

STRANGE ATTRACTOR

Sue Smith

SCENE ONE

The sound of cyclonic wind and lashing rain. The space is in darkness but for the hellish green grey light that spills through a single doorway which leads, we imagine, to the outside. GUS shouts to be heard above the din of wind and rain.

GUS: We got careless, all right. Somewhere in this bloody... bilge hole, we got careless. Are you... are any of you going to help me? Or not?

He uses all his strength to push the door open.

Blackout.

SCENE TWO

CHILLI and TAIPAN. *During this, CHILLI will collect a number of used empty glasses left from the pre-dinner drinking rush. As CHILLI works, he sings Petula Clark's 'Downtown'. CHILLI hands TAIPAN a can of beer. TAIPAN opens it and takes a mouthful.*

TAIPAN: Mate, when I need a mouthful o' warm mucus—

CHILLI: Fridge's off. Generator's down.

TAIPAN: That'd explain the hot flushes. Thought I was gettin' the change of life.

CHILLI: Maybe eat instead? Dry mess open.

TAIPAN waves the suggestion away.

You don't want to eat?

TAIPAN: Got me girlish figure to think of.

CHILLI: You gotta eat, Tai. Work hard. Not eat. No good. You're not a young man.

TAIPAN: I'm a bloody weapon o' mass destruction, son. Been taking me antioxidants.

RUBE enters.

TAIPAN and CHILLI do not acknowledge him.

RUBE: Give us a Bundy, will you?

CHILLI: Jose's salmon mornay.

TAIPAN: Mate, give me a root canal and I'll suck on the amalgam.

RUBE: Bundy. Please.

CHILLI: Wet mess closed.

TAIPAN: Hard truth.

CHILLI: Sad fact.

RUBE: Mate, don't shit me. It's forty-seven degrees out there.

TAIPAN: Just the heat of your charisma, son.

CHILLI: Rules is rules. Wet mess closed between six and seven so you pissheads eat something.

RUBE: They told me to report here, okay?

CHILLI: I don't make the rules. Wet mess closed.

RUBE: Yeah, right, sure. And so you're gonna tell me Taipan didn't just slip his fucken Swan lager under the table, are you?

TAIPAN: Never drank a lager in me life. You think I'm a fairy?

RUBE: Yeah, right, okay. And how long is this shit gonna go on for?

TAIPAN: And what shit would that be, son?

RUBE: This shit. Refusing me service. Been going on since...

TAIPAN *gestures—come on, spit it out. But...*

I could fucken report you. How'd it be if I told management in there that one of their temporary visa boys was refusing service to a paying customer? How'd that be? How long do you reckon you'd last?

Silence.

TAIPAN: I ever tell you how I got my name, Chil?

RUBE: Fuck.

CHILLI: No, Tai. How you get your name?

TAIPAN: Well, Chilli old son. Since you ask. I'll do you the courtesy.

In my glory days I was a train driver. Used to drive two and three-rake trains between Newman and Hedland. Not a bad gig—aircon in the cabin. Tchaikovsky on the headset. Downside: something goes wrong with your train, you got to walk it, find the problem. Fix it. Bad enough in the daytime. At night—man, oh man. One night I got a hot-wheel alarm—wheel's got too hot and the brake's stuck on. Three-raker, it was. Three hundred and twelve cars plus locos. Dud wheel's in the final car, isn't it? Three k's in the middle of nowhere. Black as my missus' complexion. No moon. Battery's

fucked in the torch. Walkin' the train. Not one. Not two. Not three. Five taipans tried to kill me that night. Couple of 'em got me too. By the time I'm back in Hedland, I've got tourniquets around just about everything 'cept my neck and my dick. So—legend has it—if them five taipans didn't kill me, you wanta cut off me foot and wear it round your neck for good luck.

Silence.

'Cos I'm inde-fucking-structible. That's one version o' the story. The other's about just how fast your mate Taipan can strike when somethin' gets up his crack.

RUBE: No shit.

TAIPAN: And then shed that layer of skin like nothing ever happened.

Tense silence.

TRUCKIE *enters.*

TRUCKIE: What's happened?

TAIPAN: Nothin'.

TRUCKIE: Well, what's the matter?

TAIPAN: Whaddda ya mean what's the matter?

Beat.

Come on, girlie, spit it out before it chokes you.

TRUCKIE: He's here. In the office. Charter from Perth.

TAIPAN: Who've they sent?

TRUCKIE: Didn't catch—Colin someone—

TAIPAN: Colin Colin Colin Colin...

RUBE: Who's—?

TAIPAN: Colin Murray.

TRUCKIE: They've done the autopsy—there's going to be an inquest.

RUBE: But who—?

TRUCKIE: Company's sent someone up.

RUBE: We made statements. To Worksafe. Forensic.

TRUCKIE: Guess they didn't like them.

TAIPAN: Not enough gags. They got real funny bones down there in head office.

RUBE: You knew—?

TRUCKIE: Couple of days—heard the rumour—

RUBE: You?

To CHILLI. *Who nods.*

Fuck.

TAIPAN: You're a bit of a loose cannon, you see. Be silly to trust you with sensitive information. Now wouldn't it?

RUBE: That's why they pulled me off night shift—

TAIPAN: Nah. It was to give us the pleasure of working beside you again. We've missed you. Haven't we, Truck? Wasn't anyone out there attracted the flies like you did.

RUBE: We already made statements. What do they want to know?

TAIPAN: There was a cyclone. He went out to fix the roof. Got skittled. Open and shut.

RUBE: Yes.

TAIPAN: You got that?

RUBE: I need a Bundy.

TRUCKIE: / Give him a drip—

TAIPAN: / I think that's exactly what you don't need, son. Now I asked you a question. Have you got it?

RUBE: I've fucking got it, okay.

TAIPAN: Say it.

RUBE: There was a cyclone. He went out to fix the roof and—

TAIPAN: —and—

RUBE: Can I have a drink?

CHILLI: Wet mess closed.

TAIPAN: Hard truth.

CHILLI: Sad fact.

RUBE: One day someone's going to use that face of yours as an ashtray, mate—

TRUCKIE: Alternatively, you could just shut your mouth and keep your wits about you.

COLIN enters. He wears the same company shirt as the others, but his trousers are perhaps slightly better tailored and he's a bit less grubby. He's also feeling the heat.

COLIN: G'day. Have I got the right group? Anthony Hernandez, barman. Yep. Jason Carruthers, construction labourer. Lauren Mellor, supply.

TAIPAN: Colin Murray. Cunt.

COLIN: That's funny.