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ECHO - SAMPLE PAGES

For Mum

1.

Caleb was still holding him when the paramedics arrived. Stupid to have called an ambulance – Gary was dead. Had to be dead. Couldn't breathe with his throat slit open like that. The ambos seemed to think so, too. They stopped short of the blood-slicked kitchen tiles, their eyes on Gary's limp form in his arms. A man and a woman, wearing blue uniforms and wary expressions. The woman was talking, but her words slipped past him, too formless to catch.

'It's too late,' he told her.

She stepped back. 'You got a knife there, mate? Something sharp?' Speaking slowly now, each syllable a distinct and well-formed shape.

'No.' The tightness didn't leave her face, so he added, 'I didn't kill him.'

'Anyone else in the house?'

'No, but Gary's kids'll be home from school soon. Don't let them see him.'

She exchanged a glance with her colleague. 'OK, how about you put Gary down now, let us check him out?'

He nodded, but couldn't seem to move. The ambos conferred, then ventured closer. They coaxed his hands loose and laid Gary gently on the floor, their fingers feeling for a pulse that couldn't be there. Blood on their gloves. On him, too – coating his hands and arms, soaking the front of his T-shirt. The material stuck to

his chest, still warm. Hands gripped him, urging him up, and he was somehow walking. Out through the living room, past the upended filing cabinet and slashed cushions, the shattered glass. Away from the terrible thing that used to be Gary.

He blinked in the pallid Melbourne sun. The woman's voice hummed faintly, but he gazed past her to the street. It looked the same as always – a row of blank-faced houses; trampolines in the front yard, labradoodles in the back. There was his car, two wheels up on the curb. He'd been finishing a job down the Peninsula when Gaz texted: a great result, back-slapping all round. It had been an hour before he'd read the message, another two in the car, stuck behind every double-B and ageing Volvo. He should have run the red lights. Broken the speed limits. The laws of physics.

#

Police lights strobed the street as dusk turned to darkness. Caleb sat on the back of the ambulance tray with a blanket around his shoulders and the company of a pale and silent constable who smelled of vomit. His own stomach churned. He couldn't rub the blood from his hands. It was in his pores, under his nails. He scrubbed them against his jeans as he watched strangers troop in and out of Gary's home. They carried clipboards and bags, and wore little cotton booties over their shoes. Across the road, the lights from the news vans illuminated the watching crowd: neighbours, reporters, kids on bikes. He was too far away to see their expressions, but could feel their excitement. A charge in the air like an approaching storm.

The constable snapped to attention as someone strode down the driveway towards them. It was the big detective, the one who'd searched him and seemed a little disappointed not to find the murder weapon. Around Caleb's age, mid-thirties at most, with

short-cropped hair and shoulders that challenged the seams of his suit. Telleco? Temenko? Tedesco.

Tedesco stopped in front of the young policeman. 'Move the reporters back from the tape, Constable. If you feel the urge to up-chuck again, aim it at them rather than the crime scene.' He turned to Caleb. 'A few more questions, Mr Zelic, then I'll get you to make your statement down the station.'

The easy rhythms of a dust-bowl country town in his speech, but his face was half-hidden by shadows. Caleb shifted a few steps to draw him into the light.

Tedesco glanced from him to the nearest streetlight. 'If it's too dark for you we can move closer to the house.'

Metres from Gary's body. The stench of blood and fear.

'Here's fine.'

'I take it you had more than just a business relationship with Senior Constable Marsden.'

'He's a friend.' No. No more present tense for Gary. From now on, only past: I knew a man called Gary Marsden, I loved him like a brother.

Tedesco was watching him: a face hewn from stone, with all the warmth to match. He pulled a notebook from his pocket.

'This urgent call he made, asking you to come, can you remember his exact words?'

'I can show you, it was a text.' His hand went to his pocket, found it empty. Shit. He patted his jeans. 'I've lost my phone. Is it in the house?'

'A text, not a call? Not too urgent, then. Could just be a coincidence he asked you to come.'

'No. Gaz always texted me, everyone does. And he was worried. He always used correct grammar, but this was all over the place. Something like, "Scott after me. Come my house. Urgent. Don't talk anyone. Anyone." All in capitals.'

Tedesco flicked slowly through his notebook, then wrote. Careful letters and punctuation, a firm, clear hand. He'd be able to read that back in court without a stumble. Gaz would have approved.

He kept his pen poised. 'Who's Scott?'

'I don't know.'

'I don't care what dodgy dealings your company's involved in, Mr Zelic. I'm homicide, not fraud, not narcotics. So what are we talking about here? A deal gone wrong? In over your heads with someone?'

'No, there's nothing like that. Trust Works is legit. We do corporate security, fraud investigation, that sort of thing. My partner's an ex-cop – Frankie Reynolds. Ask around, half the force can vouch for her.'

'And Senior Constable Marsden? How does he fit in?'

'He was just helping out on an insurance case, earning a bit of extra cash.'

It had been a flash of fuck-I'm-good inspiration over Friday-night beers with Gaz. A solution to a job that was way too big for them. One that Frankie had tried to talk him out of accepting. Why the hell hadn't he listened to her?

Tedesco was talking again, asking if Gaz had... something. Many problems? No, that couldn't be right.

'Sorry, what?'

'Money problems,' Tedesco said. 'You said he was earning extra cash. Did he have money problems?'

'No, but he's got a young family, money always comes in handy. Look, the case has to be connected. It's a couple of big warehouse robberies. Gaz thought the thieves had an inside contact.'

'Constable Marsden wasn't killed by some dodgy warehouse manager, Mr Zelic. He was executed. Executed – that's a word you don't hear thrown around the outer suburbs too often.'

A happy-looking word: a little smile for the first syllable, a soft pucker for the third.

'Blood all over the walls and ceiling,' Tedesco waited a beat. 'All over you. That's someone sending a message. Who? And what?'

'I don't know. He was just talking to people. Nothing dangerous, nothing... I don't know.'

The detective's eyes pinned him. Grey; the colour of granite, not sky. If the silent stare was an interrogation technique, it was wasted on him: he'd always found silence safer than words.

'Right,' Tedesco finally said. 'Come this way. I'll get someone to take you to the station.'

'Wait. The dog, the kids' dog, I didn't see it. Is it...?'

The detective's words were lost as he turned away, but Caleb caught his expression. A flash of real emotion: sorrow. Fuck. Poor bloody kids. Tedesco was halfway across the road, striding towards the crowd. Later, deal with it all later. Just hold it the fuck together now. He jogged to catch up and followed Tedesco under the police tape. Cameras turned their black snouts towards him. Lights, thrusting microphones, a blurred roar of sound. He froze.

Tedesco was in front of him, his mouth moving quickly. Something about parachutes? Parasites?

'I don't understand,' Caleb said, then realised he was signing. He tried again in English.

The detective gripped his arm and hauled him towards a patrol car, half pushed him inside. The door slammed shut, but couldn't block the hungry faces.

Caleb closed his eyes and turned off his aids.

Scott. A soft name, just sibilance and air. Who the hell was he? And why had Tedesco taken twenty seconds to flick through a clearly blank notebook when Caleb had mentioned his name?

2.

He showered and dumped his bloodied clothes in the apartment block's rubbish skip, showered again. A glimpse of something Halloween-like in the bathroom mirror: skin white against dark hair, black pits for eyes. What now? Try to sleep? Eat? He wandered into the living room. The pink walls and striped orange furniture jarred, even in the dimness. They were remnants of the previous tenant, along with the purple carpet and lingering scent of incense. Frankie had winced at the colours when she'd first visited, and given him a tin of white paint as a housewarming present. In the eighteen months since, he'd got as far as moving it from the floor to the hall table. Ten litres. Would that be enough to re-paint Gary's kitchen? Have to hose it down first. Scrub the walls and ceiling. The floor.

Something terrible rose inside him, clawing to get out. Move. Move and keep moving. He strode from the room and was halfway to the front door when the strobe lights began to flash: someone ringing the doorbell. It was Frankie. She was wearing her usual jeans and battered leather jacket; her short, grey hair purple-tipped and scarecrow-wild.

'Cal.' She hefted her backpack onto her shoulder and opened her arms. 'Fuck, mate. I'm so sorry.'

He leaned into her bony embrace, blinking against the sudden burning in his eyes.

She squeezed hard, then let go. '... home? I've... hours...'

‘What?’

She peered at him, then flipped the light switch. He flinched in the sudden brightness.

‘When did you get home?’ she said slowly. ‘I’ve been texting you for hours.’

‘I’ve lost my phone. I’ll look for it later, I have to go now.’ The words caught on his tongue; too fast for his mouth. ‘I have to talk to everyone. Somebody has to know who Scott is.’ He stepped forward, but Frankie was blocking the doorway, her face oddly blank.

‘Cal, it’s one a.m.’

‘Oh.’ He looked at his watch. His hand was shaking.

She draped an arm across his shoulders, tall enough for it not to be too much of a stretch.

‘Come on,’ she said, and steered him into the living room. ‘Sit down. I’ll be back in a sec.’ She disappeared into the kitchen.

He dropped his head into his hands. Three days ago, he’d sat on this couch and convinced Gaz to help with the case. It was an insurance job – a couple of professional hits on a Coburg warehouse and the theft of two million dollars’ worth of cigarettes. Gaz was just doing a few interviews, hunting around for similar cases. Three days. Seventy-two hours. What the fuck could have happened in that time?

‘Executed... Blood all over the walls and ceiling.’

A touch on his shoulder. Frankie was standing over him, holding a mug that smelled like cat food.

‘Creamed mushroom,’ she said, setting it on the coffee table.

He stared at it: Frankie’s idea of food preparation was to open a bag of salt and vinegar chips.

‘You made soup?’

‘Made? Give me a fucking break, it’s from a tin. It was either that or Weet-Bix.’ She slumped onto the chair opposite and nudged

her backpack with her foot. 'I brought Johnny along, too. Figured you wouldn't have anything stronger than beer here.'

A drink would be good. Bad. Terrible for Frankie. She'd been dry for six years, but when they'd first met, back in his early days as an insurance investigator, she'd worn the scent of whisky like perfume.

'Maybe later,' he said.

'Fuck, Cal, I don't know what to say. You found him? Jesus.' She ran a hand through her hair, standing it on end. 'And the phone – how'd you manage to call the cops?'

Clutching Gary's phone. Speaking into the silence, praying someone would hear, someone would come.

'I dialled and talked. The lead detective's a guy called Tedesco. Know him?'

She squinted, then shook her head. 'Must be after my time. What's the story? Are you a suspect? The bastards told me fuck-all.' She looked a little bewildered by her ex-colleagues' lack of love.

'I don't think so. Everyone calmed down a lot when they realised I didn't have a knife.'

'You don't think so? Jesus Cal, why didn't you ask for an interpreter?'

Heat flushed his face. 'Because I didn't need a fucking interpreter.'

'Don't get your dick in a twist. You and I both know you struggle sometimes. Like when you're tired, or distressed, or people are throwing questions at you. I'd be surprised if you got half of what they said.'

'I got everything. Tedesco thinks Gaz was into something dodgy. Us, too. He wouldn't listen to me about the insurance case.'

'The warehouse job? What's that got to do with it?'

'Gaz texted, said someone called Scott was after him.' He swallowed. 'I didn't get it until it was too late.'

‘He called me, too.’ She looked away. ‘I let it go through to voicemail. I was in the middle of... Fuck.’

God, who else had Gaz tried to reach out to?

‘What did he say in the message? Anything about the job or Scott?’

‘Nothing, just to call back. But Cal, there’s no-one called Scott involved in the case.’

‘Are you sure? There are a lot of employees at the warehouse. Then there’s the security company, the...’

‘Mate, I’ve been so far up those guys’ arses I know who needs more fibre in their diet – there’s no Scott. And nothing about the job makes me think the thieves are violent.’

‘You said a security guard was hurt in the second robbery.’

‘Mild concussion, barely had a bump. Almost feels like they went out of their way not to hurt him.’ She tapped the arm of her chair, an arrhythmic pattern that involved every finger. ‘How was Gary... Was he... Did it feel professional? How’d they get in?’

‘Broke in the front door.’ No, that wasn’t right. Standing on Gary’s porch, the winter sun behind him, shining on an undamaged lock. ‘God. He opened it. He opened the door to them.’

‘Would he have checked before opening it?’

‘A cop with young kids? Every time.’

‘So it was someone who looked harmless – a charity collector, a delivery guy.’

But he’d taught Gaz how to watch, back when they were kids. How to read people’s hands and eyes. How to know when a sideways glance meant he should run, when it meant he should throw the first punch. Could he have got it that wrong? Opened the door to some guy carrying a clipboard and a knife?

He met Frankie’s pale eyes. ‘It was someone he knew.’

She stayed silent. Sitting very still now, her hands folded in her lap.

‘Two people,’ he said. ‘Maybe three. Gaz knew how to fight, but there was no damage in the hallway. One on either side, one for his legs, straight to the back of the house, away from the neighbours. They killed the dog to shut it up, then wrecked the place. Took a fair while doing it – ripped every cushion, tipped out the drawers, smashed the TV and computer.’

What had come first, the killing or the destruction? Don’t think about Gary’s sprawled body, his blank eyes, just the room. Books strewn across it; the spray of blood across the pages.

‘They wrecked the place, then killed him. I think they made him kneel.’ A fist in his hair, the soft skin of his throat exposed. Did he plead? Bargain? A flash of silver and the cold burn of the blade. ‘He didn’t die straight away. The blood... it sprayed.’ He blinked and refocused. Frankie’s eyes were wet. ‘Why wreck the place?’ he said. ‘Why risk the time?’

‘Looking for something.’

‘They wouldn’t have had to search – Gaz would have given it to them. The kids were due home. Sharon, too. Nothing would have been more important to him than keeping them safe.’

‘Maybe the killers were sending a message.’

‘Detective Tedesco agrees with you.’

‘Smart man.’

‘Not that smart if he thinks Gaz was bent.’

She didn’t say anything, but the tapping started up again.

‘Just say it,’ he said.

‘Why did Tedesco jump straight to that?’

‘Because he’s an idiot.’

‘Mate, in thirty years on the force, I never met a stupid homicide cop. Arseholes, sure, but no idiots.’ She patted the air. ‘Settle down. I’m not saying Gary was bent, just that you should back off and let Tedesco do his job.’

‘I can’t just... I asked him to do it, Frankie. I dumped him right

in the middle of it and I didn't have a fucking clue.' Something squeezed his throat.

'No-one did. Because it's not connected.'

She kept talking, but he let his gaze drift away. Words, more words, but none of them could change the truth.

She smacked his arm. 'Fucking look at me when I'm talking to you. What are you? Three?'

'I don't need a pep talk, Frankie.'

'I'm not giving you a bloody pep talk, I'm setting you straight.' She dropped her gaze to his hands and he realised he was rubbing them on his jeans. He held them still.

'Look,' she said. 'If it'll help set your mind at ease, we can have a poke around tomorrow, ask a few questions. OK? Great. Now eat that soup so I can stop looking at it. The colour of fucking cat sick.'

A layer of grey scum had formed across the soup. He should eat it: not eating was the first sign. Then not sleeping, then not functioning. If you were lucky, it ended with a friend helping you start again in a tiny apartment with pink walls and striped orange furniture.

He forced down a mouthful. 'Thanks.'

'You like it? I've got some stale Weet-Bix for dessert.'

3.

Gary was gripping his shoulders with bloodied hands, shaking him.

‘They killed the dog, Cal. Why did you open the door?’

He wrenched awake, his breath coming in panicky gasps. Gary kept shaking him. A flailing moment trapped inside the nightmare before he worked it out: six a.m. and his pillow alarm was vibrating. Christ. He fumbled for the off-switch, then swung his legs out of bed and stumbled into his running clothes; there was no way he was getting back to sleep now.

Into the bathroom for a quick piss and a handful of water. His aids lay like tiny pink snails on the vanity. Expensive enough to put a serious dent in his bank account, small enough to hide under his hair. They changed the silence in his ears into distant sounds; blurred and directionless, like the murmurings of an underwater world. His hand hovered over them. Stupid not to use them: a chance to catch a warning horn or accelerating truck. And every other untranslatable hum and rumble. No, not yet. A long run by the river first. Nothing but footfall and breath, the cold sting of the wind in his face. He turned, almost expecting to see Kat in the doorway, eyes heavy with sleep, but carrying the clear warning to be careful on the roads. Funny how an absence could carry so much weight.

He found Frankie sprawled on the couch. She’d sent him to bed around two, saying she might as well stay for the ‘few fucking hours’ sleep’ she was going to get. He was pretty sure she was

snoring. Her mouth was open, hair matted: an oddly reassuring sight. Starting Trust Works with her five years before had been one of his smarter decisions – there wasn't much in the world Frankie hadn't already faced and survived. Possibly due to her capacity to sleep through anything.

He set her phone to go off at 7.30, added a few five-minute reminders, and bent to put it by her ear. Paused. Something wasn't right. He could smell... He scanned the floor, then dropped to his hands and knees. Under the couch lay a bottle of Johnny Walker Red. He pulled it out: half empty. Fuck. Fuck. Six years on the wagon and she had to choose now to fall off. His fist tightened around the bottle. What now? Leave it out to confront her? Pour it down the sink? Over her head?

He shoved it back under the couch and went for a run.

#

They were on their way by 8.30, Frankie driving while he skim-read the case notes she'd printed out. At regular, terrifying intervals she attempted to sign with him. She'd picked up a handful of Auslan over the years, most of it profane. And slow. So slow.

'Man good,' she signed as she turned north onto St George's Road. 'Twenty years.' She abandoned the wheel to make the X shape for 'work'.

Probably talking about the security guard they were on their way to interview, but he wasn't about to extend the conversation by asking.

'Hurt. No remember. Sad head.'

Good facial expressions to accompany her signing, a big improvement. Pity it meant she was looking at him instead of the road. His foot pressed against an imaginary brake as they drifted into the path of an oncoming semitrailer.

‘We’ll both have sad heads if you don’t look at the fucking road.’

She nudged the wheel with one hand and used the other to give him the universal ‘fuck you’ sign. He was definitely driving next time. Except his car was still parked outside Gary’s house. It was going to be a while before he could face going back there for it.

‘His name...’ She wedged the wheel between her elbows and began finger-spelling at a glacial speed. One fist on top of the other – G. A stab at her third finger: I.

He glanced at the folder: Giannopoulos. They were going to die.

‘Arnie Giannopoulos,’ he said. ‘Sixty years old. Been with City Sentry Security for twenty years. Has mild concussion and can’t remember anything about the robbery.’ He pointed out the window. ‘Thompson Street’s the next right.’

Frankie gave the road a cursory glance and turned in front of a speeding delivery van.

When he opened his eyes again, they were pulling up outside a dilapidated Californian bungalow.

‘OK if I do the talking?’ Frankie asked as they got out of the car.

Code for ‘*Are you with it enough to follow two people in a conversation?*’

‘Sure.’

‘Because he took a bit of a shine to me.’

‘Shit, really?’ That meant he was playing bad cop to her good, a role reversal that never sat well.

He eyed the house as they walked to the door. It needed re-stumping, re-roofing, and some serious attention paid to the weatherboards, but there were new security bars on the windows. Sawdust from the drill holes still specked the window ledges. He nodded towards them as they waited for someone to answer Frankie’s knock.

‘New locks, too,’ she said.

The sun caught her face as she turned. Frankie could usually pass for a cranky sixteen-year-old boy, but every one of her fifty-seven years showed this morning: sagging skin and pink-rimmed eyes, a hollowness to her cheeks. The bottle had been gone by the time he'd returned from his run. Neither of them had mentioned it.

The door opened a few inches and a man peered at them past a security chain. His long face was a mess of yellowing bruises. One ear was swollen and butterfly tape held together the raw edges of a scar that ran from his bloodshot eye to his lip. A deliberate cut, straight and deep.

Caleb glanced at Frankie – that was a lot more damage than the single blow to the head the police report had detailed.

'New,' she mouthed.

'Not the police again,' Arnie said. Going for disgruntled impatience, but he was scanning the street behind them. A lot of twitching and blinking.

Frankie gave him an obvious once-over. 'You're not looking too good there, Arnie. What's happened?'

'Bit of an accident.'

Caleb missed Frankie's reply, but Arnie clutched his tattered blue dressing gown to his throat. 'No,' he said. 'Not here. Come in.' He unchained the door and ushered them inside, locking it securely behind them.

'Police?' Caleb signed to Frankie as they followed the guard down a dark hallway. Former Sergeant Francesca Reynolds just grinned.

Arnie led them into a dimly lit living room and slumped into an armchair. The room smelled of ancient potpourri and unwashed skin. China kittens and puppies crowded the mantelpiece and framed tapestries of farmyard scenes lined the walls. Even the lounge suite continued the theme: cows and horses, a gentle

sunrise across green pastures. Either Arnie had once had a wife, or he was struggling with a split personality.

The guard was mid-rant, his arms crossed awkwardly across his chest ‘... to be... people and... got rights...’

Shit. He’d miss half the conversation in this light. Time to put his bad-cop powers to good use. He crossed the room and stood over Arnie. He held the guard’s blinking gaze, bent down and switched on a table lamp. A rosy glow illuminated Arnie’s face. Not quite the intimidating wattage he’d envisaged. The kittens on the lampshade didn’t help much, either. Avoiding Frankie’s eye, he went to lean against the mantelpiece.

‘Sorry, Arnie,’ Frankie said. ‘Do you mind if I sit down? It was a long day yesterday.’

‘Oh.’ Arnie lowered his arms. ‘Sorry, love, of course. You’re in a hard job for a girl, eh, lady.’

Frankie smiled demurely and settled herself next to the guard. ‘Not as hard as yours. You look like you’ve been in the wars since I saw you.’

Her sweet-little-thing act always freaked Caleb out: he kept expecting her head to rotate 360 degrees. He let her work her dark magic while he watched Arnie. Short, choppy sentences, dry lips pecking at his words like a hen’s beak. Clear consonants apart from the dropped Gs. An easy read, but why the nerves? Most men settled quickly on the rare occasions Frankie opted for charm, but Arnie looked ready to cry. Be interesting to see how he’d respond to a little snooping. He watched for a few more sentences, then peeled himself from the mantelpiece and wandered from the room. Arnie shifted restlessly in his chair, but made no move to stop him.

Master bedroom first. More cutesy figurines on the dressing table. He picked up a dense-looking shepherd, then wiped a thick layer of dust from his fingers. Not the treasured shrine to

a long-gone wife then, just the belongings of a man who couldn't find the energy to change unwanted surroundings. Moving right along – no personal comparisons to be made here. Wardrobe next. No wall safe behind the sour-smelling clothes or scuffed shoes. None behind the tapestry of gambolling lambs. Into the kitchen. An ancient stove and fridge, no microwave. If Arnie was on the take, he was being remarkably disciplined about spending the money.

He moved towards the back door, then stopped. A paler patch shone on the floorboards. An area the size of a man's body had been scrubbed clean. Dark stripes still showed where something had seeped between the planks. This was where Arnie's attackers had caught up with him. A lot of blood for one cut. Maybe Arnie was a bleeder. A cold sweat broke out across his forehead. He took a moment, then shoved his hands in his pockets and strolled back into the living room. Frankie looked at him and frowned.

He took up his place by the mantelpiece and focused on Arnie.

'... last Tuesday,' the guard was saying. 'Just a stupid accident. Had a few drinks down the pub with me mate, Pearose. Can't hold it like I used to. Fell over on the way home. Flat on me face, blood everywhere. Pearose reckons it's lucky I didn't kill meself.'

Pearose? That couldn't be right. He made a mental note to check it with Frankie.

'You went drinking two days after the robbery?' Frankie asked.

'Yeah, couple of drinks with a mate. Nothing wrong with that.'

'While you were concussed?'

Arnie's mouth hung open for a moment 'Mild concussion.' He attempted a smile. 'I've got a thick skull.'

Frankie shook her head. 'Arnie, we know what happened – someone bashed you. You witnessed something during the robbery and someone hurt you to shut you up.'

'No, I...'

'He really hurt you, didn't he? Punched you, kicked you.' She laid her hand on the guard's. 'Used a knife.'

'No.' Arnie clutched the neck of his dressing gown. 'I fell. I fell and, and there was, there was glass.'

Enough.

'One of his mates held you down while he cut you,' Caleb said. Arnie's eyes locked on his. 'What?'

'In your own home. Where you thought you were safe. What do you think he'll do to you when he finds out that you've informed on him?'

'W-what?'

'Because that's what I'm going to do the minute we leave here – put the word around that you're a dog. Those shiny, new bars on the window won't stop him. Or the expensive new locks. A sledgehammer to the door, down the hallway, and he's in your room. With that knife.'

Arnie's hand twitched towards his cheek. 'I fell over.'

'I've seen what he can do with a blade, Arnie. He killed a cop yesterday, a friend of mine. Slit his throat. Did it nice and slow, so Gaz knew what was happening. So he could watch his blood pump all over the walls and the ceiling. All over his kids' toys.' And he was somehow across the room, leaning over the cowering guard. 'Do you know what that looks like, Arnie? What it fucking smells like?'

A pain in his wrist: Frankie pulling him away. He stepped back, his breath heaving in his chest. Frankie shot him a back-the-fuck-off look, but Arnie was reaching a hand towards him.

'Please, you can't tell him. He'll kill me.'

'Who, Arnie? We can't protect you if you don't tell us.'

The guard shook his head like a cornered animal.

'We won't tell anyone it came from you, Arnie. Not your employers, not the police. No-one.'

Arnie jerked back. 'You're not cops?'

Shit. Amateur fucking mistake.

The guard struggled to his feet. 'Bastards, coming around here. Get out.'

Frankie was speaking, her hands making soothing motions.

'Get out. Get the fuck out.' Spit flecked Arnie's mouth. He flung an arm towards the door and his dressing gown fell open to reveal a pale and hairless chest. A red scar marred his skin, a hand-span wide. He yanked the gown closed, but not before Caleb had made sense of the mark. Bile rose in his throat.

Someone had carved the letter S into Arnie's chest.