

Chapter One

AIRHEAD

THE FIRST THING he ever uttered was “Marmaa”. Or so his marmaa said. The first thing he ever gurgled was “Daadaar”. Or so his dadaar said. The first thing Nathan ever said he said was this: “Who are these people?”

Not much had changed in the proceeding years. Or so he claimed, contending he was still surrounded by friends who thought they knew him. But didn't. Drawing Wander to eye level, he checked her batteries. Finding she was as full as he wanted to be, Wright began typing:

“... My life is certainly not what it was.

I've got wealth. So I don't need wisdom. Or looks. Or integrity apparently. Rich beyond my wildest, most avaricious dreams, I'm the mercedes porsche him of my fantasies.

I've got bodyguards. So I don't need biceps. I've got fame and fortune so I don't need friends. I've got women from the pages of Penthouse offering to do things with me in positions only the seriously deranged, or seriously supple, would contemplate...”

With the swift violence of an obsolete lover going for the throat of the once loved them one, the aircraft leapt into a darkening sky. Stretched out by a tiny freeze repelling window now protecting him from an extraordinarily frigid exterior (only the odd Eskimo and the husbands' of all too many

unhappy spouses had hitherto encountered) Wright was busily waffling into his electric insanity sponge, a slate grey Macintosh lap top.

“But I’m not happy. Somehow I’m still managing to achieve first degree tedium. How? Why? Christ, I’m bound for London and hope and the tawdry joys of the rampantly wealthy ...yet? Somehow I’m still courting mind-numbing monotony. Hell, I’m surrounded by champagne, caviar and the fast curves of an angel eyed airhostess and I’m still managing to bore myself into premature hibernation. How? Why?”

Just what on God’s desecrated earth could possibly be so extraordinarily dull amongst such delicious distractions as to send me to sleep for the next few millennia?

Truth is I’m attempting fate and tempting coma.

Fact is I’m writing about myself... ”

As was his habit, for Nathan N. Wright gave an identity to everything he begged, borrowed or threw against the nearest wall when it decided to malfunction, the computer had been named in honour of his dear demented Grandmother. Or to be more specific, the behaviour his dear deranged Grandmother had so diligently displayed. When he erred; when he touched the Mac in all the wrong places (an all too common occurrence the females Nathan knew naged) it would do a Gran. And forget everything he’d just told it.

Just like his Gran did. Although her memory did seem as selective as the machine’s for Wright had often told her she was crazy. But she forgot about that. Once some-one told her Wright was crazy. She didn’t forget that. Consequently, she kept knitting him white coats with overly long sleeves that buckled at the back in evidence of her retarded recall.

She was also a chronic wanderer. An ever shuffling, blue dressing-gowned escapee from the home for the aged where she was supposed to be staying. PUT. Such assiduous ambling, of both mind and bent body, gave Wright the idea.

He called Mac - Wander.

THE STORY: With the demise of any semblance of sanity, Wright's Gran would, walking frame supporting the hunched her, saunter the streets as lost as her brain was.

Such rogue behaviour forced the local constabulary to give up the more onerous duties such as catching crooks or chasing child molester's. Or getting the phone numbers of good looking girls in fast cars to go pensioner hunting. Guns drawn, patience exhausted, they'd search the suburbs for this shuffling refugee (from anything resembling reality). Unfortunately, thus-far anyway, the plods' better instincts had prevailed. They hadn't done an Oswald and blown her away. They'd merely arrest the stooped stray and swear at her. Loudly. (Which was bloody pointless because she was as deaf as she was dumb). Bound and gagged, they'd return her to the home for the tremendously old farts from whence she'd escaped. Nightly. Or so it seemed to the local upholders of law and order for she'd simply continue her habitual meanderings.

Using oxyacetylene equipment borrowed from Ted, the pyromaniac ex-plumber in the next room (who had a crush on her, so would lend her anything. Even his teeth. Which were as false as her promise to give him head one-day) she'd cut through the steel bars Wright had personally installed to contain the idiot Houdini. Awkwardly, she'd fall out the window, usually landing face first and so appearing to the plod, when they finally nabbed her, face caked in garden dirt, like Al Jolsen reincarnate.

Undeterred though by any earthy collision, she'd happily totter off in search of her lost youth and the twenty year dead, now cemetery sited, husband. (Once called Norm. Now called only via seance). There seemed to be no way of stopping such determined wanderings. (Nail her to the bed, Wright said). In desperation, Wright's parents (Wright's mum being Gran's daughter), weary of this gypsy streak and worried that some-day she'd stay lost forever, took action. They fixed a pulsing homing device around the old girl's throat so that the Australian Airforce could find her if the Victoria Police couldn't. Or wouldn't.

Fortunately for Gran, the Airforce was never called upon to find her. (Had they, the old girl would have been history. Target practice actually for the local constabulary had supplied squadrons of the RAAF with several thousand rounds of armour piercing bullets - an absolute necessity if the lethal slugs were to pierce the thirteen layers of Gran's armour plated undergarments).

As luck had it, the signal emanating from the radar necklace riveted about Grans' neck lured dogs like a well sprayed lamp post. So Gran soon forgot about lonely walks in search of the dead. To become a living lure instead. So the deranged canine Pied Piper was no longer a defence or police concern. Now she was the RSPCA's problem. These days, she's returned to the Shady Pines Rest Home for the Probably Deceased locked in a cage at the back of the municipal dog catcher's bright yellow van where she sits, happy as a pig in shit, crazily baying at an invisible moon; a pack of frenzied hounds all going for her buzzing throat.

Sometimes senility is a positive asset.

'Drink Sir?' Chanel daubed ever so lightly, skilfully, the perfume was arresting. Based on the scent and pitch of voice, Wright guessed it was an airhostess. (Either that or the Vienna Boys Choir had lost a member... who'd lost a member). Wright thought about asking for the first few bars of "Silent Night" but ignored the impulse. Too involved to glance up, he declined the offer with a grunt and continued wrestling with Wander until another voice interrupted. Dior this time.

It was Claire, Wright's private secretary. She was trying to wrest his attention away from the computer screen to a note dangling from her left hand. Smiling, Wright congratulated himself that he'd become so adept at recognising his staff by each individual's particular perfume. (Women staff anyway. The men could wear a distinctive brand of horse shit but he'd still refuse to know them).

Gentle, shortish, sweet Claire Morgan hovered over the seated Wright. (Poor sad Claire whose only brother Brett had decided to gas himself to hub-cap heaven several years earlier by attaching a green garden hose to the exhaust of his '66 Falcon Tri-matic and expired without so much as a note of exit explanation).

Wright was suddenly worried. Maybe this was IT. Brett's last will and waffle. Unsure he should accept any note that may have originated in the here-after, Wright glanced up, eyeing Claire for any tell-tale, face-worn reflection as to what the piece of paper contained. As her expression was quite blank, there was no alternative but to read the thing. Grasping the limp sheet, he scanned it to reassure himself. Though it wasn't from Claire's buried brother, it was almost as deadly. As deadly boring anyway.

It was a facsimile from mum:

“Nathan dearest, have you packed enough warm things? Have you taken enough handkerchiefs? Have you remembered the gloves your grandmother knitted especially for you...”

Nathan frowned. What? The green left glove with eight fingers? The bright pink right one with a file, a lighter and a sock puppet of Hannibal Lechter for fingers?

If dreams had wings, this was his. (And if cliches could fly, Wright was their wind). Banking right, gaining height, the aircraft headed inland. With its spread of suburbia and infantile delusions of adequacy, Melbourne dissolved from Wright’s blinkered view like light frost from a warming spring leaf.

He loathed the place. Mainly, he claimed, because the place had always seemed to loathe him. Leaning on the armrest, face to the window, he watched intently as city became country. As the remnants of suburbia passed under the port wing, he found himself smiling in refugee relief as a censoring blanket of low cumulus engulfed the houses, hopes and misguided assumptions of a now dismissed home-town. Enveloping weather that soon chased off any malingering remnants of a past which had so stoutly refused to measure up to Wright’s desperate dreams.

Until recently anyway.

Sipping coffee from a bone china cup, wearing a white leather sleeved but otherwise blue baseball jacket over a white shirt Wright, Wander glued to a denim lap, finally relaxed. An old (as in ancient) school tie, also blue but with fine yellow diagonal stripes, hung lazily from the collar and worn to cover the fact that two shirt buttons were missing. Sinking back into the seat, feet up, head tilted back, he wondered if the long overdue meeting with the long over there ex-girlfriend would be go as he hoped.

Would Kelly greet his arrival with open arms? Or a closed fist?

Until SHE arrived. Sexism has its place. Currently, that was the patch of fire resistant, dew green carpet that SHE now occupied. Standing by the video screen in the lounge where Wright sat busy being oblivious to everything,

SHE tried to attract his attention. With the airport a recent blur, it was time for the obligatory safety lecture that Wright never took any notice of. Unless. Unless they were recited by a fantasy flown first class from one of his filthiest dreams. Which this one was. So Wright stopped courting oblivion to make like he was interested in what SHE had to say. Which he wasn't. That he could look at her while SHE said what he wasn't interested in. He was.

Ever the imbecile, Nathan wanted to assist HER in HER endeavours by adding some helpful suggestions of his own. Asinine comments like: if the plane explodes, pray you're not on it. Or if the plane turns submarine, make sure your soul's waterproof. But he restrained himself. Clammy palms resting in a now agitated lap, he stared, riveted by this stunning assembly of female features. SHE was tall, slim and very beautiful.

And, even more remarkable, SHE was telling him how to save himself.

Funny. When he was poor, most seemed more intent on dispatching him.

Back then, no-one aside from the Mormons - and the Lord Jesus that November night three years ago when Nathan swore Christ spoke to him from the depths of a mid-sinners night dream - had ever seemed the least bit interested in saving him. Lately this had changed though. Now that he was filthy rich, it seemed that every-one wanted to save him.

From spending his savings on any-one but them Wright said.

Spring rain thudded playfully against the windows of a top floor penthouse. It was three months ago, two in the morning and Sydney Harbour was a dull mass beyond the wind swept glass. Scratching his head, Nathan was trying to dislodge some ideas hunched over a large Italian marble topped desk that, the size of Madonna's ego, stood in the far corner by the lines of humming facsimile machines.

Bent over on a large pad, pens and coloured pencils scattered across the desktop, he'd finally settled on what he imagined was the most likely of the designs he'd drawn. He was creating the various uniforms his crew would require. Leaning back in the chair, he tried to imagine what the chosen alternatives may look like on. On something other than a page.

Eyes closed in deep deliberation, he wondered if his outfit ideas would

look good on.

Or better off - in the trash.

Better off, completely off, Wright grinned. Avoiding a direct stare, he did his best not to make it too obvious his lurid imagination was unwrapping her. Surely, if SHE was any evidence of his skills as a designer, Wright was a genius.

If she was any indication of his talents, standing there elegantly aloof in his creation, he was couturier the equal of Chanel, Dior or Lagerfield or Yves StLaurent.

Or his mad Aunt Bessie, also the designer of many fabulous creations. Usually dressing as a side salad, she sold herself at sleazy night clubs to wealthy vegans as an expensive entree to support her broccoli habit.

Who'd have believed such simple lines scrawled so freely back then could have sprung to life quite so perfectly? Certainly, Wright had been dubious. Chanel, Dior, Lagerfield, Yves StLaurent had been dubious. (And Aunt Bessie had just been certified).

Wright had showed them. SHE looked sensational. Blonde hair, pronounced breasts, a grip tight waist and moist lips. Too blue eyes positively aglow, smouldering with a pure luminescence only the young radiated, she was perfect. Wright smiled at the combination of elements. At his and God's creation. His was the outfit, SHE God's infit. Suddenly, heaven seemed closer than he'd ever dreamed he'd get.

Realising his attentions were becoming a trifle obvious, he reluctantly dressed her again, then, sliding back in his seat, pretended to be utterly disinterested.

Expertly, deftly tying one cord over the other, SHE demonstrated to Nathan how he should secure, then inflate, the life (immediately prior to death by drowning) jacket. In her left hand, where a portion of Wright had suddenly decided it wanted to live, SHE held aloft a cartoon card pictorially explaining the futility of attempting to survive should the aircraft decide to hurtle toward wall earth or shark swimming seas. Two sterling silver W's

were attached to either collar of her black shirt. An embroidered winged silver eagle was woven into the tie. Gliding about the lounge, firm thighs rippling feline beneath the impeccably tailored, all black two-piece suit, SHE went on to point out the various emergency exits, speaking casually of what to do in the unlikely event of a maybe death dive to the first off the plane, screw the women and children, chicken shit Nathan N. Wright.

While quite stunning, her outfit looked like it had been copied stitch for stitch, ornament for ornament from the '43 Waffen SS Catalogue (£12.95 postage and packaging). It was all eagles and icons.

SHE left, so with the show over, Wright started assaulting Wander again with his dysenteric diary:

“I have attempted this exercise in ego only once previous. I was ten at the time; it was sometime pre-history. About the time dinosaurs roamed the earth, pterodactyls ruled the skies and the primordial soup was still on simmer. Or so my friends claim.

Anyway, way back then, when men were Neanderthal's and women could be had for a barbecued slab of Tyrannosaurus, I couldn't be condemned for any lack of expertise in English. Heck, I was only a kid so it wasn't surprising that the extent of my vocabulary was on a par with that much more important of subjects. Sex. Basically ten under particularly bright. Back then, my understanding of the mating habits of humans consisted of a single rumour. A rumour which to my eternal embarrassment, I firmly believed. This was it: that babies were made by kissing any female over three foot three inches in height. I was hopelessly misinformed.

The result of such a shred of chronic disinformation was that I was to proceed to waste my formative years carrying a measuring tape - and dating midgets in a spectacularly successful effort to avoid premature parenthood. C'est le moron.

My sexual naivete aside, aged ten and a bit and due entirely to the fact that I was only aware of a staggeringly limited number of words, my diary was full of infantile stammerings. Immortal entries such as 'the cat sat on the mat' or 'my dog has big ears' were the best I could do.

I was no prodigy.

Ain't that the truth. And things don't seem to have improved much either.

Take it from me the man needs counselling. I inhabit his every fibre so I should know.

Oh, and as for that business about this being only his second attempt at detailing his delirious past - it's crap! (As, take it from me and save yourself any further eye strain, is his writing).

Wright, the would be if he could be John Irving, Kurt Vonnegut, Martin Amis. Or Homer, Dickens or Tolstoy. Shakespeare, Herbert or Donaldson. Or Bozo the Story writing Chimpanzee for that matter, has been at it for years.

Since childhood, his poor, long suffering mother has warned him to leave it alone, (and she wasn't referring to the circuits of a slate grey plastic machine then). But he won't listen so you can bet your wife's parents silver that when Wright's mum reads this putrid effort, she'll begin afresh.

Tell him what I'm continually telling him. Leave it alone!

('Cos this time, it's you lot who'll go blind!)

Chapter Two

FEEDING TIME

STRAYING from the small illuminated screen, Nathan stared out the window at an horizon of low cloud tinged orange by a setting sun, two red socked feet resting on the small coffee table in front of him. Smoke escaping lethargically from the cigarette dangling from between nicotine fingers, he reached for the glass of gin.

His area of the aircraft looked more like the lounge of an exclusive club. A few luxurious slate grey leather almost armchairs, each with their own half acre, had replaced the usual few thousand straight-jacket seats. This lack of others, the absence of noise and movement was a major improvement on his previous exits from Australia when, as poor as his grammar, he'd had to endure cramped confines and the chiropractic nightmare of a long flight in a cheap seat. There were no garlic soaked old men disintegrating beside him, no screaming huge elephantine beast oozing over the armrest. There was no-one tripping over his bent legs or running across a napping lap at four in the morning in an urgent dash to occupy the last unclogged toilet. Here, in contrast to his memories, it was quiet and comfortable.

Taking a sip, he savoured the moment until, half a plane ahead, he saw something which made him, or THAT meagre portion of him anyway, stir. Bending elegantly to serve fresh brewed tea or expensive Brazilian coffee to his overpaid staff, Wright caught a glimpse of HER, the blonde airhostess who'd sent his brain dead. He immediately decided that if the plane did happen to ditch, he'd use her for a life-jacket and drown content. Go down on her, with her.

Unfortunately he'd given instructions to be left alone. This sudden sight of HER made Wright regret such an order but unusually for him, he resisted the urge to summon the long limbed temptation. Realistically, he knew he had plenty of time to attempt liaison. He was also aware that this quiet time, considering the tight schedule ahead, might be the last opportunity he'd have to get some waffling done.

So he got some waffling done:

“Way back then, when I was still ten, my junior jottings consisted of compositions forged from words of three letters or less, forming paragraphs of two sentences or less, shaping an essay of one idea or less - forgettable prose of stunning simplicity. (I may not have been good but I sure was economical).

Anyway, the time has come to give it another go.

Now one of the most onerous tasks in writing is finding a suitable title. What do I call MY MEMORIES, supposing MY MEMORIES ever get beyond the microchip babble brain of this expensive machine? I mean buggar it, all the decent titles have been appropriated.

Perhaps I can steal and modify. How about ‘Withering Nights’ or ‘The Unbearable Lightness of Being Helium’? What about ‘Whore and Piss’ (an expose on an unfulfilled fantasy. And the condition of my alcohol smitten bladder) or ‘A Midsummer Night’s Stream’ (a further expose on the condition of my alcohol smitten bladder).

How about ‘The Bridle?’ (A religious text based upon the teachings of God the Almighty - in the fifth at Ascot).

Shit, why is it so difficult? Writing doesn’t seem that hard. Until you try it (much like golf, or love. Or attaining maturity). But from the research I’ve done huddled in bed with the odd book on a chill winters night, there does seem to be a formula to it (although this is difficult to say with any real certainty for there’s usually also the odd girl in there with me doing her worst to censor my studies).

I think I've discovered though, between bouts of heaving heavy breathing, just what the formula is.

It's this: there's a beginning, a middle bit, and an end.

Pretty basic eh? Well it ain't. Certainly life hasn't been that rudimentary or well defined. I mean where do I begin? At the beginning? Sure, I could share the violent push of birth with you, only I can't remember a damn thing about it (and mum wishes to forget my dive into life with equal amnesia) so just where exactly do I start? At three? Or four?

Or five or fourteen when my memory tells me I was a boy unlike any other boy? (Nothing remarkable about that though. All boys and girls are unique at that age. It's only with the onset of adulthood, the forced implantation of a persuaded reality, the grim burden of iron limits, that neuters them. Moulds them into complacent, compliant robots).

When did I change? Why did I fail robotics, why didn't I grow up? (More importantly, why can't my mother cook a leg of lamb without the meal ending up like the benzene barbecue of a protesting Buddhist). Who knows? (Who cares). Life is full of questions only the dead are interested in answering.

Anyway back to the quandary I'm attempting to trap. Where do I start? Is there a fixed date from where to begin or has my life indeed been just what it seems - a glut of eminently unimportant non-events? Probably. Until recently anyway when something DID happen.

When IT happened."

Years ago, when poorer than your average third world buffalo, Wright had decided that when wealth finally hijacked him, he'd head a company that would pay vast salaries, provide Porsches, subsidised health benefits, generous home loans and a Utopian work environment.

Only there'd be a catch.

His company would bear a name no-one in their right mind would choose to work for (unless that company paid vast salaries, provided Porsche cars, health benefits, home loans and a utopian work environment. Which it did).

So suddenly, worth a billion or so, he was able to grant himself his every wish and named his empire (in honour of himself most said) the "Wanker Corporation".

The fuck brain did this for two reasons. First and foremost he did it for a laugh. Wright was firmly of the opinion that wealth was wasted if you couldn't get a giggle out of it. Secondly, he believed that none of his

employees could possibly grow heads too large for their hunched shoulders carrying finely embossed business cards identifying them as employees of such an absurd organisation.

Wright was smugly content that when his employees were asked, at dull dinner parties, or conventions for the indolent, who they worked for, they were forced to answer 'Wanker' (a response usually greeted with howls of laughter. Or nods of agreement).

Really, the only problem with the name he chose for his empire (aside from him, and aside from the obvious lack of credibility the name engendered) was that Wanker didn't have the same connotation globally.

Originally he'd toyed with the idea of having the Corporate offshoots in certain countries given different names to clarify his dubious humour - Jerk Corp. in the U.S., Schmuck Inc. in Israel, Le Wank Wank in France etc. But he finally decided, for the sake of continuity, to keep it simple. So it became Wanker worldwide.

What a Fuckhead!

'Drink Sir?' It was HER again. Again, Sir was too busy inventing himself to notice the inquiry. Sir at that moment was thinking that writing an autobiography was rather like plastic surgery. Only the tools were words but the results just as fabricated.

Again, receiving no reply SHE retreated sullenly, thinking to herself that Sir, for all his cash, was one right rude little shit. Why, he hadn't even glanced up at her which, when you're as beautiful as she was, is about as common as walking on water. SHE was stunned. SHE also found his ignorance of her doubly exasperating because SHE could have sworn he'd been staring at her the entire time she'd been performing the safety drill. Perhaps he was deaf? Or cross-eyed?

No, just queer she decided, slipping quietly away.

Because of its size, the forward galley was the "The Closet". Large lockers, stainless steel and polished to a mirror finish, stretched from floor to ceiling. There was a delicious smell of warming croissants.

'Christ Michele, these buggars are easily satisfied,' Gish exhaled snidely, deftly uncorking another bottle of champagne. Michelle simply grunted, too confused by King Wanker's ignorance of her overwhelming and never (well hardly ever) before ignored beauty to reply to Gish's factual assertion. SHE was positive Gish had told her the boss wasn't bent. Just crazy maybe. Well at

least lunacy would explain the man's absence of attention she comforted herself. Daneille, tugging the curtains aside, pushed past Michelle and disappeared with another loaded trolley.

Brushing away an orphan hair, Anna bent to stack the dishwasher. Gish, leaning against the bench, stared at the ceiling then informed the ceiling that so far their esteemed guests' fevered demands had consisted of eighty bags of cashews, fifty bags of crisps, a few tanker loads of champagne and the odd compliment.

'Jesus, it's like feeding time at the zoo,' she added, elbowing Anna out of the way to rummage through a lower locker in search of more nuts, trying to remember the last time she'd actually visited a zoo.

It was one of those balmy Parisian summer days. Gish was thirteen. The birds were singing, the sun was shining but she wasn't too young to understand what the beastly boys and girls were doing dancing so close together. Animals.

She remembered it vividly. She was wearing a blue school uniform, her favourite cream stilettos, black garter belt with matching fishnet stockings and a phirana grin. Standing there in the warm sunlight, prepubescent and pretty, Gish had, on sighting a huge hairy thing lolling about in the enclosure in front of them, casually advised Auntie that Auntie bore a striking resemblance to it (it being a Sumatran orang-utan). Unaware of the insult (to it), it was happily chomping away on a long stemmed snack of something quite unrecognisable, gnashing whatever the vegetation was between sickly yellow fangs.

Meantime, Aunt's response to Gish's keen powers of observation went unappreciated. Auntie exploded. Face flushed red, she whacked the giggling Gish with a loaded snakeskin handbag. But Gish was laughing so loudly she hardly noticed the blow. In fact it just tickled her into further hysterics. And she just laughed louder.

So Aunt tried again.

There they were, Gish laughing, Aunt pounding. And the orang-utan, suddenly interested, knelt forward to propose marriage to the woman whacking Gish because the woman striking the young girl in wearing a blue school uniform, cream stilettos and black fishnet stockings who bore a striking resemblance to his ex-wife Griselda.

What a scene.

Yep, Gish may have been small, but already her talent for fearless insult was precociously advanced. And positively ominous.

‘With this sort of practice,’ Gish decided, a smile stretched across her face in fond remembrance, slowly wiped her hands on a limp grey tea towel hanging by the small sink. ‘We can apply for the Zambian run at this rate. Christ, the damn apes they’re exporting thrive on the exact same diet as this lot!’ She snorted dismissively, pouring more champagne, wondering if she should demand the same penalty rates the Zambian government paid for the air-care of their primates.

Frowning loudly, Anna turned to Gish.

‘Don’t be so dreadful!’ She remonstrated, feeling that some defence of those out front was in order. ‘They’re fine. Most of them are women anyway. And the few males, aside from that vast one with the monumental paunch in 2A ...and the succulent one with the cute buns in 7B ...seem well beyond groping us.’ She argued indignantly.

‘Don’t you believe it!’ Gish advised, more experienced. ‘Hell, it’s the old farts ...and lesbian Vice-Presidents who give us the most grief,’ she grinned, thin lipped, suddenly wheeling around and tossing the towel at Anna who, had she known that wrapped inside the Trojan towel was a Wanker beer glass, would have ducked. But she didn’t know.

So she didn’t duck.

Anna squealed loudly as the missile clipped her left ear and sent one gold earring flying. Obviously defence of the guests was a dangerous tactic she grimaced, checking if her ear was still there, thankful she’d refused all suggestions to have them pierced. Quickly grabbing the shimmering ornament from the black linoleum floor, she scurried out through the closed curtains before Gish found something larger to launch at her opinions.

Gish was a handful.

Twenty-six, she was a bedroom educated, street smart Yank. Five foot seven of boundless aggression replete with the humour of a viper and the demeanour of a wounded rhino.

Dark red hair cropped short to avoid the hours of drying, combing and styling longer hair would have entailed, Gishford C. Bankdebank had a pale scar that ran razor straight across her left cheek. She applied just enough make-up to cover its minuscule indentation.

The laser line was the legacy of an ancient collision with the gear stick of a ‘67 Buick.

This mark of honour was gained one wet September night on the interstate as she and Tory McBride were heading back to New York from Washington DC.

Cuddled cosy and carnal in the front, he driving, she attempting lip liaison with a tremulous dick, she was happily slurping away. Until. Until a mangy tourist in the shape of a spaniel appeared from an undiscovered dimension and Tory braked fast. Ruined any chance of Gish giving Tory any further lip-ohh give me more-suction.

Fortunately, at the precise moment of the time travelling mutt's appearance, Gish had come up for air. (Immediately prior to Tory coming. He was already up, hands tugging her hair).

Thus, fortunately for his future wife anyway,

Tory's tool was saved from immediate dental decapitation by Gish's need for oxygen. (Note: Read "Hotel New Hampshire" by John Irving if you're interested in what the gorey alternative would have been. Read "Hotel New Hampshire" by John Irving anyway. The man's a genius. And the book ain't half bad either).

So Gish survived with nothing other than a fine scar. Interestingly, and perhaps indicative of her attitudes, another thing about her was that to give the men she slept with something to talk about after they'd proved such a serious disappointment to her hungry heavings, she'd had a small skull and crossbones tattooed on her inner left thigh. She'd done this to give them something to comment on and so fill that legendary silent void between the gushing wet deposit and the post gushing fight to avoid the now cold, clammy, adhesive liquid deposit.

She often wondered why most men were so dull. Post coital. Especially post coital (though this was a rather general observation of her human opposites).

Were they so drained of vital fluids after THE event? Did their brains become arid? Did they dry up until some unseen tanker arrived back in their upstairs? To pump a refill of fresh jitzm juice into their deserted skull!

Or were they just hopeless?

Finally, Gish had decided that it was just that she was just so goddamn good at sex and sucking, that they were simply struck dumb by her excellence. Utterly speechless due to her prowess.

Gish was up herself.

And every-one was up Gish.

'And what about our esteemed employer? If Michele can manage to get his mind off that infernal machine, I'm sure I can get him horizontal,' Gish decided, emptying the trash, still trying to figure out what a 17.5% primate loading would add to her already outrageous wage. She made a mental note to ring Qantas when they landed in London. Surely they'd know. Christ, they'd been successfully ferrying the feral (i.e. Australians) for decades.

‘Don’t be disgusting Gish. You’ve no loyalty,’ Anna rebuked sternly. Back again, she was doing her best to quell Gish’s maladjusted mind. By being target practice, Michele feared, awaiting Gish’s reaction. She needn’t have worried for, for the moment, Anna was quite safe. Temporarily anyway.

Gish ignored her. Gish just kept shovelling waste down the chute, adding, subtracting, miscalculating as to what a 17.5% primate loading would add to her already outrageous wage.

Meanwhile, Wright was still at it:

“What’s really unfair is that if this result of my random recall ever lodges on some more selectively packed bookshelf, you’ll know before I do what I decided to call this atrocity.

Did I go with ‘Scratcher In The Rye?’ (an anthology of allergies). Or ‘The Grass Menagerie?’ (A compendium on why people with incontinent pets should replace all carpets with stain soaking grass). Or ‘Death Of A Alesman’ (yet a further expose on the condition of the alcohol smitten bladder). Or ‘The Calming Sutra’ (a methodical approach to sex on tranquillisers). Maybe I settled on ‘The Gulag I’mapelican’ (sponsored by Greenpeace) or ‘Lathering Heights’ (sponsored by Gillette) or ‘Scouting For Buoys’ (sponsored by the Association for Directionly Impaired Navigators).

God knows (as do you).

If only I’d remained as innocent of words as I was when I was ten. Back then I’d have known what to call this. I’d have called it ‘THE CAT SAT ON THE MAT. THEN DIDN’T’ and have been quite satisfied with such ignorant inspiration.

Age is such a burden.

Anyway, the one thing I’m certain of is that whatever I ended up with, whatever I called MY MEMORIES, I’m sure it was a serious disappointment.”

Anna, removing a tray of steaming croissants, turned to Michele.

‘Well, if it stays as quiet as this, then it certainly beats doing the Cup Run,’ she said, adjusting her rich dark hair and clearly crooked stockings.

‘Sharing a bath with crocodiles beats The Cup Run,’ Danielle decided, folding the serviettes, an athletic shiver sliding down a thread spine at the mere mention of it.

It was infamous.

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