

Escape

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Dedicated to Lin Newborn and Dan Shersty
members of Anti-Racist Action
murdered by Nazis in 1998.



Paul stood watching as they burnt to death. The cold of the night made the hair on his arms stand up. He couldn't feel any warmth from the burning building. He knew who was inside, whose lungs were filling with smothering black smoke, whose skin was branded with the heat of the fire, whose hair was fusing, curling and burning. Fire engines came quickly, and then the police - eventually, when they could be bothered. Nothing too urgent. The building wasn't getting any less burnt, and the people inside weren't getting any less dead.

Paul and Ross were bored, hanging around outside the shopping centre, when the Leader of the Nazi Party walked by. The sun was beating down on their backs, branding their necks with sunburn, filling their eyes with glare. The concrete hurt to look at.

The Leader was wearing a black shirt with a Nazi symbol on it, and a denim jacket and jeans. He was carrying a small stereo, which was playing a male choir singing heartily in German.

There were a few corners of shade, but the centre was mostly flat open heat. There was a tiny playground with a curly metal slippery dip which would probably take your skin off if you tried to slide down it. There was a milk bar, but Paul and Ross had spent their last two dollars on a tiny 'giant cone' hours ago, and you weren't allowed to hang around the shop just because it was cool and outside was hot, and your eyes were filling with sweat running off your forehead and into scratches on your arms and under your armpits.

'Stop taking up tables if you aren't buying', even though there were white plastic tables and no one else in there. So they sat in a patch of shade outside and talked about the owner of the shop - why'd he do that - let's come back at night and throw a garbage can in the window - nah man, let's throw a molotov cocktail through the window - and watched the Leader.

Usually there were people they knew at the shopping centre. But not today. The Leader walked with a strut like a rooster, looking straight ahead, like when you have new clothes or a new haircut you want people to see, but you can't just run up and say 'look at me', you can't look at people to see if they're looking at you - you have to casually walk past them looking straight ahead. Actually he didn't have new clothes or new anything. He was about thirtyish with a scratchy brown beard and stained denim. He looked like a bikie who'd somehow been conned into swapping his bike for a shitty stereo. He looked around and saw that there was no one around. Then he saw Paul and Ross.

The Nazi Party had come to their suburb a while ago. Graffiti appeared on the white walls of the library one day, about killing Asians. Every so often you saw copies of their 'newspaper' left at bus stops or blowing along the street - a single sheet of paper called 'The White Warrior'. You didn't see that many white warriors, or any really, except the Leader. They said they had 15,000 members, or sometimes 20,000. Sometimes they said this included a couple of politicians. The Nazis were like people who say they've got a girlfriend who goes to a different school or lives in a different city: you never quite see any evidence, but they keep bragging about her.

Some kids at school were really upset by the Nazis - they wanted to follow the Leader home and find out where he lived. Some of them talked about burning his house down. Paul didn't care that much about them. Him and Ross went through a stage of reading all the books in the library about when the Nazis were in power in Germany - or looking at the pictures of big rallies and waving flags and marching armies. Paul noticed that the local Nazis photocopied pictures from the same books for the 'White Warrior'. You could tell they wanted to be as big as the old German Nazis, but also that they weren't anywhere near it. Paul had wanted to go to a rally they advertised once, but it never happened. And besides, Paul had a feeling in his stomach that it'd turn out to be shit anyway, like going to Scouts or cadets and finding out they were just people from your school in uniforms in a hall somewhere.

The Leader made eye contact and walked over to them. He smiled a little falsely, too quickly, like a lamp switching on, and stuck out his hand.

'Hi guys'. He reminded Paul of a teacher trying to show the kids that he respected them as an equal and that he wanted to be more a friend than a teacher. But Paul's friends never said 'hi guys' and stuck out their hands at each other. And adults never did it to other adults either as far as Paul had seen. Paul had a reply ready which he'd been saving up since he saw it on TV. He was going to look him in the eye and say 'get your hands out of my pants dude'. But this guy was a thirty year old Nazi and they were by themselves - and Ross wouldn't have backed him up if the Leader wanted to fight him (Paul felt really angry about this, even though he wouldn't have backed Ross up, or anyone else). And no one was there to laugh.

'Hi'. A bit of awkward silence followed, like trying to make conversation with relatives. The Leader's smile went a bit stale at the edges.

'Do you know who I am?' he said. This was begging for a smartarse answer. Paul wished more people were here, and maybe that the Leader was about fifteen years younger.

'You're the Leader arentcha?'

The Leader's face flashed a sulky angry pout at them for just a second. Paul and Ross flinched back and their stomachs tightened and they looked around for escape routes. They had that falling feeling of 'this is it, we're going to get bashed up' - but just for a second. The smile flashed back on.

'Nah...I'm not the Leader'.

Sweet relief flooded through them like a warm drink hitting their stomachs. And another good feeling - the joy of working out something that no one else knew. The Nazis never had pictures of the Leader, they just talked about him, and Paul suddenly saw that that must be because people might recognise him on the street - and since this guy was happy to be recognised, everyone just assumed he was the Leader. Paul and Ross each hoped the other one hadn't worked it out so they could tell them.

'I'm Doctor Gustav Mueller'. His hand was still stuck out in the air. Paul remembered when some kids from school were talking about following the Leader, or Dr Mueller really, home and burning his house down. He remembered standing just outside the circle, saying things and being ignored. If he found out where this guy lived they'd listen to him. He had a quick vision of being given a key to the house and letting people in. And no one would know if he made friends with him. Paul looked at the hot empty concrete and thought about what else he could do all day - walk around with Ross whinging in his ear like a blowfly trapped in a window...then he reached out and shook Mueller's hand.

'We met the guy everyone calls the Leader today'. It was Friday night and they were sitting in the lounge room of the flat where Ross' family lived. Paul and a couple of other guys were there - the same people they saw at school and after school they saw on the weekend as well. They saw each other more often than any of them wanted. Paul thought he wasn't really like the rest of them.

'He's not the Leader though - the Leader lives in a different city'. In the rush to get it out before Paul did, Ross had forgotten about not letting anyone know he was friends with Nazis.

'We went to his flat...had a few beers n that'. Without realising it, Paul held his soft drink in a different way as he said this. Ross was in the next room, setting up his computer for the game they were going to play. It was called Quest, an 'online role playing game where you play the role of heroes in a world of magic and legends', as the box said. Ross didn't like people around when he was working on the computer. The people Paul hung around with weren't that interested in what he had to

say (Paul didn't call them his friends, as if he was just killing time with them until his real friends came and took him away). Except they were interested in the part about free beer. It was a big day when they found someone who'd go into the bottle shop for them, let alone pay for it. Last time they gave their money to an older kid who took off with it.

Ross came in.

'Alright you guys, I've got it set up'. He sounded like a surgeon who'd saved the patient. Paul talked about the game so no one would mention what he'd said. Paul and Ross had agreed to keep it quiet. In fact Paul had nagged Ross into agreeing. Ross looked at some notes he'd drawn.

'OK - you don't know how role-playing works do you?' Ross said to one of them, even though they all knew he didn't. Ross' voice went a bit like a teacher's.

'Right, I'm the Game Master, which is like the referee OK? And all you guys are the players. And the game's set in this world called the Bright Land, which is full of magic of dragons and shit like that. And you've each got a character, who's a person in this world. Like in a play? Like, OK, Paul's character is called Ariel and he's like a warrior, and you're a wizard Sunil'. Ross clicked the mouse.

'OK and this screen has what skills your character's got - like it says 'stamina 10', and see here Ariel's got stamina 20, so you're a lot weaker than him Sunil. But here' click. 'it says 'Necromancy L5' - which means, necromancy is magic to do with raising the dead OK, and L is just level, so it means Sunil's character knows a lot of magic to do with that stuff. And I've got the rules here and I know em anyway, and I kind of set up the game and run it. And you can each log on at home, but I'll run you through it this time...'

Ariel rose out of the water like the sun, riding the foam, the white horses of the sea. His jewelled sword was like a butterfly and his hair wet and strong like the mane of a new born foal. His companions and he had all mixed their blood with the dark waters, in the valleys under the sea. They were like a herd of wounded, yet strong and triumphant lions, or like a bright scattering of stars that appear in the sky all at once. All the people of the island ran down the beach to meet them, and all the women hung necklaces of flowers around their necks and kissed them and called them heroes. People had rowed from all the islands to see them. Though it was a bright, hot, cloudless afternoon, even the moon had come out for them. They carried pearls and diamonds which they had stolen from the King of the Sea, and silver worked into the shape of human hands, and shining animals that were made of glass and yet moved as if they were alive, and bright gold arrows, kissed by witches and so blessed, which never missed. Like great clouds gathering to rain on a desperate desert, like a flock of young dragons taking flight, so was the return of Ariel and his companions to the islands.

In the underpass they tried again with making a molotov cocktail. It sounded easy. Fill a bottle with petrol, or something else that'll burn, stuff a rag in the top, light and throw. But you can't get petrol if you don't have a car or any money. And then you use a plastic bottle and nearly set fire to yourself. It doesn't seem to work until you figure out that you're supposed to soak the rag before you light it. And then the bottle won't break when you throw it.

'Hair is the glory of a woman but the shame of a man Ross'. They were all sitting on the couch in Gustav Mueller's flat, with beer cans in hand. It was another long, dry, creeping hot slow day, and there was a fat blowfly buzzing from one itching pink skin to another.

'The glory of a woman but the shame of a man'. Gustav waved his arms just a bit more and talked just slightly louder and longer than if he hadn't been drinking. Some of the other Nazis were there - Martin Ascher, a big man with wild thin white hair who kept scratching his arse. Ascher did most of the work on 'The White Warrior', and put most of them around the suburbs when no one was looking. Paul imagined Ascher's hand being infected and this spreading to every sheet of paper, contaminating everyone who read them.

'Dr Mueller' Ross began,

'Call me Gustav mate'. He leant forward and waved his arms again, splashing beer on to the couch. He'd asked them to call him by his first name before, but when they did he got sulky and snappy at them. Anyway, he didn't let Ross call him Gustav, or anything at all - he just launched into a speech about Ross' long hair. Paul didn't listen. He sat there in a drunken haze and looked at the pile of 'Soldier of Fortune' magazines on the floor. It reminded him of going on a car trip with his family, sitting in the back seat for hours watching the car eat the miles and shit them out no better than it found them, nothing to look at but flat dry dirt that he looked at for so long he could almost taste it, the little headache and feeling like you want to vomit that never goes away and never gets big enough to say anything about, and your thoughts run around your head in circles like a dog on a chain. He wondered if Dr Mueller and Ascher were from Germany, or just had German names. He thought about the sticker on the door - a farmer with a shotgun and the words 'get off my land or get shot', even though he lived in a flat above a shop. Mueller had wandered on to how they couldn't be Party members because they were too young. Paul told himself not to listen. There's nothing you can do about it anyway. Just concentrate on being drunk.

Paul went on a long angry walk that night, as usual. Before the sun went down he could see the moon. He loved that, the moon in the blue sky, but the night was the same as always. He felt the night air running itself up inside his tshirt like a girl's hands, or like he imagined a girl's hands would feel. The hair on his arms stuck up with the cold. He wished he'd worn a coat - he'd realised he needed one as soon as he got out of the door, but he didn't want to go back. He looked at the warm light from other people's houses and thought about the lives that went on there without him. He walked by the phone booth where he'd anonymously rung up the girl he liked - which meant he'd rung her house and hung up when her mother asked who was calling. He'd also tried an idea he had of gluing string to a coin so he could get change without paying, but it hadn't worked.

He was out of the house a lot more since the shop his parents tried to start had gone broke after six months. They went back to their old jobs, like failed runaways. But they weren't even sure they'd keep them now so many people were being laid off. Paul wanted to walk by the house of the girl he liked and stand outside, and have her come out and invite him in, and step into the warm light, out of one life and into another. He wanted to keep walking, until he was out of here, instead of round in circles and back to his house when he got tired.

He sat on a hill and looked over the suburbs. It was a field of lights, like a spaceship, or like Christmas lights. He didn't want to walk down into them and have them become just houses and streetlights, and streets where the only thing around the corner was another corner. He shivered with the cold, but he wouldn't have minded it if it meant something: if he was a soldier on a mission, or Ariel, crossing a wasteland for dragon's gold.

The only thing Paul liked about the Nazis now was getting drunk - drinking until he felt like he was wrapped in cotton wool and the world dissolved off him, like a dirty pig being hosed down before being thrown back into the dirt. He thought about his parents and saw himself in twenty years. He wanted to escape. He wanted a book that said 'this is how you escape'.

Back in Mueller's flat. Martin Ascher had just left to do something for 'The White Warrior', and the other Nazis weren't there. There was only Paul, Ross and Mueller. It was OK when Mueller was there, because he'd keep the talk going, raving on about how the blacks had fucked him over all his life, always got promoted over him, big rich niggers with their jewellery and their cars, fooling white girls and getting them pregnant, on and on, little bits of resentment and filth flying at you until you felt like a piece of sticky flypaper covered in dead flies. He always talked about the niggers. Copying the magazines from America, made-up stories filled with real hate and anger. But it was better than now - then you could drink your beer and be quiet and think about nothing. But now Mueller had gone outside for some reason, just dumped them like he often did, and Paul and Ross had been staring at each other for ten minutes and couldn't think of anything to say.

Mueller came back in eventually. He came over to the couch but he didn't sit down, he kept standing with his legs wide apart and his arms folded.

'I've got something to say to you boys'. He waited. And waited.

'What the fuck is he waiting for?' Paul thought.

'Put down your beers', in a voice like they were idiots because they couldn't read his mind. Paul would have liked to ram his beer can into Mueller's stuck up face for that. But he put it down like a good boy.

'It's about Martin Ascher'.

'Thank God' Paul thought, 'I don't have to sit here and listen to Mueller lay into Ross again'. Some of his anger went out of him, for now.

'Do you know the story of the disappearing White Warrior?' They did. But Mueller told them anyway.

'Ascher thinks he's a hotshot printer'. 'Hotshot' was one of Mueller's favourite insults - blacks with expensive cars thought they were hotshots as well.

'We used to get it done at a photocopying place. But Ascher rung up the Leader and got him to approve buying a printing press. It was a piece of shit, about ten years out of date, but oh no, Ascher had to have it because he didn't know how to use the new ones, not that he'd admit that. I had to drive over to pick it up, and have it in my flat even though it was up two flights of stairs. Anyway, he used up all the Party's money buying it, and we didn't have any money for ink. But Ascher didn't admit he'd fucked up. No, I can make printing ink he said, my Dad taught me. He never had a Dad, but never mind. So he makes his ink, and runs off a thousand 'White Warriors'. Should be a two man job, but he wouldn't let anyone help him, they might notice that he doesn't know what he's doing. Next day, where's the paper Martin? Oh, I ran them off and got rid of them all. What, a thousand in one afternoon? Yeah it wasn't too hard. I could tell he was fucking lying, he always goes red and won't look at you. Bloody idiot. But I don't know what's going on. So I'm going to go, and on the way out I see a big pile of paper sticking out of the bin. What's this Martin? Nothing, just some leftovers - but he's reaching for them and he looks even more red and panicky. I take one out. Why'd you throw them out - they look fine? Then I notice this shit all over my fingers. It was Martin Ascher's precious home made ink. The things looked fine but the ink came right off onto your fingers'.

Mueller was almost shouting now.

'He'd fucked up a thousand copies. And he gummed up the press somehow - we had to dump it. We didn't get a single thing out of it, and the Leader didn't do anything. The prick went behind my back and naturally he fucked it up because he's a stupid fucking failure and the Leader did nothing'.

'Well he's bloody excelled himself this time. You know how we were going to do a whole lot of posters and stick them up?' They did know.

'Well, Ascher, had to do the poster. I tried to get someone else to, but no one would. They didn't even say no either - they just stared at the floor and said nothing. No one ever gives me a straight answer. So we were going to meet at Ascher's place. You'll have the posters done by then Martin? Yeah, no worries. You sure? Yeah yeah, it's safe with me, even though I'm a sneaky dumb prick. Last night we turn up and he'd done the poster all right. He was holding it out all proud of himself. He just hadn't done any copies'. Mueller's fists were clenched and his face was pinched up.

'What are you gonna do?' Ross asked.

'I went out to a public phone. I've been talking to the Leader. I've had it. I'm gonna get Ascher expelled from the Party. The Leader didn't want to but it's in our Constitution, he's gotta. I'm sick of these idiots holding us back. There's a new day coming for us, and it's got nothing to do with Mister Martin Ascher'.

Paul was walking home drunk. He was imagining talking to Mueller, shouting at him.

'There's no new day coming Mueller. No new day. You won't get Ascher expelled. The Leader won't do it or you'll change your mind or probably you'll just forget about it tomorrow and hand over another hundred dollars for him to throw away. Either work with him or don't, right? Keep him around or fuck him off. Don't keep putting up with him so you can laugh at him while he's off doing the work you can't be bothered doing, so you've got an excuse for failing. Bloody walk away from all this. Don't sit there saying it'll get better because it bloody won't'. Paul felt sorry for Ascher and he felt angry at him. Then he felt guilty, because he was thinking like he wanted the Nazis to win. He didn't really. He didn't want Mueller to be able to line up all the blacks and shoot them like he was always saying. He didn't want Mueller to be able to bully everyone, instead of just him and Ross. He didn't want the pictures of death camps in Ascher's books to come true. He didn't. But sometimes he forgot.

Ross was late to role playing. He'd been hanging around with Mueller, although only Paul knew this.

'I've got some new ideas for the game'...

They were called the Shining Lords and they came over the water in long ships. They were tall and proud and they loved cruelty, and they drank blood. Everyone in the island of Cay Brasil was standing on the beach to welcome them and the Shining Lords cut them up right there with the water lapping around their feet, all of them, even pregnant women and babies, and the people held out their hands and said no, please don't, but the Shining Lords said nothing, they just ran their sharp needle-like swords the people's eyes and groins until all were dead. Then they went up the beach and burnt all the grass houses, and the black smoke rose up in a cruel cloud and all the bright birds were blackened with soot and some died from the smoke, until they flew up into the air, all their gold and blue and orange gone like it had been bled away, and the smoke and the sick ugly birds looked like the end of the world. Then the Shining Lords sailed away, back to their city which was called the Tower of Heaven. Cay Brasil kept burning for the rest of the day, then for a night and a day, blotting out the stars and making the sky an angry boiling grey sea, and the sun sometimes weak and hazy and orange, and sometimes covered altogether, like it was drowning and kept fighting its way to the surface only to be covered again.

It was night, and she was walking home from volleyball when she saw some men following her, whispering and looking at each other and trying not to be seen. She walked faster and then looked around, and she looked straight into the eyes of one

of them. The one with the denim jacket and jeans shouted 'get her!' and she ran, but they were grown men and she was a girl, short legs and big clumpy shoes.

'You fucking wog bitch'

'Yeah you bitch - fuck off back where ya came from'.

They spat in her hair and kicked her in the stomach and between her legs, again and again, shouting that she was a fucking bitch and she wasn't wanted here, until their anger was drained and they ran off. She lay on the footpath crying and holding her stomach and her bleeding mouth and hunching herself up, trying to stop punches and kicks that had already happened.

Paul was sitting with Ross and their friends at school when his cousin came up. Paul didn't know what to say. He wanted to make a joke so everyone would know how confident he was with women but she frightened him, especially with that look on her face like he was something that was going to make her vomit.

'Your friends bashed up a girl in my class last night' she said.

They were all looking at him, all of them. No one except Ross knew who she must mean. Paul half-laughed and said

'Hey, they're not my friends - I just scam free beer off them'. His cousin looked even more disgusted with him.

'Yeah - well ha fucking ha. I hope you're really proud of yourself you prick'. She looked like she was going to cry.

She left and one of Paul's friends said

'Who...who was she talking about Paul?'

'Look, they're not my friends alright?'

When Paul was very little he saw this painting of an Indian demon with three eyes and he screamed because he thought it was real, that some people would have another eye open in the middle of their forehead, and they'd be demons that everyone would hate, and it might happen to him. Sometimes he felt a fluttering feeling in the middle of his forehead and he had to jerk his hand up to feel that there was nothing there. Sometimes he thought he could feel it growing in his head, thought he could feel a soft part in his skull where it'd come out. Sometimes when he first woke up he was sure that both of his eyes were closed and he could still see so the third eye must have opened in the night. He hadn't thought about it for years but now he went to the toilets and looked at the big mirror, making sure there was nothing opening there, touching it to see that there was nothing growing under the skin.

Ariel and his companions set sail just as the fire of Cay Brasil was dying down. Their ship was called the Sky Drummer. Everyone came from the islands around to watch them go just as they had seen them return from the sea, but there was no joy in the world this time and the air was full of smoke instead of flowers.

They came to the sunken city of Bharat, which had been given to the sea by the evil of its king Anhotep and his court. The sea had come for them, rising inch by inch, but they had sacrificed the commoners of the city instead, crowding themselves into the highest towers, climbing on the backs of the people, sealing them into rooms and letting them drown. The Sky Drummer sailed above a giant statue of Anhotep, looking out over the dead city. They saw light coming from one of the drowned towers. They wondered if the people of the sea had taken Bharat, even though there was a huge distance between Bharat and the Sea King's country, and it was the equivalent of a burning desert. They also wondered if Anhotep and his court were somehow still alive, or still ruling the city.

The Sky Drummer circled above the drowned statue of Anhotep like a fly. It was as if it were the last of the thick cloud of filthy whining insects which attended Anhotep, which spread disease and which he called the Pearls of God, allowing them to crawl on him and suck his blood, and killing any person who harmed one. It was as if the Sky Drummer longed to join its master but was afraid to descend into anything as pure as the water. And Ariel did long to descend into the water, to kill Anhotep. For he was Ariel – Ariel the Liberator, Ariel who came down from the sky like lightning, Ariel the Deliverer, Ariel the sword of freedom and the scourge of evil.

Ariel remembered the stories he had heard of Anhotep the Great. He had his throne room filled with rotting corpses, and he had made them all Dukes and Barons. He sat on his gold throne all through the dark night talking to them, and had feasts prepared just for him and his cold noblemen. He addressed the people, telling them that the dead were his only loyal subjects, the only ones who were filled not with wilfulness and rebellion, but only love and obedience for their lord, the only ones other than the flies who swirled around him like stinking black smoke.

And so the Sky Drummer circled for three days like a vulture over the dead city, while the fires burnt in the towers and at night they thought they could hear ghosts howling. But in the end they could think of no way of going so far under water.

And so Ariel, the faithful, the free, the brightest star in the Bright Land, swore to return. And he and his companions sailed on.

At Mueller's house everyone was there for once, and Mueller and Ascher weren't snapping at each other, and everyone was laughing and talking to each other instead of sitting there because there was free beer and nowhere else to go. Mueller was showing off, saying things to Paul and winking at the others -

'I told you there was a new day coming', and

'No one's gonna mess with us now'. Paul laughed along but he felt sick.

'Listen...'. But they didn't, they kept on talking.

'Listen...Gust-Dr Mueller'

'What mate?' leaning back in his cane chair, big fake fatherly expression on his face.

'Did you attack someone last night?'

'Weeeeeell...we sure did'. Everyone except Ross and Paul roared and laughed and raised their beers.

'This is it boys - it begins. The wogs've been coming in here, having it all their own way- well not any more. We struck a blow for Australia last night'. He was in full flight, copying the Nazi magazines they got from America. Paul had a couple of beers very quickly but they didn't do anything. He was still there.

Mueller was breathless. He spoke as if he was talking to someone who didn't believe him.

'We did it huh! We fuckin did it! We're the White Warriors huh! No one fucks with us! Fuck...'

He punched the air.

'Did you see the look on that silly bitch's face? Fuck man – we came down on her, like...uh...'

'Like God's thunder' Ascher said sarcastically.

'You better believe it! You better believe it!' Mueller was stabbing his finger at Ascher.

'And what about the fuckin Adelaide crew? They're gonna be spewin! I'd like to see Russell's face' Mueller's voice went high, like he was imitating a girl 'oh, you guys aren't trained up to the level we are here in Adelaide'.

'She's English' Paul mumbled.

'What's that mate?'

'Stop calling me mate you fucking cunt' Paul thought.

'She's from England. She's not a...not a wog OK? She's come over on some exchange thing or something'.

'Bullshit - what do you know? You're just a kid. It's probably not the same one'.

'Well I don't know' Paul said, even though he did.

That night the White Warriors attacked a 50 year old Asian man. They yelled and spat twice as much and kicked him for twice as long. They had to make up for their mistake.

Paul had a sick feeling like cold water all through his body, and he felt like he was going to piss himself. If his cousin told anyone that he knew the Nazis he'd be bashed up for sure. The school had a strong sense of justice, when it came to unpopular people anyway. He was on the bottom of the bashing order. He remembered when one guy was hitting his girlfriend all the time. Everyone talked about it but no one did anything. No one even said anything to the guy himself. But they'd be brave when it came to Paul.

Paul had to find out how his cousin knew about him and the Nazis.

'You've gotta be like a spy Paul - spy in enemy territory'. He kept whispering this to himself as he walked across the playground. But he was thinking

'and then what? She'll either tell other people and you'll get bashed or she won't and you won't. You can't do anything about it. You can't learn martial arts and beat them and Mum and Dad won't send you to another school no matter how much you beg them. You're just waiting for someone else to decide what they feel like doing to you'. There was no real point in finding out - she wouldn't not tell because he asked her to. But it was better than doing nothing. Better to pretend you've got some say in what happens to you.

Paul went up to the group where his sister was. He stood outside the circle but they ignored him. Eventually a guy looked at him and said

'Don't sit down' and kept talking to his friends.

'I've just...I've gotta see my cousin'. He was hanging his head, apologising for being there. His cousin rolled her eyes and smiled but she got up.

His cousin walked with him away from the group.

'Is this about your fucking tough hero friends?'

'Yeah...they're not really my friends-'

'Yeah well, you told me they were at the barbecue'.

Paul remembered the last family barbecue. His Dad's family kept having them and his Dad always complained about having to go. His Dad usually hated his brothers. He said they looked down on him because they were all a lot older, and that his Mum, Paul's Grandma, still treated him like a baby. Paul always had to hang around with his teenage relatives and couldn't ever think of anything to say. Some of the girls were so beautiful though - he wanted to run away with one.

The shop was just starting to go broke but Paul's parents still kind of thought they could save it. Paul's Dad was red and shiny-faced. He was raving on about how well the shop was going, trying to cover it up, trying to talk it into getting better, like a faith healer. He kept saying

'We're out of here - we're gone!'

'We'll sell up in a year and then we're gone' - punching the air as he said 'gone' and raising his voice, nearly shouting into everyone's silent faces.

Paul let his breath out. He remembered telling her and a couple of his other cousins then. He'd totally forgotten for some reason, even though it was only a little while ago. His decision not to tell anyone else was working out about as well as his decision to stop wanking. But he was relieved. When she'd come up to him and said she knew, it was like she could read his mind, or like he was sleepwalking and spraypainting everywhere that he hung around with Nazis.

'Look...what do I have to do to stop you telling anyone?'

She looked that sick look at him again.

'Whaddya mean? Dya think I'm gonna blackmail you or something? Paul...look -'

'What?'

'I know you get a hard time from your parents n that but for fuck's sake - Nazis Paul. How the fuck are they gonna help you? What did that girl do to deserve what they did to her? That old man - yknow - it's not his fault. I don't know what to say to you. Just try and climb out of it. Try and leave home or something'.

'But you won't tell anyone?' He was bending over, holding his hands out like a beggar.

'Is that all you...all right no, I'm not gonna tell. Just keep away from me'. She turned away from him.

'OK, OK, of course', half laughing and bowing, hating himself for grovelling. He backed off.

Paul walked around the dark city and talked to himself, as if he was talking to his cousin.

'Give me something better to do if you don't want me hanging around them. Help me. Don't tell me to climb out. I can't. Why should I? I remember this girl talking to one of your friends and he was saying how bad racism is and she was agreeing with him and actually she knew more about it than he did I think, and eventually she said 'you'd rather I didn't agree with you wouldn't you' and he laughed and said 'yeah'. You bloody go on about how racist everyone is and how terrible but if we started agreeing with you you'd hate it - you'd have to find some other reason to laugh at me and leave me out. Like those fucking nerd characters in films. Always played by some sex symbol so you can like them - as if anyone like that'd ever be rejected. You stuck up shits. Climb out of it. Who's she to tell me to climb out of it. Fuck her'.

He felt alone, and suddenly he realised he wasn't, of course. Ross was in there with him. He'd never thought of that. What did he think about it? Ross always laughed along with the racist jokes and made a few of his own. But Paul did that too. But Paul just did it when he was drunk, or to fit in. He didn't mean it. Ross looked real when he did it. Paul thought he should talk to Ross. But fuck, what if Ross told Mueller? What if Ross looked at him like 'you might have a problem with these people but I don't, so fuck you'? Ross'd do something like that. Ross might really like them. Ross might really hate them but pretend not to, because he was scared that Paul was trying to trick him. Ross might hate them but do it anyway, because he could fuck Paul up by doing it. Ross would. He knew Ross would. Because Paul would.

He kept thinking about the girl and the old man. What could he say to them, if they came up to Mueller's house and saw him there drinking with them and pretending to laugh along with them - alright, really laughing sometimes, even if it was just because he was a bit drunk. 'Oh I'm not really one of them, honest. I never did anything with them and anyway I've got a little bit secretly inside myself where I say I don't really agree with them, and that makes it OK. No, it's OK really, because some people at school who I don't like are against Nazis so I'm allowed to spit in your face. And I thought I was getting away from things but it's just the same and I don't bloody see any reason to try any more, I can't see any way

out. Just fuck off alright, why should I try and do the right thing. What the fuck for? They would have bashed you up if I wasn't there, I didn't make it happen. I cost them money - I take their beer and I don't give them anything so in a way I'm working against them'. A girl looked strangely at him as he walked by and he realised he'd been talking out loud.

Ariel and his companions landed at night off a rocky part of the coast, so they would leave no footprints, and they sank the 'Sky Drummer' and swam through the heavy cold water to land, their arms and lungs burning with pain as they carried their armour and weapons on their backs. They came to a village as the morning was lighting up like a stage, and the people crowded around them, all sick and bloodless with bent backs, for they lived under the Shining Lords. A week ago the Shining Lords had ridden into the village in a carriage with one of their dead. They had commanded four women of the village to pick up the corpse. And when they dead the women were filled with madness and they danced around the village, carrying the corpse as if it were as light as a feather, until they came to one hut where suddenly it was as if it became heavy again, and they dropped it and it fell in the doorway. And the man who lived there fell on his knees crying, and confessed that he had mistakenly killed the Shining Lord when he was out hunting. And the Shining Lords gouged out his eyes with needles and filled the empty sockets with sawdust, and set fire to his hut, and taking their dead rode off silently.

Ariel asked them where was the Tower of Heaven where the Lords lived. But the wise man of the village said nothing, and looked down at the ground, as if he was ashamed of saying nothing. Ariel and his companions talked about what to do. One of them would have offered him gold, another one would have offered protection against the Shining Lords. But Ariel all of a sudden drew his sword and killed them, and then the rest of the villagers attacked them, pathetic with their sticks and bare skin against jewelled armour and shining steel, and they killed all the villagers, going through them like they were a field of screaming wheat. They were almost bored by it.

message from Sunil to Paul: wot tha fuck was that 4?

Paul didn't answer.

Paul spent lunchtimes hiding in the library for the next week. He was still scared of being bashed, not that hiding would help him if they came looking for him. He was scared he'd see his cousin, or the girl who got bashed, even though his cousin didn't hang around anywhere near where he did and the girl was away from school. He didn't want the people he hung around with asking him any questions. He felt like he had a year or so ago, when his friends had decided to reject him for a joke. He felt a mixture of boredom and aching loneliness and fear - mainly fear of being discovered, being exposed as a loser with no friends, but also just the fear of being picked on. He remembered when some older kids had chased after him on the way home from school, chanting

'here boy, here boy, come here'.

He was so bored and there were so few interesting books, especially since he didn't want to look at the ones about the Nazis any more, that he looked through the local paper. He read every entry slowly, waiting for the bell. It had stories on the front page about the two attacks. The girl had given a description to the police which sounded just like Mueller - about forty, jeans and tshirt and denim jacket. There was even a sketch which was pretty spot on. Everyone knew Mueller. He wandered round with his tshirt and his stereo blaring hate so everyone would know him. Paul looked for the story saying they'd arrested him but there wasn't one. Eventually there was an editorial about how we need more police on the streets ('what

the fuck are the ones we've got doing now?' Paul thought), and how girls ought not to be allowed to be out on the streets at night alone. And that was that.

The holidays started, pushing Paul out of the library like a rabbit out of its hole. He stayed home all day, waiting for his parents to tell him to get out of the house for God's sake, which happened three or four times a day. He sat in the stuffy lounge room getting a headache staring at hours of soap operas and sports no one liked. There was always an annoying bright square on the TV screen in summer, from the sun shining in a window. It nagged at him but he was always too bored and tired to get up and fix it. He started hanging around his friends again but he wasn't going back to the Nazis.

The days were hot and dry again, and the shopping centre was bright and painful again, and the shop owners were still mean. Paul would go over to one of his friends' houses, and they'd be bored in about five minutes, so they'd go over to someone else's house, where'd they'd get bored again. They moved like a slow miserable creature through the suburbs, getting bigger and hotter, until they ended up sitting in a playground or a park somewhere, just sitting around waiting for something to happen - a spaceship to come down and take them away or a blond, lipsticked girl in a pink Lamborghini to drive up and point one smooth, white, long-nailed finger and tell them to get in, pick them out of this group of losers, saying 'you' in a low, slow, breathy voice. Paul would have done anything to leave them behind and join up with the popular people, anything at all - lie, backstab, bash someone up, anything. And so would the rest of them. They were like prisoners who were thrown in the same hot cell together, not friends. They were always picking on each other, not physically but with their words, always looking for a weakness to stab at. Either that or saying

'when are we gonna start role-playing again? We only just started. When?' They'd have gone to the pool but they would have gotten bullied, their clothes stolen or their white legs 'accidentally' stepped on, or pushed over or their heads forced under the water, or just laughed at. Paul knew where the girl who got bashed hung out, and he was always thinking about going up and offering her his sympathy. He had a little story worked out in his head where she became his girlfriend because he was so kind. But he was too scared and ashamed and her friends wouldn't have wanted him hanging around her. In the end Paul forgot all about his disgust with the Nazis, he wanted to go back. For the last week he only stayed away because he was hoping Ross would suggest it first. He didn't, so Paul did.

Ascher got on the bus first and Paul followed. Paul waited for him to pick a space. There were spare seats, but Ascher didn't sit down. He looked at all of them, from the front of the bus right up to the back, but he kept standing as the bus drove off.

Wherever Ascher stood, that was where people wanted to walk. It was like a cloud of flies following him. He leant back, hanging from the rail, twisting away from a young girl as she got off. She wasn't black or Asian but he leant away from her anyway. One hand gripped the rail and one splayed off into space. He tried to keep away from her like she was carrying a disease, but he still seemed to get in her way. She had to almost climb over him. She was like someone caught in barbed wire.

The bus stopped and before it started again the engine made this steam sound, a hissing that reminded Paul of a quiet fart, one of the ones you can hear but no one else can, only ten times bigger. Ascher twisted his face like it was coming out of him.

He made faces at Paul. Paul guessed they were signals about the other people on the bus. Maybe the retarded girl who was talking to a picture of Ben Affleck in a magazine. Kill her. Sterilise her. Clean the race. In Germany they were the first to die. One of Ascher's big subjects. Them first, and then the political criminals, the anarchists and the others. One of Ascher's

sayings: you have to clean up your own hall first. Maybe he was trying to say all that with his face. And he wasn't doing little winks or tilts of the head or rolled eyes either. He used every muscle on his face and neck. Big twisted up comic book faces, Play School faces, heart attack faces, every muscle tightly in position like dancers in a musical, making one mask after another. But Paul couldn't tell what any of them meant. Why didn't he just whisper something? Even if it was just some of his usual bullshit about hair or the difference between milk and ink, or leaders and followers. At least you'd know what you were supposed to do. You could laugh or roll your eyes or whatever. It'd be fake but at least it'd be connecting some way. With these faces it was just like being by yourself - just you and this machine with skin on it which might hurt you and might not.

He wasn't too fat but it was like the fat was loud - you were always looking at it. Today it was the deposits on the insides of his thighs. They rubbed together like two wet bags hanging down out of his shorts. He stood up with his legs apart like a cowboy or a woman in Penthouse, then he pressed his legs together, then he hopped up and down like was trying to shake them off. They weren't even anything bad, it was just the way he used them. He threw them around like a cheerleader's pom poms until you couldn't take your eyes off them. They looked sweaty and painful, raw and red, ready to burst like a cluster of spider's eggs.

His clothes always seemed twisted around his body - like they'd been wrenched on quickly and cruelly by someone who hated him. He was always pulling at his tight grey shirt, trying to get the thick, heavy material off his back. It was way too hot for it. He kept pulling at his collar. Paul wondered why he wouldn't undo a button or roll his sleeves up.

The bus turned into Kambah Drive. There were even more empty seats now but he still didn't sit down. He just walked up and down the bus, looking for space. But they wouldn't let him have it.

Things were OK for a couple of days. Ascher was still spinning shit about all the great things he was going to do. He stood in the centre of the faded carpet waving his arms and talking a million miles an hour about his poster offensive.

'A massive poster offensive. That's what we need. None of these silly little fights. We'll get thousands of posters printed up and put 'em all around. A massive offensive. We'll all go out one night and blitz the whole area'. Everyone would nod slowly, go 'yeah...yeah' and not listen. You couldn't really talk to anyone else because Ascher's voice was so loud and he kept going on for hours. Even when it started getting husky and then cracked and squeaky he kept saying the same things over and over.

'This time it's for real. A massive night offensive'. No one said anything except 'yeah...yeah'. No one said

'Who's going to put them up - you're the only one that ever does anything?' or

'Who's going to print them, since you fucked up the printer?' Paul and Ross looked at each other and smiled and you could tell they were thinking it, but what was the point of saying anything? Ascher'd just start on about how you never do anything and how come you were always sitting here drinking our beer when you weren't even a Party member? Let Mueller say it he's so fucking keen to be King Shit.

'The Leader's said I can have two hundred dollars boys'. Ascher was treating Ross and Paul in the same way Mueller usually did - but you could tell he was copying Mueller. He sounded like a bad actor. He put on what he probably thought was a fatherly smile.

'Look...I know you're not really Party members, but I reckon I could let you be part of the poster offensive when it happens'.

'No one wants to help you do they Ascher?' Paul thought, but he said

'we've gotta study. Sorry'. He really was sorry. Not sorry that the Nazi posters wouldn't go up everywhere, but sorry for Ascher for being so hopeless.

'But you're on holidays aren'tcha?'

Oh shit. That was more attention than any of the Nazis usually paid to them, especially a loudmouth like Ascher. Paul was filled with panic.

'Well yeah, but we're going back soon...and they test us when we go back, and that determines where we go and so, um, yeah...' he was starting to babble so he stopped himself.

'Look...Ascher'

'You can call me Mr Ascher for a start!'

Paul almost laughed.

'Alright...look, don't take it out on us'

'What do you mean?' not 'waddya mean' like they'd normally say, but 'What. Do. You. Mean?', each word picked out in a fake English accent, like whatever TV show he'd copied it off.

'What do you mean? Don't take what out on you? I don't know what you're talking about'. He sounded guilty. For some reason Paul suddenly hated him for it - for being so bullying and dishonest and small and pathetic.

'Alright - don't fucking take it out on us because no one wants to help you with your stupid posters It's not our fault right?' Ascher's face was red and sweaty.

'You're just doing what Mueller tells you to aren'tcha? You think he's so great. Well let me tell you - who do you think does all the work? Not him. He just struts around hoping the young girls'll talk to him. The Leader said I was in charge but he took over. He's not even a real Doctor. It's all bullshit. And his name's not even real. It's Miller, Gus Miller. He changed it so he could sound more German!'

'What about Ascher then? What's your fucking name?'

'Piss off. Go on, piss off. You're all talk!'

'It's not your flat Ascher!'

'Yeah well, I'm gonna be leading the Party soon. Mueller's finished!'

Paul walked around the main street where all the shops were. He was less angry than when he walked out of Mueller's flat, but he was still muttering about what he should have said to Ascher. He used to walk along here every day when he had to help in his parents' shop, just before it went bust, when his father kept saying

'it's gotta be all hands on deck Paul'. Shops were always coming and going along here. Everyone knew that. His mother even said it to him when they were out shopping once. But they didn't think it'd happen to them.

It was always exciting when a new shop was coming. As if one of them was going to be like the shops in books or role-playing: the one which sells you the magic key or chooses you for the quest. But the paper shop turns out to be just a paper shop, the pet shop just sells pets. Watching shops come and go was kind of like a slow version of watching TV when there's nothing on, flicking around and around the same few channels as if by doing this you can make a new one come on.

Paul came to the shop his parents used to rent. Nothing had opened yet but someone had rented it. There was a big poster in the window like they often had. He went closer so he could read it - knowing it'd be some boring shit but hoping as always for something, he didn't know what. The poster was in plain letters. There was no special logo, no picture of an ice cream or furniture or whatever. Not even anything to say what the shop was. Just three words:

'Coming soon - freedom'. Paul stood looking at it for a full minute.

END OF PART 1

Ross opened the map and his notes for the game.

'You were meant to get information about where to go from the village wise man, but Paul had to go apeshit for some reason and kill everyone'. Ross sounded like he wanted an argument. No one said anything.

'Anyway I'll try and work around that'. He flipped through his notes for a few seconds, keeping his eyes on Paul. Paul kept his eyes down and his fists clenched under the table where no one could see them. Paul knew that if he said anything Ross would just throw up his hands and lean back and say in a pretend-shocked voice 'no, I was just saying - you're the one who wants a fight, not me'. Ross was starting to act like Mueller.

The Tower of Heaven was all made of stained glass and as they walked exhausted over the mountains, dragging themselves inland not really knowing whether they were on course and beyond even thinking about it, they came upon it all of a sudden, sitting in the middle of a huge valley like a bright crown. It seemed all the brighter because, although the valley was mostly forest, a few miles around the Tower of Heaven there was nothing but a flat plain of black ashes, as dead as the island the Shining Lords had raped. The city shone like a broken vase, all sharp beauty, filling their eyes and shining into the scarred and tired faces. The city sat there like a spider in its web. They were afraid to go nearer. They were heroes, and they did not recognise death - but there was something in the way the Tower of Heaven shone in the sun that seemed to offer another fear - the fear of going into it and coming out reborn, becoming like the Shining Lords; having the city lay its maggots of arrogance and cruelty in their bodies. But there was nowhere else for them to go. Not like moths flying into a candle flame, but like moths flying into the sun which lights all the candles of the world, they climbed reluctantly and slowly down the mountain and into the jungle valley.

They walked through the dark jungle for two days. They heard many animals, birds and crawling things, but they saw nothing, nothing but the tall trees which stood leaning over them, blocking out the sky, spreading out their branches in their slow and ancient dance. On the third day Ariel was standing guard and all of a sudden he saw a creature in the high trees. Her face was like a woman's, but she had ears like a cat or a dog. She was naked, covered in bright orange fur. Her arms and legs were silky and boneless, like tentacles or foxes' tails, and they were curled around the branches of one of the trees. Her eyes were yellow, and she stared down at them. She opened her mouth and her voice was like a musical instrument made out of glass, delicate and yet strong. Another pure and sweet note answered her from somewhere in the jungle, and Ariel heard a noise in the trees and saw another creature appear in a flash of yellow, like a candle lighting. There were more and more of the chiming calls, and everyone woke to see the creatures appear in all directions, until the trees were full of them, all deep red and yellow and orange, and the noise filled them and they felt like they were in a cathedral of fire.

Ariel stepped forward and shouted into the noise. The creatures fell silent and looked at him and he spoke to them again. But they did not reply. One of Ariel's companions cast a spell of understanding, but it did nothing. Another tried to use a mask which gave the wearer the power of speaking to animals, but again it did nothing.

'Well what are we supposed to do then Ross?'

'Hey don't chuck a sooky at me alright? It's not my fault you can't work it out'.

'Is there any way we can talk to them?'

'I can't tell you that'. Ross smiled.

'Is this part of the game or just something you added in?'

'It's all part of the game'

'You know what I mean!'

'Well, I can't tell you'.

'Yeah well, I think it's something you put in. I reckon you're just forcing us along into what you want. We haven't really had any say with anything so far. Like that Anhotep city - what were we supposed to do there?'

Ross started to say something but Paul talked over him

'I mean we're supposed to be able to do anything - it's meant to be like we decide what happens yknow? You're just forcing us into what you want -'

'Look do you wanna play or not?' Ross almost shouted it and there was an angry silence and they stared at each other.

'Yeah..well...what's the point if we don't make any difference'. Paul looked away.

All of a sudden it was as if a cloud of silver wasps flew into the forest. But they were arrows and in a few seconds all the creatures were dead or disappeared into the trees, and a group of men with long bows walked into the clearing.

Paul walked by his parents' old shop a lot in the next couple of weeks. The new shop still hadn't opened yet. The sign saying 'coming soon - freedom' was still there. Paul noticed that it was stuck on with big round blobs of bluetac which were flattened against the glass, like when you puff up your cheek and press it against a window and it goes all big and round - like four little faces trying to make him laugh. He stared at the paper as if something was going to come bursting out of it, looking at the words and his own reflection. One day he noticed two men painting something on one of the outside walls. They looked at him nervously, as if they were robbing the place. Paul wanted to talk to them but didn't know what to say. A few days later the sign in the window was gone and the door was open, though there was nothing to say what the shop was or even anything to show it wasn't abandoned, except for the half-started painting on one of the walls.

Paul walked around the block thinking about whether to go in. He was kind of worried about being caught. But really the main thing was that once he found out what it was he wouldn't have anything to do. Usually when he was sick of home he could stand the Nazis, once he couldn't stand them he could go to his friends, once they humiliated him once too often he could go home, and round and round it went. But right now he couldn't stomach going to any of them. He'd been trying not to think about it, building up stories in his head about this shop, that it really would have freedom - not just Freedom brand furniture or freedom from worrying about dirty floors or something. He felt like there was a scream building up inside him, getting bigger and bigger. He wondered if the shop would be something really bad and embarrassing, like a religious cult or something, like the fakely smiling man and woman who'd stopped him on the street once and leant over him and called him mate and asked him to come to Bible study with them. Maybe they wouldn't let him leave. Maybe they believed in death being freedom. He thought of them moving behind him and blocking off the door and still smiling in that fake way. Making him kneel and kiss a cross and then stabbing him in the back. When he got all the way round the block he went up to the shop and opened the door. He didn't know where he'd go after he'd finished with this, but he drowned that thought out, or tried to.

There was a youngish man sitting reading behind a desk - one of the guys who'd been painting the wall. The floor was covered in open boxes of books. Some of them had been put on to the white laminated shelves that'd been there when Paul's parents rented the shop. The man saw Paul and put down his book.

'Gday'. He was obviously making an effort to be friendly, but it seemed a lot less fake than when Mueller or Ascher did it. You didn't get the feeling he was going to try and trick you into doing something you wouldn't want to do, in return for him saying hi to you. Paul mumbled something back.

'Ummm...sorry about the crap everywhere. We're not officially open but you can look and stuff'. Again it sounded like something he'd rehearsed - but not in a way like he was trying to con you. Paul realised it was more like the man was nervous of him. Paul picked up a book at random. It was actually more like a magazine. It was called, or had on the front cover, 'Are you sick of being told what to do?' It reminded Paul of the 'coming soon - freedom' sign.

Paul wondered what the guy was nervous of. Not Paul's fists that was for sure. Paul always made himself look smaller, hanging his head and hunching over and keeping his arms by his side. The man'd have to be a bit retarded if he thought Paul was going to throw his weight around. Paul didn't even consider the religious cult thing he'd been so scared of a few minutes before. He always made up these big dramatic worries about things he was going to do and totally forgot them when he got there. It was more like the man wanted to be friends and was worried he'd get knocked back, like a new kid at school. Or actually, more like he was having a party and he was worried people wouldn't come or they wouldn't have a good time.

'What're you selling here?' Paul asked him loudly and suddenly, half just to make him jump (which he did) and half because if the man was like his friends or Mueller he'd laugh at Paul for not knowing unless he was aggressive about it.

'Ummmm...we're anarchists'. Paul didn't have any idea what that was but he wasn't going to say so.

'Oh yeah - cool. Hasn't been anything like that around here before'. Paul was a pretty good liar because he could make himself half-believe what he was saying. It was easy to really feel good that they were anarchists without knowing what one was. It wasn't any harder than laughing at a dirty joke you don't get. But he still felt a bit of cold guilt in his bowels when the man looked so happy and relived.

'I'm Michael anyway - Michael Lamb'.

'Ah - Paul O'Connor'

'And this is Marina'. A Greek or Italian-looking girl with long dyed red hair had walked in with another box of books and dumped it on the floor.

'Hi'.

'Paul was just saying he's interested in anarchism'

'Oh yeah?' She had soft purple eyes. They must've been tinted contact lenses but Paul had never seen anything like her. She looked like something out of a movie, or a painting.

'Yeah. I mean ah...I wanna know more about it n that...'

'Oh well - good on ya' She half turned away and started putting books on shelves. Paul looked at one of the books in her hand - something about stopping the Nazis.

'Ah..there's Nazis around here yknow'. She turned back.

'Yeah we know. That's one of the reasons we came here. The fucking pricks bashed up some people a while ago. And the cops didn't do anything as usual. We wanna try and do something about them'.

'Oh well...I'll let you know if I find anything out'. He imagined if Ross was here - the little smirk they'd both have. But again he felt the little nugget of guilt.

'Yeah - thanks a lot Paul. I really fucking hate Nazis...I mean yknow, of course I do, I'm an anarchist. But I mean it's even more for me. My Grandma was German and she was in the camps yknow? And they killed a lot of my grandfather's family in Greece...'

Greece 1943. The German soldiers stood in a ragged line in the village square. It was morning and they'd been dragged out of sleep too early as always, and they held their rifles as if they were too heavy for them. They were mostly teenagers. They looked like the boys at your school would look if you dressed them up in uniforms and sent them out to kill and die. Some of them looked frightened, their eyes darting around like wounded snakes. Some of them looked puffed up with false glory, kids pretending to be soldiers. And some of them looked blank and dead, and started across the square as if they weren't really seeing anything. There was an officer, an older man. The people of the village had all been dragged out to watch. They were dressed all in black as they always were, as if they were at a funeral that never ended. They were mostly old people and children. Everyone else had run away.

The German soldiers lived in two worlds. There was the real world of being kicked around by the officers and trudging along the dirt roads for hours on pointless little missions, and shooting people and being hated for it and ashamed, and maybe dying that day or tomorrow. Then there was the world of lies that they were told by the Nazi leaders. In this world they were a master race, and their superior blood made them kings of the world. They had only to march into a country like triumphant gods, and the dark faced people of the world would melt away like dirty snow in the sun. Some of the Greeks had lain down to be raped like they were supposed to, but some of them went into the hills and the deep forests and fought back. They cut their throats silently and shot them from the shadows, and in return the Germans ground their heels into the faces of the people that were left, punishing Greece for refusing to die, like it was an actor that wouldn't follow the script.

The officer had picked a boy, more or less at random, and dragged him to the wall of the church and made him stand there. Officially all the able bodied men of the village had joined the resistance, and the village was being punished for this. Deep down the Germans knew this was bullshit. Most of the people who'd gone had just run away, maybe to a city where the war wasn't quite as close. But the Nazis had to officially believe that the army that was beating them was much bigger than it was. Otherwise they'd have had to admit that they weren't supermen, and the Greeks weren't lazy ignorant half-humans. So officially they were shooting the boy to frighten the villagers. But the villagers were already as frightened as people could be. They were shooting him to make themselves feel better - so they could live a bit more in the world of lies, where they were invincible angels.

The boy started crying silently. The frightened German soldiers looked relived and the puffed up ones less puffed up. The blank faced ones looked exactly the same. They shot him and someone buried him, and the nightmare went on.

Germany 1943. She is born with a kink in her throat, which means she can't talk properly. It takes her a long time and it comes out sounding wrong. She works hard to make up for it. One day a man comes to the school and she has to do a test. She has to read things out and of course she takes too long. The man says this one is subnormal, why is she taking a place in the class that could be taken by a normal child? The teacher says no, you don't understand, she just has a problem with talking, she's not stupid. The man explodes, yells abuse at the teacher. Don't you contradict me, or you'll be on the train with her. When the man leaves, the teacher tells her to go home, and looks at the desk instead of at her.

That afternoon her parents are crying and won't tell her why. Then some people come and put her in a train. She is packed in with other people, really tight. Some of them have physical problems like her. Some of them seem to have mental

problems. The ride is very long and no one comes to feed them. Everyone is very scared and a lot of people are crying. She has to sleep standing up because people are packed in so tight.

Then they get to a camp in the middle of the snow, in the middle of nowhere. She has a very cold and scared feeling and she doesn't want to walk to the camp, but people make them. Some people have died. Everyone is milling around. Some of them seem to be handicapped but others don't at all. There are a lot of people who are dressed like Jews and a lot of people who don't look like one in particular. People sort them into groups. They are very rough. She is pushed with the other handicapped people. But something makes her speak up. She forces the words out at a normal speed, clenching her stomach up. It hurts her throat and she coughs up blood later. She says no, I'm not with them. Who are you with then? She points to a group of ordinary-looking people who are all adults and mostly men. She is tall and skinny for her age – she could be an adult, only just, a very small 21 year old. And she looks normal, her handicap is only when she talks. The guard says well if you don't want to be cooked don't wander around like a fucking sheep then, and hits her across the head. But he lets her go to the other group.

This saves her life. She is in with the 'politicals' – people who are against the Nazi's ideas and did things to try and stop them – not with the 'subnormals' – handicapped people. This means she is worked like a dog and she might live or die. The handicapped people are all killed, like the Jews. They're taken to a room which is flooded with poison gas and then the bodies are burnt. The smoke hangs over the whole camp, waxy and thick, as hard to ignore as a scream and, like a scream, ignored. She is young and strong and she works very hard so she doesn't die. The Nazis aren't stupid, but they have been told that they're better than the scum in the camps, and this makes them stupid. It is impossible that the heroes of the world could be fooled by a subhuman. So they never wonder why one of the 'politicals', one of this group of talkers and arguers and speech-makers, doesn't seem to be able to talk properly.

She talks to the other 'politicals' about what's happening, and they tell her. Not all at once, and not even from one person. The conversation takes many months. One part is hissed out of the side of someone's mouth as they are forced to watch one of the inmates being hanged, the next as they are digging graves which might be for someone else or for themselves. But the conversation goes like this:

What makes them do this to us? Are they mad? No, some of them are evil and enjoy doing what they're doing, but most don't. Some of them even hate it. Many of the guards kill themselves, or drink a lot to block out what they're doing. Most of them try not to think about it. They make their bodies into machines that do things while their soul is looking the other way. But why do they do it then? They do it because they're told to do it. The government wants to get rid of anyone who is going to cost them too much, like the handicapped people, or who might be against them, like the politicals. And they kill the Jews because the government have lied to the people and told them that the Jews are to blame for all their problems. Having lied they need to act out their lie and kill the Jews, punishing them for a crime they know is made up.

But that only explains why the government made these things happen. Why do the guards go along with it? Why don't they shoot the government instead of us and themselves? Because they've been raised to think that you should obey the government, you should do what you're told. Didn't you always do what your teachers said? Or at least think that you ought to? Even when you knew that this teacher or that might be stupid or have it all wrong, didn't you still think that you ought to go along with them? And didn't your parents tell you the same thing? And if the government didn't want to kill you, if you hadn't come here, wouldn't you think that you ought to obey the government as well? One of the politicals hisses this out, in a voice that is almost as bad as hers. She wasn't born that way – the guards broke most of her teeth, kicked

them all out, cut up her tongue and made one of her eyes black and always staring at nothing, because she told them the same things, she told the guards that as they cut the Jews' throats they were cutting their own as well.

By the time the Nazis lose the war and she gets out she knows what governments are.

Paul walked home thinking about Michael Lamb and Marina, especially Marina. He was already deciding to have a crush on her, but he was also thinking about what she'd said about the Nazis, and what they did to her grandad in Germany and her mother's family in Greece. You read books about wars that happened years ago and you looked at the photos and stuff and it didn't seem like something that happened to real people. It was like a film or something, with people in costume saying lines and bleeding fake blood. You kind of thought of it as all happening in black and white, like the photos. Paul could imagine Ascher and Mueller as Nazi officers, strutting around and killing people. That was what they were always talking about anyway: kill the boongs, kill the slopes, kill the wogs. Kill someone like Marina. She'd probably be a bit too much for them to take on now - fourteen year olds and old men were more their league. But what if they got their act together. Martin Lamb said at first the Nazis in Germany were a joke - no one took them that seriously. People didn't say Hitler was evil and dangerous, they said he was a clown. And then with a bit of luck and planning and a lot of help from the powers that be, they were in power. So imagine them in power. Imagine them arresting Marina. Lining her up against the wall like Ascher was always saying. And give her a bullet, like Mueller was always saying. Her red hair and her eyes and her voice all snuffed out forever. And Ascher standing over her, all red-faced and shiny and proud of himself.

He wanted to go back to the shop. It was partly just being bored with everything else, and a lot of it was wanting to hang around Marina. And as usual he was coming up with big schemes about sweeping her off her feet. But it was also what she'd said about the Nazis, and the sign about freedom coming soon, and the book he'd looked at with 'are you sick of being told what to do?' on the cover. He was a bit sick of it. Being ordered around by his parents and then Mueller and Ascher, and everyone else and his dog - the prick who kicked him out of the takeaway on the day he met Mueller for a start. And even Ross with role playing.

Fuck it, Paul thought - no, fuck it, really this time. I'm gonna dump the Nazis forever. Fuck em off for good. And I'll get Ross to as well. He wanted to go and find them right now. Have an argument with them, tell them he was an anarchist now and he was going out with a Greek chick, so they'd never let him back even if he wanted to. He thought he would want to.

He walked to Ross' house. Ross' older sister answered the door. She had a big wicked smile that turned off when she saw Paul. Obviously she was expecting it to be someone else. Paul looked at his feet.

'UmisRossthereplease' he almost whispered.

'Yeah hang on, I'll go'n get him'. She disappeared into the house, though she could have shouted for Ross and usually would have. It always felt weird when he saw her. She was two people. An older girl, beautiful and sexy and mysterious like all older girls - but she was also just Ross' sister who he whinged about all the time. It was even weirder seeing her at Ross' house. It was like having the door answered by a character from role playing or something. It was the same with the girls at the family barbeques his parents made him go to.

Paul looked at Ross' front yard, which had a little pool with ugly smiling little garden gnomes around it. When he was younger he used to think they were the most excellent things in the world, especially the lady ones with their dresses that pushed their breasts out high. This was before he worked out how to shoplift pornos. He asked his Mum 'can we get garden

gnomes' but she said they were horrible evil-looking things. Ross came to the door, holding a book in his hand and keeping his place in it with his finger.

'Oh...hi. Come in' Ross mumbled. He turned his back and walked into the house.

'Whaddya reading?'

'Oh nothing' Ross put the book away, cover down.

'Mueller leant it to me. Anyway...'

Ross sounded like he meant 'Anyway, how can I help you?' Like Paul was a door to door salesman or something, someone to be dealt with. He was talking to him the way Paul used to talk to people he served in his parents' shop: politely and efficiently, but not like he really liked them. Paul looked around at Ross' room. He took in how much it had changed. Ross had a new poster. It was of a Nazi skinhead standing on a pile of dead bodies – blacks and Asians drawn to look like animals. The skinhead was grinning, baring huge exaggerated teeth like a vampire, and his finger with its long claw-like fingernails was pointing at Paul – the caption was 'white man – it's up to you'. What used to be there? A girl from some TV series he thought. They used to argue about her. They could spend hours sitting there with Ross saying how sexy she was and Paul saying she was really average. And now she was gone, and the new poster was like shit and blood smeared on the wall. Like one of the lampshades made out of human skin from the Nazi death camps. The skinhead in the picture was grinning at him, and saying 'we've got your best friend'.

'How are ya?'

'Allright'. Ross sounded like he'd be all right as soon as Paul fucked off.

'How's Mueller?'

'OK'

'I mean I haven't seen you guys that much since I...yknow...since Ascher n that. I wondered what was happening with all of you'.

'We're fine'. Paul noticed he was saying 'you guys' meaning Ross and the Nazis. It used to be him and Ross on one side and the Nazis on the other. Now it was Ross standing with the Nazis and Paul by himself. Paul felt like he was trapped behind a sheet of glass, and no one could hear him. Why couldn't he just say something? They used to laugh at Mueller and Ascher. Or at least Paul made jokes about them and Ross laughed. But then Ross and Paul used to laugh when Mueller made a joke. Ross kept looking at his book on the bedside table. Paul felt like he was running out of air.

'You're hangin around Mueller a lot now'

'Guess' Ross mumbled, hardly looking at him. Paul could see the poster standing behind Ross' shoulder. It was like the skinhead on it was grinning at him, watching him fail. Like Paul was a fish trying to get off a hook.

Paul walked home along the main street of the suburb. Most of the shops were still open but there was hardly anyone around. A lot of the shopkeepers were standing in the doorways of their shops looking out along the street, the way Paul's Dad used to do on days when the shop was empty, as if he could call people up by magic, make them come and save the shop. The sun was just disappearing and it was getting colder. Paul thought about Ross. Ross used to kind of follow him round, look up to him for some reason. Paul realised he'd never really known what was going on in Ross' head, or any of his friends. And Paul didn't let anyone else know about him. They never really said anything to each other about what they really thought. It was all trying to bullshit people and not show any weakness. But sometimes Ross could be really nice, when they weren't in a crowd of people all trying to show off or hurt each other. He didn't want to think of Ross being

twisted until he was a clown like Mueller or Ascher. And they were clowns. Pathetic, bullying, lying little clowns. Talking to Marina and Michael Lamb compared to them was like going for a swim after wading through a sewer. What kind of shit was Ross going through that the Nazis were an improvement? But Paul knew what kind of shit. The same as him.

Paul walked to the shop thinking about Marina, pushing Ross to the bottom of his mind. They'd put a few t-shirts a books in the front window. Paul noticed one which said 'bankers are wankers'. He wondered what his Dad'd say if he wore it. His Dad was always saying what pricks the banks were, how they'd given them a loan they couldn't repay and how the family was supposed to be working for themselves but really they were working for the bank. But he'd probably be against the 'language'. His Dad was always going on about how Paul didn't know anything about the real world and he was so sheltered compared to what his Dad went through when he was young – but it was as if no one swore in the '60s. The same for the t-shirt that said 'fuck all politicians'. His Dad couldn't watch the news without giving a speech about how corrupt and dishonest politicians were. But for him it'd be as if the swearing somehow made it not true. He'd probably put up with Mueller going on about killing the blacks as long as he didn't swear. 'Well fuck em both' Paul thought. Maybe they'll have one that says 'fuck all Nazis'.

He opened the door. Michael was there, talking to an Asian guy Paul hadn't seen before. He picked up a book at random and opened it in the middle. It was something about murder. Or actually, how you could deal with people like murderers without having a government or police.

'Hi Paul' Paul looked up.

'This is Alex Ho – Paul O'Connor'. The Asian guy, Alex, said hi.

'Hi. Shop's looking a lot better'.

'Yeah, we've had a lot of people looking at the shirts n that – people's heads kind of jerk round and they look again and oh my God it really does say 'fuck', and then they call their friends over...some people look like they might have a heart attack'.

'Yeah...' Paul kind of trailed off and there was one of those awkward silences that Paul was so scared of. One thing with the anarchists, you couldn't just sit there and tune out while they ranted on for hours like you could with the Nazis, or drink until you didn't know or care who was saying what. You had to actually talk to them, and listen to what they were saying, not just wait for them to stop so you could tell them how right they were. Paul buried his head back in the book, but only for a few seconds. He didn't want to get away from these people. They wanted to talk to him, and hear what he had to say, not just score some points off him or have someone to bullshit to. Paul looked up and cleared his throat and said

'yknow, my parents used to rent this shop...'. And they talked about that, and then got onto something else. And he didn't try and impress them and they didn't try and make him feel small. Paul remembered how he used to be worried that they'd turn out to be a cult and attack him. He realised that he was always worried about people turning out to be crazy or violent, and apart from a few dickheads no one ever was. Maybe that was what the book meant. Most people don't want to treat other people badly, and we could stop the few people that do. He wondered what it'd be like if people took care of each other that way, instead of waiting until the police turned up an hour after something happened, if you were lucky. Maybe that girl wouldn't have been attacked, or they could have tracked the Nazis down at least. Maybe he wouldn't have to be afraid of being picked on all the time.

Five days later Paul had half gotten ready to log on to Quest before he remembered about Ross. He'd made himself think everything was like it used to be. He kind of pushed all the shit down into the bottom of his mind and there it stayed. It was like a wound that you don't think about until you move the wrong way and pain shoots through you from nowhere. He was in the middle of thinking about being Ariel, being brave and free for a while. Then he remembered how he used to think Mueller was kind of like that because he talked big and seemed pretty tough. Then he remembered when he realised what a joke he was, and laughing with Ross about it...Paul threw his hands up quickly and covered his eyes, as if he could stop himself seeing the skinhead on Ross' wall. He walked to Ross' house not because he wanted to go, but because he couldn't stay at home with this inside him. He was just moving for the sake of moving. He thought about moving forever, still feeling like this. If he'd end up one of the homeless people he'd seen in the city, shuffling along the street, not going anywhere, just moving because the police or security guards would come down on them if they hung around anywhere.

Ariel stood like a cornered wolf with his companions behind him as the longbowmen walked into the clearing. They stood half-hidden in the shadows of the high trees. They were tall men, blond-haired and white-skinned, as if their blood was pure crystal water. There was no colour in their face, not even in their lips, and their eyes were white and shining like diamonds. Ariel spoke –

'Who art thou, pale and bloodless strangers walking

Here in the forest, underneath the Tower

Of Heaven? I am Ariel, the golden

And the bloody. Therefore speak. I stand impatient'.

The one who appeared to be their leader stepped forward, still holding his longbow. Ariel saw that his face was twisted and deformed, seeming to be a mixture of cat and dog features as well as human. He had the look of a creature in the first stages of rabies, his shining diamond eyes bulging and rolling and his white wound-like lips wet with thick drool. He said

'My name is Capellus, and I am a servant of the Tower of Heaven. I look down on you as if from that tower, weak and worthless thing that thou art. I tell you no more than my name, foreign one, thou stranger, thou contemptible. My name and no more. Yet even this is more than thou hast earned, Ariel. Even my name is a treasure to one such as you, you who were created for our use. Be humble and thankful. Raise thyself in the small measure thou canst. Like one cast out and starving thou art, who has been taken in and treated as one of mine own, and given nothing. Thou standest in debt, proud one'. As he said this he jerked his head in arrogant spasms, spitting out his words as if each one were a foul-tasting maggot. He shook with a feverish rage and his hands gripped his bow like a drowning man clinging to life. His lips were curled back so that Ariel could see his white, bloodless lips. When he had finished speaking he turned his back on Ariel. The other bowmen, who still stood in the shadows, gave a long sound that was half angry laughter and half a sustained, demented wail. The sound was hollow, full of nothing but hate and despair. When the sound finally died away it seemed to stay in the air, like the smell of some evil animal.

message from Ross to all: capellus will lead you to the tower of heaven and you can meet the shining lords.

message from Paul to Ross: well im not going

message from Ross to all: stay here if u want to . u cant get to the tower any other way tho

message from Paul to Ross: so we don't really have any choice

message from Ross to Paul: youve got all the choice in the world ☺

Cantellus and the bowmen led them into the forest. As they walked he told them about the Tower of Heaven, where the Shining Lords live. He said they were the best of all people, living in a world of courtliness, honour and purity, dealing honourably with all people but avenging any insult.

Paul was bored, hanging around the shopping centre by himself, when Mueller walked by. He had the same black tshirt with a Nazi symbol that he always wore, but not his little stereo. He was walking quickly, nervously looking around, but he didn't see Paul. It was shocking to see him walking along without trying to get people to look at him. He looked empty. Paul wondered where he was going. Without thinking about it he waited a few seconds, then got up and walked after him. Mueller walked quickly with his head down, into the next suburb, which Paul didn't know very well. There were less houses and more warehouses and offices. It was a cold day for once and a few fat drops of rain were falling, making Paul's big grey army coat smell like a wet dog. Mueller must have been freezing. Everything was closed. He didn't see any cars at all. He walked close to the wall, ready to duck into cover if Mueller turned around. But he just kept walking through the empty suburb. Paul started thinking about if this was a movie and he was a private detective or a hitman. Or one of the last two people on Earth, stalking each other through the dead streets. Then he realised he couldn't see Mueller any more.

The anarchists had cleaned the months of grime off the window of the shop and painted the walls so it looked as new as a just opened Christmas present. And Marina was there and she turned around and smiled and mouthed 'hi' at Paul as he walked in. She was sitting on the desk talking quickly to Michael and Alex, and a guy and a girl Paul didn't know. They sounded like they were just talking but Paul heard Marina say

'nah – that's bullshit Michael' and Michael said something back and everyone started talking at once. Paul stood on the edge of the group and looked at the posters on the walls. He remembered what Mueller used to say about democracy being weak because everyone was always arguing instead of getting on with things. With the Nazis the Leader decided what was going to happen and then you had people like Mueller who headed the little groups, though Mueller always called them 'gruppen' because that was the German word, and he got really angry if you didn't call them that. Ascher said it was like a family – if the children argued with what they were told then the whole thing'd fall apart. They'd done similar stuff in school. Half the time the school seemed to agree with the anarchists and say that you had to have democracy, and half the time they'd say you needed to have firm rules and guidelines – especially when they wanted you to do something.

'What's happened?' Paul asked Marina.

'Oh the fucking local paper's written some bullshit about us'. She brushed Paul's hand as she handed him the paper. She had shining black nail polish, and each fingernail was smooth and pointed. They reminded Paul of the hood of a Rolls Royce or a Lambourghini. For a second he imagined one tracing slowly along his skin like a car cruising down a street. Paul was surprised how normal her hand felt; just like anyone else's.

The story was on the front page. 'Community Outraged By Anarchy'. The story was about the tshirts with swearing on them. Someone on the local council had seen them and wanted them banned, and the police to close the shop down. The paper had an editorial inside. It said that 'anyone who flagrantly ignores community standards has gone beyond the limits of free speech'. It said they were in flagrant violation of the law. It said 'flagrantly' a few more times, like someone who's just heard a word and wants to show off. Paul got a tight cold feeling in his stomach again. He felt like there were policemen

surrounding them and when he came home his Dad'd be standing there with a copy of the paper to get him into trouble – even though really he didn't know Paul hung around with them.

Ariel followed Cantellus through the black woods for days. As they came closer to the Tower of Heaven all things grew darker and more silent until it was as if they were buried alive. Cantellus said no more to them than did the trees. The other bowmen disappeared, and reappeared hours later. Or others replaced them. There was no way of telling. At first Ariel would say something to one or other of his companions. But the sound would die away into the vast silence of the forest, and the silence would seem even larger, and their words even more small and worthless, than if none had spoken. In the end all were silent, and finally they did not even look at each other, but trudged along with heads down, like cattle. Ariel felt like he had stepped out of time, and this suffocating parade of black trees would last forever. He did not know how long this lasted, or whether his companions felt it or he alone. After this the trees began to thin out, and finally there were no trees. There was only a flat plain and in the middle of the plain the Tower of Heaven looked down on them triumphantly from the flat grey sky. They walked towards the Tower of Heaven for what seemed like days. The sky was covered in a thick sheet of clouds which hid the sun, like a heavy lead mask hiding an eye. The Tower seemed to move away from them as they walked so the distance did not lessen. One day Ariel saw red flashes in the distance, as if the plain was on fire. As they came closer they saw a group of the bright creatures they had seen in the forest. They were being driven to the Tower by a Shining Lord on a horse. The creatures' legs were silky and soft, made for holding branches, and could barely support their weight as they walked on the ground. They walked slowly and painfully, like cripples, their beautiful faces twisted up with pain and streaked with tears. Their bright fur was black with dirt. The Shining Lord spat at them with cold contempt. Ariel saw one of them fall. As she made to pull herself up, the Shining Lord made his horse walk slowly and carefully over her. She screamed and Ariel could hear her delicate bones breaking as he stood and did nothing.

'Hey Paul'

'Hi'

Michael looked unhappy for the first time Paul had seen.

'There's been another article about us in the paper'. He was holding a copy. Paul took his time reading it so he didn't have to look at Michael. Michael was pacing up and down and Paul noticed that he had a big ugly tattoo all down his leg. Paul thought he'd never wear shorts if he had something like that. Michael said

'I dunno – the worst thing about it is the Nazis around here attacking people – the Australian Nazi Movement or whatever they were –'

'Party' Paul said it without thinking – he always had to let people know if he knew something. He clapped his hand over his mouth as he realised what he'd done but Michael didn't notice.

'Yeah, anyway – the paper didn't say anything when the police gave up on catching them. But we put up some words on a tshirt and that's supposed to be worse'

'But... ' Paul shook his head,

'I mean I can't see how people like the Nazis better than you guys'

'Yeah, I don't think they do really. But I mean people don't decide what goes in the paper do they? Like this paper says 'community newspaper' but really some businessman or other owns it'.

'Well... what – is he a Nazi or something?'

'Nah. I mean, I dunno but I guess not – they might even be Asian or something. The thing is that anyone who's rich enough to own a newspaper's gonna be rich enough that they don't have to live around here. People like the Nazis only ever go for soft targets. They bloody go on about the powerful elites that run the world but when it fucking comes down to it it's always some poor Vietnamese pensioner or schoolkid who gets bashed up' – Michael stopped for a couple of seconds.

'Anyway the point is the Nazis aren't going to do anything against rich people because if they did the cops might actually bother catching them. So rich people don't have that much reason to be against them'.

'Yeah, well how do you know it isn't the swearing they're upset about?'

'Well, I guess I don't know – but first of all, you'd have to go around with your fingers in your ears if you didn't want to hear people swearing. And second of all, if this guy really thinks that swearing's worse than attacking people then he's just fucked'.

Paul paced up and down. He felt like there had to be a way around what Micheal was saying.

'How come people believe it then?'

'Well – people aren't allowed to hear anything else are they? You can't run a newspaper unless you're rich, and so they're all going to be pretty much in the same situation'.

Paul didn't say anything. He'd wondered by the paper didn't say anything when the police stopped trying to catch the Nazis. Everyone at school was really angry and a few people wrote letters to the paper, but they didn't get printed. He didn't want Michael to be right. It was too scary to think about.

'So anyway', Michael said

'there's supposed to be all this community outrage, but they often just say that...are people angry about us that you know?'

'I dunno...a lot of people at school thought the tshirts were funny. I mean people don't talk about it all the time or anything. My Dad probably wouldn't like em – I don't know about my Mum' Paul tried to think of some community outrage so Paul wouldn't be right. He opened his mouth thinking he'd make something up, but there wasn't much point so he shut it again.

Michael changed the subject

'Your parents used to rent this shop didn't they?'

'Yeah – it went broke though'

'Yeah it happens. I read something like nine out of ten new small businesses go broke in the first year'

'Oh yeah?' Paul was surprised,

'Mum and Dad still fight about why we went broke...I kind of thought most people didn't...'

Michael had stopped pacing and sat down on the desk.

'Yeah, I guess most people do think that - no one'd start a business otherwise. Yknow, people get told all this stuff about 'if you work hard you'll be rich, start your own business, anyone can make it if they try and blah blah blah. And when they don't make it...' Michael didn't finish the sentence, but Paul guessed that it finished with his parents, still angry and ashamed and trying to work out what was wrong with them and why they couldn't make a go of it like everyone else.

Michael looked at his watch. The sun had started to set without Paul noticing. The light was all orange, like the shop was on fire.

'See ya'

Paul started walking home. He could see Michael in the shop's front window, putting everything away and locking up, moving around like a fly trapped in a window. He wondered why Michael didn't get him to help. Or just get him to do it all, which would've been about Mueller's speed.

Well why don't you help him? He accused himself. He tried to ignore this and think about how everything looked clear and glowing in the sunset.

You don't like being told what to do do ya. So you're basically on their side. So you should help them. You shouldn't stand around waiting for them to give you orders shouldya? He realised he was used to people telling him what to do even though he hated it. He just expected it. His parents and the teachers at school always told him to grow up and be responsible, but they seemed just to mean they should do what they told him to do and pretend he wanted to.

'Hey Paul'.

Paul stopped dead as he heard the voice behind him. It was a soft, smiling voice, pleased with itself. The sun had set and Paul couldn't see anyone on the street. There was no one except for the voice. Paul turned around. In some of the houses lights were on and people were sitting down to dinner.

Ross was there, but the voice hadn't come from him. It was Mueller. He was standing behind Ross with his hand on his shoulder, grinning at Paul. He'd had a crewcut, so he looked more like the skinhead on Ross' poster now.

'Where've you been Paul?' He could run faster than Paul could. Paul didn't say anything. He could hear a car in the distance. Paul stared at him. He started shaking. First his hands, then his knees and his whole body. He tried to stop it but he couldn't. He knew Mueller could see it and that just made him more scared and he shook more.

'I've been around yknow – I mean...'. His voice was squeaky and stuttery. It didn't sound like a real person's voice. It was like something someone would do for a joke. Paul tried again

'I –'

'Come with us' Mueller interrupted him in a hard voice. Paul smiled sickly. His legs felt hollow and loose, like he was going to fall over. A car drove by. The driver didn't look at them. Mueller waited as the sound of its engine got fainter and fainter.

'Do you want to know where we're going?' Mueller was using the slow, satisfied voice he used when he had a secret. Paul mumbled.

'We're going to the Jade Palace'

Paul didn't say anything.

'Do you know about it?' Mueller asked, still in his I-know-and-you-don't voice.

'Ross n Ascher talked about it once' Paul said to his shoes.

'Oh yeah? What'd they say?' Mueller's smile was even wider.

'Let's just get going huh Mueller?' Ross said suddenly and loudly. He sounded nearly as scared as Paul.

'What'd they say Paul?'

Paul nearly told him. He nearly said 'I asked where you were once and they said you were visiting your sister at the Jade Palace'. But something clicked – Ross' scared face mouthing at him like someone gasping for air. The way Ross and Ascher had looked that day – like they had a secret, just the way Mueller looked now. That long ago. Ross was getting in with Ascher and Mueller and laughing at him that long ago. Paul realised where Mueller was going that day that he followed him. The Jade Palace was a brothel, and it specialised in Asian women.

'Cmon Mueller let's just go' Ross squeaked at Mueller's back.

There was a little takeaway at the edge of the empty suburb they were going to, all run down like the last dirty little outpost on the edge of a desert.

'Go get us some chips Ross', Mueller said,

'I wanna have a talk to Paul'. Mueller turned his back on Ross, who just stood there.

'Mueller –'

'Don't forget to ask for fish cakes' Mueller didn't bother turning around.

'Yeah...OK' And then Ross was gone.

'I know you were following me Paul'. Mueller moved a bit closer to him and Paul stepped back. There was a brick wall behind him.

'You know where I was going'. He sounded like a detective, explaining to the murderer where he went wrong. Paul was going to say he didn't know, he wouldn't have lost him if he knew where he was going. He wouldn't have had to follow him at all, he'd just go straight there and wait.

'So what? Why should you fucking judge me. I'm not gonna get any of em pregnant so it's not race-mixing. Those bitches'd have abortions anyway. They're all the same in the bloody dark mate'. Now he was smiling at him, almost whispering.

'Oh Paul, Paul Paul. You think I'm a joke and you're sooo fucking great dontcha? Mmm? Think you're better than me dontcha?' Paul couldn't run anywhere.

'Dontcha? Huh? Answer me you little prick' Suddenly Mueller was shouting at him, really shouting, his face red and the tendons in his neck sticking out like thick ropes in a tug of war. Paul felt Mueller's spit hit him on the lips. The rough brick pushed into the back of his head. It cut him. Mueller was still shouting. Paul couldn't make out the words. It was just waves of noise. People must be able to hear. Maybe they were saying it was OK. It's not our business. It's a father going off at his son. The kid probably deserved it. Mueller grabbed his arm. He crushed it. He was still shouting

'You prick – you fucking stupid little prick – I'll kill you – you prick' He was showing his teeth like a dog. Then suddenly he stopped.

Paul could see that he was going to start crying and he tensed himself up and held it in. Mueller stood over him as he hunched down against the wall. Paul held his hands over his head. Some kids slowed down and looked at them as they walked by, but they kept going. Mueller stepped back. He smiled and wiped his mouth, keeping his eyes on Paul's. He turned away from Paul as if he'd forgotten about him, like a can of soft drink that he'd thrown away. All at once Paul knew something as surely as if he'd seen it. That was how he looked at prostitutes after he'd done what he wanted to them. He wiped his mouth and looked away from them just like that. Ross was standing there. He looked at Mueller.

'They didn't have any fish cakes Mueller. I didn't forget to ask em'. He sounded like he was waiting for Mueller to hit him. His eyes flicked over to Paul and then away again, back to the ground.

'Don't worry about it mate!' Mueller slapped him hard on the shoulder and he winced.

They walked to where they were going. Paul could see Mueller felt tough. He strutted along like a rooster – almost like he was dancing. He was smiling and laughing. He didn't bother slowing down for Ross. Ross would walk beside him for a while, like they were best friends, but he'd fall behind and have to run to keep up. He kept saying 'hang on Mueller' and laughing like everything was all right, trying not to show how winded he was, but Mueller ignored him. Paul kept ahead of

Mueller. He could feel him bearing down on him, just behind his back. It was dark now. It had gotten dark without Paul noticing.

'Mueller' it was Ross again.

'Mueller!' This time he didn't try and laugh. He was almost crying.

'Don't start crying Rossie' Mueller sneered at him.

'I've got a stone in my boot' Paul didn't turn around but Ross' voice sounded further away.

'I really have Mueller'

'Jesus – all right then junior, hang on. Don't you fuckin move Paul'.

Paul stopped and looked over his shoulder to see Mueller walking back to Ross. Mueller stood over him and put his mouth right up to Ross' ear, and hissed something.

'I can't walk Mueller'. Mueller moved away and punched the air while Ross unlaced his boots. He had his back to Paul.

Paul started walking, very slowly, always looking over his shoulder. Mueller didn't turn around. Paul started walking normally. Then he was running, really bolting, like a frightened animal, turning down a side street just as Mueller noticed him.

'Hey – you little fuck – you come back here' Suddenly Paul's fear went and he felt like laughing. 'OK Mueller, I've got to come back if you tell me to' he thought. He couldn't feel the cold or the stitch in his side or anything – he ran faster than he'd ever done at school. He couldn't see Mueller but he could hear him shouting in the empty streets.

'You're gutless Paul – you're gutless'.

'No I'm not' Paul thought.

Paul let himself in the house. Even though he hated it when he was stuck with his parents the house still felt dead and lonely when he was by himself. He poured a glass from his parents' cask wine on top of the fridge. He slammed it down his throat and poured another one as he felt the sick shiver he always got from drinking. His parents'd probably notice some was gone but he didn't care. A bit of wine dribbled from the plastic spout on to the lino floor of the kitchen, like the very last bit when you take a piss, you can shake and wipe as much as you want but there's always that little drop. He sat down and turned the TV on. He started to feel drunk quickly thank fuck. He felt hungry but he didn't want to eat anything in case it took the edge off the wine. He saw something on the TV and he threw back his head and laughed at it for half a minute.

'ah Jesus I feel great' he mumbled. But then he thought do I really? He didn't feel any pain or worry but when he thought about it he didn't feel particularly happy either. He just felt average. He didn't feel normal or happy most of the time. There was always something like his parents going on at him, or worrying about school, or wanting a girlfriend so badly and having no idea how to talk to girls – or something like Mueller today. Did everybody feel bad most of the time? Is this what people did, just soak it up with alcohol? Why didn't people say something? Why did people put up with things? Why did he? He could see his reflection in the TV screen. He didn't look like he was doing anything about anything. It wasn't that he didn't care, it really wasn't. Thinking about what Ross had turned into made him want to cry or scream or chuck something through a window. He could see what Michael meant about power corrupting in the way Mueller was – how he got off on having Ross to take out his anger on. He could see why Mueller and being picked on at school and the bank fucking over his parents and all the rest of it was all part of the same thing. His reflection in the TV screen was faint, like a ghost, as if the program was the real world and he wasn't. He felt so alone.

'Listen to me o Ariel, and all thy companions. Dost thou know what manner of man I am? There are a dozen stairs to the throne of our sublime father, the Lord of all the Shining Lords. And I may stand on the ninth. I am a man of the ninth degree. Dost thou understand what that is? How noble and elevated am I, and how wretched thou art? How precious am I, in the face of thy poverty? My very speech to thee is like gold flung at a rotting corpse.

'Yet do not despair. Though dead, thou may be raised up. Though blind, the scales may be ripped from thy eyes. Listen to and obey me, Cantellus of the ninth level'.

They were sitting around at role-playing with Ross running the game, just as if everything was the same as it had always been. The only difference was Ross' hair, which was cut short, right to the skull, just like Mueller's. It didn't seem like something Ross'd choose. It was like they'd cut it because he had lice in his head or it'd fallen out because he had a disease. But if you squinted you couldn't see any difference. Ross was really getting into his role as Cantellus. He was using a deep voice with a kind of fake accent which sounded like Mueller when he was making a speech.

'Listen to me o Ariel. Open your eyes to the world the Shining Lords open in front of you! The strong feast on the weak. This is the way of Nature and the will of Heaven. The best should rise above the worst. Some are made to lead and others to follow. Like wolves and sheep'.

Paul didn't look at Ross. He wondered what the other guys made of all this. He realised suddenly that they were his best friends. And they didn't know about him and the anarchists and they didn't know about Mueller, or any of it. He thought why are we like this? We're like actors in a how. We keep all this shit locked up inside ourselves. For all I know they're all being abused every night when they go home, or anything – they wouldn't tell me and I wouldn't ask. If something bad's happening to us it's like we think it's our fault and we're scared someone'll find out.

Ross was still talking – about how kings never feel pity, like wild eagles. He thought about Mueller standing over Ross when he got something in his boot. Paul felt pity and disgust at the same time. He thought you suck Ross. I feel sorry for you when Mueller picks on you and I should've done more to stop you being what you are – but you still suck. All that shit about heroes and showing no pity. It'd make sense if you really did have any power. It'd make sense if you weren't pushed around every day by any little prick who wants to feel like a big man. You're not a wolf Ross, and Mueller isn't either – we're all sheep. We're the ones they show no pity to Ross, we're the ones they don't give a shit about – like that newspaper saying all that shit about the anarchists. That's what being a Shining Lord's all about. 'Show no pity to the weak'. I used to really get off on all that shit and then I'd feel bad when someone took stuff out on me. You don't see that though do ya Ross? You don't want to see any of it.

Ross was saying something about the Shining Lords' king wanting them to go on a quest. Paul realised he'd lost track of where they were up to and that he didn't really care. He made Ariel agree to whatever it was. It didn't matter. There wasn't any fun in pretending to fight monsters when your best friend had turned into one.

'I used to do role playing' Alex Ho said in his soft voice. He ran his hand through his black hair.

'It wasn't on computers but, just pen and paper. I got sick of it though. It was a bit...full of shit I guess. Like it was supposed to be about being creative, the only limit's your imagination blah blah blah – but were always just wandering around killing the evil monsters and striking terror into everyone's hearts'. He smiled.

'You don't really...I dunno, you don't look like the kind of guy that does role playing'.

'Oh yeah, all the nerdy boys were into it'. There was a pause that was full of everything except people talking.

'I didn't mean you – I uh – I just meant, we were the kids that got picked on a lot yknow? And we kind of used role playing as a way of pretending to be big and tough – or not even that so much, just pretending to have a bit of control over things? And with me it was kind of sticking it to my parents as well coz they thought it was all Satan worship. We had roleplaying and books about war and the girls had diets and stuff.

'Or some people were into astrology and seances. Like I remember my sister's class had this thing where if you wrote the name of the person you liked on your arm and covered it up with a bandaid then it was supposed to make them want you'.

'Did it work?'

'Nah – That's the point. None of that stuff does.

'I mean, to be popular you have to do some pretty bad stuff – you have to put other people down, and lie about what you really think...but then if you're not popular that can make you do bad things as well, because you're lonely and angry and fuck them, I don't need em anyway, bunch of pricks, I can look down on them as much as they look down on me. It's like the same attitude with different clothes'

'The problem isn't that these people are popular and I'm not. It's the whole idea that some people should be popular and high up the ladder, and most people should be underneath them wanting to be like them? And the people on top should have to be acting like complete pricks and all full of fear in case they get thrown down with everyone else.

'It's all a lie anyway. Think about the idea of being really cool right? There's the mainstream idea, which is that everyone should like you. And name one person that everyone likes. You name any band you like and most people won't like them.

Or there's the alternative idea, which is that only a few people should like you, and everyone who doesn't like you you should look down on them. I mean fuck that! Yeah, let's be like a little religion – that'll show everyone'.

'Fuck, it's insane. It's like everyone's doing this little pretend of version of society – like you have popular people instead of rich people'.

Paul walked along the crowded street and saw Marina coming towards him. He always saw girls who he thought were Marina but this was different. It was like every time he saw her he remembered how she looked. He breathed in deeply. She was riding a bike that was a bit small for her. It made her look like a bear from the circus. She had her dog with her, a big clumsy ball of dribble and dog smell called Snoop Manny Man.

'Marina' he said it very softly and she didn't stop and he worried that maybe it wasn't her, but he said it louder and she turned her bike around and it was her.

'Hey Paul'

'Whereya goin?'

'I've gotta get some stuff for my Mum'. The way she said 'gotta' was almost like she was still a kid...Paul looked at her and realised that she wasn't that much older than him. She might not even be older at all. She just seemed to know what was going on and what to do all the time. Like her clothes – if he had to list them to someone who'd never seen her they wouldn't seem that great. He might not even remember them. They were right though. Once you saw her you thought of them as being the things girls should wear. She had the perfume she always had on. He thought of it as her perfume but there were probably millions of girls that had it. It might not even be perfume, maybe it was some hair thing or something – he didn't really know anything about any of that. She was like a model but she was about his age. If he was someone else she might have gone out with him. It was almost too much to take.

Paul managed to talk about nothing as they went to a corner shop that seemed to be out of everything. There were empty shelves and some of the packets had been torn open, as if rats had been pawing through them. Marina got some dishwashing liquid and three bottles of lemonade. The girl at the checkout had a sad, harassed squinting look that Paul had seen before. When the shop was going bad his parents started to take it out on him, snapping at him and making him do stuff like cleaning up for hours even though they'd said they wouldn't. They looked like that. Then once he looked in the mirror after his Dad had gone off at him and he saw the look on his own face. It was like a mark left by something grinding into your face.

'You've got enough lemonade' Paul said, because he was pretty much out of things to talk about and he really didn't want her to leave him alone. Even if he had to talk boring shit about groceries.

'Yeah, Mum gets it all the time. We useta...' she stopped.

'What?' Paul tried to put a kindly expression on his face, to show that he was understanding, a good shoulder to lean on, someone a girl could tell things to. He really worked on his face, like it was his main project for Drama. It was lucky she was looking away because he looked like he was either constipated or insane.

'Um...when I was little back home we useta read Enid Blyton stories all the time – like the Famous Five? We had this tiny little library but for some reason it had a really big collection of translated Enid Blyton books. They were always having these adventures and they'd have these picnics all the time – and I really wanted this lemonade they were always drinking, coz we were in a pretty small town and you couldn't get any. They didn't put the word into Greek either, so it sounded really different to everything else? And I remember once we went into the city to visit my uncle and at the restaurant I ordered a Coke and then I saw they had lemonade – but I was too shy to say anything. It totally spoiled the whole visit for me'. She laughed.

'And anyway when we came to Australia I really wanted to try this great lemonade...and I had one sip and I said 'it's just Seven Up'. We always had it but we didn't call it lemonade so I never knew it was the same thing'. Paul would have usually laughed and said something nasty, something that made it clear that she was stupid and he was laughing at her, but he didn't this time. Then they turned a corner and he found it.

There was a big wall that would've been white except that it was always covered in graffiti. But someone had written all over the people's names and the lists of who loved who and who hated who. They'd covered the whole wall in a big 'wogs out', and a nazi symbol. It was all in capital letters, in angry red slashes, the paint dripping in thick blobs like blood from a cut. Someone. Bullshit – he knew who. Mueller or Ascher. Or they would've told a couple of the others what to do while they kept a lookout at a good safe distance. It could've been Ross. Marina and Paul stared at it without saying anything. Marina kept clenching and unclenching her fists, her face twisting as she tried not to cry.

The Nazi graffiti started going up everywhere. It was like a disease spreading over someone's skin. One day you notice a sore or two and the next time you look your whole body's covered with them. It was all just stuff about who they were going to kill – which races they hated. Words for Asians and Greeks which made them sound like animals instead of people. Full of all the hate, all the crazy, sick, dirty fucked up garbage from Ascher and Mueller's minds. Paul could even tell who'd done which ones. Paul read the local paper. Nothing. Just more stuff about the anarchists. 'How long can the community tolerate these self-styled anarchists, who openly boast of their ideology of mindless destruction?' Pages and pages of windy lies. Paul wrote a letter to the paper for the bit they called 'Have Your Say'. He poured it out one night in

his room when he was supposed to be asleep. He looked in the paper for a week but they didn't print it, or anything else which disagreed with them.

Paul left the house at night with a couple of coins in his back pocket. It was dark but he noticed all the graffiti just as much as he did in the day time. There was no one around and there were no stars. It was like it was all written just for him. He thought that if he closed his eyes he'd still be able to see it. He found a phone booth. It was the same one he'd used to phone the girls he liked.

'Oxley South police station, can I help you?' The man on the other end sounded bored, like he was reading a lesson off the blackboard.

Paul didn't say anything.

'Oxley South police station, can I help you?'

'Hello?'

'Hello can I help you?'

'It's about the graffiti that's going up everywhere'

'Oh yeah?' the voice didn't sound very interested.

'I know who's doing it'.

'Yeah, well, if you've got any information why don't you come down to the station and we'll talk about it OK?' He sounded like he was about to hang up but Paul said

'Can't I tell you over the phone?'

There was a silence at the other end.

'Look, we've got a lot of work on OK mate?'

'Whaddya mean? Dontcha want me to tell you who it is? It's a guy called Gus Mueller and another one called Martin Ascher OK? They're in the phone book and everything so you can find em'.

The cop didn't say anything

'I mean...that's all you need to know isn't it? They keep all the spraycans just in their houses'.

Silence.

'They attacked a girl a while ago. They keep saying they're gonna kill all these people'. Paul was talking faster and faster,

'You know who they are – why dontcha arrest em?'

'We're following up leads at the moment. We don't know if it's political or not'.

'Whaddya mean? Of course it's fuckin political' Paul was shouting. He wanted to rip the phone out, smash the glass of the phone booth, mash it into the ugly face of the stupid lying fucking cop on the other end of the line.

'Where are ya mate? We'll come and getya and you can come into the station'. The voice was full of fake friendliness. Paul hung up.

He walked home in the dark. He felt cold and numb inside, like he'd been hollowed out and filled with ice. He kept thinking 'that's it'. The newspapers weren't going to say anything and the cops weren't going to do anything. The Nazis could just keep going until they killed someone, and they might even get away with that. He could imagine how they'd do it as well. Ascher would decide who they were going to do, and Mueller would make out it was his idea – and they'd keep putting it

off because they were scared but they'd never admit that was why. Then one of Ascher or Mueller would want to show up the other so they'd say right let's do it now. Then they'd stand there and make Ross actually do it. It all made sense. It was like he was seeing the future and he couldn't do anything about it. He could almost hear them walking behind him in the dark. He could see Ross standing with his hands covered in blood. He'd look like he did that day they found a dog which was dying on the road near his house: he'd look all sick and puzzled, and Mueller'd be laughing and slapping him on the back too hard. Ascher'd be dancing around like a red-faced clown saying how they were the white warriors and blood brothers. But Ross'd have to get rid of the body himself.

Paul felt so lonely. He wanted to not go home. He wanted to run but he couldn't think where to. Whatever he did they'd find him and make him come back anyway. He thought of just lying down on the footpath and waiting for them to come and kill him – just curling up like a baby, lying with his face to the ground so Ross didn't have to look into his eyes and watch them go glassy and dead. Paul looked up at the sky. It was covered in a slab of grey clouds, as thick as the walls of a tomb.

Paul was at home when the phone rang the next day. He had this image in his head that it'd be the cops, telling him they were going to arrest the Nazis after all, before he remembered that they wouldn't know it was him that rang up.

'Hello'

'Hi Paul, how are ya mate?' It was Mueller.

'Aaaaaah...how are you Mueller?'

'Great mate, great. Listen, I've got to talk to you OK? There's a big push on. Ascher's on the way out. We're going to really take it somewhere this time. Not like that stupid thing with the girl that Ascher put together. He's a joke mate, he's gotta go. Anyway, yeah, that's what I'm saying, he is gonna go, I've organised something for us and the Leader's going to kick him out for me.' Mueller put his hands on his balls, like he was checking they were still there. Then the hands flew up into the air along with his voice.

'The Leader's coming up here mate. He's going to sort all the shit out with Mueller. But we've gotta have a big push so he knows we're serious...'

Paul suddenly got a feeling that this had all happened before. Like they were going over things they'd said ages ago.

'This is it mate. The big one...'

'Yeah. Ah. Yeah....Mueller....Mueller?'

'Yeah mate what is it?'

'Shouldn't you tell Ross first?'

'No mate. No, I'm not going to tell Ross.'

'How come?'

'Well, I don't trust him!'

'What do you mean Mueller?'

'Well, you see mate. It's, ah...he looks like a wog!'

Paul thought about Ross, with his light hair and round pink face. You could tell just from Mueller's voice that he was lying. Paul thought oh yeah, Ross is on Ascher's side isn't he? I bet Ascher's trying to kick you out as well. Well tough shit Mueller. You can get your hands dirty for once.

'Anyway, yeah, don't worry about Ross mate. Word to the wise, he might not be around all that long either ya know what I mean? Anyway, whaddya reckon we're gonna do?'

Don't tell me Mueller. Tell Ross. I don't wanna know. For fuck's sake I don't wanna be part of this shit. But Paul knew there wasn't any point saying anything. It was like talking to a sewer pipe, asking the shit to stop coming out.

'What Mueller?'

Paul couldn't hear anything outside. It was like everything was listening.

'We're going to get those fucking anarchists!'

END OF PART TWO.

'When they were all stretched out on the concrete floor face down, all six of them, we saw that we had three Black males, one Black female – and two White sluts...I took a heavy crowbar and Bill picked up a shovel. We started at opposite ends of the crew on the floor...we worked quickly but precisely, one blow to the head sufficing for all of them.

Until the last two that is. The blade of Bill's shovel glanced off the skull of one of the Black males and struck the shoulder of the White girl beside him, cutting into her flesh but not inflicting a lethal wound. Before I could bring my crowbar into play to finish her off, the little bitch was up like a shot...Without hesitation I raised my pistol and fired, instantly stopping the girl in her tracks...Bill and I loaded the six corpses in the back of the Black's car. He drove it off...and left the grisly cargo parked outside a Black restaurant...In thinking over Saturday's events, what surprises me is I feel no remorse or regret for killing those two white whores...!'

The Turner Diaries, novel written by a Nazi.

When Paul was little he'd seen this movie on TV. It was about these people in jail who were going to be hanged. But they didn't know when it was going to happen or who'd be next.

They pretended everything was fine. They just talked about the weather and their families and other people in the jail. But all the time they kept looking at the door or the cell, waiting for the cops to come in and drag one of them away to die. That was how Paul felt. He walked to the anarchist shop the way he used to walk to school: slowly, with a sick feeling in his stomach. His shoulders were all hunched up like he thought someone was going to hit him from behind. The sun shone out of a cloudless sky, bright and white, and it reflected off the streets and gutters clear and hard and cruel, like God was shining a torch into his eyes.

Marina was there and she jumped a bit as Paul came in.

'Uh...hi Paul' She looked into Paul's eyes like she was a rabbit looking into the lights of a car. Paul thought she might be shaking a bit but he couldn't tell.

'Um...is, ah, are you OK' he said, knowing that anyone could see she wasn't, hating himself because he was hoping she'd say she was, and he could pretend nothing was wrong. She laughed a shaky laugh and brushed her hair out of her eye. One of her long nails was chipped and bitten.

'I was minding the shop and this guy kept calling up and saying things'. Marina said. Paul knew what things. He knew who it was too.

The Nazis hated girls like Marina. Girls who didn't do what their boyfriend told them. Girls who might not even have a boyfriend and they wouldn't think it was the worst thing in the world. Girls who weren't scared of men. You couldn't think of Marina going 'oh I'm so fat', really thinking it or saying it because she needed to hear her boyfriend say she wasn't. You couldn't imagine her pretending she agreed with someone when she didn't because it was a popular person or she wanted them to like her. She didn't look like any of that now. They'd got what they wanted. She looked like she had something in her mouth which she wanted to spit out. She kept the table between her and the phone, like it was a snake which was asleep, but only for now. Then Paul realised something. All in a second something clicked.

If you could get into Paul's mind, get right into his secret thoughts and ask him what he thought about the Nazis, he would have said 'they're hurting the woman I love'. He had this little script all worked out. He took care of it for her – he beat them up and then she looked into his eyes and said 'Yknow, you're my hero Paul'. Then they kissed and from then on they started going out – or really staying in and fucking. He was thinking about it as a way of making her fall in love with him. He was almost doing the same thing as Ascher and Mueller (and Ross now, he thought) – just seeing her as part of his fantasy. His was the nice hero protector version instead of the fucked up rapist scum version, but in a way it was the same thing. He wasn't really thinking about what it was like to be her. What it was like to be a girl. It didn't matter who you were or what rights you thought you had. If you wore particular clothes in public some fuckwit'd shout at you or touch you or worse. Even if you wore a tracksuit and didn't talk to anyone and kept your eyes down, if they decided to do something to you they would. Or they could fix it so you couldn't be alone in the day without being scared someone'd come in and rape you. If someone decided you were fair game you pretty much were, and it didn't matter who you were or what you did. He hadn't really thought about it that way. He didn't really think about how it made girls feel. He'd made jokes about rape. He'd shouted stuff out at girls so his mates'd think he was – what? A big man. Someone like Ascher or Mueller. He didn't want to scare them. He just didn't think about that. He got picked on every couple of days and he didn't think about how it made someone feel to have a gang of guys shout out at them on the street. He'd said stuff about girls being stuck up; because they didn't want to go out with him – like they had to, like it was his right or something. Sometimes when he got picked on he used to think girls were lucky because it didn't happen to them.

He thought about it for a second. You don't wanna go against your friends. Then he thought: this is my friend here. The one with the same scared eyes as me.

'I think I know who's doing it'. Marina looked at him like she didn't know who he was.

'Paul – we've finished talking about it' Michael said. Paul stood up.

'What'd you say?'

'Well, some of us wanted to just chuck you out – say we wouldn't have anything to do with you any more. But...I dunno, most of us are pretty forgiving. We decided if you don't have any other little surprises you're keeping from us then we'll let it go. I guess you did say something once they got nasty'.

'OK'. Paul thought about the girl that the Nazis attacked. She didn't deserve it any more than Marina did, did she? He did have a little secret he was keeping to himself.

'It was pretty close though. Y'know Andy, the tall guy with the blond hair? He was saying he was gonna leave if we didn't get rid of you. He changed his mind though. To be honest, if he'd really meant it we'd have taken him over you'.

'I told the cops'.

'Yeah I know. I guess you were trying to do something. But you should've told us once the cops said they weren't gonna do anything'. Michael looked angry and confused.

'I don't really get why you didn't though Paul. I mean you're not...you know what Nazis are, I mean why protect em?.'

'I guess I'm just weak'. Paul smiled.

'No – that's bullshit Paul!'. The words exploded out of Michael's mouth. Paul jumped.

'That's just something people say as an excuse. Oh well that's just me, that's just how I am, that's just my little way, I don't really want to change so la di fuckin da – maybe you are weak. And that's not your fault. But you're just gonna have to work on not being weak. It doesn't give you a license to fuck people over OK?'

'Yeah OK'

'Alright. Forget it then'.

Paul kicked a chocolate wrapper that someone had dropped there.

'Um...what did Marina say?'

'Paul – as far as you're concerned it makes fuck all difference what Marina said'.

Paul was helping Alex tidy the shelves up. He was doing as much work as he could and not saying anything unless he was spoken to. Alex was looking at a book by a girl who'd been a fundamentalist Christian for most of her life.

'You ever read this Paul?'

'Nah'

'You should. It's pretty sickening. She was scared to leave even though one of the priests was raping her. They told her the rest of the world was worse and it was just God's way of testing her'.

'God'. Paul didn't really want to read it.

'I don't get how anyone'd believe that' he said.

'Oh, yeah, I know whatcha mean – but it's different when you're in something like that. I oughta know'.

'Whaddya mean?'

'Oh yeah – didn't you know that? All my family were fundamentalist Christians. I was one until a couple of years ago'.

Paul couldn't believe it. Alex looked like he'd been an anarchist from the day he was born.

'So you...I mean you went to church every week and everything?'

'I was in the church probably four times a week. I won the church colouring in competition when I was little doing a picture of Jesus –' He said it 'JE-sus'.

'I was the main singer in the choir as well. Yes brother, I was trapped in the wicked world of Christianity – but lo, I was turned away to the righteous path of anarchism –

Alex put on an American accent,

'Say a-MEN Paul, say a-MEN! Hand me that righteous cloth there, that I may wipe the righteous shelves!'

Alex was jumping around and laughing. But Paul could see lines on his forehead.

'That must've been really hard...you just changed your whole life?'

Alex calmed down all of a sudden. He seemed to get smaller, like a balloon that'd had a needle stuck in it.

'Yeah - it's very hard when you leave something like that. It's very bad but...there's some good things about being a Christian as well. There was always barbecues and camps and things like that – people got together a lot, you weren't isolated and lonely. You were always part of something. I found that very hard when I left you know – being by myself all the time. Because most of them just cut you off. They say they've got to be apart from the world - 'the world' is what they call people who aren't in the church – you're part of the world now and you're like diseased.' Paul nodded.

'Before I left, if I felt like being with people there was a youth group every few days. And when I first left there wasn't that any more – and I still thought of everyone else as 'the world' – I couldn't go to a pub or anything like that. I thought of it like someone'd jump on me and be pumping heroin into my arm or something'. He smiled.

'My Mum didn't cut me off. But she thought that way too, yknow, I was part of all that. I can't really talk to her much. She just always begs me to come back all the time'.

'Didn't you wanna go back?'

'Oh...I did, I was pretty close a few times. But there was a lot of things wrong with it. Not stuff like the ideas are wrong, I mean...they are...I mean they say stuff like AIDS is God's punishment and that. I remember I heard that and I thought but what about babies who get it from their mothers? But to be honest I don't think I would have left just over the ideas. I'd like to say I would but I don't think I'm that strong'.

'I just got sick of all the lies. We were always smiling and together but it wasn't very honest yknow? Like all the Chinese people went to church in the afternoon and then the white people'd go at night. And it was supposed to be because of different languages – like you have a service in English and then a Cantonese one and then a Vietnamese one later on. But most of us spoke English. A lot of the kids only really spoke English. It was just an excuse to not mix. We were all brothers in Christ you know? We just didn't want to talk to each other very much.' He laughed his soft laugh.

'And we were supposed to be always spreading the word and reaching out to everyone. But most of us were like me, born into it. And if new people didn't act the way we did we just shut em out. There was this girl who, she'd had a really hard time, like she was raped and she'd gotten pregnant when she was really young, and her boyfriend was this older guy who was a real fuckwit and just used her and hit her all the time, and she had to leave him, and she found us. And she couldn't really fit into it. And...some of the guys...I think they hung around her hoping she'd fuck em. Like if it happened everyone'd blame her. She never did though. And she kept asking why God let that happen to me? I asked my Mum about that and she said that God lets bad things happen to people to test them. And I thought...well that's not very loving is it? I mean God's supposed to be our loving father. What would you say about a father who has their children raped so he can see if they'll still love him? That'd be pretty bad wouldn't it? Or sending people to hell. What would you say about a father who did that to their children because they wouldn't do what he said? That's a pretty fucked up way to be loving. And yeah, we were kind of like that. It was all very loving if you did exactly what you were told'.

'Yeah, anyway I met Marina one day. Can't remember where – she was giving out fliers in the tunnel at the train station I think. Anyway I got talking to her and she told me all about anarchism and what it'd be like, everyone sharing everything, and everyone being on the same level, no fucking bosses or politicians having any power over everyone. It reminded me of what Christians were supposed to be like. And I asked her if they believed in God and he said yknow most of us don't and we're against all the churches. And I was really shocked, I was a good Christian boy and here was this woman who looked kind but really she was the devil, trying to lure me into worldly temptation! She'll be bringing out the heroin soon!'

And I said well how can you say all this stuff then? If you don't have God in your life then why don't you just be selfish and just do what you want? And she said I am doing what I want, I want the world to be like that. She said that some of the worst bastards in history have believed in God and it didn't make them any nicer.

And that hit home a bit. Not in the way she meant though. I mean she wasn't talking about my family or anything, she meant people like Hitler or the church burning people at the stake. But I thought yeah, it didn't really make my family any nicer did it? My Mum's nice and my Dad's basically a cunt, and they both believe the same things. And actually believing in God makes them worse – my Mum won't talk to me properly even though she wants to, and my Dad has an excuse not to talk to me because he's doing what the Lord wants. Even though he never talked to me when I was a good Christian. Ah, but all along he could see there was something worldly about me ysee, it's not his fault at all. Basically none of them'd say anything against him because he's one of them and I'm not any more and that's that. He's one of the saved and I'm one of the damned. You're not allowed to talk about one of the saved being bad. You're not even allowed to think it. My Mum thinks it but she feels guilty for thinking it, because she must be evil if she thinks that about a good Christian man'.

'Anyway Marina was saying she didn't want to be nice just because she was afraid of going to Hell or whatever. Just because that was the way people should live, and it could easily happen if enough people acted on it'.

'And then that was it? Like you just became an anarchist then?'

'Um...actually I said she was an idiot and it'd never happen and I walked off. And I really worked on making my Mum be nice to me after that. Because I kind of wanted to prove her wrong – I was like thinking I'd prove that really we were better people because we believed in God, and she was full of shit because she didn't. But it didn't really change anything. Mum still wouldn't do anything except keep asking me to come home, and Dad's not really so bad, just make allowances for him and blah blah blah – all I did was make her feel more guilty. So after a while, I had this really screaming argument with her, she was crying and everything, and she just said 'you can't always do what you want Alex, you have to make sacrifices'. And I kind of thought well why should I sacrifice myself to God – what kind of God wants me to do that? If God was real wouldn't he make my Dad nicer instead of making me put up with his shit? Anyway I still had this flier I'd gotten off Marina and I went down to the old shop we had in the city. And *then* that was it. Amen brother Paul'.

Cassiel the Shining Lord sat on a gold chair. The companions (Ariel had gone from them) stood behind him. Cassiel was strong and proud, the best of the Shining Lords.

He had a musical voice, and skin which shone like silver. The forest clearing seemed like a stage which had been built for him.

'You are poor are you not?'

The wretched, sick, skinny man nodded.

'Would you like to earn some gold?'

The man nodded fiercely, desperate and hungry. Cassiel thought he was like a dog, low, thinking of nothing but his empty stomach. Like all his kind. Cassiel could see the sores on his skin, and the bloody marks on his fingers, where he'd been digging in the earth like an animal, looking for anything to put in his stomach.

'Your eyes do burn like candles'.

The man nodded again, not knowing what was meant.

'Eat these candles. Eat them all up like a good dog. And if thou vomit up one bit, then thou shalt have nothing'.

The man's face twisted and he cringed and his eyes looked like those of an animal in a trap. But, Cassiel thought, what could he do? He was free to go elsewhere if he wanted. If his starved chicken legs could carry him there. It was his choice. It was a free exchange. Cassiel thought that if he were ever poor he would never be so low. But those who were poor had no pride at all. Cassiel smiled and shifted his weight in his fine gold chair, like a cat that had just eaten a mouse. As Cassiel knew he would, the man picked up the first of the thick, oily candles and started to put it in his mouth, his face twisting up as he did so.

'Thou thou wert scratching in the snow for food, rubbing thy hands raw, licking thine own tears, thou cried to the sky and said thou only asked for anything, anything at all to fill thy stomach, did thou not?

Cassiel got up from his chair and wailed to the sky, like an actor.

'Oh Gods send us anything to fill our stomachs! Well now rejoice. Thou hast what thou earnestly desired'.

Cassiel stood over the man who was gagging on the foul meal, trying desperately not to vomit any up lest he lose his few gold pieces. He laughed his sweet laugh, and the sound was like bells.

It happened a few days later. Everyone had been at the shop, and a couple of new people were helping out, and no one was thinking about all the shit that'd happened. They were just leaving and they were talking and laughing, and Paul was thinking 'they really are gonna let it go'. Then the Nazis all barreled round the corner.

Everyone just stood there. Paul stared at them. It was funny because he thought about them all the time. But every time he saw them it hit him again – they really are like that. They're real Nazis. It's not just something someone puts on a desk to be a hard man or because they don't think about what it means.

'There's supposed to be only one of them' one of the Nazis said.

Ascher turned on him like a snake rearing out of the grass, sudden and savage – leaning into his face, shouting

'So fuckin what man, we'll get em all'. Ascher was like a preacher, trying to whip them up with his voice.

'C'mon man, they're a bunch of faggots – what're you scared of man?'

'We're gonna get you Jewboy'

The anarchists didn't say anything. Paul looked at Michael and he had a look on his face that Paul'd never seen before. His mouth was a thin, grim line like a cut someone'd made in his face. He looked like he was carved out of stone. They moved into the street. Marina and a couple of the other girls as well. Paul wanted to run in front of her. He remembered someone saying she knew kickboxing or karate or something like that.

It hit him suddenly where he was. He was in a real fight. Not two people pushing each other and wanting to end it but not because their mates were looking. The Nazis thought the anarchists were animals. They talked about killing them all the time. He couldn't get out of it. He wanted to turn and run. He was in front of one of the Nazis: a big guy with a beard who would've been about 40. Paul put his fists up and he had the wild hope that somehow he was going to be able to take this guy out and he swung at him. Ross wasn't there. He could see Ross wasn't there.

Paul felt a shock at the side of his head and the pavement jumped up at him. He'd read that in books before, about the ground seeming to jump up at you – it sounded like just something people wrote but it really was like that...like the ground was a diagonal line, like a TV show where the camera was tilted and it was like he was climbing up a cliff...he wondered what he was doing thinking about that when he was in the middle of a fight...for a second he felt like he was outside himself looking at himself and then suddenly he came back inside his head, and he was lying on the ground

'Hey! Hey! Can you hear me Paul?' It was Andy, the guy who'd wanted to kick him out, but now it was all OK.

'Yeah I'm fine, I feel fine, how are you Andy?' He sounded so bright and alert that Andy jumped back. He'd always been able to do that, when his Mum used to wake him up for school he'd always be able to call out like he was really awake and ready to go and then he could go back to sleep for a few more minutes...that sounded like a good idea actually...

He felt like his brain had something in it which was trying to get out, blow up and crack his skull open.

'They ran off down there. They must've thought they'd killed ya'

'So I saved the day again huh?' Again he sounded totally alert and hearty, like he couldn't decide whether to beat up all the Nazis in the world or go for a bit of a jog first. He wanted to vomit and then lie down in the road and cry about the huge pain in his head. Suddenly he wondered if he'd gotten concussion or brain damage, or if he was going to bleed to death. He felt cold and shaky. He wanted to sleep so badly but the pain in his head was so bad he didn't think he could. He was scared he'd die in his sleep, like his Grandma had one day when Paul was staying over with his Mum. He remembered how she looked when he saw her on her bed. The pain in his head kept going away, moving back like a sweet tide going out until it was almost gone, just a little point behind his eyes. Then it came back in a great crashing concrete wave of pain and sickness. Paul imagined Marina putting her hands on his forehead, pulling the pain out of him and throwing it away. He heard someone say 'fuck – catch him!' and he knew they were talking about him. He knew he wasn't really lying on a hammock, he was being held up by some people who he couldn't see even though it was broad daylight. But he didn't care. He just slept.

Paul woke up. He floated there for a few minutes, not thinking about where he was or what was happening. Then he suddenly realised he had to be home. He sat up like someone had run an electric shock through his body. He was lying on the couch at the shop. Michael was sitting there.

'What time is it?'

'It's seven. You were only asleep for about twenty minutes. We rang the hospital and they said just to keep an eye on ya. Everyone's only just gone home actually.'

'I've gotta go home' Paul got up.

'Yeah alright. See ya'.

Paul could see the sun behind Michael's back and his dark hair looked like it was full of light. Paul didn't want to leave Michael in the shop by himself.

'Do ya reckon they'll come back?'

'Ahh...I think they might in a while. Not tonight though. Did you hear how that guy said 'there's supposed to be one of them?' They're probably kind of working out where their brilliant plan went wrong'.

Paul thought Ascher and Mueller would be screaming at each other about how it's the other one's fault.

Michael didn't say anything for a bit. Then he suddenly got smaller.

'It's gonna really fuck us up Paul. We can't really have a shop if people are gonna be attacked and stuff. I mean we only meet once a week. If they'd come any other day there only would've been one person here'.

'Maybe you oughta have a couple of people around all the time?'

'Yeah – but then it's not that easy. People have jobs'.

Paul had never thought of any of them having jobs before. The local paper always said they were a bunch of dole bludgers and rich kids living off their parents. That didn't sound right when he thought about it. But he hadn't really thought about it.

He'd just taken it in without thinking, like food that you gulp down and don't think about until you start feeling sick. But it was bad to think about someone like Marina tied down to a job, having to smile when she was tired or sad, and be nice to asshole managers and customers. It was ridiculous and sad, like seeing a lions in a little damp concrete cage. She was too good for that. But that was what the anarchists were saying: everyone's too good for that. No one should have to lie just to survive.

'Oh yeah...I guess so. What do you want to do then?'

'I don't really know. We're having a meeting about it in a couple of days'. Michael sounded like he was saying 'and I won't have any idea then either'.

'I better get home'.

'Yeah all right. I better close the shop up'.

The door of the shop swung back gently, slow and silent like a coffin. Paul went home, hearing Nazis behind him in the dark all the way.

Paul was grounded for a week for staying out playing with his friends. It was hard not to laugh or scream in his parents' faces when they said that. But you learn how to do it don't you. They might have it completely wrong but they can still get angry at you if you tell them that, and they can still punish you.

He stayed in and thought about nothing and did nothing. Or that was how he felt. If you looked at him you'd see someone doing their homework or reading or watching TV or playing with his Playstation. But that was all nothing. It was pretending, like things someone was doing in a picture. He remembered one day when the bus was half an hour late and it was too far to go back home, and he knew he'd gotten the time right and it wasn't his fault, it'd just decided to not turn up, and he had to wait there for as long as it took. He felt a bit like that, the same angry empty feeling. But he was scared too. He wanted the week to be over, but he was so scared he felt sick and he didn't want it to be over. It was like the last hour of the weekend when someone's going to bash you at school the next day. He wanted to hang on to it no matter how shitty and boring it was, and he hated every second of it and wanted it to be over now. He didn't want to move and he didn't want to stay where he was. It was like a cold snake curled around his guts, twisting him up and not letting him rest, but not letting him move either. He slept as much as he could, but his dreams were about coming home late and finding Mueller standing over Marina's body.

Paul ran into the shop. He'd hurried all the way there as if he could make up for lost time; as if he'd just got talking to someone on the way and lost track of time and that was why he was a week late.

'Hi Paul' Michael and a couple of other people were there.

'Hi...um, how's everything going?' He wanted to ask 'is everyone still alive?'

'With the Nazis?'

'Yeah'

'Oh, I dunno – pretty good in some ways. We're having a thing where we're going to clean off some of the stuff they've been writing around the place. We put fliers around about it'.

'Oh...OK.'

'Yeah, we did em in different languages and everything'. Paul was thinking about weapons, ambushing them, following them home and shit like that. There was a video game in his head and Michael didn't seem to be playing it.

'We put stuff up in the window about it as well' Michael said with a voice like he wanted Paul to look, so he did. They walked outside and Paul said how good the posters were. A fair few people were looking at them so Paul guessed he was telling the truth. Michael reminded Paul of a little kid who'd just done a picture.

'Um, so...is that all you're doing?' They went back inside.

'Well we were going to put a security grille thing across the front of the shop. But we had to get the council to approve it. They reckoned it'd lower the tone of the area. I said there are about twelve shops on this street who've got the same thing but they said we can't, it'll lower the tone of the area. I said it'd lower the tone if we got fucking burnt to the ground too, well I didn't say fucking but anyway, they looked at me like 'no it wouldn't'. I said well how are we supposed to protect the shop and they said you should hire a private security firm. Bloody bastards – we can't afford that and they know it. It's like we're a pile of garbage and if the Nazis get rid of us well good on em'.

Paul remembered the sign they had before they came which said 'coming soon: freedom' and how he'd felt, thinking about if it really was freedom.

'So what are you doing now?'

'Well a few people check the shop out when they can. Alex says he's going to start sleeping out the back but I don't know if we want that – he might just be putting himself in danger. The main thing's getting people on side'.

'Yeah I guess. I meant to come all this week y'know. My parents grounded me'. Paul wanted to say 'I wasn't scared' but he thought he'd sound like a dick. He said

'I didn't tell em about getting knocked on the head. They'd just get me into trouble more'.

'Yeah – it's kind of stupid getting you into trouble because somebody bashed you isn't it?'

'Yeah' Paul didn't say anything else. He moved a book a couple of inches to the left like he was doing a puzzle.

'I mean I love my Mum and Dad and I know they do lots for me. It's just that...I think sometimes they say stuff...I think they say stuff that they don't really think, because that's what parents are supposed to say? Like I was going over it in my head all week. I was trying to come up with some way of explaining what I was doing with you guys. And you know how sometimes you imagine it, like what you'd say and they'd say back? I could just hear my Dad saying 'that's the police's job, let them handle it'. And I remember once our house got broken into? Someone took our video n that. I remember my Dad was saying how useless the police were, they don't give a shit unless you're rich, and when he was younger people looked out for each other and it worked a lot better...anyway I was thinking; that's what I'm doing isn't it? I'm doing what he thinks people should do. And he's not stupid or anything, he'd see that. But he'd still say the same thing. And if I kept saying it he'd just say 'don't talk back' or something like that. It's like society says you've got to control your kid, so that's what he does – what I think or he thinks doesn't matter. That's bad isn't it?'

'Yeah...I remember when I was at school there was this teacher who we all really liked. He was pretty young, only just older than us really. But when the principal said such and such was wrong, or we all had to have more pride in the school or something...he had to say it too, even though he didn't really believe it, and get us into trouble if we went against it. And there was stuff we couldn't talk about with him. It was always 'he's a really nice teacher', not 'he's a nice person' you know? He used to always say 'don't call me Mr Felter, call me Cameron'. It was like 'don't think of me being a teacher, think of me being a person'. But he could get us into trouble – you can't just put that aside and pretend it's not there. If we'd called him Cameron it would have been pretending, or just doing it because he wanted to and not because we wanted to? Just because he had power over us – it stopped us being just people with each other. I bet your parents pretend to like their boss a lot more than they really do as well'.

'I think they do actually. But they really wanted to be bosses as well when we had the shop. That's a really fucked ambition if you think about that way'.

'It's such an excellent society isn't it? If you're lucky you won't have to lie to anyone, people will have to lie to you. What a nice way to live. No wonder they need to tell lies about us and sic Nazis on to us'. Michael smiled. He looked like he felt better and Paul did too a bit. But he was thinking if the Nazis killed someone it wouldn't matter how right the anarchists were, they'd still be dead. Alex came out from the back room of the shop carrying a wad of money.

'Hi Paul'.

'Hi Alex. What's that for?' he pointed at the money.

'Oh I'm gonna buy some bombs and drugs for everyone'. Paul smiled although he didn't think it was that funny, and even though Alex had made more or less the same joke before. He was making fun of the stuff the paper said about anarchists, that they were just out to break windows and fuck stuff up. Alex looked as worn down and tired as his joke. His smile was big but it reminded Paul of a skull. His clothes looked like he'd been sleeping in them. Paul looked at Michael again. He hadn't noticed it before but he had the same look as Alex.

'Nah, I'm just off to pay the rent' Alex said.

'Oh...do you pay rent?'

'You can't really get around it can you? Yknow there's about fifty buildings around here that we know of that don't get used at all? We went round and counted em. No one lives in em or anything, they're just sitting there falling apart. Some of us wanted to open the shop up in somewhere like that? But for each one there's a person or a company who technically owns it, even though they won't be using it and it's probably just one of a hundred properties they've got around the place. So no one else is allowed to do anything with em. So we've got to volunteer to sit in a shop all day so we can make enough money for our fuckin landlord. Anyway I better get to the real estate – see ya'. Alex left.

Paul wondered why Alex had said all that. Not what he'd said exactly, just the way he'd said it. Normally Paul was really quiet, and Alex and Michael tried to get Paul to talk as much as he could. But this time Alex had just talked. Probably most people wouldn't have noticed anything – they'd think anarchists would be the sort of people who rant on and on and don't let people get a word in anyway. But it was frightening. It was more frightening than the look on Michael's face right now, that thin tired look he gave Paul as he stood between him and the door. Paul noticed that the air was choked with little bits of dust, floating around on little gusts of air. Or he guessed there were little gusts of air. The air could've been made out of glass for all he could feel. Paul could feel his top rubbing against the back of his neck like a piece of sandpaper. His neck was a bit sunburned, with that slow sunburn that comes on a bit at a time, like a noise that gets louder and louder. He wished Marina was here, rubbing sunburn cream into the back of his neck where it hurt, with her long shiny black nails firm and cool against his skin, instead of this scratchy top that didn't seem to sit properly on him no matter how he twisted inside it. Michael looked like something from a museum, a mummy that'd been taken out of the cool rooms and left in a hot basement to collect dust. He wondered if he looked like that as well – like they were two corpses, wrapped in heavy rags, staring blindly at each other in the still air. Paul wondered why neither of them were sweating, why the heat was getting bigger under his skin instead of breaking out.

Michael moved and sat down and all of a sudden he was just Michael again. A bit stressed-looking but just Michael. He said something, Paul didn't even hear what it was, and he sounded like Michael. Paul said something back and wondered if his voice sounded OK. Paul started talking quickly about nothing, about the role-playing game he used to like before Ross spoiled it. Michael nodded and sounded like he wasn't listening and really neither was Paul. It was like when you're talking

to someone and neither of you are awake properly yet. Paul wondered again why Alex had talked like that – why he'd sounded like he was talking into a tape recorder instead of to a person. It was like he was trying to get as much out and recorded as he could. It was like he needed to do it before something happened to him. It came to Paul suddenly that maybe he was worried the Nazis were going to get him.

For some reason this made Paul feel better. Knowing that someone's afraid they're going to die shouldn't make you feel better, but it did. At least he knew what the problem was. That was one thing with the anarchists. They didn't make the problems go away for you, but they could let you know where they came from.

'Anyway how long have you been doing role-playing for?' Michael asked.

'Oh, a couple of years. My friend, this guy I know called Ross, he got the rules for Christmas once, yeah...um, yeah, I'm a bit sick of it to be honest'. He picked up a flier and he stared at it but he couldn't think of anything to say about it.

'Oh really, it sounds pretty cool when you talk about it. I wouldn't mind having a go one day'.

'Yeah...maybe' Paul said quickly. He remembered his parents saying that when he was little and they didn't want to tell him 'no'. He thought of saying 'if you're a good anarchist and you beat all the Nazis, then I'll let you do role-playing'.

'Your parents used to have a shop didn't they?'

'Um...they had this shop here'. Paul hadn't thought about that for a while.

'No shit? Did they get sick of it or something?'

'We went broke'.

'Right. Sorry'.

'Nah that's OK'. Paul was surprised to find that it really was OK. He didn't feel all clenched up and angry when he thought about it. He looked at the flier he'd picked up. Compared to the magazines in his parents' shop it looked like a piece of shit. Someone had probably run it off on a dodgy photocopier at their work when their boss wasn't looking. But it was there because the anarchists thought it'd help people. To his parents the magazines they sold were shit – his Dad used to say so all the time; 'I dunno why people buy this shit I really don't'. Laughing at people for liking them, but smiling at them when they handed over the money. The things in his parents' shop weren't there because they were beautiful or useful or true, they were just there to make them rich. Or when they didn't sell enough and you looked at a pile of them they were there to remind you that you're a failure. Paul could see how that'd happen though. He used to think his parents were just arseholes – but they weren't. It was just what happened.

'Yeah...my parents used to run a shop as well and it went broke'.

'Happens to the best of us' Paul said, the words coming out of his mouth like there was an old man in his stomach.

'My Mum wasn't really the best' Michael said.

'Oh right' Paul put down the pamphlet. He'd been looking at it for five minutes and he couldn't have said what was on the front. He looked Michael straight in the eye, which he usually didn't do to anyone.

'It's kind of a long story'.

'Yeah that's OK. I don't have to be home for ages'.

Michael folded his hands together and took a deep breath, like someone giving a speech at an assembly.

'My Mum got sent out here from England when she was really little. I didn't know that until I was about sixteen. She didn't have an accent or anything and she didn't talk about it. One of my Dad's family told me she had a really strong accent to start with, but she made herself get rid of it – she used to tape record herself and listen to it. I don't remember any of that but

anyway – she grew up in a kind of orphanage or something, I think it was for kids whose parents were too poor to look after them...fuck, you'd think I'd know that at least. I asked Dad about it but he always just looks at the floor and changes the subject. Anyway she really hated it, and she wanted to escape it, 'rise above it' she always said. So she got enough money together to open a shop. And we had a bit more money for a while, this was about when I was ten. I remember me and Dad went on a holiday in the country and we got a new car n that. She was in the local paper and things as well, because there weren't that many women who did all this.

But my Mum was scared of becoming poor again. She used to work every day, even the weekends. And she started making me and my sister work in the shop as well after school. We used to always beg her to let us off. I remember once we had this project to do and she said we could do our homework in the shop which was bullshit yknow, we had to look in the library for stuff. And then after she pretended she hadn't heard when we told her that'.

Michael clenched his fists so the knuckles stood out white against his hands, which were dark and lined, like he'd spent a lot of time working in the sun.

'I really hated her then. And she took it all out on us, yelling at everyone all the time. Dad'd be extra nice to us when she wasn't there, like he was admitting she was going on at us for nothing. But he went along with it when she was around.

Anyway I left home as soon as I could. Basically I spent about a year just getting drunk every night. I used to think that when I left home I'd have a big holiday – just put my feet up and rest. But I couldn't stop thinking about her. I had this little room and I used to just lie on my bed drinking and hating her. I thought about cutting the brake cables on her car and all sorts of shit. I didn't every talk to my family, but this was about the time my Mum got a stomach ulcer because she was so overworked and scared all the time. And she was still making herself work every day. Standing there for ten hours at a time bleeding to death from the inside. Anyway I can't remember exactly what happened then...I went to some thing about nuclear bombs. That was a big thing when I was young, nuclear war – people at my school pretty much thought it was going to happen any day, the end of the world...I used to wonder when it'd happen. Not even if it would or not yknow, just when. Then that stopped being such a big issue and now it's the environment – people are used to the idea now aren't they, that the whole world could be destroyed? All the cities drowning because of the ice melting...you just kind of get used to it and don't think about it. Anyway I met these people there and they were pretty nice and they had this political party and I joined it.

I had a really good time for a while then. We used to go to these protests all the time. You see them on TV and everyone looks really angry and they are, but it's a good feeling, like you're doing something about it. And just being with people you like doing something instead of sitting around all day talking to your Mum who isn't even there. Anyway then my sister got in touch with me and wanted me to come home.

My Mum was getting really sick now. An ulcer burst in her stomach when she was cleaning the shop up one night, and she went unconscious and no one knew she was there for hours until Dad rang to ask her to come home. My sister told the doctor she couldn't stop working, and just kind of laughed and said oh well you better tell her to take it easy. And my sister said you don't understand, she won't stop, she's sick in the head. And the doctor just said well lots of people work too hard. This was a public hospital – as long as they can stick you back together well enough that you can go back to work, they don't give a fuck yknow? Get out of the way and let the next bit of meat come down the line. So my sister wanted me to make up with her. I did go home and in about five minutes we got into an argument, and I stormed out of the house crying, and that was us making up completely fucked'.

Paul waited.

'Is that the end?'

'Yeah more or less'. Whatever fire had been in Michael to make him tell the story, whatever had made him clench his fists and twist his face up, it'd all gone out of him. He just sounded like he was telling something that happened to someone else and he'd told it too many times.

'She died about six months later. My sister decided I was the main reason it happened, which I guess made her feel better. I kept thinking about the argument. It wasn't even about us. It was about me being in this political party. She was going on about bloody protestors, always whinging about something – and I knew that was bullshit. I mean fuck, we did a lot of things about nuclear war. It's not like you'd think it was fine if they were gonna drop a nuclear bomb on you. You'd be whinging – but then it'd be too late. But I also thought well hang on, my Mum's not a general or a big businessman or anything, she's not a boss, she just works for herself. We're supposed to be protesting so ordinary people will see how the world works. Half the fucking things that are wrong with the world happened to my Mum and she still thinks we're idiots. My Mum did exactly what the system said you should do. She was a hardworking, determined career woman who set up her own small business. And it turned her into a piece of scum.

I kept going to the protests and stuff but I got more and more frustrated with it. I talked to people in the party about it and they all just rolled their eyes and laughed and said yeah, their families are the same way. It was like they didn't expect to ever get through to anyone, like they didn't even really mind – almost like they liked knowing something their parents didn't. And that was fucked yknow, I'm not gonna have a bomb dropped on me and say 'ha ha, I told you so' and feel good about it. We always put up most of our posters and gave stuff out around universities? So regular people like my Mum wouldn't even get to hear about it. So what was the point of it? Anyway I met Alex one day, I think he was giving fliers out at the train station or something – anyway, I was talking about all this and he said the anarchists don't go to protests. He just said that he didn't think normal people really went to them. And no one had ever said anything like that before – once I heard someone else say it I knew I believed it as well. So he said they were trying to get something set up in the suburbs. And I thought fuck, these guys might actually get somewhere. At least I might be able to stop someone fucking their lives up while they laugh at us like my Mum did'.

On the way home Paul thought about what Michael had said. He remembered how ashamed and defeated his Dad looked on the day he went back to his old work. What am I going to be doing in ten years time? Working in a job just like my parents? He remembered when he'd told his parents he didn't want to get a job, he wanted to be in a band for a living. And his Dad had just said you can't have everything you want and you'll grow out of it, but his Mum said that she wanted to be a writer before he was born, and after that she got a job and she never had time. At the time Paul had thought 'poor Mum', but it was more like 'poor stupid Mum, I'm never going to be like her'. Now he couldn't see why he wasn't. He couldn't see why the rules that trapped his parents and Michael's Mum and everyone else, the invisible unwritten rules that nobody ever tells you but are rules just the same, why they weren't going to trap him too, grind him up just like everyone else and keep going, with people thinking they're going to escape and rise above it and being crushed just the same, the system not noticing, not even looking down to laugh at them. We do deserve better than this. It's true, we do deserve better. That was when he knew he was truly on their side. He stopped being someone who hung around the anarchists and he started being an anarchist.

Paul ran into Ross a couple of days later. Paul looked at him and Ross smiled, and held his hand out. Paul didn't take it and Ross left it hanging there.

'It's role playing on Friday again!'

'I don't wanna come to role playing any more Ross!'

Paul was amazed at himself. He didn't give in because it was easier. He wasn't saying he'd come and thinking he'd pretend to be sick on the day. He didn't look at the ground, or mumble, or make a joke out of it, or a fight. He just said it, looking right into Ross' eyes. It felt good.

'Ha' Ross tried to laugh but it sounded like someone cracking a bone.

'I thought you might be having a sook about the game!'

'I'm not having a sook about the game' Paul said. Though Ross had ruined the game for him. He got ordered around enough in his life. He didn't need his friends to do it as well.

'It's because you're a Nazi now. It's fucked up Ross. You think all these people are garbage and you're gonna gas em all. Remember when we saw that thing about the war? All those naked dead bodies in piles after the Nazis killed em. I don't wanna be friends with someone who's into that!'

'Ha' another sound like a finger being snapped

'Look...I don't agree with everything they say y'know? We're just mates. Not even really that good mates, fuck, Mueller's a pain in the bum a lot of the time...'

'No, that's bullshit Ross. I can't be friends with you any more! Paul turned around and walked away.

'Paul – look, I'll see you around OK?'

'Yeah. We'll probably see each other some time!'

Paul didn't tell his parents he wasn't going to role playing. He left at the normal time but he went to a park. He wanted to be by himself. And he couldn't be bothered telling his Mum, going over it again but not being able to say any of the important parts. Mum'd be so sad that he'd had a fight with his friend, and she'd say all this stuff which was supposed to help, but it wouldn't mean anything. Paul looked at the ground and thought about Ross. He'd felt like this before, but he didn't know when or where. Then he remembered - it was at his uncle's funeral, his uncle Al who was funny and all the kids liked. He remembered thinking about him. He remembered looking at the ground where they were putting him, looking at all the details, the little bits of frost and the pale yellow bits of grass in among the green. But really he was remembering Uncle Al, going over his life, or the bits of it that a seven year old would know about, mostly what he looked like and the things he said. It was like Ross was dead, and Paul was going over his life, burying him in this park as the sun went down.

Paul thought about nothing in particular for a while, just things that'd happened lately. Then he started thinking about Marina again, about how much he wanted her and how he hadn't seen her for a long time. He wondered how he could still think about this now, when death was looking over all their shoulders. But the truth was he'd think about it no matter what happened. He'd probably think about it at someone's funeral. He thought about her all the time; when he was talking to his friends or his parents about something else, when he was acting in the way he was supposed to.

It wasn't just sex – even though he thought about that all the time too, even though that made him feel like a dog in a cage as well. It wasn't just wanting to have a girlfriend so people at school'd treat him better and no one could make him feel trapped and small by saying he was a virgin or if he said no asking who he'd had sex with then. It was mostly love, he thought, it really was. He knew it wasn't just sex because if it was then all he'd need to do was have a wank and he'd feel

satisfied instead of cheated, like something more should've happened. If having a wank was all you needed to be happy then he'd be the happiest kid on Earth.

Paul thought about all the things he wanted to say to her, all the things that'd come out at last as he whispered them to her and ran his hands through her hair. He knew he could love someone and make them happy. He knew he could do all the things that he wasn't allowed to do now. But he had to keep it all hidden, locked up and useless inside him. The world saw all the shit parts of him, all the anger and frustration and lies. His hand never ran across someone's skin, it was a white-knuckled fist that he kept rigid against his body. His tongue never moved against anyone else's, it talked shit and it put people down behind their backs. The things he wanted to whisper to her he whispered into his pillow at night, watching the tree outside beat against his window like someone trying to break through the glass. He said her name over and over again as if that'd make her appear. As if anything he said could make her appear.

Paul's leg felt cramped under his body. He moved it and looked at nothing. It had gotten dark and the trees were orange and sharp in the lights that came on in the park at night, lit up and moving in from of them like dancers on a stage. He wondered what was happening to Ariel in the game. He looked at his watch. He guessed it'd be about time to go home but it was a couple of hours to go.

Paul knew that some of the things he was thinking were bullshit. When he thought about going out with Marina, he never thought about having to still go to school or do what his parents said. It was as if she lived in a different world and he could escape to it. But most of the shit that he got from society would still happen. Marina always talked about how girls are trained to think that having a boyfriend would solve all their problems – so they don't look at how the system is hurting them, they just blame themselves for acting wrong or being too fat or not looking right. Paul remembered nodding when she'd talked about this – partly so she'd like him and go out with him and solve all his problems.

But it wasn't bullshit when he thought about how much he wanted someone to love. It was crazy the way girls and guys were so ignorant and scared of each other. He found out about sex from friends who made fun of him for not knowing and they got half of it wrong. But that wasn't the kind of ignorance he meant. He knew which bits went where, but so what? If that was all there was, he'd steal some money and go to a brothel like Mueller.

What a fucking joke they were. All the lying and making stuff up that they did. Trying to trick each other into thinking they were these big stud gangstas when they were really scared little boys. They were like mice, running through the mazes the system set up for them, being shaped into what they wanted, having their dreams torn up before they even knew what they were. Well he knew what his dreams were. He wanted to be able to love someone. He wanted to be able to tell the truth. He wanted to be able to live, not just exist. He wanted freedom.

It was dark in the alley as they kicked him. They didn't have to dance around in front of each other to show what hard men they were. They were free to make whatever faces they wanted and hiss whatever they wanted. Ascher was spitting out something about fuck that - fuck that you bitch – fuck you cunt – little knife words that only the man could hear as he jammed his shiny leather shoes into his teeth again and again. You could hear the beat of the music from the club, a big booming doof doof doof beat, with them like a gang of clumsy drunk dancers, kicking and spitting out of time.

They'd thought of all sorts of cool little lines to say to him before they beat him up – little things to say which ended with them kicking him or punching him. They'd said them to each other as they waited. Mueller strutted around and said 'yeah, well if you don't think it's funny faggot, wait for the punchline' and punched the air and everyone laughed. But they were scared whoever they picked wouldn't say the right lines. In the end they were scared that he wouldn't give the right

answers. They just ran him down as he went into the alley for a piss. In their minds it was going to be a scene like in action movies, with them as the hero who always gives a smart answer before beating shit out of the bad guys single-handed. But in the end it was crude and blunt like a pack of dogs tearing into raw meat with their teeth.

There was a sound like water in a pot when you're carrying it and you bang it, a wobbly, metally sound that was the ball rattling in a can of spraypaint, a little 'zzzz' going round and round.

'Hey what are you doing?'

'White Warriors'

'What, are you fucking crazy?' Their voices whipped back and forth, like snakes in the dark. They stopped laying into the man but he didn't feel it, he was so far gone in pain that he thought they were still doing it, he could still feel the boots slamming into his stomach and his balls, crunching his hands like someone stubbing out a cigarette on the ground. He could only see through one eye. The pain was all through him, in his kidneys and his bladder and up his spine, like claws probing his body.

'That's the whole point man, they've got to know'

'Yeah but...fuck, we've gotta get outta here'

The man lay on the ground as they stood arguing over him. His head was a big pounding drum of agony, and he kept heaving, vomiting up nothing but still feeling full of foulness and humiliation. He couldn't feel his fingers, but he could feel every drop of their spit on his skin. He kept thinking if only he'd turned left instead of right, if only he hadn't gone down this alley. He was crying and vomiting at the same time, calling for his Mummy in a little baby voice. He wanted to say something, anything, why me, I didn't do it, please don't hurt me – but his jaw had crunched out to one side and he couldn't move it. He just moaned like an animal, lying in the damp and the garbage, trying to pull his pants up with his broken hands. He couldn't see anything, except for the hands on his watch, which glowed in the dark like two fingers stuck up at him, jammed into his face. It was ten minutes since he left to go home.

Two days out of port Ariel saw what looked at first like a small island. It was two miles across and covered in a stinking mass of screeching birds. As they sailed closer this mass curled into the sky like thick smoke, but unlike smoke they hung there, screaming and wheeling and defacing the sky, making the bright morning into a foul thing, drinking the blood of the sky and the sun. It was the corpse of a god, floating face down in the water.

The god wore the shape of a man, a young man with fine hair which was choked in weeds and scum. The birds had not corrupted his body yet, but they had torn at his clothes, tearing his red robes all to pieces so that they floated in the sea like rivers of blood, or like the petals of a flower.

All around him there were lesser corpses of all kinds. Some dressed in fine robes like priests, some naked and twisted, hairy and dirty with open yellow mouths and teeth like wolves. They clung to the god like piglets suckling on their mother sow. The god's robes twisted around them, fine silk around their bloated drowned bodies, so they looked like sick princes asleep in their beds.

Ariel wanted to see the face of the dead god. But there was no way of doing so. It could have been eaten away in any case.

There was a knock on the door. Paul was cutting up potatoes for that night's tea. They spilled globs of thick foamy liquid when he cut into them. Paul thought they looked like mouths with spit coming out of them. He left them with the knife still in one of them, like a cartoon of a pirate, or a Spanish dancer with a rose in her teeth.

Paul noticed it was a lot darker than he'd thought. He turned on the hall light and opened the door. He couldn't see who it was for a second, it was just two outlines without any features. Then he saw it was Marina and another guy from the shop whose name Paul didn't know. Marina opened her mouth and then she stopped.

'Oh...shit, hi Paul'. Paul said hi, and hi to the other guy, and the guy smiled and waved, all the little things you do when you run into people.

'Do you live here...well yeah, I guess you do hey?' the other guy said and laughed a bit.

'What are you doing anyway?'

'We're going around talking to people about the Nazis. Didn't Alex say something about it to ya?' Paul remembered now. He hadn't thought anything about it though. He was used to Ascher telling him all about his big plans and nothing ever happening.

'How are you going?'

'Oh not too bad' the guy said. Paul was trying to remember this guy's name. He had acne, and Paul thought he looked at Marina the way Paul did. When this guy did it, it looked a bit desperate. When Paul did it himself it looked soulful and yearning.

'A few people told us to fuck off'

'A lot of them thought we were selling God'

'One guy threatened to put his dog on to us' Marina said, but she was laughing. They both were, because most people hadn't told them to fuck off, people knew the council wasn't doing anything and they were on their side. Marina and the other guy were talking over each other, finishing each other's sentences, jumping into each other's words like two puppies playing with each other. They wanted to show off what they'd done to Paul.

'Yeah, there's this bunch of anarchists in England called Anti-Nazi Action? We read up about what they do and we're trying to do the same thing, like they try and get everyone in an area looking out for each other, we've got fliers and stuff letting people know what the Nazis are doing, how the local paper's trying to make out we're as bad as they are n shit, and the police won't do anything, yeah...'

'Oh fuck that's really good what you're doing. They're getting more full on all the time, I was thinking they were gonna kill someone'.

Marina stopped laughing and she and the other guy looked at each other quickly. Marina said

'No, um, Paul...they have killed someone'. This time the other guy didn't finish her sentence.

Paul didn't say anything. He just looked at her, holding on to the screen door.

'They beat this guy to death. Didn't you hear about it on the news or anything?'

Paul whispered something that could've been 'no'. He stepped back a bit, as if Marina was trying to claw his cheek, as if her words were something he could dodge away from. He knocked the hall light and it swung back and forth like a man in a noose, kicking and twisting. It made it look like the hall was moving up and down, tossing like the deck of a ship in a storm. He could hear the usual sounds; A few streets away a car turned a corner. There was a sound like someone mowing their lawn, a sharp cutting machine sound, but why would anyone mow their lawn now? Paul saw a flock of magpies on the phone line across the street, it was getting dark but he could see them sitting still on the wire, looking at him and saying nothing. Paul tried to think that he could have heard wrong.

The anarchists had all these books about Nazis and what they did. Paul knew they killed people, he'd seen pictures. But that was all in other countries. It wasn't here. You were against it and it was horrible, and you said that the Nazis here were as

bad as the ones that did that shit, but you just meant they talked about it and wanted to do it. They showed each other pictures and made jokes about them. They weren't supposed to really do it. The dead bodies were supposed to stay as pictures, like the starving people on TV.

Paul realised that he could never be friends with Ross again. Never meaning never, whatever Ross did and whatever he did. Marina made a little 'sorry' sound and moved her hands as if she was going to touch his cheek, and the other guy stroked her hair, comforting her, and Paul suddenly saw that they were 'going out', stupid thing to call it, stupid words that didn't mean anything, and he didn't even care. It would have torn him apart a day ago, an hour ago even, but now it was almost like a joke.

That was it then. There was no going back. No walking away. No more life, only death and more death. He wanted the night to come and cover him up. When the sun rose tomorrow the sky'd be as blue as the eyes of the Nazi soldiers in the books, the eyes of a Nazi God looking down on his world.

Paul woke up and there was a few seconds where he didn't know anything about anything, and then it all came back. He saw his alarm was going to go off in half an hour. Too late to go back to sleep. He lay there, and he thought that if anyone looked at him they'd think he was asleep, but really he was like an actor, an expert actor demonstrating how to act sleep, his arms and legs in exactly the right position and every muscle strained to keep himself looking exactly asleep, remembering to breathe deeply. He kept looking at the alarm clock every few minutes because he was afraid that the alarm wouldn't go off. Only moving his eyes, not his face, keeping in perfect position. He felt like he could think of anything, do anything in his head. He thought about his parents, sometimes he was angry at them when they tried to control him, and he had to sneak around them, and it made him feel guilty and he was angry at them for that as well. It was no good trying to argue with them, sometimes he knew they were just stopping him doing something for no good reason, because they had these stupid fears, and they'd just get him into trouble even though they knew he was right, try to make him feel guilty for saying it. He could think all this, not turning his head, waiting for the alarm.

'Hello Oxley South police station how may I help you?', still bored.

'Ah yeah hi...'. Someone rode by on their bike and Paul was sure they were looking straight at him.

'Hello, how may I help you?'

'Yeah, it's about the people...the people who killed that guy?'

'Oh yeah'.

'Yeah, I know who they are. I've got most of their names and...look I rang up before?'

'Oh yeah?'

'Yeah I rang up a couple of weeks ago – look, I talked to you, it was only a couple of weeks ago'

'Uh huh'

'Look, I know who they are'.

'Uh huh'. Exactly the same 'uh huh', like a dull grey stone dropped in his way.

'Don't you wanna go and get a bit of paper or something?'

'Heh. You're gonna solve the murder for us are ya? Do you think you're the first little smartarse that's rung up today?'

'I'm not being smart alright? I'm not, OK?'

Paul could feel he was going to start crying 'please – please just let me. Y'said before that you wanted me to come in. I'll come in if you want'

'Look, do you know that wasting police time is an offence? You don't want to get into trouble do ya?'

'But I know who they are. I know who they are!'

'Yeah OK. You probably heard someone talking about it didya? I don't think that'd really be enough do you? They were probably bullshitting you anyway'

'No, I fucking know who they are OK?'

'Listen mate, do you know these calls are all recorded? Have you ever heard of offensive language?'

Paul got a hold on himself. He was still breathing hard, like he'd just run a race, and his lips were pulled back, showing his gritted teeth, like a dog does when it's backed into a corner. He hissed out

'Right. Fine. Let em go then. I fucking well hope they come after you next'. He slammed the phone down. He was so angry he couldn't move, he just sat there, wanting to punch something. As if the Nazis would go after a cop. As if the cops'd be scared of what he'd said, a kid who was half crying.

Paul didn't know what was happening. Was it just because he was a kid and they didn't take him seriously? Or was one of the Nazis a cops' brother or something? Or did they just not give a fuck because the Nazis weren't hurting anyone important? Maybe they didn't want anyone to listen to him because then everyone'd know that they could have caught them ages ago, before they killed someone. He started swearing under his breath, stupid insults that didn't mean anything, didn't help him understand who'd decided to let them go, or why. He'd never know either. One of the people you never see who decide everything for you.

Paul had a shower for something to do, something to keep busy with. The water might have been too hot or it might have been too cold, he couldn't tell. He got dressed and sat on his bed, doing nothing. His parents were out and it was as quiet and still as a dolls' house. He thought he might as well go for a walk.

The streets were empty, and full of houses that seemed to have their back to him. Curtains like ponytails, and their porch lights were on but they weren't saying 'someone's home, come over' to him, it was 'someone's home, don't try and break in'. A few houses had the sounds of groups of people talking to themselves. He could even hear the noise of a party, coming from behind a high brick wall. It was cold. He suddenly realised it was very cold. His nipples were hard with the cold - they felt like bits of steel, like he had the piercings that a girl at school was supposed to have (as if Ross'd ever seen em).

He came to a pub and he thought he'd try and get in. He imagined a guy at the door asking him for ID or the barman wouldn't serve him and he'd go off at them. But it was a little miracle. No one at the door and he bought a beer he didn't want with the last of his money.

He sat down at a big table by himself. The bar was crowded but this table was all empty as if it was waiting for him. He sat down and poured the beer down his throat. Coldness spread all through his body. He could hear the people at the next table talking.

'Yeah he was a bit...y'know? Y'knowwhaddI mean?' someone said this, getting louder and louder and the whole group of them exploding into laughter, like a flock of birds flying out of a tree all at once, bursting out in a big cloud.

'Yeah...he was a bit unusual. A but unusual' The voice said it again, pulling the word 'unusual' out, playing with it, stretching it until you couldn't recognise it, tying it in knots like a clown with a balloon. 'unYOOOOOOOOOzhuhwal'. It was like the sound of a train going by and everyone cheering as it passed.

'Yeah'. Whoever was talking made their voice deeper, still laughing but saying it was a bit serious as well and you ought to be quiet, you ought to let your laughter trail off into nothing.

'He used to lie in bed right? In the dark? And she had to wear these gloves?' Whoever it was was saying each sentence like it was a question, making sure everyone was following, like a teacher on an excursion.

'He had a pair of women's gloves. And she had to wear this one perfume. I dunno what...anyway...he'd have the light off right? And she had to just walk over and touch him on the face with these gloves like...stroke his face'. A couple of seconds of silence.

'An it was coz...when he was a kid his parents were always on their way somewhere else? An that was how he used to remember his Mum. Kind of checking on him before they left? This perfume and gloves on his face.'

Paul moved from this conversation to another one like he was changing the channel.

'They used to go on these binges – drinking for days. Once they picked someone up...fuck man, you should've seen em, this real sad, desperate...I don't think they even did anything, they just passed out. But they gave each other their phone numbers and I was like 'no, throw it away'. They did too, but then they'd always get really pissed and try an remember it. They were like 'oh, we got on really well' – yeah, you were both too drunk to talk' the voice sounded like it was going to start laughing but it suddenly stopped and said

'It was pretty sad...' as if it had just realised.

Paul looked around at the people in the bar. Everyone was talking to someone else except him. He must look like an idiot sitting at this big table all by himself. One of the bar people came over and wiped the table down without looking at him. He sat there for a while taking little imaginary sips of his empty beer. It was mostly blobs of leftover foam that took minutes to slide down the glass, as slow as kids going to school, half-asleep in the morning. They dawdled down and then piled up at the end, like a crowd hanging around in the playground, putting off going inside.

He looked at his watch, or he looked at his wrist and saw that he wasn't wearing it. The bar guy was looking at him, and Paul thought he was going to ask him for ID, kick him out in front of everyone, and suddenly all these people'd stop acting like they couldn't see him. He got up, pushing the table away like he was starting a fight with it. He went into the toilet, partly to get away from things, but then he realised he really needed to go. He took a shit and it felt like a snake slithering out of him. He walked out into the night. When you're inside and it's getting dark you forget, and when you go out and it's night you're surprised, like the sun had never gone down before – as if it was supposed to wait for you. Paul wished that he had someone to talk to about the man dying. He wondered why he didn't wish that the man wasn't dead in the first place. But now he knew about it, he didn't even think about it as something that could happen or not happen. He just wore it.

He knew this was bullshit. He knew he shouldn't be doing this – he shouldn't be numb and drunk and silent and doing nothing about it. Marina always hated when people said 'shit happens' – he'd said it once and she went off at him – 'You know what that means? That means 'people do bad things but you can't do anything about it, and you should pretend not to care about it, and you shouldn't even fuckin think about who's doing it. Yeah mate, shit happens – like that makes it OK. Oh yeah mate, rape happens, get over it mate, being fired happens mate, fucking people working for four dollars an hour happens mate, people starving to death happens, what are you gunna do mate? What are you gunna do? That's the fuckin question isn't it?' Marina would've cried, and then gotten angry, and talked about it with everyone, and then they would've had a few arguments about what to do, and then they would've calmed down and worked stuff out, and now she was

walking up and down the streets knocking on people's doors and doing something about it. Or about the next one anyway...the thought snuck in a side door in his mind, and sat there. There'd be a next one. They'd get a taste for it now.

That thought kept running around in his head, slamming back and forth like a rat running in a tiny cage, banging its head against the bars, trying to get out, baring its teeth ready to fight something that never showed itself. The sky was clear and full of stars, and the city was a field of stars as well. In ancient Egypt they thought the sky was the body of a goddess and you could believe it tonight, and the city was like her mirror. But the thought in Paul's head was like a cancer on her skin so small that no one could see it.

He got back to his house and Ross was outside, waiting for him. It was like the garbage and cold and dark on the streets had come together in front of him to make Ross. Paul could see Ross wanted to tell him something. It was like he was trying to hold it in. He was bobbing up and down like he needed to piss, and looking away from him and grinning, like he was laughing at Paul to someone else just out of Paul's sight.

Paul wondered if Ross really looked like that to anyone else. He had normal, brownish-blond hair, not that tall or short, brown eyes...no white mask for a face, or extra eyes or mouths, or blood smeared on his teeth. He was pretty small when you looked at him. Alright, Paul was as well, but Ross was too.

'Hey Paul. Been out with your little friends huh?' Ross' voice was higher than normal, all fast and excited, like a kid opening his presents. Paul said nothing. He said it loud and clear.

'Been out with your little friends?' 'Little friends' - copying Mueller or Ascher again. Paul wasn't going to talk to them.

'You heard about us?' Ross was almost yapping, like a dog nipping at Paul's legs.

'I heard about this guy being kicked to death - but that wasn't you guys'.

No one ever really said 'huh?' The actual sound of someone not knowing what to say, but trying to say something, is a little patter of 'h' and 'w' noises. It sounds a bit like someone straining to get out a shit.

'Well see, you guys are fearless white warriors. You'd never do something as big and tough as eight of ya killing someone in a fucking alley, right, without putting your names to it wouldya?'

Paul gave Ross enough time to do a few more little constipated grunts - just enough time so they both knew he had precisely fuck all to come back with.

Ross looked like a little dog as well. Like a dog with a long leash, that its master uses to keep down wild animals. And sometimes it's allowed to run, and it runs with its teeth naked and ready for blood, all full of joy. It feels like a free animal in the wild but then it runs as far as its master wants and its master yanks it back. And then it remembers what it is. Ross looked like that.

'You know what's going to happen dickhead?' Ross was up in his face and Paul stepped back and all of a sudden he didn't feel so smart. He remembered, you can do this to someone who's picking on you and you can totally run rings around them but it doesn't matter, they don't just go 'curse you Paul O'Connor, you've outsmarted me again' and you walk away, they beat the shit out of you. This'd happened before. It'd happened to Ross too, before he changed sides. Paul felt a branch on his back and it felt like Mueller's skinny little arm working into him.

'Yeah I know what's gonna happen' Paul said it loudly - because he was scared, but then he thought maybe someone'd hear and come out.

'They like you guys a bit, because you fuckin run around stirring shit up, making people fight each other, and you go on a bit about how fearless big warriors you are but you never touch anyone important - but you've gone too far now haventcha?'

And they're gonna give you up and go 'oh, fuck me, how terrible, what a disgrace, nothing to do with us' and then you'll go to jail'

Paul picked out each word like they were notes of a song he was playing for the first time, reading them one by one off of Ross' eyes.

'You stupid tool, you'll be in jail for twenty years. Hero of the white race man, proud warrior, never had a fuck in his life because he went to jail for murder instead'. And they rape you in there and everyone knows it happens and everyone thinks it's funny.

'No way. No way'. Ross shook his head from side to side.

'Yes way. Whaddya think? Like, maybe they'll let you go because you're white? Yeah, they'll look after their racial brothers man. Yeah, get Mueller to make a speech...listen. OK. What'd happen if you dropped out now? They probably wouldn't be able to prove you were there would they? But if the cops come and just arrest all of you...'

Paul could hardly see Ross in the dark, but he could hear his breathing, fast and shallow like an animal.

'Look...just get home and stay there. Don't even talk to em any more. If they ring ya just hang up. Your Mum doesn't know about it does she?'

The blind stupidity of adults, that they could both hide something like this. You could be killing your friends and skinning the bodies in your room, and they'd just ask why doesn't that boy you were friends with come round any more and can they have the carving knife back before dinner?

'I don't think so...'

'Well fuck it Ross...just get home OK?'

There was a couple of seconds when he thought Ross was just playing with him. He waited for him to signal the rest of the Nazis to come out and start kicking him. But he didn't. He turned around and ran off into the dark. Paul remembered he was cold, it was like his body had been turned off and suddenly came back again, it was cold and he had a dozen sharp pains in his back from the tree. He rubbed his arms and his skin felt like iron. He opened the door to his house and it was as warm and comforting as a friend's arm patting him on the back. We can do it, he thought. We can beat em.

'How many prisoners are there?'

'There's about twenty'

'I'm going to try to talk to them'

'They ignore you'

'Whaddya mean? That doesn't make any sense. We just beat them in a fight and they surrendered - so now they're going to make me angry by ignoring me?'

'OK, the Shining Lord orders you to kill them.'

'What? I tell him I'm not going to and I'm trying to talk to the prisoners more. I'll grab one of them.'

'Look, I'm the referee alright? I can...'

'That's bullshit Ross. Fuck y'know...we don't have to put up with you pushing us into shit all the time.'

Everyone was lovely and everything was funny.

The sun shone on them like a mothers' love, warm and generous but never stifling. The leaves in the trees were ready to fall. They were red and gold like jewels, and everyone's faces shined with the same gold light. They sat in the park having lunch.

It was bread and dip which had magically become the finest food in all of time, talking and laughing like there was no tomorrow. Paul got on with Nadia and Cynthia like he was there best friend, and really he hardly new them. Alex and him jumped around like two puppies. He traded jokes with Michael, slow and easy like two hippos chewing grass at a waterhole. But Marina he hardly said a word to. She might as well have been one of the statues in the park, the perfect stone figures of ancient Greek gods and heroes. If anyone had asked he would have said 'I couldn't think of anything to say'. What a dirty lie that'd be. He couldn't help thinking of things to say. He had to hold them in. Marina, I think about you all the time. Marina I always want to touch your face. Marina you're the strongest person I've ever met. You make me ashamed of my weakness but you also make me stronger. I want to be like you. I wish you looked at me and saw what I see when I look at you. Marina I'm so scared and while we're here sticking our middle fingers up at death I want to you to hold me like I was a baby and give me some of your strength. Paul remembered what Alex had said to him. God is supposed to be someone who is all-powerful and who loves us. If he loved us then he wouldn't want bad things to happen to us. If he was all-powerful then he'd be able to stop bad things happening to us. Nobody stops bad things happening to us. So there is no one who is all-powerful and who loves us. In other words there's no God. There's no God to hear what you whisper at night, and as Paul well knew, your pillow doesn't care.

Without God to pray to we only have each other. Without angels to pass on our thoughts we only have ourselves. But Paul couldn't say the words out loud and so, like so many of his words, they stayed sealed up inside, dead and unseen. He talked to everyone else and left Marina alone. He felt like a child making sandcastles on the beach, standing with his back to the sea, hearing the water but scared to go in.

After they'd eaten they walked into the city. Doing nothing, just being together. It was a stupid thing to do, showing themselves. It was as comforting and deadly as a cigarette. But that's the thing with cigarettes - what's the chance that this one is the one that kills you? What's the chance that one of the Nazis'll see you? What's the chance that they'll start calling people and enough people will be able to come? What's the chance that they'll have gotten their act together for once? Not worth thinking about, until Paul saw someone who looked a bit like that guy who used to hang around the Nazis...and even when he saw it was him he didn't really panic, they just went to walk around him. And they saw too late that they were strung out in a line. No way round. They turned and ran. Paul tasted hot fear in his throat. There was another line of them coming straight at them, forcing them back. The line was loose enough that probably no one else noticed it was there. People walked through it like fish swimming through coral. The two lines swung round to make a square. They were trapped. Hundreds of people walking by in broad daylight and they were penned in like rats in a fucking hole. The White Warriors. It sounded like a joke when they were a gang of bullshit artists in Ascher's flat. Paul had the feeling that he'd seen this before. But that was insane, just part of the panic...He looked around wildly - two big guys he hadn't seen before, looked like they had knives...Ross wasn't here at least...Mueller, trying to look like the great warrior chief...Then he knew where he'd seen this before. Ascher loved talking about some African tribe who used to do the same thing to trap their enemies. He generously overlooked that they were black. The Nazis did that a lot of the time. As long as you were a warrior who had no pity, and long as you raped and killed and didn't show any emotions except anger, then you were all right with them.

Mueller stepped out from the line. He had on a new jacket, some kind of army one. It didn't go with his sweaty old man's face and his shorts. He looked like something from one of those kids' books with lots of pictures of different people and you can combine them, flip over the page so one person's head goes on another's body and someone else's legs. He walked up to

the anarchists, who stood there staring at him but doing nothing, like cows in a slaughterhouse, looking at the man come to put a steel bolt in their head.

'You better start squealing now while you've still got a mouth you fucking slut'. His breath sounded wet and hot as he hissed in Marina's face.

Marina stepped back.

'Hey, listen everyone - these guys are Nazis!' she shouted. Ascher's hands went up and his mouth opened in a perfect 'o'.

'They kicked that man to death in the alley! These people over here!'. She swept her hand round at the Nazis with a gesture like a witch throwing a curse. Suddenly the crowd wasn't a blind, moving blur. Everyone was as still and quiet as trees in a pine forest. And then the forest came to life. The Nazis' rigid square broke up like a blanket fraying at the edges. They stepped back and stepped back again and then they stopped stepping and they ran, they ran and everyone ran after them, and Paul ran too but it was almost like he wasn't doing anything, like the crowd was just pulling him along, like he was swimming in a huge angry river.

It looked like some of the Nazis had gotten away. Only a few of them scampered up the steps of the big glass police station, where the crowd stopped and broke apart like waves hitting rocks. A cop who looked younger than Paul shut the door behind them and locked it, as quick as a mousetrap closing. The door and the walls of the station looked thick, and dark, not like normal glass.

It was a chaos of noise and people moving, like a human traffic jam. People were shouting and gesturing to the cops. Marina was saying something about who the Nazis were and what was going on, how the paper wouldn't print any letters, people were talking about what was going on, people shouting to be heard and then other people had to shout to be heard over them, and Paul was talking too -

'I rang em! I rang em and they said they couldn't do anything. And now they can't fucking do enough - You can't protect anyone but them' Paul was saying it to the people around him, and then the anger took over, and he was just saying it, just shouting it to get the filthy shit that was the truth out of his body.

'You couldn't do anything before couldja?' Paul spat it at the cops, threw it at them like it could break down the walls of the police station. Like the truth was a weapon that he could kill them with. He wondered where the cop he'd talked to on the phone was. He hoped he was in there, hiding in a cell with the Nazis. Paul wished they were all in there, all the liars and killers, the bosses and bullies, the managers and murderers; the soft-faced millionaires and the windy-mouthed politicians with their soft smiles and lying promises. All of them listening to the noise of the crowd, the wordless roar like a lion, or like the sea, a sound that beat against the cold walls of the police station like angry fists beating at the door.

The sun snuck away and so did a lot of the crowd. It was as slow as a bath going cold, as slow as a joke getting boring. For a while Paul thought people were going to attack the police station and drag them out, but of course they weren't. The anarchists met up at the edge of the shrinking crowd. Alex said

'I went round to everyone and got people's names and phone numbers if they want to help us'.

'Um...that reminds me...Paul...do any of the Nazis have your address?' Marina looked at him.

'Ross had it but he might not be around any more. No one else does I think'.

'But you're not sure?'

Paul shook his head.

'Shit'. Marina looked away from him. She held one of her hands open and pounded it with the other one clenched in a fist, like she was fighting with herself.

'Why?'

'Uh...OK, I really don't know if this is that good an idea right? But in some places what they do with Nazis is, they put up posters with their names and addresses? That way if any racist graffiti goes up or anyone gets attacked or whatever, people know who did it'

But then they might just decide to start picking us off, and they've got my address, Paul thought. He could imagine Ascher coming up with that.

But he could also imagine how they felt now, in the police station.

'Listen...I know these guys OK?' a few people looked at the ground, embarrassed.

'Right now they feel like shit - like, they made this big plan to fuck us up, and they were gonna be these big heroes of the white race, and it's all gone wrong? They had to run and hide. They probably feel like we cut off their dicks'. A few people smiled.

'No, really, it's not a joke. They're gonna be feeling like they need to get back at us to feel OK. If we try and calm things down and not provoke them...that's bullshit, they'll just attack us anyway. They're not just gonna let it go. Even if they feel like it, they've gotta show each other that they're not scared. And also right, there's two of them that wanna run things? Now one or other of them came up with this. And because it fucked up, that's gonna help the other one. So the first guy's gotta come up with a big win to make up for it. Even if he doesn't want to, he's got to if he wants to be the leader'.

They talked about it for a bit longer. Some people wanted to do something to Ascher's house, but they saw that the cops would get them for it. Some people wanted to leave the Nazis alone and hope they'd go away. But no one really thought they would. In the end, no one could see any way out.

In Ascher's flat they sat around, tight mouths and heads down, not looking in each other's eyes. Mueller shouted and shouted until his voice was rough as sandpaper, waving his hand around like an angry red windmill.

Anhotep came to a city, and conquered it by the will of God, and commanded that the people there would raise a statue to him, which they did. It happened that the people there were foreigners, and the statue said 'praise to Anhotep, before whom all people fall in battle'. Anhotep saw this, and said that he was not proud of defeating all people, indeed most people were dust beneath his feet, and unworthy of him, he cast them down in their armies like he was treading down stalks of grass. Anhotep the Great asked praise only for destroying the highest of the enemies of Heaven, the most wicked and the most proud. And so Anhotep commanded that everyone in that city should be made into blood eagles, their ribs sawn on both sides of their spines until they sprung out like wings and their lungs torn out like tails. The people begged him not to, saying that they had misunderstood or that the words had a different meaning in their language. But Anhotep said that it was not for the man to ensure that the dog was fed, it was for the dog to come to the man, just as it was not for those above to make sure those understood were pleased, but the opposite. Then Anhotep commanded that there could be only language, just as there could only be one king, one church, one people united in one truth and harmony. For God is greatly dishonoured when disunion exists among His people, and death and life are in the power of the tongue.

Paul walked around the streets. He was looking for an internet place, so he could send an email to Ross, see how he was. Ross had the net at home, or he used to. He'd probably read it.

Kids were playing cricket and basketball in courts with wire walls like cages. Someone on the radio was rapping about freedom, living your own life, not taking any shit. A voice shouted at them to turn it down and they did. Some days every adult you meet thinks they're a cop. The voice said that all the thugz knew he was a playa, but they didn't.

Cars zoomed by; people on their way to work; even on Saturday. People who have to cut their weekend in half so they can get enough money to pay off their car, which they need so they can get to work, which they needed to do because they were paying off their house, which was so cheap because it was so far from work, so they needed a car. They drove by so fast, you couldn't see who any of them were. Men and women, white people and Asians and Arabs, all blurred into one.

He stepped on to the road, not looking where he was going. One of the cars came close to him. The driver shouted out of the window, abusing him...as if Paul had nearly killed the car instead of the other way round. One of the angry, stressed, tired people, looking for someone to take it out on.

The lights changed and let him cross the road. A couple of the cars were inching forward as he crossed. A couple of them were parked right across the crossing. As soon as the lights changed again they all sped off like there was a prize for first.

Paul thought about the people in the cars. People who'd choked down their breakfast because they were late, late because they were tired, tired because they worked too hard. Desperate to get to the job they hated on time. Coming home and collapsing into bed to do it all again. People who read their newspapers, which were all owned by bosses, and it never said 'be angry at your boss', it was always be angry at foreigners, or unemployed people. Be angry at teenagers or drug addicts. If you can't blur it out at the church or the bottle shop, be angry at someone else. The Nazis were just the far end of that.

It was only noon, but the internet place was closed. All the shops were closed. Some of them had newspaper across the windows, or thick curtains. Some of them were empty, big clear windows showing nothing but white walls, concrete floors covered in dust and paper. It was like everyone was hiding, or dead; like everyone had gone to another planet and forgotten to take him. He couldn't hear the cars any more. They must all be locked in their offices. He couldn't hear the kids any more. They must have been moved on, swept up and dumped somewhere else like rubbish.

Paul started walking more quickly. He started walking more quickly and then running. He turned the corner and he ran into Ascher. For a couple of seconds Paul's face was buried in his shirt. He thought night had come. He could feel Ascher's skin, soft like a mattress, but for some reason it was wet and slippery. He jumped back and he saw the rest of the Nazis, trailing after Ascher like a bride's dress. And there was Mueller like the bridesmaid, looking at Ascher with hate and envy, looking at the blood on his face and hands and all down his shirt.

'The race war's started'. Ascher's voice was thin and shaky, half-scared and half-proud. The race war's started. Paul felt like he wasn't really there. It was like a song - the race war's started, the race war's started, an idiot song that sticks in your mind and won't come out, as foul and stubborn as vomit. He thought 'why aren't Mum and Dad here instead of Paul?' and then he was back inside himself and he felt something in his nose and mouth like he was breathing in seawater, drowning, but it was blood, the race war's started, and he didn't think anything, he just turned and ran, running to a rhythm that tapped out Ascher's words on the concrete.

'OK...OK....we've just....fuck...Paul...How do you know they didn't just beat someone up?'

'No...but there was so much blood...!' Paul saw the blood again. He held his hands in front of his face like he was falling into it. Imagined the body, the flies blowing around it, dogs sniffing with their wet snout in the dead eyes.

Paul wished Michael would fucking well stand still and stop pacing back and forth. He didn't notice he was doing it himself. Running back and forth like the shop was a sinking ship. A sound came out of him like a kettle boiling, a long high whimper like a dog.

Paul took a deep breath. Fuck, it actually worked. He calmed down a bit. He knew that the Nazis were probably coming here and they were both going to be fucking killed, but he could think a bit now.

'All right...let's ring everyone as quick as we can. Get everyone over here'.

Michael grabbed on to the phone like it was a life raft. He started dialing. Paul felt like he had to go to the toilet. He knew that wasn't really why he had that shivering sick feeling. But he went anyway. Michael was on the phone anyway, there wasn't anything he could do. A few stinging drops came out. Afterwards it felt like he was still slowly wetting himself, drop by drop. He'd turned into a baby, sick and helpless with a dick like a leaky tap. He wanted to cry but no one would come. Except Ascher. He wanted to hide in the toilets but they'd find him.

He walked out just as Michael slammed the phone down.

'Most people are at work. I'm just talking to people's message banks'.

Michael made a sobbing noise, gulping in air like he was trying to keep from drowning.

'I left a message with Tom's flatmate but he didn't even sound like he was fuckin listening'.

'Gimme some money. I'll go to a public phone'.

'Michael looked in the cash drawer but it was all notes. Suddenly he hated all the people who came in, all these pricks who buy a pamphlet and it's one dollar thirty but I've only got twenty dollars mate is that OK? They shouldn't have made things so cheap. Bring it all up to five dollars and they might not be going to fucking die. The newsagents was closed, can't buy a phonecard.

'Have you got a mobile?'

'Yeah but...I left it at home'.

Michael's voice cracked out like a fist slamming on a desk

'What's the fucking gooda that then?'

No good, Paul thought. It's no good. A mobile that doesn't move. A mobile that isn't mobile. It was like something from Seinfeld. Paul could imagine him saying that, the hands curving in the air and the voice swooping like magpies diving at your head. 'I mean what is the use of a mobile – that stays in your house?'

'I'll go get it' Paul said. Michael said 'sorry' at the same time. It sounded like something from a different world, like asking him may he please pass the butter or telling him to straighten his tie.

There were two times. There was the world's time, where he ran home, got on the phone, called people, ran back, waited, people came, and the clock moved forward an hour or so. But there was the real time that he could feel, where everything was so fucking slow. His feet were made out of cement. Everyone talked like they were asleep. It was like being on drugs. Or so he thought. Paul could see everyone moving slowly, except the Nazis.

Afterwards Paul worked out that the Nazis must've gone home, argued. Maybe one of them wanted to run. Maybe one of them wanted to get cleaned up – it was Paul's word against theirs, they could find people to lie for them, the papers wanted to cover up - burn the clothes and wash up and get our story straight. Maybe Mueller wanted to score points against Ascher, or the other way round, make the other one look weak, so no one wanted to back down. So they decided to deal with it.

The shop was as dark and crowded as the halls of a sinking ship. People kept arriving and you'd get up to move out of their way but there was nowhere to move, people bumped into each other, chest to chest like the start of a fight.

'Fuck - we can't fit everyone in here - you wanna get into the back room, we can sit down and get a bit sane?' someone said. They moved into the back room. Even that was hard. It was too slow, it seemed to Paul to take ages and it seemed like if they didn't get out of the room now they wouldn't get out, he'd have to stay here, smothered in the bodies and the dark forever.

They sat down on wounded beanbags. Someone said 'Jesus, I'm glad that's over'.

'Ah...I'll go and keep an eye out in case anyone else turns up'.

'So...you saw blood on him like...not just like he'd cut himself, like...are you sure?'

'Yeah, I'm exactly fucking sure'. For the tenth time, answering the same question in different words. He didn't want to sound angry, he knew why they wanted to make it not true. But it was all fucking up, everything was coming out wrong. He heard the front door open in the other room and someone else came in.

'Oh hello Mr Svenson, glad you could join us!'. It was a funny voice Michael used a lot, but this time it was like a slap in the face.

The newcomer put his hands up in front of himself

'Oh, shit, I'm sorry man, I was on the net and I didn't get your message till a little while ago. I ran here from the bus stop...'

'Nah, it's OK, I was...um...just being a dickhead. Well, to sum up the meeting so far; point 1, fuck, point 2, oh shit, point 3, the Nazis are coming and what the fuck are we gonna do...and, er, point 4, in case of explosion, the plan calls for us to remove ourselves a hundred feet into the air and spread ourselves over a large area. That's pretty much fuckin it isn't it?' Nobody said anything. They heard a knock on the front door and someone going 'yeah, hold on!'. Then the same voice yelling 'oh fu - fu - shit' and other voices started yelling 'you're dead faggot!'.

He dived into the room. You could hear a crack, he must've dived over a table on the way in and caught his leg. Nobody did anything, people just stared at him, sitting in their beanbags all looking at the door like this was all happening on TV. Then everyone moved at the same time, pushed against the door and forced it shut. It was like trying to push a brick wall down, it wasn't moving, they were going to die. Paul saw someone's arm reaching in from the other side, trying to grab him. He grabbed a finger and twisted it, it pulled back, then the door clicked and someone shut the bolt. A bang - someone kicking the door from the other side. 'Fuck you!' Ascher said.

'You're fuckin dead'. Angry footsteps as his voice moved back and forth. 'There's about ten guys coming. We got some of our friends from Adelaide to come up. I bet you fuckheads haven't got any reinforcements coming have you?' He was right. The last guy had run from the bus stop to make sure he was trapped too.

'Has anyone got a mobile?'

Normally six people going 'aw, mine's out of credit' would've been kind of funny.

In his mind Paul could see Ascher, walking up and down. Stomping and little noises as he kicked books out of the way.

'You're fuckin dead. And you, you little greasy slut. You're mine'.

Paul heard a voice he didn't know saying 'the back room doesn't have any other doors. There's a door there but it's got like an outside bolt?' Paul thought, I know that, why are you saying that, then he remembered the voice wasn't talking to him, he was talking to Ascher. He realised how fucked up he must be to not get that, and he made himself concentrate. Coming awake was like diving into a sewer, the more awake he was the more scared he was, but suddenly it hit him what he had to say and he said it before he could think about it.

'Ha ha. Arencha in charge any more Mueller?'

Nobody said anything. Then,

'Fuck you Paul – fuck you. I'm in charge of your fuckin funeral cunt'. Mueller's voice now. But it was different. It was his real voice. He'd forgotten to mix in a bit of German accent. Paul'd never heard it before.

'You wait about five minutes. You can tell your fucking little jokes to ten big fucking white power soldiers cunt. And then you can tell em to my fucking knife, and then you can fucking tell em to God!'. A bit of the accent came back at the end.

'Yeah, and...'. Ascher started saying something and then stopped. They heard talking but they couldn't hear the words. They waited for a minute. Then it turned into sounds, the little breathless noises men or boys make when they're gonna fight, 'ha – ha – ha – you wanna go – you wanna go cunt – c'mon then'. There was a crash. Somebody being pushed into something.

The anarchists had had some long meetings, argued over stuff for hours that right now seemed like it meant fuck all. This was the quickest agenda item in the history of anarchism.

'Should we go now?' Everyone nodded.

It started better than they could've hoped. Mueller had his back to the door and it hit him with a crack. The sound was like the gun that starts a race. A lot of them must've been worried about being identified. A lot of the Nazis ran. But not Ross.

It looked like one of those bongs you make out of water bottles. Except it was filled with petrol, or kerosene or whatever. A genuine molotov cocktail, like they used to talk about all the time. Paul could imagine him working on it, taking it to Ascher expecting to be praised, and Ascher going off at him because it wasn't their idea. Tapping them on the shoulder when they were arguing, and then they push him against the wall because they're scared to push each other. Or maybe someone pushed him out of the way when they were running out, pushed him into the wall. Molotovs are meant to start burning when they hit something. Paul smelled something, like fat and hair all cooking together, and it was Ross' arm, holding this bottle that was on fire, melting into his hand. Michael ran up and grabbed it, trying to smother it maybe, and Ross hit him, he was crying, was he panicking or still trying to fight, trying to be a true white warrior. They rolled on the ground. Michael was fighting him or trying to help him, you couldn't tell. Someone tried to grab Michael, pull him away, but the flames covered them both. It was too hot, the shop was nothing but a big pile of paper that just went up, and Paul could feel more smoke in his lungs than air as he ran out the door.

Paul stood watching as they burnt to death. The cold of the night made the hair on his arms stand up. He couldn't feel any warmth from the burning building. He knew who was inside, whose lungs were filling with smothering black smoke, whose skin was branded with the heat of the fire, whose hair was fusing, curling and burning. Fire engines came quickly, and then the police - eventually, when they could be bothered. Nothing too urgent. The building wasn't getting any less burnt, and the people inside weren't getting any less dead.

They threw a brick through the window at Paul's house. His parents didn't connect it, they thought it was just kids. Maybe it was. There wasn't a note or any graffiti or anything. The cops looked into the fire for about ten minutes – couldn't prove any of the Nazis were there except Ross. The murders were a bit hard to overlook though. Ascher and Mueller both disappeared. The papers stopped talking about violent anarchists for a little bit – now they said that we have to beware of extremists from both sides. People noticed the Leader not being there more than they'd noticed him being there. Sometimes people would bring it up, about how this guy used to hang around and he wanted to kill everyone, and people thought it was a joke but it was pretty fucked up if you think about it. Death threats written everywhere. We should've done something about it hey. Paul tried to write down what'd happened but it didn't come out right. He could say what happened, but when he wrote the end it always sounded like the end of a fairy story, like 'and then the Nazis were gone, and life returned to peace and normality'. But life wasn't peaceful or normal, it was ugly and violent and screwed up. And it wasn't how it used to be, because he could see that now. He could see that more than he ever had before and he wanted to escape even more. At least now he knew which way to go.