

Short Story(ies)

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The Guild

There are stories within stories. What seems like one thing is really another, and that is something else again. Like staring into a mirror that is reflected into a mirror that is reflected into a mirror, no beginning and no end.

Perpetual.

Like a pack of Tarot cards. The seventy-eight cards of the Tarot tell the story of the Fool setting out on the journey of Life, and while each card adds to that journey, each card is a story in itself; a forgotten secret to be refound.

Sit back in your chair and begin to remember. Tilt your face to the sun and let the wind play gently on your skin. Enjoy, but don't be complacent. Everything can change in an instant, as easily as a shift in the wind can turn a balmy day evil.

Weather – Julie Capaldo

The streets are as cold as the people who roam them. The newspapers of this stinkin' city aren't any warmer. Rats are nearly all gone now. Finally given up hope I reckon. Too many bums, not enough trash. The City wasn't always like this. It used to sparkle and shine. The stars at night would twinkle down on young lovers walking hand-in-hand.

Heck, I used to be one of them.

Me and Tony.

Those were the times. We had our whole lives ahead of us and we would spend it together. Or so we thought.

It was long ago now. Before the Centre. The Compound.

The Guild.

Whatever you call it, it doesn't matter. All I know is that before all the changes started happening, the people of the City were happy. I was happy. No one ever imagined that life would end up like this. No one ever thought it would be them. And now it seems that there isn't a soul left unscathed in this cesspool of lost hope and decaying existence.

It only took eight months for it all to go wrong. Eight months. It was 2013 and life was good.

Technology had been developing at a catastrophic rate. Life was becoming simpler. Well, the action of life anyway. More ordered and organised. Ruled by computers, robots and other gadgets, all designed to relieve the human species of the pressures of all that isn't convenient, reliable or simply done for them. Conflict in the world was at a minimal level. Yes, life was good.

For six years Tony and I had been together. He had just proposed and we were on a mission. The mission was to find the house of our dreams and start what I hoped would be a long life together. There was one city we were told would do this for us. We both had very persuasive parents, and they agreed that Silverton was the place that Tony and I should settle down in. This was all negotiated without us of course, but it really didn't turn out *that* bad in the beginning.

Silverton was a brand new city. A new technological city, that is. The buildings and housing sections were state of the art and in great abundance. The tree-lined streets were neat and beautiful. Safe streets. Streets that enveloped you and encouraged you to stay on them forever.

I think it would be safe to say that Tony and I were in love with Silverton from the start...

Sarah stood at the kitchen sink, gazing out of the window and washing the dishes, the bemused expression on her face hiding her sheer concentration. Their new home *had* a dishwasher but she preferred to do it herself by hand. It made her feel useful. She gazed up at the clock on the wall, silently ticking the hours away.

Half past three.

She finished with the dishes and put them away. She crossed to the square linoleum table and picked up the newspaper, the fresh scent of print on paper engaging her senses. *The Silverton Gazette*. Tony had placed a subscription for her. He knew just how much she enjoyed reading the paper in the long afternoons, and this was the first of many editions that would arrive at their house. The large black headline on the front page immediately drew her eye.

The refurbished Silverton National Bank opens today!

Sarah's eyes slowly wandered to the pictures surrounding the article. Several showed changes that had been made to the Bank in sort of 'before' and 'after' shots. The largest one of all was the one that really captured her attention, however. It was a photograph of two middle-aged men standing in front of the Bank, shaking hands. Sarah looked down at the caption below. It told her that the man on the left, sporting square glasses and a very crooked nose, was the Bank President, while the other on the right was the CEO of the Vamkal Corporation.

This was the company that Tony was now working for. It would only be about an hour or so and he would be home to tell her all about his first day at work.

I was so happy when Tony and I first started out in Silverton. We didn't know then what was happening. Beyond the outskirts of the city hundreds, maybe even thousands, of men and women, nameless and on the last shred of their sanity, silently and monotonously were piling brick and mortar in a ring of astronomical proportions.

They were encircling the city and closing it off to the outside world. But no one inside Silverton knew at the time. Only the slaves and the monsters behind it all really knew what was going to happen. Looking back I can't help but wonder if the move Tony and I made had been planned right from the start, part of the ploy to obtain as many workers as possible.

"I'm so glad you enjoyed yourself, dear."

"It was wonderful, Sarah. It was like I was part of an extended family. Everyone was so welcoming and friendly. They knew almost everything about me, and they all want to meet you too!"

Tony was talking so fast from excitement, he could hardly breathe.

"Tony, come and sit down and relax. Take it easy. You know you always have my full attention."

He put down his briefcase and let Sarah lead him to a seat at the square kitchen table, an abandoned copy of *The Silverton Gazette* lay on its top. He took a deep breath and settled, then brushed a stray hair

back behind his ear, ready to speak. Sarah meanwhile, had sat down in the seat opposite him and was giving him her complete attention.

“Now, tell me all about it.”

The expression on Tony’s face as he told me all about Vamkal was amazing. Pure ecstasy. It turned out they really did know all about us. Hardly seems a surprise now of course, but at the time is seemed so surreal. It really touched my heart to see Tony that happy. I would never have told him but I had been having second thoughts about the move. It was just fear of the unknown I guess. Ironic now. I had left all my friends behind and was scared I wouldn’t make any more. Thankfully I was wrong; in fact I met plenty of new, fascinating people that very weekend. I couldn’t believe my luck.



The Vamkal Corporation’s Annual Employee Family Picnic read a large banner suspended from two tall trees in the Silverton Central Park. Sarah gazed around her wide-eyed, taking in the enormity of the situation unfolding before her. Dozens of picnic tables and Vamkal employees spanned as far as she could see underneath the large blue and yellow banner. She was standing dutifully at Tony’s side while he made business conversation with a colleague. A Mr Murdoch, Tony had told her as the tall, thin man had approached them. Sarah gazed to her left and noticed a shapely and beautiful woman heading towards her. Out of the corner of his eye, Mr Murdoch must have noticed her too, for he beckoned her to him with a broad smile on his face.

“Tony. Sarah. I’d like you to meet my daughter Helen. She’s recently been hired to work on our Special Projects Team. Helen. This is Tony Walker and his fiancée Sarah Dickson. Tony is the new Head of Planning in my division, Helen.”

“It’s a pleasure to meet you both.” Helen exclaimed brightly.

“Helen dear, why don’t you introduce Sarah around to all the girls while we men stay here and talk about stuffy old business matters. I’ve been meaning to talk to you Tony about your work over this first week.”

“I’d like that if you would, Helen.”

“It’d be my pleasure.”

Helen took Sarah by the arm and led her right away from Tony and her father. The last snippet of conversation Sarah heard was Mr Murdoch congratulating Tony on a job well done for his first major project. Journeying further into the park than she had yet been, Helen led Sarah to a table at the far back of the rows of picnickers. A group of eight women of varying ages sat talking amongst themselves. They all looked up as the two women approached them.

“Everyone, I’d like you all to meet Sarah Dickson. Her fiancée Tony has just joined our little company family.”

“Then that makes you part of the family as well, dear” exclaimed a middle aged woman on Sarah’s right. “Come sit down, and tell us all about yourself. I’m Gladis by the way. Gladis Montaine. I’m your fiancée’s secretary. I’ve had the same job with Vamkal for the last twenty years and I wouldn’t change it for anything in the world.”

Sarah had the feeling that she was going to fit right in with these women.

Everyone was so great. It was like we had been friends for years. It turned out that Helen and I had a lot in common. She was like a sister. I found in the months after the company picnic that I would be inclined to drop in to the office, not only to see Tony but to chat with Helen as well.

When we got home that day Tony told me the best news. Helen’s father, Mr Murdoch, and his colleagues had been so impressed with Tony’s work during his first week that they wanted to promote him already. Tony was completely aghast and I was completely blinded by pride in him. They wanted him for the Special Projects Team. I think his acceptance of the position was the catalyst for everything.



Timothy James loved riding his bicycle and investigating the streets around his new house. Blonde hair and eight years old with a carefree attitude, his innocence, naivety and sense of curiosity were to be his undoing.

Turning yet another new corner, Timothy saw before him a towering wall of grey. *What a great castle* he thought. He stopped his bicycle and hopped off, leaving it lying abandoned by the curb, his helmet beside it. Walking slowly, entranced by the desire to be King of the Castle, smiting his sister Lily – the dirty rascal – he moved towards the concrete wall.

As Timothy got nearer, the monster of death drew him in in a sudden flash of light and pain. It was the last time Timothy felt air in his lungs before ascending to the great castle in the sky. Only his bicycle could ever be found but all knew that it was the wall of the Compound that took him.



“Local boy missing, feared dead.”

Sarah was reading from the newspaper when Tony returned home from a long day at work. She was so immersed in the article that she didn't hear him come in. He snuck up behind her and whispered gently in her ear.

“What ‘ya reading?”

Sarah started at the noise and smiled meekly up into Tony's face.

“You scared me.”

“I'm sorry. I couldn't resist. What got you so transfixed?”

“This story in the newspaper today. A little boy went missing. Apparently it was right near this large, concrete wall that seems to have sprung up from nowhere, that his bicycle was found. Other reports of missing people have given similar tales. But the strange thing is this wall. It blocks off the streets, is about 10m high and no one can tell how thick it is because no end has been found. Some followed it

along in both directions for three hours until they gave up and collapsed for need of a rest, and yet it still reached on as far as they could see. Perhaps it goes all around the city? Surely, with the Vamkal building being the tallest one in the city, someone must have noticed something? A huge concrete wall like that doesn't just pop up out of nowhere."

"They are probably exaggerating, Sarah. You know what journalists are like. Anything to sensationalise their stories, get 'em that Pulitzer Prize. I wouldn't take it all that seriously. The boy will turn up. He probably just climbed over his neighbour's fence and got lost. He'll turn up in a day or two, bruised and battered but maybe a little bit wiser. Now, what's for dinner? I'm starved."

Tony headed off to the bedroom to change, leaving Sarah staring after him. Maybe he was right. Maybe the newspaper was exaggerating the little boy's disappearance. They hadn't said anything specific about anyone else going missing, only that there had been 'similar reports'. Despite herself, she still had a strange feeling that Tony knew more than he was letting on.

That was the first time Tony had ever lied to me. Well, I'll never really know if it was Tony or not. All I know is that he was lying. If only I had given that act more consideration, but typical me, I brushed it off, like so many other times. I was just happy to be with him, preparing for the wedding and what not. It was less than two months away and there still was so much to be organised. Helen was an angel.

"So which do you want, roses or lilies?"

"Lilies. Definitely."

"They *are* more romantic and personal."

"I know."

Sarah and Helen sat out the front of *Café Central*, their favourite coffee spot, and discussed Sarah's wedding plans.

“I can’t believe you are getting married in only seven weeks!”

“Neither can I. It has felt like Tony and I would never marry, like it wouldn’t actually happen but here we are.”

Sarah was grinning from ear to ear. She gazed happily across the street and noticed a newspaper board, announcing the day’s headlines like a proclamation of doom. The one that met her eyes sent her happy-go-lucky resolve crumbling down.

“Searchers give up hope for missing boy.”

Helen seemed to pick up on Sarah’s fallen mood.

“What’s up? Don’t tell me you’ve got pre-wedding jitters?”

“Hmm? Oh, no. I was just looking at the headline over there. It’s just so sad about that little boy. Just up and disappeared. Poof! I really feel for his parents.”

“Yes. It is such a shame.”

“But I can’t shake the feeling that there’s something sinister about that wall. I mean, a ten metre high wall doesn’t just build itself overnight. Someone has to build it. And how come no one mentioned it before this? A wall with no apparent end isn’t exactly normal, now is it?”

“Maybe it’s a remnant of World War Three. After all, they did try to colonise the cities back then. A place like Silverton would have been a sure site for one of the colonies. I’m sure there’s gotta be an end somewhere. They never did ever finish one all those years ago, or so father tells me.”

“I guess you’re right Helen. But that still doesn’t explain the missing boy.”

World War Three. I guess I should explain. That was back in 2003. The world was still recoiling from the turn of the millennium and the attacks of the World Trade Centre and Washington. Tension was brewing. The world had still not reached an ultimate decision of the war against terror. All it took was one little accident for it all to blow up in our faces – literally!

It's unclear as to who really was at fault. The Americans never found out who it was that killed the president. Some said it was terrorists, others said it was suicide. But whatever the case, that incident set it off. All the world's powers blamed each other and each reached for the button.

It had been speculated for years that another war would end the world and in a way it kind of did. Funny what an excess of bombs can do to our society. Eventually they all gave up and reached a peace agreement. No one wanted to see the world gone or not see it as the irony may be, and it was slowly disappearing under our feet. The countries had been trying to build colonies at the time. Safe havens from the war. Just like Berlin, many, many years ago, the walls went up, and the walls went down, this time in almost one fell swoop. None could stay up long enough to survive. There just wasn't time. There was a war on and that changed everything. Only time to live or die, nothing else. Much like now really.

Anyway, I could see where Helen was coming from. It made sense really. How else could the Compound have sprung up like it did? But we were just curious onlookers, Helen and I. The war had been when we were still young kids. We hadn't understood then what was happening. I sure didn't understand what was happening in the present either.



"Pass the salad please, dear."

Mr Murdoch had invited Sarah and Tony over for dinner. Helen was there too. He had said he had an announcement to make to them all. Sarah was curious, that was for sure, but she didn't know if she really liked the idea of another surprise, not after Tony's early promotion and the move and everything else. Mr Murdoch made what Sarah thought was a skilful finish on his steak then cleared his throat dramatically.

"Ehem. Sorry to interrupt your little chat about women's business ladies, but I am now prepared to share with you this little secret I have been keeping from you all. I have it on good authority that you are in need of a job, Sarah." He winked at Tony.

“Umm...ahh...yes. I am actually.” Sarah couldn’t believe that the surprise could possibly have something to do with her. She had imagined some Vamkal secret that would involve the work that Helen and Tony did for the Special Projects team.

“Well, ever since Tony was promoted, I have had a vacancy in my department. I have filled his old job of course, needed to to function but that has left me with a position left on the team. Mostly researching and analysis work but I was having a word to Tony earlier this week and he was telling me all about your work for the Brownville council. I was very impressed and even sent out to Brownville for some examples of your work, which they were only too happy to provide. Anyway, to make a long story short, I am so impressed that I’d like to offer you a job Sarah. What do you say?”

“Hank, this is almost too much. First you hire me for Head of Planning in your division, then after a week of work I’m promoted to Special Projects and now you want to hire my fiancée? It’s almost surreal.”

“Think nothing of it, Tony. The Murdochs have taken quite a liking to you two. Not to mention the whole Vamkal family. We take care of our own. So what do you think, Sarah? Shall we get a contract?”

“Where do I sign?”

I felt like I had made it. Vamkal was a multi-national corporation. It was rebuilding the world and making way for the future. It had laid the foundations for cities just like Silverton, and they wanted me to help them continue to do it? Surely they couldn’t have been all *that* impressed by my research papers for the Brownville council. It was amateur stuff really. Nothing but statistical analysis of traffic and housing patterns. It turned out that that was *why* they had wanted me. Plus it helped that I was about to marry a man who was already an employee. Keep it in the family so to speak.

Sarah strode confidently into the Vamkal front reception. The secretary at the desk, who knew her already from the company picnic months ago, and the frequent visits she paid Tony and Helen, directed her to Mr Murdoch's floor. Twelve! She couldn't believe that the building was *that* huge. *Then again* she reflected, *Tony does work on the eighteenth floor*. She silently chastised herself for being amazed at something she already knew. Mr Murdoch greeted her with a broad smile when she arrived at his door two minutes later.

"Ah, Sarah. Welcome. Let me show you around."

He led her through a series of cubicles, introducing her to colleagues and stopping every now and then to point to the scenery outside the vast windows. As she looked out beyond her, Sarah caught her first glimpse of the infamous wall that had stolen the life of that small, innocent boy. She shuddered. Suddenly aware of what Sarah was gazing at so fixedly, Mr Murdoch put a hand on her shoulder.

"Such a shame, but that is life I guess. It isn't always fair but sometimes you have to be cruel to be kind."

Before Sarah had a chance to properly mill over the strange comment he had made, Mr Murdoch moved on, and directed her right to a cubicle at the very back of the large room. A golden nameplate sat facing her.

Sarah Dickson.

"This will be your workstation, Sarah. Coffee machine is over there. I want you to get started first on these old records. We're trying to rebuild the information we have about what it was like here before the war. Should really put your analysis skills to work."

With that he walked away, whistling to himself a jovial tune. She sat down at the chair and felt the soft surface on her body. A computer sat at her desk and a large stack of mouldy, old papers sat beside it. She picked up the first sheet on the pile. *Silverwater Schooling Trust* it read. Sarah could hardly wait to begin.

Silverwater was the old name for Silverton. Too old fashioned it was decided, so thus the name change after the war. I started out with small stuff; school plans, road works and playground designs, but eventually I moved on to some heavy stuff. Big council plans. There was something in the pile called *The Guild*. In fact a good third of the sheets before me were about it, and the more I read, the more interested I became. It seemed to be some sort of underground reform program. A new way of structuring the city, socially as well as physically. Put everyone on an equal playing field. Equality of jobs, equality of pay. It sounded like a utopia. Really it should have twigged right there and then.

“How’s the research going, Sarah?” Mr Murdoch asked her at the end of the day. He had insisted on waiting for her and travelling down the lift with her to the parking area.

“It’s really interesting, Mr Murdoch. I’ve uncovered some really interesting finds.”

“That’s great, dear. Do you think you’d be up to presenting them at the team meeting next week? We’re going to be presenting to the Special Projects team. They’re working on a way to return the city to its former glory.”

“No problem. How exactly are the Special Projects team going to rebuild the city?”

“Ah. That’s top-secret business that is. Only people in Special Projects know about that. High security offices.”

“Oh. I’m sorry.”

“That’s quite alright, dear. Just remember though, curiosity killed the cat. Don’t want to go poking around up there. They’re very secretive when it comes to their work.”

Sarah again got the strange feeling from Mr Murdoch that she had had earlier that day when he was talking about the missing boy. When they reached the car park, Sarah felt relieved to be getting away from Mr Murdoch. She had been so busy that she was unable to pop upstairs to see Tony. She missed him. Noticing Tony standing patiently by the door of their new AstroCar, she politely said goodbye to Mr Murdoch and headed over.

“How was your first day?” Tony asked as Sarah approached him.

“Good. How was your day? What did you do?”

“Oh. The usual. Mountains of work.”

Sarah cast a tentative glance over at her fiancée as he retrieved his keypad to open the AstroCar. Not for the first time, she had a feeling that he wasn't being altogether honest with her.



My presentation went off without a hitch. I was so proud. The pride came after the nerves naturally though. The Special Projects team, including Tony and Helen, were counting on me to give them the most accurate and relevant information. They all seemed very interested in the particulars of *The Guild*, which from the way they were talking, was not an unknown matter to them. In fact, from what I could deduce, it had been an interest to the team for a great many years and there was literally hundreds of pages that spoke of it. It was all very fascinating, from the research point of view. A proposed utopia that appeared to actually work. It was the quest and purpose of human life, to get back to the way things once were in biblical times. Perfect.

But nothing is perfect in this world. Nothing is that positive and happy and free from faults. Nothing. Not even love.

Sarah needed to use the photocopier. The trouble was that in her three weeks on the job, she hadn't needed it once until now and she didn't have a clue where to find it. She could ask of course but her pride got in the way. She didn't want to look foolish, so she set off blindly in search of the machine. After searching the whole floor to no avail for half an hour for a single photocopier, she finally swallowed her pride and decided to ask Mr Murdoch. At least she could ask him inside his private office and she would not feel like such a fool. As she approached the partially open door, she heard voices inside. She stopped, not wanting to walk in on something she shouldn't, so she instead patiently waited outside.

After a while, Sarah grew tired of sitting outside and waiting, so she approached the door again.

The voices were still speaking but this time, her curiosity got the better of her.

“That’s right, Greg. Complete and undisputable control. Of course, we need to get the governor on side, but that shouldn’t be too hard after I blackmail him with the footage of his promiscuous days with the senator.” exclaimed Mr Murdoch. Through the crack in the door Sarah could see his form pacing the length of his office back and forth.

“Excellent. And the new one? How is she working out?” asked a voice that appeared to be from the speakerphone.

“Just fine. She’s completely unaware of everything. ‘Oh, it’s just so fascinating, Mr Murdoch.’”

Sarah was shocked to hear the change in his tone and the words that she had spoken to him only yesterday.

“Doing a fine little job she is. She’ll be perfect for the change.”

“Splendid.”

Forget the photocopier. Sarah didn’t want to hear any more of that conversation.

I should have hightailed it then. What did I do? I dug deeper instead. I spent every moment I could on trying to find out as much as possible on The Guild. I just knew that that conversation had something to do with it. It was the only thing that Murdoch had me working on anymore and I was making daily reports to the Special Projects team. I only told them the small stuff, of course. Stupid. I thought I could hide it from them. I should have known they would find out eventually. They were big business and I was just a feeble worker.

Meanwhile, Tony’s and my relationship was starting to slip. We were both so immersed in our work we didn’t have time for each other. I started keeping secrets from him What I was working on, what I had found out, and especially what I really thought of Mr Murdoch who had become somewhat like a mentor to him. I justified it by the fact that I knew he was keeping secrets from me. I feel terrible now that I would treat Tony that way. Even though I know now that it wasn’t Tony.

Suddenly, the reform started. The governor announced that the wall around the city had no end, only a single checkpoint by which food and products could come in, but no one could go out. It was the plan all along. Silverton's destiny was change. He said Silverton was change. The new way of the future and the world. Things were going to start again. Everyone on an equal playing field. Equal housing, equal work, equal everything. Everyone was being forced to leave their homes and move into the community-housing sector. To refuse was a punishable offence. Clothing was taken away and new items were issued. All the same colour, a light lilac colour with every person's name on it and a small barcode on the rim of the collar of the shirt.

A new age was starting, we were told. We were all one with the City, one with the Community, one with *The Guild*. Only the employees of Vamkal were allowed to continue their lives normally, well at least their work lives anyway. It suddenly became apparent that it was Vamkal who had done all this.



"I want to go home!" shouted the angry and frustrated mother. She clutched her baby daughter to her chest. "This place is no place for this amount of people. It's not healthy!"

Two of the officers on duty took her by the arms and led her away to the back of the housing sector. It backed right onto the wall. They were the Resistance Police, designated to stamp it out anyway they could. Their favourite new hobby was to throw offenders to the mercy of the wall. Baby screaming in her arms, the woman begged for them to relent and to let her go. Her screams were heard all throughout the housing sector and for a brief moment, the lights flickered.



Sarah gazed out her window twelve storeys above the street. The roads were almost completely devoid of movement. The only presence was the AstroCars of the Resistance Police, slowly patrolling the nothingness that was now Silverton. A colleague walked past and she quickly returned to her work. There

had been a staff meeting and the reform had been explained to them all. It was necessary they were told, to get back to the way things were meant to be. Equality among people they were told, was nigh.

Sarah didn't agree. She had know it was wrong the day she had overheard Mr Murdoch talking in his office about her and her work. Sarah had kept up the pretence of course. She couldn't let them know she knew. It was only a matter of time before she could start a revolt among the people with the information she knew about *The Guild*.

She let her thoughts wander and her eyes roam the room she was in. She focused on the photograph sitting on her desk. Tony. She had been horrible to him lately and she felt bad for it. She decided that she needed to see him and to talk about it. She took the elevator up six floors and approached his secretary, Gladis.

"I'm sorry, Sarah. Tony's not here right now."

"Oh. Can you tell him I came up?"

"Sure."

Sarah turned disappointed.

Above her, a small camera was watching her every move and was interpreting her brainwaves from the sensor on her uniform lilac clothes. A man sat in a darkened room watching on a small screen.

"It is time," he said quietly to himself.

When Sarah got back to her cubicle she found a note on her desk.

Please proceed to level twenty. The President wishes to see you.

Sarah was aghast. What could the President of Vamkal want with her? She had an uneasy feeling but did what she was told for fear of punishment. The Resistance Police roamed the Vamkal offices too. Sarah entered the elevator and pressed the button for level twenty. When she reached the level and the doors opened, she was grabbed abruptly by two strange men. What had she gotten herself into? The men issued her roughly into the President's office, threw her into a chair and closed the door behind them.

Sarah looked around her and saw a huge mahogany desk sitting in the middle of the room. Mr Murdoch was standing beside it, one hand resting on its surface. Another figure sat in a plush chair behind the desk. His face was in shadow.

“Hello, Sarah.” Mr Murdoch said, all friendliness gone from his voice.

“We’ve been expecting you.”

“What can I do for you? What is this all about?”

“This is about what we can do for you. You see, we’ve been watching you closely and you have been exhibiting tendencies that are somewhat ... disturbing to our company here.”

“What do you mean?”

“You know what I mean. Listening in on private conversations, snooping about where you don’t belong. We know all about it, Sarah.”

“I’m sorry about that day. I didn’t mean to eavesdrop but you *were* talking about me.”

“Yes, that’s true.”

“What’s *The Guild* really all about? I’ve read the data. This isn’t my idea of utopia.”

“Feisty. Tut, tut, tut. There you go again. Messing in matters that don’t concern you. Curiosity killed the cat, Sarah. I’ve told you that once before.”

“Stop playing games and just tell her, Murdoch.” The voice came from the man in the chair.

“Very well. Do you know why you are here?”

“Cause you sent me the notes to come up here.”

“No, foolish girl. I mean Silverton. Why did you come to this city?”

“Tony. He got offered a job here. And our parents are really pushy.”

“Yes. Tony got offered a job he couldn’t refuse. You see, your precious Tony led a double life. It was he who invented the concept behind *The Guild*.”

Sarah couldn’t believe what she was hearing. Tony wasn’t responsible for *The Guild*. He couldn’t be, could he? She would have known. They shared everything. Well, up until recently that is.

“N-no.” she stammered.

“Yes, he did. That was why we brought the two of you here. He was going to start *The Guild* in Brownville. We couldn’t have that.”

“He was going to take all the credit,” exclaimed the man in shadow, angrily.

Sarah glanced in his direction but she still couldn’t see his face.

“We had to persuade him to come here instead, and it worked. He was happy to help ... for a short time.”

“What do you mean?” Sarah asked quietly, afraid of the answer, afraid for Tony.

“He wasn’t co-operative. He wouldn’t do things our way. He wasn’t a cat like you, Sarah.”

“Do you want to see who eliminated Tony? The man who brought you here.” Mr Murdoch asked her.

When she didn’t respond, the man bathed in shadow stood, and as he did so his face caught in the light. She couldn’t believe what she saw. It was Tony, but somehow it wasn’t. Sarah stood with her mouth open.

“Surprise, Sarah. It’s me. Poor, dithering, lovable Tony. Or should I say Greg.”

“How? Who? What have you done with Tony?”

“Didn’t he ever tell you he was a twin?” Greg laughed deep in his throat. “And a bad one at that. He always got the glory. Mother’s favourite. Now who’s the one with the power?”

Sarah’s world was spinning. She had to get away but she was glued to the chair she was sitting in. She had to know the full truth, for Tony’s sake.

“My brother tried to shake me, but I caught up with him. I watched him. Heck, this *is* the computer age and I found that satellites, cameras and microphones are pretty darn useful for watching someone. I was there when he drew up his finalised plans. His perfect world. I nearly had my grasp on him but then the war started. The colonists had the right idea. Close everything off and you have your very own little container of people over whom you can have complete power.”

“So that’s why you brought us here? To steal Tony’s plans and distort them?”

“Yes. It was the only way it would work. He was somewhat strong-minded about it, so I took care of him. Took his place. No one ever suspected a thing. Least of all you, the love of his life. The one person who knew him better than anyone else.”

Sarah sat crying hot tears. She had been so fooled by this Greg. He had got the better of her.

“Why take the city though?”

“I need the workers, my dear.”

“Workers?”

“It takes manpower to build a new world and destroy the old.”

“And the wall?”

“For protection. Couldn’t have people getting in or others escaping to the outside. Only the weak run away. But, there are always those who will resist. You’ve sometimes got to be cruel to be kind. And now Sarah, I must be kind once again. You’re a cat that doesn’t know when to quit. You’ve gotta go.”

Slowly Greg reached into his pocket and pulled out a gun. The sight of it jolted Sarah awake and she realised what was happening. She raced for the door, shoved the two goons out of the way and bolted for the stairs, just dodging the fired bullet from Greg’s smoking gun.

Somehow, she wasn’t sure how, she made it from the building. Thank god for gym classes in high school or she’d have never made it. Far away, into suburbia she ran. She ran so far that she didn’t even bother checking to see if they were following her. Dumping her lilac uniform, she pulled on some clothes she found in a dumpster and quickly dashed inside the nearest abandoned home to avoid the Resistance Police and Greg. She had joined the world of the bums and the lunatics still permitted to aimlessly roam the streets with nothing but time and insanity for company.

I realise now that I was that fool in the journey of life. Nothing in my life in Silverton was what it seemed. All I do know is that I had Tony and I loved him. He hadn’t changed into that horrible man that is still hunting me. And despite *The Guild*, Tony was a good man. Like other good men, he dreamed of a world of freedom. In every meaning of the word. I’m sorry he never got to bring about that world.

I know now not to listen to the weather forecast. A slight breeze had been predicted for the day Tony and I moved to Silverton. But take heed of the power of the wind. It can easily turn a balmy day evil.

I can hear the sirens. They are coming for me. Maybe they'll find me. Maybe they won't. It doesn't really matter now. Maybe then I can be complacent.

Reflection Statement

The process of creating my Major Work was an endless series of avenues of investigation and choices, which are common to the writing of any works of literature. In completing the English Extension 2 Major Work, I was very aware of how my creation and investigation related to the topics I studied in English Advanced and English Extension 1. I set out to create a story developed around the notion of 'Changing Self' as it captured my attention during my study in English Advanced, particularly, in the exploration of additional material such as the novel 'Feeling Sorry For Celia' by Jaclyn Moriarty. Directly influenced by this text, I created a female protagonist of a reasonably young age. I explored ideas of how she could have changed as a person but was not content with any of these. I therefore turned my investigation to relating my story to English Extension 1 instead. Using sources such as Douglas Wynn's 'The Crime Writer's Handbook' and our chosen area of study in English Extension 1, I divulged information that I thought might aid me in my new venture of creating an intriguing crime story, suitable for an adult audience.

Having completed my research in this area, I found the construction of such a story to be too challenging and the technical information I had gathered I felt would detract from the intrigue of the story and so I abandoned the idea of writing a crime fiction piece. I then returned my focus to the concept of 'Change', however, novels such as Aldous Huxley's 'Brave New World', Lois Lowry's 'The Giver' and Brian Caswell's 'Dreamslip', caused me to divert my focus to the concept of 'Changing Worlds' rather than 'Self'.

This last novel, 'Dreamslip', I found was the most influential in the construction of my plot and structure, as I was greatly interested by the futuristic dystopia apparent in it. In using aspects of this novel as a base for my own futuristic world, I created a fictional city which I dubbed 'Silverton'. I returned to my idea of a young, female protagonist and reminiscent of 'Dreamslip' and 'Brave New World' I caused this character to be exposed to a dystopia hidden beneath the ideal of a perfect world where everyone knows their place, good or bad. Once this was decided, I researched styles of writing by reviewing 'Writing Fiction' by Garry Disher.

As I have mentioned above, 'Dreamslip' also greatly influenced the structure of my story. This novel was presented in a mix of first and third person, switching from times, situations and characters,

thus gaining the different perspectives held within the story. I really liked this idea and adapted it to my story by firstly having the voice of Sarah telling the story as a flashback and then reverting to the actual flashback told in third person. I originally structured my story in first person completely but I reached a point where I found I could not continue and so changed my structure. I also added dates to differentiate between the flashbacks and the actual telling of and opinions about the flashbacks.

At the beginning of my story I have also added an extended quote from a novel called 'Weather' by Julie Capaldo. I selected this quote because I felt it epitomises the nature of my story, with Sarah being the fool, the cards as each small section of the flashback, and the wind that turns the balmy day evil as the oppressive nature of the 'Vamkal Corporation'. It was most fortunate to come across this quote as I only by chance was able to read a small section of the novel at the time, and that passage really captured my attention and got me thinking about the themes and ideas explored in my story.

In writing my Major Work I discovered even further how it relates to my study of Advanced English and the subject area of 'Powerplay', in particular George Orwell's 'Nineteen Eighty Four'. Like Orwell's 'Big Brother' the oppressive presence in my story, the 'Vamkal Corporation' or the 'Guild', are a dominant force who see all and have the power over the masses. This theme of power is one that I hope I have explored thoroughly through writing my Major Work as embodied by my protagonist, Sarah, and her fight against the ruling force of the 'Vamkal Corporation' and its leader, Greg, her fiancée's evil twin brother who steals his identity and deceives her.

The lessons that Sarah learns at the conclusion of her tale are very meaningful and personal. She realises just how naive and trusting she has been and how this trust can be abused and exploited to gain power, as embodied by Greg's deception. As I had originally intended, Sarah does change her sense of self to some extent in her experience of the 'Guild' and its oppression. By the end of her tale, she notes that she has grown strong by refusing to be suppressed and no longer believes everything she sees, reads or hears.

The audience I am targeting in the completion of my Major Work is late teenagers to adult. I have aimed at this reading base as some of the situations in my story - such as Timothy James' death and the capture, torture and general treatment of Sarah by Greg and the 'Vamkal Corporation' at the end of

my composition - are not suitable for a younger audience who would be worried or confused by the motives of my characters and the violence in the plot.

The completion of my Major Work has allowed me to be exposed to a close representation of just how real writers go about creating new works. I learnt the value of editing and getting what you want to say clearly and cleverly on the page, while not losing your audience. I also learned that creativity takes time and will not happen overnight. One aspect that interrupts with this lesson, however, is the fact that this work is to be prepared within a restricted time frame for assessment and you must learn how to manage your time effectively.

On reflection I hope that I have achieved what I set out to accomplish. That is, a thought provoking, intriguing and clever story that explores ideas out of the ordinary comfort of our world. The oppression of the 'Vamkal Corporation' is simply a scenario of a predicted future in which business gains ultimate power to control the people. I did not attempt to give the view of a utopia because there is no interest in a perfect world or situation. For it is through disagreement, controversy, conflict and hardship that the real appeal comes that so entices readers to the fantastic and futuristic which I hope I have successfully instilled in my story.

ENGLISH EXTENSION 2 — Short Story

[View Sample](#)

Band E2/3

Sample 1

Title: The Guild

This short story demonstrates some developing insight.

The short story is substantial and sustained. Audience engagement is at times hindered by the need for a more careful edit of the story. The story is predictable and requires further refinement.

The Reflection Statement demonstrates investigation of the concept explored in the narrative. There is limited investigation of the form. The candidate was able to explain the process of composition.