

UNDERNEATH MELBOURNE LIES A RIVER

Urban stories

By Gregory Hill

Introduction

Underneath Melbourne lies a river. It flows unhindered in the darkness. Following the course of Elizabeth Street it meets the Yarra River at Southbank. My father saw it once, probably in the late forties. He was painting the lower levels of a building and had to clean the brushes. A supervisor gave him a key and a torch and pointed to a door and through that door he found it. The riverbank was dank and slippery but he heard the rushing waters, found the rocks, edged his way in to the flowing, gurgling waters lapping the rocks at the river's edge. His torch showed it was many metres wide. His mind told him it was ancient.

A few years ago a friend and I entered a stormwater drain. The tunnel was large and a small channel straddled its length. Underground, I climbed a ladder beside a waterfall. Eventually we ran out of light, but not before we hiked to a point under the city where we saw a white horse painted on the tunnel wall. I wondered how many people knew about tunnels like this. I wondered how many candlelit hours it took to paint that majestic horse: it stood out like a beacon in a world hidden to almost everyone, on one hand indicating, 'Over here. Over here. Beauty is everywhere, even here. Art is everywhere.' On the other hand it warned, 'Danger. Danger. You don't know what lies ahead. You cannot fathom what this secret world is all about.' It was a difficult trek back after our torches and candles expired. Time seemed to stop and we couldn't judge distance anymore. I considered panicking but came out in time.

Hidden places can do strange things to people. Hidden thoughts and stories can do the same. There may be a world beneath Melbourne that many people don't know, but the world above can be just as mysterious.

I let my imagination go as I stroll the city streets, explore its buildings and lanes and arcades. Secret societies and clubs live in these places, histories and emotions

linger at every corner, with every reminder. Stories live everywhere; old stories, new stories, dynamic stories forever changing.

I often wonder, as I walk below street level along Campbell Arcade, and I sense another story. Are you like this? The arcade begins at an underground entrance to Melbourne's busiest railway station. On leaving the station tiny shops reach into the arcade walls like bay windows and I wonder if they are open or closed and if they ever do any business, for the people walking this way when I do are scarce and quick.

I've seen many mysteries in Campbell Arcade. Once a corner beside a staircase displayed ten thousand notes, all pinned without explanation in a glassless shopfront that seemed to have no back.

The arcade moves on as I walk through it and wonder, photographs of Melbourne displayed on its walls, calling, beckoning with their loneliness that promises a secret. Steps rise into the wall, becoming an alcove that once led to a door, a door with its windows posterred from the other side with unknown matter. But I peep through. It appears to be the foyer of an old picture theatre. I imagine it is dusty and I note that the couches are red and the walls layered with wood. (These are obscure memories, buried deep in my imagination and not necessarily a totally accurate portrayal of the place.)

Stepping down I walk on toward the end of the arcade. Instead of turning right and climbing the wide steps to the street I wonder why a section of the arcade continues on only to end at a wall. I look at the floor. It becomes apparent that a false wall lies to the left. I want to go home and get a screwdriver and hammer and force my way into that wall. I want to do the research and find where it once led.

It is so easy to become caught up in what we are doing now, and not hear the stories. Our vision becomes narrow, shaped only by what lies before our eyes. I have written this collection to play my part in changing all this, because stories are powerful. And in hearing the stories do we not become free to live the present unencumbered with the chatter that usually fills our minds. Perhaps a healthy, stimulated, creative mind is the only one that truly lives?

The following stories are all set in Melbourne and its suburbs. Some occurred in the past, some may occur in the future, others ... perhaps they are happening right now

in another Melbourne, a Melbourne slightly different to the Melbourne you may know.
Or is it?

I would like to dedicate this book to my wife, Lilette, and my children Alisha, Melissa and Christopher, and to those who have encouraged me and taught me to write – Barry Carozzi, Kevin Brophy, Liam Davison, and most of all Antoni Jach.

The following places may be of interest to you if you come and visit Melbourne:

- The Cave Clan can be found via the internet. They explore and know about everything underground, including safety.
- The Victorian Writer's Centre is now located on Level 3, 176 Little Lonsdale Street.
- Astro Networks – a group looking into the paranormal, the alternative and the esoteric – meet every second Monday in Balwyn.
- The Australian UFO Research Network meets in Chelsea on Sunday evenings four times a year.
- *Making Modern Melbourne* by Jenny Lee is a marvellous book.
- The Melbourne State Library at the top of Swanston Street is old and beautiful. It is an inspiring, peaceful and informative place to spend time in.
- I find cycling is the best way to see or explore Melbourne. There are many safe tracks away from the roads. I like to ride along the coast from Brighton to Port Melbourne, then through the city to Docklands to return via the Alexandra Gardens then Albert Park.

Melbourne is a city of beauty and mystery, of history and adventure, and of many, many stories. I hope the collection in this book helps to indicate this.

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THE SECRET OF MOONLIGHT

Beneath Melbourne lies another city, a subterranean metropolis. It stretches far into caves and crevices and huge caverns of towering buildings and strange machinery.

Long tunnels reach between the caverns; wide tunnels large enough to shelter streets and the remains of structures that once were homes; tunnels now littered with rocks, fallen columns, shelters and masses of neglected people, and sometimes trucks. They are highways too. A procession of giants thirty feet tall would find ample space in the tunnels among the denizens and the trucks. This is The City. The City is vast like a rabbit warren, extensive like an ant nest.

The trucks maintain the lights. The fluorescent lights shine most hours of each day, flickering and pulsing, remnants from ancient times when The City prospered and everyone was a citizen. The lights are a constant, up above the roads, on the walls, between the buildings and shining through some of the windows.

The Greater Tunnel houses most of the people. One continuous rock dwelling is carved from its walls. Two levels high, this structure stands like an ancient Greek acropolis, lining the full length of the road which stretches throughout the tunnel, fringing the road like a huge prehistoric bird, wingspan extended. Its continuous presence is interrupted only by courtyards without greenery and stairwells broken by tremors. This is The Building. Stairs lead up to balconies edged by other rooms, rooms often protected by barricades to enable those who are less unfortunate to protect their spaces. Can you picture it? Rock, rock, rock, all rock; rock and rocks, rock and stones, grey, old, dusty; inhabited and surrounded by people who never wash, trapped forever in The City that sees no sky, no clouds, no rain, no water, unless you have the money to buy it, or the desperation to drink from the muddy fountains ridden with disease.

Sometimes there are trade kiosks, with officials and food protected by guards. Like beacons they stand out. When the trucks come, movement near the kiosks is faster, voices louder, while the powerful and their world remain in the caverns where the truck depots are. As well as servicing the lights, the trucks give us food. Or they come to take us.

You know nothing about this, about any of this, do you? It's hell down there. The subterranean world that was my home until I was twenty-four is nothing like here in the city above, in the suburbs of Melbourne.

I lived on the floor of The Greater Tunnel. There was no co-operation. No peace. No health. No family. Only the scraps we were fed from the trucks. And the light. We did anything to survive. We had to survive for as long as we could while we sought the work allocated at the kiosks. Time crawled like the drones that we were.

I thought I would go blind looking at the lights. So high up, they were untouchable, except for the slender cranes on the trucks. Geena said they guided her; they were a beacon leading her soul to another place. I lost Geena. They came and took her. They herded her and fifty others from the shanties onto a truck as I grabbed Tilda from her arms. Geena gave birth to Tilda when I was eighteen. As I held her I saw tears of mud cover her dirty face – my little girl's face – as her screams echoed from the tunnel walls. Then, a week later, Tilda was gone too, snatched from my arms without explanation as Geena had been.

When I had a place to sit or to lie, perhaps on a broken staircase, or on the road at the edge of someone's shelter, I would dream of the mystery The Building held, of what it once was, of what it may be in other parts of The City. The Building stood as the boundary of The City in all places where the road went. It didn't stop. It must once have been something different, but ... I don't know. I don't know the history of The City and no one seemed to care. I don't even really know The City except for The Greater Tunnel.

Sometimes I found a way up to the first balcony. Looking down, I would see the eyes of wanderers and residents stretch up with lust past columns and long stairways, while from the balconies workers with their weapons pointed their eyes to us with contempt. One day I climbed up high. As I stood on the balcony and wondered about my place in this world, as I felt like an invisible dome surrounded and protected me, set me apart, I thought I saw Tilda.

A group of workmen stood between me and the stairs and I tore through them. 'Who are you?' one of them yelled as another punched me, knocked me into a wall.

But with grazed legs I raced on. A guard on the steps knocked me over as I hurried by. I rolled and I tumbled but I stood again, then hurried along the road.

I caught up. 'Go away,' a woman said as I grabbed her arms. Her man didn't speak, only grabbed me and shoved me into a couple of boys with no legs lying on the road. I jumped up and rushed him, saw that the girl his woman had wasn't Tilda, then ran on my way.

I thought of Tilda every day. She was six when I lost her, her mother just sixteen years older.

The City: one city, and we were all its victims. The lower level slums contained the sick, the dying, the thieves and other transients. The upper levels were owned and sparsely populated. The caverns contained the citizens, our jailers who ruled from a distance. I never saw a cavern but I knew they were real. The trucks and the soldiers came from the caverns.

There was too much violence, never enough food, little hope. My name – Daniel – was on the list for Science Work. I remembered science. I think my father was a scientist. I remember being a young child and sneaking into my father's work area jammed full of equipment and jars and benches. There was always light, light streaming through surrounding windows, inciting the dust to haze and blurring my vision. Memories of my father are vague. I was only six when I was taken.

All we had while we waited for work in The City was the night. Under the dull light our tired bodies and starved minds rested. We would speak and share the stories we all remembered as nightmares, listen to the rumours and the legends which melded into a heritage which was our only entertainment. When the fluorescent lights were quenched like candles and the violence waned and we closed our eyes while our arms gripped our possessions to our chests, I would look up and imagine the moon. I knew the moon. It was the last thing I saw before I was taken from my father and brought to The City.

In The City I reported to a kiosk every day. When our name was on a list we had hope. I saw those whose names were called. They would wait at the kiosk in a space beside the guards. A truck would come, with different people dressed in clothes that were clean, like the Kiosk Managers'. The truck would take those whose names had been called. I waited, hoping. If I wasn't accepted I knew I would die.

That was ten years ago.

Last night I rose at four and went outside to a full moon that stared back at me like an omen of change. In and out its image pulsed, in and out through the haze of cloud that covered the sky. The brightest stars twinkled, and then faded, but the moon like a strong king shone constant, as if a lighthouse illuminating the way for needy ships and lost souls.

I stood there on the damp ground, in Carlton, in Melbourne. I walk that soil day and night, knowing what lies below. Can you imagine? Do you hear ghosts beneath your feet?

I returned to bed, stirred again at eight am. I eased the blankets and crept out as she lay beside me, sound asleep. I left the bedroom and opened the kitchen door, closed it again, said hello to the dog and put him out before walking the long passageway to the other end of the house. My son was asleep and I woke him.

I told him what to wear and said to hurry out for breakfast. Walking back to the kitchen I took the oats from the cupboard, a banana from the basket, the soy milk from the fridge, and placed them all in the saucepan on the stove. Pulling open the curtains beside me I stared out the window as my right arm mechanically stirred the porridge. I pictured the moonlight in a clear sky over desert and trees.

After making the porridge I scooped it into a bowl, took a roast from the freezer and sat the bowl there in its place. I made the boy's lunch. He came out. I took the bowl from the freezer and gave it to him with his vitamins, cleaned up the kitchen. I went to the laundry and fed the cats, came back with the dog's bowl and fed him too, then took him with me in the car to take the boy to school. She was still in bed when I returned.

I'm never comfortable with what I have now.

Walking across the yard I think again of what lies beneath. Do you ever imagine? Do you ever hear the rumble beneath your feet? I imagine. I remember, 'though it was almost ten years ago that I escaped.

The Kiosk Manager called my name one morning, and I stood there by myself as I waited, before being interviewed on the steps. The truck that took me was almost empty and soon stopped. Other men lifted the flap and entered. Their clothes were clean. They covered my eyes but spoke with comforting words, and sat with me 'till we stopped again and left the truck for another vehicle and another journey that finished on a smooth road.

I was helped into a room in an empty building, sat on a seat then tied to it. My questions went unanswered and I was left alone. Finally I heard footsteps again. I was untied and allowed to see, fed and given clothes, but my questions still remained unanswered. Left alone again, left for sleep, I dreamed of Tilda and of other places.

Eventually the next day came and brought with it an older man who thought he was God. He led me to another room, spoke so many words. They made only a semblance of sense to me but I held to his promise that I would see Tilda again.

Then he called other men to move me. Of course I was blindfolded, then allowed to see again after being placed in a strange room with coloured walls and neat, clean floors: I'd never seen anything like it.

Suddenly his voice rang in my ears but he wasn't there. As well as sending his voice to me he could see my movements, he could see everything I did. I listened to him, I listened like a fool as he led me in a game like I was a rat in an experiment.

'Come on, give it a go,' he said.

'Step closer. Have a look. Remember, you volunteered.

'What did you expect?'

The room was large, bare of furnishings, and something sat in the middle of it.

'There, the light is on now. Are you still afraid?'

'Pale blue walls; windows with white trim, laced with fine cotton frills that shield the darkness from the other side; a white ceiling. What else do you see? The mat? The huge cream mat covering the floorboards? And do you see any furniture? No, there's only ... sitting there in the middle of the mat, in the middle of this odd square hall ... well, what is it?'

I didn't know what it was.

‘Everyone sees it differently, you know. It changes shape from one thing to another. Do you know why? It’s unexpected, that’s why. It doesn’t fit with what you know. And then, if you move closer, it finally takes its true form. Will *you* move closer?’

‘It’s only ten steps away. What’s holding you back? Look at you. You’re not old. The look in your eyes and the lines on your face are an indication: they tell me the hurts and the disappointments have wizened you. But you’ve taken control of your life. You have your ways, your understandings.

‘You’ve got nothing to fear.

‘I know you’ve heard the rumours: the psychological experiments, the mind control, the torture. It’s just ... you’re in an unfamiliar situation. You’ve been confined to the cave structures all your life and you’ve never seen a room like this. That’s all.’

I had heard, but I knew nothing. Everything about his voice made me distrust him. But I had to play his game. A game without an ending? Without rules or meaning? I didn’t know.

‘No. You know you can’t ask why. You get new accommodation and a pension for ten years but you don’t ask why. So are you backing out?’

‘Too much for you?’

I must have grimaced but I didn’t want to. I didn’t want him to see how I felt.

‘Is this little room too torturous?’

‘WELL?’

‘Why don’t you just take a chance?’

I didn’t move.

‘Why? Why take a chance?’

‘Why take a chance!’

‘BECAUSE IT IS NOT ENOUGH. You know when you lay down at night and you’re all alone in your thoughts and those dreams, you know what you do. You push everything aside. You push your worries aside and you tell yourself it will be okay but you know it isn’t.’

It was never enough.

‘I have your name,’ the Kiosk Manager had said after a thousand nagging visits to his kiosk. The interview was long and promises were made. They told me Tilda was alive. Though I’d always dreamed of her, I had thought my daughter was dead, that Geena had given her up in vain to the Research Department.

The Department had kept their promise to Geena and taken her, my six year-old Tilda, given her a life among the citizens in the Caverns. Geena had fought so long to convince them Tilda was special. I had never thought she would succeed. Now I could hardly believe the promise that I would see her again, have a life with her in the caverns. I had no choice but to accept their offer.

The truck had taken me past guarded barriers, through a gap in the Building which led to another road. Another road: the Caverns must be down there, I thought. I was taken to a research facility and prepared for my task. But I had no idea. The interrogations blinded me and took away my memory. It had been session after session, voices without faces, before the old man came.

‘There, that’s it. Another step. Good, nine to go. Do you see it now?’

I had stepped toward the object in the centre of the room.

‘Come on, another step. That’s good. And another, seven more now.

‘Step closer; go on, one step at a time. Good, six to go now. Don’t squint, it won’t change. Maybe close your eyes for a moment, for clarity, that’s right, and when you open them again you will see more clearly.

‘Open.

‘You can see it now, can’t you? I can see the glow in your eyes. You didn’t expect this, here in this room. You know what it is, don’t you?

‘I know you’re wondering if it’s a token ornament, or if it goes through the carpet. Well, does it? There’s only one way to find out. Five more now. Four. That’s good. Three.’

It looked like a well rising out of the middle of the floor.

‘Do you like the brickwork, the symmetrical roundness, the overhanging arch? What about the colour, don’t you think the deep blue matches the cream mat, the blue walls, the white ceiling and windows? It is flawless, isn’t it?’

‘Don’t stop now. Surely you know you’re here for a reason.

‘I can read the deepest stirrings of your soul. I know your hurts. Your emotions are cradled next to me and you’re a child in need. So don’t stop now.

‘Don’t cry.’

I wasn’t going to cry.

‘I know there have been problems. Yes, and hurts. Alright, it’s true she didn’t care enough, she couldn’t see past her own selfishness, but ... isn’t it time you made a change? Isn’t this why you volunteered?

‘Get on with it.

‘Three more steps. Two more. No, it’s not a hoax. No, of course it’s not a dream. Last step now. There – you’ve done it.

‘What do you see?

‘Yes, it is deep.

‘But no water?

‘Careful now. NO. Don’t do that. NO.

‘GET OFF THE LEDGE.

‘Just look over, you don’t want to fall in. You won’t see anything anyway, only the blackness. So just hold on to the rim.

But I climbed over. I would push this and make it end.

‘NO. What are you doing?

There were steps.

‘Ahhh. How did you know?

‘I knew you would do it. You’re driven. You know it will be worth the rewards. All right, climb all the way into the well then. It’s not a wide ledge though. That’s it, yes, the ladder. I can see you, you know. But don’t rush down, be careful. You’ve always been careful. And you’ve passed through the first stage.

‘Just keep going.

‘Slowly.

‘Slowly down, into the darkness.’

‘I see it now. There’s a light,’ I said.

‘Oh, you see it. Are you sure? It must be dim. So far away. And your legs are shaking.’

‘I see it,’ I said.

‘All right, climb down to the bottom. You’re nearly there.

‘You’re panting.

‘You’re slowing.

‘Having second thoughts?

‘What is your name? Tell me your name?

‘Perhaps you’re not as strong as you used to be. Do you remember when things were different? Don’t you long for those days? But you need someone for that, don’t you. And it looks like she’s gone, there’s no one else and you don’t want anyone else, and you’re getting older. How old are you now?’

‘SHUT UP.’

‘I’ve had people down here before, you know. It begins to feel cold now. And the light is no brighter, is it? You’re in a well that might be a dungeon and you have no idea what you’re doing – do you?

‘So you have to trust me.’

I wanted to tell him he was a maniac, but dared not.

‘Tell me your name?’

I remained silent.

‘Okay then, but keep going.

‘Down.

‘By the way, did you notice the water dripping over the rungs, onto your hands, down your arms and now onto your sweaty face?’

I slipped.

‘Ah! That must have hurt. But you held on. If I had said it was a spider you might have fallen right off.

‘A couple more rungs.

‘Now step off.

‘What a sight. No, don’t mind that, they’re just old bones. So what a sight eh? It’s huge. Where’s the light coming from? I don’t know. But it’s beautiful, isn’t it. You can’t see the roof and you can’t see the walls and you’re in a huge open space. Take it in. Absorb it all. What do you think? Could you ever have imagined being in a huge cavern like this, where you can hardly see anything? But you know where you

are. The rocks, the walls – they’re all around you. And ... space, you know it’s there, more space than you’ve ever seen in your life.’

‘I ... remember ...’

‘You remember what? Oh, that’s right. You were brought to us as a child. So you have seen space.

‘Now go on. Go on, follow the sloping path. Go on. Watch for the loose stones.

‘That’s good.

‘You’re going deeper and deeper now, ever forward, ever on. Now do you see it? No, your eyes don’t deceive you – it *is* a lake.’

But I was tired now, unsure of what I saw. Was it a lake?

‘That’s right, up to the pier. Do you see the jewels shining above? They are the souls of the others I have led here.’

His humour, if that’s what it was, didn’t stir me.

‘Now see the boat?’

I turned.

‘No, over to the left.’

‘You want me to get on, don’t you?’ I said.

‘You’re shivering. There’s a blanket on the boat.

‘Stop looking about. You won’t see the other side.’

Will this go on forever? What did he want, I wondered?

‘Just get on the boat, you know the routine now. I’m really not an enemy. It’s just ... it’s only through me that you can move on, complete the task, gain your reward.

‘That’s better. It’s time you relax a bit and rest. CAREFUL. Hold on to the pier. Now get comfortable. A dozen blankets hey. Maybe more. You are tired. Good. Yes it is a pillow. Now off you go.’

As I lay down I felt a semblance of peace. The water troubled me – I had never seen so much water – but my bones ached and I began to rest.

‘WAIT? You surely didn’t think you were going to stay tied to the shore. Take it easy. You’re tired. Lay down. Relax.

‘My name is Proctor,’ he said.

‘It’s so beautiful, isn’t it? Beautiful and silent. So still, so peaceful – and so profound. Just a huge cavern and a lake, somewhere underground, and you lying down on soft warm blankets on a boat, drifting into the darkness, drifting and drifting, floating away in an endless cavern as your thoughts and feelings slow down and you want to sleep.

‘You do feel safe. I know you are resting and going deeper and deeper into the cavern, deeper into peace. You’re about to let go. And you can. You can let go now like you never have before and you’re ready to, you will, and you will see you have done it.

‘Your eyes are heavy.

‘Close those eyes.’

His words were a lullaby that had power over me, and I fell into a dream state.

‘Go on, let go.

‘Let yourself float out.

‘Drifting now. Deeper water.

‘Let yourself go. Deeper. Deeper. Sleep now,’ said Proctor.

I slept. And I’m still sleeping because the last ten years have been one long hypnotic trance.

I lay down on the bed with a hot towel on my forehead. She sat beside me. I heard the dog bark. He was playing with the boy. ‘Be still,’ she said with a distant voice and I knew I didn’t know her.

I remembered the past ... and ... how could I know her if I let the pull of the past fill my mind and my emotions? I’d become a man of otherworldly secrets and it set me apart. How could I know her if I couldn’t let her know me?

What did she think? I had withdrawn and she knew it and I still loved her and she loved me but ... my headaches were worsening, the dreams were more frequent, and I was drifting into my world of depression again.

I couldn't put it aside anymore.

I didn't call her by name anymore because I didn't deserve to, because I showed love to her the way I did to those in The City where there were no names and no love.

A man with no history is a man of mystery. That once appealed to her. Don't judge me. Would you have told her you lived under Melbourne for eighteen years? Would you tell her that's why your education is lacking and that somewhere you have parents you were abducted from when you were six? Somewhere in Melbourne? Perhaps here in Carlton? Maybe the southern suburbs like luxury Brighton? The outer east like Ringwood? Perhaps I passed them in a shopping centre or in my car on the way to work.

Amnesia is what I told her it was, but I hated lying. I was confused, I told myself. I didn't know what I was meant to do and told her James was my name. I went to night school, read books, learned to work with stone and made enough money. She kept up with her teaching. We had the boy six years ago and called him Daniel, after me, if only she knew, but my lies have put a rift between us. It's not what I want. It can't be what she wants.

'What time is it?'

I had woken, and called out as I raised myself onto my elbows. The boat on the lake in the cavern rocked in response. I sat, tentatively.

'WHAT TIME IS IT?' I called. 'WHERE ARE YOU?'

The shore was not close. I couldn't see it, or feel it. In the darkness the jewels were glistening overhead, their sparkling presence the only movement I saw. I looked to the water again and they glistened there too.

'WHERE ARE YOU?' I called again.

Hearing only the soft echo of my own voice, I became disoriented. I tried to stand and crane my neck like a telescope reaching up to the stars or the Moon. But they were not stars. I was alone. Lost. The wisdom of my pact with the authorities had left me long ago.

I nearly fell in. The boat rocked as I stumbled. I looked for the ripples but it was too dark. Everything around me was black and I sat down again.

The water! I could smell it, its clarity and wetness. I wanted to touch it. My fingers reached in. The water was icy cold and I felt its chill. It was too cold to paddle with my hands and in the boat there were no resources, only blankets.

I lay back down.

I would try to be calm. Surely the boat must be drifting. Sooner or later I would find myself somewhere because there's a reason for all this, I was guided here for a reason and that reason was Tilda.

In the darkness the lake became a stream flowing through a narrow passage as I slept in the boat with no oars. I dreamed of her again. The boat rocked. Waking, I reached out and felt a wall. Hungry and despondent, I pushed against the wall, I pushed myself along in the boat as the lake turned into a passage with a light at the end, until there was a ledge and I knew I could get out. Stepping out into the darkness I tripped against the shore and fell into the water, the icy water. I climbed onto the ledge. After shivering for ages the ledge broadened and I moved faster for a while. I was moving toward the dull light. The ledge left the water and became a tunnel and I followed it, on and on to a lamp attached to the wall and from there I saw another, then another. The tunnel narrowed and became steeper. Then I crawled and climbed, up and up through the difficult tunnel. Eventually I reached the surface.

I walked for hours before coming to a farm. I held no fear of surface-dwellers. They thought I was simple. And I didn't tell them what I knew. Those first days in the light were marvellous. I was home.

After a year, another family took me in and soon they saw I was as sane and bright as anyone and worked much harder. Only the pain in my temple put limits on what I could do. No one knew the extent of this pain. No one, only Arundel. I know the pain will go if I return.

I rose in the middle of the night with the pain, and went outside. It was cold, but I knew the moon was full. I stared back at it after the clouds passed; the same moon, always the same moon that was the last thing I saw when I was carried into the tunnels as a boy.

Those early memories haunt me more and more, and until this day I don't understand why Proctor let me out, and why he chose to do it the way he did. What did they do to me and what did it achieve. Where is my Tilda? I returned to bed and dreamed of her. The same dream – more than a dream. We have a connection. Because of the uncanny things that happen when my headaches are at their worst, I know I dream the truth.

I had the dream again last night. In it I saw my Tilda, and I knew a part of her life as she did, a part I can see again now as clearly as I can see my hand if I hold it up to a light.

Under the Arch in the Gethsemane Garden is a stone bench. The arch is grey and crumbling and older than anyone knows. Resting beside it is the Commemoration Plaque. Building works are taking place. Renovations, Tilda calls them, just like those that occur each year as the rocks move, the soil shifts, and water leaks unexpectedly yet again.

Living underground does have its problems and it's these that have caused Tilda to hide her diary outside. Well, not really outside, for the Arch lies in the Third Sector of one of the Great Caverns – Cavern Nine. The gardens have become her special place, the Arch her sanctuary, and, as she reaches down under the bench, she remembers as she always does the decision that made this her place.

'It is where many people died,' said her mentor, Lecter, the great leader of the Science Area.

She was living in B-Quadrant with her guardians, so the Gethsemane Garden *was* close to home, even though it had been set aside like an outcast that everyone hated.

'It was the location of the last Great Battle,' Lecter had continued. 'More than three hundred people were killed. Nothing was ever the same in Cavern Nine.'

'Were you there? Were you there?' she had pressed.

‘I was. That’s why I know how everyone feels. Because we lost people, people we love.’ But *she* didn’t know. How could she know the past.

He had hesitated then, moving his eyes off the wall and staring at the then ten-year-old Tilda before adding, ‘And because that battle marked the closing of the way out. It is since then that we’ve been trapped.’

Tilda grew up free from the memories her elders had. All she knew were the sparsely populated caverns with their houses and roads that stood out like stains against the walls, and school and the petty squabbles and dreams that filled the thoughts of all the children. She grew up believing both her parents died in a cave-in when she was nine. Yet she was different. With a mystical sense she never understood, she knew she had been set aside.

She asked questions ‘as if her life depended on it’, Lecter would say. ‘Because you take after me,’ he would often add. Now at sixteen years she knew he was grooming her. She was one of the few children being taught Science and one day she would work in the Science Area and perhaps learn of the experiments Lecter had devoted his life to.

Other Science students didn’t share Tilda’s inquisitive nature. That’s why she had hidden her diary all these years. She had lived in a hostel for as long as she could remember and privacy was rare, not like how it must be Outside.

She reached back down again into the sandy gravel, moved her fingers across to the side this time – but that’s not where she had placed it. It should have been in the middle of the hole. It was always in the middle.

Jumping off the bench she ran around to where the hole hid, inconspicuous and unknown. She lay down and risked stains to her school clothing – but it wasn’t there. Someone had taken her diary?

It was a vision, not a dream, and it told me Tilda lives. She lives there, in The City. The key to finding her once lay in doing their will. I submitted to their experiments, to the conditioning and the programming without a clue as to what they did, but that led to nothing.

I knew at this point that the key lay in going back. I had the right to go back despite our pact because ... because I had the right of the father.

The father!

Daniel my boy was in Melbourne!

But the key lay in going back.

The sun's rays were bright. I squinted, raised my hand as I stepped out through the doorway of the shop in Carlton. It wasn't busy. My assistants would cope.

Cars hurried. Shoppers too. Avoiding them, I strode up Lygon Street toward the car. Arundel would be home and I would speak with her, tell her my resolve, look into her eyes and try to mend what I had damaged.

I wanted to take off my shirt as I walked. There was a wildness welling inside me and I felt my mind drifting from what I could see. Depression didn't strike though, not this time, and I waited, got into the car and drove fast. Around me, industry flourished in the gait of people walking and vehicles pressing. Colours sparkled. Buildings seemed to swagger with the dance of freedom.

Returning to the house, I fumbled for the right key. No. Returning them to my pocket, I knocked. Brighton was a world of its own. No industry here, just a quiet waiting, a breeze that promised something.

I knocked again. A gentle breeze. The garden bushes didn't sway. Turning my back fully to the door I breathed deeply as I raised my hand again to shield my eyes and began unbuttoning my shirt. Shirt in one hand, key in the other, I turned and entered. For a moment I wondered what I would find. Would my abandoned wife be there with another man?

The house felt empty.

Sadness filled me. I would be leaving soon. Leaving a mess of my own making. Would she understand?

I saw in the glass cabinet my boy's figurines – characters from Star Trek and Stargate. And the spaceships and his own Lego constructions. He too lived in another world. Daniel was as lost as I was.

The door opened and I swung around.

‘James’, she said.

‘Arundel.’

She met my gaze, puzzled at first. I stared then rushed to her. She smiled as I wrapped her up in my arms.

Pulling away, she hung her bag and sat on the couch. ‘Everything went wrong this morning,’ she said. ‘James, what’s going on? Am I cursed? Danny was pretending to be sick. He’s only six and he’s manipulating me. Then Mum rang and she needs me to get groceries for her while she’s in hospital but I took Daniel to school without her key so I had to come back again. And I forgot to get petrol, and left the keys in the car at the shops and had to wait for Road Service.’

She wiped her brow, and trembled as she stared down.

‘Arundel.’ I hurried to her and sat down. ‘It’s alright darling.’

Stroking her hair, I held her close as she cried.

Daniel jumped on top of me as Arundel and I tickled each other. The dog barked. We ignored the doorbell ringing. Then Arundel got up off the bed and hurried downstairs. I was at the foot of the stairs when she called back from the door with a parcel.

Daniel’s face was alight as he ran up to her, looked at the parcel.

‘It’s for me. It’s for me,’ he announced and he opened it quickly.

A Generations Captain Kirk figurine appeared from a box and he took it over to the glass cabinet.

‘Not yet,’ I said. ‘It’s not your birthday yet.’

‘Besides there’s no room for it in there,’ Arundel added.

Daniel carefully placed the figurine on the dining table, then rushed at me.

Before I knew it he had me under the arms again and I was laughing. Arundel laughed too, then stomped her foot and snorted like she was a ringleader of wild horses.

‘It’s time for school,’ she yelled. ‘And time for work, James.’

Daniel ran upstairs. ‘Don’t forget to pack your lunch,’ she called.

She came to me and put her arms around my neck, kissed me then pulled away, stared into my eyes like I’ve seen women do in the movies: a magnetic stare that

wouldn't let my eyes pull away. She was reaching into my soul, searching for the truth and searching for hope. 'Is it okay,' she said?

Last night when I told her, I thought it was going to be the end of us. Instead we came closer and drew Daniel in too.

'Will you come back?' she added.

I gazed back into her eyes, and tried to smile.

'Do you want to come back?' she insisted.

She threw her arms off me.

'DADDY, DADDY, LET'S GO.'

Daniel came running downstairs and grabbed my arm. Arundel left for the kitchen and grabbed his lunch. Along the way she kicked the dog, then tried again.

'MUM-MY,' Daniel rebuked.

'Come on, let's go,' I said.

From the doorway I turned back and saw her face. I felt a headache returning, as I knew a piece of my heart that was healing had suddenly broken off again.

I took the boy to school without telling him, then came back home and spoke briefly with Arundel. She only wanted to speak about work as she shrugged her hair continually from her face and looked at the carpet more than she looked at me. Little was said. I couldn't face her as I did before. Only if I returned could we begin to repair her hurts. I was leaving her, abandoning her physically like I had abandoned her emotionally. I didn't want to, but I had no choice and as I walked out the door I shed her from my mind.

The sky was clearing and the dog followed me out. I called him for a final pat but he didn't come. I unlocked the car and checked my supplies.

With my headache the drive was not pleasurable; from Brighton to the city, through the city to the shop in Carlton and then dropping the spare key at the cleaner's in Coburg like I really cared. It was all tedious and hot but soon after lunch I was at the base of Hanging Rock, north-east of Melbourne. The rock rose into the sky like a huge monolith that had been ejected from another planet. It stood there as a beacon. I had

heard the stories, listened to the park ranger. I felt sure this was where I had left the underground.

It was mid-afternoon on a warm and oppressive spring day. Few people were around. I carried my pack and tent and hid them near the Rock.

It had been night when I came out ten years earlier, although the moonlight was brighter than the brightest day in the tunnels. It was around here somewhere. I didn't climb down so it wasn't from up in the Rock itself that I had come. I hadn't walked far and I had found a road. So ... it must be here, somewhere, I thought: there has to be a cave, a tunnel, where the forest meets the huge rocks at the base of Hanging Rock?

I drove the car away and walked back in. The headache worsened but came to me as a visitor, a portent that something of significance was occurring. My strength remained and I remembered Arundel telling me it wasn't a typical headache, that normal headaches bring tiredness and inability. Shedding her again I set up my tent on a small clearing and let the aching wane. I'm coming, Tilda, I chanted. I'm coming.

After resting for a time, I wandered for hours before the sun set and the aching in my temple struck me with such violence that I had to sit. How far had I wandered that night? Was it really from here that I'd emerged?

I have to find a way back in.

Have to look for Tilda.

All afternoon and all evening I searched. I explored the perimeter of the Rock and sniffed my way into tunnels and caves. Time seemed to stop, but there was no way in, no way here to find a tunnel that would reach to the City.

Sleep came quickly, not soundly. Wild dreams woke me often. I saw the moon in my dreams and through the side of the tent when I stirred.

A screech woke me. Unzipping the tent, I looked out into the night and tasted the fragrance of the dew on the eucalypts. There was a light in the trees. I eased my way out, gathered my shoes and pushed through the bush. There was a car and I watched doors open and people climb out.

Dark shapes took a struggling boy from the back of a four-wheel-drive and carried him toward the Rock. With only the torch I held in my hand, I followed. I followed and disappeared into a tunnel after them. So many memories and thoughts reached into my mind like tentacles and threatened to explode it: it's still happening,

I'm thirty-four now and I was taken when I was six and this boy who looks about six is being taken now. How many others? How did they hide this tunnel?

Stealthily through the tunnel, my headaches lifted. They waned quickly as they hadn't done for years. I didn't need the torch – the dim light ahead was enough. Then my headache returned with a thump when I hit it on a jutting rock.

Hurrying on, I lost sight of the other torches.

Gravel appeared beneath my feet and I slipped on it often.

There was a smell. It filled my nostrils with a scent of herbs and mould and it filled my mind with confusion. Then fear. Then, it was a ... hole, to the side. I shone the torch and felt around it – it was another tunnel.

I could get lost. What on earth did I think I could do?

For what seemed like hours I sat there, mostly with the torch off. I strolled further down and found two more tunnels, and on the way back three more jumped out under torchlight as if to say, 'Fool, how dare you try to conquer me.'

I thought about the boy. Why didn't I help him? So engrossed in my need, he became only an object and yet ... that was me once! The headache returned with a vengeance. It made me sit, and I tried to reason why I had it at all – did I have a barometer brewing inside my brain, implanted by the old man ten years before?

Moonlight shone bright on my face as I exited the tunnel. Not one but two cars stood nearby. The light of the moon illuminated them clearly as they melded with the trees, parked next to each other beside a picnic table just metres from the dirt road.

Someone must be nearby? A second boy, perhaps a second boy was taken down and I didn't meet them because I had gone the wrong way?

At that moment a sharp pain sounded like a siren in my head.

'Owwwww,' I cried.

'Here, over here,' I heard.

I held my head as I crouched down, didn't hear the scuffling, the movement of foliage and the footsteps.

The pain subsided as a hand grabbed my shoulder.

'This one's come back.'

I turned to a dark figure.

'You're home now. You'll feel better soon.'

One of my arms was grabbed and twisted behind my back. The other arm was jabbed.

I forgot the boy, but remembered the boy I once was, as I was carried along the dark tunnel. Full circle, the full circle of the bright moon. I was back and there was nothing more to understand. In my delirium I knew I just had to go to Tilda.

But then ... there were other men and there were conversations. The men carrying me turned around. Something jabbed my arm and—

I opened my eyes from a vivid dream to Arundel squeezing my wrist. She smiled and said ‘hello darling’. I tried to smile back but didn’t feel like speaking. Turning my head I saw a hospital room. Facing Arundel again I noticed tears streaming down her face, and loud sobbing as she lowered herself backwards onto a chair with her hands covering her eyes.

A nurse walked in. ‘Mr... James, is it? Here,’ she went to Arundel with a glass and something in her other hand, ‘take this.’

Arundel screamed and lashed out, knocking the glass to the floor. She came to me and shook the side of the bed. ‘JAMES, JAMES, WHAT HAPPENED. DO YOU KNOW?’

The nurse held her and told her to be calm, then looked at me.

‘I’m alright,’ I muttered, but I feel beaten up. ‘What happened?’

‘YOU MUST KNOW,’ Arundel screamed.

A doctor entered, met the nurse’s eyes. ‘You must leave him for a while,’ the nurse said as she and the doctor escort Arundel from the room.

I closed my eyes and told myself Arundel would be okay, because I would be okay, then I recalled how I left her and how she would be feeling. My heart sank as I remembered.

‘What happened?’ a police constable asked later.

But I didn’t remember, not then. I recalled only the headache that was more unbearable than anything I had ever felt, and then the hospital bed.

‘You were found not far from your home. Your car had rolled several times. Do you recall what happened?’ I shook my head. ‘You might remember soon.’

After he left, the nurse informed me Arundel would be back soon, and that I should let her know if her visit became ‘too much’. I tried again to recall the dream I was waking from. Images of my past life in The City stole into my mind. These mingled with dreams of Tilda and Lecter as she grew into the sixteen-year-old she must be now. Lecter, Tilda’s protector, and ... I sat up with a start – he is Proctor. It was the same man. I had never seen Proctor, knew only his voice. But it’s the same man, I knew it now and my mind raced but went nowhere, my heart pounded in frustration as I suddenly recalled a segment of a dream – Lecter telling frustrated sixteen-year-old Tilda, ‘It runs in the family. That’s why you’re here. It runs in the family.’

The nurse came in with Arundel. Arundel pushed the nurse away and slammed her fist on the bed beside me.

‘You mustn’t,’ the nurse demanded.

‘They’ve taken Daniel,’ Arundel screamed.

Her fist hit my knee this time. Her hands covered her eyes again, just for a moment as the nurse held her up.

‘They’ve taken Daniel,’ she sobbed.

She stared directly into my eyes with gritted teeth, probing deeply.

‘Where is he?’ she demanded.