

English Extension 2

Major Work

Wrong, But Not Forgotten

The Christian Empire

His breath was short, sharp, and hardly adequate enough to consume any oxygen. He took another breath in, trying to make his body more compact, squeezing his body in between the shadows. Footsteps again, he shut his eyes as they sped past him, hoping that if he couldn't see them, they couldn't see him. There were more running footsteps. Would he have to sit there all night long? After what seemed like hours he exhaled, and gulped in the metallic tasting air, the evil scent of warfare.

He got up, and shook his legs, pulled his jacket over his head and made his way down the dark ally to the hideout. A blonde woman answered the door, "Fred!" She rushed to him, "What happened?" she touched his wounds with care, and kissed him on the forehead. "I'm alright Mum." He gently pushed her aside and made his way down the hall, before suddenly turning around to face her again. "Where's Sara? Is she back?" His mother hung her head low. "Why did you let her go?" he said with a hint of disgust in his voice.

"I couldn't stop her!"

"You didn't even try to Mum. Don't you understand? I feel guilty enough as it is, and now Sara is going out and getting herself into trouble. This is all my fault."

"Oh Fred, she's a big girl, she will be alright. I know she will be. Look, if she's not back in a few hours we'll go out looking for her. Alright?"

He clenched his fists in frustration, sick of her naiveté.

"No Mum, I'll go alone, I don't need you getting into any more of this mess."

He stood watching from His window, nervously playing with His grey sideburns. The city was in ruins. People threw debris around as they walked along in groups. It was only safe to walk in groups now. Not only had people turned against different groups, they had turned against their own kind too. The shopfronts has been looted, windows smashed, houses set alight. The hospital was barely running, the Churches were no longer a sanctuary for The Fallen; they were taken over by The Fallen.

And in a dark tower in the centre of it all stood the instigator, the creator of this mess. Watching. Waiting. Waiting for the Lord to come and help them, waiting for their saviour to undo this disarray. “What have I done? How could I have hurt my people so much, I have caused them such pain and suffering. How did it come to this?”

Of course, He had not intended the outcome to be so severe. He had planned and planned this operation, each intricate detail was thought of, every problem was discussed and sorted through. And still, things never go according to plan. How disappointing. He thought back, to the first stages of the operation, where it had all seemed so simple, so easily carried out, it all started at that one, simple meeting...

“Those in favour.”

“I”.

“Those opposed.”

Silence.

“Now, let’s discuss the first stages of this project. Arthur.” He said the name with distinction, calling upon one of his disciples to spread the word.

“Good morning Gentlemen.”

“Good morning Arthur.” The members of the table said in unison.

“We will be taking apart the city systematically, and rebuilding it again, starting in the middle and working our way out. The centre of the city will be The Midpoint; it is

a tower where The Leaders and the High Priests, present company included, will live and worship. Then, the second stage of construction will be upon the section beyond The Midpoint, known as The Zone of the city. It will house shops, theatres and what not. Then, the third stage of construction will be the residential area, known as the R-Sector. The houses will be uniform in shape, colour and size. The Mandatory Daily Prayer which we discussed earlier, will be held in The Midpoint, The Public will attend in their designated time slots. The Midpoint will be 36 storeys in all, the first will be the church for the public, the second level will be the church for The Leaders and so forth...”

The meeting went until all hours of the morning. But they pulled it off. Who could say no? They were the highest rank of rulers. The leaders of the various Christian Churches had joined forces more than a decade, to create a Christian Empire, something that would rule the people. They would be The Leaders. From the disdain and hurt that once existed, they would create an Ark, they would save the people from their suffering. Save the people from their ignorant devotion to other religions. The city would no longer be a place of fear and pain, it would be a sanctuary, somewhere for the followers to go for peace and relief.

But, the plan had failed. It had failed miserably. The Leaders had become too picky, too finicky. Rather than accepting everyone, they hand selected their group for the Ark, they selected a small group that were to be saved. It was originally intended as a reform, sewing up the broken seams, rather than cutting them off. But it happened, the seams were cut, and the city that was to be an Ark became a plank of wood, barely keeping them afloat.

Instead of allowing the people to gain from the Spiritual Wisdom of the Leaders, the Spiritual Wisdom was sparingly given as a precious gift, to a handful of people. They

tormented The Fallen, “We can’t help you now. You are too far gone down the Devil’s path.” To those who had addictions, marital problems that needed solving, the only reply was, “God helps those who help themselves. You are no longer our responsibility.” They branded the outcasts, letting the people see that they were different, and that they were not to be accepted. Over the months they abused their authority, and at the same time were becoming more and more bitter, with the thought that what they were doing (an unintentional as it was at first) was not right by their Lord. Yet, The Leaders did not stop. And He stood in the middle of it all, not knowing what to do.

Night had almost fallen; it was safer now, to be out on the streets. There was less of a chance of being noticed. It was Fred’s time now to find Sara, and right this wrong. Where would she have gone? Not to the centre of the city hopefully, it was much too dangerous for her there. Although, it was likely that she would go to The Midpoint, or The Zone, wherever she was, he knew that she would be making trouble for herself. It was just like her, always thinking that she had to defend everyone else, never letting the rest of the family fight their own battles.

He passed a small group of people, none of them bore the brand of an outcast, the mark that had been burned onto his upper left cheek, yet they were still sitting on the kerb, out in the cold. Homeless? Probably. The city had been destroyed, ever since The Leaders had started to enforce more and more rules, mandatory prayer hours, curfews, tattoos, the people had become more and more rebellious. What else would be expected? It goes without saying that rules are made to be broken. It just seemed

that when The Leaders planned their town, they had not taken that into consideration. They had expected that with their dominance rather than their guidance, that they would be able to tell people what to do with their lives, how to act, what religion to follow, when to eat, where to live. But the result was not at all a positive one; human nature tends to refuse orders.

Fred stopped and listened at a corner, he had heard voices, and his perpetually growing fear didn't want to disturb anyone, he peered round carefully, and breathed a sigh of relief. They were members of The Fallen also, "Hi, I'm looking for my little sister, she's about this tall, thin, blonde hair, brown eyes. Have you seen her go by?"

"No, sorry. No one's come past here for a while. But we'll watch out for her if you like." One of them said.

"Please do, and tell her that Fred is looking for her. Thanks." He continued to walk vigorously on his search. *How far could she have gone?* He thought to himself. *Why? Why? She knows that she's only going to get taken away, locked up, and punished for my sins. My sins.* It was the guilt that was killing him. Fred's sin was his sexual inclination, he had displeased The Leaders, and he and his family had been tattooed with a mark on the left cheek. This was to make them outcasts, part of the group that were known as "The Fallen". There were all types of people that had been cast as The Fallen, it seemed to some, that they were the majority of people. Even if they were the majority, it would do no good, they knew that they were unable to control The Public the way that The Leaders could.

Sometimes he simply didn't understand, the way that things were run. The Leaders, who were in fact Spiritual Leaders, were not virtuous people at all, they did the most atrocious things to people in the name of God. He remembered when it all began, when they were told that their city was going to be a better, fairer place. They'd lied.

The Leaders were supposed to be helping the people, instead, they were hurting the people. They'd rebuilt the city in order to make it a better place, they said it would be safer, easier to get around, a better place for families, and they said that everyone would be accepted. Well he wasn't accepted, and neither were his family.

It was little things at first, advertisements around the city which preached about the various types of sins there are, and made a point about avoiding any kind of sin. The fact that "All Sinners go to Hell" was enough to scare most people into obeying The Leaders. Then, The Leaders began to call daily community meetings, excluding of course The Fallen. The people that had sinned were thought to be unworthy of being rescued, they were adulterers, divorcees, sex workers, criminals, homosexuals, the greedy, the proud, the envious, the angry, the lustful, the gluttonous, the slothful, and anyone else that The Leaders deemed "unworthy".

The Leaders had gained the support of the majority of the community simply by frightening them into following orders, and The Public would spend all day just wandering around preaching to one another, and trying to make people feel uncomfortable. But it wasn't as though they were trying to help The Fallen, they were just rubbing it in that they were a part of the group that would never be saved. It was one colossal campaign against a group of people, so that they could have a reason to exclude them, a reason to ridicule others. The Leaders and a number of high-ranking followers ordered a portion of The Fallen (about fifteen or so people) to attend a brief meeting in The Midpoint. There the fate of those people awaited them; a cell had been built especially for them, one by one they were led into the empty room, four concrete walls, and a small shaft at the top letting in light and air. They were kept there for a few days, and were released for a few short hours, so that they could be put on display outside The Midpoint, where the Public were encouraged to come and ridicule them.

From each person's neck hung a sign, which had the name of his or her sin (or sins) written in big black letters.

Some people passed, and others stopped to look at what was going on. The Leaders tried to make the people belittle them, "Don't let them forget that they have sinned!" But the people just stood and stared, mouths opened wide, astonished. Then, one of The Leaders spoke to the crowd, "This is a warning to all members of The Fallen, and those of you who step out of line, you will be punished! Your behaviour will not be tolerated! From this day onwards, members of The Fallen will have restricted access to the R-Sector only! If you are a branded member of The Fallen, you will be punished if you are found in other areas of the city! God will punish you for your sins!"

That evening the members of the Public had a meeting, where rules were laid down to keep them in order, "We are concerned with the lack of discipline in your lives. From now on, Mandatory Prayer will take place *three* times daily, there will be tighter restrictions upon films, books, magazines, music and newspapers. You must be in your homes, with your families from 7pm, there are to be *no exceptions!* This is not a charade, you will obey your Leaders. If you expect to be received by the Lord, you will act accordingly...Let us bow our heads for the final prayer."

Almost instantly people could see the ridiculousness of these ideas, as if the restrictions weren't obstinate as it was, The Leaders wanted to enforce more. For one or two days people tried to obey the laws set down, those who were devoutly religious tried their hardest not to displease their Lord, but for most, it was impossible. It was not that it was overly difficult to obey the rules, it was simply the lack of freedom that was unbearable, the lack of choice was what upset people.

Every day, more and more of The Fallen were taken, and added to the cell. Over eighty people were crammed into the room, and still, The Leaders just kept adding to that number. And, everyday, a group was selected for the sardonic ritual. Those who wanted to please The Leaders ridiculed them, but most people tried to avoid the platform that held The Fallen. The Leaders noticed that people were not going to the Mandatory Prayers, and tried to punish people by making the rules more and more strict. They cut off food from the city for an entire week, hoping that this would cause the people to obey them, but it didn't. The Leaders then put some members of the Public in charge of weapons, and instructed them to use the weapons to control the rest of the people, but this simply promoted more rebelliousness. The people were finally left in a city of chaos, The Leaders and their followers were at war with the Public, and people had turned against one another. There was no trust, no love, no leadership and no faith.

Fred didn't realise how frantic he was becoming, as his thoughts sped up so did his walking pace, until he had finally broken into a jog. Sara had to be somewhere, but it was getting too dangerous, he knew that she was hiding out somewhere, or seeking help, maybe both. His eyes darted around the deserted streets, looking up at the sky he saw that night time was well and truly under way, it was as though he hadn't noticed, one moment the sun was just going down, and the darkness had simply jumped upon him without much of a warning.

"Sara," he whispered through a crate, on the other side of it was the entrance to a small hideout; she'd been there a number of times in the past few weeks. The door opened a little, "who is it?"

"It's Fred. Is Sara there?" The door opened, allowing him to step inside. The hideout was a small room, which had originally been a part of a restaurant, four bare walls and

a floor covered in broken tiles. Around the edges of the room people sat against the walls, some cuddled blankets, others held onto one another. Fred spotted Sara sitting in the far corner, he rushed to her side, careful not to thank God that she was alive.

“What are you doing here?” he said, attempting to assume the parental role.

“We had organised a meeting,” she said, we’ve been discussing our escape from the city. “But Sara...,” he knew as well as she did that there was little hope of escaping the city, The Leaders were too powerful, they had planned the Ark down to the last millimetre, no one got in and the only way to leave was through death.

“There’s a convoy of trucks leaving town tonight, they’re carrying out bits and pieces of the old city, we figure that we can jump onto the convoy and get our ticket out of here.”

“And you seriously don’t think that anyone has ever tried that before?” he said, his voice rising.

“And you seriously think that we would be in all this mess if it weren’t for yo-“ she looked at her feet, “Fred, I have to do something, I can’t just sit here and wait for us all to die.”

“We’re not going to die!” he yelled, shaking her by the shoulders, “no one is going to die, we can make it through this, we just need to stick together, as a family, you and me and mum.”

“It’s too late Fred. They’re too powerful, they’ll win in the end. I know what I’m going to do. I’m going tonight, with them. I’m leaving.”

“What about us? You want to leave me and mum here, to do what? To die? You want us to die Sara?” He was hysterical, he couldn’t believe that she was going to just leave them there, she wasn’t thinking straight, he knew it. “Listen to me, you don’t want to

do this, if you try to leave they will shoot you on the spot, they wouldn't even think twice."

"Have faith Fred. Have faith."

"In who?!" he screamed, "In God? He hasn't done much for me lately, how bout you? I don't get this Sara, who has done this to you? Hours ago you were all out to protect me, now you're just trying to save yourself! Wait, why are we fighting? Sara, we're fighting! Do you see what they've done to us, they've made us fight...we never used to fight Sara," he said softly. Fred hadn't noticed the group packing up behind them, he looked into her eyes, pleading with her. She got up and walked past him, "I'm sorry Fred."

"Sara!" he called, "Sara, please! Wait!"

Tears welled in his eyes, he kicked a bucket that was at his feet and walked onto the street, the group had vanished into the night, all he could do was return to his own hideout. Going after his sister would mean leaving his mother. He couldn't do that. *They'll win in the end, Sara, they always do, we can't fight them, we can't win.*

He stood watching from His window, still nervously playing with His sideburns. He had been praying, He had been praying for days on end, waiting for the war to cease. Not knowing what to do with His own mess. Through the darkness, He was certain that He could see figures, moving about on the street, running from something, someone. BANG BANG BANG. Silence. Three figures fell, two were still running. BANG BANG. Silence. His face was pressed against His window now, trying to decide whether or not He had simply imagined the shooting before Him or not.

Morning came again. Kids. The figures, they were only kids. He walked down to where the bodies lay. "They were trying to attack our trucks, we were just defending ourselves."

"We didn't realise that they were only kids."

Fred knelt beside his sister's body, and screamed up at Him, "You've won now! You have won, it's over, we lost! It's all Yours! Just let us be... You've won."

The Man Behind The Mask

Cindy looked up at her sister, thanking her as she took the tea. Tears welled in her eyes. "Cindy," the older woman put her arm as around her little sister, "It's alright, he's at rest now. He's got to be happy."

"It's not that..." Cindy paused, looking for the right words, "I never did enough...enough to help him, he needed my help, and I, I turned my back on him."

"Cindy, he didn't want your help, you did your best, I know that you did." What on earth could she possibly say to comfort her sister? Caroline, Stephen's daughter looked on, making Chrissie even more uncomfortable.

"I told him to leave, I told him that he wasn't welcome in my home." Cindy hung her head, as though she should have been ashamed.

"I'm sure that you wouldn't have put it quite like that," Chrissie said softly.

"Well I might as well have. I feel so guilty: it was un-called for. He was over at our house, arguing with the kids once again. I intervened and told Amelia to go and do her homework, because I really had had enough of his nonsense, he was always arguing with the two children, who might I add, had been just as irrational as he was. I was at my wits end. So I sat down with him, to try and hold a reasonable and coherent conversation with him, something that we all know he's never capable of. And very calmly, and unobtrusively, I said to him, 'Have you received any replies from your job applications?' I think he must have sat there for about five minutes looking at me as though I'd just asked him the meaning of life. He didn't even say anything, just shook his head and looked away. It's so difficult to have any patience with someone like that. Then when I asked him what his plans for the near future were he blew up at me! 'How dare you pry into my personal life like that? I'm a grown man, what I do with my life has nothing to do with you!' et cetera, et cetera, he went on for ages

saying that I was 'just like the old man,' telling me how much of an unbearable person I am.

"So I had to ask him to leave. I must have said something along the lines of, 'go home, Stephen,' and so he up and left. That was the last I saw or heard of him, until you rang saying that he was going to Sydney. When I told him to go home, I simply meant for him to go back to the other farm, my intention was not for him to leave town. I should have realised that his abuse towards me was simply a cry for some help." Chrissie held onto her, the two of them realised that the entire room had been listening to Cindy's grief for quite some time. Caroline was the first to speak, "I'm sorry."

They all stared at her, as if to say, *what for?* "I'm sorry because he was my responsibility, and I didn't even bother to stay in contact with him. I am the one who should have looked after him, not you. It's too late. It's only now that I see, you've all got your own families, your own problems to deal with, and I just let you take care of my duty, and pretended that I never had a father to begin with--"

Chrissie interrupted her, "Caroline, it's not that Stephen was necessarily a problem for us, it's simply that he couldn't control his own actions, and neither could we."

"But, he treated us *all* incorrectly!" Caroline cried, "He never loved me, he never even loved my mother. You know when Mum died, all he said was, 'Yes, I'll miss the old girl.' I've been furious with him for all these years, I've tried to bring him back into all of our lives, yet he was so reluctant. I'm not sure whether he wasn't capable of emotion, or he simply was too scared to show any emotion. Perhaps he was worried that people might see through his facades, his games. You know that Nanny and Grandpa paid for my education. Sure, he wanted me to attend the best school in Sydney, but he couldn't stop himself from drinking the school fees away. Not one

school function did he attend, no meetings or interviews, not the equestrian he'd enrolled me into, not even my graduation. He didn't even know that I got into university.

"He was such an unthinking, unfeeling person, and I'm sorry that he mistreated his own brothers and sisters in such a fashion. I'm sorry for the way he treated you, and the way that he treated Nanny and Grandpa. I know that he never meant to do any harm to anyone, *I know it*, but he certainly has hurt us all. He simply didn't think."

They sat around the room, most just stared into their teacups, one or two of them dared to glance at someone else's teacup, but the awkward silent moments had started to kick in.

"He hurt me too. Deep down." Caroline said quietly.

"I know he did."

"You don't know that he did. You weren't there Sue," said Caroline, "You don't understand, there were things that happened that I never even told Mum about. My wedding...I sent him some money, just before my wedding, a few hundred dollars. I knew that he would be embarrassed, and he wouldn't even come if he didn't have an expensive gift to bring. I just wanted to help him to begin to lead a normal life, and I thought that my wedding would be a good place for us to start over. He never even showed up to the wedding. He didn't even call, or write a letter or anything, for all I knew, he was de-" she stopped herself, realising what she was about to say.

"And now, all I can possibly feel is guilt. I feel guilty for not taking care of him, for ignoring him, and guilty for letting it come to this." Caroline scanned the room, looking at all the sad faces, all the tears and regret, and she couldn't help but think to herself, *is it wrong to wish that I had never met my father?*

“But we do understand Caroline,” said Sue vehemently, “he was *our* brother. We’ve known him all our lives, and he hasn’t always been like that. I remember when he was younger he used to take us out with him all the time. He was good to us. It wasn’t until he started university and he met all those friends that he really changed, you remember all those arguments he used to have with Mum and Dad? He’d get into trouble because he’d come home very drunk, reeking of cigarette smoke, and he’d lose all of his money in those late night poker games. It was then that his personality got worse, I remember the day that he swore at Dad!” They all started to laugh, “Dad chased him around the house for what seemed like forever, and he never caught him!” The laughter subsided, Sue recalled despondently, “That’s the only time I can ever remember seeing Dad get angry...when he was forced to get angry at Stephen.”

“We shouldn’t blame other people for his condition,” Chrissie said, “we shouldn’t blame his university friends for Stephen ending up the way that he did. I guess he was disappointed in himself, and that’s why he let things get so bad. He knew that he had not only let down Mum and Dad, he’d destroyed his own dreams as well. It was as though he simply didn’t care what happened from one day to the next, instead of going out and working to achieve his dreams, he simply pretended that he already had reached his plateau. I think he thought that that way people would see him as successful in their eyes, which was good enough for him. And I guess, that after living in his make-believe world for so long, he truly thought that it was there. What a hopeless existence.

“I remember when I went out to pick him up from the farm. He had called me, and Cindy,” she gave her sister a quick glance, “he never said that you had thrown him out of your house. He simply said that he didn’t think that you required anymore of his assistance. Quite a regular ‘Stephen comment’ to make, but if he thought that it was

true, that's all that really matters...I guess. I know, it's hard for us all, not to feel as though we let down Mum and Dad, *and* Stephen by not forcing him to go into some sort of care, but how many times did we discuss that sort of thing, and nothing ever happened." Chrissie stared hard into the room full of faces, "Nothing." Reflecting upon what she had just said, she hoped that she wouldn't be causing one enormous emotional row, over who-did-what to help Stephen.

They all knew, that for years they had organised meetings, discussed his situation, over and over again, but in all those years, they had never really got anywhere. "Now it's too late, and we're still sitting here, talking about it, not getting anything done," Chrissie said. "Well what do you expect us to do now," Mick spat the words at her, as though she had just blasphemed, "bring him back from the dead?" They shared looks of helplessness and regret with one another, barely noticing that the room had exploded into silence.

Wrong, But Not Forgotten

I'm fed up with everyone at Kelly's school, it's run by a bunch of rednecks whose ideas about life are simplistic and very narrow minded, backed by families whose whole hearted support simply encourages them. The problem is that we live in a country town, so word gets around pretty fast. In my family's case, word spread like fire, something that most people in our area would normally be quite scared of.

It began a while ago now, I gave birth to an unhealthy baby girl, Jessie, who had a hole in her heart, and she had to be operated upon immediately. During the operation she lost a hell of a lot of blood, and so I gave consent for her to have a blood transfusion. I was told that everything had gone according to plan, and that Jessie was in good health and that she would pull through after her operation. For about a fortnight I stayed with her in the hospital at night, sitting beside her cot, simply waiting, watching the staff as they went through their hourly check up rituals, clinging on to each of their hushed few sentences regarding her condition.

I had to put my trust and faith into these people, who knew what they were doing, and knew what the situation was. After a few days I felt comfortable leaving Jessie at the hospital whilst I went back to work, and checked up on Kelly and Michael. Kelly my daughter who is thirteen has been looking after ten year old Michael for me. Their schools are next door to one another, which is quite convenient for us all, especially me. I work at the newsagency in town, luckily we live in town also, so there's not far for me to travel. We used to live on a farm, with the children's father, but he moved away shortly after I became pregnant with Jessie, leaving the farm to me. It wasn't that he didn't love me, or the kids. I think sometimes people just feel the need to escape everything. So I sold the farm and moved into town, leaving my grief behind, and eagerly waiting for the arrival of my new child. We were doing fine until Jessie

was born unwell. I don't intend to imply that Jessie has been the cause of our problems, not at all, she simply gave the problems a starting place.

To explain the situation is difficult. We live in a small country town. People like to gossip, and the more honesty that there is amongst the townspeople, the less gossip there is likely to be. So when my husband left, I simply had to tell everyone that he'd gone, left me, and people understood and were sympathetic towards me because they knew the facts of my story, so there was no need for gossip. But, sometimes the gossip you hear can be disgusting, outrageously disgusting.

Kelly had been sent home from school for hitting another child, and she came crying to me that afternoon, "Mum, I can't lie anymore," she sobbed onto my blouse. "It's ok sweetheart, you just tell me what the problem is, and we'll sort it out together. Is it a boy?" I asked, trying to show her how trendy I can be. "No, it's the kids at school. They've been saying things about Jessie." I was puzzled, what would the kids at school know about Jessie, and why would it be any of their concern?

"What have they said to you?"

"They say that I have a disease sister!"

"Oh, sweetheart, just because she's in hospital doesn't mean that she's got a disease. She's simply not well."

"No, Mum, they say that she's got AIDS! They say that you gave her AIDS!"

I didn't know what to say to reassure her, assuming that it was simply playground talk, all I could do was comfort my daughter. I decided to pay a visit to the headmaster of the school, and ask if he knew anything about the teasing, and whether he thought it would be wise for someone to intervene or make some inquiries into the situation. He greeted me with a pleasant smile, and a warm handshake, before taking

aim and launching the missile at my head, "I just wanted to say, Mrs. Carter, that I am very sorry to hear the news about your youngest daughter."

I cleared my throat, "Excuse me?"

"Jessie."

"Yes," I said, "What about her?"

"She's not well?"

"Well I thought you knew that she had the operation weeks ago."

"Ah..." he looked at me with a strange expression on his face, as though he was in some sort of pain, "Must've been mistaken then, I'm sorry. What did you want to discuss?"

"Mistaken about what?" I asked, perhaps there was some reasoning behind Kelly's fists and tears.

"Oh, just gossip. I assumed it was general knowledge."

"You assumed what about my family was general knowledge?"

"Alright. I have heard, now don't quote me on this, that Jessie was born with AIDS, and that she's been very ill in hospital."

"Well, I certainly won't be quoting you on that one. I think I would know if my own child was ill," I snapped at him. I knew that he wasn't the person I should have been upset with, but obviously people had been discussing my family affairs in public, common practise for most people, but not appreciated by me.

Leaving Kelly's disputes at the school, I went to the hospital just to ensure that these silly rumours had not been instigated by anyone there. I think I also went to the hospital to be certain that these silly rumours were nothing of consequence.

Upon arriving at the hospital I was greeted by a nurse who looked almost nervous at the sight of me, and from then on I knew that something was wrong. Fear gripped

onto my stomach, telling me that things were not right, my throat tightened, I could feel the angst building up in my shoulders, and I hadn't even spoken to anyone at that stage. They always say that a mother's intuition is the strongest, but why hadn't mine kicked in before now?

"Just calm down, please, Mrs. Carter," There seemed to be people standing all around me, forcing water down my throat, patting my forehead with paper towels. "We understand that you're upset, and we'll try to do what we can to help you--"

"Calm down! Calm down? You tell me now, after three weeks, *three weeks*, that you think Jessie has contracted HIV! Well has she or hasn't she? Correct me if I'm wrong, but somebody should have told me about this a little earlier! Calm down! Maybe I could calm down if someone had told me what was going on before now!" I was awash with fear and anger, "Can I see her? Am I *at least* allowed to see my child?"

"Perhaps you should settle down a little first, I'm not sure whether it would be good for Jessie if you were to approach her in such a condition."

"Ok. Alright." I said, seeing the reason in this, "Just...just let me see her. Then I'll be back, and I'll be wanting some damn answers, so you'd better have some ready." I sat down beside the small cot, and took hold of Jessie's tiny fingers. I rested my head against the side of the cot, and began to sob. I couldn't understand why I hadn't been informed, why wasn't I told about my daughter's condition; obviously everyone else in town knew, they all knew, even *their* children knew, yet I had to find out from the schoolyard bully.

I briefly scanned the nameplate on the door, Dr. John Frate, Chief of Staff, before giving it a light tap and barging in. "So what the hell is going on here doctor?" Already I was off to a bad start, letting him see my anger.

“Mrs. Carter, I’m so terribly sorry. You see there have been quite a number of misunderstandings-“

“You don’t say?” I butted in, “I just want to know what is wrong with my child, and why I wasn’t told before now.”

“I was getting to that. You see, Mrs. Carter, when Jessie was given the blood transfusion, there was a mix-up, and the blood, which had been sent up, had not properly been screened, and so we could not be sure whether or not it contained any viruses or infections. I’m very sorry.”

“So,” I said, running my fingers through my hair, “Has she contracted anything?”

“We’re still waiting for the test results, I’m terribly sorry that I can’t give you any more positive news.”

“Hang on a minute, you’ve known about this for three weeks, and you’re *still* waiting for results? What the hell is going on here?”

“Well Mrs. Carter, other tests are also taking place in the lab, you must understand.”

“You’re telling me that my child’s health is not first priority, well I’d sure like to know what is! You’re not a parent are you? No, obviously not, otherwise you’d have a little more sense. Just get the damn results!”

“It’s not that simple, once the samples have been sent away, there’s nothing within my power that I can do about it.”

“So, you’re telling me, that you have the power to give my child blood which may or may not be infected, but you don’t have the power to find out whether or not you have given her any illnesses!?” I was furious, and thinking rationally was not high up on my list of priorities for that afternoon.

“How did other people find out about this?”

“About what?” he said monotonously.

“This!” I screamed with rage, “This! My daughter! Why did I hear the news of my own child’s health from somebody else? Not you! You didn’t ring me, or notify me! The damn school kids knew before I did!”

“I’m not sure, Mrs. Carter, I don’t know. I assure you, that this hospital maintains the confidence of our patients 100 percent.”

“Well, obviously this isn’t the situation in Jessie’s case.” I tried to settle myself down, I wanted to act with dignity and sense, to ensure my daughter’s welfare. “I’m sorry, I’m tired and I’m worried, I just need to know that my baby is alright. Please, I need to know if she will be fine. I’ll go home now, I will rest, and I will come again tomorrow, and please, could you greet me with some good news tomorrow, that would delight me so much. Please, tomorrow, just let me know what her situation is. I have to know. You do understand that I am eligible to press charges against your staff for not informing me. Don’t you?”

He looked a little shocked by my statement, but I had to have something to fight with, for my daughter’s safety I had to have a weapon, “So please,” I said, “I don’t want to have to go through the torment of a court case, just keep me informed.” He nodded as I walked out the door. This fight wasn’t over, I was so positive of that.

Months later, and I’m sitting here, in a courtroom, fighting for the rights of my daughter and my family. Life has become very painful for me and my children, Kelly, can barely face the other kids at school, who continue to torment her, because Jessie has contracted HIV from the blood she received. I barely believed it possible. And, once again, I had to discover the news about Jessie from another member of the gossip

party, this time it was the wife of one of the nurses. I've been so emotionally distraught over my family's situation that I had to seek legal advice, and I've been advised to seek compensation for not being properly informed and for my daughter's rights to confidentiality having been violated.

I realise now, as I sit, waiting for documents and testimonies to be processed, that this was obviously not the best course of action, but what choice do I have now? I'm caught up in a legal battle with the doctors from our little country town hospital, and I'm quite sure that their political and emotional influence in the town, should secure them a strong win over me. I don't know how or why I got into this battle in the first place. As soon as the case has concluded, I'm taking my children, and we are moving from this town. I don't care what the people say about us anymore, they can talk on corners all they want, but I'll be damned if I'll let them hurt my family.

I don't even care about the case, either. These people have been wrong, they've done terrible things to my daughter and my family, they're wrong. But I can't do anything to stop them, I can't change a thing, I'm powerless. I know, they will continue to endanger others, and hurt them, as they have hurt me, but I'm powerless. I can't change the outcome. But I won't forget either. I won't forget.

Reflection Statement

The Major Work was intended to investigate and interpret the individual's perception of power, and how it affects their lives in a range of scenarios. The three stories I composed involve characters whose lives are affected somehow by the power that controls their lives. The first is a story set in a futuristic world, known as "The Christian Empire", where the leaders of the different variants of Christianity formed an Empire to aid civilians in their life journey. It is told from the perspective of a homosexual man, whose family have been preyed upon by the leaders of the Empire, and looks at the power that the Church leaders hold and abuse, because they are respectable members of society. The second story, "The Man Behind The Mask" is about a man who's life was given up to alcohol, and is set in a small room, after his funeral, his family sit and discuss his life, and the various ways in which it affected them. The story looks at the emotional power that the man had over his family, but the total lack of control that he had over his powerful addiction. The third story, "Wrong, but not forgotten" is the story of a mother who's life is impacted upon the discovery that her daughter has HIV. Her daughter's doctors look her down upon her, and the hospital staff mistreat her, because they hold the powerful upper hand in her situation.

To write each of these stories, I had to go down various paths of investigation, for "The Man Behind The Mask" I took a very scientific approach to my investigation, looking at the physical and psychological effects alcohol has upon the body, but then I abandoned this research, and looked at people's personal views of and experiences with alcoholism. To write "The Christian Empire", I looked at articles and publications which express the views of members of the Christian Church in a variety of situations, one topic I looked at in particular detail was their views upon homosexuality. In writing "Wrong, but not forgotten" I looked at various articles

which focused upon the treatment of patients with HIV, as well as the opinions of people in the medical profession, but in this story, I took quite personal approach to writing it, telling it from the perspective of the mother, and I looked at publications about personal struggles with HIV.

My intended audience are my peers and adults, my work should appeal to a mature reader who would appreciate an investigation into power in the 21st Century. I wrote these stories with the simple intention of exploring the diverse effects that too much or too little power can have upon one's life. The point that I am trying to make to the audience is that power is abused by people in high places, causing the little people to be crushed by this overwhelming sense of might, as in "The Christian Empire" and "Wrong, but not forgotten". I am also trying to show the audience the devastating effects of not having enough power in one's life, seen in "The Man Behind The Mask".

"The Christian Empire" is told in a controlled third person, looking at the homosexual man's experience, as he goes in search of his sister to save her from the leaders of the Empire. But, the story is cut into sections where one part is told about the man's experience, and the other is told by one of the Leaders, ("He" as in Christ) looking back upon how the Empire can about, and why the situation got so bad.

"The Man Behind The Mask" is told in third person, but I've used extensive dialogue to convey each person's story and opinion. The dialogue is also used to give a contrasting effect to what the family are speaking of; they are discussing the fact that they've spent their time talking about his alcoholism rather than helping him with his alcoholism.

"Wrong, but not forgotten" is told in the first person, and I've made use of extensive dialogue in this story also, where the mother expresses her anger and her frustration

with having to investigate into her own daughter's case. The story then jumps a few months forward, to show the devastating effects that power has had upon her life, where she finds that she cannot battle with the overwhelming power of the people in the medical profession, because they hold such a high status within the community. She also finds that the community are no longer supportive of her, because the leaders of the medical profession allowed her to be persecuted because of her child's condition.

My first purpose in writing "The Christian Empire" was to show the power that the Church has over communities that are the minority, and I was going to convey this through the homosexual community.

The first approach that I took to writing this story was to look at as many examples as I could find that proved that in the past there has been much persecution and prejudice exhibited by the Christian Church towards homosexuals. There have been a number of articles about the distress, which has been aroused throughout various denominations of the Christian Church, due to the debate over allowing homosexuals to worship and take part in the religious ceremonies. There have also been a number of publications in Christian media, such as "The Word" or "The Catholic Weekly", which focus upon the ongoing dispute.

I also applied knowledge that I had accumulated through our studies in the preliminary course of dystopias, to writing this story. As I was looking for information, I noticed that members of the Christian Church seem to enjoy making public statements upon many issues, which cause moral and social conflict. After realising the full extent of the impact that the Christian Church does have upon the media and our society, I decided that the story should focus more upon the manner in which the Church gains power, told from the perspective of a homosexual male.

I was originally going to tell the story, "The Man Behind The Mask" in a controlled third person focusing upon the point of view of the alcoholic. But most of the attempts that I made ended up as a first person point of view anyway, from the view of either the alcoholic, or his sister. The story is now told from the third person, and documents the experiences of the alcoholic's family.

When I first began to research Alcoholism, I decided that the best approach to take would be to look at how alcohol affects the functions of the human body, and the type of damage it can cause, one very helpful source was "Alcohol – Issues for the 90's", edited by Kay Healy. An interesting observation that I made, is that the only books which had any scientific facts rather than professional opinions, were the books that had been composed with children and teenagers as the target audience, for the purpose of a teaching aid. The books that had been written for adults focused more upon how one should be dealing with an alcoholic, ways to help the alcoholic and how to support the people living with the alcoholic.

One book, ironically titled, "Alcoholism: The Facts", by Donald W. Goodwin, gave me more of an overview rather than any facts, for why alcoholics behave in the manner that they do, making some interesting points that I was able to reflect upon regarding depression and psychiatric illnesses related to alcoholism. At the stage when I came across this book I was intending to tell the story from the point of view of the alcoholic, and so I required some insight into the way that the brain of an alcoholic functions, and how this differs to the brain activity of a non-alcoholic. But, after looking at a number of texts, each author gave me a different view of the alcoholic's brain, and a different explanation for it's functioning, so I decided that I would not make the story through the eyes of the alcoholic, but from the point of view of the people around him, who are affected by his disease.

My initial aim was to make the story about the impact that AIDS had upon the family after a child had contracted the virus, so I looked at information regarding the effects of AIDS, how society, members of the medical profession and patients view the disease and the way that it is handled. The first information I found was mostly in files with old newspaper articles, one example, is the article I found from the Sydney Morning Herald, 17/10/95, titled, "Hospital 'discriminates against HIV patients'" which documents the comments of various people involved with HIV/AIDS patients, made in 1993 and 1994. The Doctor, is alleged to have said, "The only place for AIDS patients is at the bottom of the river tied to a concrete block". Although, after reading this, I allowed the story to take a different turn.

I found an article, which was in the Current Social Issues titled, "Life With An AIDS Baby" by Rene Sanchez, which is the experience of a foster mother whose child contracted HIV from it's mother. This article impacted upon my decisions as to what I should focus upon for the story, and I went back to my original approach of looking at the effects of the disease upon the family. This has tied in well for me as "The Man Behind The Mask" is from the family's point of view also.