

Alchemy

Visible Ink 11

PREVIOUS BOOKS IN THIS SERIES

Launched (1999)
The Words Have Eyes (1998)
Feel (1997)
Fresh (1996)
Visible Ink 6 (1995)
The Front (1994)
Visible Ink 4 (1993)
Visible Ink 3 (1992)
Visible Ink 2 (1991)
Out House (1990)



VISIBLE INK

DEPARTMENT OF CREATIVE MEDIA
ROYAL MELBOURNE INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
MELBOURNE AUSTRALIA, 2000

Copyright individual authors and artists for their work, 2000.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means – electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval system – without prior permission in writing from the publisher.

First published in 2000 by



VISIBLE INK PRODUCTIONS

RMIT Professional Writing and Editing
Creative Media – Building 94
GPO Box 2476V
Melbourne 3001
Australia

email: visible_ink@iname.com
web: <http://www.tcm.rmit.edu.au/PWE/visink99>

Alchemy: *Visible Ink 11*

ISBN 0 864 59069 5

Designed by Simon Sellars.

Front cover by Carla Gottgens.

Illustrations by:

Peter Christmas Savier (vi, 9, 25, 34, 43, 100, 109, 120),
Dee Rinbaud (14, 50, 61, 70, 76, 82, 91, 129).

Printed by Arena Printing.

CONTENTS

Foreword <i>Ben Maas</i>	viii
Introduction <i>Simon Sellars and Ben Reeves</i>	xi
Shut It <i>Finnegan Woolley</i>	3
Seduction with Feathers <i>Anita Purton</i>	4
Bitter Water <i>Celina Day</i>	12
The Shadows and the Swarm <i>Andrés Vaccari</i>	17
Eight Stories from Lima <i>Simone Dawson-Walker</i>	30
Jinks and Sheba <i>Dan Sanguinetti</i>	32
Blind Pain <i>Tony Reck</i>	39
http: <i>Tessa Keegel</i>	46
Sweet Blood, True Love <i>Jillian Abbott</i>	47
While the Groom Stood Under the Chestnut Tree <i>Ben Reeves</i>	54
She Slept with Faith... <i>Simon Sellars</i>	66
The Last Red Bike Summer <i>Louise Swinn</i>	75
From an Island <i>Maria Zajkowski</i>	80
The Weather Girl's Film <i>Carrie Tiffany</i>	81
Allah's Sheep <i>Jenny Ackland</i>	88
Aqua Profundo <i>Paola Bibrough</i>	96
Boat Plane <i>Nicola Johnson</i>	98
Hutt Valley on Easter Sunday <i>Maria Zajkowski</i>	104
Raptures of the Deep <i>Jeff Sparrow</i>	105
Picked <i>Margaret McNena</i>	116
Press Play <i>Sarah Endacott</i>	117
Notes on the Contributors	126

http:
Tessa Keegel

aichteteeteepee
colon
slash slash
doubleyou doubleyou doubleyou
dot
me
slash
walking
slash
same as yesterday
slash
toes ankles fingers hands
slash
wanting
tilda
thinking
dot
about the impossibility of you
slash
same again tomorrow
dot
eedeeyou
dot
aiyou

SWEET BLOOD, TRUE LOVE

Jillian Abbott

The body of the widow was found rotting in the bedroom. All the bones in her feet were smashed, walking must have caused her immense pain. She had died of starvation, unable to feed herself, trapped in her cushioned prison. Her husband's body was found lying in the field where a bough, blasted loose by lightning during a violent storm, had cut both their lives short. No doubt the wind carried his voice to her, imploring, commanding, willing her to come to his rescue... But by his own hand, he had rendered her lame – she could not go to another man, but she could not come to him either.

In the beginning, the man and woman mixed freely in society, until their obsession with each other grew and they turned inward, withdrawing from everyday life. Their jobs slipped by. To each, the other's separate life opened the way to betrayal. The thought of the other working – and through work, coming into contact with others, sharing one's self with strangers – conjured up images too disturbing to contemplate. She could not bear the thought of another hearing his voice. It belonged to her. She knew that others, on hearing it, would want to possess him as intensely as she did. For his part, he lived, *yet could not live*, with the knowledge that when other eyes fell upon her, they would want to devour her, as

he devoured her with his every gaze. His knowledge of her had to be exclusive, her secrets open to him alone – *his* secrets, a mystery he must protect, possess. He lived, *yet could not live*, with this knowledge. It was a simple matter of self-preservation to cart her away to the old farmhouse in the hills.

There were questions of course, and requests for a forwarding address, but these were met with evasion. They had been retreating into each other for some time, the interest they held for others dwindling. This leave-taking was merely the completion of withdrawal, not its beginning.

They left town towards the end of winter. On the appointed day, the temperature rose above freezing and the first fog of spring shrouded the city. By the time they reached the farm, the strengthening sun had burned off the fog. They saw themselves moving from darkness to light. But they were not farmers and their first season was disastrous, hunger impelling them to master farming, for they knew they could not return to town life. In time, however, they discovered the impracticality of total isolation, reluctantly accepting that occasional visits would be an unavoidable intrusion in the harmonious rhythm of their life.

The day of their first excursion was delayed as long as possible. It was not until the morning after the hen house blood bath, when a wolf devoured the rooster and all his consorts, that they accepted the necessity of commerce. By then, next year's seed had rotted, and if seed and poultry were not replaced immediately, frequent trips to town would be necessary just to avoid starvation.

The question of who would make the journey was settled in silence. Somehow, each understood that the anguish of the person left behind would be too great, their imaginings too vivid. So, when the time came, they dressed in their finest clothes and travelled to town in quietude. The village was small but the sight of so many houses, shops and people awed them.

For the woman, the day contained a pleasant surprise. The

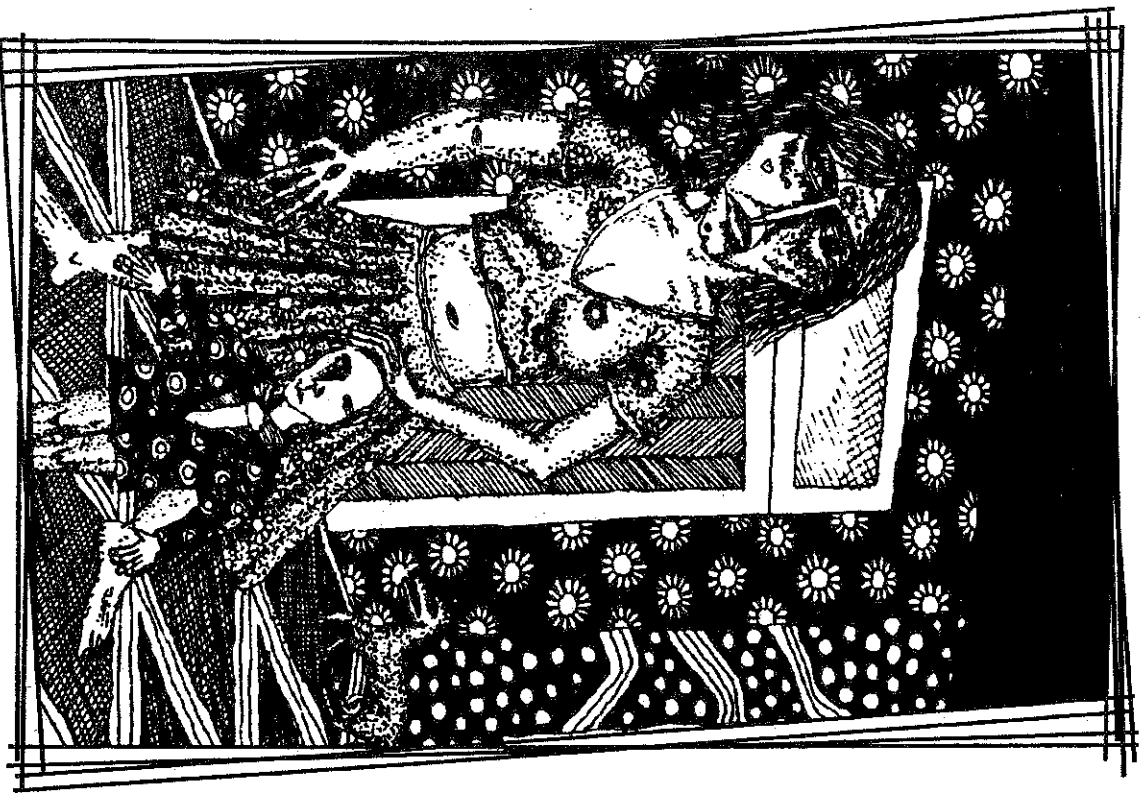
sights and sounds and smells of town life made her giddy with a different forgotten desire. Everything seemed larger than life, and at the store she found herself entranced by butterfly clips and multicoloured ribbons. As she stood caressing the cheap baubles and tinkets, an older woman – the owner of the shop – stood beside her, looking on with kind eyes and a soft smile.

The woman jumped and turned to face the matron, not knowing what to say. Then, remembering the company of women and the way they smelled – that warm, safe, feeling – she held out the collection of ornaments and said she'd take them all.

When the man found her, she was smiling at the old woman, who had quietly and skilfully discovered the manner of their life and even the district where they lived. The man saw his woman pleasantly chatting to the kind eyes and soft smile and the blood rose in his cheeks. His hands formed into fists without conscious direction. He grabbed his wife by the arm and dragged her outside, before the old woman had time to object. It was settled that the man would henceforth go to town alone – he had found nothing there to seduce him.

During the journey home, the man was filled with rage and the woman, terror. But as the houses thinned out and the countryside opened up, he began to calm. Had the journey been shorter, the violence might have begun then. Instead, upon their return, there was rough lovemaking, bringing to each a pleasant annihilation. Alone together in the wilderness, surrounded by only the sounds and creatures of nature, they settled back into calmness and serenity, knowing that the secret world of their isolated bower would remain theirs forever.

In time, the woman began to swell and a male child was born. In his arms, in her absence, the boy evoked love and possession, and protection, from the man. Yet in the presence of the wife, whose affection for their child was great, the man felt a crushing fear of



SWEET BLOOD, TRUE LOVE

51

loss and jealousy until, because these feelings were unbearable, he killed the child, clubbing it over the head and burying it underneath the maple tree. Each spring thereafter, he drained the maple's sap and boiled down the tree-child's blood, offering its sweetness to his wife. The woman grieved for the child; he kissed her tears, drank of them, possessing her again. She surrendered to his passion and in time her surrender encompassed hunger for him. Her love for the child was erased just as her enjoyment of society had been, until she was again his.

He smashed her feet, after he returned from the field to find her giving directions to a stranger. He heard her before he saw her, that melodious laughter, that sweet tender joy he had owned wholly and exclusively for so long. He heard that laughter offered to the stranger and the blood in his temples surged and throbbed. The bones in his wife's feet were shattered before the stranger was a mile away. There was no deliberation before the act; just his desire for equality of pain.

The woman grew to cherish her lameness, accepting it as a badge of their intense bond. Imprisoned in his love, she was made free, for with the loss of moment came freedom from temptation. The bones knitted together and solidified at odds with their rightful configuration. And he lived, *yet could not live*, with the pain of her disfigurement. At times he howled at what he had done. When he held her and tried with excruciating gentleness to wipe away the agony he had caused, she was touched by his remorse. They grew closer, losing themselves in each other, becoming one. Like a blacksmith alloying different metals into one flowing mass, their boundaries dissolved in the searing heat of their love. One became the other, a new life grew, and the woman's belly again began to swell.

Between them, now, was a barrier. In a dream, she opened her eyes as her husband ripped at her blanket and loomed over her huge belly. His large knife was poised to cut the obstacle away, to

join them together by removing her inner lover. Upon awakening, she felt horror, because she knew he would kill her before he would share her. This knowledge aroused her as she had never been before, and she begged him to consummate it. He ate her lips, she swallowed his tongue, and they devoured each other with a burning desire large enough to destroy them both. With his penis he stabbed at her and her distension, again and again, until the three lost themselves in dreamless sleep.

In the morning the sap ran in the maple tree, and with his memory of the tree-child came anguish. When the second child was born, the woman rejoiced that it was a girl, because she might be permitted to keep and love it. Indeed, the man now loved his wife and daughter and took pleasure in both of them. The agony of the wife's maiming made movement difficult and so he took his turn, caring for the girl himself. Seeing the love he had for his daughter reawakened in the woman a deep hunger and desire for the man. This hunger was exclusive – she wanted to have him to herself again.

In time, the woman saw the child as the man had seen the foetus in her dream – as interloper, competitor, destroyer. One evening, as the man slept, she took her baby to the maple tree and dashed its brains against the trunk. Thus, the girl joined the boy under the maple tree and the sweet blood ran both ways. There was now a truce between the man and woman, with each knowing the measure and extent of the other.

Days passed into months, then years – nothing intruded to spoil their pristine, isolated union. The farm work grew easier, and regular, although not less in volume. The man had toiled the land for so long that he thought he had tamed it as he had his wife – with loving violence.

The cyclone took them by surprise. At that latitude, storms were rare and when they did come, it was from the *inner* rather than the

SWEET BLOOD, TRUE LOVE

outer world, forming around the couple's passion and upturn only the roots of their love. But by the end of its first hour, tempest had lifted the roof off the chicken coop.

They watched in impotent horror as hailstones and w flattened their precious crops, and as the storm continued to r the man and woman recognised themselves in its fury. They t the pulse of the storm as their own, revelling in its intensity. A while lost in the eye of the hurricane, they were shaken awareness by a blast that struck fear into their souls, thunder lightning, striking the barn and igniting its roof.

The man ran outside into the fray, the howling wind pelting him with hail. He set his head low and struggled against the element blindly forcing a way forward. Then there was a lull...an metallic smell which seemed to suck all the oxygen from the There was a piercing crack as the maple tree was struck, split in two and trapping the man under a burning bough. He spent last hours with his spine smashed, imploring his wife to come his aid, knowing that it was by his hand that she couldn't. With last ounce of strength, he let forth a howl so loud and raw that wife heard him above the roar of the storm. She knew, then, that was lost and settled in to await the end, which was mercifully slow in coming.