This is a story about a guy who wanted to make some money out of something bad. He wanted to make a film about something bad that happened to some people who lived in a small city in Australia. It's small like a county town is small. It’s a desert city. It’s not that big in population. It’s a desert city that’s all. It has some pockets of middle class privilege. It has large swathes of lower class battlers. It has a few wealthy people. It used to think of itself as progressive when that meant something. It’s not a hotbed of right wing ideology, but it could be one day.

This guy who lived in this city he was just a guy like all the others. He was a middle-aged guy who didn’t think his life was really going anywhere. He had a regular job and a wife in the suburbs and he was financially alright but that was about all. He hadn’t achieved that much and still hankered for something great to happen in his life. Meaning that he wanted to be seen by others as something great. He has always wanted to be special but never really was. He got this idea about being special from God knows where. Maybe his parents. It doesn't matter. He was always hankering to be great in some way. He dabbled in a bit of literature. He wrote plays at school. He wrote poems when he was a teenager. All the normal artistic activities of a person growing up. After he made some short films and even entered them in competitions. The problem was they never did anything special for anyone. No one came back to him and said ‘You really are something special.’ No one told him that he was the new whatever. The new whatever. Insert your favourite Australian artist in there. If you have any. You probably do. Anyway, he wasn’t any of them, at least not according to the people who saw his small films, or read his poetry, or his fiction. Not that he wrote a lot of fiction. He didn’t have a strong yearning for fiction. Calvin just couldn’t see the point of it. Although he did have a few books that he had read and liked. Read many times over. The Outsider. Nausea. And later some Kurt Vonnegut or James Elroy. That kind of thing. So he couldn’t see the point of long fiction but he kept going back to it. He was that kind of guy. Sort of a bit blind about himself. Like he couldn’t see the whole thing, even though it was there for all to see. If anyone cared to look.
Wanting to be special like an artist or writer always had an appeal. He wasn’t sure why. He had met a few and most of them seemed pretty ordinary. Like they were ordinary people. He just didn’t want to give up the dream. The dream was something that kept him going, in those ‘what am I doing here’ moments. It was like a consolation, or something to be hopeful about. Something that makes life seem hopeful. A life without hope can be hard to handle. In fact, it’s probably not manageable at all. Why get up in the morning if there’s no hope for something better? Being special one day made him think there was a reason to get out of bed and say hello to people and be socialable. Being sociable was a real strain sometimes. Particularly when Calvin was feeling hopeless.

When he was a student he did some writing about some bad stuff. He did some writing about some serial killings. In that city he lived in. It was part of a big study he was doing. About how to write in an ethical way. ‘Maybe writing in an ethical way could bring me some success’ he used to think. ‘Maybe writing in this postmodern ethical way could make people realise that I’m special’. He did that writing and maybe about three people read his writing and thought it was alright. But that was about it. After that there wasn’t much action on the ‘you’re a very special person’ front. It doesn’t matter. He had some other things to do. Like get a job and pay the rent. It’s hard to be special. That’s what he thought anyway. It’s actually a special thing to look after yourself, have a job and pay the rent. He knew that. But it wasn’t special like being famous. It was good but not really special in the way that would last a long time. That would last for eternity. That was the kind of special he was thinking about.

Ethical postmodern writing was the thing that made him feel a little special for a short time. What does ethical even mean these days? To him it meant a writing that did no harm. That meant writing against the grain, which has become a bit of a cliché, but it’s probably true. His writing was about the serial murders in the city. It was about showing how to write about them without doing any harm This was a big call. Probably too big. Too big for someone who was a bit blind. Who couldn’t see the whole thing. It’s probably not a coincidence that he made a big deal out of not knowing the whole thing. Not wanting to know. That was the postmodern way. Writing with gaps in the knowledge. On purpose. Something about writing with silences and gaps and absence and the interplay of those things with something real and concrete. There was supposed to be something ethical in doing that. Not doing harm to
victim’s families. He never tested that out. Never asked them what they thought about his writing. It probably doesn’t matter much what they thought. That sounds harsh maybe but it’s the truth. Maybe they did matter but he was too scared to ask them. That’s probably a hard thing to do. To ask a victim’s family about your writing. “How does it seem? Is it Ok?” Does it hurt you?” He didn’t do that. He never tested his theory. It remained pretty academic.

Brigitta used to run him down a lot for being a loser. She would say things like ‘so and so is doing really well at university’ or that ‘so and so was getting published in some journal’. That was, to be honest, pretty mild stuff. But there was a constant theme running through a lot of the interactions ‘You’re such a loser. Do something about it’ He had a kind of addiction for this woman because she was pretty hot. At least he thought so. Some people didn’t. It doesn’t matter. This woman was pretty hot for him, but she ran him down all the time. She was a bit of a player in the local film industry. She’d produced a film here and there. She knew people. She’d done an interesting film interstate. She had some kind of addiction to the guy. They weren’t really right for each other. They plodded on. She would always be at him. Maybe he really was a loser who couldn’t stand up for himself. So maybe he deserved everything he got. He hung in there hoping it might get better. He wanted their relationship to be really great. Like a perfect thing. And maybe it could be one day. If he could do something special then maybe he could get the relationship back to where he wanted.

Brigitta knew this guy called Jakob, who was a popular author, and who lived in town too. One day she said to her husband, ‘Jakob has done so well for himself. People really like his screenplays. Why don’t you have a chat with him sometimes? Maybe he could give you some tips. Maybe he could help you out. Why don’t we invite Jakob and Shushana for lunch and maybe you could talk with him?’ Calvin said ‘Sure, if you want’.

The following weekend Jakob and Shushana came over for lunch. They brought a nice expensive wine and some vegan chocolate Shushana saw in her local food speciality shop. Jakob and Brigitta talked shop most of the time. He had a couple of ideas he was playing with, thought they might be ok, but didn’t want to let the cat out the bag just yet. Brigitta mentioned that Calvin wanted to have a chat sometime about writing for film. About taking the first steps. ‘How would you feel about having a chat?’ He said he’d feel fine. ‘Send him
over, that is when you can spare him.’ They both laughed at that. As Jakob and Shushana left Jakob said ‘Give me a call and we can make a time for you to come round’. Calvin said ‘Thanks’ and waved them goodbye, in their nice new French sedan. Back inside the house she said she’d done enough with cooking so he needed to clean. It was a warm spring day. The sun was shining. She lay on the couch and opened her laptop. Time to relax and think about the future.

Jakob’s film scripts had been pretty successful. He played it safe. He did the romantic comedy thing with a bit of Australian weirdness. His first film was about a couple who split up over the phone one day because they couldn’t agree on whether they should get married or not. It went on in the usual style, both of them finding other lives for a while, making ridiculous mistakes with the wrong people, getting into weird trouble, and then, accidently one day they meet up again and realised they still loved each other and it didn’t matter if they were married or not as long as they were together. His subsequent films all followed the traditional romantic comedy line, lovers or people who will be lovers, split up and loose each other over some kind of issue and then find each other again and get together. The truth is they were low brow and went quickly to TV after a short release. Despite this they were popular enough and he was regarded as someone who knew how to write. The only trouble was that he was at a bit of a dead end in his career. He was like Calvin except he was actually successful. That made him different. What made him the same was that he felt all used up. He didn’t really have any ideas about what to do next. He had lied to Calvin’s wife. She’d probably think he was a bit of loser because he couldn’t keep the success thing going. He didn’t want her to think that. Jakob wanted her to think he was successful and was really going somewhere. Jakob had his eyes on Brigitta for quite a while. Shushana didn’t know. At least that’s what he thought. Calvin certainly didn’t know.

So Calvin visited Jakob one day in the hope he could get some help about being successful. Jakob poured them both a soda and lime and sat down with Calvin in the big bright lounge room. ‘It’s nice in here’ said Calvin. ‘We felt like we deserved something nice after all the years of struggle’ replied Jakob. ‘It’s like the pay off in a film. You invest all the time and energy into something, and at the end you want the pay-off for your investment. That’s what people want. That’s what makes them happy. Makes them feel it’s been worth it.’ Jakob clinked his
ice and took a long sip. ‘So we’ve just started talking, but in lots of ways that’s my advice to you. Make sure that when you write you’re giving the audience the pay-off they want.’ Calvin was thinking about value and commodities and services and looking around at the white walls, wooden boards and clean lines. ‘How do you know if you’ve given them the pay-off?’ he said. ‘You don’t know until you see how they react’, said Jakob. ‘You can use all the film theory you want, the generic formulas, experienced cast and crew but in the end it’s still a gamble. No-one knows the secret to always making a successful film.’ Jakob got off the couch and went to the kitchen. He brought back a moderately expensive Pinot Gris and some green Sicilian olives in a hand-made rustic bowl. He filled both glasses and handed one to Calvin who said ‘There must be something you’re doing. Something that makes your films successful. What is it?’ Jakob sat back and had a faraway look on his face. Maybe he would tell Calvin what it was. Maybe he wouldn’t. After another sip from his wine Jakob said ‘The thing you need to know is that there’s no easy answers, and that even if I told you it probably wouldn’t mean anything to you, because you need to start at the beginning. Develop your own knowledge. Develop your own understanding about how to make something work.’ Calvin was looking hard at Jakob now. ‘So there’s nothing you can say?’ He was feeling his life go down the drain. He saw an image of Brigitta walking out on him. Being left with nothing. That kind of thing. Jakob patted Calvin on the shoulder reassuringly and said ‘What’s your concept?’ Calvin looked confused. ‘You know, what’s the basic idea that you want on in the film? What is your film about? What’s the concept?’

That was a hard question for Calvin because he hadn’t given the concept a thorough work-out. He had a vague idea that he wanted to do something with some murders. But he wasn’t sure why. It was the blind spot problem. Now he was going to have to face up to the problem of his blindness as well as the paucity of his thinking in front of Jakob. Who was going to be really successful one day. Everyone knew that. ‘What the hell, I might as well just talk and maybe we can get somewhere by doing that’, said the guy. Jakob, who was pretty cold on the idea of letting Calvin waste his time with some poorly thought out average ideas, said ‘Sure, let’s hear what you’ve got’.

‘There’s a guy in prison who wants to donate his kidney to a woman. She’s a middle aged school teacher. She needs a kidney transplant because she has some terrible medical
condition. She needs a kidney to save her life. He invites her to jail. She goes to visit him. They talk. In fact he’s got flowers for her. This guy is in prison for being a murderer. He’s found guilty of six murders over a period of a couple of months. The murders of young girls. He did the murders with a younger guy. The younger guy died in a car accident before he was even charged for the murders. Anyway this guy wants to donate his kidney to this woman who is also the mother of one of the murdered girls. The donation never happens. She dies too soon, or it’s all too weird or something. Anyway that’s the beginning of the film. The meeting of the mother and the killer in jail. With the flowers. And the kidney donation thing’. Jakob was listening with some interest, although he didn’t show it, then he said, ‘That’s not a concept. That’s the beginning of a film. What’s the film about? What’s the concept?’ Calvin was confused and a little angry. ‘You don’t think it’s any good?’ he said. Jakob took in a breath and told Calvin that it wasn’t about whether he thought it was good or not. ‘The problem is that it’s not really a concept.’ Calvin was feeling a little embarrassed. He didn’t even know what a concept was. ‘You’re going have to tell me what you mean by a concept he said. Just then Jacob got a text. He picked up his phone and then walked to the front door. Calvin saw Jacob and a big man dressed in black walk into the kitchen together. The big man was carrying a cardboard box. It looked heavy. He laid it down on the kitchen counter top. The big man and Jacob talked quietly with each other. They looked like they were talking about what was in the box. The big man seemed calm. Jacob seemed agitated about something. He was struggling to keep his cool. He turned around and walked up to Calvin saying ‘Let’s pick this up another time. Maybe some time on a Saturday, in a couple of weeks, how does that suit you?’ Calvin looked over at the big man. The big man was looking in his direction. Calvin looked back at Jacob smiling that forced smile of his. ‘Sure’ said the guy, ‘Saturday is good’.

Later that night Calvin was watching some television with Brigitta. They were watching something a little boring. Maybe a Western. Calvin really hated westerns. He found them depressing. Really depressing. So why was he watching a western? He wanted to understand something about them. And maybe he wanted to understand why something he found so depressing could be so popular. At least popular for a while. Maybe they’re popular in a different way now. Like in terms of detectives finding out about a crime and tracking it down. In lonesome places. Struggling on their own to find the truth. In the desert of the real. Maybe Baudrillard said that. Something like that. He’s dead anyway. It doesn’t matter. What’s
important is that there’s a search in frozen waste lands. Or that a maverick forensic scientist is hunting the truth somewhere in old Viking lands. Probably a woman. On her own. Searching for the truth in a northern city. Anyway westerns were really disgusting and old. That’s what he thought. Really disgusting like an old house that stinks. An old hoarder’s house. That you lost something in. That you had to go into to find the thing you lost. What was it? Probably a key. Why were you there anyway with a key in the first place? It doesn’t matter. You’re there. In the stinking house. Looking for a way out. While Calvin was enjoying his western experience.

Brigitta asked how it went with Jakob. ‘It was ok’ he said. ‘I told him about the idea I had for the film. He thought it was ok but needed some work’. ‘That’s a good start’ she said. ‘I’ll do some more work on it, along the lines he suggested, and we’ll meet again in a couple of weeks’ replied the guy. ‘That’s great’ said Brigitta, ‘You see you did good. That’s great that he was so positive. I’m proud of you’ she said softly in his ear. He turned and they kissed, and as they did he forgot about westerns and the desert of the real. As they draw apart she looked back at the television and asked ‘Did Jacob have to go out or something?’ ‘Why do you say that?’ he asked. ‘Because you weren’t there for long,’ she said ‘Did something happen?’ ‘Nothing happened. Some friend of Jakob arrived out the blue. They had something they needed to talk about. So that’s when Jakob arranged for us to meet another time.’ ‘Who was the friend?’ she asked. ‘I didn’t catch his name’ said Jakob. ‘What did he look like?’ Brigitta asked. ‘He was big and very solid. Very big and solid. Maybe in his 40s. Short dark hair.’ he said. ‘What was he doing there?’ asked Brigitta a little more urgently. ‘He dropped off a box of something and talked with Jakob, that’s all I know’. ‘Think about his name. What was his name?’ asked Brigitta. ‘Maybe it was Jean’. Brigitta sat up quickly and looked at the guy. ‘That’s Jean Jambon, I’m sure of it.’ she said. ‘What kind of a name is Jean Jambon?’ he asked. ‘You’re joking right. Jean Jambon is a joke name’, he said. She was pacing around the room now. ‘Just stay away from him. Stay away from him and don’t mention him again’, she said. ‘Who is he?’ Calvin asked. ‘What did I just fucking say? Don’t fucking mention him again!’ She walked out to the kitchen, opened the cupboard door, took out the vodka and unscrewed the lid, and poured herself a large one. On the television John Wayne was searching for a girl. He was looking for the girl abducted by the Indians. He was searching in lonesome places. That’s what brings you down, thought the guy. Searching in lonesome places. ‘Don’t you ever fucking mention that person again’ said Brigitta, as she poured herself another. John Wayne was a real man who wasn’t afraid to search. Calvin was a depressed loser on a couch. That’s what
he was thinking anyway when he heard the sound of glass being smashed against the kitchen wall.

Calvin couldn’t sleep much that night. He kept dreaming about getting lost in an old hoarder’s house. He kept having those dreams where he’s on the verge of being totally out of control and plummeting into a life threatening void. Something like that. It begins with the feeling that he is really stoned. Like he’s just had a joint in his dream and now he is out of his mind and something really fucked-up and diabolical is about to entirely engulf him. It’s bad. But so is a lot of life. No-one really cares. It’s just a fucking dream. Get over it he says to himself in the dream. That’s before he gets stoned. And gets stuck in the old house. The endless desert. ‘Oh fuck’ he groaned as he dragged himself out of the dream. ‘What’s wrong?’ asked Brigitta half asleep. He was going to say something about Jean Jambon but stopped himself. ‘I hate westerns’ he said. ‘They really fuck my dreams.’

Brigitta had some shopping to do the next day. She couldn’t decide whether to take the car or tram to the city. She took the car. The day was pretty foul with wind and heat. The city was drab as usual. Why was she even here? She need a particular book. The book of was by a German author, August Herder, and had just been translated into English. She heard it about it from a friend of hers, Helena, who reads German. She thought it had potential as a film. Generally she hated science fiction, always thought it was a boy genre, but lately some people had been doing some interesting things on screen with it. It seemed to speak to anxieties floating around at the moment. That kind of thing. Anyway Brigitta flicked through the first few pages. A group of friends get stranded in a forest after a long day of trekking. They find a cottage and settle in for the night as best they can. They get through the night and start walking back through the forest in the morning. The problem is that two of the young people are not who they were. Then they meet this very tall man in the forest, who appears from nowhere. He’s very cold and threatening. He orders them into a truck that is parked nearby on a dirt road. One girl refuses. One of the guys rushes at the tall man and is knocked down unconscious. One girl starts crying. The other guy runs off through the forest. The girl who’s crying looks into the distance and sees three bright lights silently landing in the forest. She blacks out. Next she’s inside the cottage again. It’s morning and she’s waking up. She looks round. Two of her friends are missing. She looks at her arms and legs. They have multiple tiny
blood spots on them. Brigitta placed the book back on the shelf. ‘Trash’ is what she said out loud.

She walked out the bookshop and looked for a coffee shop. In front of her, a short distance away, she saw Jakob. She ran and caught up with him. ‘Brigitta,’ he said, ‘You look well. I’m going for coffee. Why don’t you join me?’ ‘Just a quick one’, she replied. The coffee shop was decked out in retro sixties with intimate booths and wood panelling. It was cosy. Brigitta asked Jakob how his new work was coming along. He replied that it was fine but of course that was a lie. He was still feeling a bit desperate about it, but didn’t show it. ‘And what about you?, he asked anything in the pipeline?’ There was nothing much happening for Brigitta at the moment either. She was pretty bored with just about everything. ‘I’ve got a couple of things on the go’, she said. ‘But what I really need is a break. These last two years have been hectic.’ ‘You know I feel the same way,’ said Jakob. ‘We’ve both been working hard and we need a break.’ ‘That’s the truth’ said Brigitta. Jakob paused for a while as if he was actually thinking something through. ‘How about this,’ he said, why don’t we spend a weekend at our cottage? All of us. You, me, Calvin and Shushana.’ ‘I don’t know. I’ll talk to Calvin about it,’ she replied. ‘By the way, how did it go with you and him? Jakob hesitated for a slightly too long then said that Calvin was obviously struggling a bit but he’d help as far as he could. That he couldn’t refuse, after all. ‘Why is that?’ she asked. ‘I think you know why,’ said Jakob. ‘Maybe’, she said with a smile, as she got up to leave. As she walked away she suddenly remembered something and turned back to Jakob. ‘By the way, was Jean Jambon at your house the other day?’ Jakob looked her in the eye and said ‘No. I haven’t seen him in years’. ‘It’s just that Calvin said someone was at the house when he was there, and when I asked him to describe the person, it sounded like Jean. Calvin said he was carrying a box’, she said. ‘No, that’s not possible, we were alone the whole time’, said Jakob. ‘Wait a minute, there was a delivery for Shushana, some art books, but they were delivered by a woman. So you see it couldn’t have been Jean Jambon. Calvin must have been confused for some reason. We can sort this out another time, said Jakob. ‘Thanks again’, she said. As she left she looked back and saw Jakob dialling a number on his mobile.

Although Brigitta had raced off she didn’t really have anywhere in particular to go. Where was she going to go? She didn’t know. The mall was just ordinary. It was ok but nothing more.
There used to be something special here. I used to feel something about all this, she thought. What did she feel? She couldn’t even remember. Maybe it was something soft, or warm or nice, something like that. The city was full of young people in a hurry and dressed fairly well with nice haircuts. There was an occasional street person begging for money. The lady in the flower shop smiled at Brigitta as she walked past. Brigitta ignored her. She bought some perfume at the counter in the department store nearby. It was her favourite. Or it was her favourite. Those films she made seemed a long time ago. Maybe they were just trash now. Probably, she thought. Film’s a shitty business. Nothing lasts. Just the outside shell. The inner things, the soft things, the nice things, they get blown away in time. It doesn’t matter. Better just get on with life and stop being anxious about the end of the world. What’s the point, she thought. Someone already made that film. Was it good? That’s not the right question. Did it make a good return for investors? That’s the secret. Don’t worry about the content. Just think about the return to investors. ‘Years ago I would have been angry for thinking that. Now I just think it’s the truth’. Time was closing in. Hunting her down. I’m on the run today, she thought. I’m going to fucking well stop running and make something happen. For some reason she thought about Jakob. She smiled again as she walked towards her car. ‘He wants me’ she said to herself. She looked up into the bright blue sky. Little bits of black ash were falling slowly to the ground.

When Jakob got home from the city Shushana was sitting in the kitchen at the counter. She was flipping through one of her art books. Since the diagnosis she spent a lot of time looking at art. And doing her little paintings. She loved her little paintings. She loved to paint portraits of herself. In nature. Doing weird stuff like gathering poisonous plants. Or guiding a horse down a dark trail. Or sitting at a table and just looking at the viewer. On the table were things she had collected. In nature. Like shells, small skulls and flowers. She spent a lot of time not talking. Just painting. And reading. She was looking at Munch again. She didn’t care that no one was looking at Munch anymore. Everyone was really over raw expression. It seemed kind of disgusting. Very uncool. Shushana liked that about Munch. She embraced the uncool and the disgusting aspect. To be honest, she thought, I am painting like Munch, but more like Munch the Christmas greeting card painter. Disgusting and uncool in that way. Expressing things in a kind of flat and uninspired way. Is it good to be like that? Don’t care she thought. This is what I am now. Christmas card expressionist. Why bother getting to the depth of it?
I’m not interested in that, she thought. It’s just the form that interests me. The colours and shapes. My content is somewhere else, she said to herself. Munch’s content was people isolated and alienated. She couldn’t think of anything more last century. She wanted immersion in nature and the earth. I will have immersion in the earth, she thought. I will be the earth. That’s what she was thinking as Jakob walked in.

Jakob thought Shushana’s art was really shit. He liked shiny bright art works. Like Koons. He smiled a bit like Koons. People would sometimes remark, when they were drunk with him, that he had a smile like a con man. Jakob walked up close to Shushana and put his hands on her shoulders. He stroked her long black hair. She enjoyed it when he stroked her hair. ‘Let’s go to the cottage’, he said, ‘maybe for a week or so.’ ‘What about your work?’ she replied. ‘The work can wait,’ said Jacob. ‘Will you be ok if I don’t come?’ she said. She turned away. ‘I’m feeling very down. I don’t have the energy.’ Jakob walked to the fridge, took out a bottle, and poured a glass of wine. ‘You know I won’t go without you.’ Shushana sighed and looked at Jakob. ‘You can paint there’ he said. ‘I think Calvin and Brigitta will come.’ ‘Let me think about it’ said Shushana. “I’m tired. I’m going to lay down. Why don’t you come and keep me company?” They walked to the couch. Shushana lay her head on Jakob’s lap. He stroked her hair softly. Outside the night had fallen. Jakob looked out towards the hills. The fires spread their yellow light into the darkness.

That night Calvin had a ticket for an amateur theatre show. Brigitta couldn’t stand amateur theatre so she wasn’t going. A friend of his was still doing the theatre thing. He lived on his own. Worked as a cleaner in the day time. Didn’t have anyone special in his life. It was a bit sad. Jason re-connected with Calvin recently. Talked about the old days. It made Calvin sick to think about the old days. Why was he going to watch this guy on stage? He was a middle aged guy now but he was still loving the theatre. Did Jason know why? Not really. Something about the magic that he felt once. At a puppet show. Or was it a pantomime? Either way it was magic theatre. He’s transported to another world. That was a good thing to do in life. This is really living. That’s what his five year old self thought. And here he was, forty years later, playing the ham. It was kind of shameful. Calvin liked theatre when he was young, sure. But these days was there really a need for it? Other than as nostalgia therapy for old people. Brigitta was right. It was a museum art form. There should be museums where theatre shows
are played, she used to say. That would be the right context for theatre. You could go to the theatre museum and see something extinct that had been preserved for some reason. Whatever it was. Probably not scientific reasons. Like dinosaur bones. Or old Pacific islander masks. Theatre would be preserved for some other reason. He wasn’t sure what. Maybe the history of culture. That’s what he was thinking about as he presented his ticket. The show was *Victims of Duty*. The theatre itself was full of old people. Maybe a couple of young couples who probably knew someone in the cast. On stage there’s a middle aged couple. Choubert and his wife Madeleine. The woman playing Madelaine seems too young. A detective enters looking for answers about how to spell the name of a previous tenant. The old detective thing again. At least it’s not a western, thought Calvin. I’m in France, he thought, reading the stage signs. Somewhere. Mid-century actually. Calvin started to picture mid-century Danish furniture. This wasn’t about furniture. This play is about a detective who can’t find the answers and characters who are falling apart. Literally. The characters don’t make sense. Nothing makes sense. It’s confusing. The characters are obsessive, forgetful, slavish to orders, paper thin copies, clichés. Once the house lights came up he applauded and walked quickly out to the bar for an after show drink.

There were quite a few people hanging around after the show. Calvin wasn’t sure why. If he didn’t know Jason he would have been out of there by now. He was feeling sick. The old uncertainties moving in again. And settling down, maybe. For a laugh. Jason appeared accompanied by a woman from the show. The inevitable post show conversation. Calvin was capable of this sort of chat. He mentioned that the theatre of the absurd probably wasn’t his sort of thing. ‘Why not?’ asked the woman standing next to Jason. ‘You’re Madelaine from the play’ he said. ‘I am, she said, ‘Madelaine is also my name,’ she said, ‘I am Madelaine and I play the character Madelaine’ She was young and tall. Very at ease with herself. She wore red leather pants and a red leather jacket. Madelaine turned her attention to Calvin. ‘You said you didn’t like absurd theatre. Why is that?’ she asked. ‘It’s fine I just think it’s a little dated that’s all’, he said. ‘For me it’s not absurd at all. I feel like I’m just living a normal life when I’m on stage’, she said. She was being serious now. ‘Madelaine is very committed to the theatre. We all appreciate her enthusiasm’, said Jason. ‘My ride is here’, replied Madelaine. At the door Calvin could see a man clad in leather looking in his direction. Madelaine met him and they kissed. She seemed happy to see him. The guy kept his composure. Calvin felt uneasy.
He had seen that man before. ‘Who’s the guy with Madelaine?, said Calvin. Jason looked around and saw the two of them slip away. ‘That’s Jean’, said Jason. ‘Jean Jambon?’ asked Calvin. ‘No, not Jean Jambon’ said Jason, ‘Jean Le Reel’.

Madelaine and Jean sped through the night city. Going fast felt good. Madelaine held on tight. They left the city behind. The freeway led them deep into the mountains. Past the farmhouse ruins and empty fields in the glow of the moon. Jean and Madelaine arrived at an old house. Madelaine got off the bike. Jean wheeled it into the shed. A gravel path led to the front door. Madelaine and Jean stood at the threshold. ‘Are you ready for this?’ he said. Madelaine smiled and opened the door. Inside were two people, a women and a man, sitting on some run-down couches. The room was kind of ugly but warm as well. Florinda got up and went to the kitchen. ‘Here we go’, she said as she walked back into the room with a tea pot and mugs on a tray. She moved from person to person, distributing the tea. Madelaine took hers. Jean declined. He wanted to stay sober. Psychedelic mushrooms weren’t really his thing. Jean looked at a reproduction on the wall. Late 20th century expressionist. Saw a demon playing violin on the deathbed of an old man with a swastika rosary. ‘What’s that painting called?’ he asked. ‘I am the door’ said Carlos. Jean looked out the window as the others sat and sipped their tea. The moon was really bright tonight. You could see the mountain tops and the deep darkness beneath the folds of the trees. He wanted to get out there and feel the rays of the moon on his face. He wanted to feel the darkness of space. He wanted to feel the terrifying and immense presence of nature next to his being. ‘We ready then?’ asked Madelaine, ‘Let’s go’.

Back at home Calvin talked with Brigitta about his theatre experience. ‘Did it help you with your thinking about a screenplay? she said. ‘Did the museum let you in to its secrets?’ Brigitta was feeling a little cynical tonight. Maybe she was unhappy again. Maybe she was really unhappy about her life and about her lack of progress in having a successful husband. ‘When you waste your time going to see shit like that I really wonder if you have the first clue about what you are doing. I mean do you? What was that piece of shit you saw? Who gives a fuck about that? Get a grip on reality. You’re getting old. We’re getting old. You don’t have time to waste. Stop fucking around with stupid undergraduate ideas and start dealing with reality. The real world. What have you got to say about the real world? Well? Say something!’ Calvin
knew where this was heading. ‘You know I went because of Jason, that was the only reason, he said. ‘Jason! That fucking loser! That fucking loser who is a fucking cleaner! Are you mad? What other losers did you meet tonight? Dishwashers? Chamber maids?’ She was yelling now. ‘I met a young woman who seemed pretty smart’ he said. ‘She’s smart is she? Is she attractive as well?’ Brigitta asked. ‘She is,’ he said. ‘And she’s in the play?’ she asked. ‘Yes,’ said Calvin. ‘Her name is Madelaine’. Brigitta moved a step closer to Calvin. ‘I don’t care what her fucking name is. You’re just an old fool. You think you’re interesting and attractive to young women? Do you think that? She’s probably laughing about you right now. The old idiot who came to the theatre who thought he had interesting opinions. I suppose you drove her home as well? Well did you? How was her house? Did she invite you in for a drink or cup of tea? Is that what happened?’ She was up close now and in his face. ‘I thought she went home with someone that you know,’ he said. There was a pause. ‘I thought she went home with Jean Jambon’, he said. ‘You think that’s funny, don’t you. You fucking well think that’s funny don’t you? You fucking arsehole! What did I fucking well tell you! I told you to never mention that bastard again you fucking arsehole!’ She took a step back and then slapped his face hard. She collapsed on the couch. Put her hands to her face and cried. Calvin walked to the kitchen and poured two vodkas. Walked back to where Brigitta was sitting. Put the vodkas down on the table in front of her. Brigitta picked up her glass and drank the vodka down quickly. She smoothed her hair and wiped her tears away. ‘Jean Jambon is evil’ she said, ‘and he used to be my life.’

Madelaine, Jean and the two others walked thought the forest. ‘We need to be at the top of the mountain while the moon is at its zenith.’ said Madelaine. The path was narrow. ‘You need to keep your eyes open. Your wild eyes and your wild ears open’ said Jean. Madelaine felt the onset of the mushroom. She could feel it in her mind. The way the thoughts were forming. The way they bubbled up like pictures floating across the sky. Across the night sky. Her inside night sky and her breath. Her breath intermingled with the life of the plants around her. She could feel it entering her nose, go down inside her, and mingle with her blood. Her blood that filled with the breath of nature. Dark green and light green life circulated around inside her. Madelaine led the group further into the darkness and towards the mountain top. Jean was at the rear. ‘Remember’ he said, if you see a darkness that looks like a door, stay away from it. The door will take you away. You won’t come back.’ The four stopped walking.
Carlos turned to Jean. ‘What do you mean we won’t come back?’ he asked. ‘What the hell is a door doing out here? What does that mean?’ Jean walked to Carlos ‘Keep your voice down’ he said, ‘And keep calm.’ Carlos was breathing hard now. Madelaine walked over and put her hand on his shoulder ‘We’re going to be calm, and stay together, and we are going to enjoy this’, she said. ‘Sure’, said Carlos, ‘But what about the fucking door?’ ‘Just do what Jean says. Do everything he says, Ok?’ He could feel her hand merging with his body. Merging and glowing with warmth. ‘Don’t worry’, she said, ‘We’re almost there.’

‘Jean Le Jambon is a monster’, said Brigitta ‘but he wasn’t always like that.’ Calvin was sitting opposite Brigitta and willing her to speak. ‘Jean was a handsome guy. We met at university, He was doing engineering. Something like that. I was doing anthropology. I joined the university amateur theatre group. I loved acting even though I wasn’t good at it. Jean was already part of the group. He was a year ahead of me. He was in charge of directing the show. He was acting as well. At first he didn’t really notice me. One night there was a party at his house. After the show. The cast was there. There was plenty of booze and dope. Anyway Jean and I got talking. We talked for a long time. Something happened. We started kissing. We fell in love. Just like that. It was crazy. It was so sudden. It came from nowhere. After that we were inseparable. We spent a very beautiful time together. Then things started to fall apart for me. I dropped out of uni. I was taking a lot of drugs. The only person I saw was Jean. I lost my friends. I lost touch with my family. And I got pregnant.’ Brigitta stopped talking and looked at Calvin. ‘You never told me that,’ he said. Brigitta looked at him. ‘I’m telling you now,’ she said. ‘Jean told me he never wanted a child and it had to go. He said I had to get rid of it. He arranged for an abortion. But I couldn’t go through with it. I had the child in a small hospital. In the mountains. On my own. It was horrible.’ Calvin moved closer to her. ‘What happened to the child?’ he asked. ‘Jean said that if I had the child he would track it down and kill it. He said he would kill the child and then make me suffer.’ she said. ‘What happened to the child?’ asked Calvin again. ‘I don’t know! I don’t fucking well know what happened to the child!’ she said at the top of her voice. There was silence in the room. Calvin wasn’t sure what to say. What the hell was going on here? he thought. ‘Didn’t somebody in the hospital tell you?’ he asked. ‘I told you I was on my own! Don’t you know what that means? I was on my own! I was completely alone and I was scared and I was clueless!’ ‘I’m sorry. Didn’t you want the baby? Surely you wanted the baby?’ he asked. ‘You are a stupid man. You are completely
fucking stupid. What was I going to do? When I asked them they said the baby was gone. The baby was gone! I should just forget about it!’ she said. ‘They had a car waiting for me. They made me pack my bag. A nurse walked me to the car. She told me not to worry. That my life would be a lot better now. That I needed to look after myself. Get some help’ said Brigitta. She sighed like she was exhausted. ‘Just forget it’, she said. ‘There is no child. It’s over. I’ve had enough. I’m going to bed.’ With that Brigitta walked upstairs to the bedroom. She got undressed and fell into bed. The coldness made her shiver.

When they arrived at the clearing at the top of the mountain Madelaine collapsed and started to cry. ‘I didn’t think I could do it. I thought I would never be here.’ She wept freely in front of the others who gathered round and consoled her. ‘It’s alright.’ ‘You’ve done really well. ‘It’s fine now’. Carlos stood to one side. Gazing at the moon. It seemed so close. It was glowing. Rivers of light were pouring down from it. Florinda walked over to him. ‘It’s so beautiful’, she said. The light flowed down on her too. She stood there and let herself be bathed in it. Carlos and Florinda were entirely immersed in a river of love. Madelaine clutched Jean’s jacket. ‘I want to go into darkness. I want to go into the darkness now,’ she whispered. ‘I want you to take me into the darkness.’ Jean looked at the others. They were gazing at the moon as it glided towards its zenith. ‘We should stay here’, he said. ‘With the others.’ She clutched his body tighter. ‘Take me into the darkness now,’ she whispered again with an intensity that frightened him. She was standing now and holding him close. ‘Do this. I know that you want to!’ Just then she heard the beating of wings flying close overhead. An owl landed on a tree branch on the edge of the clearing. ‘The owl wants to speak’, said Carlos. ‘Now,’ said Madelaine, as she took his hand and slipped into the darkness. Florinda turned and looked for them. ‘Where’s Jean and Madelaine?’ she said. Carlos looked at Florinda. ‘They’re gone’ he said. ‘What do you mean they’re gone?’ asked Florinda. ‘They were here a second ago. They’re just out there’ she said, pleading, and pointing into the darkness. ‘Look’ she said, ‘look right there’. They were both looking now. Into the darkness surrounding them. ‘There it is!’ said Carlos, in a terrified whisper. The door moved slowly behind a tree trunk, as if it was trying to hide. Then it fled quickly across the clearing. As it moved they heard Madelaine’s cry for help coming from inside the darkness.
In the bedroom Calvin saw that Brigitta was still awake. He undressed and got into bed. He lay there for a while. He stroked her hair. After a while Brigitta spoke. ‘I’ve been afraid of that bastard for a long time. I hate him.’ she said. ‘Of course’ said Calvin. ‘I won’t let him get near you’, he said. ‘You already have though, haven’t you? You said you saw him at Jakob’s. Then you said you saw him at the theatre. How could you do that to me!’ she said. ‘I saw someone at Jakob’s. I described him. What he looked like. You heard the description. It was you who said it was Jean Jambon,’ he said. ‘I asked Jakob and he told me it wasn’t Jean’, she replied. ‘He said it was a parcel delivery woman.’ Calvin felt cold and was silent. He saw the person. They were male. ‘If that’s what Calvin told you then I must have been wrong.’ he said. ‘And then you said you saw Jean at the theatre. Why would you do that? Why would you be so cruel?’ she asked. ‘I thought it was Jean Jambon. He looked like the guy I saw at Jakob’s.’ he said ‘The guy you thought you saw’ she replied. ‘But Jakob told me his name was Jean Le Reel.’ he said. She turned around suddenly and held his head in her hands. ‘Are you trying to fuck with me again? How old was this man?’ she asked. ‘He was in his early twenties’ he said. ‘So why did you say it was Jean Jambon?’ she asked. ‘They looked the same,’ he said. She turned away quickly. She lay on the bed staring at the ceiling. ‘You piece of shit.’ she said through her tears. ‘Do you know what you’re telling me? I told you not to go to that fucking theatre. Are you trying to kill me with this shit? Do you know what you’re saying? You fucking well saw my son!’

Florinda and Carlos were stuck in the clearing. They couldn’t move. ‘I can still feel them’ said Florinda. ‘Where?’ said Carlos. She pointed in the direction of the outer darkness. ‘Over there’. There was a rustling in the bushes. ‘It’s in there’, she said. ‘Don’t look at it’, said Carlos. ‘Turn around the other way and move closer.’ She did as he said. The ground was rippling now. They were fully intoxicated. ‘We’re in danger,’ he whispered. We need to stay in this clearing until sunrise. We can’t go down the path tonight’. ‘I’m not leaving them’ replied Florinda. ‘I’m not leaving them to die out there.’ As she spoke she shone her torch into the outer darkness searching for Jean and Madelaine. The light skimmed over the green bushes and past the white tree trunks. It travelled up a tree trunk to its dark crown. Then she heard some movement and shone the light. ‘That’s them!’ she gasped. The light showed two frozen faces trapped in a dark mirror. Their startled eyes returned the gaze of the torch light. ‘Do something Carlos!’ said Florinda. Carlos stood up and rushed towards his friends. Their images
vanished. The darkness that trapped them rushed down the mountain. Their cries for help faded fast. ‘Jean! Madelaine!’ screamed Florinda. ‘They’re gone!’ said Jean as he collapsed onto the dirt. ‘We’re fucked’, said Florinda. She saw Jean on his hands and knees. She looked at the night sky. A lone plane flew slowly overhead. Something from the real world. So far away she thought.

Shushana woke in the early hours of the morning. The house was quiet. Maybe too quiet. Jakob was asleep on the couch next to her. The mountain fires had grown. The city lights were still shining. At least the ones that had power. In the old days all that area would be illuminated, she thought. That’s alright. Maybe the lights will come on again one day. One day when I’m not here, she thought. That will help with the illumination problems. My absence, that is. She wasn’t thinking clearly. It was late. Very late. She didn’t like being awake at this time. It was a little creepy. There was the other realm. It wasn’t far away. You could reach out and touch it, she thought. ‘More like it will reach out to me’ she said to herself. She walked from room to room. There was an empty feeling in the house tonight. The full moon illuminated life with an empty light. That’s what she thought. Like the bones of the dead had been ground down and burnt and recycled in a furnace of light. A gift from the moon god. Especially for earthlings, she smiled. To help us though the darkness. The house was empty and so was the night. It had been for a long time. The emptiness was everywhere. Even in the fires in the mountains. They burnt life dead. They burnt it to nothing. It’s nothing where I’m going too, she thought. I’ll visit the fires and the moon god. The little house on the other side of the moon. She switched off the lights. The room was still bright. She whispered to Jakob that he needed to come to bed. She headed in that direction. It felt like a long way, she thought. It always did on your own.

Jakob woke up. He looked around for Shushana. It was two thirty in the morning. Time for a night cap and then bed. He fixed himself a drink and sat down at Shushana’s painting table. Her sketchpad was on the desk. He picked it up and opened it. On the first page was a series of small sketches. One was of a man standing with a bottle in his hand and pouring whatever it was down his throat. He was standing in some kind of garden. At night. On his own. Another sketch was of the same man. He was sitting at a table. There was rubbish everywhere. It looked disgusting. It was dark. There were many empty bottles on the floor and on the table.
There was an empty glass on the table. He was looking at the viewer. He was holding up his fingers. He held up nine fingers. He was making the number nine. On the next page was the same man again. He was naked. He was on all fours on a grassy mound. There was smoke pouring from a factory in the distance. This picture was bordered by small flowers in the shape of a love heart. All of these sketches, he thought, they are all of me. He looked into the sickly night sky. What am I going to do? he thought. I don’t want to destroy myself. But I can’t control it, he thought. He finished his drink. He got up walked to the bedroom. I don’t want to die. That was the thought he had as he got into bed and held Shushana.

Florinda and Carlos stood alone in the clearing. ‘I’m not going out there’ said Carlos, it might still be there. We don’t know. We need to think about protecting ourselves. We need to stay here.’ Florinda got up and paced around. She put her finger in her mouth and bit hard. She was breathing hard as well. She walked in circles. ‘I don’t want to stay here. That thing could come back. That think could just swallow us. We need to get out of here. It knows where we are. It knows where we are and it will come back here and get us too!’ She was yelling at Carlos now. ‘I want to get out of here now. I need to get out of here. You can come with me or not. I’m going!’ With that she started out into the darkness down the same path they arrived on. Carlos quickly got to his feet. He followed Florinda down the mountain. She was running now. She was running hard through the trees and bushes and the moon lit darkness. Carlos could only think about following her. All other thoughts had left him. They ran forever. Then from nowhere a tall man appeared on the trail. He stepped in front of Florinda. She screamed. Carlos caught up and stood panting behind Florinda. ‘Who the fuck are you?’ he shouted. ‘What the fuck is going on here?’ he yelled. ‘Get the fuck out of our way you fucking bastard!’ screamed Carlos. ‘Get the fuck out of our way!’ Florinda grabbed Carlos’s hand pushed past the man. They ran. At the bottom of the track, at the base of the mountain, on a small road was a white van. It was standing there on its own. The rear doors were open. Carlos and Florinda stopped and tried to regain their breath. They bent over breathing hard and leant their hands on their knees. The false dawn light was glowing around them. Florinda straightened up. So did Carlos. They looked around. Everything was deathly quiet. They looked in the direction of the white van. Standing next to it was the big man. The one they had met on the trail. Florinda walked towards him. Compelled. ‘What do you want? she asked, Why are you following us?’ The big man moved silently towards her. From a distance Carlos
saw Florinda collapse to the ground. ‘What have you done to her!’ yelled Carlos as he ran to help her. 'I won’t harm her’, said the big man. ‘After all, I am her father’. They both suddenly knew that he was evil. Florinda threw up. Carlos began sobbing.