

### *Prologue*

At her uncle's house, looking forward to Christmas with her younger brother and the rest of their family, Freya was thrilled to find a book that she had been desperate to read for a number of years. The romantic story of Lynn Dyson Diamond and her handsome husband had fascinated the little girl for as long as she could remember, rendered ever more alluring after her mother insisted she was too young for the rather adult themes explored by the bestselling autobiography. Several of the youngster's friends had read it, mostly in secret too, and the pre-teens had spent hours at school and during sleepovers reliving its expedition through the spectacular life of Australia's most famous heroes.

Delighted to have been left with the house to herself while her mum treated all the boy cousins to an afternoon at the beach, and after checking that her aunt was absorbed in her gardening, the eleven-year-old's temptation had been far too great to resist. The book had fairly leaped off the shelf into her hands, and by the time Christmas Eve two-thousand-and-eight finally arrived, the avid reader had successfully snatched enough time here and there to immerse herself in the novel's hidden treasure trove and make it to the end of Act One.

Freya found her mind constantly returning to the love affair between her favourite superstars, who had both passed away before she was born, and she could hardly wait to find out how they had weathered their separation. It was as if Christmas had arrived early when, most unexpectedly, another fortuitous opportunity had opened up while her mother was frantically wrapping last minute presents to go under the tree. She smuggled herself into her uncle's study, closed the door and curled up in his comfortable, leather executive chair.

The studious and creative child had been through a great deal in her eleven tender years. She had inherited her father's intelligence, but luckily not his fierce temper and tendency for aggression. Her mother had avidly consumed Jeff Diamond's powerful autobiography when her marriage had ended, recognising in it many of the traits her former husband shared with the author and which had eventually led to their divorce. It was mostly for this reason that she had forbidden her daughter to read it, and although the young girl had been spared the specific details leading to this conclusion, somehow the telepathic signals had been nagging in the back of her mind.

And so it was that every night over the balmy Queensland holiday season, Freya planned to retrieve "A Life Singular" from under her mattress, and every morning she would make her bed exceedingly tidily, so that her mother wouldn't feel the need to touch it. The magic of this heavy book surpassed her every expectation, and the curious child devoured page after page as the tragic love story unfolded. There were some sections she didn't yet fully comprehend, and a great many more with which such a girl couldn't help but identify.

A new act, Freya's eyes recalled excitedly from that morning, parting the pages at her bookmark. Exactly how did the extraordinary boy from the south-west of Sydney turn himself into one of the biggest stars the world had ever known? And how did his broken heart manage to survive the nightmares alone? Her heartbeat quickened. She needed to know so badly...

### *Overture, Act Two*

Having dabbled in a wide variety of art forms during his long and illustrious career, Jeff Diamond had spent many nocturnal hours arriving at the most compelling way to structure his autobiography so as to do justice to their extraordinary story. He wanted people not only to read it, but to understand it and to learn from it. To be energised by it, and even to love it. Above all however, he hoped his crowning glory might mobilise a whole new generation of inspired world-changers to embark on lives yet more singular than his own.

Furthermore, remembering how adamant Lynn had remained throughout their time together about constantly widening their reach, the author was determined to make the finished book appeal as much to their detractors as to their fans, and even more so to those who remained disinterested in bringing about a better world. What would he need to do to attract people who rarely visited a bookshop or library, and then to draw their gaze to this book among all the others? And which first impressions ought it to register in order to engage the public enough to lift the memoirs of this particular pair of national treasures down from a crowded shelf and take them home?

The eye-catching cover, with its composite of colourful photographs artistically arranged, was sure to beguile their fans; particularly females of all ages, who had always clamoured for glossy magazines and picture books featuring the couple and their family. Indeed, their feeding frenzies in recent years had occasionally crashed Stonebridge Music's computers after certain announcements, when they surged to download pictures by the tens of thousands from the celebrities' website! For the cover galley and a collection of special photographs inset chronologically into four separate sections, Jeff had worked with the publisher's graphic artists to create a visual design that would convey an irresistible yet accessible image of supreme happiness and triumph over adversity. Given his own lowly beginnings, he most certainly didn't want the life he and Lynn had enjoyed to seem beyond the reach of ordinary folk.

Part star-studded musical marathon, part feat of endurance; part comedy, part tragedy; their life singular had twisted and turned so many times and at breakneck pace around a succession of achievements and setbacks. To say that things had gone according to plan was both a truism and a falsehood, Jeff realised, as he sat staring at the list of chapters inside the front cover. Yes, he and Lynn had found each other and hung on to their rollercoaster of a partnership through thick and thin, which had always been the master plan. But on the other hand, one could hardly say the unfolding melodrama hadn't thrown up its fair share of unforeseen challenges along the way.

'Dramatic structure,' the billionaire author explained to his faithful personal assistant and publicity guru. 'Plain, old-fashioned dramatic structure's what it's ended up as.'

Cathy Lane laughed and shook her head. 'I know I should remember that from my school days, 'cause I loved English, but I can't. Another coffee?'

'Yeah. Great, thanks,' Jeff nodded, tossing her an arrogant smirk. 'Would I care to enlighten you?'

The longstanding employee and her husband had invited the widower to dinner, knowing his daughter was out of town. They were endeavouring to continue Kierney's good work by monitoring his eating and drinking, maximising the former while reining in the latter to a level tolerable by all parties. Having known the great man since the early nineteen-seventies, the woman with the sunny disposition and natural flair for marketing whom Gerry Blake had recruited to handle the superstar's explosive showbusiness career had learned very early on that excess was a vital part of Jeff Diamond's character. She remembered sharing a joke in the office, shortly after meeting Lynn Dyson for the first time. Never had she seen more love shine from a person's eyes than when the beautiful star had said of her leading man, "To deprive him of his vices is akin to stealing his soul."

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'I'm sure you would,' Malcolm sniggered, refilling their wine glasses and unknowingly ruining the romance for his wife.

Peeling the cellophane from two slim-line cigars, the intellectual smiled and handed one to his host. The December evening was warm in Camberwell, and dinner had been eaten outside on the deck of the couple's expansive period home, purchased of course with the spoils of their long association with one of the world's richest celebrities and quite the most generous of men.

Leaning forward to accept a light from his friend, Jeff led the couple once more along the path of enlightenment. 'One story, many subplots, woven into three acts and with five stages in all.'

'Oh, how boring and mathematical,' Cathy whined. 'Not at all arty-farty. So Act One is your first period together, when Lynn was still at school. Act Two is your time apart, and Act Three is the rest?'

The writer blew a long plume of smoke into the darkness overhead. 'No. Well, Act One, yes. Dramatic structure's how you build the story so that you don't leave the audience behind. Explaining what's going on without giving too much away too soon and spoiling the ending.'

The faithful employee frowned when she saw her boss catch his breath, knowing full well how the ending had already been spoiled for him. As usual, Jeff had read her mind and gave her a grateful wink. His reaction was not one of regret though, on this occasion, since his present discomfort came as the result of a sharp twinge in his left pectoral muscle; the one adorned with the bigger of the eternal couple's twin tattoos, through which he regularly received assurance that their happy ending was still to come.

'Exposition, followed by rising action, leading to the climax,' the handsome man continued, eyebrows raising suggestively, 'then falling action and finally the *dénouement*. The unknotting. Untangling, I guess, which I always thought was a weird word. It suggests that endings have to be tidy, or somehow that the plot can only end when everything's clear, straight and ordered. To me, that'd leave nothing left to be decided. Such a concept leads me to picture everything disconnected, and that's not an ending I'd ever look forward to.'

'So why not five acts?' Malcolm interjected, cutting himself a large chunk of melting brie and attempting to scrape it onto a cracker. 'You guys certainly had enough rising and falling action to flesh out all five stages. Look at this cheese, hon'. Bloody warm summer evenings! Sounds like you need more than three.'

'Yes, mate,' Jeff replied. 'I laboured over that for a while too. But in the end, I went back to basics, mainly because I want people to recognise where they are at any point in the book. I think, even if you're not into plays or symphonies, most storytelling art forms use standard dramatic structure, more or less. People are familiar with it innately, so artists should only deviate from it if they want to confuse. Stir things up a bit...'

His audience nodded obediently.

'If people watch TV or listen to pop songs, it's still a three-act gig. Everything works towards the climax, doesn't it? Then it's downhill from there, and the credits roll or the DJ moves on to the next track.'

All three friends laughed out loud, the consummate performer once more in his element. The Diamonds' life had been chock full of climaxes, enjoyed both in private and in public, and it was nigh on impossible for the Lanes to discern where falling action might have given way to a new patch of rising action. For Jeff however, the climax had always been as clear as day. And judging by the sweet stinging in his chest, so had it to Lynn.

'Our high point was always going to be our twenty-fifth wedding anniversary,' he croaked, sniffing back tears and attempting to stem their flow by dragging hard on his cigar, 'if she was still here... But now, I don't know. I still haven't decided. Maiastra in 'ninety-three or Live On Earth at the beginning of 'ninety-five?'

'But why your silver wedding?' Cathy blurted out, herself overcome with emotion by a memory of the intimate and very splendid occasion she had attended at the turn of nineteen-seventy-six.

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The widower smiled and rubbed his chest again. 'Because I finished my groom's speech with an invitation for everyone to get together again in the ballroom at Admin, to mark twenty-five years from that amazing day.'

'Oh, yes. I remember that. Only I always thought of it as just a party invitation. And a bit of a dig at the Dysons for doubting your commitment to their daughter! But after all the accolades you achieved on the public stage, why would you choose that to be the climax of your autobiography?'

'Ah, y'know... It was all of those things too, Cath. Symbolic, in a typically pretentious kind of way. You know me. Always want to have the last word. Make a statement, as per the phrase coined by my fallen angel. The date's creepy though, don't you think? First of the first, two thousand and one? The very start of a millennium.'

Malcolm frowned. 'Never thought about that before. Who picked your wedding date?'

A shiver ran down the great man's spine. 'Lynn did. Jesus! And she said it too... A new beginning. New Year's Day's always been significant for her. The Dysons have their big, annual pow-wow on that day, and she originally chose it because her family were guaranteed to already be around. Well, I always thought that was why she chose it anyway... The whole damned command performance was arranged in less than three months. She was in one hell of a hurry!'

'She wanted to make sure you didn't change your mind!' Cathy laughed.

'No chance,' the handsome man shook his head. 'Not in a million years.'

The hairs on the back of Jeff's neck stood on end as the gradual realisation hit him, and he exhaled as tears flowed from his eyes without warning. It appeared that he was undergoing an enlightenment of his own... Had Lynn known all along? Maybe she had. His tattoo was lending no clues at this present moment, but perhaps now wasn't the time or place. He couldn't bear the thought of having to endure this living purgatory for another four years. Surely it wasn't his destiny to stick around until the turn of the century? Feeling his heart rate accelerate, the man who had been left behind was imbued with a renewed sense of purpose for the next sections of his book, suddenly anxious to obtain a better explanation for this latest kink in their ethereal plotline.

'We only realised the significance of the date our silver wedding would fall on several years later,' he continued, 'and it freaked us out. Oh one, oh one, oh one. Like time was starting again.'

'Who for though?' asked Cathy, sneaking a dubious look at her husband.

Their dinner guest shrugged. 'Never got that far. And now we'll never know. We'd planned to go to extremes, like give it all away and kick off something completely new. But we hadn't put much thought into it by the time Lynn left for greener pastures. Therefore by its nature, the book has to be somewhat anti-climactic too. The loss of great things to come.'

'Premature ejaculation,' Malcolm chuckled under his breath.

'Mal, please,' his wife moaned. 'That's in awful taste. For God's sake! I'm sorry, Jeff. My husband can be so uncouth.'

The widower pushed his chair back and stood up. He saw the funny side of the vulgar comment, but it had cut to the quick nonetheless. Excusing himself for a visit to the bathroom, he squeezed Cathy's shoulder to let her know he was not too offended, having played his part in encouraging the corny, schoolboy humour with his own *double entendres*. He walked back into the house, listening to raised voices and the agitated clattering of plates and cutlery.

'Hey, angel,' he checked if Lynn was following him. 'I'm still causing trouble. Some things never change, huh? Did you know about oh one, oh one, oh one? What does it mean? Anything? We would've talked about it. You didn't know, did you?'

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Again no sensation was forthcoming, and Jeff smiled. 'I take that as a no. Thanks, angel. Shall we go home soon?'

By the time the billionaire returned to the table, a fresh cup of coffee had been placed next to a large measure of whisky in a heavy tumbler. He grinned and toasted his hosts, before scooping two blocks of ice into the glass and swirling them around. The clear peal of high quality crystal was unmistakable, expressly meant to reinforce an appreciation for the couple's strained hospitality.

'To climaxes, in whatever form we can get 'em!'

The Lanes simpered in gratitude and raised their glasses to the magnanimous superstar, who proceeded to lift a flame to his extinguished cigar and reinstall himself on the other side of the table. His rugged good looks and haunted expression sent Cathy's pulse racing. How she had loved this man for so long and from such close quarters, watching his wildly successful career take him from bad-boy rock star to a revered leader of worldwide stature. He seemed a little less lonely these days, she thought. More resigned to his new solitary life.

'D'you remember when I made that series of philosophy programmes?' Jeff coaxed his chief publicist from her trance.

'Oh, yes. The year before last?'

The celebrity nodded, flicking ash into the ashtray, dragging hard and letting out another long, provocative waft of smoke. 'Nietzsche and I don't agree on everything, but his idea of the best view being from the top of the mountain is what I'll aim for with the book, I think. The idea of a high point being high not least owing to the effort and hardship we endure to reach it. Does that make sense?'

The others nodded, although the billionaire suspected that he had lost them to the lateness of the hour and to liquid spirits proofed at a high percentage. Cathy succumbed, as she inevitably did, to the super-octane sex appeal oozing from the man across the table, acknowledging with some solace that he was at last growing back into the classy yet unpretentious bespoke tailoring which had been his trademark for two decades.

'I don't agree with his view on alcohol though!' he added.

Hearing the ice crunch between her guest's teeth, she laughed. 'No, obviously!'

'A sober philosopher's got to be treated with suspicion, don't you think?'

'I suppose so,' Malcolm grinned. 'Was Nietzsche teetotal? I didn't know that.'

Jeff smiled. 'So they say. Because he was so sickly, apparently. He went up into the Swiss mountains and wrote about the evils of alcohol, but I'm not sure if he never touched it. The passage of time makes room for some hypocrisy. For fuck's sake, I'm banking on it! The thing that annoys me so much about him though was that he always complained that no-one took him seriously, but he didn't change the way he looked or behaved to improve his chances.'

'How do you know?' his loyal employee squealed like a girl. 'You say the strangest things sometimes.'

'Cheers! Kind of you to say so,' the forty-four-year-old cocked his head. 'It's well documented. It's also reported that women were repulsed by his monster moustache. So if you need to get laid, why not shave it off, Herr Nietzsche? He was surprisingly obtuse for an intelligent man. Whatever... Enough of this shit! You're tired, and I should let you get your own rocks off. What's on next week, boss?'

Sighs that could have been born out of relief or embarrassment blended with the smoke hanging in the air, causing the celebrity to smile again. A desk diary had appeared at the table on the verandah at the same time as their recent round of drinks, and Jeff recognised it as his assistant's method of keeping track of the Diamonds' movements. Despite having supervised the conversion of Stonebridge Music's office to electronic recordkeeping, Cathy still insisted on maintaining a paper version of their busy schedule. The

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star's private diagnosis for this uncharacteristic duplication of effort was that the physical article was kept as much as a souvenir as for any practical function.

'Yes. Sorry. Do you mind?'

The widower took the large black book out of the woman's outstretched hand and leafed through the pages until he reached the current date. A folded newspaper cutting fell out and drifted across the table on the breeze, coming to rest next to the ashtray. Jeff retrieved it and flattened the page to reveal a photograph of himself as a much younger man, alongside two columns of copy. The headline read "Free Radical", and the browned paper and old-fashioned typeface led him to date it from the early nineteen-seventies.

'Why's this in here?' he asked.

Cathy was caught unawares, feeling her face redden, and she hurriedly held her hand out for the flimsy piece of paper. 'I found it while I was sorting through some old files. Magazine articles we hung on to, you know. I like the photo'. Do you remember that being written? Just after you'd launched Childlight, I think.'

'Mate! Look how young you look!' her husband exclaimed, looking over his wife's shoulder.

'Yes, and how happy. Do you want it, Jeff?'

The billionaire shook his head, feeling another deep tingling in his chest. 'No, thanks. You keep it. I was young and happy then. That was when we'd first got back together after Lynn had been in the US. Literally days after, I reckon, judging by the cocky expression on my face. That was the onset of my absolute invincibility period.'

'And you were so different from the Jeff Diamond we'd known up 'til that point,' the middle-aged office manager gave her boss an impish smile. 'The girls here in the office were quite disappointed. You went from one hundred percent sinner to almost saintly in the matter of a few weeks.'

'Sorry about that. I sure did,' the superstar chuckled. 'You're not wrong there.'

'I know I'm not!' Cathy affirmed. 'Do you remember the time Gerry let on that you had five dancers in your hotel room? The girls were shocked but they wouldn't stop talking about it either. I had to send a couple of them home because of their hysterical chatter.'

'Oh, yes? Wish I'd been there then!' Malcolm perked up. 'I've never heard that story. Tell me more.'

Seeing Jeff smirk, clearly about to indulge her lecherous husband, the publicist cut him off. 'I said you had to be careful, I seem to remember. It was right at the start of that huge tour, wasn't it? In 'seventy-three. You'd just come back from the US leg and were going straight off to Japan. Gosh, you were such a big, big star, Jeff. I just couldn't believe I was working for you and how lucky I was to be hearing all these real, live rock'n'roll stories straight from the horse's mouth.'

'Yeah,' the widower sighed, knowing he ought to play along with his host's reminiscences, even though he had no desire whatsoever to recall those awful months of desolate debauchery. 'I said Gerry should learn not to tell tales, and I told you I was tired. I remember that really clearly, for some reason.'

Cathy nodded. 'And you also said, "It's not in my nature to be careful."'

The exhausted man shook his mane of greying hair, which was cut quite a lot shorter than in those days. 'Most probably! Sounds like the sort of dumb-fuck thing I would've said back then.'

The kindly woman carried on, memories coming thick and fast. She was keen to lift Jeff's mood before he went home, with Kierney away overseas and the grieving husband returning to an empty house. With any luck, a light-hearted conversation about the good, old days would give him sufficient motivation to keep writing until the alcohol wore off or he managed to fall into some much-needed peaceful slumber.

'I said something about calling your mother too,' she continued, angling the corners of her mouth downwards, 'not knowing she was no longer alive. You really were the proverbial wild child. Oh, and I

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remember wondering out loud about who was going to tame you, to which you said you weren't going to be tamed by anyone. But you knew you were lying then, didn't you?'

Her employer nodded with a wry half-smile. 'Yes, I did. I was hanging out to be tamed, but I was hardly going to tell you that, was I? You were like a bloody schoolteacher sometimes. Gerry and I used to call you "Matron" behind your back!'

A hearty guffaw burst from Cathy's husband's chest. 'Good on ya, Jeff! That's priceless! I'm going to use that one.'

'On your own head be it, darling,' the stern woman couldn't help but laugh at the unbecoming term of endearment from her good-looking charge. 'You were always such a nice guy, JMD, even when you were off your face with drugs and booze. Like when I suggested you get a driver, because then you wouldn't have to worry about getting caught or having a crash...'

Malcolm left the table, taking a few empty glasses with him and still sniggering about the nickname with which this colossus of a superstar had labelled his wife. He would never understand what made Jeff Diamond so great and he certainly didn't envy his current situation, yet there remained a residual jealousy between them for the close relationship the star shared with his long-serving assistant. He could hear the two of them continuing the conversation while he trudged through to the kitchen.

'Yep, and I remember telling you, "I'm not worried. *You* are!" I have to get going soon. Thanks for dinner. It's been great catching up. And before you say it, I won't get caught tonight, just like I never got caught then, Matron.'

'OK. Yes,' she capitulated, with a brief glance over her shoulder to make sure they were alone. 'The smile on your face made me swoon then, exactly like it still does now. I loved you, Jeff. Really loved you. But we all kept our distance because you said you weren't interested in being loved.'

'Yeah. I lied about that too.'

'Oh, God,' Cathy sighed. 'You always came across as so bulletproof. No-one knew you were caving in inside. None of us did. We just thought you were making the most of your rock star privileges, and none of us wanted you to break our heart.'

The tall celebrity leaned towards his assistant's tear-streaked, smiling face and kissed her cheek. 'That's right. Also exactly like now. G'night, Cath. Thanks again, and see you on Monday.'

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Act Two's overture was to be dark and brooding. The long exposition of Act One had been mostly joyous writing, save for the last few chapters and with the promise of significant rising action to come. Act Two would see writer and reader revelling in unbridled good cheer for the majority of its scenes, but for now Jeff was obliged to languish in those long, Lynnless days of drink, drugs, decadence and despair. With both children out of the country, the large house they were renting in the riverside suburb of Burnley South echoed with the same emptiness that resided in his heart.

Part of him wanted to omit the interminable stretch of time he had endured while counting down the months and waiting for his dream girl to return to Australia from the Californian college sentence handed down by her parents. After seven months of sublime happiness, Bart and Marianna Dyson had concocted a new plan for their elder daughter, in order to turn her attention away from the revolutionary ideas espoused by her first love, the dissident boyfriend who they were convinced was going to lead her in the opposite direction from the path they envisioned for her.

The author sighed, rolling his chair in towards the desk and waiting for the computer to boot up. It would be wholly inappropriate to skip over these lonely episodes in their life singular though, wouldn't it?

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After all, these represented the inaugural, auspicious steps on his own all-important path to "someoneness". Act One had concluded with his first album about to be released, with twenty songs telling the story of his journey thus far and offering scant glimpses into the bleak past of a damaged teenager who had fought for everything he had ever possessed. Act Two would see the fight transfer to saving the love of his life from a forced extinction.

The autobiography's prospective readers must not be cheated of any secrets from this formative period. Many of the instant superstar's fans had been following him from the very beginning, as the battered box of lever arch files which Cathy had recently delivered by car served to prove, stuffed full of letters, photographs and the odd piece of lacy *lingerie*. Pledges of undying love from hysterical females, numbering in their hundreds, were interspersed with a much smaller smattering of genuine admiration for electrifying stage performances and powerful music which had moved men to join his fan club too.

Now with a teenaged daughter of his own, Jeff had grudgingly come to appreciate the stance taken by Lynn's parents a little better, especially faced with the type of antics and resulting hearsay that his early years of fame had borne witness. He trusted Kierney's choice of partner implicitly these days, as he watched her heading towards legal majority and becoming more focussed on a promising career as a human rights lawyer. However, it hadn't always been so. He had spent many nights fretting over her whereabouts and wondering who had their hands on her beautiful and blossoming body; understanding all too well how hard it must have been for his parents-in-law to see their naïve, blonde Melbourne Academy student misappropriated by a loudmouthed and arrogant non-entity from Sydney's west.

Yet even in the doting dad's most apprehensive moments, while waiting for their gorgeous gypsy girl to return home from a night out in the city or having agreed to camping weekends in Ocean Grove, his patient wife had continually reminded him that he was only being protective, and not controlling, as her own father had been during that time.

It was actually fortunate that Kierney was away when the author pieced together this part in her parents' history. The seventeen-year-old was hungry for information about the years before she and her brother had come into existence, and had asked reams of questions while reviewing the chapters that constituted the opening act. What was it like to meet a soul-mate? How did he feel when he found out he was the first man to touch Lynn Dyson? Why had he agreed not to contact her after she left for America? Had he believed they would get back together eventually?

'No, angel,' Jeff pointed out to Lynn now, just as he had to his persistent daughter. 'I didn't really believe we would. I wanted to. More than anything. But I didn't expect I'd ever see you again. In those first few months, flying around the world, shooting up on a regular basis and swallowing all manner of grog like it was going out of fashion... There was a time when I convinced myself you'd never want to talk to me ever again.'

Jesus! It certainly was going to be painful to resurrect those memories and admit to recognising the deeply flawed personality he would assume in the process of becoming rich and famous. Nevertheless, the diligent scribe couldn't shy away from providing an honest and complete account of how stardom had befallen him and how he had somehow managed to escape alive and more-or-less intact to arrive on the other side. He groaned aloud. Was there no end to the parallels to be drawn with his present circumstance?

Enough feeling sorry for himself... There was work to be done. Jeff lit another cigarette and twisted the stopper out of a half-empty bottle of *Rioja* that had been left sitting on the desk before he went out to dinner. Where to start? How about the panic attack during his first trip on the New York subway, watching people hanging from the handrails, swinging from side to side like carcasses in a butcher's cold store? That had been a wake-up call, no doubt about it! The momentary shock to the system had made him realise in no uncertain terms what a difficult transition this new era was destined to be: the way the past would

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interfere with the present wherever he went, his overactive and tormented mind poisoned still further by illicit substances and a dearth of sleep.

Even now, in nineteen-ninety-seven and as a stable, middle-aged man, the storyteller's blood pressure immediately dished out a dizzy spell as he remembered the flashbacks he had suffered in the packed train carriage; those of his mother hooking her toddler son onto the straps which hung from the ceilings of Sydney trains and leaving him to dangle his three-year-old feet a metre off the ground.

The twenty-year-old, novice rock star had clearly visualised, much like his older self could now, this cruel, spaced-out woman who had given him life but not much more cackling as he shouted to be let down. After several minutes of having his cries for help ignored, surrounded by gaping passengers, the boy had ended up letting go and crashing to the floor. He also remembered a kindly, old man beckoning to give him a cuddle, from which he could have benefitted equally at forty-four and at twenty as well. He still heard his mother's screeching voice calling the compassionate gentleman every name under the sun, and could feel his skin repelling her frenzied fingernails when she had snatched her confused son against her legs.

'That old bloke probably wanted to take me home,' the lost boy whispered to Lynn's ghost. 'I know I was willing him to. He knew he couldn't, I guess, and I only cottoned on to that much later. I hated him for years for not taking me with him. I often used to look back and wish I'd pulled him up out of his bloody seat and off the train at the next stop. He would've been arrested for kidnapping. Shit! What you don't know as a little kid, huh?'

In the quiet luxury of his current environment, Jeff put his head in his hands, desperately trying to rid his mind of the hallucinations. One of Lynn's most famous anthems had already begun to play in his ears, helping him on his way. Somehow she always knew when he needed a kick along, and this time was no exception. He was becoming stronger, no doubt.

'OK. You're right,' he shook his head in dismay, rifling through a pile of papers until he found what he was looking for. 'Leave it behind, I know. I found that quote, angel. The one I was going to start with...'

The ancient soul had long been an authority on French literature, once leading his wife to wonder whether her mystery man had spent time in Paris during the eighteenth or nineteenth century. Such was his affinity with the characters and events from that time that he found himself able to spout forth quotations galore without effort. However, before he could commit any excerpts to the pages of their autobiography, he insisted on verifying their accuracy with the original texts.

'*Alors... Ecoute-moi*, angel,' he coughed, his heart steadied by Lynn's smiling, ever-attentive face staring back at him from the photograph on the desk. "'What is reported of men, whether it be true or false, may play as large a part in their lives, and above all in their destiny, as the things they do.'" That was the one. I think I pretty much had it right, but that's it, *mot à mot*. Pretty apt, as it turned out.'

As he typed the sentence into the computer, Jeff couldn't help but laugh. Quite apart from the misinterpreted notoriety which triggered the *omega* of the Diamonds' long run in paradise, on countless occasions throughout his long career in the public spotlight he had been forced to restate his case, saying he was as often misquoted as quoted. And therefore misunderstood. Interviewers and news hacks hadn't quite known what to make of him when he first burst onto the rock music scene in October of nineteen-seventy-two. A musician who had plenty to say about the world, as many others before him and after him, yet far more eloquently than most.

'I found another one too, baby,' he continued, feeling his tattoo itch again. 'Another Victor Hugo. "*Monsieur*, you are looking at a plain man, and I am looking at a great man. Each of us may benefit.'" I wish I'd had that in my arsenal when talking to your dad. You're probably glad I didn't though, I s'pose.'

Lynn and her charismatic first love had been given no alternative but to break up by her parents, who had forged a road to greatness for her on the tennis court and in Hollywood. They enrolled her into a sports program at a prestigious Los Angeles university, and the couple had been issued a total embargo on

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contact during this period. Hence, after a tortuous goodbye which had lasted for several weeks, Jeff had been left to his own devices in Melbourne while his beautiful best friend was off making movies and winning Olympic medals. And to his own vices, as it turned out.

It had taken every last ounce of strength for the scarred twenty-year-old to pick up the pieces and turn himself towards his own rock music goals, having grown dependent on everything that his relationship with Australia's favourite schoolgirl had given him. With the help of a youthful but no less esteemed Gerry Blake, who had reluctantly agreed to be his manager, the smouldering, dark-haired singer-songwriter had rocketed to stardom within a matter of months, and along with this newfound fame came a plethora of adult adventures and an outrageous lifestyle which allowed him to seek refuge in the dark underworld of drugs, alcohol and orgies.

But how had Lynn fared during this two-year separation? Their combined life story needed to be balanced not only to include his own hard luck tales. While documenting Act One of their autobiography, Jeff had delved deep into his wife's diaries and unearthed the young woman's most intimate thoughts and souvenirs of her foray into their all-consuming affair, discovering a number of untold secrets. Following the same course for Act Two would necessarily contain many more harrowing revelations for the forty-four-year-old widower, since he feared she may have adjusted far better to their fate than he had.

And at least from an outside viewpoint, Lynn Dyson had taken America by storm. Appearing on television almost weekly, recording hit after hit and starring in blockbuster movies soon became her new kind of normal. That much her husband had found out over the years, being treated to insights long overdue once they had reunited and snubbed their noses at stuffy Australian society. Jeff Diamond had become a respected powerhouse of national pride during those same months, being credited with status and public adoration only rivalled by the fondness the country had always held for its returning handmaiden.

Against all precedents, the hottest celebrity property to have emerged from the southern hemisphere in the early nineteen-seventies had not been a sun-kissed, blond stereotype, as personified by the Dyson family. A boy of recent immigrant stock from Sydney's run-down western suburbs had climbed to the top of the pedestal and had taken up residence in the nation's psyche, by dint of a slew of well-chosen words on subjects dear to the average person's heart. He had gladly assumed the mantle of cult hero in a country which heretofore had hardly been an incubator for dissidents and rebels worthy of export onto the world stage. Like Clive James, Robert Hughes and Germaine Greer a decade earlier, Jeff Diamond was doing his bit to put the huge continent with the tiny, predominately white population on the map of cultural coolness and awaken its social conscience.

Yet as much as the surviving writer of an autobiography destined to be snapped up by millions around the world ought to speak of the successes which the couple's fans yearned to revisit, "A Life Singular" must also set out the many personal challenges endured by its subjects for all to see; for no other purpose than to serve as counterpoint for the acclaim and affluence best remembered by followers and sceptics alike.

'Two sides to every story,' Jeff murmured. 'At least. D'you remember when you asked me why I didn't publish "The Runner" under a different name, angel? To separate it from the music?'

There was no reply. The bereft husband lit another cigarette and walked over to the window, looking out over the lawn. 'It wasn't separate from the music. I told you that everything came from the same source, and you answered with something incredibly profound. Remember that, baby?'

The image of Lynn's radiant face filled his mind again, bringing a smile to his lips and tears to his eyes. 'Thank you. You said, "You're so fiercely honest." "Not honestly fierce?" I joked back, and you shot me a scolding look, like I'd insulted your intelligence. Then you said, "No. I mean fierce, as in proud. You know... Fier."'

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The great man leaned both hands against the glass and bowed his head until the heat in his forehead met the chill of the windowpane. The benevolent lion to which his wife had once likened him in a letter from the dead was tonight unable to summon his patented noble roar. Lynn had understood the strain of a virtuous pride born from humility, and they had both pursued its quest over their entire, momentous journey. The inked muscle on his chest gave another short twinge, causing him to gasp at its strange, optimistic pain. The other half of their famed pantomime lion was telling him to get moving. Time was closing in, and she was as impatient as he was to chronicle their phenomenal alliance.

'I liked that idea then and I still like it now. It's what Act Two's theme is, I reckon. Fierce honesty, and bugger the consequences. By the time we got to the end of Act Two, I'd gone from the plain man to the great man, and I only have you to thank for that. *Celui-là, tout le monde le saura, Lynn*. It will be reported.'

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At six o'clock in the morning on the fourth of November nineteen-seventy-two, Jeff Diamond embarked upon his first overseas promotional tour. A car was booked to pick him up at eight and take him to Tullamarine Airport, and his passport was ready for its first real workout. He felt particularly worse for wear, like a real rock star in fact, but for very non-rock-starrish reasons. The previous night had seen him finish the rest of the year's university assignments which would fall due while he was away. He had tried to steal some sleep early, before midnight, but had awoken violently less than an hour later. Dragging himself round the streets for his last run on Australian soil for a few weeks, his brain finally kicked into some positive momentum.

It was now nearly two months since Lynn Dyson had left for California. The first four weeks or so had settled into a bearable sort of half-life. Memories of their tearful farewell remained fresh and raw in his mind, and the student was determined to do as much as he could to push the next two years past quickly. However, as the long nights stretched into the second month, he found himself descending into the same dark places he had visited in his mid-teens.

The old adage was definitely true: the higher you climb, the harder you fall. Jeff's lifestyle regressed to the same state of depravity that he had known from before he moved to Melbourne, although suddenly on a much bigger and more destructive scale. Back then, he used to crave any vice he could lay his hands on, relying on friends or using the little money he could spare from part-time jobs and running errands for local businessmen and minor neighbourhood villains. These days however, since he had slammed his tired body into the big-time, and with the success of his first few records, people already lined his path with temptations of every description, and he willingly succumbed to them all with a familiar, jaded desperation.

Sobering up under a cold shower and squeezing the very last drops from a shampoo bottle, the twenty-year-old cursed his ludicrous situation. He had kept himself together fairly successfully during the months he and Lynn had passed off their relationship as something close to normal, but as soon as their irregular dates and secret *rendezvous* had dwindled out of his calendar, so had the accompanying range of wholesome activities which sustained life, such as shopping, eating and laundry. All vestiges of organisation now seemed pointless, and fortunately for the new star in the making, apparently they no longer mattered.

Fear of losing control gripped him without warning, and Jeff lost his balance and fell against the tiled bathroom wall. What was he doing? Was he ready to start jetting all over the globe? He whose sole adventure up to this point had been a weekend in New Zealand? For as long as he remembered, he had yearned to travel the world and see for himself all the wondrous sights about which he had only read or heard second-hand after friends' holidays. He and Gerry had recently been briefed by record company

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officials as to the requisite security measures and round-the-clock schedules while on tour, drilling into the young man that this was his career to win or lose.

These perfectly reasonable words of caution were received with authentic civility at the time. Later however, the two friends had shared a laugh at the forthright tone of their messengers and pondered how often the well-meaning lecture must fall on deaf ears, judging by the reputations of established stars of the Swinging 'Sixties. It was intriguing to imagine The Rolling Stones and The Who sitting through similar sermons! Perhaps publicity companies had learned a few costly lessons in dealing with these pioneer rock'n'roll bands, the pair concluded. A far cry from MAC's innocent touring stories which Lynn had shared with her former boyfriend, as high school students chaperoned wherever they went and surrounded by clean-living role models.

Would these very sensible pieces of advice still hold as much weight once the manic traveller was out of the country, no longer sober and seeking comfort in the company of nameless females? Or when he was caught prostrate and pouring with sweat in the middle of the night, haunted by nightmares and desperate for distractions? The new star pictured himself being rushed from place to place, weary and hyped-up; a truly lethal combination. Fraying at the edges, as his dream girl had once alleged.

Christ Almighty! Lynn had understood him so amazingly well. He would never know how or why, Jeff guessed, but was thankful for the brief flash of love they had shared. In his more lucid moments, he managed to let go of the obsession with maintaining some sort of telepathic connection across the miles. She was not his saviour, his lighthouse or his angel. She was a talented teenager destined for great things who had been tempted by his charms temporarily. If her parents hadn't seen fit to split them up, it may not have been long before she had lost interest in his attention and idealism and grown tired of the incessant mood swings, addictions and disturbing patterns of behaviour. She was his dream girl again, pure and simple. That would have to be enough to see him through.

The spring morning air was cool as it slithered in through the draughty Richmond bathroom window. Jeff had showered the night's dark clouds from his head as best he could. His daylight self was genuinely looking forward to the next episode of his early career, intent on putting Lynn to the back of his mind and enjoying all the amazing opportunities that this wondrous, new life was throwing at him.

Since his first single had been released in September, the newcomer's rise to stardom had been nothing short of meteoric. Despite all the times he had heard artists decry the term "overnight success", having spent years plying their trade in local pubs and clubs before being scouted by a roving agent, his first album had four singles lined up, two of which went to Number One in many countries almost as soon as they were allocated air time. What was more, on top of popular adulation, critical acclaim abounded.

The new sensation's record company immediately put him on the road in Australia, delighted that their good-looking discovery could talk as well as sing. First up, he had played three sold-out nights at the Festival Hall in West Melbourne, with a band quickly assembled from session musicians and friends of friends. These were followed by similar excitement in Adelaide, and then the other east coast centres of Sydney and Brisbane. Fans flew in from Australia's more remote state and territory towns and also from New Zealand, such was the star's instant appeal, prompting the executives to squeeze in a few nights in Auckland and Wellington too.

By mid-November, the second album would already be pressed and scheduled to hit the shops for the Christmas rush. Jeff Diamond became the proverbial "talk of the town" before he had really had time to think about it, and he chastised himself mercilessly for feeling so low, knowing how lucky he was. Whether by chance or not, he had risen far above Sydney's poorer suburbs and the poverty-stricken, crime-ridden community in the midst of which he had brought himself up. He now had a regular stream of money flowing in from royalties and television appearance fees, not to mention offers to act in films or collaborate with other well-known songwriters.

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His old friend did a sterling job of handling the sudden star's growing financial stockpiles, and the twenty-year-old was already in a position to buy a city apartment outright. They had also set up a company called Paragon Holdings, aimed at providing seed capital for any new business ventures that happened to take their fancy. This was one of the most satisfying aspects of Jeff's newfound investor status, since he loved sharing ideas with innovative people who, like himself, had a vision for a better future.

The two ambitious mates had opted for this deliberately arrogant and tongue-in-cheek name after rather too many whiskies and with more than a passing gibe at his former girlfriend's father. "Paragon: an outstanding example," the Macquarie Dictionary revealed, after they had spent a few hours playing with various nouns of power and substance. The Dysons would soon see exactly what sort of a man Jeff Diamond was, with a social justice shopping list commensurate with the level of income he was generating of late.

Another few months and the Aston Martin would also be within reach, and Jeff had begun closely monitoring the design plans of the British car company. The nineteen-seventy-three model of the V8 was planned as "Series 3", a twin carburettor machine. His advisers had steered him away from an impulsive "Series 2" purchase because the factory had capped production at less than three hundred cars, thereby signalling it to be a comparative disaster. The musician was convinced to wait with negligible impact, given the modest amount of time he would be in Melbourne to drive it over the next year or so.

Accountant and client sat for hours over cash-flow projections and investment strategies, the numbers composed of so many digits that the younger man frequently lost sight of the fact that the money actually belonged to him. He had laid down strict ground rules for his new manager very early; one: fifty percent of all earnings after tax and expenses were to go to a variety of not-for-profit organisations; two: each year Gerry was to calculate a suitable pension amount in case the new chart-topper's popularity dried up the following year; and three: none of the many new family members and long-lost friends whom he had suddenly gained was to receive anything, save in exceptional circumstances. Those circumstances were to be decided by Gerry in an objective and independent capacity, chiefly because Jeff didn't trust his guilty conscience not to give in.

Between Blake & Partners, his record company and the music publishers, a whole army of people were now at the photogenic celebrity's beck and call: a clothes stylist, hairdresser, personal shoppers, footwear consultants, image makers, a producer-arranger, musical instrument maintenance people, fan mail readers and answerers, someone whose sole purpose was to RSVP to party invitations... The list was endless, and he eagerly lapped up any new tips and tricks that came his way. Jeff Diamond, the stray Catholic Argentinean Polish Jew, had turned into a marketer's dream, and the offices were soon besieged by salespeople left, right and centre, all trying to sell him the biggest and brightest of everything.

The university student's first purchases in this deluge of wealth consisted of a washing machine and two televisions. His infrequent trips to the local laundrette after appearing on prime-time had become fraught with danger, regularly accosted by curious patrons peering on his clothes. It was a peculiar invasion of privacy that went far beyond the day-to-day whispers, nods and shouts from passers-by to which he had grown accustomed upon meeting Lynn. The televisions were for the sleepless nights in his flat; one for the lounge room, to fill the space that had been vacant since he moved in, and the second for the bedroom, to hypnotise his mind into relaxing sufficiently after each nightmare to return to sleep until the next one.

Performing on stage and in television studios hadn't fazed Jeff at all. In fact, it came as a surprise to everyone, including the man himself, how naturally the cap fit. But it shouldn't have been a surprise. He had performed in front of Lynn, and nothing could ever make him more nervous than that first evening in the ballroom in the Dyson Administration building. As it soon became apparent, the newcomer's stage presence was electrifying. Men and women alike clamoured for concert tickets, and some of Australia's most reputable musicians had competed to audition for his first international tour.

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And the girls... There were so many girls! Women of all ages, in fact. As if the handsome man's "sexual mercenary" moniker had ever been justly deserved, roles were certainly now reversed. His services off-stage were every bit as popular as his crowded dance-card of public engagements. Wherever Jeff went, they screamed and mobbed him for autographs or simply to touch him, and as soon as this new kid on the block was spotted with a woman at a nightclub or restaurant, the following day's newspapers would be splattered with all sorts of make-believe nonsense which he and Gerry found highly amusing. These flamboyant antics often led him into considerable hot water though, and his bemused business manager began to set aside a serious provision for legal fees.

So why, with everything going so well for him and no end in sight, did Jeff still feel so wretched? It was perilous for him to slow the pace, because immediately he took his foot off the gas, his mind would plunge into the depths of despair. He kept on running away from himself as fast as possible, knowing full well that at some point he would need to rest. There was no way to keep up such a frenetic pace indefinitely or he would burn out, so the tortured soul forced himself to suffer the consequences of a night every so often when he fought with and very nearly gave in to his suicidal tendencies.

The songwriter's intensely personal lyrics and evocative melodies spoke to his fans of anguish and loneliness, yet somehow the songs took on a surreal distance during concerts. He often found himself on the verge of breaking down on stage, only managing to save the situation with humour or by looking into the crowd and finding an attractive female face on which to focus. As the musician's confidence grew in his ability to perform songs inspired by Lynn, he agreed to include material that until then only they, or indeed only he, had heard.

Not long before this decision, "Donna Jade" had been released. Jeff hadn't wanted to launch this track as a single, but his record company was convinced that it had an enormous hit on its hands. The musician had warned his team of the likely consequences, and sure enough, within a few days of the song's radio *début*, the face of his ex-girlfriend, Donna Watts, was plastered all over the media. Always one to steal any available limelight, the minor celebrity television reporter went public with their brief relationship from when the newsworthy singer-songwriter had just turned sixteen. The woman after whom the track was named had been nearly thirty years old at the time, and the public latched onto the story with keen interest. What made it worse for Jeff was that he had initially dismissed the name of the song as merely a good cadence.

This had been the first time the magnetic star's fans had turned cool, prompted by the stories Donna spread about his unfaithfulness and lack of respect for her feelings. He knew there was no point in trying to defend his teenaged self, because on the face of it, most of her complaints were absolutely true. Luckily however, both the press and his fans possessed short memories for bad news about their idol, and the damning indictments on Jeff's character soon faded. The spurned woman ended up dropping her case in exchange for a percentage of the song's proceeds, and her former lover secured a gagging order through the courts, thanks to Gerry's gun lawyer.

So today, on this warm November morning and with the limousine driver waiting down in the street, Jeff steeled himself for yet another first day of the rest of his tumultuous life. By the time the airport terminal buildings came into view, a mindless conversation with the driver had turned the morning's depression into a dull overlay on top of a positive and excited outlook. He barely remembered how he had felt that morning, once the aeroplane took off for New York and the breakfast beers began to slip down nicely. The restored, re-energised and re-anaesthetised Mister Life-and-Soul was back.

Glamorous flight attendants jostled each other to secure gossip about the musician's tour plans and other snippets of personal information. Where was he going? Who would he be seeing? And when might he be flying with the airline again? The red-blooded artist lapped up their friendliness eagerly, feeding his fantasies with visions of how far they might be persuaded to go for their apparently delectable new customer.

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The twittering young ladies also wanted to know why the star was flying in the rear section of the aeroplane instead of in First Class, which was another ground rule he had been at pains to hammer home to his travel agent.

'I'm a cheapskate,' he admitted. 'It's a waste of money, and the beer tastes the same from any seat.'

Transiting through Los Angeles on his way across the huge North American continent, Jeff allowed his fantasies to wander to the well-known Australian beauty currently in residence. The pair was physically closer than they had been for two months; so close that he could almost feel her presence in the cold anonymity of the airport. He felt foolish scanning every single face in the halls and corridors, just in case she also happened to be flying somewhere on this very day, but he couldn't help himself. No gratuitous allocation of painted smiles or straining uniforms would ever compensate for the ache inside.

What if the traveller were to break his promise, defy the Dyson family and go in search of his dream girl? She wouldn't be too hard to find, once he had managed to sweet-talk the office staff at UCLA. Would Lynn be pleased to see him or angry that he had contacted her? Both, the decent man imagined, so he changed his mind. He was a man of his word. But for Christ's sake, it was so painful to consider the missed opportunity.

By the time Lynn Dyson's first lover climbed the steps up onto his connecting flight to New York, the sun was already setting over the west coast city, and with it the beam of his metaphorical lighthouse swept away from the heartbroken man. He sat down heavily in his seat with his waiting complimentary glass of champagne and forced himself to concentrate on the many happy conversations he and the blonde songstress had shared, when she would answer his never-ending questions about this trendy entertainment industry hub to the best of her sixteen-year-old ability. She had always assured him that he would know for himself before too long. She had been right, and yet setting foot in America without her had predictably failed to live up to the great expectations of those precious and fervent discussions.

How the tired man longed for those slow, sensuous, breath-filled kisses he had perfected with his beautiful best friend, which had spoken of love over lust and with a taste of passion beyond the sexual. A shudder ran through his body at the memory of Lynn's angelic blue eyes harbouring so many sinful pleasures. He pictured them opening on the verge of orgasm, only to close again once the sensation overtook her. How many more bleeding hearts would she leave behind before he saw her again? Or might he soon read in the newspapers that she had found a connection even more arresting with someone else?

The prospect of spending his entire US tour in such a state of desolation was neither appealing nor constructive. This was far too special an experience to squander. He was hot property these days; the man of the moment. Wasn't it every man's dream to have an endless flow of nubile companions hanging on his every word? He needed to snap out of morose melancholy and be grateful for this enviable position for which most men would give their eye teeth.

There had to be a way of kicking the Lynn Dyson habit, or at least dulling it to a point where the feel of her soft, warm skin ceased to linger on his lips day in and day out. Something to replace the hankering for her tight grip around his biceps, her desperate words of encouragement no longer hauling him out of a nightmare. These memories had to go too. Neat Scotch whisky warmed the inebriated poet's lungs and filled them with an amber light; a beacon calling love back. It didn't come. He hadn't expected it to. Only hoped.

Jeff hypnotised himself by staring endlessly at clouds being swallowed by the jet engines and cursed the depth of his feelings. Why couldn't he take a leaf out of Gerry's book, never becoming attached to anyone? The fun-loving Irishman only took two things seriously: work and sport. Indeed, the younger man had been much the same until Lynn had come into his life; seldom thinking twice about a woman once their hard-core encounter came to an end. These days however, for the duration of each inconsequential affair, memories of sweet and sensuous lovemaking would run rampant in the cultured Australian Romeo's head,

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riding on a stranger's touch and listening to someone else's rapture, before releasing the sluice gates of emotion as soon as he retreated to the solitude of his hotel room.

The upside to this inner turmoil, of course, was that new songs coalesced through him faster than ever, and the performer's stage shows became raunchier and less inhibited as he perfected his beguiling art form. The Jeff Diamond brand became synonymous with superb showmanship. His concerts were more than a dynamic set of hits played loud to crazed audiences. Whether rocking with a guitar slung across his body or screaming into a microphone, the Pied Piper had them laughing, crying, gasping and swooning on command, and *impresarios* from Tinseltown to The Big Apple stormed the office of Stonebridge Music's US representatives to book his time. He played by their rules, did as he was told and set about studying his new industry meticulously. He was keen to develop the skills and contacts that would enable him to strike for showbusiness self-determination, having learned the ropes from the best.

The price tag on the new star's time was increasing exponentially too. His face was in demand on camera and in magazines, and fans of all types and ages gorged themselves on his music. To think he had feared being overambitious by ordering a pressing of fifty thousand units for his first single! This quantity regularly sold in a twenty-four-hour period in the USA during October. What would Marianna Dyson think of him now?

Wallowing must be kept to a minimum from now on, the philosophical student decided. Once he landed in New York, his feet would barely touch the ground for a month. There would be little time to think about feeling lonely and wronged. Nothing vital had been taken from him, had it? He was neither the first nor the last person to suffer a broken heart, and he was physically fit and sufficiently in control of his faculties. Just a quick tune of the heart strings, and he would be fine.

The sight of Manhattan Island from the dusky sky was absolutely incredible. Jeff took a moment to reflect on the possibility of a different genetic manifestation of himself being born in this city, had his grandparents and father not left their first port of refuge after World War II for Australia. The well-read student was familiar with the striking skyline from pictures at which he had marvelled as a child. He fancied New York to become a second home, if this fantastic, new career of his continued to soar, looking forward to finally being able to visit such iconic sites as Washington Square and the State Library, and soaking up the essence of knowledge and innovative spirits which must surely hang in the air around Cornell and NYU.

The rapacious musician could hardly wait to be granted a batch of free hours to wander the famous streets and breathe the same air that filled the lungs of so many personages of influence and notoriety. He arrived for an appointment with his US publisher in the Brill Building and spent a good hour scanning the walls of gold discs, photographs and memorabilia in the corridors and offices.

Poking his head into an empty writer's room, the boy from Canley Vale sat at the piano for a few moments and stared out of the window while his fingers toyed with a brand new melody which had obviously been anticipating his arrival. Yet another in a long list of childhood dreams to come true.

As a supplement to these experiences, the modest twenty-year-old struggled to come to terms with the level of interest everyone was taking in his growing popularity. He found it disconcerting at first and would often steer the conversation away from himself. However, this aspect of his naivety soon left him too. This was *his* promotional tour after all, and therefore it was better than good that people in this important city were engaged. He was here to sell Jeff Diamond, so he did what Jeff Diamond did best: charmed the pants off every last one of them. The many years spent analysing people's responses to his actions had turned the young man into a fine spin doctor, and the wordsmith soon had the Americans eating out of his hand.

Every journalist tried to seek out the story behind the songs, caught up in the expressive lyrics which unlocked the imagination of even the hardest heart. They would ask the typical questions about personalised content, and Jeff would describe his material as mostly "scenariographical". No-one had a clue what he meant by this, but his replies to each sycophantic interviewer were accepted without further interrogation as long words spoken by a charismatic foreigner with a strange accent, in which case they had

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to be right! Their blank looks and overt fawning left the clever songwriter smiling on the other side of his face.

Walking past a newsstand on his third night in The Big Apple, the Sydneysider flashed a double-take while glancing at the magazine rack. There was his headshot on the cover of this month's edition of "Rolling Stone". *Howzat!* He remembered the issue was imminent, but it was nonetheless a big deal to actually see copies for sale. His initial impulse was to buy twenty to send to everyone at home down-under, but such a childish act would have been decidedly uncool. Cringing at his own duplicity, he resolved to ask his publicist to complete this task for him the following day...

One kiosk attendant recognised the good-looking star as he walked by, hollering after him in true New York fashion. Flattered by the man's exuberance, Jeff posed for a photograph with the magazine and its seller, and provided him with an autograph to boot. The lessons he had learned while observing his beautiful best friend's generosity towards her fans now stood him in excellent stead while interacting with his own.

That night, the "flavor of the month" performed live on the Johnny Carson Show, overtired from jet-lag and loaded up on caffeine and a few other residual substances. The seasoned *compère* made reference to the fact that another Antipodean native by the name of Lynn Dyson had appeared on his show just a few weeks prior to promote her forthcoming movie. Giving nothing away, the newcomer's only reaction was to say that everyone loved Lynn in Australia, which of course was perfectly true. He then went on to perform a string of his recent hits to the noisy studio audience, who went wild with applause and chanted his name until the closing credits rolled.

Jeff requested that the limousine driver allow him to walk the last few blocks back to his hotel after the late-night show. He had no intention of going to bed in the city that never slept. Wasn't he the man who never slept? Feeling completely at ease on the streets, he must have taken every turn at least once in SoHo and Greenwich Village, attempting to list all the songs to have been written behind each door and at the top of each staircase over the last fifty years. Downtown Manhattan was an inspiring place, full of every kind of person, vehicle, noise and smell he could imagine.

Feeling tired and sentimental at the end of a very long day, the famous loner allowed himself to wonder whether his dream girl might also have set eyes on this month's copy of "Rolling Stone". What would she make of his success? If he were permitted, he would certainly give her much of the credit, since it had been she and her friends who had taught him about recording, and he had honed his performing talent from watching their televised concerts. Yet he was also content that his success had not come off the back of Lynn's fame, safe in the knowledge that she would never wish to take anything away from her former boyfriend's achievements.

The following morning's reviews raved about the latest raw yet sophisticated talent to win admiration from the American public. "The Australian Elvis", Jeff had read reluctantly. No, he resolved. He would refute this epithet publicly. He was too much of a Presley fan to accept such an accolade at this early stage, he announced to the waiting press, stopping short of adding "if ever..." Quietly, he thought back to his casual dismissal of Lynn's idea that he might send his compositions to the man himself. Funny how much more likely a scenario this had become, less than a year after the wild idea had been floated.

Was he already so different from the computer science student who had chased Lynn Dyson down the corridor to ask her out? Or, cast into the limelight at the piano in the grand ballroom which already seemed far less enormous and almost provincial, had the nervous songwriter simply been unusually self-effacing on that wonderful evening?

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With applause still ringing in his ears, security men dressed from head to toe in black hustled Jeff Diamond and his four band members down the steps at the side of the stage, along a corridor lit with bright fluorescent tubes and finally into a series of dressing rooms. They had flown to San Francisco, after another brief stopover in Los Angeles, to perform his final sell-out concert on American soil.

Ripping off his sweat-drenched shirt and slumping down onto a chair, the exhausted but elated superstar stared at his own face in the mirror and marvelled at how his life had changed in the space of a few, very rapid-fire weeks. He slid his hand into his toiletry bag, freeing the lid on the compartment at the bottom, and pulled out a small bag of pre-mixed tobacco and cannabis. Echoing through the bowels of the stark concert hall were the bizarre, ear-splitting sounds of women screaming and men's raised voices, the latter presumably trying to keep order in the ranks of the former. The similarity of these noises with those of his nocturnal torturers would wreak havoc with his nerves after every gig. He spread a generous amount of leaves onto some papers, rolled them up and lit one, and within a minute or so, having stashed away the remaining joints, he drifted into a pleasant distraction as the drug hit his brain.

Australia's newest export, who was still breathing hard after well over two hours of exertion, cracked the top off yet another bottle of beer just as the door opened behind him. Stealthily, he secreted the joint on the edge of the Formica table top, hidden among items of clothing. A burly guard hurried to admit the star's manager along with his two flabbergasted sisters, who had been overjoyed to receive an invitation for a quick trip to the West Coast to see their old friend in action.

'Is it OK if I let Jack and Tammy in?' Gerry asked, gazing at the ripped carton in a crate of watery ice, wherein only five bottles remained. 'Have you drunk all those already? You should take it easy, mate.'

'Yeah, I know. Thanks. Sure, come on in. Fucking crazy, isn't it? Grab a beer, sit down and watch me strip, ladies.'

The visitors' brother let out a caustic laugh, helping himself to three bottles and passing two of them across to the awestruck women. His sisters would not be offended at the arrogant remark. They had known Jeff Diamond far too long for this to be an issue. He pointed at the door, referring to the hubbub still rumbling and fizzing on the other side.

'All that's for you, mate. It's totally manic out there. You've got to front up to the press in a minute. Are you ready, or do you want us to get out for a while?'

'My God, Jeff! All those women out there!' Jacinta interjected in a frenzied screech, fanning herself with her programme. 'You were absolutely amazing, by the way. I can't believe it was you up there. Our Jeff. Wow! How does it feel?'

The performer nodded and slugged back some more beer, suddenly remembering the half-smoked spliff which was probably burning the table by now. 'Great! Cheers, guys. Tonight was a good one. Did you enjoy it? Chuck me that black shirt, Tam, please?'

Gerry's younger sister reached behind her to lift a folded shirt from a suitcase and pass it to the half-naked man in their midst. Her eyes were ready to pop out of their sockets, scanning from his lithe, hairy torso to the day's dark stubble on his chin, and finally to the long waves of black hair which fell in unruly, damp curls beyond his shoulders. Jeff offered the joint around, winking his thanks, and the bottle almost slipped out of her hand as she gladly accepted.

'Shit!' Tamilla cursed. 'Jeez, Jeff, you were amazing. Thanks for making Gerry your agent. We had the best seats. They're crazy, your fans! Completely mental. And almost breaking down the door when we got here. How the hell are you going to get out?'

Jeff leaned forward in his chair, first to Jacinta and then to her younger sibling, giving them both kisses. Both women swooned, making no effort to hide their attraction to the dark, smouldering musician who had turned them on from afar with the beat of his rhythm guitar, his deep voice and the gyrations which perambulated him nimbly from one side of the stage to the other.

# A Life Entwined

## Chapter One

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Gerry looked on, as if a penny had just dropped. 'You've slept with both my sisters, haven't you, you scumbag?'

His friend cocked his head. 'How long have you known?'

The accountant scowled, unable to maintain a straight face, while the women looked from each other to the men in a moment of tipsy awkwardness. It had taken quite an effort to hide their irregular trysts with their brother's handsome best friend, and Jeff had been sworn to secrecy that neither Gerry nor their parents should ever find out. As far as they knew, the older generation remained none the wiser, and that was for the best for all concerned!

'Forever, mate. You're such an animal. I'd be an idiot not to get that you couldn't spend a whole night at our house without taking advantage of the local merchandise. Just tried to put it out of my head, I guess. Are you ready for the journoes?'

Shirt buttoned to halfway, hair somewhat tamed by a quick comb, and yet another stubby emptied in less than five seconds, Jeff Diamond was about as presentable as he was going to get. Jacinta saw him pop a tiny white pill into his mouth, along with four paracetamol tablets, all washed down with another large slug of beer. Giving him a scolding look, the woman received a sly wink but no further explanation. Their sinful *compadre* was saved by a knock at the door, accompanied by a shrill cry shouting a five-minute warning for the press briefing.

'Jesus! "Merchandise" is a tad degrading, mate. These are your sisters, remember? Jack and Tammy are here to protect me from them out there,' the lothario instantly redeemed himself, raising his arm chivalrously to allow the excessively preened and primed young ladies to exit ahead of him. 'Let's get this over with.'

His manager encouraged everyone out of the room after another loud rap on the door, herding his errant flock. They made their way down the narrow passageway until they reached the source of the commotion. The songwriter shouted to his drummer, Martyn Bailey, who was a few paces behind them, then hung back until they could all walk into the hungry pack of wolves together.

The media conference was a long, drawn out affair. The new celebrity was becoming accustomed to the types of questions he was likely to face, which were duly drilled at him and Gerry like a barrage of machine gun fire. Only ten-word answers were required, and this suited him perfectly. Elaborating on his private life seemed both unnecessary and distasteful, beyond the platitudes which sold newspapers and magazines.

Midway through the quick-fire question and answer session, having watched their sexy intellectual run rings around television reporters and newspaper journalists alike, Gerry ushered his siblings out to a waiting Towncar. The women were wild with excitement, again unable to quite believe that the skinny boy their brother had befriended at a school sports camp had suddenly turned into a superstar. Clearly revitalised by the cocktail of stimulants he had ingested since coming off stage, the Blake sisters exchanged exasperated glances at the change which had come over the young heartthrob who used to play the piano for them as teenagers.

A large crowd of concert-goers were still hanging around outside the venue, determined to catch their idol's attention when they attempted their getaway. As soon as Jeff and the band appeared, surrounded by their entourage of roadies and friends, the fans surged forwards en masse. Remembering the grace and generosity Lynn had always shown to her adoring public, the chart-topping rocker steeled himself for signing autographs on all manner of body parts and letting them take photographs of each other draped all over him.

He shrugged at the sisters' incredulous expressions. Of course it boosted his ego... Too right, he enjoyed it... This was exactly what he had signed up for, wasn't it?

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Later on, relaxing back in a sumptuous leather armchair and talking to Jacinta and Tamilla while his manager disappeared to settle the bill for dinner, Jeff came clean about the extent of the favours his lustful fans had been known to do for him. As he recounted some of the nights he had spent in New York and Florida, once more the women's faces were conflicted, multi-coloured canvases of curiosity, jealousy and horror.

'They're bloody desperate to please me. It's weird. Intent on putting on a show for me,' he condoned the groupies' behaviour. 'I'd be happy just to rip their clothes off and get stuck into it, but they come in in twos and threes, premeditated and pre-medicated. At first I used to object, albeit pretty half-heartedly, but now I'm getting used to not denying them their wish to entertain me. I guess I've entertained them for the last couple of hours, so now it's their turn. And then we get stuck into it.'

These titillating stories had Gerry excited at what lay in store. His friend had promised him some groupie action this evening too, once the ladies had retired to bed. Apparently, the few minutes the superstar had spent indulging his fans after the show were also long enough for him to have made correspondingly indulgent arrangements for the fortunate few to meet him at his hotel. With any luck, a gaggle of giggling and teetering hotties would be waiting for them in the bar, having already loosened up with a few expensed bottles of champagne.

'Do they strip?' Tamilla asked, with more than a little contempt in her tone. 'Right in front of each other?'

Jeff scoffed. 'Yeah, and the rest. You've got to start hanging around, mate. I'm prepared to share the booty. Plenty to go around. I could call up some agencies to get you girls hooked up too, if you want? Ever been in on a full-on orgy?'

The North Sydney private school girls were by no means virtuous Catholic *immaculati*, yet the fearsome idea of a rock musician's alcohol-fuelled love-in was a little too daring even for them. While they were clearly inquisitive, neither sister particularly wished to witness her brother or her erstwhile shared lover engaged in torrid, soporific fornication with numerous other women, deciding to tend to their jet-lag in their room with their own ice bucket of champagne instead.

'Good decision,' their famous friend's voice was laced with sarcasm. 'You might like it too much.'

The party was in full swing inside the luxurious suite that had been reserved for the celebrity's party, and from behind the door, the Melbourne accountant could hear his mate yelling. He pushed his way past several heaps of writhing limbs which loosely resembled copulating couples until he found several band members surrounded by empty bottles and further evidence of narcotics freely available. Never had he imagined an accountancy degree and an unlikely friendship with a boy born west of the Harbour Bridge would deliver him into such a dangerous type of heaven.

'Gez!' Jeff held out his own half-empty beer bottle. 'Get down here! Brandi's been beside herself, waiting for you to get back. Haven't you, baby?'

A voluptuous brunette immediately made an attempt to scramble to her feet, falling back onto the sofa and squealing in apparent amusement. She was clearly relieved to discover Jeff Diamond's manager was not a portly, fifty-something bore, instantly attracted to the virile Irishman. In contrast, Jeff's own female blanket, still relatively lucid, lunged to assist Brandi back to an upright position, having been requested to greet the illustrious Mister Blake in a more appropriate fashion.

Gerry helped himself to a generous whisky and soda and rolled himself a joint, settling down to catch up with his spaced-out client and their new collection of amorous best buddies, who would of course be interchanged as soon as the Diamond tour party rolled into the next town. He too was full of wonder at his situation, but such reservations were summarily dismissed since he had no wish to remain the last man standing now that his responsibilities were fully discharged.

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'Jesus! It's too hot in here, man,' the singer roused everyone out of their comfortable muddle. 'Let's get the air-conditioning blasting. Where's the weed? Marty, over here, mate.'

### *Reaching For The Stars*

The inaugural promotional tour next took Jeff Diamond to northern Europe, starting in rainy London. Again stealing time to himself late at night, he ended up hopelessly lost almost every time he left the hotel. After the sensible grid pattern of Manhattan, the twisting labyrinth of streets around the West End and down towards the River Thames was much more of a challenge to the tourist. Despite this time-consuming hurdle however, he found London oozing a sophistication to match New York, or perhaps even to surpass it. He was introduced to some very interesting Bohemians in the eclectic shops and art galleries of Carnaby Street, and was again excited to be soaking up the sensual vibes of this cultural hot-spot.

Dream after dream came true on the wide-eyed man's travels, passing through Amsterdam and visiting the famous bars, coffee shops and nightclubs about which he had read a thousand times. Plenty of glass doors in this city, the dreamer was glad to see! And then on to Paris and Madrid, where he wooed his audiences still further by having no trouble conversing with them in their own languages. He had instinctively developed a Midas touch with the crowds, which was both a blessing and a curse.

Jeff had expected to feel more at home in Madrid, due to his fluency in Spanish, but it was the French capital city which had been the surprise package. Meandering around the streets near the intersection of *les Boulevards Saint Michel* and *Saint Germain*, he stumbled across an eclectic cluster of bookshops and cafés surrounding *La Sorbonne*. Students and professors of all ages and grades of eccentricity sat in the open air, wrapped up in jackets, gloves and colourful scarves, with their cigarettes, *cafés simples* and *cognacs*, discussing philosophy and women. Strangely, he had never felt so much at home. This was his sort of place, and the closet intellectual vowed to return as soon as an opportunity presented.

After Madrid came Rome, Frankfurt and Berlin. The diligent linguist's Italian sounded too much like his mother tongue to appeal to the locals' sensibilities, and his German was by no means proficient enough to prevent the proud natives from answering him in English. This led the Australian to stick to his second language in these countries, not wishing to risk the embarrassment of inadvertently saying something he shouldn't. No matter though... He was an instant success wherever he went, with his swarthy Mediterranean looks, dynamic stage presence and passionate music. He also found the Italian girls especially amorous and was reluctant to leave Rome so quickly.

As the months clicked by, the tormented soul recognised that he was better off on the road. In fact, as if back in his teens, he spent as much time away from home as possible. That way, when he finally touched back down in Melbourne, the long absences made sure he was beginning to crave familiarity. He liked having dinner with Suzanne for old times' sake, and catching up with his university friends for a game of basketball or a few drinks at one of the many live music pubs in Fitzroy or Carlton. By this time, the bad boy simply wished to act like a normal person again for a while and to leave his excessive consumption patterns behind. After six weeks overseas, the irrepressible performer's body was exhausted with endless travel and constant substance abuse, yet his mind was replete with a multiplicity of cerebral fodder which he set about processing slowly and methodically in order to appreciate the magnitude of his new experiences.

Returning home again in mid-December nineteen-seventy-two, the rock star found a cryptic message left by Gerry on the answering machine in his dark and lonely Richmond flat.

'Mate! GB here,' it went. 'Come into the office when you're back on deck. Something big to show you.'

Something big? Jeff was intrigued. When he reached the prestigious Collins Street address late the following afternoon, jet-lagged and listless, the indomitable business manager met him in the newly renovated reception area, positively brimming with excitement.

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'What's got into you?' his friend asked, feeling doubly tired at the level of energy being expended around him.

'We're going for a bottle of wine,' Gerry told his client with an air of mystery and grabbed him by the arm.

Down in Rosati's, the money-spinning regular asked for the wine list and stood at the bar, contemplating its many pages for several minutes, while his famous buddy fended off some eager female fans. The accountant laughed, initially jealous, before sarcastically agreeing with the *sommelier* that such a level of attention could easily become quite suffocating. Jeff rolled his eyes in frustration, grateful for his mate's refreshing but predictable humour. After an amusing exchange at the celebrity's expense with the bartender, whom he knew from Blake & Partners' Friday evening drinking sessions, his manager placed an order.

'Elvis here's buying me one of your finest bottles of Grange Hermitage. 'Sixty-four or -five, if you have it, please, Vito.'

'Am I?' Jeff asked, giving his friend an irritated glare. 'Since when?'

The accountant put his arm around the songwriter's shoulder and led him to a nearby table, where they sat down opposite each other. Jeff crossed his legs and lit cigarettes for himself and his cheerful drinking partner, waiting to hear his excuses.

'Since about two weeks ago,' his manager informed him, slipping a few folded pieces of paper from the inside pocket of his suit jacket and flattening them out on the table in front of his client.

'What's that?' Jeff enquired, glancing down.

Before the older man had a chance to respond, the restaurant manager brought out a dusty bottle of the oldest Grange vintage he had been able to find in their cellar, a "'Sixty-two", and presented it to the dark-haired star for examination.

'Looks expensive,' the half-hearted celebrity joked.

Gerry huffed his objections in his own inimitable fashion. 'He can afford it. I cook his books.'

'Go on then...' his friend smiled at the shocked expression on the haughty man's face. 'Open it up and let him try it. Thanks.'

'This,' the businessman continued, expansively waving his right hand over the top page like a magic wand, 'is official confirmation that you, my good man... my best mate... are now a millionaire.'

After a short pause, Jeff exhaled sharply. He picked up the papers and stared at the figures in each column, taking a few moments to work out what they represented. His manager couldn't wait for him to examine the balance sheet in detail, eager to propose a toast.

'To Jeff Diamond, rich bastard!' he announced with aplomb, lifting both their glasses into the air, clinking them together and offering one to his friend.

The songwriter took the long-stemmed goblet and spun the rich, red liquid round a few times, sniffing its bouquet like a professional and admiring the way the fine legs of syrupy liquid clung to the sides of the glass. This information was worth celebrating, he had to admit.

He toasted his manager in return. 'Cheers, mate. Sorry to be a bit slow to catch on. This is good.'

'This is good?' the incredulous man echoed. 'It's more than fucking good.'

Jeff laughed. 'Yes, OK. It's very fucking good. Thanks, Gez.'

As accountants went, the one across the table was about as excited as they could get. He reached forward and shook his old buddy heartily by the hand, almost sending the precious bottle flying. Both men lurched to save it, which Gerry did by a whisker.

'Jesus! That was close to a disaster. You're welcome, mate, but it's your money. Look at this...'

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Gerry took back the papers momentarily and leafed through them until he found the transaction he was looking for. 'November the twenty-ninth,' he explained. 'Your balance had been tipping over the million-three mark consistently for a fortnight or so, and here... See?'

Following his friend's finger to the entry on his statement for that date, Jeff exhaled and rubbed his hand across his forehead in disbelief. The entry for this particular day read one million, five hundred and ten thousand dollars, give or take a few cents here and there. The rock star nodded but said nothing. In truth, he didn't fully understand his own indifference either.

The businessman continued regardless. 'So I got the girls to do a bit of digging around for outstanding expenses and did a proper cash projection, took a tax position as at the end of November and... Hey presto! Millionaire!'

The younger man sat back and savoured the dark claret. It was absolutely delicious, and was becoming all the more delicious as the afternoon's news sunk in. His first rational thought was to imagine the looks on Alan and Ruth's faces when their irregular client could present them with a cheque large enough to fund The Fellowship's entire happiness chart research program, not to mention the rich assortment of new musical instruments he could purchase on behalf of the combined Fairfield High Schools' orchestra. And he mustn't forget Alberto's boxing club... The list of good causes was endless, but finally possible to address.

'How does it feel?' Gerry asked, seeing the cogs turning in his friend's tired mind.

Jeff shook his head. 'I don't know, mate. Great, I guess. Weird. Does it include your fee?'

Scoffing, his manager was undaunted by the brooding singer's lack of enthusiasm. 'This is not going to go away, you know,' he insisted, stubbing out his cigarette and refilling their glasses. 'This is only the beginning. I've got contracts on my desk from all and sundry, waiting to be booked in and signed. You are a *bona fide* star, mate. You are a serious money-making machine.'

A serious money-making machine? Yes, that was about right. The expression summed up how he was feeling quite well. Entirely unwittingly, his closest friend had hit the nail on the head. He was going through the motions, putting very little of his heart and soul into anything other than the few hours he spent on stage, where he could immerse himself in the power of the music and pretend to feel the semblance of goodness preserved within his lyrics.

The singer realised with a *frisson* of disappointment that his thoughts hadn't immediately turned to how Lynn might react to her former lover reaching this exalted milestone. So why was that? Simple, the philosopher rued. She would be pleased for him, no doubt. She would know how helpful this money could be for setting his many plans in motion, but she had never been the one to seek material benefit from their relationship. His elevation to rich rock star status was unlikely to impress her one *iota*, beyond the implicit recognition for the talent she had believed in so wholeheartedly.

'Thanks,' Jeff shrugged. 'I'm fried. Give me twenty-four hours, and we'll hit the town properly. I'm really grateful for all your hard work and looking after all this for me. It's just not that important, I suppose. Not the numbers. It's more what I can do with it that'll get me going. Sorry, mate.'

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As Jeff rounded the corner from the kitchen, he could hear his children laughing. It was a welcome sound, since the house had been deathly quiet while they had been away. However, the frivolity was suspended as soon as they became aware of his arrival. Two synchronised heads turned to see him walk across the floorboards, revealing two angelic faces which then swung back and burst into more fits of laughter.

'Look at this, *Papá!*' Kierney cried out. 'It's so funny!'

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The father crouched down and carefully edged three mugs of coffee onto the table, taking care not to spill any on the video cassettes and empty cases that were strewn everywhere. The kids were doing well. Sharing progress of their parents' autobiography as it took shape had been one of his most ingenious preventative treatments, sure to stave off any long-term psychological damage from what they were soon to go through.

Looking over his daughter's shoulder, he could just about make out the grainy footage of one of his early concerts playing on fast forward and with the sound muted.

'What are you up to, guys? You look guilty.'

Still chuckling, Ryan set the tape in motion, this time reversing at speed. 'This is hilarious, Dad! I wish we could get the sound backwards too.'

The three remaining Diamonds stood between the coffee table and the couch, while the long-haired band played with earnest looks on their faces, launching jerky, *staccato* attacks, almost as if the instruments were in control of the players. They each tried to guess which silent song they were watching, and it wasn't until the camera panned round to reveal a set of bongos that the superstar put the pieces together.

'This is "Leeway Sunset",' he announced. 'One of the bongo drums broke that night, if it's the gig I think it is. Rome? What does the case say?'

Kierney lifted the empty video sleeve and read the handwritten label on the back. 'It doesn't. Just "Nineteen-seventy-two, Europe", and then the band's names. Do you want to see yourself on fast forward? That's what we were laughing at when you came in. You look like you're on speed.'

'I was,' her father retorted with a shameful shrug. 'Well, the old-fashioned version, at least. Is this going to be the order of events for the rest of the night? If it is, I'm going to do some more writing, because I'm not much into analysing my own performance at this point in my career, if you know what I mean.'

His dark-haired daughter sat down next to her father and cradled her coffee mug in both hands. Her brother disregarded the question, insisting on rewinding further and then stopping for more track quizzes, backing his tall frame up a few paces and perching on the arm of the chair. The vision was amusing, Jeff had to admit, and he slapped the sportsman's back with a friendly force.

'You're easily pleased, aren't you?'

'Haven't you ever done this, old man?' his son taunted. 'What did you spend your student years doing? You missed out. Look at all the good, clean fun you could've had...'

Their dad shook his head. 'Contradiction in terms, mate. No such thing as good, clean fun.'

'You had big hair before the 'eighties,' Ryan continued, pausing the tape at a frame where the rocker was front and centre, looking raw and unkempt in a dark, satin shirt and tight, black pants. 'Look at you!'

'Big everything. Goes without saying, of course, boy.'

'You wish.'

'Whatever. Move it on.'

The seventeen-year-old grumbled. 'Shut up, guys. You had bigger hair than *Mamá* back then, and bigger sales.'

'Shush, *pequeñita*,' the widower urged. 'Yeah, probably. Let's not go there. Although I'd be lying if I said it wasn't a competition between us in those big-charting years. We were very competitive with each other for some peculiar reason, where neither of us was the slightest bit bothered by anyone else's chart positions. We never understood that about ourselves.'

'With the exception of body parts, I'm guessing,' Ryan gave a suggestive snigger.

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Jeff raised his eyebrows as if to say his son's comment was accurate enough but that it would be advisable to refrain from any further commentary along these lines. The younger man laughed, throwing the empty cassette cover down onto the coffee table. As his sister took a seat on the floor in front of the others, the tape rolled on to show a scene from outside the concert hall, where fans were lining up to gain backstage access.

'Oh, my God! Look at those girls!' Kierney brought the men's attention back to the television, pointing at a sea of black and white faces belonging to females who were screaming at the top of their lungs, clutching T-shirts and programmes from their night out and with tears streaming down their faces. 'They're literally hysterical.'

'It was madness,' Jeff agreed. 'A noise like nothing I'd ever heard before. The venue was so old that my dressing room reminded me of a spray-painted dungeon, below ground and with only a long, narrow window at the top. There was even a security grille over it, I think. It was like being in a jail cell with a pack of dingoes waiting to mob me the moment I stepped outside. From that far away from the crowd, it honestly sounded like some sort of primal howling and screeching.'

Lighting a cigarette, the father tossed the packet into his daughter's lap to see if she also wanted one. Kierney flipped the lid, peered in at the white sticks for a few seconds, before deciding against it and throwing the packet over to her brother. He also passed up the offer, agreeing that it was too close to bedtime. During this familiar ritual, the footage had changed from the manic scenes outside to a press room inside, where a small group of fans had been invited to meet their new idol.

Jeff leaned forwards, wondering if he would recognise any of these original devotees. A mixture of young men and women, he watched his twenty-year-old self sign autographs and pose for photographs with this lucky few, who had presumably won their privileged audience with the headline act in a competition. He heard Kierney sniff in mild disgust when the arrogant, young Diamond looped his arm around the best looking woman and offered her a beer. Of course, the star-struck fan was mesmerised in the moment, accepting the drink eagerly and fawning all over the handsome star. Several of the others appeared downcast and thwarted that they were not receiving such undivided attention.

'So how did you choose?' Ryan enquired, also keen on checking out these excited females, even though they would now be old enough to be his aunties. 'First come, first served?'

'Ry!' his sister exclaimed. 'Gross-out or what?'

Smirking, Jeff put a steadying hand on the young woman's shoulder. 'Other way round, mate, don't you think?'

'Papá!'

'C'mon, Kizzy. Lighten up. It's late, and we're just mucking around. It was the era of free love. Easy pickings for me. It wasn't pretty, but it didn't need to be. There were no expectations. They wanted a piece of me as a souvenir, and I got me a piece of ass for the night. That's all it was. OK? I was the master of cheap and nasty back then.'

The willowy teenager shuffled backwards and levered herself up onto the couch beside her father. Resting her head on his arm, she tucked her legs up underneath her and snuggled into his warm body. Jeff curled a long arm around her and kissed the top of her head. His kids had watched recordings of both his and Lynn's concerts many times over the years and had heard various backstories, the versions becoming more honest and less sanitised as their youth gradually evaporated.

'I shared the spoils with the band. And Gerry, when he stuck around. We'd do our thing, then I'd leave 'em asleep in the hotel room and go back to mine.'

Ryan stood up, stretching and yawning. 'Doesn't sound at all bad to me,' he grinned. "'The Roughs" need to step up band practice when I get back to uni'. I want me pieces of ass after every gig too. Can't

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believe you're actually using that phrase with us, after all the lectures about respecting women! Close your ears, sis.'

'So cold,' the rock star's drowsy daughter moaned. 'I guess girl bands do the same thing. Just there weren't many girl bands in those days, Papá, were there?'

'No. That's true,' Jeff continued, satisfied that his life had turned out so differently in the end. 'And yes, it was very cold. Simple and meaningless. We all enjoyed ourselves for a short time. They got to brag about sleeping with the singer in the band, while I moved on to the next town and next batch of girls. Sorry, guys, but that's just how it was.'

The proud father gathered up the empty coffee mugs and the ashtray. In a few days' time, the trio would be driving out to Lynn's parents' enormous farm at Benloch for the first Christmas without their mother. None was particularly looking forward to masquerading in a party mood with their grandparents and extended family, yet each knew they had a part to play in ensuring everyone managed to enjoy the festive season.

'One more example of the relentless passage of time,' the grieving husband thought aloud, wondering if his children might be mulling over the same notion. 'Sometimes it sweeps you up in its wake. Other times it leaves you behind, and you have to scramble to catch up. But none of us can ignore it. I'm going to the study for a while. This little retrospective interlude is the perfect segue into the chapter I'm currently working on. You guys alright?'

'Dad?'

Jeff wheeled around at the sudden serious tone in his son's voice. 'Yeah?'

'So while you were getting it on with all those women and living the rock star life,' the nineteen-year-old began, 'did you talk to anyone about the shit you had going on inside? You know, the depression and suicidal thoughts?'

'Jesus, mate. Where's this come from? *Sientete*.'

The young man shook his head. 'No. It's all good. I just wanted to know how you managed to live two lives in parallel. I asked Mum once how she dealt with being apart, but she wouldn't tell me. S'pose she thought I was too young. It was a few years ago.'

'She dealt with it a whole lot better than I did,' Jeff nodded. 'She had the ability to rationalise things, whereas I was just a mess. Resilience, I guess. Like you two.'

'It comes from being loved when you're a kid,' Kierney offered. 'Helps you to know you won't always feel this bad. That's what you missed out on. *Mamá* told me that.'

Tears immediately formed behind the father's eyes, and he sniffed them back. 'Yep. I think you're right, *pequeñita*. I didn't want to talk about it to anyone, mate. It was easier to force a smile and behave like an idiot, because that's what was expected of me. On the few occasions when I opened up a bit to Celia, she'd always say, "But you shouldn't feel that way."'

Both children laughed at the showman's impression of Gerry's prim and proper mother, who had taken it upon herself to become the young man's surrogate parent. Jeff shrugged as if to accentuate how straightforward she thought his problem was to fix.

'"Oh, OK. Thanks, Celia. I won't then,"' he continued the story. 'Your *mamá* was the first person who didn't say that to me. Instead, she said, "How awful that you feel that way." She wanted me to feel better just as much as Celia did. She just knew it wasn't something I did on purpose; that I could turn on and off at will.'

All three Diamonds stared at each other while the missing fourth family member sent a private message to her wistful husband, causing him to scratch the skin over his heart. 'That's the big difference when you

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need support. I remember the look of complete sorrow on her face. All you have to do is acknowledge its validity. You'd don't have to fix anything, because most of the time, you can't. *Buenas noches a los dos.*'

Kierney wrapped her arms around her father's waist and leaned her head into his chest. Wiping the tears from his eyes, he hugged her back. Slender fingers moved his hand off his shirt and stroked the fabric covering the "JL" tattoo.

'That's so beautiful, *Papá*. And *Mamá*. Buena escritura.'

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The movie which Lynn Dyson had been filming for the last few months was set for release at Christmas. "Reaching For The Stars" was a typical schmaltzy Hollywood musical; an idyllic story of growing up in America in the nineteen-forties, full of post-war positivity and a dream-like innocence. The part of Barbara had been written especially for her, and the precocious starlet had fallen back into acting easily, despite privately admitting that she had well and truly outgrown the childish, chintzy plot. Her co-stars, also big names in their own rights, were seasoned professionals and took the stunning, blonde seventeen-year-old under their wing in the studio and during the rare outdoor scenes. Lynn had been a keen student, respectful of the director's wishes and very popular with everyone on set.

Her character's "romantic interest", Dominic, was played by another former child-star making his debut in an adult role. Carson Wright fell instantly head over heels in love with the well-known Australian singer and sportswoman, his obligatory Hollywood ego unable to understand why she was not interested in him. He feverishly wined her, dined her and showered her with gifts until Lynn finally had to confront him and put a stop to his attempts at winning her affections. The producer had even pulled the leading lady to one side to air his concern that the on-screen relationship might suffer as a result of the youngsters' lack of involvement off-screen.

This unexpected allegation served as an interesting lesson for the young Australian beauty. No wonder so many actors had such short-term relationships, she realised. Thrown into a situation where they were required to be on heat while playing their roles, it was sometimes hard to distinguish fact from fiction when she and Carson were spending such long and irregular hours in each others' company, full of pretence and in so many compromising positions. Moreover, the rest of the cast and crew, and soon the ever-attentive press as well, took it for granted that the good-looking pair would become the next showbiz scoop.

It was with a mixture of amusement, frustration and sadness that Lynn imagined her former lover's outspoken opinion on this issue. Jeff would unquestionably hook up with his co-star without a moment's hesitation, easily able to consider the relationship as inconsequential outside the context of the movie. Such an arrangement appeared to suit everyone in the here and now, so why the hell not? His deep, expressive voice spilled into her ears from her forlorn heart, as she imagined the man who dominated her vivid dreams night after night gently goading her into enjoying the fun for what it was. It would also help pass the time, she imagined him telling her, echoing her own words back. Should she relent and keep the peace, for the sake of box office triumph? Everyone would be satisfied with her life's new veneer, as her worldly lover had so aptly put it.

Back in Melbourne, Jeff rolled his eyes in disgust when he read the synopsis of Lynn's new film in the entertainment section of *The Age*. Evidently, her overprotective minders were determined not to honour her advancing adulthood, despite the polite protestations she would doubtless be insinuating. The sundered lovers had spoken many times about the various directions in which she wanted her career to head, and this certainly wasn't one of them. He hoped she was suitably scornful of her casting, but couldn't be sure now that he no longer lent a supportive ear, acting as the disreputable influence her parents had sought to purge from her life.

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Nevertheless, the humble student who up until recently had shared the sexy, new film star's most intimate aspirations would love to have secreted himself into a cinema under the cover of darkness and feasted his eyes on his dream girl once more. He might have been prepared to swallow his pride under the circumstances, yet without his certain someone to protect him from the movie monsters, Jeff couldn't bring himself to step inside a theatre.

At least the twenty-year-old had the perfect excuse for why he hadn't seen the blockbuster hit when Gerry and his sisters pressed him. The stern critic simply told them it was a ridiculously frivolous plot and he was disappointed that Lynn had been enlisted. Jacinta and Tamilla had rushed to see it anyway, since romantic musicals had always been "just their thing", and once again the ruthless duo set about teasing their brother's longtime friend by describing Lynn Dyson's on-screen kisses and bodily entanglements in infuriating detail, knowing full well how jealous it would make the hot-blooded male.

Christmas nineteen-seventy-two came and went in a muddy fog. Jeff had been invited to the Blakes' family home in the North Shore suburb of Mosman, like he had every season in recent times. This year though, the affluent family's wayward extra son had turned down their invitation, using his travel schedule as an excuse. Truth be told, he knew he would be lousy company, and didn't care either to dampen the happy family's spirits or to suffer the endless taunts of the catty siblings. He had also heard that the entire Dyson family was flying across to spend the holidays in Los Angeles with Lynn, and this news hit the heartbroken young man particularly hard when picturing their happy festive reunion.

The now famous musician was undecided about the whole Christmas concept. Without any firm religious beliefs to fall back on, two days of gluttonous eating, drinking and merriment were crass and wasteful on the one hand, seeming to have developed in recent years into a competition to see who could spend the most on gifts. However on the other hand, there remained a magic the loner envied when families came together to celebrate. He preferred the idea of the American Thanksgiving holiday, which had fewer religious overtones while still acknowledging the importance of surrounding oneself with loved ones.

The other, more private reason why Jeff was not looking forward to the holidays was the fact that Lynn's Christmas Special was being regularly advertised on television, and it was clear from the publicity that she was living life to the full over in California. Over the last few weeks, she had been pictured dating a prominent star of the screen and had given interviews which revealed to the jaundiced sceptic that she was changing a lot during this sabbatical from Melbourne. He hoped her conspicuous affairs were as superficial as his were, but he had his doubts. He knew women too well to believe his own spin.

For all the newspaper columns and magazine articles describing The Australian Elvis' many steamy assignations, he hadn't found a single one in the least bit fulfilling. Had he used up his one respecting sexual relationship and was therefore now being punished for wanting more? He sorely missed the intimacy he had shared with Lynn and the natural touch they had perfected, knowing exactly how to entice, enflame and then pacify each other at every moment. He also craved the exchange of witty banter, the endless words of love and the small tokens of affection that had made life so special, none of which he had the slightest desire to repeat with anyone else.

Night after night, the southern hemisphere's most eligible bachelor found himself in someone else's bed, too often anticipating a strong hand to reach round the back of his head as he came inside the latest beautiful stranger. He longed for the feeling of Lynn running her strong, piano-player's fingertips down his spine, forcing him to struggle to maintain control until he had satisfied her. What he would do for a massage of his tired shoulders from his beautiful best friend, and to feel the slow, kneading strokes travel along his neck to the most susceptible sinews just below the hairline. Yet the magic sensation never arrived, and neither did he want it to arrive as soon as he focussed his eyes back on whomever he was with.

Other frequent memories of their supremely choreographed, bare-skinned confluences were those enjoyed after a night out with the most beautiful woman in the world, painted nails running the length of

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his engorged penis as she shifted similarly painted lips back and forth, her tongue hidden from nothing but his eyes. These images were easy enough to reproduce, and indeed Jeff's frazzled body begged his mind to reproduce them on an alarmingly regular basis, such was his rampant dependence. However, the truth was unavoidable. Applied to Lynn Dyson, these colourful adornments were merely symbols representing something much, much deeper; something unique and powerful that neither she nor he had fully understood, and which were now lost to them both.

And to cap it all, if a nameless woman happened to trigger a sensuous suggestion of those heady times, the seasoned addict was scarcely able to prevent himself from recoiling. He was unable to stomach his soul being invaded, despite his insatiable physical needs, as if someone were venturing into his dream girl's exclusive domain. Only when he was blind drunk, high on amphetamines or mellowed by cannabis... or all of the above... did this missing element not matter quite so much. The loss seemed insurmountable in the rare sober moments, invariably pushing him to seek another high.

The lonely superstar arrived back in Melbourne a few days before the city shut down for the holidays, sitting alone in his dark Richmond flat and wondering what sort of sexual relationships his gorgeous ex-girlfriend was enjoying these days. Did she look back on their special moments together as lost forever, or were their recall as pervasive to her as they were to him? Did she also expect to be touched the way he had touched her? Was she getting what she needed? Perhaps she had found something even better. Jeff Diamond had given Lynn Dyson a thorough education, including how to ask for exactly what she wanted. Much to his *chagrin*, Miss Irony rarely missed an opportunity to admonish him. His gorgeous schoolgirl songstress would be a superb partner now.

Craving company of any kind in the lead-up to Christmas, Jeff had gone straight from a one-day international against Pakistan in Gerry's corporate entertainment box at the Melbourne Cricket Ground to a gala event at the National Gallery of Victoria, celebrating a tour by the Paris Opera Ballet. The tearaway rocker had no real idea how he had ended up on the guest list for such a glittering *soirée*, especially since the Australian ballet's patron was none other than Marianna Dyson.

The Victorian Premier and his wife, who confessed that their daughters were his biggest fans, had made an unexpected beeline for the swarthy singer, and they were soon sipping cocktails in front of a painting by Sidney Nolan, discovering a common appreciation for Wassily Kandinsky's work. The elderly couple's task for the evening was to chaperone the principal dancer from the grand, old French company, and they had been begged to introduce her to the famous rock star.

'From the ridiculous to the sublime,' he told them, after describing his day first in English and then again in French for the benefit of the diminutive and delicately sculpted visitor.

He had said the very same thing to Lynn a few months ago while standing in the very same spot. The irresistible opportunity to revisit this memory and test their invisible elastic connection was aided by another tiny, white pill slipped down in the taxi between the two venues, later serving its purpose when it dulled the disappointment he felt on receiving not one hint of a response.

'What's the difference between an art critic and an art *connoisseur*?' the handsome charmer posed to the dignified party at his side, who all shrugged politely.

The rueful philosopher sighed and forced a smile. 'Both know what they're looking at, but only one understands why.'

This was how he had answered his sixteen-year-old muse. Back then, his thoughtful reply had triggered an in-depth exchange about the underlying sensuousness of art appreciation, laden with bubbling chemistry that set both lovers' passions alight in the very public arena. He was not surprised when only blank stares and a few more placatory grins came his way this time. Jeff could see Lynn's parents out of the corner of his eye. Paranoia suggested they were scrutinising him closely, but he was wise enough to realise

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this was most probably due to the effects of the drug on top of an afternoon of drinking. Who cared? He was no longer beholden to them in any way.

*Don't drink too much*, the twenty-year-old imagined escaping from the elegant woman's mouth. He raised his glass to the all-Australian couple on the other side of the hall and gave Lynn's mother one of his highest-octane smiles. The gracious lady flinched slightly, clutching her own champagne flute, before turning to Bart and suggesting they walk off in the opposite direction.

After a few paces however, Jeff noticed Marianna turn briefly. Had she only just noticed to whom he was speaking, or about what? Or even that he was speaking French? Perhaps she had secretly been impressed. Perhaps not. He watched her re-join her husband, who was sensibly keeping his distance. Feeling hot under the collar all of a sudden, the young man sensed the room closing in on him as panic invaded his senses. There was no invisible elastic connection after all. Who was he kidding?

The rock star spent that night in a hotel room with the prima ballerina, where she danced for him and with him, nude but for his tie knotted around her waist. He surrendered willingly to her lithe, supple frame and star-struck advances, finding the asinine discourse strangely comforting. There were worse ways to kill time, and for once he could proffer his own, genuine observations about Paris.

In the end, Jeff rode out Christmas Day and Boxing Day in a drunken and drug-induced stupor with a bunch of international students from RMIT and Melbourne University who couldn't afford to fly home for the festive season. They dubbed it their "Orphans' Christmas", and the displaced Sydneysider fitted right in. He paid for some typically classless entertainment recommended by one of the others, which he found as funny and titillating as he could through the hazy *mélange* of drugs. By the time he returned to his apartment, Melbourne's richest student was too far gone to care that he had broken all the promises he had made to himself after his mother died concerning substance use and abuse.

On Wednesday the twenty-seventh of December, with time having slowed to an absolute crawl, Jeff penned a song entitled "Broken" while straightening out after his Christmas bender. This was a cracker of a song, destined to make him a lot of money, yet he knew he would never be able to perform it live. It joined the swelling ranks of potential chart-toppers that weren't even candidates for singing in the shower without breaking down, but which would go on to be multi-platinum hits for other artists.

And thus on Thursday the twenty-eighth of December, the millionaire hermit tuned in to Lynn's TV Special in the privacy of his rented flat. It was the torture he deserved after the debauchery of the last few days. With the lyrics of his plaintive ballad still lying on his coffee table, he did his best to match his spirits to those of the show's bubbly host by blocking out the taste of her kisses and the pain of their absence tearing him in two. Her soulful voice melted his tired heart, which skipped a beat each and every time her blue eyes looked directly into the camera.

Good sense kicked in halfway through the self-inflicted emotional agony, and Jeff started to wonder exactly why he was putting himself through this misery. Just forget her, he told himself. He was on one hell of a ride without her these days. He didn't need her any more. His body was telling him so, with not a shred of recognition rising from below the belt. For the first time since the blonde beauty's departure, he found himself wishing they had never met.

How did the saying go: better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all?

Bullshit, he thought. Utter bullshit.

Gerry flew home from the Blake family Christmas in time for New Year's Eve, and things immediately took a turn for the better. Jeff had come through the lowest point of his life so far, and the concentrated accumulation of inorganic chemicals had eventually cleared out of his system. He made a promise to himself that he would take it easy over the next round of celebrations, secretly admitting it was a false hope. Gerry's younger sister had flown down from Sydney to spend New Year with her brother and their

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now super-famous childhood friend. She decided during this trip that they should all go skiing in the French Alps or Switzerland in February, and to her surprise, both men agreed.

Tammy had been shocked to see the dark and dashing sex symbol looking so unhealthy and had quizzed the star's manager as to why he had let his client get into this state. Her brother, as usual, had noticed nothing, both because his mate was a good actor and because Gerry only really cared about Gerry.

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Jeff took heart from his stumbling, tenuous recovery during January. He had arranged to spend some time in Canada, as the guest of a fellow songwriter with whom he had swapped demo' tapes over recent months. They rented a log cabin in the hills way north of Toronto and wrote some high quality material which the Canadian folk singer would later release in a series of mainstream albums. Both men were nocturnal beings, drinking rye whiskey well into the night while turning their ideas into music. Douglas would then sleep all day, leaving the Australian free to conduct his business over the telephone during working hours or to run in the clear, clean mountain air in an effort to reclaim some much needed fitness in preparation for the rigours of his next tour.

Also while in the stunning, rugged landscapes of Alberta, the generous benefactor with an ulterior motive made contact with a leading psychiatrist whose work on addiction he had admired after reading articles in a medical journal found in a waiting room somewhere or other. Such was the life of the rock star of the moment, who could no longer easily go out on his own, thereby necessitating him to spend an inordinate amount of time waiting for other, lesser mortals to convey him from place to place.

Professor Sarah Friedman was fascinated by Jeff Diamond's story, or rather the pieces of his story he chose to impart, and they worked together and played together in the name of science. Their project was a shining example of a using relationship, which the only guitar-toting honorary doctor of Toronto University would often quote in years to come when speaking to audiences far and wide. The rank outsider needed a professional accreditation to give validity to his theories on psychological trauma and addiction and to attract supplementary funding for the treatments' clinical trials. The academic, on the other side of the transaction, was over the moon to secure a walking, talking case study with an absolute passion for making sense of himself.

Miss Irony came to call yet again during this fascinating interlude in the onslaught of fame and fortune. Being immersed in the research over a three-week sabbatical, Jeff felt the happiest he had been since Lynn's departure, both because and in spite of coming face-to-face with his own "below the line" issues. This fact didn't surprise him, since the intellectual stimulation he found with Sarah was as close as he had come for a long while to enjoying female company beyond sex. Nonetheless, he caught himself on more than one occasion expecting too much, crashing down in flames when he recognised that the scientist could never give him what he had enjoyed with Lynn.

Or was his mind merely insisting she couldn't? Try as he might, the frustrated lab rat was unable to entertain the prospect that he might be about to replace the girl of his dreams and settle for a worthy substitute because it took him partway back to the paradise he had glimpsed.

To her credit, Sarah took the time for her handsome and intelligent subject to cross these hurdles without pressing him for the reasons why. Their research didn't depend on knowing the details of each atrocity to be visited on patients, since the list of damaging events was very long and wide-ranging.

'That's good,' Jeff smirked, "cause I wasn't going to spill my guts about that anyway. You're right. We don't need to know how, just what was the result and how do people work around it.'

The handsome celebrity slipped off the side of the bed and reached down for his clothes. Pulling on some shorts and slipping a T-shirt over his head, he turned to locate his cigarettes. He could feel Sarah's

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eyes following him all the while, and his head filled with melancholy and regret. It was a bad idea to get this close, even in the name of science, but she was an attractive woman, and they had spent the whole day together.

He walked over to draw the curtains on the distant, frozen landscape and dragged hard on his cigarette. 'You know, we should've done this in Queensland. Or even in LA. I'm not used to being so cold in January, spending so much time indoors.'

Turning away from the window, Jeff strode purposefully towards his suitcase and slipped his hand into a recessed pocket in its back wall. Sarah watched him carefully, wondering what he was looking for. It made her a little nervous when she thought back to his references to a violent adolescence. With great sleight of hand she saw him pop something into his mouth, before their eyes met and he continued to speak.

'It still blows my mind, you know, that less than six months ago my practical knowledge of the world was limited to its lower east side. Eastern Australia and South Island New Zealand, I mean. I never did get the whole "western society" nomenclature. Australia and New Zealand are about as far east as you can get, and we're still considered a western society. We're west of the US, I s'pose, if you don't factor in time. Go west and skip a day.'

Feeling the drug take hold of his senses, the tall man flopped down onto the end of the bed.

'You're ranting,' the professor issued an ingenuous critical observation. 'You're getting high, aren't you?'

'And only the capital cities, at that!' the superstar went on with a grin. 'Hope so.'

Sarah knew she should disapprove. 'What was that? What did you just take?'

Jeff shrugged. 'Nothing you need to be worried about.'

'We could take a walk,' the professor suggested, marvelling at another substantial mood swing taking place. 'What's wrong? This was your idea.'

Jeff sighed. 'Yeah, I know. Can't walk and work at the same time. Let's spend an hour or two here, and then we'll go grab a drink somewhere dark. I'd prefer to get all this junk out of my head before it turns into a song instead.'

The psychiatrist laughed out loud. What was the point of coming on all high and mighty with her superb lover? This conundrum of a man never ceased to amaze her with the constant dissonance between his words and actions. Jeff Diamond was a blatant hedonist who also wanted to change the world, all seemingly enacted by a perfect match of left and right brain function. Such an altruist, but also supremely self-absorbed; fun-loving one moment, spitting chips the next. Attentive and keen to please her in bed, yet he couldn't wait to put some distance between them immediately afterwards. And intelligent. So unbelievably intelligent.

'Sexy and smart: my favourite combination,' her self-assured bedfellow cocked his head, as if reading her mind. 'Say it, whatever it is, or leave it alone.'

'Shoot! Alright,' the sophisticated woman acquiesced, dressing quickly. 'I can see through you, you know. And I can mess with your head just as well, so leave it out, buddy. Let's keep the trauma causes as categories. We'd never manage to list them all anyway in the time we've got. It'll only trip us up later, when we're more under pressure. You said that the day before yesterday, and I thought you were nuts, smart-ass!'

'I am nuts,' her sarcastic chief lab' rat chuckled. 'Jeez, you're good, doc. Remind me to fuck you again tonight. So which categories do we have so far?'

The professor fastened a patent leather belt around her waist and rolled her eyes. 'I wish I could just say, "Go fuck yourself," but I won't. And you know it, don't you? You're a bastard, Jeff Diamond, but a

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fascinating bastard who also happens to be bankrolling my research, so I have to force myself to be nice to you.'

Picking up a sheet of paper from the circular, teak table, Jeff straddled the chair next to the tall brunette, leaned in and kissed her pouting lips. 'I'm sorry. I'm an asshole, as you Canadians say. Feel free to say whatever you want. I deserve it, and you're gorgeous. Now, categories... "Under six years of age, was I cherished by my parents and family just by virtue of my existence?" No. Can't say I was. I was the happy event that shouldn't have happened. My sister was too, but my parents were excited the first time. After a while, when my dad hardly ever came home anymore, for my mum I was just that kid who looked like a miniature version of her bloody husband. So strike, I guess. Next?'

Sarah wrote feverishly, only looking up when Jeff drew breath. 'Wow. That's a pretty horrible way to grow up. I'm really sorry to hear that.'

'Not your fault, I assume. It was a classic case of "more of the same",' the musician gave her a wry smile and a half-hearted impersonation of his mother's attitude. "'Ah, boy child..." *Yadda, yadda, yadda*. It just left me with an abject ambivalence towards my own flesh and blood. But you know, Sarah, I wasn't the only one. And as we've seen these last few days, there's people way worse affected than me.'

'This is interesting,' the professor raised her hand and looked into troubled eyes. 'Where's your grammar gone all of a sudden? Have you been listening to yourself over the last minute or so?'

'What? No, obviously not. Go on...'

'Jeff, it's like talking about this time in your life has caused you to regress to the speech patterns of someone much younger and unschooled. One moment you're saying "abject ambivalence towards my own flesh and blood", and then you can only find the most grunting of vocabulary. It's a fascinating response.'

'If you say so, doc,' the sexy superstar hid his distress with humour, his oft-used deflection technique. 'Mahatma Gandhi said something like "Happiness is when what you think, what you say, and what you do are in harmony." Did you know that? He was onto it too, babe. What's category number two?'

'Gandhi? Really?' his research bedfellow murmured with a modicum of impatience at the capricious attention span which the fast-acting drug brought to her serious data collection exercise, directing her eyes back to the notepad. "'Were you provided with adequate food, clothing, shelter and medical care?" That should be easy enough to answer.'

Jeff nodded. 'Yeah, to begin with. We had some sort of home nurse come after I was born, I think. So my grandmother told me a while back... I don't even know why we were talking about it. I was probably caught complaining about something, and she pulled me up on it.'

'Hold on for a sec'. You said, "to begin with",' the doctor jumped in when her rueful subject paused. 'Slow down a little. It wasn't always that way?'

The twenty-year-old shook his head. 'To tell you the truth, I don't really remember. I know we... my sister and I... used to take money from our mother's purse and buy groceries. Whatever we felt like. Nothing very nutritious! Smokes, if there was any change left over. And I know Lena used to steal clothes, but maybe not until she was older. Six and under we're talking about, aren't we?'

'Yes. What about your living arrangements?'

The superstar scoffed loudly, lighting yet another cigarette. 'My living arrangements? I don't remember any living arrangements. The opulent surrounds of our flat? The maid who came to clean up, and the cockroaches that loved to climb six flights of stairs? Get outta here! It's not like we had any sort of routine, I can tell you that much.'

'I mean your house, or wherever you lived,' the longsuffering woman teased. 'You know exactly what the classifications mean, so don't get all hard-done-by on me! Did you feel safe? Did the roof leak? Were you too cold, too warm? Did you have size-appropriate clothes?'

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Jeff tipped the chair backwards and stood up. To the psychiatrist's astonishment, beads of sweat were visible on his forehead, and his breathing had become erratic. Could a panic attack really be induced simply by talking about this man's childhood home? Indeed, their discussion appeared to trigger all manner of negative reactions, the most unhelpful of which was anger.

'All of the above,' his tone was almost mocking. 'Absolutely nothing about my living arrangements was safe. I can assure you of that. Jesus! This never gets any easier. I'm sorry. Clothes though? I guess they were OK. I wouldn't have cared about that.'

Sarah felt great pity for the quivering mess which was now pacing round the table, as if he were endeavouring to pluck up the courage to sit back down again. 'Is the agitation due to what you just swallowed? Or solely from having to talk about this? OK, sorry. Don't answer that if you don't want to. How old were you at that time?'

'Don't know. Seven or eight? I was in worse shape talking to the last shrink, so the pill's probably helping. Hope so, otherwise you're in for a real treat, baby! I do remember having to spend a day indoors because all my clothes were in the wash at the same time. In fact, I think I took them to the local launderette and told the woman my mum'd be back with the money. Then I realised I didn't have anything else to wear. Can't even remember how we got it all back!'

The songwriter's eyes suddenly darted upwards, staring out of the window. It had hit home exactly how much easier it had been to talk to Lynn; that somehow she had made him feel less ashamed. He had all but forgotten those sunny afternoons spent sitting on the edge of the dam, pausing between bouts of love- or music-making to answer another of his dream girl's empathetic questions. Anxiety had always reared its head, but in her company, its effects seemed to diminish quickly after the first churn of his stomach.

Dismissing the happy memories, the human case study picked up their questionnaire again. 'Come on. What's left? "Were you given opportunities for education and developing talents?" Yes, but not at home. At school, when I went after them. I'm an anomaly on this front, Sarah. I always went looking for information, even before starting school, so I can't tick this box. But this last one's a big joke... "Were you given age-appropriate boundaries, enforced without demeaning your value?" Fucking hell! Yeah, "Fucking hell" is what you should write down against this one.'

The long index finger of Jeff's left hand reached over and stabbed at the end of the professor's notes, coming to a discouraged rest on the paper. Her hand closed over his and squeezed it down until its palm was flat on the notepad. It was best not to press further on this issue. Instead, she read out the more specific categories for the six to eighteen age group: children who were subjected to abuse of any kind, whether verbal, emotional, physical or, of course, sexual; and also whether the children witnessed the abuse of others.

'Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes,' Jeff murmured, his head in his hands. 'But I can't give you any details. You have to understand. I'm sorry. I'm not prepared to put this into words. But yes, all of this happened to my sister and me, and my mother. And even to my dad by people who came to despise him. It was one unholy mess, and that's no exaggeration. We saw things and were made to do things that kids just aren't supposed to be a part of. It wasn't healthy, physically or mentally.'

Sarah gripped his clammy hand in hers, moved to tears. 'Gosh, I'm so sorry, Jeff. I had no idea things were so bad. I thought maybe one or two episodes of violence, but never that you lived in that type of environment permanently. It's OK. I don't need you to tell me. I'll write it up later.'

'Cheers, gorgeous,' the rock star breathed deeply and freed his fingers from her grasp. 'The adult onset categories here don't really apply to me. Any that do only build on what went before, so I can't honestly say that any specific trauma arose after I was eighteen. I pretty much lived on my own from fourteen onwards, so managed to stay away from any further shit.'

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He retrieved the questionnaire for a final scan down the list of typical events which caused long-term symptoms in adults: relationship break-up, business collapse, unexpected bereavement, domestic violence.

'They're much of the same core categories, but with a more adult slant,' the doctor smiled. 'Rape, physical trauma, war and catastrophic events.'

'It's only one category, if you think about it,' Jeff offered, lighting a cigarette and offering the packet to his companion.

'What's that?'

'Breach of trust in the world. It lets you down... You know, when it's not exactly how Louis Armstrong promised.'

Again, the handsome celebrity looked away, fighting back tears. He had lied about not incurring further damage as an adult, hadn't he? His mind pictured precisely where he was when Lynn had spoken this most *à propos* phrase, prising the guitar out of his hands and beginning to sing the song. It had indeed been a wonderful world for that brief period. His memory recalled the curvaceous instrument sitting across irresistible brown thighs, on a rug surrounded by eucalypts and willows by the dam at Coldwater Creek, and he steered his line of sight upwards, past her hidden breasts and those sportswoman's shoulders until they reached her smile, her blue eyes and long, golden hair blowing in the breeze.

On that particular afternoon, he recalled, the ambitious songwriter had just finished giving "Do As I Say" its *début* in front of his Number One Fan; a song which would go on to earn him a magnificent and perpetual income. Six months later, its framed double-platinum disc currently leaned up against the wall in his empty Richmond flat.

'Are you OK?'

Jeff jumped at the sound of Sarah's voice, half expecting to hear another's. 'Yep. I'm thinking of a very special time that's now gone, that's all. What's next?'

The telephone rang beside the bed. Both occupants went to answer it at the same time, but Jeff gently pressed down on his roommate's shoulder until she was seated again. It was Gerry calling from Melbourne, clearly excited about the news he needed to impart.

'Mate!' the celebrity shouted. 'What? Sure am. It's only cold if you go outside, you idiot.'

Sarah laughed loud enough for the indomitable accountant to pick up, and he was both surprised and apologetic that he had not expected his client to have company.

'Why not?' Jeff exclaimed. 'What time is it? That doesn't matter. Party time, mate!'

It transpired that Gerry was calling to make sure his friend was the first to know that Michael Parkinson, the British chat show host, had booked the musician for a whole hour-long episode. It was a big deal, his manager continued, since it would be only the second time an entire programme had been devoted to a single personality.

'I met him at the SCG,' the half-naked singer reminded his manager. 'We sat next to each other at the cricketers' breakfast. You should've been there too, remember? You had to cancel for some client thing.'

The academic looked on in surprise, listening to the subject of her very testing research behaving like a regular buffoon with his transpacific correspondent. The erstwhile sweat-drenched and angst-ridden patient had transformed again, full of the joys of spring. Once the call had been terminated, her curiosity got the better of her, and she asked him how he managed to switch *personæ* so seamlessly.

The young man chuckled, a little ashamed. 'Yeah, someone else used to wonder about that too.'

'The one you were thinking about earlier? A woman?'

The doctor was jealous, and Jeff smiled. 'The very same. My guardian angel.'

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'What happened to her?'

By the impish expression on the rock star's face, Sarah was frustrated to be toyed with again, yet she was interested to find out more. This arrogant upstart had wormed his way into her affections with no difficulty, and it was unnerving to discover a hint of heartbreak in this man who had women lining up in their hundreds wherever he went. Calmly dressing in a fresh, crisp shirt and donning his leather jacket, he stood tall and faced his determined inquisitor.

'I let her go,' Jeff answered, his eyes briefly giving away the very smallest of hints. 'Let's go for a drink. We can do the rest there. Bring your notebook. You need a drink.'

'I need a drink?' the woman gasped. 'You're a priceless fuck, Jeff Diamond, and an extreme asshole.'

The tired musician laughed at a poor rendition of the mildly obscene Australian label, holding the door open for her to exit ahead of him. Once they were out of the lift and walking through the hotel foyer, Sarah asked him to describe his state of mind while talking with Gerry over the telephone or while joking with her and the concierge while he had made their dinner reservation.

'Don't give me any sympathy,' he admitted without pathos. 'It's all an act. The whole fucking thing, recently. I have no idea who I am, doc. Years of practice at making life up.'

After a pleasant evening dining on seafood and steak, washed down with two bottles of wine and a few cocktails, Jeff walked his attractive colleague back to the hotel. Surprising her yet again, he left her at the lift doors, confessing his intention to stay out for a few more drinks. Sarah unwillingly accepted this dubious excuse, realising she should not expect to retain the attention of such an imperious man for any length of time.

The celebrity returned to the freezing night air, armed with the addresses for several local nightspots supplied by the helpful staff. Within an hour, he had met up with a new playmate, bought her two quick drinks and slipped her one of the special mouthfuls which always assured pleasant entertainment. Forethought had already seen a second hotel room booked, and then a third for good measure.

Jeff respected the eminent and flirtatious professor too much to use her so artlessly in his drunken state, though nowhere near enough to spend the night with her. Or with anyone else, for that matter. He knew he would be quizzed by Gerry as to why he had expensed so many rooms, already imagining the ebullient Sydney accent bellowing in his ear: "You rented three rooms in the same hotel on the same night? What the fuck were you up to?" Grimacing as the lift doors closed on him and his latest guest, he stifled a chuckle. "What the hell was he doing? Hide and seek?" he could hear the executive laughing with his PA, as he was entitled to. Indeed, what was he doing?

The next morning, over a languid breakfast and nursing a hangover, the twenty-year-old faced the maternal scolding of his research fellow, whose ego had been dented by his rejection, apportioning little sympathy for the seediness of his morning after.

'What was the most important lesson you learned during your teens?' she asked, pen poised to take dictation.

Jeff smiled, feeling the bile rising both physically and metaphorically. 'To inhibit animal behaviour, particularly when off my face with drink.'

Sarah's eyes met his, and her intriguing bad-boy winked. He was forgiven. Women always forgave him. It was such a pity that it counted for so little, since he was unable to forgive himself. He poured another cup of coffee and dropped in six lumps of sugar. Stirring vigorously, taking his frustrations out on the tepid liquid, he provided the explanation that her gaze demanded.

'Twisted, malformed instincts still take me by surprise all the time, so I'm learning every day. My mouth's easier to control than my fists, which might surprise you! And it's dangerous. I had absolutely the wrong role model for violent behaviour in my dad.'

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While they were talking, a member of the hotel's reception team approached their table, red-faced and flustered at having to interrupt a serious conversation involving her most favourite superstar. Jeff's breakfast companion excused herself to take a telephone call from the university, leaving him with his meal and his thoughts. What he had omitted to pass on to the researcher was that his sister had suffered a far worse fate than he had during those early years in Canley Vale. Three years older, Madalena Diamond had escaped the worst of their parents' physical abuse, since both families' cultures held females in subordination and therefore with fewer expectations. However, she had certainly suffered a great deal of sexual abuse, and at the hands of the worst of Sydney's underworld. Her brother's graphic depictions would doubtless have reduced the professor to tears at the thought of a young boy bearing witness to such demeaning acts, let alone hearing about the screams from behind the bedroom door and the guilt he still carried from not being able to do anything to help.

Furthermore, he refused to confide in Sarah that their father had actively discouraged his son from intervening, sometimes hitting him and other times booting him down several flights of concrete steps from their squalid, second-floor flat. These were atrocities he was likely to keep to himself for the rest of his life. Madalena would never hear these details, and certainly Gerry wouldn't either. The fewer people with access to this information the better, not least to minimise the chances of it slipping into the wrong hands. Such salacious gossip about Australia's hottest new star would no doubt spread like wildfire across a globe which was hungry for scandal.

For the remainder of this study, the team in Toronto was more interested in the way victims reacted to trauma and how they sought to compensate for their losses through addictive behaviour. Jeff and his fellow guinea pigs, who came from all walks of life, swapped experiences of rejection, shame and insecurity, finding they commonly addressed these by shrouding the traits they perceived as defective. All patients admitted to feelings of anger, resulting from resentment of a life which had dealt them such a raw deal. The danger of this implicit fury, kept firmly obscured by their masks, was that it tended to cause severe depression in virtually the whole sample, along with suicidal tendencies in many.

Of course, across the board, altering their state of mind with alcohol or other drugs became the easiest method of convincing others that there was nothing wrong with them. In addition, several reported a dependence on anything that could bring a sense of personal power, particularly sex. Listening to these stories of dominance and revenge were frightening, making it clear to Jeff and Sarah that reliable evidence existed to support the reasons why the abused often showed a propensity for becoming abusers themselves, and therewith an urgent imperative to find a way to rehabilitate them. Shivers ran down the young man's spine as he remembered the time he had been a hair's breadth away from raping Lynn Dyson, forevermore to be known as "the tennis skirt episode", and felt thankful that so far he had known when to stop. So far...

The longer the study continued, and the more data they collected, a second stark difference became apparent between the millionaire who was funding the program and the other participants: an unflinching resolve to be the instigator of lasting change. This was the phenomenon which was explicable to the philosopher only by the deeply-held belief in reincarnating souls which he had only ever shared with one person. Why, otherwise, was he the only one among his cohort not to be beset by an inferiority complex? Quite the opposite, in fact.

Jeff had known for many years that he stood apart from the rest, constantly at pains to play this useful characteristic down. It had been evident right through school and again in the present day, as demonstrated by the velocity with which his career had taken off. Whatever drove him, whether from within or without, was a force greater than Jeff Diamond. This man was only the nineteen-fifty-two vintage of an old soul passing through, with the misfortune to be delivered into the world as the second child of Pavel Diament. The nobody from Canley Vale harboured a need inside far stronger than the mere desire to

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turn such misfortune into a monumental vat of good fortune. Perhaps the same need that had seen him seek out Lynn Dyson.

No wonder the rising star felt so compelled to deliver tangible results from this piece of research! He had long held the suspicion that he was born preordained with this outlandish responsibility, and thankfully he had now garnered both the financial and intellectual means to do something about it.

As he had suggested to Lynn all those months ago, Maslow's Hierarchy had served its expected purpose nicely, and the patience and perseverance of this peculiar partnership was soon rewarded, with Doctor Friedman totally unaware of her financier's private commitment. The result was a seminal work linking the triad of trauma, mental illness and addiction presented to the Committee of Reactive Disorders, which would go on to achieve worldwide critical acclaim. Jeff remained relatively anonymous as its unqualified co-author, but nevertheless he was very proud of his contribution and anticipated it as a trigger for accelerating further research into new treatment patterns, including a better understanding of the requirement to supplement psychological therapies by fulfilling oft-neglected basic needs: sleep, exercise, relaxation and healthy nutrition.

It would prove difficult to pursue his own treatment plan once the rock star headed back out on the road with his bombastic, beer-swilling band. He was also eager to work on the more sophisticated layers of the hierarchy, such as learning to stay in a positive frame of mind and to do his best to control his environment, the groundwork for which had been laid during his time with a certain Australian tennis player. He smiled when he remembered the sixteen-year-old's amiable efforts to wean him off excess alcohol and her pointed criticism of the amount of time he spent in nightclubs and pubs instead of "recharging".

The stakeholder plan which his former girlfriend had encouraged him to maintain had certainly undergone a considerable workout in recent months. Some new names had been added, and others demoted. The same name remained steadfastly on the top row. No surprises there! Jeff wondered if his name might have cracked a mention on Lynn's plan now that her parents weren't able to oversee it quite so closely... Regardless, the ambitious celebrity was confident that he was putting his newfound fame and fortune to good use, which left him feeling a good deal happier than if he were simply amassing further fame and fortune and having it stagnate in some Swiss bank account.

On the night they put the final touches to their paper, the professor and the rock star shared a celebratory dinner at the Panorama restaurant in Toronto, overlooking spectacular city views. Sarah took the opportunity to proclaim her love for him and begged him to stay for longer, unaware of the unbroken bond which Jeff shared with an ex-girlfriend. The announcement did not come as a surprise to her dinner companion, who had watched many similarly-infatuated women dissolve into distraught tears. Even though her offer was rejected with great compassion, the shoe was firmly on the other foot, and blame was cast unfairly once again. Callous though it seemed, the lovelorn musician felt strong and satisfied with his ability to be honest and not simply cave in and prolong a relationship for the sake of not being alone.

The songwriter recalled the sorry situation into which he had tumbled several years earlier with Donna Watts, determined not to make the same mistake again. Theirs had been a hostage situation, in which neither party had been acting rationally. Similar to his mental state upon meeting Sarah, he had been in such a desperately low place that he sought refuge in the attractive television reporter; someone he could hang onto and let drag him up and out of the abyss. In those days, he had been too immature to stop himself latching on, and both suffered the consequences when they discovered that neither was the saviour they had expected.

Jeff understood what was happening this time, with another four years of self-awareness under his belt, and broke the dependency soon enough. However, his reliance on Lynn remained fully intact, confident that she was the key to helping him rise above the trauma and its exhausting after-effects. He had always known this, hadn't he? Therefore, departing for the Swiss Alps with Gerry and his kid sister, the rock star

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made the transition to Mister Life-and-Soul once more, ready to serve out the rest of the sentence Bart Dyson had imposed upon him.

Lynn would be proud of him. Hopefully.

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