Where's the Harm?

An Alternative Approach to Criminology

By

Lene Hansen

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About The Author

Lene Hansen is a criminologist specialising in financial crime. For over two decades, she has worked for investment banks, exchanges, regulators and litigators in over 20 countries.

Initially dedicating herself to the human rights of sex workers, she was thrown into the world of corporate crime by an encounter with the victim of a supposedly victimless crime committed by Robert Maxwell. Her subsequent work in this area led to the offer of a postgraduate place at the University of Cambridge.

Since that time, she has worked for positive change on projects as diverse as the Financial Secretary of Hong Kong's Peregrine Investigation, the development of derivatives risk systems with the Options Clearing Corporation of Chicago, environmental degradation across Asia, anti-money laundering in Dubai, and the results of the Royal Bank of Scotland's takeover of ABN AMRO.

Foreword

This book started as a simple attempt to put something of the madness of my life down on paper, and at heart, it still aspires to do that. But as so often happens when a seed takes root, it grew and took on a life of its own in the process. Events that I have struggled with in my life reached back to me through the pages, particularly crimes that I have witnessed and pondered the reasons for. In revisiting these events, I found that once I had removed the bandages that time had placed over my wounds, the strength of my feelings surprised me. What they say may be true: the body remembers but does not understand. I want to understand now. I hope you will help me.

My academic background is in psychology, law and criminology, and my professional background is centred around white-collar crime. As a student, I remember crimes being presented in isolation, either in summaries or case studies where one crime might be analysed in extensive detail. I recognise the drivers for these approaches to learning, but I want to consider crime in a different, more relatable way than that of the mind-numbing textbooks that I had to endure. I believe that a dark heart beats powerfully under our societal skin and that these more analytical approaches can dehumanise the characters who appear and devalue the effects of them on their environment. I want to offer a way more closely related to how we think, learn, and react.

Human experience has been carried through history by storytelling. There is a story, an epic poem, that has echoed through time. It is the journey of Homer's Odysseus. The protagonist faces many trials on his journey home, and I have always loved that he was not a god-gifted superhero but someone who succeeded through resilience and resourcefulness. I do not know where my home is yet, but I have always felt I could do that. I could endure, adapt and learn—and I believe you can too.

My approach uses stories—multi-level stories about real-world crimes and real-world people, stories that spring from the ground in which they are sown—in which we are sown. A story's visual and emotional elements make it memorable and shape our understanding. That is why I have tried to show you places and make you feel something about what happened there.

My focus is not on being 'right' if such a thing exists. This book is about my personal questions, whether directed as appeals to the universe or as screams at the ocean. I offer them to start a discussion, but you should not hesitate to ask your own questions. Questions lead to actions, and your questions may lead you to act, just as my questions have done for me. Our questions may eventually ripple out and affect others. I hope so because I believe in the power of questions and good intentions.

It took time, several false starts and a little in the way of forensics to find the weight of evidence and the criminal heart of this book, and I did so by leaning on the thinking of Homer and looking at a series of crimes through the prism of my own life. What I took from them is that what matters most is not the crime itself but the harm that radiates from it, not just in the present but in the past and the future. At one extreme, it might be in a person's inability to function properly as a person or in their work life because of the childhood traumas that they have suffered; at the other, it might be in a legislator's inability to understand the people that laws are being made for. We will explore these outcomes together.

Of course, I am curious about what you will take from these lessons, but most importantly, I wonder what you will choose to do with them. Whether you are a criminologist, a lawyer, a policymaker or a layperson, I hope that in these pages, you will find outrage and inspiration and be moved to spend a moment— or maybe a lifetime—doing something to lessen the amount of harm in our world and the law's complicity in it.

And please do not think small: please dream and rage on a grand scale because we need to question, respectfully but firmly, the social and criminological systems that we have created so that we can consider how to improve them.

At the end of each chapter is a study guide. Its central aim is not to teach a range of facts and figures for you to regurgitate and forget a day later, nor is it presenting you with a perfect system which you should bow down to, but its aim is to help you question the 'way things are done' and develop your thinking about causes, effects and options and offer a holistic process for approaching an event. What would your roadmap to a positive outcome look like? What and whom would it involve? And how do you

assess the harm such an event has caused? I have put forward some themes and questions here, but please feel free to create your own. The guidance sections are intended to ignite discussion, and I heartily encourage you to be respectfully inflammatory.

In the spirit of igniting discussion, I have also outlined some disciplines that traditional criminological studies might touch on. It may be helpful for groups to choose one of the topics to discuss and then either write essays individually or, as a group, use these ideas to come up with themes of their own to explore.

Some of the chapters and resulting questions are more detailed than others. The more detailed ones are generally connected with areas I have worked on or studied. To the best of my knowledge, every word is true, but—as psychological research will attest—memory is funny. I have done my best to focus on the message and avoid hurting anyone's feelings, and, to that end, several names have been changed to legendary and fantastical names, which I feel convey my memory and the intent of the chapter. So, for your incendiary entertainment, here is my life of crime.

All mistakes are entirely my own. If you remember things differently or have any constructive feedback, please reach out.

Prologue

Rosie

"A spider lives inside my head
Who weaves a strange and wondrous web"

Shel Silverstein[1]

The well-oiled fly screen door swings back on sprung hinges, without any discernable sound. An exhalation of scorched Queensland air follows me into the cool of the kitchen. My mother turns. She can see I'm upset and speaks to me in Danish. '*Hvad skete der*?'— 'What has happened?' These were the happy days before the teachers at our local school told our parents to speak only English to us.

'Rosie's dead,' I mumble. I've been crying. Twin trails of salty tears snake their way down my cheeks. I will lick away whatever delicious traces my tongue can reach later, but, for now, my heart is broken.

'*Ah, lille skat* ….' My mother always provided an oasis of calm in my chaotic world. 'Who's Rosie?' I hold out my little plastic jewellery case with grubby outdoor fingers and open its clear cover. Rosie lies there enthroned on a despondent sliver of faux red velvet, a tiny empress lying in state, glorious in her bold livery of red and black. The look of empathy on my mother's beautiful face freezes.

'Lene, where did you find Rosie?' Her sympathetic tone has evaporated.

'In the garden. Why?'

'Do you know what Rosie is?'

'Rosie's my friend.' She had been, too. I found her one morning a short distance from our house, suspended from an innocuous bush, its large leaves a canopy for her webbed court, from which she ruled the insects at the bottom of our garden. Her pristine beauty had its own gravity; it

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[1] Silverstein, S. (2005). Runny Babbit: A Billy Sook. Marion Boyars Publishers.

drew me forward. Without thinking, I raised my hand, offering it to her. She stepped forward onto it, minute yet regal, and moved carefully, even watchfully, up my bare arm. I froze, completely still, spellbound at the precision of her legs and sleek shell.

'You look like a Rosie,' I decided out loud, knowing nothing about how queens should be named. After a while, I gently coaxed her back onto her branch, and our understanding was now secure. I returned every day for the next two weeks, and we danced the same dance. I fully planned to attend her forever. And then, the fateful day. She was in her special nook, her legs curled a little tighter than usual, and I realised she was dead.

'Darling,' said my mother, 'Rosie is a redback spider.'

A single bite, and I'd have been dead in minutes, apparently. But what did I know about it? All I knew—and know still—was that we were friends and that we understood each other.

The far north of Queensland, known as FNQ to anyone who has lived there, is an unusual place to grow up. It is a far-away land full of monsters and angels. The trick is being able to tell one from the other. It was as plain as day to me that Rosie was an angel.

If you lived in FNQ, the lessons came early; I guess they had to. Only much later, when the wider world introduced me to people with narrower minds, did I realise that my monsters and my angels were not the same as those that other people saw. I tended to see the person (though maybe not the angel) behind the monster. It has been a view that has been useful in my work as a criminologist.

Many people believe in evil and lash out mindlessly against those they see as monsters, punishing them without apology. I believe that this perpetuates the cycle of cruelty that has created the monsters in the first place; we should act more rationally. I also believe we will never understand anyone whom we paint as a monster (or as an angel). We have to understand people better because things must change; and without understanding human motivation, the right type of change is unlikely.

Chapter 1

The Wraith

There have been plenty of chances to close my eyes and go back to the sleep of my life as it was, but I hadn't taken any of them. Do I wish now that I had? It's hard to answer that question as the wraiths move closer.

Lisa Unger[1]

Two kids, two suitcases, $200 and one wife. That's how my father drily describes our arrival in Australia. They gave me the name Lene (pronounced 'Ley-na'). According to some, it is completely normal in its natural habitat, the 'Jane' of Denmark. Taken out of its native land, it has required patience. Often pronounced 'Lean' by the uninitiated or taken to be a masculine name like 'Lenny', it holds the dubious honour of being better than my middle name: Møllebygger. According to church records, this means 'mill builder', a trade in which my father was the last person in our line to be trained in 800 years. In Holbaek, you can see a large, dark, boarded windmill down near the fjord. One of ours from days long gone.

On the upside, it was a great name to have when playing word games in the schoolyard, where you got more points for more letters, but other than that, it wasn't that great a name to have in non-Danish schools. 'Molly bugger' was my unimaginative nickname in many of the Australian schools we dipped in and out of. Giving someone a nickname that sticks is a time-honoured custom in the Aussie outback. The highest distinction in nickname-giving is that people who have known you your whole life don't know your real name. I never achieved such heights; it was just a lifetime of those little frozen moments when another person mangled my first name or middle name.

Circumstances brought us to Weipa, a small town in Far North Queensland, that jagged shard pointing north on the Australian map that revels in a cruel and unusual beauty. I recall that the vistas in Weipa were wondrous and alien in many respects, not the least of which was the colour palette.

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[1] Unger, L., (2009) Beautiful Lies, Bantam

It was, and still is, a rich, rust-coloured bowl of land under a crystalline blue sky, with spherical sunburnt orange pebbles sloughing dust that never washed out properly if you got it onto your clothes.

The Aboriginal mission was close by, and all the children from the mission and from our town went to school together, with all the usual banter that arises between communities. Some of my Indigenous classmates were baffled by the logic of cutlery. They didn't see why metal things kept in a dusty drawer (and probably crawled over by cockroaches, of which there were many around) were more hygienic than freshly washed hands. They had a point.

It was in Weipa that I first became aware of nature and how its beauty showed itself in the smallest things, like the profound wonder of a butterfly's chrysalis. I recall sitting alone, motionless, in a dry field near our house, the hardy planting of introduced trees and shrubs in military rows forming the mining companies' pathetic apology to the earth for what they had done to her. I was oblivious to that sadness, amazed instead by my discovery of the chrysalis, spellbound at the magic of the change happening inside its sleek, shimmering shell. In parallel, although in a decidedly less sleek shell, I became aware of the changes in myself.

Apparently, someone else, a stranger, was also aware of those changes. It seems that the one I came to call 'the Wraith' had been watching me for some time. I don't recall being aware of that or how that fateful evening started, but I know that I was in my spartan room. Perhaps my *farmor* (father's mother) was visiting because there were two little beds for my sister and me, pushed up against the walls. One was against the inner wall on the door side, and the other was against the curtain and louvred windows. That night I lay on the inner bed, flopped out on my stomach on top of the soft, woven bedding of deep green and blue, probably after a great day of larking around: healthy mischief, they called it in those days. I had my favourite long, striped nightdress on, and there wasn't anything unusual as I fell asleep, breathing peacefully in the tropical heat.

My first dim awareness of the Wraith was when his hands slid up my nightdress, brushing against my thin thighs to reach my underclothes. I remember sitting up, disoriented, and turning to the shadow, the Wraith,

sitting on the bed. A shard of light from the street had snuck in through the louvres and fallen across his light eyes. I kept pushing, confused at his soft, insistent hands. My eight-year-old mind, still half-asleep, thought that those hands must have belonged to someone in my family, someone supposed to be under our roof, but I couldn't think who.

'Farmor?' I whispered, not wanting to wake my sister. 'Far?' The shadow didn't respond. Instead, he pulled my little hand into his lap, where a soft mass stirred under my touch. My hand recoiled from the strangeness of it, but his grip around my wrist was firm, pulling it back.

I can't tell you how long our struggle continued, me trying to fend off the insistent hand pushing up my nightdress while he fought to keep my hand on that strange place in his lap—time telescoped into a confused tunnel of scuffling. But I do know what happened next.

The corridor light snapped on to reveal my father's muscular silhouette. He was dressed only in his Y-fronts (the wardrobe of a tropical white knight, I guess). Time froze while all three of us took in what was happening. Then my father opened his mouth and ... roared—a semi-naked, Y-fronted, enraged bear. The Wraith was off the bed in a flash, pushing along the wall past my father's uncomprehending howl of shock and rage. The next second, my father leapt after that spotted back (the Wraith had vitiligo, I assume), his roar cut short.

In one way, it is good that my father didn't catch the Wraith that night: I think he would have killed him. And I think the Wraith knew that. I sat still as stone on my bed, my eight-year-old mind trying bemusedly to process what had just happened. How could it?

My mother came in and gathered me up in her arms, mutely astonished that such an event could happen in a community where so much trust existed that we didn't even lock our doors at night.

We did afterwards, though.

The next memory of that night is being tucked away behind my mother as I answered questions from a policeman, one of three or four officers who had been detailed to investigate. Their looming dark uniforms, size

and stern demeanour all seemed very out of place in the soft-lit haven of our home. I remember shaking as I stared at the shadows they threw over the cream-and-tan flock living-room wallpaper that so pleased my mother. Her arm draped protectively over me. I had gone into shock and had little comprehension of what had occurred. I still believe that if I had been able to roll over and go back to sleep, I would have woken up the next morning with nothing more than a memory of a strange nightmare. Still, the arrival of the policemen robbed me of any such misapprehension, shaking me to the core and leaving me completely awake. I knew then that what the Wraith had done, or tried to do, was 'Wrong' with a capital 'W'; the jarring presence of the police proved it.

I don't know exactly what my mother said to the police, but I do remember how she stepped between me and them. I found out much later that she had refused to take me into the police station for questioning, insisting that they take my statement at our house.

She took the same stance for the court case, which took place shortly afterwards. I have come to understand what a powerful thing it was, as a young girl, to see my small mother standing up to those terrifying, large, uniformed men.

They found the Wraith easily enough based on the details of his pale eyes and vitiligo. There weren't many Aboriginals in the district matching that description. Years later, my mother told me of the outcome, the bitter rage in her voice curling her lips into harsh, unfamiliar lines. After the Wraith's arrest, the tribal council insisted that he should be punished under tribal law. Given the fraught local situation, the police had acquiesced. We never learned what happened to him, but I was told later by my classmates that sex with pre-pubescent girls was not unknown in his tribe. Indeed, one young Aboriginal woman later joked to me that if a girl was still a virgin at twelve years old, she was probably ugly. I didn't laugh.

My parents said I could talk to them about it if I ever wanted to, but I didn't know what to say. I am not sure that I would know what to say now. In retrospect, this outcome is strange to me because I now know there is a widely followed traditional practice of Aboriginal justice, often known as 'payback'. In this practice, the wishes of the victim and the victim's family

are taken into account; ours most certainly weren't. One thing was clear to me, however: the rules were different here, and life moved on.

The experience left several little hooks in me. Since that night, I've never slept without being fully clothed and under covers. For at least a decade, I couldn't sleep in a completely dark room, and more than forty years later, I still double-check that the exterior doors are locked before going to bed. Finally, I never put any part of my body over the edge of the bed. That may sound silly, but I have evidence of monsters under there.

But my monsters remained night-time monsters; daily, in my relations with others, there was no change. People now ask me how my view of the local Indigenous population changed after the Wraith's visit, but I find that a strange question. I went to school the next day and played with everyone as usual. Why would my attitude to them change? They had nothing to do with what had happened. The world was back in balance—at least during daylight.

Later, this unusual response got turned even further on its head. While at the University of Queensland, I was drawn to sit next to a young Aboriginal woman in a lecture theatre. The girl fascinated me, her presence evoking so many good memories from my past. We got talking, and I found myself wanting to find out how she had managed to get to university since many tribes saw the acquisition of Western education as a betrayal of their culture and adoption of the white man's ways. I asked her about this.

'It hasn't been easy,' she told me. 'But my mother felt I was destined for different things and encouraged me to do it.' Our chat was, I felt, going swimmingly until I said she must be glad that white people had come along for at least one reason (though, God knows, there are a million reasons to hate us).

'What reason is that?' she asked.

'Well, at least now men are being punished for raping children.'

The atmosphere between us turned icy. 'Actually,' she said, 'you guys have really screwed it up for us.'

I sat, frozen into mute bewilderment for a moment.

She explained that, in her tribe, identifying to the (white) authorities a man who had raped you, someone who was simply doing what all their male relatives had always done, would effectively end the man's life and occasionally that of his family as well. 'It's hard enough being employed as an Aboriginal as it is; being an ex-prisoner is a death sentence to any prospects you might hope for.

You hear of men coming out of jail having done their time, and they go on permanent walkabout. You never see or hear of them again.'

I was stunned at her pragmatism (not to mention her sympathy) for someone who, I had come to feel, had done something unforgivable. Our culture habitually refers to murderers and rapists in the same sentence. This is perhaps why the eight-year-old of my past rose up in self-righteous horror to speak up about what had been taken from her and her peers. 'But the children are innocent. How can you overlook what is done to them?'

Her answer was even more eye-opening. 'No one enjoys being raped, but it's like a rite of passage, a kind of hazing ritual that brings you up into the sisterhood. Your sister, mother, aunt, grandmother—they've all gone through it. And anyway, you've been warned that it could happen and then it does.' She shrugged. 'Afterwards, they're there to support you and share their own stories. She then pointed out, rightly, that the Western obsession with punishment doesn't create sisterhoods. It brutally punishes the victim and the accused and does so at every step in the legal process. Very occasionally, it punishes the perpetrator in the way the law is meant to, but it always advertises, amplifies, and seals the accuser's reputation as a 'victim'. In April 2023, *The Guardian* published the story of a rape survivor on 'the brutal reality of taking an attacker to court'.[2]It detailed the travails of a young woman who waived her right to anonymity to highlight the terrors that she faced in court, chiefly as a result of the victim-shaming culture in the criminal justice system.

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[2] Moore, A. (2023) The rape survivor who spoke out. The Guardian, 20 April. www.theguardian.com/society/2023/apr/20/the-survivor-who-spoke-out-ellie-wilson-on-the-brutal-reality-of-taking-an-attacker-to-court

And it does not stop after the trial. Shamefully for us as a society, women who have been abused can go on to be labelled as sluts, tramps or damaged goods. Accused parties can also be improperly and unfairly stereotyped.

I wish I could meet that Aboriginal student today. I wish I could tell her that she tore a hole in the world that I thought I understood, a hole that has never closed. And that I am very grateful to her.

Criminological considerations

This is where we put on our analytical hats and consider the preceding chapter. When we look at it in class, it is always interesting how much of a person's background and experience they bring to this case study. We should be mindful that reading this material can be extremely upsetting or even triggering for some individuals, and not necessarily for the reasons you might expect.

The importance we place on punishing 'bad' things—of ensuring that people 'get what they deserve' – lies at the heart of how we over-simplify criminal events and believe we make the world a 'fairer' place. Punishment is a one-dimensional 'good- versus bad' silver bullet that is easy to understand: 'You've done that; you deserve this.' Quid pro quo. End of the movie. Credits roll. But, if we think about it for one moment, we know that is untrue. I once had to assure a group of young adolescent men in a seminar that my father had not 'failed' me by not catching and punishing the Wraith. His having caught him would not have changed the experience or the outcome for me: I would still be quaking at shadows each night and, had I been raped, would still have attracted the accusation of being damaged goods. It may have brought some solace to my father, but that is different.

One note to flag up here: when I say 'we', I mean what we loosely refer to as Western society. It is not a particularly accurate label, but it has the benefit of being widely understood in the context I intend.

Developing these questions has led me to consider which disciplines within the social sciences best address the influences which lead to crime. Clearly, my background in psychology, law and criminology was going to be at the

forefront of my thinking, but many of these questions also straddle other disciplines. Therefore, I have distilled the questions down to the smallest number of disciplines and arrived at 'my' core discipline of criminology, followed by psychology, sociology and education.

It is worth noting that the nineteenth-century French sociologist Emile Durkheim[3] wrote prolifically about crime as a natural expression of society. I agree with this observation, and for this reason, I have provided both chapters and questions with a sociological element. I have also included educational considerations, as this is the cradle where many pivotal developmental moments occur.

Let us start by stating, for the record, that we should never tolerate abuse or harm of any person against their will. This may seem obvious, but there are many situations where this occurs and is accepted as normal behaviour, and several chapters deal with this unfortunate reality. The stories of harm that I draw upon mainly apply to minors, who may be compelled and may also not have the experience or maturity to provide consent. Still, I will also consider adults who are compelled in different ways. Let us begin the conversation with questions that emanate from my core discipline of criminology and then move on:

1. Our justice system prioritises incarceration over rehabilitation. What factors do you believe may have led to this approach?

2. Which cultural approach considered in this chapter (our Court System or Aboriginal Payback) provides the better outcome for the victim and why?

3. How could the police officers who came to our house have reduced the trauma I experienced?

And now other issues:

[3] Lumen Learning (2023). Functionalism and Deviance—Introduction to Sociology. https://courses.lumenlearning.com/wm-introductiontosociology/chapter/theoretical-perspectives-on-deviance/

Psychology

Let us step outside the victim and perpetrator considerations and consider some of the possible psychological ripples of such an event.

1. Children may discuss their traumas with other children. How would you support children indirectly affected by sexual assault?

2. Children are often reluctant to report the behaviour of adults who attack them. How do you think children could be supported to do so?

3. How should children, caregivers and court staff be supported before, during and after a traumatic court case?

Sociology

The relationship between society and the individual has always been pivotal to the primacy of the human species. This story shows that the stigma around rape or sexual assault can result in this relationship being destructive rather than supportive for victims.

1. What do you think would have been the long-term benefits and harms to the affected communities of the Wraith not being sent to prison?

2. What do you think would have been the long-term benefits and harms to the affected communities if the Wraith had been sent to prison?

3. How might the societal stigma associated with the victims of such crimes be minimised?

Education

Education is our opportunity to create an early, structured approach to a complicated problem. As such, I invite you to consider these aspects of the educational landscape.

1. Traditional children's stories focus on the dangers of the world. Modern children's stories favour the maintenance of innocence. Which approach do you think is better and why?

2. Do you believe schools should automatically be advised by the police (or other agencies) about traumatic events that affect their students?

3. Please compare a teacher's role to a psychologist's role in relation to the support of a traumatised child and family.

Chapter 2

The Boneman

A freelance enforcer found in Irish mafia clans; a Boneman is utilised to remove members of opposing clans, aid in burying victims, collect taxes and break the bones of targeted enemies. He is involved in interrogation and sometimes slow torture methods such as drilling or shooting out the kneecaps or breaking one bone at a time.

Lene Hansen, September 2020

Apart from the incident with the Wraith, our life in Far North Queensland was full of vivid colours and joys, though of course it was not without its challenges. Challenges are one thing; having an outright enemy is another. But that is the uncomfortable position my father found himself in for those early years of our adventure. As it turned out, the most dangerous enemy hid in plain sight.

My parents came to be in Queensland in the first place because my uncle—my father's brother-in-law, who had made a fortune manufacturing heated hair rollers—had asked them to go from Denmark to Australia and manage a property he had acquired there from the proceeds of the sale of the curlers company. 'Five years,' he'd said to my parents. 'At least to begin with. And then, if you don't like it, you can come home.'

They didn't just like it; they loved it. They drank in the lush freedom of the place and cherished the big characters that gave them the room to be fully themselves, free of social judgement. They were judged on the sole criterion of whether they were honourable people and good workers, and they earned the enduring love and respect of those who remembered them.

My mother's connection with the place even burrowed into its soil. I can still hear her singing softly to a little struggling plant in the garden, encouraging it to grow, or chatting to whatever spider was currently resident in our home (redbacks excluded). She called one of them 'Seksilegs' as she dusted around it. It was a fun bit of wordplay because, apart from the obvious, it had only six legs due to various escapades, and in Danish, six

is '*seks*'. The spiders were also very helpful at keeping the all-pervading mosquitoes down a little. But it was the plants that held her most in thrall, and she worshipped that verdant landscape with every beat of her heart until the ash-bitter day when that beat was stilled some decades later. Even though much of the land was tough, or maybe because it was, my parents found joy in facing the questions it posed and answering them with their resourcefulness. The pioneer life suited us blissfully well from the outset.

However, there was a certain man, a real-estate agent, whom my father had to have dealings with from the moment we arrived. He was of Irish stock, and in the Irish mafia, there is a name for men like him: 'the Boneman'. Since this describes this man better than his own name, let's call him that.

There were mutterings about the Boneman's background, but nothing solid was ever said. It would have been useful to connect his history and motivations with his actions to understand how much the environment he grew up in dictated his later behaviour. All I knew was that he had been, in his youth, a handsome man with hair almost as dark as his heart.

As if to set off that darkness, he always dressed exclusively in white, a choice I am told his gentle wife bewailed when the cane fields were burned and the ash floated about in the air, in search of white things to land on. As an agent, he had to cultivate his clients and naturally took great care of his appearance, but he put his greatest attention into his hair, shaping it into what served as the crown of this self-appointed king.

The Boneman managed a fiefdom of cattle stations around Far North Queensland—extensive grazing lands used primarily for raising livestock—and with my uncle in the mood to build an Australian empire from 1,400-odd kilometres away in Denmark, the Boneman became his bondsman on the ground. Whenever there were any financial problems, you went to him. When there were planning or legal problems, you went to him. When there were problems with the police, you went to him.

To succeed in the property business, my uncle needed a trusted adviser with an eye for opportunity, a man as shrewd as he was honest; what he got was one of these two. Although my uncle had heard worrying stories about this man, no other person was able to carry out his vision, so he probably felt it was better not to ask.

One of the Boneman's peccadillos was a dislike of family, and I am told that he never hired any members of his own. He was, therefore, not best pleased when my father turned up because my father's introduction to the business was based on an accident of marriage rather than a shared set of values. My father's arrival exposed the Boneman's unconventional ways to the scrutiny of an outsider. As he quickly found out, my father was not the sort of person to keep his head down and ignore his behaviour, as so many other people did—at least in front of him; when I visited my father in Australia decades later, it soon became clear that the vitriol still ran deep.

That said, a lot of money was made through the uncomfortable position my father had allowed himself to be put in between my uncle's self-assurance and business nous and the fact that the Boneman was already the boss on the ground. He told my father what to do and where to be, and my father acquiesced. We made moves all around FNQ, from north of Daintree to Biboohra and then to Mount Molloy and Miallo, which were all carried out at his request.

The first place we ran—north of Daintree—was huge, but only by the standards of people outside Australia. My parents were managing cattle on a property of 12,000 acres, which meant working with a seasonal posse of jackeroos (the Australian equivalent of cowboys), maintaining hundreds of miles of fencing, watering and feeding and slaughtering the cattle, bringing them to market and so on. One of my earliest memories is of sitting on a metal bench in the back of a Land Rover Defender—as the youngest I drew the short straw on the coveted front seat— watching the bloody remains of a butchered animal sliding languidly from side to side on the truck's flat-bed as we negotiated the rutted path. I recall how cool the seat was, how the inside of my nose itched, and how I was being good for not picking it (something my mother was adamant about). Most of all, though, I remember how much more slowly the thick, dark slab of liver slid than the other cuts of meat.

At the time, my parents were also responsible for planting over 5,000 oil palms intended for the palm-oil business. I'm not sure how I feel about that now, knowing the devastation that has been caused to old-growth forests in Indonesia by this crop. Still, wages in Australia at that time were happily too expensive for the crop to be viable, and ours never wound up as anything

more than street decorations for the main drag in nearby Port Douglas. My beautiful mother sang to the trees as she planted them, her long dark plaits swaying in rhythm while she worked. My parents found their feet in the Daintree community and soon became well-known and liked.

This did not please the Boneman. The last thing he needed was his boss's brother-in-law casting an eye over his doings. He was as twisted as a corkscrew; everyone in Daintree knew this. It was later rumoured that the Boneman's eventual move from the area was caused by the community finally rising up and refusing to do business with him any longer. The Boneman was a creature of the shadows, and such creatures always loathe anyone shining a light on them, so he hated my father.

To his credit, his reach was extensive, and he had built up business ventures right across the region. On the other hand, he always found a way for more than his fair share of any deal to fall into his pocket. And so, as my parents assimilated what people said to them, their hitherto innocent view of the Boneman began to change. Sensing this, it would appear, the Boneman hatched plans to get them out of the way, not once but over and over again.

The property that he first moved us to was, in truth, a beautiful house on a sugar cane farm in Biboohra. It was roomy, bright, full of character, and clearly intended for others to use, but that is not my story to tell.

In any case, the Boneman told my uncle that the house needed managing and that my parents were the ones to do it. Of course, he wanted them to disappear and reckoned that uprooting them and hiding them away on the cane farm was the perfect way to do it. My father, still under his five-year verbal contract with my uncle, did as he was told.

But the Boneman's scheme backfired. By now, my mother could speak English and decided to start a gym class once she got settled in Biboohra. It soon became quite the attraction in the local community, and before long, she was teaching upwards of seventy people at a time. My sister and I would stand at the back of the town's cavernous meeting hall, trying to follow the 'movement' class set to wonderful late-1950s-style big-band music. My mother emphasised the need to move in a ladylike way, which my sister excelled at. (I didn't; even then, I was always a bit of a tomboy.) But half the fun of our being there was annoying the ladies with how easily we children

found the stretching exercises. I think they forgave us, if only for our mother's sake. I had no notion of what impact or reputation she was building in the town, but I can now see that my parents' personalities were too large to stay hidden and that the Boneman was a fool to have imagined otherwise.

It must have been around this time that I acquired my one clear memory of the Boneman. For some odd reason, my parents needed to leave us with him and his family overnight. Maybe they were going away on business or visiting my uncle and aunt.

I recollect that my sister and I were told to wash our hair. This may have been because it was a hair-washing night for all the Boneman's kids, except that I got the impression we had been picked on because it was stipulated that we must wash our hair outside in a big concrete trough. I don't know whether the other kids washed their hair inside the bathroom, but they certainly weren't with us.

The incident sticks in my mind for its sheer strangeness, as if the Boneman regarded us as unusually dirty or distasteful, even though my mother was always meticulous about our cleanliness, even if we were in the depths of a rainforest. I can picture myself standing on my toes and shivering as I hung my head over the trough, my hair flipped forward, my skinny little neck exposed. Little did I know it then, but my whole family was in that position waiting for the executioner's axe to fall.

I suppose that our being made to wash in an outdoor sink was indicative of a maliciousness that the Boneman nursed for our family, for his vindictiveness was legendary. But maybe he thought of it as just a great jape; according to stories I have been told since then, he was that sort of man. Even now, over forty years later, we meet people from that region who sneer at the mention of his name and who still nurse wounds they accumulated from their contact with him.

My father often recounts stories from this time and is bitter about the spell under which he felt my uncle had become enchanted. Whether or not the Boneman was skimming money off the top, he had undoubtedly made my uncle a bundle— although perhaps there was nothing so special about that; everyone was making money back then because the Australian economy was in great shape and rewarded those who had any capital to invest. But

to my father, the fact that the Boneman could do no wrong in his brother-in-law's eyes jarred with everything he came to know about him.

My father wasn't the kind of person to do a man down on the strength of hearsay and gossip, but there was no shortage of stories. One of them ran something like this: a fellow was eager to procure a piece of land abutting his property for which the Boneman was the selling agent. Having been told that the price was AUS$10,000 if he could pay it in cash by that afternoon, the man duly hopped off to the bank, withdrew the cash and returned to the Boneman's office, only for the Boneman to say, 'Seeing you're that keen for it, the price has just gone up. It's now AUS$20,000 in cash, today. Otherwise, we put it back on the market.'

'You son of a bitch,' the other man muttered and punched him in the face.

That didn't appear to bother the Boneman at all. He didn't seem to give a fig for what anyone thought of him. He would readily take a punch if it meant fatter earnings. Despite his reputed acumen, he managed to go broke twice while doing business and was readily bailed out by my uncle. Things didn't make sense.

When it became obvious that the plan to make us disappear in Biboohra had failed, the Boneman invented a pretext to move us somewhere else, this time to Mount Molloy. By now, I think my father had gained a very clear idea of the character he was dealing with; he didn't yet know how calculating the Boneman could be or how much bitterness he nursed for my father. Meanwhile, my uncle and aunt came and went away from our lives. They had a lovely house nearby and would take the long trip from Denmark a couple of times a year.

I do not know why the Boneman moved us: whether it was in revenge for my mother's rejection of him—I'll explain this in a moment—or because my father was starting to question his business methods. I do know that for a long time, Dad kept his own counsel, and my mother encouraged him not to go looking for trouble. However, Tom, an indestructible old fellow who was a very dear mentor to my parents in the early days, warned my father.

'You want to watch your back, Finn.' 'What do you mean?'

'That Boneman,' Tom growled in his rusty voice. 'He's out to get you.'

'Get me? Why? I've never done him any harm.'

But Tom didn't say why—not then. Dad didn't take it seriously, but my mother soon found one reason to be on her guard.

The Boneman caught her on her own and propositioned her. He had taken a shine to my lithe and lovely mother. He said he wanted to set her up as his mistress and that he had an apartment in Cairns not far from where he lived where he could keep her and us girls.

My mother told him what he could do with himself in no uncertain terms. He clearly didn't understand her if he thought the idea of being cooped up in a shoebox, awaiting his next visitation, would appeal to her at all. But then, I don't suppose he really cared what she wanted any more than he cared what anyone did or wanted. It was what he wanted that was important, and he probably saw my father as standing in his way.

My father knew nothing of this event until many years later because my mother had decided that it wouldn't help matters to mention it, but from the Boneman's side, I would expect that her spurning of him and my father's silence about it would have soured things even further: 'the green-eyed monster which doth mock the meat it feeds on,' and all that. His wicked concoction of envy and hate and his unscrupulous nature made the Boneman a potent enemy—how potent my father only truly discovered at the end of his five-year contract when, by chance, he obtained proof of the Boneman's stealing from my uncle.

It was about something innocuous: a tractor purchase and resale. The Boneman had bought a tractor for one of the properties, using my uncle's money, and then sold it on for a much higher price. Dad knew the man who had bought the tractor and what he had paid before he came across the entries for the purchase and the sale in the account books. The two figures didn't match; somewhere in the middle, the Boneman had extracted AUS$10,000 for himself.

By this time, my father had seen with his own eyes what the Boneman was up to all over the region. And being the man he is, a man entirely with-

out guile, he arranged to meet the Boneman and call him out on it. The Boneman obfuscated and fumed and slithered this way and that, but there was no doubt in Dad's mind. Enough was enough. He would tell my uncle exactly what kind of man he had been relying on all those years, and so break the spell that my uncle was under. So he hoped, anyway.

Shortly afterwards, my uncle and my aunt were due to fly into the nearby city of Cairns from overseas. My uncle had arranged for Dad to pick them up from the airport and drive them to their house in Mount Molloy. But on the morning that they were due to fly in, Dad got a call from the Boneman saying that he was in town anyway and that it was a lot simpler for him to pick them up as it would save Dad the long drive to the airport. Dad could not do anything about it, so he agreed—a decision he would come to regret.

There are a few different versions of what happened that day. Perhaps the Boneman levelled some kind of accusation against my father during that drive; perhaps he didn't. Whatever he said or didn't say, he made the effort to make sure that my father wasn't there and given previous form it doesn't stretch the imagination much to think that he did it to get the jump on him. Whatever the truth, from our point of view, things went south for us quickly after that.

Part of my uncle's and Dad's verbal arrangement had been that one day, after Dad's good service managing my uncle's various properties, he would be gifted a house that my uncle owned on Newell Beach, to the southeast of Daintree. It was a beautiful little place, with three or four bedrooms, not hugely expensive—the figure of AUS$14,000 sticks in my head—but it would have been a lovely place to live and a lovely home to raise the family. But as my father recalls, Newell Beach was suddenly off the table after that car ride.

Instead, a week or two before the official end of the five-year term, the Boneman turned up at our house and told my father that we had to be out of the property by the first of the following month.

'But we have nowhere else to go,' protested my father. 'What are we supposed to do?'

'Not my problem, mate. Out by the first, yeah?' chuckled the Boneman, no doubt checking his white shirt and dark hair in his rear-view mirror before he left us firmly behind him.

You would think, at this point, my father would have been straight on the phone with my uncle. But to this day, it seems that Dad has never talked with him about being slung out in such a fashion, even going so far as to describe it as taboo. Maybe my uncle was intimidating in his way. It is interesting how many bad things, including crime, seem to happen because people cannot communicate properly.

As kids, we didn't get much explanation. All we knew was that one day, we were living in a nice house, and the next, we were all staying in a caravan behind a filling station. The garage was owned by a kind man with whom my father had become friendly. With nowhere to go and no immediate prospect of a job, Dad quickly decided that he would help his friend out with his mechanical work in return for a place to live and a bit of cash to keep us going.

This must have been a shock to my sister and me. But the memory I have retained most clearly about those weeks living in the caravan was once more connected with hair. We had moved school (again), and as often happens at that age, we both managed to pick up head lice from some of the other kids at school. The first time it happened, my mother washed our hair in a bucket outside the caravan, then combed diesel through our long blonde tresses with meticulous care to prevent the return of any nasty little crawlers. There we were again with our hair flipped forward, our necks exposed and the smell of diesel burning our noses as we crouched over those buckets. Only this time, the executioner's axe had already fallen.

I still remember the smell and how hard it was for my mother to comb through our hair. It hurt a lot, and even more annoyingly, it didn't work because we soon picked lice up again. They like clean hair. Our practical mother didn't mess around the second time we got them. She simply got out the clippers and shaved our heads.

We found it funny at the time. I suppose that it was degrading, but my mother had a knack for keeping her head high and her sense of humour intact, whatever the situation, at least in front of my sister and me. It was

only later that I learned of the tears she had shed. Because it is a great photo of my mother, I cherish a faded picture of the three of us from that time near my bed now, and I can finally smile about people commenting on the tow-headed little 'boys' in it. We didn't look all that ladylike even when our heads weren't shaved. Much later, I'd have to be confronted with the same problem—losing my hair—for a different reason. I wonder if my relaxed approach to that experience came from our time in the caravan.

My father got us out of this situation pretty quickly. His arrangement with his friend was for a provisional period of three months, after which they would reassess whether it was working or not. We didn't need to stay even that long. Dad got himself a contract as a fitter up in a place called Weipa, 700 kilometres to the north, and you already know what happened there.

Criminological considerations

If you cannot have love, then you look for respect. If you cannot have respect, then you look for fear.

Unknown

I feel a kind of righteous anger on my father's behalf about him and his family having been treated so carelessly. But we all know people like the Boneman, which pains me even more. I want to make some sense of it, to examine *where* these men come from (I have yet to come across a woman who shares these characteristics, but this is not to say that they do not exist) and *how* they are able to operate, indeed succeed, within our society's dynamics?

There was a joke during his first presidency that Donald Trump would be far less trouble to the rest of the world if only his father had hugged him more. I don't know if this is true, but it is well documented that Trump's father and the lessons he taught loomed large in Donald's later behaviour. When Trump was a child, his father reportedly encouraged him relentlessly to be a 'killer' and sought to channel his aggression.[4]

[4] Dan P. McAdams (2016) The mind of Donald Trump. *The Atlantic*, June. www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/06/the-mind-of-donald-trump/ 480771/

I wish I knew more about the Boneman's background, especially his relationship with his parents and other important figures in his early life. There might be an argument to ask whether it was the Boneman's 'fault' (feel free to insert a 'nature versus nurture' discussion here) or if these early influences created in him a disposition towards gathering power for himself. It is a trait that soon becomes ingrained when used in childhood with apparently successful results. A child bent on gaining power over others is playing a different game from most of their peers. They seek ways to manipulate situations and relationships to their advantage (usually in acquiring power) and become recognised by the person they admire most.

On this basis, can we say that a man like the Boneman is responsible for his actions? I think we can because we all possess free will as functioning adults. But let's take the next step: does the environment punish or encourage this behaviour? And let's be clear: *we* are the environment.

I consider men like the Boneman fully cooked monsters, broken and largely beyond redemption. Unless they are genuinely repentant, they are not interesting to me. I am far more interested in the system that creates and, most importantly, enables them. Suppose there are any lessons to be learned. In that case, they lie not in understanding the Boneman but in understanding ourselves, the conditions we create—or allow—for a man like him to thrive: we are responsible for our action or inaction in letting him, or anyone like him, get away with monstrous behaviour again and again.

Whether we are standing by or interacting, we create monsters at some level. And I believe we can change this. We can start by not turning the other cheek. I know that my father vehemently believes that he did the right thing by doing so, but our opinions differ deeply on this.

I live in England where, despite a mental health media campaign to the contrary, there is still a high social value placed on having a 'stiff upper lip' and 'politely' ignoring bad behaviour. It all sounds very harmless, doesn't it, to ignore things? But in my experience, every action causes a vibration that spreads outwards like ripples. Having lived in several different cultures, I have witnessed the downsides of this behaviour. It plays out in different ways. In passive people, virtuous feelings about not confronting the things they disagree with conflict with private struggles over feelings