

# **the wrong hospital - book 1**

## ***chapter 1: she cut herself with ribbons***

they made love within a few hours of first meeting. angels wept. within a week he had fallen in love with her by a bend in the river close to a bridge and an island but it was not clear if she had fallen in love with him and he did not hear the sighing of the river gods, the shrill mocking laughter of the pantomime horses or the howling of the rag dolls. all that would come later and back then the secrets of mountains were unknown to him.

she cut herself with ribbons then she cut herself with stars, then she married money, then she married cars. then i married ribbons, then i married scars, then she fucked wild horses in the back seat of my car, then she said her name was jesus in the back seat of my car. then she married strangers and hung around in bars and the secrets of mountains remained unknown to him. last i heard she was living in a bus station in county kilkenny.

he liked to cook. clams in tomato, onion, garlic and coriander sauce. sunday brunch - lamb chops, hash browns and the same tomato, onion, garlic and coriander sauce. soups and stews too but what he really liked to cook was chinese dumplings. if not hearing from her was an olympic sport he would be king.

she was the queen of indifference and he was the prince of time. she insisted on boundaries then broke them every three seconds. she thought he was a toy but he was the prince of time and time can destroy many and most things except time. she always did exactly the opposite of what she wanted so wherever he was she wasn't. and wherever she was she wasn't and love is just a four letter word.

eat me said alice. so he did. as almost every idiot moon knows clam chowder like most soups and stews is better on the second day. on the first day god made cake, time and broken things. on the second day he made rivers of stars and threw a little madness into the mix and on the third day he made more broken things and sent out invitations.

on the fourth day god invented french fries and blue cheese sauce and he fixed all the broken things he'd made previously. then he invented spit, rust and nails then combed his hair with a silver spoon. then he created whales, sharks, doves and tenderness then cast a veil of mystery over all that was worth knowing and a veil of silence over all that was worth saying and a veil of idiocy over all that was worth doing. yeah he was kinda busy on the fourth day.

then he instructed his angels tell them not of the treasure of the oneness for they will surely mistake it for gold, tell them not of the secrets of rivers, wind and rain for they will surely mistake them for silver and tell them not of the rivers of stars in her blood for they will surely mistake them for lies. then god invented cinema, long weekends, vice and dentistry. then he invented canada and moved there and opened a chain of butter thumping clinics - a business he had once run successfully years before. yes let's hear it for butter thumping.

fragments. stumbling around, over and thru' fragments. composed, not in bad shape for a bum, but stumbling around like one. a friend of mine is writing a screenplay about the sometimes sober kid. in the screenplay the kid has lost his ability to paint and starts to fall and disappear into the spaces and cracks between things. a spell has been cast upon him, he has to drink hard liquor to stay real, to stop himself falling and disappearing forever into the spaces between things. the writer contacted me twenty years ago on a wet and boring sunday afternoon when she could think of nothing better to do. in the current rewrite nets are strung all over the bar where he now lives to stop him disappearing into space but really she should just let him fall.

darling be home soon. in the garden of good and evil, love invites and embraces grief. grief stumbles, hesitates and trembles for without love there is no grief. wisdom sharpens his failing blade, eternity checks and corrects his failing clocks inside whose works flowers secretly bloom and fade and plot his downfall degradation and destruction. time's broken arrows wither to dust but in the garden of good and evil, love embraces grief and grief embraces time.

as the broken arrows of time breathe their last, they whisper her name and worship her. all universes, known and unknown, implode. enter the prince of time. walk a mile in his shoes. note the wings at his feet, liquor smoke and mirrors on his breath, blood on his hands and rivers of stars in his eyes. doves surround him. he opens his mouth to speak but eagles and not words escape him. he wraps himself in a blanket of dust, lays himself gently down, weeps then falls asleep. and in the garden of good and evil, love embraces time and time embraces dust.

as jackson browne used to say - in the end there is one dance and you do it alone. the dream is not over and thus endeth the first chapter.

darlin' be home soon.

## chapter 2: then she cut herself with stars

eat me said alice. and he did. then she cut herself with stars. four in the morning and he'd been painting badly all day and all night. his horses had all come second at the track and he'd bet them on the nose. he was in the cathedral business and he had more rooms than he knew about or realised. it takes a thousand men a hundred years to build a cathedral and many men die in the making of a cathedral and he had built many despite the tricks of time.

she changed her boundaries in harmony with the ticking of clocks, changed her shoes endlessly, painted her nails religiously while he tried to write poetry with a gun then she cut herself with stars. and the river rolled along empty and cold and the moon hung over the wrong hospital like the central character in islands in the stream.

in the 50's it seems everyone was trying to write the great american novel and with the town and the city i don't think kerouac failed. i was born in the 50's in a place called glasgow. there was no colour there so god invented jim baxter. just to make me happy. god and his angels have been kind to me. if only the same could be said about the rag dolls and the river gods. then she cut herself with ribbons, then she cut herself with stars. then she took a little pill, then she took another. hey mary don't you weep and don't you mourn.

he studied what was left of his good looks and found there was nothing left then he painted all the next day and all the next night. these days mostly he painted angels. he couldn't remember what he used to paint before he started painting angels - something to do with alcohol and chain-smoking. then he remembered the thing he didn't want to remember. mostly he'd painted her. he sent out for alcohol and cigarettes then painted all the next day and all the next night. dawn found a gentle rain falling on the roof of the wrong hospital. even tho' it was now morning the moon still hung in the sky like an evil eye and our hero slept on the floor in a blanket of dust. then she took a little pill, then she took another and he dreamed of lamb chops, pork sausages, hash browns with tomato, onion, garlic and coriander sauce as the shadows played tricks on the rag dolls and pantomime horses in the cold morning light in grounds of the wrong hospital.

it was five in the morning, he didn't sleep long. he worked on 5 little paintings of drinkers, then 5 little paintings of poets then went for a stroll in the grounds and gardens. the rag dolls threw stones at him, the pantomime horses kicked him but he didn't seem to notice. he just walked right thru' them as if they weren't there. he contemplated the flowers and the flowers contemplated him. the rag dolls spat at him but in reality they spat at themselves. he contemplated the rivers of stars in her blood and the rivers of stars in her blood contemplated him. and the river gods smiled and laughed and exchanged secrets between themselves. he saw universes in a raindrop sitting on a leaf and

thought of his mother. clarity is paramount in the cathedral business but with him clarity rarely lasted long.

everything dies baby that's a fact but maybe everything that dies some day comes back, put your make-up on, fix your hair up pretty and meet me tonight in atlantic city - said the bishop to the actress. yup, tender is the night. and angelic voices whispered to him yes there is indeed comfort. and thus comforted he returned to his studio like a king without a kingdom and resumed work on his five little pictures of drinkers and the five little pictures of poets. but the poets started drinking and the drinkers started writing poetry but with guns and not words and eventually they shot all the poets. a doctor was sent for but of course it was too late. all the poets were dead and the drinkers' poetry just didn't cut it. he abandoned this series of paintings and resumed work on a twelve headed angel and a sixteen headed angel.

sometimes we all have a black day at the office.

### chapter 3: we do not need a dancing master

he adored her. but she didn't want to be adored. it is the heart that teaches refinement and dignity and not a dancing master said mrs yepanchin to her daughters in dostoyevsky's masterpiece the idiot. and no we do not need a dancing master.

dreams within dreams. the drinkers regretted killing the poets so they prayed to the angels and the birds of the sky. and the angels and birds brought the poets back to life. life would be such a bummer without poetry. both drinkers and poets promised to stay away from guns and it was in this fashion that our hero was able to resume his series of paintings of poets and drinkers - but only under the strictest medical supervision. and thus was born that magnificent series of paintings - poets shooting drinkers, drinkers throwing themselves off tall buildings, poets shooting poets, drinkers falling off highwires, poets robbing banks and blowing up trains, drinkers shooting rats and poets shooting stars. it all ended badly. the angels and the birds of the sky regretted bringing the poets back to life. they blamed the drinkers for their prayers. quite simply it would have been best for everyone if the drinkers had just been left alone. and of course all the magnificent paintings were destroyed in the wars between the rag dolls and the river gods.

rope ladder to the moon, i'm still climbing it today with her image haunting me every step of the way. there was a rope ladder in the grounds of the wrong hospital that led all the way to the moon but nobody had ever succeeded in climbing it. most of the pantomime horses had tried but had won only serious injuries for themselves and it was this that lay behind their bad attitude to almost everything. the ladder had been planted in the grounds by the river gods at the time of their first war with the rag dolls in the hope that it would seduce the rag dolls into climbing to doom and oblivion but for once the river gods' thinking failed them and the rag dolls let the ladder remain as an eternal monument to this failure. rope ladder to the moon - me i'm still climbing it today.

life imitates art as art imitates life. the creative process is both joyous and painful, complex and simple and all in no small measure. it is contradictory yet clear, elusive yet constant, realities within realities, illusions within illusions, dreams within dreams, both profound and shallow.

the rope ladder was something of a trojan horse but made out of rope and not wood. its function had been the destruction of the rag dolls and so far it had failed in its mission but i'm still climbing it and i don't have a wooden heart. the stars are my companions, the stars in her blood, even when the poets are shooting them. yup rope ladder to the moon i'm still climbing it today with her image haunting me every step of the way. the medication is not working. rehabilitation is not working but the cathedrals still stand in their glory bathed in the light of sun, moon and stars.

my grandfather's name was jimmy strain and i was his favourite. it caused a lot of bother back then within the family in the 1950's but i was too young to notice or understand but i did wonder in those days why everyone within a hundred miles of glasgow was called jim or jimmy. maybe it had something to do with hummingbirds or a rose tattoo or even dog roses. yeah probably something to do with dog roses.

a white rose, a glass of wine, a restaurant table. quiet, alone and remembering when you were still mine. there are advantages in being a veteran, if only i knew what they were. black and white photographs of you live in my heart and when i bleed i bleed in black and white and i bleed your name.

and then he remembered sunlight playing in the small hairs on the back of her neck and he poured himself a strong one. now the sun is cold and the new day seems old. and no we do not need a dancing master.

#### **chapter 4: her mouth is the sacred heart**

four in the morning, painting a six headed angel and a seven headed angel and he hasn't a clue. five in the morning, painting a twelve headed angel and now a sixteen and now a seventeen headed angel and still he hasn't a clue. his companions are doubt, whisky and dead poets and the medication is not working. and she's in india riding water buffalo, now cave dwelling in namibia, drinking yak's milk from a broken cup in nepal, now waltzing with dolphins off the iberian coast, shopping now in new york, now walking thru' a gateless gate in tibet and christmas yet to come. yes anywhere and with anyone that will take her as far as possible away from him and his stupid clumsy graceless six and sixteen headed angels.

alone. without you. when i grow up i'm gonna be an actress, a poet, wild horses, a wilderness, then i'm gonna be a postcard, a cathedral, war and peace, love and hate, albatross trousers, creation and destruction. and when i grow up some more i'm gonna be the end of all things and the beginning of all things, then i'll be all broken things, then i'll mend all broken things, then i'll be a butter thumping clinic. then when i grow up some more i'm gonna be a mountain, an open window, my parents' ashes, a paper boat, a memory, a stolen trombone, a saxophone swallowed by a child, an open secret and a closed door. and when i grow up some more i'll be alone. without you.

when i grow up i'm gonna be the wind in your hair and the sunlight playing with the small hairs on the back of your neck, then i'm gonna be alone. without you. now the sun is cold and the new day seems old.

he combed his hair with a borrowed spoon then headed off to the dead lions department where the dreams of poets are stored. but she wasn't there. nor were his dreams of her. he tried the janitor's room where they used to drink tea and wine and make love but she wasn't there nor were his dreams of her.

when i grow up i'm gonna be elvis on the radio, a small but important experiment at an oxbridge university, the wings of a dove, the eye of a hawk and the claws of an eagle, a gentle rain on the roof of the wrong hospital, a stranger in a strange land, a maker of paper boats and a graveyard in kilkenny. when i grow up i'll be the entry point to another world, bob seger's driver, the prayers of the innocent and the grace that answers them. i will be all things to all men. and then i'll be alone. without you.

the shaving razor's cold and it stings. but the secrets of mountains were watching him, watching and waiting. and as he inched bit by bit towards them, they inched bit by bit towards him. when i grow up i wanna be the scar that never heals on the sacred heart. dukes and earls and actors play their



part in her menagerie but her face is a work of art, her mouth is the sacred heart. yeah her mouth is the sacred heart.

he went looking for the sacred heart in the janitor's room but she wasn't there. he went looking in the grounds and gardens but she wasn't there. and for good measure the rag dolls spat at him and stoned him and the pantomime horses laughed as they kicked him but just as before he didn't notice at all. he was looking for the sacred heart. her face is a work of art, her mouth is the sacred heart. he stood looking for a long time beyond the tall gates of the wrong hospital and far away in a field a dog barked and the girl the dog was with laughed silently and the fairies that lived in her voice laughed silently too and the prince heard this silent laughter and he too laughed silently. this silent laughter enraged the rag dolls and pantomime horses to a most unfortunate degree and they escalated their attacks on the prince but just as before he simply didn't notice. her face is a work of art, her mouth is the sacred heart.

he returned to the studio and painted all night and all the next day and what he painted was silent laughter and a girl in a field with a dog.

### chapter 5: elvis has left the building

i am the scar on the sacred heart. i am the scar that never heals. but jesus loves me and i am not alone, i am not without love and i am not without wisdom. some say my name is chaos but i prefer elvis or ace or simply the prince of time. king amongst men is good, king of all men is better but i prefer the prince of time. yes jesus loves me, the bible tells me so. i'll settle for the prince of time.

i am the scar on the sacred heart. i am the scar that never heals and i am the prince of time. her face is a work of art, her mouth is the sacred heart, i am the rivers of stars in her blood and the medication is not working. and the secrets of mountains edged a little closer towards him. and our hero the prince edged a little closer towards the secrets of mountains. the river gods of course were watching and they smiled and were quietly impressed. they had taken him for an idiot but like proud edward's army they were being forced to think again.

agitated, he knows he's lost something but he can't figure why or how or what or who. birds of the sky follow him adoringly and rivers of stars run lonesomely thru' his veins. agitated. composure not even a distant memory. he knows the answer lies in a secret garden but secret gardens by their very nature are not easy to find. a dog barks in a secret garden not a million miles away from here and his agitation increases. he can hear that which is far from him but not that which is near. he stumbles and falls and is taken back to the studio and wrapped in a blanket of dust. he sleeps for a long long time and when he wakes he paints all the sounds that he can hear from far away and then paints all the sounds near to him that he can't hear and then he paints silence but the sun is cold and the new day seems old.

many rivers to cross. once upon a time he had indeed been the sometimes sober kid and the fastest gun in the west but that was long ago. now he was old and no longer annoyingly pretty and fast and dangerous. his body rattled and shook a lot, his teeth were falling out and his mind was a ruin. rembrandt had the same problem and utrillo was worse. in time he would hire a nurse to help him hold his brushes steady. when the ponies started running for him again he would choose a good looking nurse with long long legs.

yes indeed he was the prince of time and yes time was on his side but he was not time itself. he was merely a prince, a servant of time. he could move forward in time and step into the future for short periods and he could regain his prime and step backwards into the past for short periods but he was not time's master, in truth he was time's servant. we are all servants of time and tho' he'd heard it said some of us are prisoners and some of us are guards he didn't quite agree. and then time moved on whilst standing still and the birds of the sky that live in her hair gave him their blessing and prayed for him and still the medication would not work. time would not and could not heal time. i guess there are some wounds that just won't heal.

he wrote her a letter but then realised he didn't quite know where to send it. make a list of all the things you love more than me. let it be a long list. then feed it to your horse or to your dogs. or better still, throw a party and feed it to your friends and neighbours - this list of all the things you love more than me. and then he awoke and fell into a dream. and that's how the web was woven, from one dream to another.

there is more than one prince of time, gentle reader. modigliani was one, elvis was too. oscar wilde too. there are generally a few around at any given moment but our one is the scar on the sacred heart. they are easily recognisable, these princes of time, by the ability to appear astonishingly quickly as if out of nowhere and to disappear disconcertingly and equally quickly without even a hint of a puff of smoke, a clap of thunder or a hint of sulphur. they generally talk well, these princes of time, generally dress well and display casually and elegantly a strong sense and understanding of style. when they move quickly they cannot be seen and when they move slowly they don't move at all. time is not linear. it can move in one thousand and one directions at one and the same time and when it moves slowly - really, gentle reader, you don't want to know. time is not a simple case of moving forward or back. and yes elvis has left the building and thus endeth the first lesson.

## chapter 6: so you want to be a rock and roll star

gimme a ticket for an airplane, got no time for a fast train, lonely days are gone, i'm going home, my baby she wrote me a letter. this sort of stuff ran thru' his brain endlessly like an army of headless chickens. his brain was a radio time could not switch off or destroy and every half decent record ever made in the 60's ran thru' his brain permanently one after another and at full blast.

when i was a kid the population of glasgow was around one and a half million but in many ways it was a small town. i wasn't even born there. i was born in a mental hospital twentyfive miles out of town but glasgow is where i did what passes for growing up. and we lived right in the heart of the city right next to the river. my grandmother, old minnie strain, dropped me on my head when i was six months old and that i guess was the start of it all. i was quiet for a few days and then it was realised i had a fractured skull. nobody blamed my grandmother. but me i knew it was the work of the river gods. they were gunning for me even then. and it's been that way ever since.

the first thing i learned about indian fighting was to wait for daylight. in those days in glasgow there were very few cars. we had trams. coal, milk and the like were delivered by horse. horses were a common sight on our streets and when evening came along the lamplighters, men with some kinda flame on a stick, hit the streets to light the streetlamps. it's safe to say it was a different world then.

altho' we were supposed to be living in the biggest slum in europe our stairs were scrubbed clean every day. apartment blocks back then were known as tenements. most tenements had an area at the back known as the back-court. there was generally a washhouse there and a space to hang washing which was mostly used by kids playing football and it was here that glasgow's back-court singers would gather to sing. they were mostly gypsies and that was how they made their money - singing in glasgow's back-courts. people would hang from their windows to listen and if they liked them they would throw pennies. and if they didn't they would throw things other than pennies. i loved glasgow's back-court singers. most of them looked like tramps but sang like angels and i found them poetic. i wrote my first poem aged eight about the bridge and the river and a tramp who lived under the bridge just a couple of blocks from my home.

hanging? this was in the days before television. in the poor districts people spent a lot of their time just hanging (pronounced hinging) - hanging from their windows above the streets and watching the world go by. hanging was big in glasgow. we lived opposite a big police station and on saturday nights we'd watch the cops on horses, batons drawn, racing into the city centre to quell the riots after the saturday football matches. yup, hanging was big in glasgow. and football too. and the city centre was just the other side of the bridge. alcohol and violence were our main exports then and in those times a man was judged by his talent and capacity for both.

as a boy in those days glasgow was always a thing of black and white to me. then along came a drunken fool of a football player and together god and jim baxter invented colour. the first time i came across the words artist, genius and elegance all in one sentence was in an article in the sports pages about slim jim baxter and i was smitten. the disease descended upon me there and then and has remained with me every second of every hour ever since.

baxter would move his shoulder half an inch and six men would fall over. he'd move a hip a fraction of an inch and three men would die. he'd turn his head just a fraction and find his team was six goals and many streets ahead of the opposition. this man was a god but he rarely knew what was going on around him most of the time because most of the time he was drunk. but i didn't care. i quit attending church and devoted myself to my new god and i've paid the price for it every hour of every day since but i see no cause for complaint.

and then my ma and pa moved us away from glasgow. yes i loved glasgow's back-court singers and yes i loved jimmy baxter and yes it's been said many times before - you can take the boy out of glasgow but you can't take glasgow out of the boy. yup i'm a glasgow boy - and all these years later i still am.

true to the flag. and his flag was her. and somewhere in sunshine or in shadow in a secret garden closer to here than you think a lonesome trumpet played mac the knife for the prince of time.

### *chapter 7: battering the sun with a stick*

the princess and the prince discuss what's real and what is not. nothing is real outside the gates of eden. and now that the last lonesome buffalo has gone, battering the sun with a stick is no longer the fun thing it once was. once upon a time battering the sun with a stick was the only game in town but now, now that the magic has gone, now that the last lonesome buffalo has left town, battering the sun with a stick just doesn't have the same edge, just doesn't cut it any more.

many sad and beautiful paintings line the walls of the wrong hospital. some are in offices, some are in private rooms and many more are stored and unseen face to face and back to back in the dust and in the shadowy corners of the janitor's room. these paintings in time will become known as the missing years - the lost years, the years he spent without her.

everything dies baby that's a fact but maybe everything that dies some day comes back. he knew she'd come back. and after thirty years she did. then left again almost immediately this time with the jack of diamonds.

the king was in his counting house counting all his money, the queen was in her chamber eating bread and honey and the prince of time was at his prayers. his cathedrals still stood proud and tall in the sun but his heart was in shreds. the secrets of mountains edged closer to him and he edged closer to the secrets of mountains. and far away in a secret garden a dog barked and a girl laughed. or perhaps it was the girl who barked and the dog that laughed. and the river gods - as usual they were up to no good.

he prayed for her safety and for her serenity. he prayed that one day the secrets of mountains would touch her. he prayed she would no longer cut herself with stars or with ribbons or with scars and he prayed for the river gods that they might see the error of their ways. then he prayed for her sanity and cared little for his own. then an almost eternal night descended upon him and he didn't paint again for a long long time.

poets were sent for but they couldn't please him. fiddlers and pipers were sent for but they couldn't move him. acrobats and actors were sent for but they couldn't release him and the tall gates of the wrong hospital cast a long shadow in his heart that pierced it darkly night after night after night. fine victuals and fine wines were presented to him but he would not eat or drink and he became a shadow - just another shadow amongst the many whispering and screaming her name in the grounds of the wrong hospital.

he spent a long time as a shadow - let's keep it simple, let's just agree and accept he wasn't happy as a shadow. time? once we figure it out it's generally too late. time is a tricky bastard. and now that the last lonesome buffalo has gone, now that the joy had gone out of butter thumping and battering the sun with a stick and now that he'd found being a shadow wasn't all it had been cracked up to be he decided it was time to go back to his easel and brushes - time to resume painting. and this time he'd try not to drink the turpentine.

he painted wolves, insects, doves, tigers, lions, whales, sharks, snakes, monkeys, seas, oceans, drowning kangaroos, drowning rats, drowning buildings and typhoons but no matter what he painted everything looked like her. everything he painted looked like her, praised her, sang of her, worshipped and adored her, whispered or screamed her name. his heart and his nerves were in shreds. again. it was almost as bad as being a shadow.

and the angels of the lord took pity on him and sayeth unto him - paint us o' prince of time. and he did. and that was the start of him painting angels. and painting angels was the start of him feeling better but please note, gentle reader, there is no trace here of the word - recovery. she had turned him into a pile of mush. his mind was a ruin, his nerves fractured and his heart took a holiday and never came back. this was not the type of thing you recover from with a cup of coffee and a slice of buttered toast.

yeah crack up town, crack up city. yes he could still paint but he could do little else. except think of her and dream of her. and the secrets of mountains edged a little closer towards him and he edged a little closer towards them. and far far away in a field a dog laughed and a girl barked.

and now that the last lonesome buffalo has gone there was just him and his paintings and a broken dream. and the locked gates of the wrong hospital.

a chapter a day keeps the doctor away. and thus endeth the seventh chapter.

## chapter 8: eternal companions

this. that. emergency. he adored her but she didn't want to be adored. so he cracked up and they put him in the wrong hospital and threw away the keys. she was indifferent of course but in the real world it was a well established fact that she was never where or what or who she appeared to be. the rivers of stars that ran thru' her veins ran thru' his veins too. she was he and he was she so no matter how far she tried to run from him she was always confronted by the haunting fact that her blood was his and his blood was hers. they were in fact eternal companions, one and the same person. two hearts, one blood. she was he and he was she so no matter how far she ran or tried to run or with whom or what or where she found she just couldn't get away from herself. she was his blood and he was her blood. and she found this difficult at times. and she added this to her list of great and deep resentments. she should and could have become a great artist but her habit of leaving most places even before arriving often tripped her up and got in her way and her requirements regarding doing everything, seeing everything and being everything without fully realising that doing everything, seeing everything and being everything is in fact quite a lot in itself and often very tiring - that often brought her down and tripped her up too.

yeah, this and that. eternal companions. sometimes together, sometimes apart. sometimes together, sometimes not. two hearts, one blood. and her blood was his only companion. darlin' be home soon. this. that. emergency.

his life was hanging by a thread. but no big deal. at any given moment everybody's life is hanging by a thread. this. that. emergency. then she cut herself with ribbons. then she cut herself with stars. then she said her name was jesus in the back seat of my car. this. that. emergency.

the lord giveth. and the lord taketh away. victory is mine sayeth the lord. and the secrets of mountains moved a little closer to the prince and the prince moved a little closer towards the secrets of mountains.

suicidal for two or three years. no big deal. just suicidal for two or three years. he had form and background in this regard - let's not forget he had been born in a mental hospital. his good looks were gone, she was gone and his teeth were falling out. the secrets of mountains visited him and they spoke of foothills, recovery and paper boats. often he would visit his old dreams stored in the dead lions department but his old dreams were of no use to him now. often he would haunt cheap hotels, the janitor's room at the wrong hospital and the dead lions department. they had made love in these places often and often he would return to these places in search of the sacred heart but it was no use. his search was futile. but the secrets of mountains visited him regularly and regularly they discussed foothills, rivers of stars and paper boats. he studied esoteric lore seeking maps and locations for the secret gardens of the world but this too proved fruitless. but the secrets of mountains continued with their visits and slowly he learned one doesn't seek out or seek after the



sacred heart - the sacred heart seeks you. when the pupil is ready the master will indeed come. and a friend recommended a good dentist.

recovery and relapse. recovery and relapse. emergency this. emergency that. crack up city, crack up town. dreams within dreams.

the drugs didn't work. alcohol didn't work. therapy and other women didn't work. but the secrets of mountains patiently held his hand and continued their visits and their discussions about foothills, rivers of stars and paper boats and eventually he started building paper boats - an armada of paper boats - and he sent them out into the world in search of the sacred heart. and this time it wouldn't be him looking for the sacred heart - but an armada of paper boats.

the river gods were impressed. this time they'd thought they had him beat. their respect for him grew. and he resumed his painting of angels.

eternal companions. sometimes together. sometimes not.

this. that. emergency. recovery and relapse. relapse and recovery. eternal companions. infernal companions. once upon a time there had been a time when she adored him. why did she stop, why would she now no longer love him back - something to do with the river gods he guessed, eternal companions and infernal companions. there was a time when rama had to do without sita. there was a time when lancelot had to do without his lance. there was a time to enter the forest and a time not to enter the forest. there was a time to keep to the the path and a time to leave the path. there was a time when krishna had to do without radha and radha had to do without krishna. there was a time for arjuna to fire his arrows and a time for him not to fire. there was a time the good lord left jesus alone on the cross. there was a time to clean your gun and dream of galveston. internal companions. external companions.

this emergency. that emergency. and as a gentle rain fell on the roof and in the gardens and grounds of the wrong hospital he cleaned his gun and dreamed of galveston while krishna and radha walked hand in hand in the moonlight by the lake in the grounds of the wrong hospital. internal companions and external companions.

holy and profane, profound and shallow, proud and shameless the moonlight played on the surface of the waters of the lake in the grounds of the wrong hospital and he cleaned his gun and dreamed

of galveston. and as he dreamed, arjuna fired his flaming arrows at the moonlight's reflections on the surface of the waters of the lake and he hit his mark every single time.

and in a dark corner a leaf fell from an old oak as the bishop said to the actress yes my dear you can check out any time you like but you can never leave.

### chapter 9: the long road north

betrayed. disconnection. alone. the long road north. verlaine shot rimbaud. and in a dream rimbaud shot verlaine. and in the real world john wayne shot liberty valance. emergency this. emergency that. relapse and recovery. recovery and relapse.

i remember her walking out on the water, walking out on the sea to the horizon then coming back. hell of a trick. then i remember her walking out on me and not coming back. years later she came back. then left again. and she did this several times. and i ended up in the wrong hospital. crack up city. crack up town.

my mother never told me about this. nobody warned me. and i've always bruised kinda easy. another big trick of hers was silence. she was good at silence. she could do the silence of drums and the silence of thunder. and she could do the silence of drowning kangaroos. the river gods were her teachers and they taught her well. or maybe it was she who taught the river gods. and her hair it hung over her shoulder tied up with a black velvet band.

betrayed. disconnection. alone. and the long road north beckoned. relapse and recovery. recovery and relapse. and the wrong hospital waited. and her hair it hung over her shoulder tied up with a black velvet band. and then when the sun shone and played with the small hairs on the back of her neck....

he never did figure out why she left. but that's a lie. of course he knew. he just didn't want to admit it. just as she didn't want to admit that she loved him, just as she didn't want to admit she did everything and anything she possibly could do not to accept that she would return to him lifetime after lifetime. for now the wrong hospital was the right place for him and for now she could have the whole fucking world. so he waited. and the wrong hospital waited with him. and watched. and waited.

hey diddle diddle, a cat and a fiddle, a cow jumped over the moon, a little dog laughed, a girl in a field barked and a dish ran away with a spoon. get real shorty. get real. he would not accept her denial. and the hall of mirrors waited for them both.

crime and punishment. in his eyes his only crime was that he adored her. the authorities at the wrong hospital saw it differently. but his paper boats sailed on. in his eyes her only crime was that she refused to adore him. and far away in a field a dog laughed and a girl barked. emergency this. emergency that. disconnected. alone. and the long road north beckoned and he followed. he started

the engine, switched on the lights, hit the road jack and don't you come back no more, pointed the car north and headed to the higher ground, then next the foothills, then next the mountains and at last he was again amongst his own. and the earth spoke to him and the air spoke to him. and the winds tried to blow him back down to the foothills but he declined the winds' kind invitation.

high in the mountains there was no betrayal, no disconnection and he was not alone. but he was not high in the mountains. there was no car. no right minded person would let him near a car. the car was not real, the mountains were not real, but the wrong hospital was and the matter of his release was a delicate and complex issue.

his paper boats played on the lake for a few days and nights and then one by one they sank. betrayed. disconnected. alone. and the hall of mirrors waited for them both.

## chapter 10: he cleaned his gun

he remembered the glass bead game, he remembered emmett grogan and ringolevio. he remembered the back streets of naples and the small hairs on the back of her neck and then he remembered the fall. ah yes our old friend the fall. king of the streets one minute then along comes our old friend the fall.

with your long blond hair and your eyes of blue the only thing i ever get from you is sorrow. girls used to break into song when he walked down the street. that's how good looking he'd been before his good looks fucked off. it was fun while it lasted and now he was a patient in the wrong hospital and his teeth were falling out. so good looking had he been in fact that most people hated the sight of him. most people hate good looking people. and they waited and prayed for his fall. and these days there were so many falls. god was kind and he answered their prayers to a high degree.

the prince now - his feet had gone. his legs, knees and hips had gone. his back had gone and his right hand and arm were on the way out. these days there were so many falls. god was indeed kind. he had indeed answered their prayers to a high degree.

when the prince got out of bed that morning he fell. he picked himself up then fell again and his days and nights pretty much continued in this vein. when his right hand and arm gave out he started painting with his left. his was a sensitive soul but somehow somewhere along the road he had acquired a certain toughness that permitted him to endure. he lived mostly on alcohol and cigarettes smuggled into the hospital for him by the birds of the sky and the living dreams of dead poets. the janitor was a big help too and the librarians in the dead lions department simply adored him.

frankie miller came to mind then thoughts of frankie drifted away. if ever one man defined the glasgow that i knew and loved and understood frankie miller was that man. but here in the wrong hospital nobody gives a toss about glasgow - except of course frankie miller and me. me and frankie share the same birthday and sometimes i wonder what that's all about.

and then the river gods hit him, hit him with all they had. and all they had was quite a lot. they hit him hard then they hit him hard again. falling down was what he did these days but somehow he stood tall and just looked at them and the river gods knew it was all over. they wouldn't come for him again. they would find another fool to pick on and to pester. the tramp who lived under the bridge just a couple of blocks from where i used to live and who used to beg for pennies on the bridge above - well, somebody gave him a twenty pound note. in those days you could live for a year on a twenty pound note but he spent it all much too quickly and was dead within a week. in those days hanging was big in glasgow but for some people hanging wasn't good enough.

and time played his usual tricks. sometimes complex, sometimes simple. nothing happening, then everything happening all at once. things connected then disjointed and disconnected. time slipping thru' and above, around, over and beyond, destroying some things and healing others. time could not heal or cure or destroy himself so he healed or cured or destroyed others according to his fancy. he had a sense of humour and he let his princes run free most of the time, rarely interfered with them, let them roll back the years or take a few steps forward in time but always and only depending on his moods.

time takes a cigarette and puts it in your mouth but there is no smoking in the dead lions department - unless of course you are the prince of time. kerouac haunted north beach when i lived there. his ghost was everywhere, watching everything, constantly reading, writing, smoking and drinking, reciting and watching. not even an idiot could fail to bump into kerouac's ghost in north beach.

in his art school days his great hero had been modigliani and forty odd years later his great hero was still modigliani. funny how some things just don't change. and tell me where do you go to my lovely when you're alone in your bed...

and where have all the flowers gone...

some things just can't be reached. some targets just can't be hit. o' really said the prince. o' really said the poets. some targets will always remain out of reach. o' really said the dreamers. o' really said arjuna. some targets are simply unrealistic, some situations simply have to be accepted. o' really said geronimo.

and the prince cleaned his gun and dreamed of galveston. yup it was all over now for the river gods.

### chapter 11: war and peace

she was the queen of indifference. he was the scar on the lips of the sacred heart. sometimes together. sometimes apart. she was the queen of silence and he was a chocolate soldier melting in her arms.

yup time passes slowly up here in the mountains. yes sir, they had made love all over the grounds and in the gardens of the wrong hospital, in the shadows by the lake, in the dirt and dust of the janitor's room and in the dead lions department but after the fall she didn't visit once. she was indeed the queen of indifference.

she was the main event. he was the undercard. in a clearing stands a boxer - but no we won't go there. she was the moon and the stars. he was a rippling shadow on the lake. he lived in her and she lived in him and this is exactly what she refused to accept and it drove her mad in her way and it drove him mad in his and he ended up in the wrong hospital and she ended up everywhere and nowhere and anywhere as long as it was a million miles away from him. last known address - a bus station in county kilkenny.

in some cultures it is understood that the stars in the sky are the souls of dead poets and this sure as hell beats watching coronation street on a loop. they say you should write about what you know and he knew about her and the stars and the souls of dead poets. he knew the rivers of stars in her blood - he lived there. he knew the birds of the sky that lived in her hair - they prayed for him. he knew the gentle winds that kissed the small hairs on the back of her neck when she walked her dogs by the ocean - he was that wind and she was the ocean. he knew the madness in her heart and the madness in his own.

she was his soul and he was hers and her denial drove him mad and beyond madness. and when the authorities at the wrong hospital read his notes they grew pale and worried and lost all hope. and they were wrong, wrong, wrong. simply wrong.

sometimes together. sometimes apart. sometimes together, sometimes not. he was right and they were wrong. lifetime after lifetime she would come back to him. the battle was over. and he let her go.

he was the scar on the lips of the sacred heart. he was the rivers of stars that lived in the blood of the queen of indifference. and he adored her. no matter what. she was the sacred heart. and he was the scar on her lips.

rope ladder to the moon, i'm still climbing it today with her image haunting me every step of the way. and now is not a good time to fall. and far away in a bus station in kilkenny a girl with a dog laughed silently. the battle is over. the authorities and the river gods have lost. but there is a war still to be won.

the prince finally made it to the top of the ladder and took his first few steps on the moon. waiting for him there was a girl in a field with a dog. the girl laughed silently, the dog laughed loudly and the prince of time wept. and a curtain of serenity drew itself gently and discreetly over them and made them invisible for a while. knock, knock, knocking on heaven's door.

her mouth is the sacred heart and i am the scar on the lips of the sacred heart. the battle is over but there is a war still to be won. but, gentle reader, we are getting a little ahead of ourselves - such are the tricks of time.



## chapter 12: my career in films

in death in venice i had more than three parts. i was the young pretty boy, the old nervous composer and i was the plague. i was also the gypsy musicians. in the deer hunter i played the trees. in the deer hunter when de niro asks walken what do you like best about hunting walken answers with a far away look - the trees - i like the trees. and i was the trees in the deer hunter. and in a tale of two cities i played sydney carton's collars. in the desert fox i was a tank and in a man for all seasons i played winter. yup it was an actor's life for me. i had a broad range then but these days are gone now. life is much more confined here in the wrong hospital.

i liked it best when i was the trees in the deer hunter. in islands in the stream i was a grain of sand and in gone with the wind i was an explosion and a handsome blade of grass. but these days are gone now. life is quiet these days here in the wrong hospital.

they say every poet must have an unrequited love but i'm not sure that i agree. once upon a time i wrote a book about unrequited love but the authorities took it away and burned it. i think the book was called the missing years. one is not allowed to both paint and write. one has to learn to live quietly in a box called a cell and one has to be nice to the authorities at all times. i'm not certain that i fully understand the instructions. and yesterday they increased my medication. they told me it was a kind of reward - like an award for my career in films.

her face is a work of art. her mouth is the sacred heart. i don't know where these words come from but i think it has something to do with her, her blood, the rivers of stars that live in her blood and the birds of the sky that live in her hair - the same birds of the sky that pray for me at night. maybe it has something to do with bubbles in a stream - i guess i'll never know.

the librarians in the dead lions department are rather fond of me. any time i need a dead lion they land on a sixpence for me and deliver. and i'm grateful. i study the dreams of dead poets but it gets me nowhere. it neither helps nor hinders, like a building on fire on a hot day or like a gateless gate that never opens or closes because it is indeed gateless.

no smoke without fire. i remember serving robert redford a beer in the washington square bar and grill in san francisco in 1979. no tip. how come he gets to be a big movie star and apart from death in venice and the trees in the deer hunter i only get to play blood stained shirt collars and small explosions - i pondered this for a while but there was no immediate answer or explanation. and as an award they've increased my medication again.

poet, painter, gardener and gentleman. all of these things and none of these things. it's an actor's life for me and my name is chaos. and i played the trees in the deer hunter. no actual deer hunting of course - just trees. yeah me and christopher walken we liked the trees. painting by numbers now in a doll's house. close to the edge, now beyond the edge. poet, painter, gardener, thief. and dreams within dreams. and death lives on every street corner. and in the garden of good and evil, love embraces grief and grief embraces time.

an idiot wind blasted its way thru' the garden of good and evil and an idiot moon cast dark dangerous shadows all around the grounds and gardens of the wrong hospital frightening the pantomime horses and rag dolls and stampeding them towards and into the lake where they collided with a new armada of paper boats. the paper boats so frightened, so distressed and disturbed the rag dolls and pantomime horses that they stampeded again running off screaming in all directions and ending up god alone knows where.

the wind continued to blast its way thru' the wards and corridors of the wrong hospital. and in the dust and dirt of the janitor's room the ghosts of their love tried and failed to contact each other. life is a contradictory business. the further away she got from him somehow conversely the closer she got. something to do with the other side of the mountain i guess.

if he could at any given moment he would die in her arms. but in the real world you can't kill time, not even a prince of time so he contented himself with being the trees that grow in her heart. and in the wrong hospital her arms and her heart and the trees that grew there were a long long way away. last known address - a bus station in county kilkenny.

wingless birds dreamed of him. acrobats wanted to be him. and he dreamed of her endlessly. dreams within dreams. and she was the sacred heart. god alone knows where.

then god made more broken things but this time instead of mending them himself he sent them to the wrong hospital where they would never be fixed.

### chapter 13: the people all said sit down

the river gods withdrew and retired. they accepted defeat with good grace and hid their cunning in a secret place. the rag dolls and pantomime horses never returned and were never heard from again. and god filled the spaces they vacated with the broken things he had recently invented and which he now refused to mend. the wrong hospital had never been pretty but now it was becoming more and more of a nightmare. god invented more and more broken things, refused to fix them and dumped the lot at the wrong hospital. space was getting kinda tight - broken things here, there and everywhere.

the wrong hospital was not a place of light and truth. it was a place of dreams, shadows, visions and nightmares. it was a dark place but not too dark. its grounds and gardens were not unpleasant and sometimes angels visited. but now you just couldn't get around - more and more broken things everywhere. and god just kept on inventing more and more broken things and kept on refusing to fix them and he kept on dumping them in the grounds and gardens and in the buildings, the corridors, the wards, the offices and waiting rooms of the wrong hospital. and even in the lake.

man - you just couldn't get around any more. broken things everywhere and more on the way. god was out of control. a deputation was formed but god wouldn't listen. the birds of the sky tried to tell him, his own angels tried to tell him but god simply would not listen. a magician was sent for but all he did was fill nearly all the remaining space with rabbits.

in short the wrong hospital was running out of both space and time. for long hours the prince would stare at the tall gates of the wrong hospital and beyond and he knew that one way or another he would be leaving soon. he knew she was out there somewhere. and he knew one day she'd come back to him. if the river gods had their way he would leave two or three days before she arrived.

yeah she wrote me a letter - said she couldn't live without me no more. she was the sacred heart and he was the scar on her lips. then she cut herself with ribbons, then she cut herself with stars. and the people all said sit down - sit down you're rocking the boat. and for many long hours and for many days and nights the prince stared hard and long at the tall gates of the wrong hospital. his thinking was that if he stared at the gates for long enough they would melt like chocolate soldiers in the glare and gaze of the sun. the birds of the sky tried to explain to him that this was a highly unlikely outcome but he persisted and refused to be swayed or diverted from his intent or from his chosen path. and the birds of the sky escalated their prayers for him. and the wingless birds prayed for him too.

the seasons came and went and now snow rested on the tall gates of the wrong hospital. and still he stared. and stared. and stared. at the gates. the wrong hospital was supposed to be a place of

recovery but the prince was as far away from recovery as it was possible to be - just as she was as far away from him as it was possible to be. she did not wish to be adored. and remembrance was killing them both. gardens of remembrance are never quite as simple as they often appear to be. and the songs of solomon haunted him and the songs of solomon haunted her too.

he could reject without experiencing but she needed to experience before rejecting. he didn't need a brick wall to fall on his head in order to establish that he didn't like it. he didn't need to be hit at speed by a truck in order to establish that it was unpleasant and thus he was considered simple, too simple - dangerously simple - by those in authority. that which he perceived as clarity, that which he perceived as simple - the authorities perceived as dangerous. and so his time in the wrong hospital was extended and extended and extended. and so he stared and stared and stared at the tall gates of the wrong hospital knowing full well that in time he would destroy them. and that's exactly what he did.

alone. like the sun. he destroyed the tall gates of the wrong hospital. but she did not wish to be adored. so she cut herself with ribbons then she cut herself with stars. but forgive me, gentle reader - once again we are getting ahead of ourselves. let's just say that for now, alone, like the sun, he stared and stared and continued to stare at the tall gates of the wrong hospital day after day and night after night.

and she did not wish to be adored.

and day after day and night after night the river gods screamed her name in his ear and whispered to his heart - she does not wish to be adored.

### chapter 14: he dreamed a dream

little fish swim like big fish. only smaller. and the people all said sit down - sit down you're rocking the boat. once upon a time you dressed so fine - but enough of that. sit down. sit down - you're rocking the boat

before he melted the gates the prince had a dream and this is the dream he dreamed...

the prince of time, the windows of the world and the gates of hell collide and separate, collide and separate, eternally. the prince of time is protected by idiot snakes, all flowers, elegance, jack of diamonds, rain, the birds of the sky and rivers of stars. the windows of the world are protected by solitude, geese, wild horses, drunken acrobats, three golden monkeys and batman and robin. and the gates of hell have no protection at all.

the kings and queens of heaven decided to stage a contest to determine once and for all who was the prettiest star. jack of diamonds, as always, already knew but he kept his mouth firmly shut. the prince of time also already knew and he too kept his own counsel, kept his nose clean, his powder dry and his dice loaded. jack and the prince hit the road together on a pantomime horse called solitude, not knowing or caring where they were heading. they hit the lost highway with a vengeance scattering seeds of remembrance and forgetfulness all around and with every stride and gallop red and blue sparks flew like rockets from boot heels and hooves setting fire to the mountains of old fading pathetic love letters that somehow mushroomed everywhere behind them like forget-me-nots in a forest or like stars reflected in the dreams of the fast flowing waters of an evil river.

when the queen of spades heard about the contest she trembled and said - it must be me. she kept four chambermaids chained to her needs like dancing bears and their names were poison, emptiness, absence and distance and each one of them was uglier, more vile and more stupid than the rest. and when the chambermaids heard of the contest they trembled and said in unison - it must be she.

the queen of spades turned herself into a pomegranate and flew to all the planets and searched all the skies but all she saw and all she found was a reflection of her own sad soul. she smoked her pipe and pondered what this might portend. she sent her chambermaids in search of the prettiest star but they found nothing...nothing...not even their own reflection, not even a nightingale, a tattered flag, a bored dog or a tattoo'd rose.

thus enraged, the queen of spades destroyed the windows of the world ten thousand times but each time she did so the windows simply rebuilt themselves immediately with a little help from some out of work carpenters and actors, a few drunken acrobats, chocolate soldiers, anchovies and a stolen trombone. she sent eminences and emissaries in search of the prettiest star. she sent emperors and thieves, magicians and lunatics, drunkards and clowns, foot soldiers and horse soldiers, magazine husbands with idiot wives inextricably attached to the idiot wallets of their idiot husbands. she sent piquant sauces, trains, planes and automobiles but nothing could be found - not even a trace of a hint or a trail.

she destroyed empires and planets, killed kings, princes and underlings. she killed overlings, she killed rulers and the ruled and those inbetween and then she killed twilight. she ripped herself apart with rage. she sent elephants, dolphins, telephones, cooks and cake. lingerie, broken arrows, a plague of frogs. she sent rare and obscure cheeses, toymakers, surveyors, assassins, lepidopterists, economists, an army of ants. autodidacts and an auto-da-fe. she sent autographs, prostitutes, tins of paint, tins of gravy, pots and pans and tins of grease, tears of rage and tears of grief and soon there was nothing left to send but her breathing and her cold cold heart.

jack and the prince turned up out of the blue resembling each other perfectly, resenting each other not a bit and laughing their heads off. jack touched her heart tenderly with a long elegant finger and there plain as day in the secret gardens of the secret palace of the queen of spade's secret heart a small tiny single simple flower was blooming like a diamond and shining like the prettiest star.

the prince of time, the windows of the world and the gates of hell collide and separate, collide and gently separate. collide and separate endlessly.

and that was the dream he dreamed. the queen of spades sure went to a lot of trouble to find the prettiest star. she was a fool - all she had to do was ask jack or the prince. i guess she was just too proud. i guess she just didn't want to be adored.

in his dream the prince played himself and the jack of diamonds, the windows of the world also played themselves and the gates of hell were played by batman and robin.

the prince remembered when she used to call him jack of diamonds. then he remembered when she was the prettiest star. the dream lingered for a short while only then faded away to something close to zero. and far away a lonesome trumpet played mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the lord....

### **chapter 15: i am the wrong hospital**

i am the prince of time, i am the wrong hospital. then he walked away from himself as if he'd never existed - as good a trick as any if indeed you can pull it off.

it seems we have a new prince of time. but no. i am the prince of time said the new prince of time - i am the wrong hospital. seems the new prince of time is pretty much exactly the same as the old. the medication isn't working. and his new trick of simply walking away from himself has failed.

there was nothing new about the prince of time. same old scar on the same old mouth. some things just don't change. the war was over but the prince was not getting well. he had let her go but still he was not getting well. still, he had the same old fears and resentments, as had she, but her advantage was she was a million miles away from the wrong hospital.

dostoyevsky had his prince myshkin and our prince too had his nastasya filippovna. he was the scar on the lips of the sacred heart. he was the wrong hospital and sometimes it wasn't clear if he wanted to leave or not.

it is said that 96% of our brains remain unused. it is said 96% of what is going on around us remains unseen. there is a conspiracy of silence. yes we all agree that pots and pans, tables and chairs, guns and bullets exist but he was more interested in the spaces between things rather than the things themselves. he figured that's where the real action was. he saw too much, felt too much and knew too much. most people, including our friends the authorities, just thought he was nuts. william blake and van gogh both had the same problem but the passage of time has taken a kinder view regarding blake and van gogh. utrillo, of course, was indeed nuts but his mother was a hell of a good looking dame.

yeah i remember when you used to call me jack of diamonds. and i remember when you were the queen of spades. and i remember when i was the wrong hospital and the trees in the deer hunter and the trees that grow in your heart. i remember when the birds of the sky prayed for me and tried to save me and i remember my own disgrace.

yeah i remember when you used to call me jack of diamonds...

now it's just albatross trousers, new medication and picking myself up off the floor every three seconds.

her face was a work of art. her mouth was the sacred heart. and i am the wrong hospital. and she was his natasya filippovna.

what next he wondered. what next. he had destroyed the gates of the wrong hospital and all the broken things that god had made and that he kept on making had spilled out into the open space beyond. but the prince wasn't ready to leave. fuck it he said. fuck it.

i am the wrong hospital. i am the rivers of stars that live in her blood. she belongs to me - no not at all - he wasn't gonna fall for that she belongs to me crap. i am the prince of time, i am the wrong hospital, i am the rivers of stars that live in her blood. and i adore her. and no - i'm not gonna fall for that she belongs to me crap.

and no - he wasn't yet quite ready to leave the wrong hospital. he was indeed the prince of time. he would move at his pace and according to his own understanding of time or he would not move at all.

i am the prince of time. i am the wrong hospital. and i adore her. and in the distance far far away a dog barked and a girl laughed.



## chapter 16: paper boats

but she didn't want to be adored. and sometimes he was kinda slow on the uptake. but for now, he was tired and sick of being tired. and for now, he was ill and sick of being ill. so he sailed his paper boats on the soothing waters of the lake and studied the reflections on the water - harlequin on the rooftops, pierrette and pierrot on the stairs. and he waited, tho' exactly what for he didn't quite know.

he felt like a wingless bird in a cage nursing the desire to sing, to fly and to be free. a motherless child a long way from home. many rivers to cross, the singer not the song. and he prayed for wings and he waited for wings and as he waited he continued to sail his paper boats on the soothing waters of the lake in the grounds of the wrong hospital. and he continued to study the reflections on the water - harlequin on the rooftops, pierrette and pierrot on the stairs.

yes she was indeed his natasya filippovna.

time passes slowly up here in the mountains. he had climbed the ladder to the moon. he had destroyed the gates of the wrong hospital. he had even revealed to the queen of spades the location of the prettiest star. wings would be a small matter. but they would take time. and he was the prince of time.

once upon a time she had come back to him after thirty years. there had been times when she'd come back but left before arriving. he knew she would return - and this time he would have wings.

yes - wings would be a small matter. dreams within dreams. and he sailed his paper boats and dreamed of her. harlequin on the rooftops, pierrette and pierrot on the stairs. and in the shadows of the grounds of the other wrong hospital she dreamed of him and sailed her paper boats. many rivers to cross - and i just can't find my way home.

yup - up here in the mountains time passes slowly.

she wrote me a letter - take back the ring that you gave me, take back your flowers that died, bury them deep in the ocean or give them to the birds of the sky. take back the sun that you lent me, it consistently refuses to shine. think of me often at twilight and remember the shadows are mine. take back your truths that have failed me, take back your whisky and wine, take back the poems you

sent me, the lengthening shadows are mine. the prince wept when he received this letter then he made a little paper boat of it and sailed it on the lake.

then another letter arrived - take back your silver dagger, take back the pills that you sent, look thru' your windows of deception and remember the shadows are mine. the prince made a little paper boat of it and sailed it on the lake. then more and more letters started to arrive from her but he couldn't read them. he made little paper boats of them then sailed them on the lake.

then she took a little pill. then she took another. then she took a little pill, then she took another. in the lengthening shadows in the grounds of the other wrong hospital.

then a parcel arrived for the prince with a noose in it. he couldn't make a paper boat of it but he thought of her always at twilight and often and carefully he remembered to whom the shadows belong. harlequin on the rooftops, pierrette and pierrot on the stairs.

he was wearing an old pair of spectacles that kept on slipping off his nose. he couldn't see properly. couldn't see properly to read, write or work. his real spectacles had been broken a week before, it would be another week before new spectacles would be ready and the old ones were pretty close to useless. but in truth it had been a long long time since the prince had seen anything properly. so long a time in fact that he had forgotten what it meant.

and silver threads and golden needles will not mend this heart of mine.

### chapter 17: time casts no shadow

favourite books from his youth - the idiot and desolation angels. favourite writers - dostoyevsky, kerouac and wilde. he was reading the idiot again. all six hundred pages. almost finished. and he was reading or trying to read with old and damaged spectacles. let's just agree he could barely see to read. it was indeed a struggle. last ten pages and he realises he can't remember the ending and when it comes he is devastated by a cruel and concrete sadness. it smacks him in the mouth, overwhelms him and refuses to leave. a concrete and cruel sadness that refuses to leave.

and now a million miles away from recovery he doesn't know what recovery is. he knows he is writing a book. he knows there are parallels between the idiot and the book he is writing but he no longer knows what parallels are, no longer knows if he's writing a book or living a book. and a million miles away in the other wrong hospital she too is writing a book. and as she writes a cruel and concrete sadness descends upon her, envelops her and refuses to leave.

she doesn't know what her book is about, she only knows that she must write it. shadows or no shadows. and as she writes sorrow dances lightly on the roof of the other wrong hospital. her book is called - i am the wrong hospital. it's mostly about shadows and to whom they belong. word follows word, words follow words and she little realises it is she who is creating and directing them, it is she to whom they belong and it is she and only she whom they obey.

she writes in shadows. to shadows, for shadows, with shadows and about shadows. yes, gentle reader, the shadows in the grounds and gardens of the other wrong hospital. no angels of the lord visit here. no birds of the sky flying free or living in her hair. just shadows. and more shadows.

and she hums to herself - just me and my shadow all alone and feeling blue...

the words came easily. perhaps too easily. all she had to do was hold one shadow against another and the words just came one after the other. she was like a dominatrix of shadows and she placed no value on that which she wrote. the birds of the sky learned to understand and adore her work, the angels of the lord too learned to understand and praise her work. they prayed for her and together they brought her efforts to the attention of the good lord but this she would never know for she lived now only in shadows, with, for and amongst shadows. she would only deal with shadows. nothing else could claim her.

she was queen of the shadowlands, empress of all shadows and she had indeed become a shadow of her former self. then she took a little pill, then she took another. and sorrow danced lightly on the roof of the other wrong hospital.

he had a theory that most of us become cartoons of ourselves but this theory did not hold water in the grounds of the other wrong hospital where everything becomes pretty much a shadow of its former self. and new spectacles wouldn't help much. it wasn't so much that his eyes had gone - it was his heart that had gone. sometimes we look with our eyes, sometimes we look with the heart. sometimes it's the singer, sometimes it's the song. but his heart had gone and now it was a shadow, just a few shadow words in a shadow book being written in the grounds of the other wrong hospital. the shadows had claimed him and they had no intention of letting go. and his favourite books and writers from his youth didn't matter a damn. he knew in his heart that this was not true but his heart was now a shadow and kind thoughts and deeds are not what shadows do. if shadows think kind thoughts or do kind deeds the gates of hell will open and the heavens will fall. so they continue to think dark thoughts and do dark deeds and for this we should all be grateful.

then she took a little pill, then she took another and he waited patiently for his new spectacles. and time cast no shadow. and the good lord continued to create more and more broken things and he continued to refuse to fix or mend them and he continued to dump them in the grounds and gardens, corridors and wards, offices and waiting rooms of the wrong hospital.

### chapter 18: laughter travels alone

she had become a shadow. and his heart had become a shadow. the authorities had no way of dealing with or treating a heart that had become a shadow. they were flumoxed. the river gods were ecstatic - they had triumphed. his heart had become a shadow. and with each word she wrote he became less and less a prince of time and more and more a shadow. he was no longer a prince of anything - he was a shadow. but he continued to sail his paper boats on the lake knowing not whither or why.

and time rolled merrily along caring not for the plight of his prince - his prince who didn't know he was no longer a prince, who didn't know he had ever been a prince and who didn't know that now he and his heart were merely shadows sailing paper boats in the grounds of the wrong hospital. and sorrow danced lightly on the roof of the other wrong hospital.

things were getting kinda complicated. the prince was almost blind. his legs refused to work, hips, knees and back too. his right hand had gone and his right arm too. his heart was a shadow and he too had become a shadow. sounds of the 60's played constantly in his head but he hadn't a clue what that was all about. and his memory had gone. he sailed his paper boats and regularly visited the dead lions department but the dead lions department even at the best of times was no place for a shadow. and god kept on building, creating and inventing more and more broken things then kept on refusing to fix or mend them. the wrong hospital was indeed overcrowded and its twin the other wrong hospital was overflowing to the brim with shadows. something had to change, something had to give.

the prince taught himself to paint with his left hand. even as a shadow he knew that it was not the eyes or the hands that counted regarding painting - it was the heart. he was yet to discover that his heart had become a shadow. he knew there was a change in his painting that couldn't be explained by his failing eyes or painting left handed and in time the penny would drop.

and a million miles away she was a shadow in a twin of the wrong hospital. and she was writing a book called i am the wrong hospital and with every word she wrote the prince somehow became less and less of a prince and more and more of a shadow. yup, the queen of the shadowlands, empress of all shadows.

the queen of the shadowlands had a son and his name was laughter. he was concerned regarding his mother living only in shadows and he'd heard tales of another wrong hospital far far away, far beyond the mountains, where shadows were welcome in small doses, where shadows lived in harmony with light and where the greatest library known to man still flourished. the name of this library was the dead lions department and in it, it was said, stored, recorded and meticulously filed,

were all the dreams of dead poets and saints, the memories of angels, the songs of the wind and the rain and all the wisdom of the four worlds. he removed his mother from the other wrong hospital and together they set out for the mountains. as his mother was now only a shadow, she had no weight and travelled comfortably in his pocket and thereby laughter appeared to be travelling alone.

and on the rooftops of the wrong hospital the ghost of sorrow danced lightly and sadly. and all the shadows in the grounds and gardens and in the wards and corridors ran away. the queen of shadows was coming. and laughter travelled with her.

### chapter 19: the real smart money

he was painting. and making notes for his book. and as usual he was having trouble seeing. his spectacles had not as yet turned up. things often move slowly in the wrong hospital. he felt a shadow lift from his heart. then he felt a shadow lift from his body and he noticed that he felt lighter, stronger and happier than had been the case for quite some time. the queen of the shadowlands and laughter had started their journey to the mountains. but he knew nothing of this.

the first cut is the deepest and it ran singing thru' his veins all that day. when it comes to being lucky she's cursed, when it comes to loving me she's worse. his memory was returning and later that day he sailed his paper boats on the lake with a light heart and a light shone in his eyes that had been absent for a long long time. he remembered he'd once heard someone say even at his very worst elvis was still magnificent and this thought made him laugh. and he realised he hadn't laughed for a long long time.

he painted all evening - sunset and stars. then he painted all the next day and all the next night. he painted the trees that grow in her heart and the birds of the sky that live in her hair. he painted the small hairs on the back of her neck, the angels who had prayed for her and then he painted a laughing dog. then he laid himself down in a blanket of dust and slept and when he awoke small wings were attached to his feet. yup painting is a fool's game. he treated his new wings casually as if they were the most natural things in the world and they treated him in exactly the same way. and his new spectacles still hadn't turned up. but the queen of the shadowlands and laughter had started their journey and now each night the ghost of sorrow dances lightly and somewhat sadly on the rooftops of the wrong hospital. and in the dead lions department there are no shadows and no happy endings.

he turned some of his notes into a chapter, a very short chapter. but he was too scared to read it in case it made sense. sense was not what he wanted or required. he took some more notes and formed them into another chapter and then he read both chapters and thankfully they made no sense at all.

he was in the cathedral business and not at all in the business of making sense. making sense was not his department. he was pleased indeed and satisfied with his two new chapters that made no sense at all and he resumed work on his notes creating several more new short chapters within just a few short hours. and pleased and satisfied he waited patiently for his new spectacles little realising there was much more journeying towards him other than new spectacles. and her name was queen of the shadowlands.

o' happy day, o' happy day - when jesus washed all my sins away. bom be de de bom bom, little girl with the red dress on, little girl where did you come from, bom be de de bom bom...

he painted all evening. then he painted all night and all the next day. he painted the wine red sea, the new wings attached to his feet, elvis in chains and poets falling off chairs. he painted the bones of laughter, the coming of the queen of the shadowlands, the bones and dust of time, chinese dumplings hiding in a dark kitchen corner, flying arrows and swords in flames and white rabbits checking their watches.

o' happy day, o' happy day....and the words of the prophets are written on the subway walls. and there are no happy endings in the dead lions department. they pierced his sides, lord, his hands and his feet, and they left him to die, lord, like a tramp on the street.

every picture tells a story. and he was finally learning his lines. i adore you. fat or thin. i adore you. with make-up or without. dressed or undressed. i adore you. but the smart money said it's too late. then the real smart money said it's never too late. but she didn't want to be adored.



## *chapter 20: some of us are still learning the game*

wingless birds dreamed of him. birdless wings dreamed of him. almost any one single thing or act can be a prayer. almost any one single thought or place can be a church. he knew that to be a real gardener you have to wear a stupid hat and he had lots of stupid hats. he had glimpsed recovery, he had glimpsed the sea-sick sparks of eternity and these days he worked almost daily in the grounds and gardens of the wrong hospital. flowers became his friends, the earth and the cycles of the seasons became his friends. seasons don't fear the reaper. and laughter and the queen of the shadowlands were travelling, edging their way, inch by inch, towards the mountains and ultimately to him and to the wrong hospital.

almost any one single breath can be a prayer. and he breathed for her. and the flowers he tended breathed for her too. and soon she'd be passing thru' the mountains, a shadow in the pocket of laughter.

he'd begun to realise we are all one person - all of us are one entity. it's just time that keeps us apart. some of us get there quicker than others. some of us are still learning the game. when he explained this to the authorities they simply thought he was plain nuts and immediately increased his medication. the prince was enjoying the medication more and more and was learning to use it to his own advantage in ways the authorities would never understand. the natural authority of the authorities was more than a tad limited. imagination was not their strong suit.

the prince cleared all the broken things that god had made and then refused to fix out of the grounds and gardens and then out of all the buildings of the wrong hospital too. he formed a union with the earth and beautiful flowers in all shapes and sizes were the fruits of this union. and together they filled the grounds and gardens, the wards and offices, waiting rooms and public spaces with beautiful flowers. the birds of the sky were their chief helpers. the authorities were appalled and as usual the river gods plotted. and he taught the making and sailing of paper boats to any and all interested parties. he opened a bar in the wrong hospital and it was, not surprisingly, a huge success. for a while everything he touched glittered like diamonds in a mine.

and laughter and the queen of the shadowlands were approaching the secrets of mountains and the secrets of mountains were approaching laughter and the queen of the shadowlands. harlequin on the rooftops. pierrette and pierrot on the stairs. dreams within dreams. and crack up town and crack up city were not even a distant memory.

i am the trees that live in your heart said the prince and the very second he said this hundreds and hundreds of trees suddenly appeared throughout every building in the wrong hospital. trees trees trees and trees pushing their way thru' walls and ceilings as if there was no tomorrow.

i am the birds of the sky that live in the trees that grow in your heart said the prince and as soon as he said this the wards and corridors and waiting rooms of the wrong hospital were filled to overflowing with birds of the sky all singing her praises as if there was no tomorrow. and the queen of the shadowlands, travelling in the pocket of laughter, heard this distant song and smiled a secret smile.

i am the scar on the mouth of the sacred heart said the prince and somehow even tho' she was still on the other side of the mountains the queen and empress of all shadows somehow heard his remark and she smiled. and a small black and white dog travelling with her barked knowingly.

wingless birds dreamed of him, birdless wings dreamed of him, acrobats wanted to be him. the queen of the shadowlands dreamed of him but she didn't want to be adored.

her face is a work of art, her mouth is the sacred heart the prince of time sang softly to himself and somehow, travelling as a shadow in the pockets of laughter, the queen of the shadowlands heard him and laughed and the little black and white dog travelling with her laughed too. far far away on the other side of the mountains.

and some of us are still learning the game. harlequin on the rooftops. pierrette and pierrot on the stairs.

### chapter 21: kerouac's ghost remains king

relapse. tired of drinking turpentine the prince hit the bar. if it moved he drank it. if it didn't move he hit it. crack up town, crack up city here we go again. police. fire. ambulance. which service do you require - yeah the good old days. but the good old days were gone and our friend the prince was in pretty good shape for an idiot.

no rag dolls, no pantomime horses. all the broken things that god had created and then refused to fix had been cleared from the grounds and the gardens. the prince had restored the gates. the gardens were in bloom, the lake was placid, trees flourished in the wards and corridors and waiting rooms. fragrant jasmine and orange blossom perfumed the air and the ghost of sorrow danced lightly on the rooftops. the prince was looking younger and some mobility had been returning to his ailing limbs. he was painting with his right hand again. sometimes when the light was upon him he painted with both hands and his brushes smoked and flamed. and the queen of the shadowlands journeyed closer and closer to the secrets of mountains and tho' still in her shadow form she dreamed of the prince most nights. and the prince dreamed of her constantly.

circles within circles, dreams within dreams. he dreamed of the coming of the queen of the shadowlands. he dreamed she was travelling as a shadow in the pockets of laughter. he dreamed she was accompanied by a small black and white dog. then he dreamed of white rabbits, then he dreamed the blind were leading the blind, then he dreamed that trees were growing in the offices, wards and corridors and thru' the ceilings and walls of the wrong hospital. he dreamed that he adored her. then he dreamed she didn't want to be adored. then he dreamed that all he dreamed was true. and most of it was.

and some of us are still learning the game. and he cleaned his gun and dreamed of galveston. the wrong hospital was in fact looking kinda pretty, the prince was reasonably well and she was on her way to him travelling as a shadow in the pockets of laughter. yes indeed we all tend to become cartoons and shadows of ourselves towards the end. we might as well say he was on his way to her travelling as a cartoon, she was on her way to him travelling as a shadow, the secrets of mountains edged their way towards both of them and of course a fuck up waited in the wings. there were and are no happy endings in the dead lions department.

she was no longer writing her book. space and time were somewhat limited in the pockets of laughter and consequently there were fewer and fewer shadows in the world and more and more peace and light. for now, her book of shadows had been put on hold and laughter had indeed made the right move.

when next you see a disturbing shadow, gentle reader, remember well that it was she who created it - and remember well it is only the prince's love for her that has saved us all from a world of shame and shadows. yes laughter too had something to do with it but laughter too was a creation of the prince - his years of study and experiment in the dead lions department had not been entirely wasted. if god had not invented himself the prince would have done it for him.

the engines of time clunked, clinked, chugged and chundered. some things changed. and some things remained the same. the prince was looking more and more like a prince, less and less a sick man, an invalid, a north beach bum. and he sailed his paper boats contentedly on the ocean that was the lake. and the thought that she would come back to him lifetime after lifetime in different forms and shapes contented him too. and the prince waited for his new spectacles and a new deck of cards.

and the secrets of mountains touched them both and she became him and he became her. and the whole ridiculous farce started all over again, she seeking him in secret gardens, he seeking her in bars, dark alleys, bus stations and shadowy places. and in the cinnamon lights of north beach kerouac's ghost remained king.

they would pass each other on the streets as strangers. sometimes meet in cheap hotels and make love. and as usual she left before arriving and as usual he wanted her to stay. sometimes they would meet on the ocean as waves, sometimes above the ocean as clouds. sometimes she would permit him to fall as rain on the small hairs on the back of her neck. sometimes she would permit him to be the sun. sometimes they would meet as dogs running free in a field but mostly it was cheap hotels or the janitor's room at the wrong hospital and mostly she left before arriving.

and in the cinnamon lights of north beach kerouac's ghost remained king - watching, waiting, studying, observing, reading, writing, reciting, smoking and drinking as if he had never been born.

and when you come back to me it'll be like you've never been gone.

then the prince of time wept an ocean, then he made some paper boats and sailed them upon it. she had left again before arriving. and on the far side of the lake jay gatsby strolled hand in hand with daisy buchanan. and a new moon threw shadows at the ghost of sorrow who was dancing lightly and sadly on the rooftops of the wrong hospital.

## chapter 22: king and queen of crossed wires

yes she was coming. the queen of the shadowlands was coming. the secrets of mountains had touched her. she had changed but she hadn't changed. she still travelled in the form of a shadow in the pockets of laughter accompanied by a small black and white dog. and she nursed a list of resentments, reservations and requirements as long as a lance. we could write a book about this list of resentments, reservations and requirements and we probably will if indeed we have not done so already.

it was her habit to leave most places before arriving. and she did not wish to be adored. her big trick was to always be with people she didn't want to be with - she figured that way the people she wanted to be with couldn't hurt her. she figured that if she was always with people she didn't want to be with she'd be safe and that whatever happened wouldn't really matter because the people she was with didn't really matter. there was something charmingly naive about her thinking but there was a dark side to it too. let's just say it had caused friction between her and the prince more than once.

in short, she figured if she spent most of her time with people she didn't like and doing things she didn't really want to do she'd be safe. and this didn't add up too well with the prince. there had been times when it had infuriated him and driven him beyond despair. it had in fact once upon a time driven him and his brushes all the way to the gates of the wrong hospital.

yes, gentle reader, we could discuss and assess and speculate regarding her long list of resentments. perhaps another time. a few more miles down the road. perhaps this, perhaps that. perhaps she would arrive just a few hours or days after he had left. perhaps they would pass thru' the gates together, not recognising each other, she coming in and he going out. perhaps they would meet on the stairs. harlequin on the rooftops, pierrette and pierrot on the stairs. perhaps they would bump into each other in the janitor's room or in the dead lions department. who the fuck knows said the prince to nobody in particular - who the fuck knows.

his travelling bag had been packed for several days. not a lot in it other than new spectacles, brushes and paints, pencils, a lined notebook and a photograph of elvis. he had tested his wings and found them reliable. but he wasn't quite ready to leave. he no longer tended the grounds and gardens, no longer sailed his paper boats. and he stared and stared and stared at the new gates not at all clear in his mind regarding what he was waiting and watching for. perhaps he waited and watched for the king and queen of crossed wires. perhaps he feared the return of the rag dolls and pantomime horses.

he knew he wasn't a prince. he just liked the sound of it, just liked to act that way sometimes, just liked the way it annoyed some people i guess. yeah he liked being a prince in exactly the same way he liked being the trees in the deer hunter and sidney carton's collars in a tale of two cities. my kingdom for a horse - an actor's life for me. and the band played the battle hymn of the republic. and he continued to stare and stare and stare at the new gates of the wrong hospital. and he waited and waited and waited. and the stars and the birds of the sky waited with him. and the ghost of sorrow danced lightly and sadly on the rooftops.

always. just one or two steps out of time. not quite touching or connecting. always just a fraction out of reach. yet she was the sacred heart and he was the scar on the mouth of the sacred heart. yup life is indeed a contradictory business. and in the deep shallows of the lake the stars' reflections busied themselves with their nightly duties and in her mind the queen of the shadowlands lined up all her pretty little tin soldiers in pretty little rows.

and in the gardens and grounds and in all the buildings of the wrong hospital, in the wards and in the corridors and waiting rooms all the trees let fall all their leaves all at once but the prince didn't seem to notice.

### chapter 23: another life

the queen of spades. she was hard work. bad news. but he loved her. everything in her country was perfect apart from the sixty six tv sets screaming in her brain. they had lived together on and off thru' the 60's in san francisco and had worked together at the wrong hospital before the big fire that burned it down.

in and out of love a hundred times thru' the 70's and 80's. couldn't live together but they were ghosts and shadows of themselves and running on empty when apart. she'd had a couple of kids by god alone knows what or who and they had grown up and moved on to pastures new and didn't keep in touch. she still lived in that big old house outside town. just her and her horses and dogs. drawing lessons, painting lessons, flying lessons, dance classes, fitness classes.

he had a room above a bar. had written a couple of books that nobody wanted to read and was working on another. did an early morning set up shift in the bar and a late night shut down shift to keep the wolf from the door. mostly he wrote. words, sentences, paragraphs, chapters. he liked words, rarely spoke, rarely slept and smoked a lot. he liked words and he tended to become the words he wrote.

if he wrote fire, he became fire. if he wrote love, he became love. this brought with it its own pleasures and difficulties. if he wrote betrayal, he betrayed or was betrayed. if he wrote disaster, to say the least things went badly wrong. if he wrote innocence, he became innocence

thru' words, sentences, paragraphs and chapters he learned quickly to be careful regarding what he wrote. if he wrote sex, he became sex. if he wrote gun, he became a gun. if he wrote theft, he became a thief. and if he wrote silence he became silence and if he wrote her name he became her. yup he learned quickly to be careful regarding what he wrote.

the working title of his third book was moon saucers of cheese bark and he tried hard not to think too much about this. thinking was not his strong suit. he likes words. words next to words giving and producing sentences and paragraphs. meaning was not his target or desire. he cared little for meaning. communication was not his purpose or function. he likes words, words sitting nicely and comfortably next to each other giving and producing simple sentences and paragraphs. words like pretty little soldiers sitting or standing next to each other in pretty little rows.

he confined himself to a fairly narrow range of words rather than a broad range and he sought and strived to produce a maximum range of possible meanings from a minimum range of words. to him

meaningless was just as valid and important and as meaningless as meaningful. you can't make an omelette without breaking eggs.

if he wrote kill, he killed. if he wrote, eat me said alice, he ate alice. in another life he had been an orchestra but his nerves became jangled and he grew tired of being another man's fiddle and another man's drum always playing another man's tune. and the desire to be a writer grew in him like trees in a valley and as soon as he picked up a pen and put it to paper and wrote of it he became it. it was safer than being an orchestra. nice safe quiet words next to other nice safe quiet words. then one day he wrote the word explosion. then one day he wrote the word lust and everything turned queer and again he had cause to remind himself to be careful regarding what he wrote.

and just like the central character in his first book - he was in love with the queen of spades. and the queen of spades wasn't in love with anyone. least of all a stupid writer living in one room above a bar and working as an early morning set up and late night shut down man.

he wrote about the river gods then became one. he wrote about tired horses and became one. he wrote about sad rag dolls and became one. he wrote about the rivers of ice in her blood and he became a river of ice and remained so for a long long time. he wrote about the night all the leaves fell all at once from all the trees in the grounds and gardens and in all the buildings of the wrong hospital and he became all the leaves that fell that night. he wrote about the night the wrong hospital burned down and he became the fire.

no matter what he did or didn't do he couldn't get away from her. then he dreamed of another life.

and thus endeth the last chapter of the first book of the wrong hospital.