10 (2001): 255-74.
- Furth, Charlotte. "Androgynous Males and Deficient Females: Biology in Sixteenth and Seventeenth China." Late Imperial China 9.2 (1988): 1-31.

- . A Flourishing Yin: Gender in China's Medical History, 960-1665. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.
- Garber, Marjorie. "The Occidental Tourist: M. Butterfly and the Scandal of Transvestism." Nationalisms and Sexualities. Eds. Andrew Parker, et al. London: Routledge, 1991. 121-46.
- Geertz, Clifford. The Religion of Java. New York: The Free Press, 1960.
- Genette, Gerard. Narrative Discourse. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980.
- Gerston, Robin. "A Bellyful of Bali: Travel Writing and Australia/Asia Relationships." Australian Literary Studies 17.4 (1996): 253-63.
- Gibson, Ross. South of the West: Postcolonialism and the Narrative Construction of Australia. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992.
- Giese, Diana. Astronauts, Lost Souls and Dragons: Voices of Today's Chinese Australians in Conversation. St Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press, 1997.
- Gilroy, Paul. The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness. London: Verso, 1993.
- Ginzburg, Natalia. Family Sayings. Manchester: Carcanet, 1984.
- Goellnicht, Donald C. "A Long Labour: The Protracted Birth of Asian Canadian Literature." Essays on Canadian Writing 72 (2000): 1-41.
- Grenville, Kate. The Idea of Perfection. South Melbourne: Picador, 1999.
- Gunew, Sneja. "Playing Centre Field: Representation and Cultural Difference." Representation, Discourse and Desire: Contemporary Australian Culture and Critical Theory. Ed. Patrick Fuery. Melbourne: Longman Chesire, 1994. 86-98.
- Gupta, Akhil and James Ferguson. "'Culture': Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference." Cultural Anthropology 7.1 (1992): 6-23.
- Hadlock, Philip G. "The Light Continent: On Melancholia and Masculinity in Maupassant's 'Lui?' and 'Une Famille'." Style 35.1 (2001): 79-98.
- Hage, Ghassan. "Locating Multiculturalism's Other." New Formations 24 (1994): 19-34.

- . White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in a Multicultural Society. Sydney: Pluto, 1998.
- Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." Identity: Community, Culture, Difference. Ed. Jonathan Rutherford. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990. 222-37.
- Hall, Stuart, ed. Representations: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices. London: Sage, 1997.
- Hallam, Elizabeth, and Brian V. Street, eds. Cultural Encounters: Representing "Otherness". London: Routledge, 2000.
- Hamilton, Annette. "Fear and Desire: Aborigines, Asians, and the National Imaginary." Australian Cultural History 9 (1990): 14-35.
- Harley, J. B. "Silences and Secrecy: The Hidden Agenda of Cartography in Early Modern Europe." Imago Mundi 40 (1988): 57-76.
- . "Deconstructing the Map." Writing Worlds: Discourse, Text, and Metaphor in the Representation of Landscape. Eds. Trevor Barnes and Nancy Duncan. New York: Routledge, 1992. 231-47.
- Hassall, Anthony J. Dancing on Hot Macadam: Peter Carey's Fiction. St Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press, 1994.
- Hattori, Tomo. "The China Man Autoeroticism and the Remains of Asian America." Novel: A Forum on Fiction 31.2 (1998): 215-27.
- Hetherington, Kevin. "The Utopics of Social Ordering -- Stonehenge as a Museum Without Walls." Theorizing Museums: Representing Identity and Diversity in a Changing World. Eds. Sharon Macdonald and Gordon Fyfe. Oxford: Blackwell, 1996. 153-76.
- Hibbins, Ray. "Male Identities among Chinese Migrants." Asian Masculinities: The Meaning and Practice of Manhood in China and Japan. Eds. Kam Louie and Morris Low. London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003. 197-219.
- hooks, bell. Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics. Boston: South End, 1990.
- Huang, Yuanshen. "Ancestor Complex: A Reading of The Ancestor Game." Meridian 15.1 (1996): 90-100.

- Huggan, Graham. Peter Carey. Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- . The Post-Colonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins. London: Routledge, 2001.
- Hutcheon, Linda. Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction. London: Routledge, 1988.
- Hutnyk, John. "Hybridity." Ethnic and Racial Studies 28.1 (2005): 79-102.
- Jacobs, Lyn. "The 'Good Oil': Eucalypts and Murray Bail's Eucalyptus." Antipodes 15.1 (2001): 40-46.
- . "About Face: Asian-Australians at Home." Australian Literary Studies 20.3 (2002): 201-14.
- Jameson, Fredric. Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature: Modernism and Imperialism. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988.
- JanMohamed, Abdul. "The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonial Literature." Critical Inquiry 12.1 (1985): 59-86.
- Kato, Megumi. "Representations of Japan and Japanese People in Australian Literature." PhD Diss. University of New South Wales, 2005.
- Khoo, Olivia. "Whiteness and the Australia Fiancé: Framing the Ornamental Text in Australia." Hecate 27.2 (2001): 68-85.
- . "The Chinese Exotic: Contemporary Visibilities of Diasporic Femininity." PhD Diss. University of Melbourne, 2002.
- Khoo, Tseen. Banana Bending: Asian-Australian & Asian-Canadian Literatures. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2003.
- . "'Angry Yellow Men': Cultural Space for Diasporic Chinese Masculinities." Asian Masculinities: The Meaning and Practice of Manhood in China and Japan. Eds. Kam Louie and Morris Low. London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003.
- . "Selling Sexotica: Oriental Grunge and Suburbia in Lillian Ng's Swallowing Clouds." Journal of Australian Studies June 65 (2001): 164-172.
- King, Francis. "A Man, Two Women and a Dog." Rev. of The Idea of Perfection, by Kate Grenville. The Spectator 16 June 2001: 14.

- Kirby, Kathleen M. Indifferent Boundaries: Spatial Concepts of Human Subjectivity. New York: Guilford, 1996.
- Ko, Dorothy. "Footbinding in the Museum." Interventions 5.3 (2003): 426-39.
- Koch, C. J. The Year of Living Dangerously. Melbourne: Thomas Nelson, 1978.
- Koh, Tai Ann. "'Crossing That Little Bridge into Asia, with the Ghost of Empire About Us': Australian Fiction Set in Southeast Asia." Westerly 4 (1993): 20-32.
- Koshy, Susan. "Asian American Literature: Institutional Legacies." The Yale Journal of Criticism 9 (1996): 315-46.
- Krishnaswamy, Revathi. "Mythologies of Migrancy: Postcolonialism, Postmodernism and the Politics of (Dis)Location." Ariel 26.1 (1995): 125-46.
- Kristeva, Julia. Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.
- Kurtzer, Sonja. "Wandering Girl: Who Defines 'Authenticity' in Aboriginal Literature." Southerly 58.2 (1998): 20-28.
- Kushner, Tony. "Selling Racism: History, Heritage, Gender and the (Re)Production of Prejudice." Patterns of Prejudice 33.4 (1999): 67-86.
- La Breche, David S. "Australian Reflections in a Mirror Clouded by Dust: The Search for the Self, Soul and the 'Other' in the Asian Novels of Blanche D'alpuget and Christopher J. Koch." PhD Diss. Universitat Trier, 2001.
- Lacan, Jacques. The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Norton, 1981.
- Laclau, Ernesto. "Universalism, Particularism, and the Question of Identity." October 61 (1992): 83-90.
- . "Subject of Politics, Politics of the Subject." Differences 7.1 (1995): 146-64.
- Lake, Marilyn. "The Politics of Respectability: Identifying the Masculinist Context." Debutante Nation. Eds. Susan Magarey, Sue Rowley and Susan Sheridan. St Leonards, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 1993.

- Lamb, Karen. Peter Carey: The Genesis of Fame. Pymble, NSW: Angus & Robertson, 1992.
- Larson, Wendy. "The Self Loving the Self: Men and Connoisseurship in Modern Chinese Literature." Chinese Femininities Chinese Masculinities. Eds. Susan Brownell and Jeffery N. Wasserstrom. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002. 175-93.
- Lau, Siew Mei. Playing Madam Mao. Rose Bay, NSW: Brandl & Schlesinger, 2000.
- Lazaroo, Simone. The World Waiting to Be Made. Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1994.
- . The Australian Fiancé. Sydney: Pan Macmillan, 2000.
- Lee, Rachel C. "The Erasure of Places and the Re-Siting of Empire in Wendy Law-Yone's The Coffin Tree." Cultural Critique 35 (1996): 149-78.
- Lee, Rachel C. The Americas of Asian American Literature: Gendered Fictions of Nation and Transnation. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1999.
- Li, David Leiwei. "The Formation of Frank Chin and the Formation of Chinese American Literature." Asian Americans: Comparative and Global Perspectives. Eds. Shirley Hune, et al. Pullman: Washington State University, 1991. 211-23.
- Liang, Fen. "Castro's After China in China." Bastard Moon: Essays on Chinese-Australian Writing. Ed. Wenche Ommundsen. Melbourne: Otherland, 2001. 83-94.
- Lidchi, Henrietta. "The Poetics and the Politics of Exhibiting Other Cultures." Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices. Ed. Stuart Hall. London: Sage, 1997. 151-208.
- Lim, Shirley Geok-lin. "Asian American Daughters Rewriting Asian Maternal Texts." Asian Americans: Comparative and Global Perspectives. Eds. Shirley Hune, et al. Pullman: Washington State University Press, 1991. 239-48.
- Ling, L. H. M. "Sex Machine: Global Hypermasculinity and Images of the Asian Woman in Modernity." Positions 7.2 (1999): 277-306.

- Liu, Guande, and Jun Huangfu. Bitter Peaches and Plums: Two Chinese Novellas on the Recent Chinese Student Experience in Australia. Trans. J. Bruce Jacobs and Ouyang Yu. Clayton: Monash Asian Institute, 1995.
- Liu, Lydia H. "The Female Body and Nationalist Discourse: The Field of Life and Death Revisited." Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices. Eds. Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994. 37-62.
- . "Invention and Intervention: The Making of a Female Tradition in Modern Chinese Literature." Chinese Femininities Chinese Masculinities. Eds. Susan Brownell and Jeffery N. Wasserstrom. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002. 149-74.
- Lo, Jacqueline. "Beyond Happy Hybridity: Performing Asian-Australian Identities." Alter/Asians. Eds. Ien Ang, et al. Sydney: Pluto, 2000. 152-68.
- Lo, Jacqueline, Tseen Khoo, and Helen Gilbert. "New Formations in Asian-Australian Cultural Politics." Journal of Australian Studies June 65 (2001): 1-12.
- Louie, Kam. Theorising Chinese Masculinity: Society and Gender in China. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- . "Chinese, Japanese and Global Masculine Identities." Asian Masculinities: The Meaning and Practice of Manhood in China and Japan. Eds. Kam Louie and Morris Low. London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003. 1-15.
- . "Decentring Orientalist and Ocker Masculinities in Birds of Passage." Culture, Identity, Commodity: Diasporic Chinese Literatures in English. Eds. Tseen Khoo and Kam Louie. Hong Kong: Hong University Press, 2005. 183-204.
- Lu, Sheldon H. "Soap Opera in China: The Transnational Politics of Visuality, Sexuality, and Masculinity." Cinema Journal 40.1 (2000).
- Lu, Tonglin. Misogyny, Cultural Nihilism, and Oppositional Politics. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995.
- Luke, Allan. "Representing and Reconstructing Asian Masculinities: This Is Not a Movie Review." Social Alternatives 16.3 (1997). 32-4.
- Lydon, Jane. Many Inventions: The Chinese in the Rocks 1890-1930. Clayton: Monash Publications in History, 1999.

- Macdonald, Sharon, and Gordon Fyfe, eds. Theorizing Museums: Representing Identity and Diversity in a Changing World. Oxford: Blackwell, 1996.
- Marcus, Julie. "Towards an Erotics of the Museum." Cultural Encounters: Representing "Otherness". Eds. Elizabeth Hallam and Brian V. Street. London: Routledge, 2000. 229-44.
- Martin, Adrian. Phantasms. Ringwood: McPhee Gribble, 1994.
- Marx, Karl. Capital: A Critique of Political Economy. Trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling. Ed. Fredrick Engels. Vol. 1. 3 vols. London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1976.
- Massey, Doreen. Space, Place and Gender. Cambridge: Polity, 1994.
- Matthews, Julie. "Deconstructing the Visual: The Diasporic Hybridity of Asian and Eurasian Female Images." Intersections 8. 2002. Available: <http://www.she.murdoch.edu.au/intersections/issue8/matthews.html>. 20 November 2005.
- McClintock, Anne. Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest. New York: Routledge, 1995.
- . "'No Longer a Future in Heaven': Gender, Race, and Nationalism." Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation and Postcolonial Perspectives. Eds. Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti and Ella Shohat. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997. 89-112.
- McCluskey, Phil. "The Handsomest Drowned Man in the Outback: Contextualising a Structural Magic Realism." Span 36 (1993): 88-94.
- McGowan, Barry. "Reconsidering Race: The Chinese Experience on the Goldfields of Southern New South Wales." Australian Historical Studies 36.124 (2004): 312-31.
- McMaster, Don. Asylum Seekers: Australia's Response to Refugees. Carlton South, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 2002.
- Mercer, Kobena. "Welcome to the Jungle: Identity and Diversity in Postmodern Politics." Identity: Community, Culture, Difference. Ed. Jonathan Rutherford. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990. 43-71.

- . "Reading Racial Fetishism: The Photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe." Fetishism as Cultural Discourse. Eds. Emily Apter and William Pietz. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993. 307-29.
- Metzger, Sean. "Charles Parsloe's Chinese Fetish: An Example of Yellowface Performance in Nineteenth-Century American Melodrama." Theatre Journal 56.4 (2004): 627-51.
- Miller, Alex. The Ancestor Game. Ringwood: Penguin Books, 1992.
- . "Chasing My Tale." Kunapipi 15.3 (1993): 1-6.
- Milne, John. "Overcoming Australia's Regional Image Problem." Australia in the World: Perceptions and Possibilities. Eds. Don Grant and Graham Seal. Perth: Black Swan, 1994. 283-90.
- Min, Susette. "Remains to Be Seen: Reading the Works of Dean Sameshima and Khanh Vo." Loss. Eds. David L. Eng and David Kazanjian. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003. 229-50.
- Moreton-Robinson, A. "Unmasking Whiteness: A Goori Jandal's Look at Some Duggai Business." Unmasking Whiteness: Race Relations and Reconciliation. Ed. Belinda McKay. Nathan: Queensland Studies Centre, 1999. 28-36.
- Moy, James. Marginal Sights: Staging the Chinese in America. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1993.
- Mullen, Harryette. "Optic White: Blackness and the Production of Whiteness." Diacritics 24.2/3 (1994): 71-89.
- Mulvey, Laura. "Some Thoughts on Theories of Fetishism in the Context of Contemporary Culture." October 65 (1993): 3-20.
- . "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." Feminism: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism. Ed. Robyn R. Warhol. London: Macmillan, 1997.
- Nettlebeck, Amanda. "'The Two Halves': Questions of Post-Colonial Theory and Practice in Christopher Koch's The Year of Living Dangerously." Span 32 (1991): 3-8.
- Neumann, Karl. Refuge Australia: Australia's Humanitarian Record. Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2004.

Ng, Lillian. Swallowing Clouds. Ringwood: Penguin, 1997.

Ommundsen, Wenche. "After Castro, Post Multiculturalism?" Tirra Lirra 5.2 (1994): 10-13.

---. "Multiculturalism, Identity, Displacement: The Lives of Brian (Castro)." From a Distance: Australian Writers and Cultural Displacement. Eds. Wenche Ommundsen and Hazel Rowley. Geelong: Deakin University Press, 1996. 149-158.

---. "Sleep No More: Ouyang Yu's Wake-up Call to Multicultural Australia." Culture, Identity, Commodity: Diasporic Chinese Literatures in English. Eds. Tseen Khoo and Kam Louie. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005. 231-51.

Ommundsen, Susan. "Shifting Light and Shadow." Southerly 60.2 (2000): 190-92.

Ong, Aihwa. "On the Edge of Empires: Flexible Citizenship among Chinese in Diaspora." Positions 1.3 (1993): 745-78.

Ouyang, Yu. "Australian Invention of Chinese Invasion: A Century of Paranoia." Australian Literary Studies 17.1 (1995): 74-83.

---. "The Ultimate Other: Recent Representations of Chinese in Australian Fiction 1988-1994." Tirra Lirra 16.2-3 (1996): 42-44.

---. Biaoxian Ta Zhe: Aodaliya Xiaoshuo Zhongde Zhongguoren: 1888-1988 (Representing the other, the Chinese in Australian fiction: 1888-1988). Beijing: Xinhua chubanshe, 2000.

---. "An Interview with Brian Castro." Bastard Moon: Essays on Chinese-Australian Writing. Ed. Wenche Ommundsen. Melbourne: Otherland, 2001. 73-81.

---. The Eastern Slope Chronicle. Blackheath, NSW: Brandl & Schlesinger, 2002.

Palumbo-Liu, David. "Universalisms and Minority Culture." Differences 7.1 (1995): 188-208.

Pearce, Susan M. Museums, Objects and Collections: A Cultural Study. Leicester and London: Leicester University Press, 1992.

Perera, Suvendrini. "Whiteness and Its Discontents: Notes on Politics, Gender, Sex and Food in the Year of Hanson." Journal of Intercultural Studies 20.2 (1999): 183-98.

Pierce, Peter. "'Things Are Cast Adrift': Brian Castro's Fiction." Australian Literary Studies 17.2 (1995): 149-56.

---. "The Solitariness of Alex Miller." Australian Literary Studies 21.3 (2004): 299-311.

Pietz, William. "The Problem of the Fetish, I." Res 9 (1985): 5-17.

---. "The Problem of the Fetish, II." Res 13 (1986).

---. "The Problem of the Fetish, IIIa." Res 16 (1988): 105-23.

Pons, Xavier. "Impossible Coincidences: Narrative Strategy in Brian Castro's Birds of Passage." Australian Literary Studies 14.4 (1990): 464-76.

Prasso, Sheridan. The Asian Mystique: Dragon Ladies, Geisha Girls, & Our Fantasies of the Exotic Orient. New York: Public Affairs, 2005.

Price, Charles A. The Great White Walls Are Built: Restrictive Immigration to North America and Australia, 1836-1888. Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1974.

Pyke, Karen D., and Denise L. Johnson. "Asian American Women and Racialized Femininities: "Doing" Gender across Cultural Worlds." Gender and Society 17.1 (2003): 33-53.

Ramsay, Guy. "Myth, Moment and the Challenge of Identities: Stories from Australians of Indigenous and Chinese Ancestry." Journal of Intercultural Studies 22.3 (2001): 263-78.

Ravenscroft, Alison. "A Picture in Black and White: Modernism, Postmodernism and the Scene of 'Race'." Australian Feminist Studies 18.42 (2003): 233-44.

---. "The Girl in the Picture and the Eye of Her Beholder: Viet Nam, Whiteness, and the Disavowal of Indigeneity." Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies 18.4 (2004): 509-24.

Reynolds, Bryan , and Joseph Fitzpatrick. "The Transversality of Michel De Certeau: Foucault's Panoptic Discourse and the Cartographic Impulse." Diacritics 29.3 (1999): 63-80.

Reynolds, Henry. The Other Side of the Frontier. Townsville: James Cook University, 1981.

Rhine, Marjorie E. "Reading as Mapping: Max Yeh's The Beginning of the East." Melus 24.4 (1999): 157-72.

Ridchi, Henrietta. "The Poetics and the Politics of Exhibiting Other Cultures." Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices. Ed. Stuart Hall. London: Sage, 1997. 151-208.

Riegel, Henrietta. "Into the Heart of Irony: Ethnographic Exhibitions and the Politics of Difference." Theorizing Museums: Representing Identity and Diversity in a Changing World. Eds. Sharon Macdonald and Gordon Fyfe. Oxford: Blackwell, 1996. 83-104.

Rimmon-Kenan, Shlomith. Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics. London, New York: Methuen, 1983.

Robb, Sandi. "Myths, Lies and Invisible Lives: European Women and Chinese Men in North Queensland 1870-1900." Lilith 12 (2003): 95-109.

Robertson, Jo. "Does It Matter Who Authorises the Discourse? Michel De Certeau's Heterologies and Black and White Australian Literary Criticism." Social Semiotics 6.2 (1996): 247-61.

Rolls, Eric. Sojourners: Flowers and the Wide Sea. St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1992.

Roskies, D. M. "A View of Asia from Down Under: The Politics of Re-Presentation in The Year of Living Dangerously." World Literature in English 29.2 (1985): 35-50.

Rowley, Sue. "Imagination, Madness and Nation in Australia Bush Mythology." Text, Theory, Space: Land, Literature and History in South Africa and Australia. Eds. Kate Darian-Smith, Liz Gunner and Sarah Nuttall. London: Routledge, 1996. 131-44.

Rushdie, Salman. Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991. London: Granta, 1992.

Rutherford, Jennifer. The Gauche Intruder: Freud, Lacan and the White Australian Fantasy. Carlton South, Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 2000.

Ryle, Gerald. "An Author Arrives with a Work of Love." The Age May 26 1993: 1.

Safran, William. "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return." Diaspora 1.1 (1991): 83-99.

Said, Edward. "The Text, the World, the Critic." Textual Strategies: Perspectives on Post-Structuralist Criticism. Ed. J. V. Harari. New York: Cornell University Press, 1979. 161-88.

---. Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient. London: Penguin Books, 1995.

San Juan, E. Jr. "Symbolic Violence and the Fetishism of the Sublime: A Metacommentary of David Hwang's M. Butterfly." Journal of Intercultural Studies 23.1 (2002): 33-46.

Sang, Ye. The Year the Dragon Came. St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1996.

Scott, Joan. "The Evidence of Experience." Critical Inquiry 17 (1991): 773-97.

Shelton, Anthony, et al. Fetishism: Visualising Power and Desire. London: South Bank Centre; Royal Pavilion, Art Gallery and Museums, 1995.

Shen, Yichen. "The Site of Domestic Violence and the Altar of Phallic Sacrifice in Gus Lee's China Boy." College Literature 29.2 (2002): 99-113.

Shen, Yuan Fang. "China Girls: Australian Literary Representations of Chinese Women." Southern Review 29.1 (1996): 39-49.

Shi, Nai'an, and Luo Guanzhong. Outlaws of the Marsh. Trans. Sidney Shapiro. 2 vols. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1981.

Shih, Shu-mei. The Lure of the Modern: Writing Modernism in Semicolonial China, 1917-1937. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.

Silverman, Kaja. Male Subjectivity at the Margins. New York: Routledge, 1992.

---. The Threshold of the Visible World. New York: Routledge, 1996.

Silvers, Ronald. "Photography, Sympatheia, and Canada's Visual Heritage." 2005. Available: <http://www.museums.ca/Cma1/ProgramsProjects/diversity/Pubphsympat.htm>. 6 June 2005.

Soja, Edward W. Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory. London and New York: Verso, 1989.

- . Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real and Imagined Places. Oxford, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1996.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Culture Alive." Australian Feminist Law Journal 5 (1995): 3-11.
- Stephenson, Peta. "Cross-Cultural Alliances: Exploring Aboriginal-Asian Literary and Cultural Production." Lost in the Whitewash: Aboriginal-Asian Encounters, 1901-2001. Eds. Louise Edwards and Shen Yuanfang. Canberra: Humanities Research Centre, 2003.
- Stewart, Kathleen. "Nostalgia -- a Polemic." Cultural Anthropology 3.3 (1988): 227-41.
- . "On the Politics of Cultural Theory: A Case for 'Contaminated' Cultural Critique." Social Research 58.2 (1991): 395-412.
- Stewart, Susan. On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984.
- Tang, Xiaobing. "Melancholy against the Grain: Approaching Postmodernity in Wang Anyi's Tales of Sorrow." Boundary 2 24.3 (1997): 177-99.
- Tavan, Gwenda. The Long, Slow Death of White Australia. Sydney: Scribe, 2005.
- Teo, Hsu-Ming. Love and Vertigo. Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2000.
- . "Literature, History and the Imagination of Australianness." Australian Historical Studies 118 (2002): 127-39.
- Thieme, John. "Re-Mapping the Australian Psyche: The Asian Novels of C. J. Koch." Southerly 47.4 (1987): 451-61.
- Thwaites, Tony. "More Tramps at Home: Seeing Australia First." Meanjin 46 (1987): 400-09.
- Tiffen, Helen. "Asia, Europe and Australian Identity: The Novels of Christopher Koch." Australian Literary Studies 10.3 (1982): 326-35.
- . "Asia and the Contemporary Australian Novel." Australian Literary Studies 11.4 (1984): 468-79.
- Tucker, Shirley. "Asian-Australian Women's Writing: Literary Re-Orientations." PhD. Diss. University of Queensland, 1999.

- . "Beyond Belief: Representation and Revolt in Lillian Ng's Swallowing Clouds." Bastard Moon: Essays on Chinese-Australian Writing. Ed. Wenche Ommundsen. Melbourne: Otherland, 2001. 125-43.
- . "The Great Southern Land: Asian-Australian Women Writers Re-View the Australian Landscape." Australian Literary Studies 25.1 (2003): 178-88.
- van Gulik, R. H. Sexual Life in Ancient China. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974.
- Viviani, Nancy, ed. The Abolition of the White Australia Policy: The Immigration Reform Movement Revisited. Nathan: Griffith University, 1992.
- Wagner, Tamara S. "'After Another Round of Tissues': 'Bad Time' Fiction and the Amy Tan-Syndrome in Recent Singaporean Novels." Journal of Commonwealth Literature 38.2 (2003): 19-39.
- Walker, David. Anxious Nation: Australia and the Rise of Asia 1850-1939. St Lucia: Queensland University Press, 1999.
- Wang, Yuejin. "Red Sorghum: Mixing Memory and Desire." Perspectives on Chinese Cinema. Ed. Chris Berry. London: BFI Publishing, 1991. 80-103.
- Wang, Yiyan. "Mr Butterfly in Defunct Capital: 'Soft' Masculinity and (Mis)Engendering China." Asian Masculinities: The Meaning and Practice of Manhood in China and Japan. Eds. Kam Louie and Morris Low. London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003. 41-58.
- Weinbaum, Alys Eve. "Ways of Not Seeing: (En)Gendered Optics in Benjamin, Baudelaire, and Freud." Loss: The Politics of Mourning. Eds. David L. Eng and David Kazanjian. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003. 396-426.
- Wigley, Mark. "Untitled: The Housing of Gender." Sexuality and Space. Ed. Beatriz Colomina. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992. 327-89.
- Wong, Sau-ling Cynthia. Reading Asian American Literature: From Necessity to Extravagance. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993.
- . "Denationalization Reconsidered: Asian American Cultural Criticism at a Theoretical Crossroads." Amerasia 21.1 & 2 (1995): 127.
- Wu, Cuncun. "'Beautiful Boys Made up as Beautiful Girls': Anti-Masculine Taste in Qing China." Asian Masculinities: The Meaning and Practice of Manhood in

- China and Japan. Eds. Kam Louie and Morris Low. London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003. 19-40.
- Yue, Audrey "Post-Declaration Hong Kong: Migration-as-Transition." Intersections. 4. 2000. Available: <http://www.she.murdoch.edu.au/intersections/issue4/yue.html>. 2 Sept. 2004.
- Zamora, Lois Parkinson, and Wendy B. Faris. "Daiquiri Birds and Flaubertian Parrot(ie)s." Introduction: Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community. Eds. Lois Parkinson Zamora, and Wendy B. Faris. Durham: Duke University Press, 1995. 1-12.
- Zha, Jianying. China Pop: How Soap Operas, Tabloids, and Bestsellers Are Transforming a Culture. New York: New Press, 1995.
- Zhang, Benzi. "Identity in Diaspora and Diaspora in Writing: The Poetics of Cultural Transrelation." Journal of Intercultural Studies 21.2 (2000): 125-42.
- Zhang, Jie. "Ai shi buneng wangji de" (Love must not be forgotten). Beijing wenyi 11 (1979): 19-27.
- . "Fang zhou" (The Ark). Shouhuo 2 (1982): 4-59.
- Zhang, Xinxin. "Wo zai na'er cuoguo le ni?" (Where did I miss you?). Shouhuo 5 (1980): 91-105.
- . "Zai tongyi dipingxian shang" (On the same horizon). Shouhuo 6 (1981): 172-233
- Zhong, Xueping. Masculinity Besieged: Issues of Modernity and Male Subjectivity in Chinese Literature of the Late Twentieth Century. Durham: Duke University Press, 2000.
- Zizek, Slavoj. "Melancholy and the Act." Critical Inquiry 26 (2000): 657-81.
- Zolberg, Vera. "Museums as Contested Sites of Remembrance: The Enola Gay Affair." Theorizing Museums: Representing Identity and Diversity in a Changing World. Eds. Sharon Macdonald and Gordon Fyfe. Oxford: Blackwell, 1996. 69-82.

