

Evelyn arrives back from the now familiar route at eight. It is almost dark, and already the sun is setting much earlier. One of the fish lightly pan-fried with margarine, onion and pepper tastes like a restaurant meal, but even after the cooking there is still a faint trace of the beast in the air, or is it just the memory lodged in her olfactory glands? It was a good idea seeing Joseph, even if she decided not to discuss this problem with him. She is in considerably better spirits than this morning. If she changes her mind, he is always there, and now she can contact him via radio.

Late next morning she wakes from her first good sleep in ages. The smell is still there, giving a claustrophobic atmosphere to the cabin, the oppressive heaviness of a distinct other presence. Male glands. While working through the morning at her notes, she leaves the door open to air. In the late afternoon, she makes herself lie down for an hour, even though she is not in the least tired, as that night she will be tracking one of the pademelons.

After dinner, the second fish. Evelyn again applies herself to her notes, still feeling fresh, and just before midnight dons all her gear in preparation for the long dark hours ahead. She makes her way across the stream and climbs up the opposite bank to a prominent spur. She will give herself a bit of a break tonight and follow Henry as he ambles painfully around his feeding area. Trying his transmitter frequency, she immediately picks up a signal. Fortuitously he is just below her, near the hut, and moving slowly in the direction of the pine forest. She descends and follows him into the enclosing depths of the forest, where there is no residual light and she is completely reliant on her headlamp and Henry's steady beep. It is important to try and keep back a good distance from him so as not to disturb his usual foraging habits. Evelyn settles down into her routine, vital data for her project, but cold and boring work.

As always, she feels how eerie and unsettling it is trailing a disembodied electronic signal through the night. The dark falls around her like a blanket, and it is this perhaps that triggers an increasing restlessness, and a curious 'strain' in the work itself, the source or sources of which, she cannot initially fix. Since his movements are normal, she assumes Henry is either unconcerned about her, or given his illness doesn't even know she is following him. An unnerving fantasy settles on her, with a growing persistence, maybe partly in reaction to the boredom, that while she is tracking she is also *being* tracked, a conceit that once established, makes it difficult for her to give sustained attention to her quarry and her work.

She has occasionally experienced this somewhat paranoid but hardly unnatural sensation on previous tracking nights, but for some reason tonight it is more powerful than she has ever known it. Perhaps it is simply her surrounds: the low creeping mist, the dense chilled air, the unseen but imagined presence of the great gloomy forest canopy casting her into a sort of underworld, one

seemingly peopled by the ghostly trunks and wild frozen limbs sequentially caught in her roving headlamp.

It is not these effigies themselves that seem to be spooking her, as they did previously, but something that seems to lie behind them, or beyond them. She switches off her receiver, and then her headlamp. Utter pitch. She feels extraordinarily vulnerable standing there blinking blind—a diurnal domesticated mammal completely out of its element—but she hears only what she knows to be the usual night crepitations. The occasional rustle of possum, quoll and bird, the various small creatures of the night going about their businesses. The faint background trickle of an icy stream.

She tries to tune herself into the inky darkness, the subtleties of the living forest, much as she has tuned her receiver into Henry's frequency. Let herself feel finely, be actively passive, perhaps even discover and develop senses other than her customary overused five. Or further sensitive her five, attempt to attain the smell and hearing of a wild thing.

Beasts smell like we see, all those subtle tonal gradings, but there is a dimension of time, they also smell what has been, as though you could look at a scene and see its past, and so perhaps guess its future. And they can hear all those higher frequencies, the silent dog whistle... She recalls a Victorian ghost story she once read about a man who finds a silent whistle in a ruin; he blows on it and unknowingly summons up a malevolent spirit.

Nothing she can fix on, but such a powerful feeling. She wonders if something is following her, or more probably, if she is creating this 'something' for some reason with her peculiar complex of fancies and fears. Is she somehow then, tracking herself? If so, what could this mean?

She switches the headlamp back on, swings it around erratically, focussing on the varying perspectives presented in the beam by the random placement of the ancient pines. Nothing. She must get a hold of her nerves and get on with her job, proceed through the routine just as she has on previous nights, just as she must on successive nights.

This Evelyn forces herself to do, but at some personal cost. Henry spends the rest of the night in the pine forest, therefore so does she, unable ever to shake off the firm conviction, without any proof, that all the time she is being followed, just as all the time she is following. A little before dawn she walks out and returns to the hut, considerably shaken, although the night has been fine and still, and she has collected good data on Henry's nocturnal feeding range, which she can usefully compare with that similarly compiled from the other five study-group pademelons. It has been a long night partially because Henry is a far less efficient forager. With his advanced disease and age it is becoming increasingly difficult for him to simply sustain himself, a struggle that must shortly defeat him.

Back inside the hut Evelyn's anxiety dissipates, but she still feels as though she is under some kind of peculiar spell. Exhaustion, presumably, although she doubts whether she could sleep at this point. Some muesli and coffee help cheer and warm her, but the dreamy sensation lingers. Everything she touches seems slightly unreal, every act she performs, supernatural, either with a strange déjà-vu tinge or alternately a feeling of pre-destination. Whenever she stops moving, it is as if she is somehow still in motion. All sights and sounds and smells seem more vivid, even though, paradoxically, experienced through an enveloping gauze, which like a theatrical scrim creates a sensual chiaroscuro.

Sometimes it is like this for her before a bad headache. A sort of silver-tingling light euphoria, although at present there is no accompanying background heaviness. She was also like this, she remembers, for days, as she completed her thesis; it was when she wrote her most brilliant and difficult passages. She was inspired. And recalling this, suddenly she is filled with a nervy energy and feels intolerably cramped by the damp room. The air is thick and slightly rank, soupy, all metal surfaces are wet. Maybe the dense humidity is why everything feels strange, and also why it is so very silent. Opening the cabin door she peers out into the grey twilight, raw with cold. The sky is clear, a few sparse stars linger faintly. She slips her boots back on and tromps down through the sodden grass to the creek.

Before her is the bulk of Mount Jerusalem, silhouetted sharply against the pre-dawn sky. Maybe she can scurry up to the top before sunrise, the east is cloud-free, it is a good opportunity. She takes a few deep gulps of the freezing spring-water, returns, grabs her parka, sashes it round her waist, and heads off.

Happy to be back out in the biting air, and without all her heavy night gear, she climbs quickly and confidently up the rocky slope, skirting the tarns, not sticking to any path, leaping recklessly from boulder to boulder and pushing through the tough scrub. She feels re-born out of the long dreary night, alert and elate. Ascending is easy and pleasurable, she is almost floating up, climbing with the strange ease of a dream, immune to cold and exhaustion like a god. Although, as the going steepens, she starts to flag, slows, even pauses for a moment to examine some beautiful red lichen and catch her breath, but it is not long before she is standing triumphantly at the summit.

The wind is bracing, and although she is now sweating, Evelyn wraps her parka around and raises the hood. She will be cold shortly. The eastern horizon is significantly lighter than the sky but there is as yet no distinct glow. The view is fine nevertheless. Gazing north-west over the lakes' country, towards the departing night, the long stretches of water are soft and silver, fading with the forest into the grey distance. Now she is still, the dreamy sensation, spell, again manifests. Perhaps it has never left her.

A flickering movement at the base of her vision diverts her attention. Almost directly below her over the steep eastern wall, is a wide U-shaped valley formed from sheets of clay, poorly dried acid soils supporting sedgeland, bogs and stretches of wet heath. The flat level ground and a bolster plant community, mostly cushion plants and alpine coral fern, impede any water flow. The valley was probably once a lake and would quickly fill again in heavy rain.

She scans the landforms. Nothing. No, there it is: a pademelon, moving quickly, very quickly, almost as if it were being pursued. It is Henry! Old, sick Henry showing amazing dexterity, scampering erratically, frantically, hardly bothering to avoid the pools and bogs. He looks exhausted and terrified. She peers in the general direction from where he has run, south-west down the valley back towards her hut. For a while she sees nothing. Then her focus is caught, as in a trap.

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