

A LETTER ABOUT "ANGLESEA"  
TO MY FRIEND DOUG  
FROM NICHOLAS HOLLOWAY (email to [nick@nickholloway.com](mailto:nick@nickholloway.com))

Saturday 8th July, 1995.

Dear Doug,

I have my ear to his heart. At Ballarat he held me. He brushed his fingers through my hair with the deliberate rhythm of care nursing me softly and soft and soft. And that's when it began. At Ballarat The Arsonist set light the fire that would burn until nothing was left, nothing except the flame turning in his heart, softly and soft and soft. In a country town, in a terrace house, in a lounge room with a television and a couch and a mirror it began. In a seventeen year old boy's embrace it began. In the simplicity of his touch on my head, his heartbeat in my ear it began. At Ballarat The Arsonist began his work. Watch it burn.

I despised you. You were queeny and loud, fat and short, brash and ugly. You were mean and never used my name when you spoke to me. I used to cringe when I saw you perform your camp, cheeky, ugly, sleazy sex show. For irony there was a streak of sequined bitterness - just like the real thing. I saw a stupid, empty headed, girley, ugly poofter. And you couldn't even remember my name. I hated you.

I set upon your seduction. On New Year's Eve I played cheeky and your eyes lit up. Now you saw me and if nothing else you would remember my name. With the twin gifts of innocence and naivete I flirted outrageously, devouring you and though it took weeks you finally came close to asking me. You scrambled to walk with me and how delicious it was to watch you move to the very edge of seeking it from me then hide. You didn't ask me, so I couldn't answer you. Together we cast a promise, and with the seduction incomplete I rode off into a February night and you went back to Ballarat.

You couldn't wait to find me and tell me about Jason. I was scared. What I had just found I risked losing. I needed you. And now there was him. Beautiful him, you said. Seventeen and glorious. Met him in a toilet, all smiles though, no fucking. Not yet.

It took a week before you fucked him. As you spoke I went with you, on the way to him, into his caravan, into his life, into his bed. You held him, and took him, and he gave you what you wanted, and he never stopped giving. The night you told me this I noticed a spider web of cum between me and the buttons on my pants. I wanted to meet him.

Jason was seventeen. Clear Levi's and a black belt made an invitation to him. Let us. In the awkwardness that fell about our silences he smiled and issued the invitation. He looked at me. Let's. And I did. I grinned. He was gorgeous.

Caravan's are cold and desolate places and you gave him a home, you had him in your claw. Did he grow tired of the fucking after the first few weeks? Certainly he grew fond of the warmth of his new mother's embrace. It was a first for him, not that he was a virgin, he had fucked before. But his own mother had never even promised what you were creating daily; a home. Clinging to his new mother's breast he sucked you off nightly and you made pasta and beans to keep baby plump and content. You aren't a bad cook.

Falling in love with you was easy, the two of you together were irresistible. I became part of your family, nestling in your wing, infatuated by your laughter. It was so easy to fall into it, to lay down inside it, to be idle and watch you do the work, tell the gags and keep the show running. Like Jason I became lazy and gave you responsibility for it; audience was the role you had seduced me into. Cruising the lake were the ugly men of Ballarat seeking a fuck, dancing in their shadows we laughed at them, we mocked them that afternoon.

That evening we went to the theatre to watch you act. While in life you perform like a diva, you struggle to have a presence on stage. The work was fine, just not very interesting. The play was called 'The Public Eye' and he that played it called Peter, your teacher and utterly compelling. After the show we drove to his place.

In the car I had a feeling of dread, sudden and to the heart it clouded over me and I wanted to get out of the car and go back. I almost did.

Apparently Peter's house was a ritual; a glass of wine, chocolate and gossip. How suddenly you to share a drink and a bitch with the dean of the college, you had found your way to the clique of control; this was a place that was utterly repulsive to me. I retreated to the cushions near the fire, by now I had learnt to allow your noise to fill the spaces and silences I brought into a room. I could hide behind you, and tried to, but Peter refused me this

behaviour, and he was relentless in his refusal.

Midnight passed and Peter began his assault. I used every posture in my body to avoid his glare but he wouldn't take his eyes off me. Seeking something from me became a parlour game at first and even I found it amusing, flattering in fact. Peter had taken some kind of interest in me and began asking me about my life. I was characteristically shy and withdrawn but he didn't give up. Revealing my awareness of his pursuit I blushed and the whole room changed colour. By now only you and Jason and Peter and I were left in the room. It was funny. He was funny. What he was doing, whatever he was doing was witty and sharp and interesting.

He was after something and he was getting there by asking me questions about the way I felt, the way I saw and heard and he wouldn't stop. You and Jason fell silent. After half an hour I was tired. It was sheer and relentless. It didn't hide itself. After an hour I couldn't look at him. He didn't stop. After two hours I was afraid. I had never been to this place, I didn't understand what he wanted or what he was doing. I felt helpless. This was a beginning. By the third hour I felt sick. In the fourth I had given away all resistance. Speech abandoned me in the fifth hour. Surrender came in the sixth, but even this did not distract him.

In the seventh he pointed to the mirror over the fire place. He asked me to look into it. I couldn't even lift my head. The thought of seeing myself repulsed me. He asked me to look into the mirror and say "I love you". I couldn't do it. Shame and terror and grief tore at my heart. I cried. Jason came and held me in his arms. At last it had begun. Listening to his heart beat I heard a sound I had forgotten. Burning inside of me was a fire that was almost dead. Now it breathed, softly and soft and soft. All he did was brush his fingers through my hair, that's all he did. He held me, I was exhausted, I needed him to hold me and I gave in. He cared for me that morning, I welcomed his care and in that moment it began. That morning in a house in Ballarat it began.

Along the highway between Ballarat and Melbourne you played your compilation tape of camp eighties hits and sang along, always managing to be a half pitch from the actual key. I tried to sleep, but even when you stopped singing I couldn't rest. Something, somehow had happened at Ballarat that morning, a gift had been whispered to me and now it lay with its wrapping torn off and I couldn't put it down. You drove me home.

Here is how I slaughtered my father the night after Ballarat; deliberately. You always used to park and turn the engine off at the bottom of my drive and we

would wait, talking sometimes, but really just drawing out that inevitable moment of parting. Reluctance is the key note of your goodbyes. You hate the word, you hate the event and you tease farewell out until it is fatal. What I did to my father that night was not fatal, I only tore his heart out; deliberately

It won't surprise you if I tell you I hated my father. There is nothing extraordinary in that. In my eyes he had grown repulsive. The war had started years ago, the battles constant and unrelenting. Sunday was the day for it, because this is when he and I would spend time together and it would always begin with something trivial. Sunday was the day after Ballarat, and I can barely even remember how it started so it must have been trivial.

You drove off and I walked up the drive, the glow of exhaustion dancing to an eighties dance track inside me. Mum said something to me as I walked in and I brushed her off. Dad tightened his fist and it began. Mum took off up the stairs and I watched her and it occurred to me that she did this every time Dad and I got going. Not this time, I thought. No more. I followed her to the stairs and with both my arms I grasped her and held her. Dad puffed his chest out and shoved it against my body, he put his face so close to mine the stench of his cigar breath smeared me. "Let her go" he said. No. "What will I do Dad? Do you think that I will hurt her? She is my mother. I love her. What do you think I will do to her? I love her". And he moved away from me. No more, I thought, it's got to stop, this has to stop, now, tonight, here. No more. I pulled mum into the lounge room and dad followed. He sat down and I started. With each of these phrases I tore my father's heart out:

"You have failed us"

"You have failed mum"

"You have failed me"

"You are weak"

"You don't know me"

"You don't know yourself"

"You pretend to be somebody you're not"

"You are pigheaded"

"You never admit fault"

"You never say sorry"

"You repulse me"

"You are incompetent"

"You are lazy"

"You are irresponsible"

"You have left everything for mum to do"

"You have made her carry us"

"You have neglected us"  
"You are a coward"  
"You abandoned your own mother"  
"You left her when you were young and abandoned her"  
"You lost her. When she died the telegram went to an old address"  
"You abandoned your brother"  
"You don't know him"  
"You never knew your own father"  
"You were abandoned by him"  
"You never talk about him to me"  
"You don't know my brother, your son"  
"You can't talk to him"  
"You are a bully"  
"You threaten us with your fists"  
"You bully mum"  
"You fight with her"  
"You don't listen to her"  
"You have hit me"  
"You can't hold a job"  
"You have failed to provide security for mum"  
"You have failed to provide the home she longs for"  
"You have failed to care for us"  
"You have failed to listen"  
"You have failed us"  
"You have failed us"  
"You have failed us"

Much more was said and done than this. He would not hear it and fought me for hours. He tried to get up and walk away and I pushed him back down onto the sofa saying, "No More. This is it. No more Dad". And then mum, whom I had brought into the room with us, started crying. My mum just never cries really. Dad said to her "Are you just going to sit there and let him say these things" and she replied, "It had to be said. It has to be said". And after that he went quiet, though I didn't stop, I kept on and on and on, until he was silent and dead, his eyes were dead and sad and teary. I had broken him. Now I let him walk away, his body sunken and weighty, I stopped him and hugged him and said to him "I love you Dad". And that is how I tore my father's heart out.

By now it was the second midnight and I had not slept for over two days, and what hope of sleep was there now? Celebrating the defeat of my father I walked the streets for hours. This was a kind of dance, the blood still warm in my mouth from the kill, and I had done it hadn't I? That was the single

recurring thought that night; it really did happen didn't it? I really did say those things. I turned a corner and remembered pushing Dad down back onto the couch refusing him to escape from me, to run away, refusing him, denying him, and it was me that had done it wasn't it? I danced down the street. I don't mean I walked as if I danced, I grabbed street poles and hurled myself around them, I ran to the edge of houses and jumped on to their fences and danced. With a clenched fist I raised it to the sky and shouted "Yes". Ego took a walk down it's patch and paraded the arrogant victory; my victory. Even though I ought to feel ashamed to recall this I don't. Actually, it's thrilling.

One time Dad and I had fought quite badly and it had ended on such bad terms that I left the house for a day and a night. I remember having a fantasy then of what it would be like if Dad became everything I demanded of him, if somehow he were to change. So severe would this metamorphosis need to be that it would transform everything, including my relationship with him, and in turn myself, and the change would take hard work, not just on his part but also on mine. The change would upset every pattern of behaviour I had grown used to in my relationship with my father and I would have to change also. I was so exhausted by the thought of this that I returned home, content to settle back into old patterns and old behaviours, rather than begin the hard work of change alongside dad and enter into a new and unfamiliar relationship with him. It must have been premonition, because that is exactly what began the morning after I defeated my father.

On a Monday morning the house should have been empty. When I woke up I took a breath in but before I could release it I heard a human sound; somebody was in the house. When I walked in to the bedroom Dad was laying down, his skin was grey and tears were dribbling down his cheeks. What could I have seen and felt? I will tell you what I did; I sat with him and held his hand. I was scared and sad. Was this my father? On a Monday morning Dad should be at work, that is where Dad should be. I offered him a cup of tea, food, anything, please dad, anything. He shook his head. What had I done? I told him I loved him and he held my hand tighter and cried.

Food to my father is his single greatest pleasure, not what he values most, but what he celebrates, he loves to eat, and eat, and eat. By Tuesday he still had no appetite and on Wednesday he visited our doctor who prescribed a psychiatrist's number, but they booked him into an appointment weeks away. Dad told me this and I immediately wrote a letter to the psychiatrist telling him that Dad was not eating and was unable to work. The moment I had written it I travelled to the psychiatrist's surgery and asked to see him. The concerned receptionist took the letter and assured me he would get it. I told

her I would wait, and did.

Nestled away in a house in a chic little inner city suburb it was quiet and green and springtime was just beginning in its court yard. Now I was ashamed, this was no victory, there had been no defeat, I had hurt my father so deeply he had almost lost touch with himself. Doubt filled me and all I cared for was to see my dad again, be with my dad again, and I sat there and waited until someone would help, anyone. Finally she came and said the psychiatrist would see dad the next evening. She looked at me in such a caring way, almost as if she was proud of me.

Slowly is how it happened, day by day he got better, and within a week he was back at work and eating. Slowly is how we spent our time together, not saying much but just being with each other, getting to know each other again, getting to know ourselves. What had happened was neither him nor me, not defeat or victory, not anything we could understand really, but it had happened to us and that's what we shared; we had survived it and now we just held each other. My father and I have never fought each other since that day, we disagree and clash, we are different people, but we have never fought again.

Abruptly I came at you and told you everything that had happened. We shared a meal, you and Jason and I, and I brought you with me through every moment, hurling out of control with panic for myself and my father. I had questions, so many questions, about what would happen, concerns about my father and myself, a sudden helplessness corroding that day to day sense of safety, and all Jason could say was "Don't worry. It'll be alright", with that stupid righteous smile on his face. No that wasn't enough, I wanted to tell you and keep on telling you but he got in the way. He wanted to move on, I wanted to go on like that forever. "Don't worry. It'll be alright". Who was he to say this? Did he think he knew? That stupid seventeen year old fuck had no idea. These are the thoughts I had. I kept asking him "Who are you to say this? You don't know that. Who are you to say this?". And though we were sitting in the kitchen of a little Italian restaurant on a table with a dozen other people you stood up and stopped us by shouting "That's enough" and walked out.

We walked silently with you until we reached a bar and went inside and sat down for a drink. I was persistent and kept on at you, I needed to talk to you and he was in the way. Get out of the way Jason, that was my intention, get out of my way, but he wouldn't move. Persistently he said "I'm just saying you've got to trust that all this will turn out alright". When he said that I wanted to strike him across the face and wake him up. Instead I did this. I

said "Who do you think you are? Do you think you can see the future? Do you think you know? Who died and made you the prophet?" and I reached across and made the sign of the cross on his forehead. It was desperate cruelty, and it worked, he stood up and without saying a word he left us.

"It finally happened". That's what dad said two months later when I walked into their bedroom on a Saturday morning to read the papers with my parents. "Good morning" is what I said, and "how are you and", and he replied "It finally happened". Immediately I looked at him and a tear came. There was always stories of dad and his work, that is what mum and dad had spent decades arguing about, dad and his work, dad and his work, dad and his work. What mum never realised is that dad worked for her and for no other reason. He worked because she wanted him to, because that was the condition of their marriage.

Dad was a sailor, as his father had been, and it is what he had wanted to be since he himself could say "dad". Dad had a wanderlust and pursued it with his youth around the world. When he met mum it had changed. His love for her was so strong he had to choose between the sea and her. At first he chose the sea, and broke her heart and left her for over a year until he returned to her and (though he had me promise never to tell her this, I will tell you) she held him and said "Don't you ever go away again"; and he didn't. He stayed with her and got a job, selling, in business, a place that was alien to him, but he did it for mum, and he succeeded at it, for a long time. But he was never a fighter, and finally they got him, they betrayed him, they ate him up and spat him out, and my mother had never forgiven him for his incompetence, she punished him for it every day of his life. As he went from one failure to the next, the increasing pressure would finally paralyse him, it was a slow and gradual build up and the final event of it would be quiet and harmless really. This is what he meant when he told me "It finally happened".

They had worked him hard in this latest job. It was underpaid and he had been given a burden of responsibility beyond what could be reasonably expected from him. It had smothered him. I asked him what had happened. "Well not much really. I was just sitting in the office and the phone was ringing and I looked at it and I just couldn't answer it. I just sat there and watched it, and I just couldn't answer it". He was holding my hand. "The boss was good. He came and sat with me for a while. They rang your mum, got me in a taxi and...". He held my hand, and gripped it tight and cried and I saw my father's courage and his strength; it's his heart, he is human. I love my dad. I love him with all my life.

Within a month my brother David got married. On dad's birthday each year



I had become used to watching my father accept that his first born son David most probably wouldn't call him, and it wasn't that he had come to a final acceptance of this, instead I would see him go through the same ritual every year. The birthday would begin and Dad would be in good spirits, early afternoon and he'd hurry to the phone if it rang, and then be disappointed that it hadn't been David calling. In the evening Dad put on a good show through the meal, he liked to eat, it distracted him, but as the day ended it would collapse. We would be sitting watching television and he would fall quiet and sullen, suddenly leave the room angry and upset, to sit in the dining room, the room where the phone was.

Dad and David used to fight, just the way Dad and I had, but David had enough and left home, and when he left he lost touch with us. It wasn't sudden and abrupt, it was over years, a gradual decay of relationship, until finally he was a stranger in our home. I caught a glimpse of this one Christmas day when he turned up in the late afternoon and stayed for only a few hours, sitting in the lounge room smoking, coughing and pale. By this time mum had become tentative with him, it's like he had trained us all to keep a distance or else, but finally she couldn't help but see her sick son and fuss over him. He cut her short; "If you don't leave me alone mum I'll leave". So she left him be, and he left shortly after that anyway. This is what David had done, he pulled away from us and any attempt to come close to him was dangerous as it risked losing him, and fearing his loss we failed to act; did we lose him anyway?

The price for this was no higher than at his wedding. Who were these people? I did not know his friends, I did not know his wife's family, these people were the people of his life, and I didn't recognise them. Was I at the right wedding? Who had invited me? The person I knew the least was the groom, he was a stranger to me.

I watched David with his wife Lin's father. They liked each other, they had a rapport, they laughed and joked with each other, he put his arm around David with pride, they had a friendship. I had never even met this man that was holding my brother, fathering him in a way that David denied his own dad. I can't even remember the last time dad touched David, let alone embraced him. How must dad have felt seeing this?

At the reception Dad gave a speech. He told a story that revealed someone who knew and loved his son deeply. It was a story from when we lived in Mosman. When David was younger, he was a promising athlete, he excelled in most sports, most notably cricket. When he was eleven he achieved an extraordinary feat of sportsmanship while playing cricket for his school, he

bowled an entire team out for seven runs. For a short while he was famous, with an article in the local paper and the award of a trophy by his school. It was an actual cricket ball mounted on a plaque that commemorated the event. Dad told the story of how one day David ran into the house and was looking for a cricket ball, as they had lost the one they were using in the neighbourhood match that afternoon. Unable to find one, David went into his room and tore the one from the trophy and used that. As Dad told this story his voice became deep and full. It captured David beautifully, a man who was much more interested in what was concrete and real, the day to day rather than the ethereal gift of an award, even at age eleven. As Dad spoke, people drank and ate, dishes were rushed in and out of the kitchen, people muttered and missed completely Dad's silence at the end of the story when he took a deep breath in and sighed. Did David hear this? I don't know.

It was while at this wedding reception that I learnt my sister Sarah was coming home. It was her husband Philip that let it slip, and who also managed to tell me that they had been planning it for a while and was surprised mum and dad hadn't told me about it. It didn't surprise me at all. Sarah and I hadn't spoken for almost three years. We had fallen out and away from each other, and now we barely knew each other. I hated her and tortured her because she would not give me what I demanded from her; approval. Three years of silence lay between my brother's wedding and the night she refused her little brother his little brotherhood. Now I was twenty, then I had been seventeen. Here is what happened.

When I was seventeen I did some theatre work and took it all very seriously. One night I showed her some photographs of the latest show I was doing, I was proud and wanted to show my sister what I had achieved and how well I was doing. I shoved them in her face, one after another after another.

She looked at them and asked me "Why are you doing this?". I didn't understand the question and immediately felt hurt and confused. She wanted to know why I was pursuing this work, putting on shows. One by one she shot off questions to tear us apart.

"What's the worth in doing this?"

"Do you really think you can make it?"

"Why are you choosing it? What's it got to do with you?"

"Why are you dreaming like this?"

"It's competitive. It's hard work. You need to be talented"

"Do you think you're gifted?"

"Do you think you have something other people don't?"

"Do you think you're special?"

"Do you think you're better than us?"

It was deliberate. It hurt deeply and I grew angry and shouted at her and made her cry (it wasn't difficult with Sarah), I stormed out of the room in fury and went to sulk in my room.

Over the next few weeks we argued each time we saw each other, and always it would come to the same moment of me seeking her support and approval for this choice in my life, and her refusing it. She came to the show I had put on and afterwards I sat with her in the theatre and held her hands and pleaded with her "Sarah this is very important to me". The next time I saw her we discovered exactly the same heat in our exchange and she went home in a mess of tears and shouting, me in fury and now nurturing a freshly wrought bitterness. I determined that envy must have been driving this torrent of jealousy. Mum and Dad would not take sides. They knew that it would hurt Sarah more than anything for them to show favour, so I set out to wrench approval from my sister.

At first it was my seventeen year old shoulder turning cold to her. She didn't show anything. I thought that within a few weeks she would burst and we would have it out. She didn't. After a few months the bitterness was turning over daily and I grew even more determined to show her how angry I was. At first all I would do was acknowledge her and have basic conversation, but as the sixth month approached something more was needed so I kept it to the barest minimum of pleasantries. At the end of the first year it had been pared back to a greeting and a farewell and by half way through that year even this was lost, and by the second year's end I would walk out of a room she walked into. By the beginning of the third year I had forgotten who she was, she had become alien to me. I hated her. She was evil. She was not even human. I wished her dead. I had hurt her with my coldness and she had struck back, becoming destructive in her behaviour too. I did much worse to her however, I won't boast about it here, but please just take it at my word, I hurt her regularly the same way and much worse.

David's wedding was shortly after that. I had turned eighteen, I had turned nineteen, I had turned twenty and I had not spoken to my sister in all this time. Now she was going to move back into our family's home for the summer while she and her husband built their new home. That is the news Phil handed on to me at my brother's wedding, and that is the night I decided that it had to stop, finally. No more, that is what I thought. No more.

I told mum and dad I would move out unless Sarah contacted me and was willing to work things out. They tried not to deal with it for a while, and

finally by announcing a deadline, I forced them to action. The next Sunday they went to see Sarah, and I waited for them to come home. They returned after a couple of hours. As the car pulled in the drive I watched them get out, walk past the living room where I was sitting and go straight up the stairs into their bedroom. They didn't even acknowledge me.

On walking into their bedroom I didn't recognise the people lying in mum and dad's bed. I saw two children bawling and hiding under their covers, they spoke but were incomprehensible through their crying. What had I done? Immediately a bolt of calm settled inside of me and I sat down. That is what is needed, I thought, be calm and they will catch on, I will sit here and be with them and they will cry it out. When I was little mum and dad would do the same thing with me if I was upset and in a state. I wanted mum and dad back in the room, not these two strange children.

Slowly they sat up, and then told me what had happened. They had offered Sarah a lift to work and on the way they told Sarah they thought she should contact me and talk it out, make the peace. Sarah went ballistic. I could tell you everything that she said to them, but I needn't. Essentially there is only one thing she accused them of in the car that day; "You favour him". She punished them dreadfully for what I had made them do, she terrified them and reduced them to what had walked in the door and scurried to the safety of their bed. We talked it through and I apologised to them. Somehow I had crossed some fundamental line in demanding this of my parents and I was sorry for it, afraid for them. We sat there for a while, and by the evening we were laughing, mum listening to the news, dad having a smoke out the back. I breathed a sigh of relief, the strange children were gone, mum and dad were home again.

The first strategy had failed, so I set all my energies towards finding another way of forcing her hand. Since mum and dad had not moved her, perhaps her husband would. Mum and Dad had told me Sarah was angry at me for threatening them in this way as they had real life problems to deal with, principally a mortgage on their new home. The fact that they could spend the summer rent free at our family's home gave them an essential head start. Sarah saw me as being childish in placing my own feelings on par with real world concerns, the grown up problem of building a home. Using this as my premise, I wrote to her husband Phil and told him I did not want to stop them spending the summer at home. Instead I wanted us all to live together under the one roof, but didn't see this as possible given the relationship between Sarah and I. That's what I was seeking, I told him, peace with Sarah, and that could only come from her contacting me with a willingness to make the peace. As a vicious postscript I sent the letter by certified mail, so that only

Phil could sign for it.

It worked. She rang me. I picked up the phone and she said "We have to talk". I asked her if she wanted to make a time and place. She ignored me and within moments we were having the same argument we had suspended years earlier, but something terrifying had happened. As I listened to her describe how she felt about me, about what I had done, I heard her hate me. She had forgotten who I was, as I had forgotten her. We had created monsters and demons of each other in the silence that lay between us. I kept saying over the phone "I love you Sarah. I love you" and all she could say was "I don't understand you. I don't understand". She was at work and in tears and hung up on me.

Some days later Phil came over. By some sheer coincidence this was one of the few times my brother was visiting our home. Almost immediately Phil went for me. For the first time he spoke to me about the trouble with Sarah. He saw my behaviour as selfish, hateful, cruel and hurtful. It grew heated and my brother David hung back most of the time, that is until Phil said something about mum. I can't even remember what it was, and it wasn't out and out disrespectful, but it was enough for my brother to stand up and tell Phil "Right. That'll do mate", and that was enough for Phil to shut up. My brother got me into his wife's car and they drove me to work. I had never seen David like this, behaving with care and responsibility in this way. That evening he fathered me and cared for me and it just about makes the whole ugly three years with Sarah worthwhile.

I felt defeated and all that was left was to save pride. I took off out of the house as they moved in that night. This was a crucial choice; to leave now was really to leave in a final way. I could have done it. Finally there was only question before me "How can you care for Sarah?". I chose to go home that night. I walked upstairs and knocked on my sister's door. They were in bed, Phil was reading and Sarah had her back turned and was curled up, as if asleep. I told Phil I wanted to talk to her, he said she had to be up very early in the morning and asked me to go away. I asked him again. He said no. I asked him again, "Please Phil", he said no. I stood there. It had come to this, I couldn't even speak to her, I felt lost. And then she turned over and said "What do you want?". I spoke to my sister, "I love you. That's all. I just want you to know that. We don't have to talk about it if you don't want to. I love you, that's all". We said goodnight.

As I walked to my room my mother found me in the pitch as black hall and she called my name. I said "It's okay mum, I'm not going away" and she said "Good boy" and kissed me goodnight. I was awake again, I was dancing the

same dance I had found the night after Ballarat. I lay in my bed and had the conviction of love beating inside me. I had said "Yes" and that's all I had needed to do. You see I didn't understand why I had done what I had done, only that it was with the conviction of love that I did it. Something was changing inside me, and around me. Great gifts were being given and more promised, I lay there in my bed that night like a kid on Christmas eve, so excited about the coming morning that I couldn't sleep.

In the intense encounters that transform us there are the thrilling and terrifying moments of change. What follows is the slowly evolving shifts in the day to day patterns of our lives, the gradual change of posture, our way of breathing, walking, sleeping and feeling. Slowly relationships begin again with new understanding and new ways of listening and touching. Gently is the touchstone of real change, it's day to day and often imperceptible; it begins immediately but is negotiated daily.

With my sister our relationship normalised within a couple of weeks, but the tragedy of a three year silence is that we no longer knew each other, and what we thought we knew we were tentative of. We settled into a cautious and careful relationship of civility. I hated it and accepted it, at least we were talking, that was something, and for the time being that's all it could be. What was frightening was the thought that it might never be anything else, the aftermath of our destruction left very little hope for any real meaning in our relationship again, perhaps it was too late. In the meantime all I could do was wait and hope that by some miracle we would hold each other again. The miracle would come but it would take another three years before it touched us, and that is just about how long it took before we were ready for it.

In the meantime my life was changing. With sudden conviction I finally made an application for the college I had been wanting to attend for years. It was a competitive entry scheme and very few people made it in. I knew I would, and did. Action upon the conviction of love has its perks.

When I started college they worked us. We would arrive in the morning and they would work us until we were sweating and then they would keep working us until we ached and then sometime after that the day would end. Towards the end of the first week I came home and you had left a message saying you were in trouble and needed to see me. Though I was exhausted I immediately jumped on my bicycle and rode in to see you. I remember looking at the bicycle and reckoning that it must have been almost a year to the night since we stood around it and you had come close to seeking something from me, but had failed to actually ask for it. Anyway it didn't matter, you had met Jason almost immediately and that had been that, right?

Jason had left you. Without warning and without any particular reason he had left you. He had told you that afternoon and you were in shock. I held you and you cried like a baby, you sobbed into my shirt so that it was warm and wet when I took it off that night. As the weeks went by you soaked me in your tears, and your anger and your self-righteous bitterness towards him. Every day I would shower to wash it away and every day you would bathe me in it again, in your car, in restaurants, on street corners and on the phone. You showed me your diary, the letters you intended to write to him, you played me Barbara Streisand singing Stephen Sondheim, you sang that ridiculous half pitch off perfect. You talked and talked and talked and talked and talked and wept and raged raged raged against him and life and you went on and on and on and on for months. You were drowning me in your pity for yourself, you couldn't stop singing this song, just one note long "Me", that's all you could do any more; "Me". You made me sick with its monotony and finally one night I kicked my foot into the floor and took you into my eyes and said "Let's change the record, this track's getting boring".

Slash, and it cut through you like a knife, and that's when I took the first hack at the umbilical cord between us. You ran away, you wouldn't speak to me for weeks, and finally when you did it was like you were forgiving me and I was receiving your grace, it was sickening to be with you. And what is it you had to say when you spoke to me at last? "I'm going to London" and with that you announced that you had finally made the choice to leave me.

The mask is just a piece of wood, carefully carved and polished into a simple, unexpressive, human face. There are two holes for the eyes and in order for its wearer to breathe there is space for where the mouth and nose should be, this way air can flow in and out. David, the dean of the college and one of my teachers, called it "Neutral Mask", and this was the ritual he taught us. "Choose a mask from the many that are laid out before you, each has been hand carved and is unique, and you will be drawn to choose a particular one each time; as if it calls you. When you have chosen the mask take it to a place in the room that is private and sit with it a while, hold it and feel it and look at it. When you are ready, being sure that your back is turned to those around you, turn away and place the mask on your face, then lie down and relax. Sometime after that the mask will awake. Allow it to move you".

The first time he had us simply put the mask on and stand in the room. He invited us to be on a sandy plain that stretched to the horizon in every direction; he invited me to the desert. I stood there and power filled me, it was intoxicating and stunning. All I had done was put on this mask, enacted this simple ritual, and it was charging through me and around me with a

power that I had never experienced; it was seductive.

Water was the second image. This was about a week after the first time, and I hadn't given this work a lot of thought. I chose a mask, spent some time with it, placed it on my head, and lay down. The next thing I remember is being moved around the room in a torrent of energy and emotion, it hurled me around the room, it jumped me up and down, it breathed and farted, and vomited out spirit into a little rehearsal room in South Melbourne. I remember having both my feet and hands planted on the ground, all four limbs banging on the wooden floor with an increasing rhythm, faster and faster and faster until I wasn't even aware of where I was, and then I collapsed. David said to relax, to let it go, and I did. I was angry and blamed him for doing this to me. I was scared, this was unfamiliar and I didn't like it at all. He laughed and was fascinated by what had happened. As I left the class that day he asked me if I was alright and I brushed him aside with a "Yes".

I walked out of the room and up the corridor, onto the street and into the city. I bought two sausage rolls and a bottle of lemon mineral water and sat in the mall. I couldn't sit still, from deep inside of me was flowing a stream of clear, bright, clean energy and it wasn't stopping. I had forgotten that life could feel like this, and it wasn't stopping, I couldn't even sit down, I kept jumping up on my feet and even that wasn't enough, I started swearing "Fucking Fuck. Fucking Fuck Fuck Fuck", scaring the lunchtime crowd around me. I walked, and kept walking, all the way home and then finally I realised I was barefoot, I had not even paused afterwards to put my shoes on. I went home and had a bath and celebrated, and it was another day and night before it began to subside. What was happening? I wanted some more of this terrifying drug.

David kept dealing it to me. Images of wind and fire followed. After fire I wanted to be sick but David wouldn't let me leave the room, finally he did and I went and lay down, my head throbbing so that I couldn't stand up. I lay down and suffered bad pain right throughout my body, if this was a drug, I had just taken some bad stuff.

Earth came next. It was a dreary afternoon, wet and grey and cloudy, I looked into the skylight above the room as David talked. I had a sense I would never come back here again, that these were the last moments I would spend here. I chose a mask, fondled it in my hands and eyes, placed it on my head and lay down.

The mask awoke. Earth was rich and moist and cold and alive. It stretched my body up and fell it down, slowly at first and then with intent, up and down, stretching up, falling down, pulling me up, catching me down,



throwing me up, hurling me down, and on and on and on, up and down, up and down, bruising me and bashing me and striking me and playing me up and down, up and down, and then oscillating so frequently that it held me and I couldn't move at all. Earth was hard and rock and concrete, suffocating and dense, to move was to take the effort of life and breathe, but even this seemed impossible. I was lying prostrate in the room and trying to edge forward, darkness pushing down, pushing in, death, this was death. I fought it, my body trembling and shaking, my veins bursting as I moved slowly forward. With every effort of movement I left the room. The last thing I remember is my hand reaching around to the back of my head.

I took the mask off and looked at it. It was dripping wet with mucus and tears. I had my back to the class and the room was silent. David came up and sat by me and took my hand. He lifted me up, and held me, and we turned around to face them. I was like an old man and a child, I couldn't even stand up straight. He walked me back to the class and I let out a sound that fascinated. It was a deep, ancient sigh and with that it broke. It had started coming and now it wasn't going to stop. David put me next to someone and they held me, and I was just a mess, I couldn't even communicate, they were talking to me and I couldn't even sit up straight. David cleared the room and sat me with me and held my hand and that's all he did. I was speaking nonsense, not even speaking, just shouting. And then it would be calm, and I'd breathe, up, up, up and then a rush of pain and terror and grief and more tears and so it went on for an hour. I know when it stopped because I suddenly felt David's hand and saw him and became self conscious and pulled my hand away. It was as if I had come to the surface and I breathed, cool and fresh and this is what it tasted like; air. I had forgotten it, but now I remembered with deep breaths. David sighed relief.

After a while he invited me into his office and offered me a drink. I thought he meant like a Coke or something, but he handed me a scotch and helped himself to some, which he swallowed in one take. He was shaken. As I sat there an extraordinary peace came upon me. It is still one of the greatest gifts I have received.

Almost immediately I moved in with Juliet. Juliet was sweet and sad and vicious, beautiful and vulnerable and fire. From the moment I had met her she had known me, it was as if we said "Oh, there you are". That had been years earlier, and now we were moving out of home together.

On the eve of this came my twenty first birthday. We had drinks, you and I and Juliet and Chris. Chris was a big breasted, sassy girl who liked to fuck around. She was short and funny, joked with a broad accent and could mix

it up with the boys. She had a mess of big beautiful blonde hair, and startling blue eyes. She was stunning as both mother and whore. She liked my big fat lips, and called me "sweetheart". I loved her, and so did Juliet. You and she were rivals for whatever it was you and she did, the game you played in bars and nightclubs, conversations and flirting, you understood each other and kept the repartee sharp.

It was some time after midnight when you toasted me happy birthday. It was some time after that when I began to feel the earth slipping away from under me. I kept a tight lid on it though, this is what I had done for so long, why should I let go now.

Chris drove me home. In the car on the way I broke down and to this day I can't tell you why I did, but I did. When we got home, Chris parked in the drive and held me, "Let it out sweetheart. Let it all out" and I did. I wept as she held me close to her breast and I had no idea why, but Chris knew, somehow she understood and could hear me, that's why I could cry like that. Somehow in her life she had felt what I was crying, and that event heard my own grief, though even I did not know what this grief was about, either for her or me.

Time for a party. Let's forget all this and get pissed. So Juliet and I had a house warming, and I invited everybody I knew. The house was jammed from one end to the other with young bodies and young eyes sexing each other up. It was about that time when Richard arrived.

I had known Richard since I was thirteen. We had fallen into friendship then, and for the first year we had kept fairly close to each other, just the two of us. He is physically stunning, stocky, soft caramel skin, a beautiful face, sharp features, soft eyes, hazel coloured hair in locks that hang over his forehead. I had a terrible crush on him at school, and I knew that I had never really shaken it. He was as straight as they come, whatever that means. We had fallen out for some time towards the end of our schooling, but for some reason he had persisted in keeping the friendship alive, and it had sustained even to my twenty first birthday house warming party.

He was wearing a white T-shirt, blue jeans and black boots. When I saw him my heart, as it is doing now, beat fast and flew. Suddenly I knew what to do, and it was a now familiar conviction of trust that I heard and which moved me forward to this action. I was learning how to listen.

I took him into the alley behind my house and sat down (I was pissed on bourbon, lots of bourbon) and finally I told him "I love you, I have always

loved you". I was telling myself as much as I was telling anyone else in the lane; I wasn't saying I had a crush on him at school, I was confessing an adult experience of love for Richard, here and now and always. Richard said "You'll have to find someone else". No more sobering a phrase could have got me on my feet quicker than that. I stood up and opened my arms. He was tentative, I said "I just want to hug you. That's all", he still wasn't certain "That's all, I just want to hug you", and we did.

The only thing worse than the hangover I had the next morning was the memory of what I had done in that lane. I felt certain I had lost Richard's friendship forever. As it turned out only the morning and that afternoon were to pass before he contacted me. Some gate had been walked through, some barrier passed, a new relationship had been struck with Richard and now we could move forward.

Growing in every way, in every direction, I had broken free of the depression that had gripped me for years. I was alive again and succeeding in this new life. In my work, at college, with my friends and family, my life became exciting and full. I had learnt to dance again, and now I played with it on weekends in cafes and pubs and nightclubs, at parties and on the street outside the house Juliet and I had as our home, we celebrated life nightly. Driving us there you'd have me in hysterics as Juliet, who was weary of you the behind the wheel, would tell you to slow down, and you'd comply until we were going so slowly I could hear the breaks grinding as we turned the corner at the top of the street. You're so beautiful when you're funny.

We had our crises and parties, birthdays and fuckdays, and we would talk. Juliet was always going on about this misogynist world and its men who hated women. It was such a stupid conversation because it was always the same. It was while listening to you and Juliet have the conversation one night that I noticed this. You had been talking for hours and all I had done was listen, I hadn't said a word, and then I knew immediately what to say "This conversation never goes anywhere. When will it move on Juliet?". And she looked at me with daggers and tears and tore out of the room. Knowing you as the coward you are, it doesn't surprise me you deserted us that night, a favourite scene and character of yours "The Runaway". Outside Juliet's bedroom door I asked to be let in, and was refused and refused, but finally granted entry. I said sorry. I knew what her father had done to her, and he was a man, and this was good enough reason to keep having that conversation. I loved her, that was all. I said sorry.

That time in my life was a great gift. It had its culminating moment of glory on Christmas morning of that year. You came over and we sat underneath our

tree and opened our presents for each other, just you, me and Juliet. That was it. As we left the house that morning to go onto a champagne breakfast with our friends, I couldn't stop smiling. It's sad that it was not just the culminating moment but also the beginning of the death of that time.

On New Year's Eve I got pissed out of my mind. I showed Carla the Lesbian my penis in the ladies toilet, I kissed a policeman as I wished him "Happy New Year", I tried to kiss the only Italian boy I knew, and while we were dancing at the club I turned and saw Jason on the other side of the floor. I hadn't seen him since he had left you almost a year ago. We hugged and kissed and danced and celebrated being with one another.

Apparently you didn't handle it very well. He was down from Ballarat and needed a place to stay the night, not to sleep with me, just to bed down. I offered him my home as I would offer it to any friend. The performance you staged that night was the definitive moment in your career thus far. You put on such a show, you were a complete girl's blouse and an utter fuckwit. You told Juliet that if Jason stayed at our place that you would not come and sleep over as we had arranged. Since you had already been drinking this would have involved driving home pissed, and risking your life, and with one calculated shot you snookered me. Juliet would not have him in the house. Who are you to determine who stays in my house? And how typically you to do it in a way that is utterly subversive, slippery, greasy and ugly.

I was furious and let you have it, I told you exactly what I thought about what you'd done and slammed the door in your face. Happy New Year! Why hadn't you left for London yet? You'd made the announcement months ago. Did everything have to be in five acts? Go, I thought, go.

Another three months and you finally pissed off. Juliet and I came out to the airport. You loved it, every moment of it, the farewell was for you, all eyes on you, attention to you, tears for you, hugs for you, kisses for you. Go, I thought, go. And then you did, with class and style and a little flair in your step you played the drama out, walking through those big white customs' doors.

At the escalators I lost it. Juliet held my hand. I was devastated. What happened? Juliet and I got a lift together as far as the house, and then she got and out and I kept going; to my parents house. I was moving back home.

Julian had starting going out with Juliet about the same time she and I had moved in together. Julian was funny, charming, smart, tall, dark, handsome, everything you could want in a man and then a whole lot more. It all seemed

fine in the first few months but slowly it had begun to change. He grew jealous of Juliet and I. Well it wasn't particularly me, it was anyone and Juliet, it was just that she and I had a closeness that he couldn't understand and resented, and therefore took an axe to.

I didn't even know it had begun, the war between Julian and I. Everyone else seemed to know about it well before I did. He had been telling Juliet I didn't care for her, that I behaved badly to her and was selfish. We had moved from one house to another over the New Year and she later told me he had advised her to move away from me, though he wouldn't actually leave his own family home and come live with her himself. It was a nasty situation and the tension built up around the house, as he was there most nights and so was I (I did live there after all). It was slow and gradual, but eventually there was a coldness between us and it stank the house out.

Juliet hung on the sidelines the whole time. She wouldn't favour either one of us, though she said she saw my point of view and didn't want me to move out. She also said that when Julian spoke to her about his point of view it also made sense. I think she saw it as being between Julian and I, and that she was not a player. She was quite wrong.

I came home early one afternoon from college and had a rest. It was unusual for me to be home at this time, and while resting I heard Julian and Juliet come into the house. Opening the front door and seeing my bike in the hall Julian said "Shit, he's here", and that for me was it, this was no longer my home, and hadn't been for a while.

Walking up the street I thought about what I would do. There was a little gap in the footpath around the corner and I would always trip over it as I walked. There was something about the pattern of this which caught my heart that afternoon. I had walked this same walk again and again, and every time I tripped over the same gap. I stopped dead still and suddenly had a conviction of what to do; give up. I knew that all I had to do was leave. I had to move away from it and break the patterns of relationship between the three of us. Without fuss and without any more blood to be spilt I surrendered.

It was in Juliet's bedroom that night that I told her. We lay on her bed, talked about it, I said I loved her, that this was the most important thing to me and because I didn't want to lose her I had decided to move out. She said she didn't want me to do that, insisting that it was she that should move. Knowing that wasn't the answer, I told her so, and told her also that my moving away wasn't going to make things better; things with Julian would get worse. She didn't understand. I told her that Julian's actions and feelings towards me had

very little to do with me actually, I had done almost nothing to provoke them, I wasn't innocent, but the intensity of his anger didn't balance with the events between him and me. I said "Juliet, this isn't to do with me. It's to do with you and Julian. And finally it's to do with you". I was frightening her and continued "And it's dangerous. You're in danger, because I can feel it's destructive and when I leave that's going to have to find another place to go, and that will be back into your relationship with Julian, and finally you".

After I moved out, Julian and I would pass each other on the street and I would say hello. At first he didn't even acknowledge me, and then slowly he would patronise me with a smile, gradually he even began speaking; "Hi". Over the following months the pressures upon Juliet and I pushed us away from each other and threatened to destroy our friendship. It is one thing to decide to move out, it is another thing entirely to remove your furniture, to be chased for your final bills, dollars to be counted and checked, and doubted, and checked again. Weeks went by and we were slowly losing contact. And then abruptly we saw each other again and started laughing in the way only Juliet and I knew about. Just as abruptly Julian cornered me one night and apologised. He offered me a lift home and spoke about his life, his family and his own grief. What a strange gift to receive. I'd taken a risk, bet what I had on the conviction of love, and it had paid a handsome reward; Juliet.

We celebrated by going to Byron Bay. We had two weeks worth of money and that's exactly what we spent it on; we went north. Juliet hated Melbourne, to escape it was to escape the bondage of her life, her family and Julian, who she had now abandoned, and sought again, abandoned, sought again, abandoned and so on. At least in Byron Bay the pattern had no meaning. But as we began our slow retreat back into the city she grew tired and moody. She fell silent. I thought I understood what she needed, and gave her a day, but then it persisted, and I was feeling neglected, so I played for her attention. She was very clear in the signal she was sending; "not now, leave me be". Despite that I persisted, and kept persisting until she told me to shut up and leave her alone; "Why must you be at the centre of everything? Why must you always have my attention?". It hurt very, very deeply. I fell silent. When we got off the train we walked for a while and finally she said "What's the matter?" and I said "You're a cranky cow, that's what's the matter". She started crying.

She thought we should part company there, and find our own way back to Melbourne alone. Calm caught up with us eventually and we sat down to a meal. I was so sure of myself here. I saw so clearly that she had acted to hurt me and was selfish in doing it. I saw so clearly that she was wrong, wrong, wrong and I was determined to have it out. I tried, but she said she just

wanted to leave it and move on, which drove fury into me, a giant rush of fury that was so driven the only expression it could have is when these words came rushing out of my mouth "Okay. Fine".

Stunned, I sat there and heard myself say it. I was agreeing to let it go, in the whole history of relationships through my life, and always with Juliet, I never gave up seeking to talk it through to some resolve, demand some resolve, force some resolve, steal some resolve, and suddenly I had given up. I didn't understand at all what was happening as we sat at that table and had that meal.

For the next twenty four hours I could hardly speak. I wasn't sulking, I was in shock, I didn't know where I was or what to do. Some fundamental change had taken place in making the choice to say "Okay Juliet, we don't have to talk about it". I felt sick and scared and utterly at sea, I felt as if I would die.

We boarded the final train that night to take us back into Melbourne, and as it took off the lights went out, it was an overnigher. Juliet started saying something and it made me laugh, and as soon as I did I started crying. What I thought was how hurt I felt by what Juliet had said to me, and how I had hurt my father the same way when I had said those things to him the night after Ballarat. I had a sudden realisation of the weight of my attack upon my father, of how I deeply I must have hurt him. I told Juliet and she said "I know. I know". Something was happening to me, and it was scaring me, and all I can tell you is that I felt like I had died, and I was excited by the hope in this death, the promise it made. I remember Juliet's silhouette against the train window that night as the country flew past and how beautiful she is, how very beautiful she is.

Upon returning to Melbourne Juliet and I spent a Sunday at Gavin and Julia's house. They had just had a child, Billy, their first born son. I don't think there was a meal as such, but there was lots of red wine, the stuff flowed through the afternoon, into the evening and beyond. They are doting parents, and I watched right through the day as they held him, fed him, changed him, touched him and cared for him. I had never realised how much care a baby takes, they attended him every moment, every breath he took. He was a beautiful baby, and the way they cared for him was deeply moving, and no doubt the piss had hit in pretty bad by this time as well.

On arriving home I made my way to my parents room and lay down on the floor in the dark (it was past midnight by now). I just lay there and cried. After a while I sat on the end of their bed and woke them up and told them the story of being with Julia and Gavin and their boy Billy. I told them I had

never realised what it takes to care for a child. I told them I had never understood what care they had taken of me. My mum and dad each took one of my hands in the dark, they didn't know that the other had done the same thing. I said to them "I never knew. I never knew" and mum said "Yes. Yes it isn't easy" and I said "Thankyou" and just kept saying the word over and over. "We did it because we love you" she said.

My mother had uttered dangerous words; powerful and dangerous and within weeks they would tear my world apart. You see as mum said it I cried not because I was happy, but because I was sad. The events of my life had conspired to bring me to my parents bed, a crying child at the age of twenty two, realising what he already knew; that his parents really loved him, with their whole heart. Why should this be sad? In that moment I did not know why, but I said "Yes" to the feeling and opened my heart to it. That was the danger in what my mum said, not in her words, not even in what they made me feel, but that I allowed them to make me feel this way. Accepting my parents love was painful and riddled with grief, but still I did accept it and was open to it and I kept saying "I never knew". And there was the grief; that I had not known.

Each of the stories I have told you played me into this moment. Ballarat made a promise to me, it seduced me into hope. After that night at Ballarat I had pursued that promise again and again, and each time I would surrender more and more to move closer to it. Now I sat on my parents bed, a twenty two year old child, opening himself to his parents love and the grief it brought because it promised me closeness to hope, I wanted to get closer and closer to what was promised. That's what I did that night; I said "Yes". Now I was ready. The promise had flirted with me, in the shadows and ripples of the relationships in my life. That is what each of these stories have been, just shimmerings. Now I was ready, I was saying "Yes. Come. Now". That night on my parents bed I invited it into my heart, and within weeks it would reveal itself. Her name was Anglesea.

It's on the south eastern coast of Australia. It's about two hours drive west of Melbourne. Most of the time less than two thousand people live there. In the summer months, over the Christmas and New Year period, this grows to about thirty thousand, mostly holiday makers living in Caravans and tents. It's just a pretty little seaside holiday town. That's all.

I had been there only once before, when I was fifteen. It was in the week before New Year's Eve, part of that post Christmas rush of people from Boxing Day to New Year's. I went with the guys I hung around with at school, there was a gang of us. We spent days on the beach, night times at



the town hall watching crappy summer flicks and trying to get booze from the local. I lost my acne there and found a tan for the summer. It was just a bunch of teenage mates hanging out down the coast for a week. That's all.

I was twenty two when I went there for the second time. If you had asked me then to tell you about Anglesea I might have said I went there for a holiday when I was a teenager. That's all I knew about Anglesea. I hadn't thought about it since I was fifteen. It didn't mean anything to me. It could have come up in conversation and I wouldn't have felt anything. Anglesea was just a name of a town up the coast, and I had been there once for a holiday with some mates. That's all it was to me.

I am twenty four now. Ask me what happened at Anglesea. The word, the name, the place, the event of Anglesea is at the heart of who I am. Anglesea is the flesh, spirit, blood, breath, body, soul, life in me. It is at the heart in me. It is the heart in me. Ask me what happened at Anglesea. It tore me apart. It terrified me. It took my heart. It almost killed me. It held me prisoner. It tortured me. It made love to me. It saved me. It set me free. Anglesea.

I didn't choose to go back there, it seemed a sheer coincidence. I was nearing the end of the second year at my college. As a finishing project for that year we were to do a performance piece based on landscape. There was five of us in the group; Fiona, Malcolm, Trevor, myself and our teacher Anne. Fiona has a house at Anglesea, and so as part of the project she suggested we spend a few days and a few nights exploring the landscape around that part of the coast, staying over at her house. The only thing I remember is not being that enthused about a trip up the coast.

I have never been sexually molested. I have never been physically abused. I don't come from a broken family. My mother and father love each other deeply and love their children unconditionally with their whole hearts. They have worked all their lives to give us everything. We have never wanted for anything. They have been loving, but firm; caring and devoted. We are everything to them. Much of what they earned for two decades went to pay for our education in top schools. They encouraged us in everything we did, they allowed us to dream and pursue our dreams. They took us where we needed to be and then picked us up afterwards. They held our heads when we were sick, our bodies when we were sad. They cooked and cleaned and fought for us. They suffered when we hurt them and made us dinner the same night. They never stopped loving us, they never stopped finding ways to love us. I have never wanted for anything because of them. No one has ever done anything to me which has left a scar. I am lucky. I have been blessed with

love and care at every moment in my life. What happened at Anglesea?

It was Tuesday October 5th 1993. We left Melbourne in the morning arriving at Anglesea in time for lunch. After lunch we went for a long walk along the top of the cliffs high above the beach. Anglesea is tiny and surrounded by quite stunning wilderness. The cliffs are hundreds of feet high, and it is dangerous to walk near their sharp edges which are slowly eroding and falling to the sea below. The cliffs are so sheer that it makes access to the beach below virtually impossible. However, Fiona knew a way down through the scrub and we made our way to the narrow strip of beach between the cliffs and the ocean.

Walking along the beach we strayed off from one another. On one side was the sea, vast and eternal. On the other side were these gigantic cliffs towering above us, so much so that they hid the sun as the afternoon wore on. The cliffs are mostly just straight vertical drops, there is no relief. Every so often along the beach there was the rusty shell of an abandoned car, probably once stolen by hooners, taken for a joy ride, then propelled off the edge. One chassis was half buried in sand, weary and corroded after a decade of tides. Apart from these strange relics there was nothing else to indicate human life here. It was just the sea forever and the cliffs up to the sky stretching all around us.

I felt tired. I wanted to get back to the house quickly. The others stopped to feel the cliffs, discover the different textures and smells in this place. I grew tired and weary of them, wanting to get back. The more we walked, the heavier I felt, breath became sighing. I knew this particular streak of melancholy, I had lived with it most of my adolescent years, but at Ballarat I had begun to fight it, and now had virtually shrugged it off. This was my new life. Sometimes the depression would weigh in, and I would just walk it away, or sleep it off, let it take its toll and lift within a few hours, or a day; at its worst a day and a night.

The further we walked the taller the cliffs felt, the vaster the ocean, the closer the sky. I felt dark and constricted, tied up in knots and I knew it was pretty bad, but thought I could ride it out, I had felt like this before and much worse - besides, it couldn't last more than a few hours. The tide was coming in and when we came around the last cliff we were cut off from the next bit of beach by the sea. It wasn't impossible, and Fiona and I were the first to make it around the splashy rocks, wet and safe back on the town's main beach, deserted and quiet in the autumn.

Seven years had passed since being here, but it was precisely as I

remembered it. The precision of the memory was startling. I began to tell Fiona that I had been here when I was fifteen. The way back to her house was through the caravan park that sat just behind the beach. The others were still battling with the incoming tide, so we went ahead.

We walked up the ramp from the beach to the camping area in the caravan park. It hadn't changed since my friends and I had been here when I was fifteen. I decided I wanted to find the exact place where we had camped. Fiona came along and I knew exactly where to go, I walked the direct route there. There were no tents around, after all this was the off season, but I recognised the camp site by its perspective, the trees above and around it, its closeness to this path and that water tap. I couldn't take my eyes off it, I squatted down and stared at it.

Turning my head and looking over my shoulder I saw a playground for kids across the way. I stared at it. Here is what I told Fiona:

"I remember one afternoon we were coming back from the beach and we walked past the kiosk, through the playground. There where these two girls sitting on the swings. They were about our age. And they were pretty. We looked at them, and they looked at us, and they blushed and started giggling. My mates got very excited and decided to hide behind the adventure playground wall, peeking through its gaps to see the girls. They knew we were there, and the whole thing was very silly. My friends were scared to go over, they were embarrassed. I just thought it was silly, and of course there was nothing invested in it for me. They were pretty, but naturally I didn't have the same feelings my friends were having. So after a while I just got up and went over to the girls and started a conversation. It was easy. There was no risk for me. We struck up an easy chat, and they laughed and slowly my mates came across. That evening we all went out, it was New Year's Eve. My friends Richard and Jonno got with the two girls that night. I remember walking back here after midnight and seeing Richard and Jonno each kissing one of the girls". And then I fell quiet.

The others caught up with us, having made it around the cliff before the tide cut them off. We went back to Fiona's and shared a meal. I was struggling. This was a very heavy feeling of depression I was having, much stronger than usual, though I didn't realise how strong. That night we sat around the fire and smoked some pot. I had learnt to fight these black turns, and did my best that night, but finally I had to retreat and went to bed. I barely slept.

On Wednesday we went for a long walk in a national forest nearby. It helped. After a few hours of walking I felt better and was finding it easier to speak

again, though no one noticed that anything was wrong with me. Through the long, deep and depressive years of my adolescence I had become adept at functioning despite the weight of feeling inside of me. I was struggling, but doing okay. I began to feel relieved as I thought the mood was lifting, and I could forget about it and get on with the work.

That night at dinner it hit deep and dark and I felt like I was suffocating. I maintained an acceptable demeanour, but by now keeping that up was becoming quite exhausting, and I was already tired from no sleep and the experience itself was eating away at me. I didn't last very long after dinner. First I turned my back on the others as we sat by the fire, pretending to sleep, and finally I just had to get out of the room, and retreated to my bed. I didn't sleep much.

On Thursday we headed back to the city. Upon arriving in Melbourne I walked down the main street that runs through the town. I let the glass and steel of the city fall hard and fast around me. It was familiar and safe, it nestled me in its citiness. Surrounded by traffic and noise and people the city made me feel safe again, thousands of people, bustling in city buildings that almost covered the sky. A deep single breath escaped from me and I began to feel relief from the feeling that had gripped me for the last few days. I put it away, happy to forget about it.

On Friday I gave a public speech. It doesn't matter about what, or to whom I gave it. What matters is how I spoke. I began simply, with a single phrase. There was about a thousand people in the room, it went dead still and quiet. I spoke another phrase and took a breath. The city outside retreated. With each phrase I moved closer to the expression I was making. It was clear and focused and powerful. It drew them in slowly, the stillness in my body, the calm definitive voice, the young man with a heart speaking to them. I leaned across to take them into my hopes, expressing my knowledge that these were only dreams and impossible to achieve in the world they had created, and they laughed with me. I looked at them one last time, and released my breath. They applauded.

As I left the room people approached me and thanked me. They pursued me with pens and paper, names and addresses, needs and promises. My friend Mark found me and hugged me and thanked me. We went to a park nearby. I was calm. We talked, and something very strange happened. I told him I needed help. He listened. I told him that two days before I had been a wreck, so haunted by depression that I could barely function. What was this gap in my life? What was the chasm between the strong young man that had spoken just then, and the broken child that had cried himself to sleep in Anglesea

days before? Mark suggested a psychiatrist friend of his, and I accepted the number politely, quite determined that the last thing I needed was a psychiatrist.

That night I went out with friends and got drunk. At three in the morning, smashed out of mind, I knocked on a friend's door and he took me into his room. I felt desperate. I made a move on him and he said no. I was afraid of sleep, but he offered me his bed anyway and we lay together, side by side. I didn't sleep.

On Saturday I worked through the day. On Saturday night I went to a friend's twenty fifth birthday party. I got drunk. As the night wore on I began telling my friends that I wasn't well. I told them I was going to get the next train to Sydney and just go. I told them I didn't know what was going on inside of me, I said I just had to get away. They said, uniformly, "Don't do that. People care about you". I got a lift home that night, and the friend that drove me home told me he cared for me. I didn't sleep much.

On Sunday morning I walked into my parent's bedroom. I sat down on their bed. Only mum was there, reading the Sunday newspapers. I said "Mum, I'm in trouble". And that's how it started.

On Monday morning I went to college and told them I wasn't well and needed a few days off. I walked a lot that day. That night I saw a friend and when he asked me how I was I told him what had happened in the last week. He arranged for me to see a counsellor friend of his the next day. By now I couldn't sleep, and there was no real sense of peace or calm any more, not even during the day.

On Tuesday morning I went to the counsellor. We filled out some forms together and then we chatted for a little while. He told me that there must be something about Anglesea that had triggered off such a powerful emotional response. I said it was a complete mystery to me. And it was. He talked some more and as he was talking I lost track of what he was saying, and I stared at him and I just started crying. He got up and pulled the blinds to darken the room. I told him I felt like there was a huge wall of concrete inside of me and that it was slowly giving way. I said it felt like it was buffeting, and pushing up and as I said this I became panicked and started crying and then couldn't remember what I was saying. He just let me cry for a bit, I got myself together and he told me that he would contact me the following day with the name of someone I could see to talk about what was happening; he was going to refer me.

He suggested I go for a walk. I walked the rest of the afternoon, crying - but not outright crying, just dribbling like a three year old. When I got home, I sat down with mum and started talking to her. Poor mum, she just had no idea what was going on with her son, and neither did he. But the thing is, she sat with me and listened and was with me that whole time. While I was talking with her I started crying, and then the phone rang and when I picked it up it was my friend Scott.

I said hello, and he immediately knew something was wrong. He asked me a very dangerous question; "How are you?". I could hardly speak, or make sense, but I managed to get this phrase out; "I'm in trouble Scott". He said "You know, people care about you", and that broke my heart to hear that, because I don't think I had heard it for such a long time and believed it. When I went back to sit with mum I was a mess. I was in serious trouble.

That night I had an appointment with a teacher from my college. It was an important meeting, and it had been postponed several times, and I didn't feel like I could put him off, so I decided to go along and see it through. John and I met at a cafe, when he walked in he asked me how I was. I told him I wasn't well, and told him why.

As I talked I cried, but this time my whole body wept. I couldn't keep upright on my chair. I fell down on the table. I was like a child, and this was a public place, an adult place, and I couldn't behave, I could only cry. I told him what Scott had said, and he replied, "It's true. People do care for you", and when he said that I grabbed his hand and told him that these were new words, that I was hearing them as if I had never heard them before. At that moment I saw my mother and my father in my minds eye, and seeing them I felt them in my heart, and what I felt should have killed me.

I had not believed that my parents loved me, not for a long time. At that moment grief hailed down on me. John got me out of the cafe. He walked me a long way and I calmed down. He drove me home.

I walked into the kitchen and took my father and led him into the lounge room where mum was already sitting. I turned the television off and I began by telling Dad I hadn't been to college that week and had seen a counsellor earlier that day; "Dad, I'm in trouble". He hugged me. I told him what had happened in the last week and as I spoke I was bashing my father with my hand saying "Dad I never knew. I never trusted your love. I didn't believe it. I didn't know. I didn't know. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry" and I kept hitting him, and shouting that at him, and he just held me. "All those years" I started saying "All those years". I heard mum say "He's been like this since Sunday"

and I kept shouting "All those years. All those years. I didn't tell you. I wouldn't tell you". And then I fell quiet, not into peace and calm; into terror.

This is not a "coming out" story. I had "come out" to my parents and friends when I was twenty. It was, like many "coming out" stories, a difficult and painful time. It was also a time of celebration and parties, excitement and adventure, sex and laughter. My parents had struggled with it, but never stopped loving me, and never abandoned me through it. On the Tuesday night in October 1993 about which I am presently writing my "coming out" was history. My parents had come to accept and embrace the fact that I was gay. That was old news.

This is not a "coming out" story. I had known I was gay since I was a little boy, but did not tell them until I was twenty. It was this thought in particular which brought the terrorising grief; I had known all those years that I was gay, and I had not told them. Why such grief? Because during those years I was afraid I would be rejected by them, I did not fully trust or believe in their love of me; I had never tested it and therefore never known it.

This is not a "coming out" story. It is not particularly about being gay. We had fought the battles, had the conversations and confrontations of "coming out", and we had come through, and never once had their love of me been threatened. It is unconditional. But not until this Tuesday night did I finally open my heart fully to that love, and in opening my heart to it I realised that I had been closed to that love for so long. Each of those years I feared their rejection, and so had not risked telling them, keeping my heart closed to the full experience of their love. I pushed them away rather than risk their rejection, a rejection I now realised was impossible with my parents. All they could do was love me. All they had ever done was love me. All they will ever do is love me.

Now in my father's arms I finally gave into it, after years of holding back I risked everything and cried like an eight year old boy in his arms. These tears were old and overdue. The grief was the grief from those lost years, the lost love, loss, loss, loss - so much had been lost.

I was exhausted. I was forgetting what sleep was, what it is to be at peace, just the simple calm and peace of day to day life. There was no escape into distraction. I couldn't hear a song without forgetting where I was and then I would want to smash the radio it played on. The television was like a wasp buzzing around my head. If I tried to read, I would only make it to the fifth or sixth word and then forget what I had just read and start again, and after doing that three or four times she would rise up and I would wet the page

with tears. In conversation I would begin talking and then suddenly be distracted by the distant experience of something I couldn't see, and then feel as if I was falling, and turn to who I was with, and forget why I was with them, and again start crying. It was exhausting. I was tired. There was no longer continuity from one moment to the next. Afternoon felt like the middle of the night, then the evening, then the sun would shine in my eyes and I'd open them and turn to my mother who I was sitting with in our kitchen. What was happening? I'd begin a sentence and then go silent and still, not even a memory distracting me, just an echo of one whispering from some far distant time, and then I was fifteen again and the house I was in was unfamiliar, I hadn't been here yet, but this was the lounge room where my father held me. Terror. It was terrifying, and I embraced it. As much as it scared me I was complicit with it, to allow this to happen was to say "Yes" and that is all I wanted now, to open my heart and move closer to this hope, even if it meant terror, loss of control, fragmentation of feeling and being; "Yes". It promised me hope. It promised me life.

The cost was high. On Wednesday I went to college to abandon my studies. I was incapable of functioning; it was very sad. The group of people I was working with was out of the building. I then tried to find the head of my department, and he was away that morning. I felt panicked, incapable of doing even the simplest thing. I asked to see the Dean. He took me into his office and I started what was now becoming familiar to me, "David, I'm in trouble". In many ways the mask work he did with us had opened a window into my soul and I had glimpsed what was happening inside of me. The mask had acted like a lubricant to begin the work of loosening old feelings deeply buried, and now they had worked their way to the surface and were exploding through me and into his office. He knew. He knew exactly what was happening. It's almost as if he had waited for it. He held me and congratulated me. He congratulated me! If you could have seen me that day, unshowered, unshaven, in dirty clothes, a mess of tears in a tired and weary body collapsing in on itself you might not have thought to congratulate me. I was weak and pitiable, pathetic and sad, broken and useless, and what did he say? "Congratulations!".

Later I walked into the rehearsal room to meet the group of people I was working with. I told them that I was not returning and that I was leaving college. They were like stone. They didn't say much to me, but I could feel their anger, and it hurt me. I walked out of the room and knew that this was the beginning of a very tough time; not everyone would offer me "Congratulations".

On Thursday morning I went to the counsellor who I had been referred to. I



walked in and sat down and we started talking and within minutes it was as if I had fallen asleep. I was still conscious, but I had closed my eyes and rested my head downwards, and when he spoke to me I heard him and responded like a child in twilight, on the verge of dreaming. At the end of the session I apologised and said that I really wanted to get better and didn't know why I had behaved the way I had.

It took a breather. It had climbed a peak and now it was exhausted. I rested when I could, but as soon as I caught any sleep the greedy fever would use what energy had been replenished to plunge me further into its grasp. I fell, and kept falling. There was times when I wished it would abate. It didn't.

The following Tuesday I had another appointment with the counsellor. Over the weekend I had a strong conviction that he was not the man. I can't tell you why, it was a deep feeling of mistrust. He was not the man to listen to me, I wanted someone else. When I went there on the Tuesday morning I told him so. He spent an hour trying to persuade me away from this decision, but even amid a decaying sense of reason, I knew that this decision was the right one. It felt right, and at that moment that was all I had; the conviction to say "Yes" to the feelings in my heart. "No you are not the man; find another". He said he would organise for me to be referred again to someone else.

I had heard through other students at the college that the group I was working with was angry at me. I arranged a meeting with two of them, Fiona and Malcolm. We met that same Tuesday morning, after the counselling session. They were largely in the dark as to what had been going on in the last week in my life. They only knew I had said I was sick and couldn't continue with the project. In the meantime they had abandoned the project, and blamed my leaving for its disintegration. This made me very angry.

We met in a cafe. It was all very polite at first. I told them everything that had happened since we had been to Anglesea and a whole lot besides. As I told the story I kind of "fell asleep" again. I closed my eyes and hunched over myself and spoke to them as if half asleep, from a dream. I didn't understand what I was doing, but I did realise at the time that I was doing it. That is crucial. I didn't have to behave in this way, I could have fought it, but the way forward was to say "Yes"; to surrender to it. I remember when I had started the conversation I was playing with an ashtray on the table. By the time I came to the end I was bashing the ashtray down into the table, making a noise and a scene, though my eyes were closed and it was the rhythm of the ashtray that had caught me. Malcolm said if I didn't stop behaving like a baby he would leave. Fiona said I should pull myself together, and that I had to understand their point of view; that we all had a responsibility to the project

and that I had abandoned them for my own selfish needs. I started crying, Malcolm said "Grow up". I gave up. I surrendered and accepted that they had every right to be angry at me. I couldn't see any other way forward. As we left I hugged them and the last thing I saw was a glimpse of concern on Fiona's face. This was very important to me.

I walked out of the cafe and I watched my legs take me to a friend of mine who worked around the corner. I walked into his office and sat down. Ian is a very dear and close friend. He had very little idea that all this had been happening. I began "I'm in trouble" and so it went, until I was in a slumped over heap, my eyes closed, almost asleep, speaking like a child. The ritual now had a beginning and a middle. Ian held me and I cried. Perhaps I won't tell you I cried any more, I am growing sick of writing it, as then I was growing tired of tears. I confessed to him. I confessed how in my life I was afflicted by a black depression that I lived with daily, and how I thought I had pretty much buried it, accept that now it was alive and kicking and destroying everything I had built in my life. Before Anglesea people would ask, often in a club or at a party, "What's the matter? Are you alright?" and I would smile and say "Sure". Ian was holding me and I was in his shoulder just saying "Smile. Smile" like it was a knife in my heart. It was deepening.

I did not want to be alone. Ian looked after me through the afternoon. He took me home and we shared a meal, then in the evening he drove us to a meeting that we were both attending. I had to chair the meeting, and somehow once I adopted that role and took on that responsibility, I functioned; not perfectly, but I got away with it. I was having trouble understanding how I could go from such brokenness in the afternoon to seeming efficiency in the evening, not with ease, but still effectively. It was characteristic of what was happening. My world was collapsing in and around me, and it was my responsibility to manage the whole event; and I was a sharp manager, not a broken one.

After the meeting a group of us went on to McDonalds. As we walked in there was a bleached blonde haired kid, he was about sixteen, sitting down with orange juice and fries. He caught my eye. I kept watching him and when we sat down with our meals I said to the others at the table "That kid's in trouble". He left the restaurant and I walked out after a while to see where he went. He was up the street sitting on a bench. Something was going on in him. After the meal I asked my friends if we could walk past him, they didn't want to as it wasn't on the way to the club where we were going, so I let it go. But as we turned the corner I just twirled around and looked at him, then turned back with my friends.

The club where we went was just around the corner, but it was closed. As we headed back the way we came, who should we walk into but the kid. He said "Is it closed?". I said "Yeah". He said "So where are we going now?". We all went back to one of my friend's place.

His name was Edward. This was only his second time out on the scene. He had read about the club in a gay newspaper. We hung out for a while at our friend's place, then we went onto another club. We stayed there for a while, and then Edward said he had to go as he had to catch the last train. I went with him since it was the same train as the one I caught.

On the train he told me "I'm in big trouble". Apparently he had lied to his mum and told her he was working that night, and he had arranged to be picked up at midnight at his work. In the meantime he had met us and was having a good time, but now he was going to be late and would have to explain where he had been to his mum. I asked him what he was going to say to her. He told me; "I'm going to tell the truth". He meant he was going to "come out" to his parents. We talked about it, the pros and cons, whether this was the right time, what he risked, what the worst outcome would be, if he could cope with it. Finally he said it was what he wanted to do. I got off the train at my station; "See ya' Edward".

When I came home I got into bed. Sleep had become a silent terror. I couldn't actually sleep, so I would just lay there restlessly becoming swamped by memories and emotions that were disconnected and discontinuous. I felt terribly lonely and scared. It never paused in its pursuit of me, it never tired; it was relentless. To be alone now was to be alone with it, nothing but it, and that terrified me. I went into mum and dad's bedroom and asked if I could spend some time with them. When I was little and I would get "sore legs" (rheumatism) I would go into their room and fall asleep between them. For the first time since I was a child I lay down between my mum and dad; and rested.

A fortnight had passed since I had set out on that college trip up the coast. Then I had been twenty two years old. I was excelling in my studies, and the work I had done was very promising. As well as studying full time, I had worked for years with a prestigious company and had established myself well there. I had also developed a strong volunteer commitment to a community health organisation and had responsibility for entire projects as well as sitting on key committees to determine policy and programmes. I promoted this organisation to the wider community at public seminars and represented it at conferences. I was a valued member of the communities I was a part of, I played an important role and function in each of them. I had a close group

of friends, we shared our lives with each other. They were intimate, full and loving friendships. My relationship with my parents had grown, always with the echoes of parenthood, but now there was a closeness and openness we hadn't shared before. This was my life before I went to Anglesea. I was the twenty two year old man, establishing a promising career for himself, making valued contributions to his community, sharing full and loving relationships with the people in his life.

Two weeks after visiting Anglesea I had abandoned my studies, abandoned work commitments, couldn't be with my friends without breaking down, and lay like a child between my parents in their bed; I was terrified. The high flying young hot shot was now a broken child afraid to be left alone. It hadn't taken long to disassemble what had taken me years to build, in fact it hadn't even taken fourteen days.

I rang you half a world away, I wanted to tell you everything, I didn't know where to begin. I tried to tell you what had happened, but you were in your life in London, and my life in me must have sounded bewildering. I'm sorry. As a throwaway I remember saying; "I'll write you a letter. I'll write it all down. There's so much to tell. It will look like a book". I didn't know the half of it.

A long week passed before I got to see another counsellor. His name was Robert. I sat down and started telling him the events of the previous weeks. Within a short while I was slumped over, and with my eyes closed I kept telling him what had happened, but slowly I began to feel so heavy I couldn't even move my mouth. I just sat there breathing. It was as if I was asleep, I felt like I had left the room, though I could hear Robert's voice asking me questions. I felt so old, so heavy, so ancient. Not until this moment had the experience of it been so profound. The melancholia that had afflicted me from time to time had just been a tributary of this powerful Jordan. Now I was experiencing it fully. It was deep, dark, heavy and silent. The affect of listening to its silence was mesmeric. I heard Robert ask a question, and did not, could not respond.

Suddenly in its silence I heard something. It was an image, a memory, a ghost. I caught a glimpse of my friend Richard kissing that girl at the campsite on New Year's Eve at Anglesea. But as I reached out to look closer, it disappeared; a phantom. I listened, and listened, but would only just taste the memory fleetingly, and then it would slip away.

After a while Robert asked me to take a deep breath, then another, and slowly I returned, my eyes opening to let the room and its plastic chairs and

unwatered plants return. It rushed into me, all too sudden and abrupt. My body felt strange, it was foreign to me. I felt a stinging sensation in the tip of my toes and fingers. It grew, and grew and grew until it was unbearable. This was real, it was physical. This wasn't some pretence I was indulging in, my hands were in real pain, something was happening in my body, I wanted a doctor to tell me what was happening, this was scaring me. I held my hands out to Robert, "It hurts" I said. He just looked at me. "It's painful. Help me. My hands are hurting. Help me. What's going on? What's going on?". He remained calm. He asked me a question; "Do you trust me?". Immediately, without thinking, I uttered "Yes". He was the man.

He told me what was going on, what was happening when I "fell asleep". He said I was going into some other state of consciousness, and that when this happened my heart rate and breathing slowed down. Apparently what I was experiencing was quite severe and my heart rate slowed down so much that blood wasn't making it to my extremities, emptying my toes and my fingers. When I started to take deep breaths, I would "come out of it" and my heart would begin beating rapidly again, and the blood would rush back to my extremities, and this experience was quite painful for the body. That's what was happening physically. Why I was "falling asleep" and going into another state of consciousness was the work ahead of us.

I began seeing Robert once a week. Each time the same thing would happen. I'd "fall asleep", though still be present in the room, and Robert would speak to me and ask me what I saw. Occasionally I would catch glimpses of different memories, see lost voices, all of it fragmentary and sparse, then suddenly I would be standing at the campsite at Anglesea and as I would turn to look I would glimpse the kiss that Richard and the girl shared and abruptly I would fall backwards and drown and lose it.

After a few weeks I went away on a weekend holiday with some friends. We went to a beach side town out of Melbourne called Sommers. It was a wonderful weekend. We woke up in the afternoon, spent hours drinking tea and coffee and lazing around in the sun, wasted the late afternoon on the beach, gave the early evening to the sunset and finally made the move towards dinner.

My friends were being particularly maternal around me and my job for the meal was to pour the wine. As ridiculous as it sounds, I wasn't able to do even this simple thing. It was a cask with one of those little taps on it that you turn and the wine comes out. I poured two glasses successfully, but when I completed the third I couldn't turn the tap off and slowly the wine overflowed onto the table and then everywhere. I panicked and stood away

from it, my hands at my head. My friends rushed over, doting on me like caring parents and everything was fine.

What I remember most distinctly about the event isn't so much that I couldn't handle a simple responsibility, like pouring wine, but the way my friends cared and fussed over me in that moment. They cared for me like I was a child. I remember stepping away from the table as the wine dripped off its edge and thinking how "adult" it was to pour wine, how alcohol was a very "adult" drink. I suddenly realised how very young I felt.

This experience stuck with me and I began to realise that since Anglesea I often felt childlike. There was times when I felt normal, quite adept and adult. There was others, such as when I was pouring the wine, when I felt much younger and unsure. As I thought about this I realised there was times when I was completely one, or completely the other, but most of the time I was halfway between the two; fragmented. As soon as I thought this I became excited. It was like hitting the jackpot; I had named the fragmentary way of seeing and feeling and being I had been hurled into since Anglesea. It was like being between two states of me, neither one nor the other, and that described perfectly the lack of continuity, the getting halfway through a sentence and then forgetting what I was saying. I felt as if I was oscillating between two extremes, rarely pausing to take a breath, accept perhaps as a child in my parents bed, or chairing a meeting as an adult. The rest of the time was just the chaos of being neither one or the other. Relief began to fill me, hope rushed through me; I had begun to name it.

The next day I had my session with Robert. I sat down and within minutes I had "fallen asleep". Again, images and voices and memories flirted with me and I pursued them. Turning a corner I ran headlong into New Year's Eve and saw my friend Richard kissing the girl at the campsite in Anglesea. I stood there and stared. I was fixated. Robert asked me what I saw. And then something wonderful happened. A single tear came gliding down my cheek. Robert asked me what I saw, I replied "I'm sad". Robert asked me "Where are you?". I said "He's kissing her". I didn't move a muscle on my face, but the tears fell. Robert then asked me "What do you want from me?", and I said "Care for Nicholas".

Robert asked me to take deep breaths and I opened my eyes and came back into the room. I was fretting, upset and anxious. I asked him again "What's going on? What's happening to me?". He said "I'll tell you. You're regressing. When you go into that other state of consciousness, when you "fall asleep" you are yourself as a younger person. It is not you now, it is you then. You speak from then. You tell me what you were seeing then, what you were

thinking then, what you were feeling then, but you speak about it like it is happening now. When you "wake up" you are twenty two again, back here in the room. This struggle going inside of you is the struggle between these two people; you as you are now at the age of twenty two, and you as your younger self".

"Yes". That's what I said.

In the next week what Robert said became clearer and clearer, in my day to day life I became aware of a struggle going on inside of me. Sometimes I was like an adolescent; cheeky, blunt, rude, shy and awkward. Sometimes I was twenty two years old; assured, careful, sharp, patient and in control. Most of the time I was an exhibition of the tussle between the two forces; lost, confused, anxious, terrified and broken.

In the following week Robert suggested we call myself at twenty two "Nick" and the younger me "Nicholas". It didn't take long to "regress", it took no effort at all, I would simply begin talking about what had happened in the previous week and within about ten to fifteen minutes my body would shape itself into that now familiar shape of half sleep. What had changed was that now I could name it. I was regressing.

"Nicholas" didn't make things easy; he was reticent to talk. Robert would ask him a question and he would just grunt, implying "yes" or "no". When he did speak he spoke in very simple English, just bare phrases, mostly not wholly constructed, but still conveying their meaning. It was like he was angry and didn't want to be there, so he just suffered it like a disgruntled adolescent, doing what he had to get by.

Robert just sat there patiently and listened. Suddenly "Nicholas" kicked his heel into the floor; it was deliberate, sharp and abrupt. He did it again, and again; sharp punches to the floor with the heel of his right foot. As he did it he continued to hunch over himself, until his head was almost between his legs. He kept kicking the floor until eventually the force of it fell him off the chair. Robert rushed around him with something soft and safe. "Nicholas" was now kicking with his foot, his heel catching the side of the chair and forcing one of its legs into the wall. The rhythm of it grew and "Nicholas" was enjoying it.

"Are you angry?" asked Robert.

"Uhn" came the reply, "Nicholas" was very certainly angry.

"Who are you angry at?"

"Him" is what "Nicholas" answered.

"Who?"

"Him!", there was no patience from this adolescent.

"Who?"

"You know who". Robert was patient.

"What do you think of Nick?"

"Smart arse"

"You think he's a smart arse do you?"

"Knows everything"

"Does he?" Robert asked, finding affection for his brashness.

"Thinks he does" responded the adolescent, declaring himself.

"Nicholas" continued to thrust and kick himself against the world, but very little was said after that. I remember again turning to see Richard kissing that girl at Anglesea and then raging and spitting and kicking until I was exhausted. Finally I rested and then opened my eyes and saw myself lying on the floor surrounded by cushions Robert had planted around me in my frenzy. I looked at the wall and saw the hole I had made there with the foot of the chair. I was deeply ashamed of the way I had behaved, very embarrassed. Robert implored me not to be, he was very excited by what had happened, saying it was a great step forward. I felt silly.

"Nicholas" and "Nick" got to know each other. "Nicholas" could do what "Nick" couldn't. He was good at playing and relaxing, he had a cheeky take on the world, and created mischief with ease. He was blunt and direct and could speak plainly with a simple eloquence. Once Robert asked "Nicholas" what he wanted, without a beat "Nicholas" replied "Fuck". Robert tried to read this as meaning "wanting to be in the real world, to be physical, to wake up from his long sleep". Actually he meant just what he said; he wanted a fuck. He wanted to get out and play, find the danger and take the risk, make trouble. He was fifteen, there was no doubt about that. "Nicholas" was fifteen years old and he had been locked away for years, almost killed, and now he wanted his turn; he wanted to play. That's what he wanted; "Fuck".

"Nicholas" didn't value much of what "Nick" did. There was this kind of "So what" attitude to all the things "Nick" had made and built for himself; my career, my studies, the work I had done. When "Nicholas" looked at it all he kind of shrugged his shoulders and felt more like going out for a dance. And I did go dancing. "Nicholas" was extremely likeable, he had a freshness and brashness I fell in love with. He had a way of feeling and looking at the world that was attractive, and he seduced me into it. There was still the tension between the two forces, but mostly "Nicholas" was getting his way, and enjoying his hour in the sun.



After about a month something extraordinary happened. I was walking down the street and a very clear image came into my mind's eye; it was a wall, a gigantic tower of a wall that stretched vast distances in every direction and was covered with shelves, little pigeon holes. In each hole were bits of paper. I imagined this vast and complex construction suddenly being smashed down by me and all those pieces of paper falling into a heap on the ground. "Nicholas" was making an offer.

I tried negotiating. I tried understanding what I had seen in all kinds of ways, but "Nicholas" did not want to barter. It was typically him; all or nothing. What I saw I experienced very clearly. This wall of shelves contained everything I had built for myself in my life, each piece of paper carefully filed; career, work, status, authority. "Nicholas" wanted me to smash those shelves down, give it all up, to give way and surrender all of this so that he could live and grow. Everything would still be there, its just that it would be in a huge mess of a pile, and it would have to be rebuilt, piece by piece, hand in hand with "Nicholas".

Each time I regressed I would come to that moment at Anglesea. I would see Richard kissing that girl and I would freeze. I couldn't see beyond that moment, because that is where "Nicholas" stopped. That is where I had stopped him. When I was fifteen I had done something at Anglesea, something that I couldn't name yet, but it was so destructive it had almost killed off this part of me I now called "Nicholas". I had made a choice to cut off part of myself, rather than face the pain of what I saw; a simple kiss. Somehow he had found his way back into my life, a fifteen year old kid, sad and weak and almost dead from seven years imprisonment in a dark cell without light, solitary and deadening. At Anglesea I had seen Richard kiss that girl and it had caused such pain that I had closed a whole part of myself down, rather than experience that pain. I couldn't yet say why I did that, but I now knew that this is exactly what had happened at Anglesea when I was fifteen. Now "Nicholas" was alive and kicking again, and he wasn't prepared to negotiate, he wanted me to surrender everything that "Nick" had built and let "Nicholas" grow up. There were no deals to be made; it was simply "Yes" or "No".

It's funny to remember how serious I thought about his offer. It must have been very real to me. I remember speaking with my parents and telling them about it and fearing that to give way like this might have meant such a complete physical and mental breakdown that I would end up in a psychiatric institution.

I can't remember the exact day, the hour or the minute when I said "Yes", but

I know that I did and it was a gentle and harmless event. In that moment "Nick" surrendered his hot shot self, his career and work, and "Nicholas" breathed again and began to walk the earth as once he had. I can't say I was cured, but I was breathing again, I was living again for the first time in seven years.

About two months had passed now since Anglesea. I had surrendered everything and slowly I was learning to live again. Strange changes were taking place; my palms used to be constantly sweaty before Anglesea, now they were dry most of the time. My mind always used to buzz and rattle along, now there was silence a lot of the time. It was as if my consciousness had been an American Sitcom and now I was a river resting quietly against the earth. Before I would fidget, now I was still. There was a new clarity, a freshness, a wholeness. I was becoming whole again.

About this time my sister came over to visit. I hadn't seen her since Anglesea, but mum had spoken to her about what had gone on. I had been out walking, and when I came home Sarah and Phil were in the lounge room with my dad, mum was in the kitchen. I sat down and it didn't take long to start the story of what had happened. I told her just what you have read here. Throughout it she sat with me, her eyes somehow distant, I got the feeling she was performing a duty. I felt like one of her patients as she took blood from them, knowing that this was the last one on her current shift. There was the disturbing feeling of talking to a wall, I'm not sure she wanted to hear any of it, though I needed to tell her. It was disturbing because I was making myself incredibly vulnerable to her, opening my heart in a way that is rare and not always possible, and she seemed disinterested. It was awful. This was the high cost for what I had done in the years I had hurt her.

Towards the end my eyes drew shut and my father took my hand. That is the picture in the room that night. My father on one side of me, holding my hand, and my sister on the other, staring distantly into a wall, her husband Phil on the other side of her. Dinner had been ready for a while and eventually Dad and Phil left for the dining room.

Sarah said "You know I love you and care for you Nicholas, and I want to do anything I can to help you. Okay?". I sat there, and I so much wanted to accept this and be happy, but I wasn't. It actually made me very sad to hear it. I tried asking Sarah some questions, and this is how she replied; "You know I love you and care for you Nicholas, and I want to do anything I can to help you. Okay?". Again, there was a distinct feeling of unease in my gut. I said "Sarah, it makes me very sad that we don't really talk very much, that we seem to have trouble communicating". She said "I love you and care for

you Nicholas, and I want to do anything I can to help you. Okay?". No, I thought, it is not okay. I want to talk to you. I was listening to some script. She had written it before she came into the room. She had prepared for this. I had just spent an hour opening my heart to her, and she wouldn't respond to it; "I love you and care for you. I want to help you. Okay?". She kept saying that like I could let her off the hook by saying "Yes, that's okay, thanks". Well that isn't how she could help me, that isn't the care that I needed. I asked her a question. It was about trust. I asked her "Why don't you think I trust you?". Her eyes came over with tears, she reached across and touched me gently on my knee and said "C'mon. Dinner's ready", and shot out of the room.

I sat there for a while, I was stunned. Eventually I returned to the dinner table. After dinner I tried to talk to her again, but she wasn't interested. It was an awful night because it made so real the damage that had been done in our relationship. It ran very deep. In sadness I accepted that it was likely Sarah and I would never find each other again; though I hoped it wasn't true I accepted that it was probably over, that all we would ever have was that relationship of civility. I needn't have worried, the hope was alive, so too then was the love between us.

A few weeks later my brother came over. I was getting tired of telling this story; it is exhausting to tell. In the style that is characteristic of my family nothing was said about what had happened right through the evening. At times I thought it not important to burden David with this, but I didn't have the conviction of that manufactured concern. As the night wore on I realised that if I was going to do it, I would have to do it soon.

We were sitting around the table after dinner having coffee. Every so often the conversation would pause, and just as I was about to begin, mum would jump in. After this happened half a dozen times I noticed that just as I drew a breath in to speak, mum would ask David a question and I would lose my chance. What was she up to? I'm not even sure she knew she was doing it, but she was most definitely getting in the way. After a while I went to the kitchen with some dishes, and I was a mess of anxiety. I had to interrupt this delightful family dinner and, for my own selfish needs, turn it into a ugly cathartic experience for everyone. Mum was making it so difficult by being so delightful and charging the tone of the evening with such "bon vivre". To interrupt their adult conversation was to be like the three year old that suddenly shits its pants and has to be attended to, even at a dinner party. Once I thought of it like that however, it didn't seem so bad.

I went back to the dining room and sat down at the table. After a while the

conversation paused and I took a breath in to speak. Mum tried her trick, but I just ignored her and got David's attention and began by telling him I had left college, and then started telling him why. I told him the story.

It all happened like I've been telling you. I ended up with my eyes closed, silent and crying. Telling my brother was strange. This picture was at the dining room table; my father at its head, my mum next to him, Lin and David at the other end of the table, and then me. Dad listened very carefully, it was strangely moving. Mum seemed angry at me at first, and then there was the sense that she was lost and scared herself; helpless. Lin listened to every word, sharp and fast and interested; somehow she could relate to what I was saying. David has big blue eyes and he is my big brother, and that is what he is like. He is like my big brother.

I was just sitting there alone, my eyes closed and filled with tears, the room silent like a church. David came over and hugged me. I held, gripped, took, grasped him and would not let him go. I hugged him so tightly and moaned tears and sobbed. I did not know how much I had needed to do this, or for how long I had waited. David. David. He said "Hey, Hey. I'm only your brother". I still don't understand what he meant when he said that. Finally I let him go.

After they had left mum went to bed. I thought she was angry at me, but she wasn't. She was tired. It had been a long two months, and mum was tired, and helpless, there was nothing more she could do. She could only say goodnight.

Dad came into the lounge room and sat with me. He talked to me. He talked about his father, and his grandfather. He told me how his grandfather was a gentle man, how they would walk together, how he would talk to him. He told me how he loved his grandfather, and how his grandfather loved him. He told me that while his father was away at sea most of the time, his grandfather had always been home with him. He talked about his father the sailor, a watch dad had received from him when they met in Singapore once, gifts he would bring back to him when he was a child, his father's love of the stars and astronomy. He spoke of his father's strength of conviction, the way his father cared and loved him even though he was hardly ever at home. He told me I reminded him of his father. He told me stories about him, and I sat there and listened and was enthralled. I felt so blessed. I felt so happy and at peace with him. Dad was fathering me. I was being fathered. And it was my dad that had found this simple and gentle way of fathering me, in the way I needed him to. He told me stories about his own dad and his grandfather. That's what he did. He fathered me. And I had waited a long time for that.

A long time.

The following week my friend Graeme invited me to a show. Graeme is in his late forties. He is a lonely man, a man with a strange face and a strange body. He is nervous and he repels people. By cruel people he is considered less than human, a joke. He has been poorly treated throughout his life, and bears the scars of this cruelty. I have always liked him. I have known him since we worked together years ago. When we first met he found me attractive and began pursuing me at work. I was young and green and felt very threatened by him. I ignored it, but he was persistent. It actually became quite ugly, with him harassing me on the phone, and then continuing to pursue me at work, and involving the rest of the staff in it. After about two years it had got completely out of hand and one of the staff members accused me of not be thoughtful towards Graeme. That did it. I had him up before the boss, and had him warned off me. About another year passed before we spoke again, and then slowly, and strangely, we had become very close friends.

Anyway he invited me to a show, and I hadn't see him for a while, so I went. That night I was enjoying my new sense of feeling, a kind of naked sense of fun I hadn't played with before. I certainly played that night, and caught Graeme up in the mischief. He enjoyed it, and he was surprised. At one point he stopped where he was and looked at me and said "You've changed. I can't put my finger on it, but you have certainly changed somehow". It was absolutely delicious to hear him say this.

As we took our seats in the theatre, who should be sitting behind us? Jason. How 'bout that? At interval and after the show we caught up with each other's lives. I was in a particularly mischievous mood and so when he asked me what I had been up to I told him, rather flippantly, "Oh... My life completely collapsed. I've left college, I'm not working, and I'm in therapy. And how have you been?". Not to be outdone he shot back, quick as flash "I've had a breakdown too. Isn't it fabulous?" And we laughed and laughed. How very twentieth century we were that night.

Later he told me more seriously how he had taken off one night. How strange that he should have done what I was threatening to do; he got on a train and went to Sydney and stayed there a while. Eventually they tracked him down, though I don't know who they were. It certainly wasn't his mother. It reminded me of how blessed I was by the gifts that surrounded me; my family and friends.

As we said goodbye outside the theatre that night we determined to keep in

touch. We kissed goodnight. It was a nice kiss, a lovely kiss. He had such soft lips, such a gentle man.

In the fantasy Richard is chained up. He is completely naked. He is kneeling as if he is praying. His ankles are shackled to the cement floor. There is a short link on each ankle attached to a metal ring in the floor so that the front of his foot is pushed hard against the cold concrete. There is about three feet between his ankles, so that his ass is spread open. Above his ass are silver handcuffs restraining his hands behind his back. He is gagged. I have a long piece of cane and I draw it across his face slowly, making him smell it. His eyes reveal panic. I move behind him and then rest it above his buttocks, just moving gently, back and forth. Then I softly remove it, swing my arm back, and whip his ass with it. I do this six times and then pause. I come close behind him and feel his now hot ass, red with pain. I lick him on the neck, then kiss him behind his ear, and whisper for him to lay his face down on the floor. He doesn't move, so I take the cane, put it hard on his face, burn the space below his nose by brushing it by his lip, then grab his hair at the back of his head, and whip his ass six more times. This continues until finally he relents and pushes his face into the floor, his ass delicately poised in the air. Then I fuck him.

Clearly, I had some strong feeling toward Richard. The sight of him kissing that girl had caused me to turn away when I was fifteen and split myself in two. Seven years later this image had returned causing my life to collapse around me. My sexual fantasy life had been haunted by him since the trip to Anglesea two months earlier. The images had grown dark and become violent in a way they had never been before; and they all centred on Richard.

Over the next few weeks, at Robert's suggestion, I started drawing pictures to show what I was imagining in my fantasy life. It was very difficult, in a real sense I was ashamed, and at the same time all this energy was centering on Richard, and I was continuing to regress from time to time and see that kiss at the campsite at Anglesea. It seemed part and parcel, and the way to move forward was to face it, in whatever way I could.

In early December I showed Robert a series of pictures I had drawn of a particular fantasy. It was in an abandoned warehouse. It was dark and cold, and there was water on the floor in puddles from when the rain had come in. It was night time and there was very little light. Richard was chained upright in the centre of the room. He was utterly bare, completely naked. His arms were strung above his head and met at the handcuffs around his wrists. These were connected to a further chain that hung from the roof. His ankles were again fastened to the floor, and the legs were attached to each other by

another chain between his feet. He was strung up so that his feet were slightly off the floor. He is gagged.

I approach him. I come right up to him and smell his neck, breathing on him. I bring my hand up to his chest and brush it across his nipples gently. I move my hand down his torso and grab his balls. I play with them gently, and then I squeeze them, tighter and tighter until he is convulsing with pain. I tell him to stay still. He can't. I grab his face at his chin with my hand and put my face so close to his our eyes almost touch, I tell him to stay still. He can't. I slap him across the face, and then again, and then again, and I grab his hair and tell him to keep still. He falls quiet. I stretch my hand down his face, past his neck, then onto the side of his stomach, gently rubbing him with my thumb. Then I punch him hard and fast in the stomach. He lunges forward, breathless. I ask him if he likes that. I do it again. And again. He can't quite stand up. I tell him to stand up. He is winded. I walk back a way, perhaps three feet from his body, then I kick him in the balls. He is weak and frail now, his head bobbing down to his chest. I pick his head up and kiss him on the lips, then lean his head back so that it is facing up. I clench my fist and punch him on his chin, then his cheek, then his nose. And I keep doing it until he is bleeding. Then I fuck him.

While telling Robert this I became exhausted, and began to regress. I was angry. I hadn't regressed for ages, and I thought it was over. It became stronger and stronger, and finally I gave in. Robert asked me what I saw. I told him it was all going too fast, there was lots of images, but none would stay long enough for me to taste it. Mostly they were of when I was fourteen and fifteen, and they involved Richard in one way or another; in a classroom, at the milk bar, down the beach, at the movies, on a train. They all rushed passed and I grew dizzy and felt sick. Gradually they slowed and then I was with Richard in my bedroom in the summer before Anglesea. We had been out with our mates to a cricket match, and Richard had come back to my place to stay the night.

We had gone to bed, him on my bed, me on the floor on a spare mattress. We were fourteen then, this was a year before Anglesea. It was as if I was there. I could feel the warm summer night, I remembered the window was open, but there was no breeze, and it was still and hot and dark in the room. We had been talking as it was too hot to sleep, talking about all kinds of stuff, nothing really. The pauses in our conversation had grown longer, and I knew what was happening. I was on the verge of telling Richard I was gay. I had come to the decision that I would risk it and tell him. He is the one person in the world who I would have, and could have, told. I was getting up the guts. I was very close, I had the phrase in my head, I took a deep breath

in and was about to voice it when - he spoke to me. He said "Have I shown you my letter?". I asked him what letter, and he got up and took a small envelope from his jeans pocket and handed it to me. It was a letter from some girl he had met, it was some fourteen year old girl's love letter; her name was Fleur. I smiled and laughed and offered him all the enthusiasm I could muster, and I put on a very good performance. I backed away and decided not to tell Richard; not yet. It was almost as if he had stopped me. He had stopped me.

Lying on my bedroom floor, on the flimsy spare mattress, in that dry summer heat, I stared at Richard in the dark. Robert asked me "What do you want to say to Richard?". I said "I love you" and said it again, and then again. What else was there to say? Robert asked me again "What do you want to say to Richard?". Again I spoke and all that was there was "I love you". Robert asked me a third time, and this time I wept, and suddenly it spat out of me "I hate you. I hate you. I hate you. I hate you. I hate you". Not until I said it then did I know it. I was very angry at Richard.

Robert brought me out of the regression and I was wrecked. I was sick and tired of this whole messy experience. Just when it seemed I was getting better, I had been propelled into another hidden, secret world in me. How long would this go on? I was sick of it, sick of it. I just wanted to get out of that room and go and be a normal twenty year old, to catch a bus, to go to a party, to relax. I stared at Robert, I was sick of him too. I was sick of this room, and its stupid decor. I just wanted to get out of there.

Robert looked at me, he never averted his gaze. I stared right back, I was not in the mood for this. He said "I think perhaps it would be a good idea if we brought Richard in for a chat". He had found the one thing to say that I absolutely did not want to hear. In fact I couldn't believe he had said it. I felt like he had kicked me in the gut. I spat back at him, "No! What is the good in that. That is a stupid idea. What would that achieve? All it would do is place an unnecessary pressure on our friendship. It would destroy the friendship. How could he understand what has gone on with me? What sense would it make? It would scare him. He would hate me. It's wrong. No. No. It is a stupid idea. No. No". I kept staring at him, but he hadn't flinched. I put my head in my hands, I was ashamed; deeply ashamed. I couldn't even look at him. I said "I'm sorry". He forgave me, for him there was nothing to forgive. I told him I'd think about it.

Two weeks later I met up with Richard. We caught up with each other's lives, after all we hadn't seen each other since before I went to Anglesea three months earlier. He didn't know anything that had happened since then. I put



it off, I even reconsidered, but finally I told him the story; everything you have read here, from the day I left to go to Anglesea to when I had decided to contact him.

I remember I had a beer bottle in my hand, and I found it so difficult to tell him I had slowly peeled away the entire label. I was crying, but this wasn't for pity, I was angry at him and told him. Here is what I told him:

"When we were young we were very close. Unusually close for boys our age. We hung around together, just the two of us, for a whole year. We used to just like being with each other. You'd wait for the train I was on, even if it made you late. I used to smile when I saw you, and you would smile too; and blush. We were close; very close. I felt like you knew how I felt about you, you used it in our friendship, it was part of our friendship. I feel like you used it, you led me on, like you knew how I felt and you let me feel that way and believe in it. You led me on. It's as if you knew".

As I said these things I thought I was ending our friendship. I didn't actually believe he would be bothered to respond to it, even if he understood what I was saying, and even I didn't really know what I was trying to say. I expected him to get up and say "Pull yourself together. I don't know what you're talking about. And anyway it's all in the past. You've got to get on with your life. Goodbye". But he didn't say that, here is what he said.

"I'm sorry. I want to help you. I'm sorry".

I couldn't believe it. I put the beer bottle down and looked at him. He was concerned for me, he had reached across and grabbed my arm, and said "I'm sorry. I didn't know. I didn't know. I want to help you. I'm sorry".

He talked about how his friendship with me had been important to him, how it had been emotionally close for him. He drew his hands out and separated a space in front of him with his palms. He said that this closeness had been deep, and he indicated with his hands. But he said that it had been enough the way it was, he hadn't needed to take it any further. As much as it was close, that was enough for him, he hadn't needed any more. Again he said "I'm sorry. I could never tell you that. I'm sorry. I want to help you. I'll come to counselling if that will help. I want to help you".

It was shocking. There was a real energy in him to want to help, as if he had been needing to do this for years. Suddenly I felt free. All these years I had this feeling and belief in my love for Richard, but it had never been made real because I had never expressed it to him. I had been angry because he had

never responded to this deeply held feeling. He had been caught too, unable to respond to me because I would not declare myself. He had wanted to for a long time, and now he could, and finally he had told me how he felt about me. He did it with such love and care as if he had waited a long time to do it. The anger I had for Richard were the chains I had enslaved him in. He was a prisoner just as much as I had been. And I had enslaved him. All those years he had persisted in keeping our friendship alive when I had abandoned it. He never gave in, he never gave up. And now came his reward, and our freedom. We went for a walk that night. We shared a meal, we got drunk. I hugged Richard goodbye that night. I had finally said "Yes" to that which I had said "No" too for far too long. It seemed over. The ghosts had been made real and faced. At last it seemed over.

That summer I had fun. The trial of the last few months had transformed me, and like never before I adventured and went on the prowl, seeking mischief and talent. Terror became cheeky, and celebrated it. At parties I would cruise and watch my body play sassy until it found a boy and kissed him, and danced him, and slept with him. Mostly I didn't fuck, I would pursue with a wide eyed eagerness, but really this was just a fifteen year old mucking around, experimenting, discovering the rules and boundaries, bending them a little; but just a little. I had fun anyway.

I remember on Christmas Eve being at a club with friends, dancing and celebrating, and getting drunk. A friend of mine was there who was a waiter in a restaurant I used to go to. Ken was in his late twenties but was sweet and silly like a teenager. He was wild and had a wicked take on the world, and many people took him to be an idiot, when in fact he is actually very gifted. That night he was making songs up for me, and buying me drinks, and I was enjoying being with him. Since I would be attending the now annual "Christmas Morning Champagne Breakfast at Gavin and Julia's", it made sense when Ken offered me a bed for the night at his place, which was nearby. Ken and I had flirted outrageously for about three years, but nothing had ever come of it. Maybe something would. I didn't know. I didn't care much, I was feeling on top of the world.

Ken suggested we go to the local sauna. I told him it wasn't my scene. He said he never went except when he was with other people, and that it was like a trip to the circus. I told him I did not think rooms full of naked men wanting a fuck was like the circus. He insisted, and finally I relented. I was curious. At the Sauna they give you a towel, you drop your clothes off in a locker, and then you walk around with just your towel, admiring other men, taking what you want when you please. That's it essentially. I had fun. We ended up back at Ken's and we slept in each other's arms. Nothing happened.

In the morning I went to the champagne breakfast. It was Christmas morning. Everyone was there, except Juliet. Sometime into the morning someone rang and told us that Juliet had overdosed; they had pumped her stomach though and she was doing okay; she was alive.

When I got home I walked into the kitchen and kissed mum Merry Christmas. There was the briefest moment when she caught a glimpse of my neck and noticed the love bites there from the previous evening, and then quickly looked away. I'm almost sure she had a little grin on her lips.

At dinner that evening I sat silently as my family went into their Christmas Dinner Conversation Thing. It's all very strange to me. Maybe I'll hit a certain age and suddenly be able to do it. I sat around and looked at them; mum and dad, Sarah and Phil, David and Lin. Three happy couples. I think they were talking about garden utensils (well, something like that anyway) and all I could think of was where I had been the night before, sucking off some guy in a steam room, and how different my life was from theirs; how very different I was. It was quite depressing actually - then the phone rang.

It was Juliet. She was at her house, by herself. She had just got back from her family's place, where they had taken her after the hospital. She was lonely. She had overdosed because she was lonely; she had broken up with her boyfriend months before, but that was the least of it. Juliet felt isolated, the pressures of her life, pushing in on her and crushing her. She was desperately lonely. I felt helpless, she talked and I listened, and all I wanted to do was say "Juliet, there must be some hope in your life". But as she talked I lost conviction for it, so all I did was listen. I asked her if I could come over, she refused me. She wanted to be by herself. Fair enough. My sister came in during the phone call to say goodbye. I remember I was crying because of what Juliet was saying to me, Sarah walked in, saw me, waved goodbye, and took off out of the room. Poor Sarah, what can she of thought of her strange brother. Towards the end of the conversation Juliet and I were laughing, about something, I don't know what. There was hope. There is always hope.

I spent New Year's Eve with my friend Scott. We walked from his place to the local dance club. On the way I tentatively ventured that I might do some writing about what had happened in my life in the last few months. Scott is a writer, and very down to earth about it. "What do you want to do that for?". It didn't take him long. Within seven questions he had completely destroyed any enthusiasm I had for the idea of writing it all down. It wasn't time yet.

At the club I ran into Jason. How monotonous of us to keep meeting like this on New Year's Eve. At least you weren't there to spoil the fun this time. He was dressed all in black; black shoes, black socks, black jeans, black belt, black skivvy (you know, the one with the polo neck). How apt that he should be dressed all in black since this was the last time I would see him alive; but then he often wore black, didn't he? He was drunk, and pretty out of it. I went to take a piss and he was getting with some pretty boy in the toilet. Later he was outside the club as I left. We chatted for a bit, I don't know about what (not about you), and then we said we must catch up sometime. I think the last thing he said to me was "I'll call you", but he never did. Of course he died though, didn't he?

The summer of fun raged on until you arrived back in Melbourne. You returned from London; four weeks only. It was going to be a whistle stop tour, a short run, but bound to be a sell out. It was wet and cloudy the day you arrived back. I watched you come through customs and knew the summer was over. Autumn had arrived, and it was you who would herald in the long winter.

I had changed, and I showed you how. I couldn't have cared less about your photographs of Europe; I wanted to know what had happened in your life, I wanted to hear your stories, your secrets, you, you, you. I wanted to talk as we once had, but you had nothing to say. You rang me up and invited me to go with you and watch you do your thing with the people we used to know. I told you "I've seen that show. I watched it eight times a week for three years. No thanks". You were shocked. Good. You were hurt. So be it.

I was so eager to tell you everything that had happened. I couldn't wait to tell you the story. You came over and we sat down and I wanted to tell you, I wanted so much to tell you. I had anticipated this moment, I had waited for it, and then you sat there and you didn't want to hear about it. Everything about the way you were behaving told me you didn't want to hear about what had happened in my life, you didn't want to know that I had changed. I was angry, I was defeated. I had waited to share this story with you, it was a gift, and you didn't want it. All you needed to say was "Yes, tell me" and I would have. But you didn't. You wouldn't. I fought with you. We talked for hours, and by the early morning I was at peace. It seemed it just wasn't right to tell you, it wasn't important, you didn't need to know, and I accepted this. Along the way I had hurt you saying "You aren't ready to hear this", "You don't want to hear this", "You don't seem to care", but in that early morning I made it utterly clear to you. I had held onto this need to tell you for far too long, and now I was letting it go. It was not fair to force it on you, and I apologised. It didn't need to be told to you, so I didn't tell you. I didn't know

why. It wasn't the time. And I was at peace with that. And you didn't tell me otherwise. You seemed to accept that. We spent the rest of that night together, and you never said anything about being angry at me for anything. You hid, and I can't know what is going on unless you show me. If you want something, ask for it.

Everything was fine in the few weeks that you were in Melbourne then. We spent time together, we went out, we talked, we laughed, we drank and danced and shared meals. You never told me or showed me that anything was brewing inside of you. In fact quite the contrary. We went to shows and spent time with our friends, we played and cared for each other in those weeks.

I remember being in the van with your brother, his fiancée and your mother. And I remember sharing a secret with you, something only you and I knew, and we were trying not to laugh so that your family wouldn't twig. We were being mischievous together. This was just before you went away. Were you hurt then? Were you angry? If you were, you were hiding it brilliantly. And frankly, you were never that good an actor.

Juliet had overdosed again. In fact this was the third time. Her flatmate had found her unconscious in her bedroom. If her flatmate had not come home she would have died. Juliet was lonely, desperately lonely, deeply alone. She abandoned life for the third time in three months.

I visited her at the hospital. You had been there in the morning. You had made her laugh, it is what you do. Congratulations. It was a psychiatric ward in a big city hospital. It wasn't like "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" at all. There was no bars, and it was an easy walk into the elevator and down onto the street; except that permission was needed from the duty staff. At one point we went into a room where there was a piano. We closed the door and I played while she sat and listened. After a short while an orderly came along and opened the door abruptly. He stared at Juliet, then looked at me "I have to check the piano, it needs tuning". And so we left that room, and he kept an eye on us the whole time, making sure the door remained open after that.

I spent the afternoon with her. She is so frail, beautiful, sassy little Juliet. She could take the world and break its back if that were her choice, she is as tough as nails. Instead she lets it break her, needle her, paralyse her, stomach pump her, imprison her. She has beautiful soft red hair. She looked pale and defeated. I was angry at her. This was the third time she had tried to kill herself, and what she was doing was violent. Ugly and deliberate violence to herself, to her friends; and to me. It was killing her, killing us, killing me.

She made me a cup of tea, I noticed there was no spoons, or knives, or forks, or anything sharp in this "Kitchen". The cups were made of plastic; big baby blue plastic. On Juliet's bed we sat as she whispered the gossip of the ward into my ear; who that one was, the beautiful one in the bed next door, how that fellow had come to be here, how he talked to her in nonsense and laughter, and how that old lady was cheeky and showed Juliet her cunt. We got out of there. Juliet asked for permission to go to the park across from the hospital. They agreed but "only for a short while".

In the park we sat in the sun and slowly fell silent. I played with the grass at my fingers, struggling to be with her. I told her "People are angry because of what you are doing. On the way here on the train I thought of how angry I would have been if you had died. And I thought of all the people that have hurt you, and would have made you do this. And then I thought if you had died how I wouldn't be angry at them. I'd be angry at you for taking yourself away from me". It was eerie sitting in that park, the city going by in the distance, Juliet listening but not saying much. In fact all I can remember her saying was "Loneliness" and "Death".

That night we had a goodbye meal for you. You were returning to London the following day. When I arrived I could see clearly something was wrong with you, and I immediately asked you what had happened as I sat down at the table. Why were you shocked that I could see it? I knew you; I know you. And anyway, you wear your emotions on your sleeve. You seek for people to be interested in your stories. You are like me. Except that I don't pretend not to be seeking it. You said your English boyfriend had brought someone else into your home and slept with them. Whatever. I don't know. I didn't care. I'd given you six months of my life listening to you drone on about Jason, I wasn't going to waste my last hours with you before you went back to London playing the same routine. Whatever. It was a lousy thing to do to you. He was a jerk. Get rid of him when you get back and get over it. Let's enjoy the meal. I wouldn't play your monotonous little attention seeking ego game anymore.

You drove me home and this is what I said:

"I will miss you. I'm sad you're going back to London, but I accept that's your choice. I've learnt a lot since you've been away. One of the things I've learnt is that when you say goodbye to someone, you really are saying goodbye. When we said goodbye a year ago, our lives took off in different directions. Now we are different people, and so our relationship has changed. I love you, and I will always love you. And I accept that your choice to go away to England is a choice to live a life away from here, away from us.

That makes me sad, but I also want to be realistic about it. It is hard to sustain a friendship over such a long distance. I'm no letter writer, and neither are you. Telephone calls are too expensive. Even if we did these things, it is not the same as being part of each other's lives from day to day. It is a different kind of relationship. You are going away. We won't continue to have the kind of friendship we have had. Our lives will go down different paths. I will always love you and care for you. I hope to see you again. If you are ever close by, then please come and find me and stay with me. I hope this happens. I hope to see you again, and hope you will welcome me into your life if our paths cross again. But they may not, and that is what I am trying to say. I love you, I will always love you, but I guess this is goodbye". And I hugged you. In almost losing Juliet I had learnt one thing; when you say goodbye to someone you must really say goodbye, you may never see that person again. You looked at me and this is what you said "Do you have that twenty dollars you owe me?".

We sat there and you had nothing more to say to me. I hugged you again, and for me that was goodbye. I had done everything I could. I accepted your choice to go away, and hoped that our lives would meet again someday. But finally, it was goodbye. I was at peace with that, and as far as I knew, so where you. I didn't think about it again until you wrote that ugly letter to my parents later in the year. But I am ahead of myself. For the moment we had said goodbye, with your departure the summer had ended; Autumn began her work.

Goodbye. In the shadow of your goodbye and Juliet's almost suicide I had a vision. It was the first of many. These are not visions like the prophets had, mine are much more day to day. There was no burning bush, no letters in fire, no booming voices, no apparitions. This is how it happened.

It was quite ordinary. I was sitting down in a rehearsal room at college. They had invited me back for a short term project as they were short an actor. It was low key and low pressure and I was pleased they had asked me. I had just finished my own part in the scene we were rehearsing and the others continued playing it. I was quite relaxed, at peace and calm. Someone tapped me on my shoulder, or at least that is how I would describe what happened next. I turned and felt as if I was being held in someone's arms. The room fell away. I was still there, I could see everyone in the room and what they were doing, but it was at once distant and present.

Here is what I saw. I sat on my sixteen year old's bed, in my sixteen year old's room. It was years earlier. Dad sat beside me. I knew this moment. This was about six months after the first time I had been to Anglesea; I was

sixteen again. Dad and I had just argued about something. I was sitting with dad and I had been talking, but now I was silent. It was just he and I in the room, but - and that's when I felt it. There was Dad. There was me. And there was something else in the room. I wanted to speak to Dad, but I couldn't; something was stopping me. There was me. There was Dad. There was something else in the room. Speak, I thought, speak to him. But I was kept silent. Speak! Speak! Speak to him! Trust him, believe him, speak to him, now is your chance. Speak! But I was gagged. There was me, there was my dad, and there was something else there in my sixteen year old's bedroom.

I did not run. I waited until the rehearsal broke for morning tea, and then I quietly left the studio. I had been crying, but I did not let anyone else see. I did not deny the experience, neither did I flaunt it. I went and ate and drank, anything to return to the present day, to return to earth, to shake it off, I wanted to shake it off. It turned me inside out. But I refused to let it stop me taking part in that rehearsal. I was stronger now, I had been through a lot, and as chaotic as this felt I was not going to let it stop me in my tracks as it had done just six months earlier. I had made a commitment to this group of people, I was not going to turn blubber baby on them and abandon it. I breathed deeply, I focussed and calmed down, and got on with the day. No one knew the better. It was as much pride as anything. How boring it would have been for me to perform the same breakdown, in the same college, twice in six months. I could be accused of many things, but couldn't have stood to repeat myself. How terribly dull that would have been. So I fought it and kept myself together. Though it wasn't easy.

I was continuing with Robert, my counsellor. I told him about this experience, what I had seen. And while doing it I was ashamed to regress again. Months had passed since I had regressed. I was just about ready to re-enter my life, find a job and begin again. I had thought it was over. It had been a brutal six months, I had faced myself, I had faced my family, I had faced Richard, I had confessed everything; Hadn't I? What more.

Little Nicholas on his chair with his head between his shoulders and mucus dripping from his nose onto the floor and tears wetting his pants. What more little Nicholas? What more?

I sat there and it was just as if I was sitting on my sixteen year old's bed with my dad. I knew now what I had not known before; there was something else in the room, some other presence. That's all I knew. And then I saw myself and my father sitting there, as if from above. And there was little Nicholas, baby, baby, baby boy with his sixteen year old head between his sixteen year



old shoulders and even though his dad sat next to him he was so lonely and then I uttered "Juliet".

It was different now, this regression, different from before. I was absolutely in two places at once; I was both in the room with Robert and in this "other" place, when I was sixteen. I lifted my head and saw both rooms. I looked directly into Robert's eyes; "Juliet", and the tears that came here belonged in both places.

"What about Juliet?" Robert asked.

"She almost died"

"And how does that make you feel?"

"Sad", it was all I could come up with.

"Why does it make you feel sad?"

"Because she almost died", I shouted at him as if he was stupid.

"Why is that sad?"

"Because I almost - "and I caught my breath

"What?" Robert was on his way somewhere.

"Juliet almost died - if her flatmate hadn't found her then -"

"Then what?"

"She would have killed herself - She could have -"

"And how does that make you feel?", he wouldn't give up.

"Frightened. Sad. Death. She almost -"

"Why does it make YOU feel this way?"

"Because I - because - because I -"

"What?"

"Because I almost died. I almost died. I almost died".

And I remembered what had happened that night. After Anglesea the first time I had returned to Melbourne a very depressed fifteen year old. Whatever happened there when I saw Richard kiss that girl, hurled me into a deep and dark state of mind and state of feeling. I returned to school that year, but over those six months I had grown more depressed every day, withdrawing more and more into my own world, and away from the friends around me. They grew closer with one another, and I grew apart, more and more alienated. It was a vicious cycle. The more I withdrew, the stranger I became to them, the less they wanted to be with me, the more depressed and alienated I became. Six months of that had hurtled me into the a profoundly suicidal depression. I had decided to kill myself. I had decided how, I had decided where, and finally I had decided when. I had set the date. On the eve of my suicide my father and I had some stupid argument about something trivial. The pattern was for dad and I to fight, me to run off to my room, then about twenty minutes would pass and dad would come up and give me a hug and tell me

he loved me and sit with me a while. The pattern had affirmed itself the night before the day I would kill myself.

That's what I had seen when I saw my father and I sitting on my sixteen year old bed. Dad and I talked that night, and what I needed to say was "Dad, I'm in trouble". Here was a boy about to kill himself, and he sat with his father on his bed, and he could not tell him, could not tell him, did not trust to tell him, something had stopped me; "Something else was in the room".

Instead of killing myself I woke up the next day and went to school and cut myself off from my friends. I no longer spent any time with them, not at lunchtime, during class or outside of school. For the next eighteen months, the remainder of my school life, I kept mostly to myself. I would leave the school grounds at lunchtime and go and walk for a while, buying lunch from the local delicatessens (it was better than tuckshop anyway). I remember there was this lovely little bandstand in a local park, and that is often where I'd sit; by myself for an hour, returning just in time for afternoon class. That's what I did instead of killing myself; I cut the line between me and other people. As far as I remembered it was my only choice.

Now I knew something crucial about my life. The night I was going to kill myself, I wasn't able to tell my father I was in trouble, even though this is what I needed to do in order to save my life. This is why I insisted on there being "something else" in the room. This "something" would see me kill myself before I would tell my father I was in grave trouble. I had been gagged, been made silent on the night I most desperately needed to speak - to live. I had never forgotten that dark period in my life, nor of how I had decided to kill myself when I was sixteen. What was new was the realisation of how close I had come, I really was going to kill myself that next day, it had come that close; its closeness could be measured in hours.

I also knew that something had happened through those hours. When I woke on the day I had nominated for my suicide, I decided against it. Instead I went to school and cut myself off from my friends, and in a much more fundamental way cut myself off from other people completely, and finally from myself. There would follow five dark years, really I didn't breathe again until that night at Ballarat when I realised I could not even look at myself in the mirror without feeling disgusted and repulsed by what I saw; myself. I didn't yet know what, or who, had saved my life that night when I was sixteen. Secrets. This journey was a web of carefully woven secrets, and slowly but slowly they were being untangled. There was still more work to do. It wasn't over yet, not nearly.

Robert, my counsellor, had a radio show on Sunday nights. As a perverse coincidence Robert turned out to be a priest as well as having his own psychology practice. He also had this radio show. I was listening to it one night, and he was interviewing this fellow called Michael. Michael was talking about rituals and the great tradition of the shaman in ancient culture. The shaman was the healer and spiritual guide within his tribe. Michael described how the shaman would be chosen, how the young man or woman would suffer a fever that would haunt them with images and painful feelings until they accepted their role as shaman. Then they would be initiated and serve an important role within the tribe. He described how this had been lost in western society, how we had neglected and abandoned the spiritual for a more material way of being. As he spoke I thought of the mask work I had done at college, and how powerful it had been, and how I had felt so at home doing it. As I thought this I had a sudden rush of energy in and around me. It was so abrupt it actually frightened me and I shouted out to my parents, but they didn't hear me. It was like I left the room, and all I remember saying is "I've come home. I've come home". It felt like it lasted ages, I remember it ended abruptly, and when looking at the clock only a few minutes had passed.

I had a bath the next afternoon. I remember being in the bath and becoming utterly relaxed. I stared around the bathroom, at the tiles and watched the steam and water play around me. I caught the light in them and it tickled me, it made me laugh. The light here was beautiful and sublime and cheeky. I felt at peace and had a sudden and clear experience of faith. Something was going on in my life, something wonderful. That was undeniable. I couldn't say what was going on exactly, but it was happening, that was real; faith.

Around this time I had returned to the volunteer work at the health organisation I had been part of before Anglesea had started her work on me. I was running a group at this time, it was a discussion group run over a couple of months with about a dozen young guys in it. We met once a week and the focus was on self esteem. I ran the group.

One night around this time there was an exercise where everybody was to bring in photographs of themselves at different ages in their lives and talk about how they felt about themselves at these different points. We got about half way through the group, and it was standard fare most of the way.

Then it was David's turn. He was about twenty years of age, short, quite shy and quite attractive. He looked at me and showed me his empty hands "I haven't brought any photographs. I have them, I just didn't want to bring them. I'll tell you why. It's because I can't bare to look at myself. I hate

looking at myself. I hate myself". And so it went. I didn't need to ask a single question, he had more energy to talk about why he hadn't brought his photographs than anyone else in the room did to talk about the photos they had actually brought. He spoke long and eloquently about his life and the events which had brought him to despair and grief, to a point where he couldn't even look at himself. He spoke beautifully, he spoke powerfully, it is like he named the very thing which had been in the room with my father and I the night before I was going to kill myself. He did name it, and in naming it, he brought it into the room. And it silenced me again. When he had finished I was speechless. Usually I could speak to what one of these guys had said, to offer insight and care. I couldn't even open my mouth. It had silenced me again. Even seven years later I recognised its smell, its taste, its death. And even seven years later it could gag me and silence me still. Here is what I said after a minute's silence "Thanks David. Who's next?".

Later we all shared a meal. While we were eating we had an exciting conversation, ideas flew up and down the table, wine was drunk, the food was good.

Simon is short and considered. He offered a lot of care to the others in the group. We were whipping up a frenzy of a conversation. Our language lifted us up and we flew right into the story of when I was sixteen and sat on the bed with my dad and how there had been some "other presence" in the room. Until that moment the conversation had been rapid and heated, suddenly Simon went distant and silent.

Then he spoke; "When I was sixteen I went into the bathroom. There was a cabinet there with a mirror. I opened it and gathered everything I could see. I took them into my bedroom. I walked past the lounge room where my parents were watching television. I went into the kitchen and poured myself a jug of water. I took the jug past my parents and into my bedroom. I swallowed everything I had collected". He stopped and stared at me. We both fell silent. He stared at me, and stared at me, and stared at me. He said "I have never told anybody that". I was gagged. He had named it, and it had silenced me; again. I pushed my chair away and retreated from the table to the restaurant toilet.

Of course afterwards we went dancing, what else was there to do? Afterwards I got a lift home. We pulled out the front of my place and stopped the car. I was in the back. I was shaken by the night. If I am ashamed to tell you I cried it is only because it seems I couldn't do anything else at this time in my life. Simon held my hand saying, "You are special. You care for people, and they care for you. You have a gift, you should share it". He was right. It was

true. And again it was like I was hearing new words, and even when hearing them as new, I had known this for a long time.

I walked up the driveway to our front porch and as I did I saw a boy kissing a girl at a campsite in Anglesea. What had I seen that New Year's Eve that was so painful it almost broke my fifteen year old body? I still didn't know, but I now knew that I had seen it in the way "Nicholas" sees things, the way I see things. It wasn't just a teenage crush and hurt feelings. That was not enough. That was not enough to explain the power of that event in my life. It had pursued me for seven years, it had turned my life inside out. Seeing that kiss had broken me in two. I had glimpsed it and rather than look at it I had buried a whole part of me. Six months later I almost killed myself because of what I had seen that night. I hadn't just seen that kiss; I had seen everything a kiss is. That is how I see.

If I knew nothing else I now knew that I had been given a gift, a way of seeing, and feeling, and being and its name was "Nicholas". That night at Anglesea I had seen with those eyes, and felt with that heart, and it was so painful I had turned away from it. "No thanks", that is what I had said at Anglesea. Whatever I saw in that kiss, I didn't want to see it; the pain it brought me was not welcome. "Go and get fucked" that is what I said to The Bearer of the gift named "Nicholas". I didn't like the hand I was dealt, so I turned away from it.

Walk with me up the stairs to my parents bedside that night. Wake them up with me. Sit there with me as I cry like a baby. Watch me hold my mum's hand. Feel the concern in my father's touch. Listen to what I said to them, listen to me, "It has taken me a long time to know what I have needed to tell you. I have a gift; it's a way of seeing, and feeling, and experiencing life that is unique. It's special. It's rare. I have a gift. It's wonderful, and it scares me, its thrilling and painful, but it's offered to me. It's me. I can do something with this gift. I can do something". I had removed the gag. I won't be silenced any more.

The very next day Richard rang to tell me he was going overseas. I said I would like to see him before he went away and we made a date. I had not seen Richard since we had shared that beer the previous year. I had been reluctant to face him then, but I had done it and had it out with him, and the rewards had been rich. We had untied a knot that had been fastened between us for years. And that had been that. I had not contacted him, or needed to contact him. He had left me alone as well. I was very happy about that. In fact, I never wanted to see Richard again in my life. I would just as soon have purged him and the pain he had brought me. And now, at this moment,

literally the next day, he rang. It was the timing that scared me. I was just beginning to understand what had happened at Anglesea all those years ago, and now he was saying he would be gone in seven days; he had rung me to say he was leaving. "Goodbye" is a powerful event.

In the week leading up to the encounter with Richard I fantasised about what it would be like. I imagined we would meet and I would kiss him and we would end up fucking. I imagined we would meet and I would be so angry I would push him, and he would push me back, and we would have it out with our fists; I enjoyed the thought of it. The one that made me laugh was the fantasy of us meeting, having a pleasant evening together and then bidding each other a polite farewell. When I thought of that I just laughed and laughed and laughed.

We met and went to some crappy cafe and ordered the food. I offered him very limited civility. I just wanted to get down to it. I asked him why he had rung me. He said finally because he felt a sense of duty. I wanted to know what he still wanted from me. He was sick of this. I told him I was still angry at him. He looked at me genuinely frustrated, and told me he thought we had taken care of that already. I said no. I was a real pain in the ass actually, but I didn't care any more. That's how it was.

I asked him why he thought we had always been drawn to one another, since school, and then right throughout. He said he didn't know, but then acknowledged that there was something between us that he had never been able to ignore; it was compelling.

I told him I had a gift. The gift was a way of seeing, and feeling and experiencing life in way that was quite unusual. It was about experiencing events very deeply, seeing things in relationships and people and events that other seems quite different from most people. I told him that there was times in my life that this had made me feel very lonely. He stared at me without flinching. Suddenly I knew something about Richard I had always known. I said to him "I think you're like me".

He blushed, and looked down. He smiled, and then looked at me, and lost the smile. He stared into my eyes and said "You're very smart, aren't you?". Adrenalin pumped through my body. Something was starting to form between us, a realisation, an understanding, a bond.

We talked. He asked a lot of questions. It was as if he was confirming that this way of being was shared between us. We were talking the way two car enthusiasts do, a common language, shared desires and experiences, a

shorthand that communicated itself quickly and accurately. We knew one another, intimately. More than intimately. We had shared this all our lives together, but we had never named it, as we were doing now.

We continued up the street. I did not quite believe this was happening. Richard spoke about his life, the way he saw and felt, and how this brought him a sense of being alone in his life. What a victory, that is what I thought, after years of waiting I finally understood what lay between Richard and I. He knew too. He knew it, and spoke it, and lived it. We walked together up that street excited by the naming of this shadow that had followed us through our lives, this shadow which we felt and bound us together.

Walk with me as I approach the campsite at Anglesea. What do you see? A kiss. And what else? What is it you're looking at, what is it you feel? The twelve feet between you and him; the gap. It's the kiss you see, and the gap you feel. The gap was the widening space between Richard and I. The man with whom I shared brotherhood was moving away from me, and the thought of losing his closeness terrified me. The kiss had been an invitation to adulthood, and I had declined. I was learning more and more about what I had seen when I saw that kiss.

We sat down in a pub. Richard bought some beers, and then he went for a piss. Inside of me I felt an anger brewing up, and I tried to ignore it, I wanted to believe that this was it, that we had finished, but we hadn't.

When he returned I drank with him and then I said "Richard, there's something more". He was tired, and so was I, but this was our last chance. He said he didn't know what, that he felt helpless, that there was nothing he could do. I just kept staring at him, putting faith in the conviction that I was doing the right thing, I was saying "Yes" to the feeling in my heart. That is all I needed to do. It got tetchy, he accused me of being angry with him. I said I didn't know if that was true. It was messy and awkward and I began to lose hope.

We were silent for a long time and then he turned to me and said "I didn't ask you to cut yourself off". Immediately I shot back "You never asked me why". And there it was. We had said it. These words were seven years old, I had grown thirsty for them and become parched, and now I drank, and drank, and drank. It was intoxicating.

When I had cut myself off from my friends, essentially I had cut myself off from Richard. It was a cry for his help, for his acknowledgement. He had never once asked me why I had done it. He never once asked me where I

was, or what I was doing. He ignored me, and I had never forgiven him for it. We had been bound to each other in these chains for years. Now we forgave each other, really there was nothing to forgive.

There was just one last thing; "I can't live anymore as we have been living. I can't live in this half relationship with you. It has almost destroyed my life. It has haunted me, and now it's over, it has to be over one way or another". I reached out my hand across the table and opened my palm to him; "I want us to commit to the bond that's between us. I want us to committ with our whole lives to this bond. Either you honour this bond with your whole life " and then I took my hand away "or you get out of my life completely".

Did I know what I was doing? Not really, but I knew with the conviction of my whole life to do it. You can read this account and determine for yourself what the bond is about, I don't think I will ever understand it. I know that this was a transformation. We were loosening the chains that had imprisoned us to one another, and now we were striking a new bond, a new brotherhood. All I knew then was to make this offer. Like me, he did not really understand what was going on, but we both knew there was a choice. To committ to it, or not to.

Finally he took my hand. He put his fingers through mine and we clenched each other. We made real the bond that holds us in each other's heart. We honor that bond with our whole lives. Whenever that bond calls us, we will honor it. However that bond calls us, we will honor it. We are brothers, we have always been brothers, we will always be brothers.

I haven't seen Richard since then. He was travelling in America for a while. He rang me a few times, and wrote me a letter. I wrote to him earlier this year. Shortly after that I received a letter from him. He wrote "I love you. You will always be my friend. I want to be there for you in whatever way I can be. I want you to know I will always be there for you". He is moving around the world, so am I. I love him, and trust that our paths will cross if they need to cross. I hope to see him again, though I accept we may never meet again. But finally we will always be together, we are bound in a way that neither of us understands, but both of us honor with every breath we take, with every day, with our whole lives. We made the discovery every person is invited to make; we are brothers, all of us.

At home I celebrated. I walked up and down the house, unable to be still. I shaped my body the way Olympic champions do; this was a gold medal. I had won. I kept stretching my whole body upwards, my hands clenched for victory high in the air. How proud I was. How proud and very blind I was.



However there was finally a moment of clarity. My body, posturing itself like a prize fighter, suddenly felt a gentle whack, and I flinched. I stood dead still in the dark hall and just heard myself breathing. Somehow I had the conviction that this was a premature celebration, I was opening the champagne before the guest arrived. I tried to ignore it, and instead foolishly savoured the fruits of the night.

I hadn't shaven for a while, and there was quite a growth by now. I went into the bathroom, filled the basin up with water, soaped up my face and then rinsed it clean. I shook the can of shaving cream vigorously, as advised on the packaging. I pressed the top and released the foam onto my finger tips, I lathered it gently and applied it liberally to my beard. I picked up my razor and turned to the mirror. I lifted the hair away from beside my ear so that I could begin with my sideburns. I froze. Somehow it was wrong. Somehow it just wasn't right to shave. It seemed funny to me. I looked at myself in the mirror and smiled. Somehow the feeling in my heart was against shaving. It seemed so funny to me, such a trivial thing, and why not? That's what I thought. Why not? As a whim I put the razor blade down and washed my beard. As it turned out I would not shave again until after it was over.

Mum had made chicken. When she brought the plate I looked at it and felt strange. It was as if I didn't recognise what I was seeing. I put some chicken on a fork and put it in my mouth. It was a bizarre sensation, vaguely repulsive, but just simply strange. Somehow it seemed strange to eat meat. I don't have much conviction for animal rights, it has never really been a great concern of mine. I have eaten meat all my life, and now suddenly I felt as if it was an alien experience, it just seemed wrong. So I stopped. And the strangest thing was, I didn't miss meat at all, though it had been my staple diet my entire life. I stopped eating meat after that night, and I did not eat it again until after it was over.

I woke up one morning and started to get dressed. I reached for my underpants and started to put them on. Slowly a feeling of unease came over me. Lifting my underpants to the light at my window I stared at them. How strange they were. I couldn't take my eyes off them. Half naked, I wondered around the room playing with my underpants, feeling them, stretching them, tasting them and smelling them. I didn't recognise them, though I knew what they were. I put them on my head, I wore them through my arms, I threw them against the wall and caught them again. None of this felt as absurd as when I actually tried to put them on. When I did that I felt so silly I blushed. Suddenly underpants were strange objects quite unreal to me; to wear them felt strange. Somehow I had the conviction not to wear underpants. So I

stopped. And I wouldn't wear them again until after it was over.

All this had been quite strange and had a kind of whimsy about it that I found utterly appealing. I was reflecting on this one afternoon as I walked through the city. Around me were thousands of people, this was the city rush hour, peak time. All around me were men, men on trains, men on buses, men in suits, men with umbrellas, men with newspapers, men with eyes. It was cruisey. I caught its energy and rhythm, and then something awful happened. I felt suddenly very isolated. I saw the game happening around me, the cruising and posturing, the eyes catching eyes, the men following men, and it was all passing me by, I was watching from outside, I was not a player. I stood dead still in the street and the colours and patterns and rhythms of the city rushed by me, outside me, around me and past me. I did not belong here, it was all quiet alien to me, and I watched the men pass me by.

I went home that night and went immediately to my bedroom, took all my clothes off and climbed into my bed. I lay there willing myself into sexual fantasy, hoping for the thrill of a quick wank and the ecstasy of orgasm, but finally I just couldn't be bothered. My mind would wander off and I would lay in the ecstasy of silence, the sound of my breath and my heart, the quiet of the new world I inhabited. I just couldn't be bothered. It now seemed so strange to me, to wank, to lay there and escape to a fantasy. It just seemed strange and alien. Anyway I was hungry and dinner was almost ready. I got dressed, without putting any jocks on, and went and enjoyed my new vegetarian diet. I would not have an orgasm again until it was over. And that was another six months away. It just didn't occur to me to.

No sex, no meat, no underpants. This was the beginning of a preparation. I didn't know that it was a preparation at the time, I just followed my heart, listened to its instructions, and surrendered to them. It wasn't difficult, there was a pleasure in saying "Yes". It had delivered me to where I was now, rewarded me with gifts and experiences which I thought I would never have. It had freed me, and freed me again, and just kept freeing me. I knew it was strange what was happening, but I also knew that this was bringing me closer to it, closer to what was hope, closer to life, closer to the great gift I felt was being promised.

The way was being prepared. I still had outstanding commitments from my old life, and one by one I completed them. When each was completed I felt a weight lift. Not only was I completing old contracts, I was not renewing them. Nor was I making any new commitments. I was freeing my life up, making way for it, welcoming the promise into my life, offering it my whole life, piece by piece. Whatever it took to get there, I would surrender it. That

strange deal struck between "Nicholas" and "Nick" was becoming more and more real as each week went by. In giving up this work commitment, and that debt, I was smashing down the wall that had held my life together. I was leaving each of the communities I had been a part of. I finally left college, forgoing on the option to return and complete my degree; that was finished now and I would not return to that kind of work. I left the health organisation that had been so much a part of my life for the past three years. I hadn't held a job for nearly a year now, whereas once work had been a crucial part of my day. For the first time since I was a teenager my life was freeing up, all energies surrendered to the hope that something was going to happen, some gift being offered, some event soon.

Walking away from college was difficult. This had been my life's dream. I remember walking away from the building, and feeling disorientated. I staggered up the street and across to the gardens that welcome people into the city of Melbourne. It was drizzly and grey in the early evening. It was on of those bitter cold Melbourne winter evenings. I was choking on a red hot passion inside of me. I was sweating and felt nausea. I remember falling into trees, then picking myself up and just going forward, losing track of where I was. Fever gripped me and pushed me on, I was shaking and dizzy and felt as if I would collapse. I couldn't go any further and fell to my knees where I had come to stand. I looked up.

I was kneeling at the bottom of the steps that lead to the Shrine of Remembrance. It is an epic structure, like a building in ancient Rome, its stairs cover a hill side, and go up, and up, and up until the shrine itself is towering over you. There are great massive pillars at its front, and at its top there is a Crucifix. That is what caught my eye as I knelt there in the rain. I was furious.

I began my ascent towards the shrine. I walked forward and the wind whipped across my face and tore at me, the rain stinging my eyes. I didn't avert my gaze, I didn't flinch, I stared at that Cross and determined myself toward it. As I climbed the next set of stairs I opened my arms outward, stretching them so that a prostrate body ascended that hill towards that Cross. I came to the level of the shrine itself, there were no more stairs, just a vast stretch of stone before me to the foot of its temple. I stood there, soaking wet and freezing, fevered with shaking, my arms outstretched and I shouted "What? What is it? What then? Here I am. What? What do you want? What? What? What?". And all I remember hearing is the wind whistling in my ears, softly, so softly. There was no words, but it is as if I was listening to words. After a while I realised it had stopped raining and I walked over to The Eternal Flame, a fire which never goes out and commemorates the fallen

soldiers of all wars. Soothing and silent, that is what the flame was. It said "Soon"; its flame whispered "Soon".

Walking became my life's work. I would walk for hours and wait. I was waiting, though I didn't know for what, but I did know to wait. It was the late winter by now, and one Saturday night I went for a walk around eleven o'clock. I walked from my house and reached the end of the road. I didn't feel like walking, but I wasn't able to keep still. At the end of the road I didn't know which way to turn. Starting towards the north I felt ill and stopped. I turned away and went eastward, and became frustrated and turned back. I headed south-west, and finally I was so exhausted I stopped dead still and decided I would turn back. As I turned around I felt completely overwhelmed by a sense of despair. I couldn't go back, I wouldn't go back, so I set again in a south-westerly direction.

It landed me in my old high school. I walked into the great hall, which just about lives up to its name. It is a large hall which holds two thousand people in a pinch. It is decorated by boards which hold the names of a century of adolescent achievers. The place was open on a Saturday night because the high school I attended has boarders, and they inhabit the place twenty four hours a day, seven days a week. It is run by Jesuit priests and they live there as well.

I sat down in the centre of the great hall. In a room nearby some young boarders were watching a video. I sat there and stared around the hall, remembering the dark days I had spent there. As I sat there I started crying. Little light crept into this hall, it all came from the rooms at its periphery, but there was quite enough for me to see everything and be seen. A cry came pleading out of me "What? I'm here now. What do you want?". Distantly the boarders laughed at their American video. "What is it? What do you want from me?". Nothing. I had come here to learn, for years I had come here to learn, this was a place of learning. Looking around I said "Then teach me. Teach me. I'm here now. I want to learn. Teach me then. Teach me". The boarders came out of their television room and made their way through the hall to their bedrooms. They saw me, and some of them stopped and had a gape from a distance, but nothing came of it. Their teacher or supervisor came out and locked the door behind him. I was about twenty feet from him, in the shadows, but I was sitting in a lone chair in the middle of a gaping bloody hall. How could he not see me? I felt invisible. I felt as if I had never been seen here.

Turning around I caught a glimpse of a window. It had wood carving through it, so that it was made up of different shapes; circles, squares, triangles and

so on. It reminded me of something, though I couldn't say what, I could only feel it. I had come here to learn, and I had learnt nothing. I had been invisible, I had never been seen here, and I never would be. This was not the place, this was not the place, I was never going to learn anything here. "Where then?" I asked out loud. And clearer than anything I knew immediately where; Anglesea.

Having received what I came for I got out of there as quickly as possible. As I left I noticed two men by the path that took me out of the school. It was the boarder's supervisor and a priest. I recognised them both from my time at the school. I wanted to walk past both of them and not be bothered by them. Just let me get out of here. As I approached the supervisor asked me "Can I help you". I stopped dead still and stared at him. I didn't say a word for ages. What did he see? A young man with a wild beard, panic in his eyes and panting, wet clothes and madness. I stared at them, I dared them to teach me. I stared and stared and stared. They could not teach me, they weren't going to teach me, it would be someone else. "No. I'm leaving", I spat it at him. I stared at the priest. Look at me you fucker, that's what I thought, look at me and see me and speak to me. He was looking down, he wouldn't meet my gaze. Look at me you cunt, look at me. I'm twenty two years of age, I'm in trouble, it's your life's work to reach your hand out to me, to offer yourself, to reach out and you won't even look at me. Look at me! But he wouldn't; he never had done, and he was never going to. I walked away. Finally, I walked away.

I told my parents I was going to have a holiday. Mum thought that this was a very good idea. She casually enquired "Where do you think you'll go?" and I couldn't help grinning when I uttered "Anglesea". I began to make plans, organised the money, made enquiries as to accommodation and so forth. I planned to leave at the end of September, but I wasn't exactly sure when.

It was at the end of the first week in August that I began to start saying goodbye to the people in my life. I didn't even realise I was doing it at first. I spent days chasing up friends, sharing meals with them, and telling them I was going away to Anglesea for a while. I said I didn't know how long for, but it would be a while and I would be by myself.

It was while saying goodbye to some friends in a cafe that I happened upon a guy I had met years earlier. He had seen me perform a show and had approached me afterwards and tried to make a date. I was too shy, and so had missed out. He recognised me, even through my now wiry beard, and we got chatting. It just seemed very easy to be with him. He sat down with me in his break and we talked for so long he eventually got into trouble and had to go

back to work. He said "We should catch up sometime". I said "Okay". He said "When?". I said "How about tomorrow?".

The next day I walked to his house and met him for lunch. We spent a couple of hours talking. I had no idea why I was with him. For whatever reason sexual desire had abated in my life at that time, I knew I wasn't there to have sex with him. I just knew to be there with him. We spent the morning chatting. I told him I was going away, and then I told him why; the whole story. He listened carefully, and then started crying. Not me, mind you, him. He then talked about his own life.

We went for a walk down the street to a cafe. We shared a meal on a table out the front on the side walk. After the meal he went to pay. I sat there and thought "What am I doing here? I am twenty two years of age. I should be at work. I should be laying the ground work for my life, and instead I'm sitting with someone I hardly know on the conviction that "it feels right". Look what's become of me". It seemed so strange.

He came back and sat down and looked at me. I looked at him and said "I don't know why I'm here. I have no idea why I'm here with you. I don't want to have sex with you, I don't really know you. And yet I feel compelled to be with you today" and I laughed. We kept looking at each other and I kept saying "I don't know. I don't know". And as I said it I could feel the rhythm in me increasing, my heartbeat accelerating, the adrenaline pumping, and I was laughing saying "I don't know. I don't know". After a while there was just his eyes, they were blue, just his blue eyes and my laughter. I was still on the street, I was aware of the traffic passing by, but it was silent; there was just his blue eyes. "I don't know" I said and suddenly I understood; "but you know" and as I said it the rhythm slowed and panned out to a rested silence. "You know. I don't know. But you know". It was so peaceful here, I knew this place, this silence, his eyes, this presence; I was home, I had come home. I didn't know why I was with him, only that I was meant to be. He knew why, and that's all that mattered. I didn't need to know. All I had to do was be there with him. The rest would do the rest. Later I received a letter from him thanking me, telling me it had been important that he spent time with me that day. I still don't know what that was all about, and it doesn't matter; he knows.

The next day I met Michael. Robert, my counsellor, had been insisting I meet Michael, the man he had interviewed on the radio months earlier. Michael and I went into a room by ourselves, we spent some time in silence together, and then we talked. I told him the story of the previous day, of meeting the guy and what had happened on the side walk cafe. He was very moved. He

used words like "genuine" and "legitimate" to describe my experience. I didn't quite get him, but he seemed to relate in some way to what was happening in my life. I asked him how his faith had an expression in his life. He said two words; "surrender" and "trust". These two words would guide me and carry me through Anglesea. And finally they would carry me back to Michael. He told me he had a house in Rye, which was not that far from Anglesea, and that I was welcome to come and visit anytime I wanted. It was a crucial invitation.

I was sitting with my parents that night, it was a Friday, and they asked me what I was going to get up to on the Saturday. I told them I had planned to see my friend Scott and say goodbye to him, since I was going away to Anglesea. As I said it I realised how strange it sounded. There was a sense of finality in what I said. Why was I taking such care to say goodbye to Scott?

I went for a walk and as I rounded the corner at the end of the street I began to feel the rhythm inside of me building, adrenaline began to pump and I stared at all the familiar sights around me. I had walked these streets for years, this was my patch, I knew every tree, every house, every crack in the side walk. Tasting it was delicious and familiar, I soaked it up. The feeling became so powerful it literally stopped me dead still in my path. Taking a deep breath in I smelt my neighbourhood, and realised that I would never see it again. I continued to take that breath in, and suddenly saw my mother, my father, my sister and my brother; and felt that I would never see them again.

I was still standing dead still on the pavement, taking that breath in when I saw the frightening vision. I saw my mother coming home from work in the afternoon. She came in the house and put the papers in the lounge room. She put the kettle on for a cup of tea. She walked up the stairs and went to the toilet. She went into the bathroom to wash her hands and there was her fifteen year old son Nicholas in the bathtub, dead and lifeless. He had killed himself. She couldn't even make a noise. She knelt down and grabbed his naked body from the bath and held him in her arms, soaking herself, rocking back and forth, back and forth, and finally she made a noise that shamed me, utterly shamed me. That's what I saw going for a walk that Friday night.

The next day I spent the afternoon with Scott and told him what had happened. As I spoke to him I realised I was saying "Goodbye. I don't think I will ever see you again". What made it frightening was that when I spoke these words they seemed true; it was real. Even Scott, who is the salt of the earth, believed there was truth in what he heard. It struck a deep chord in him. As we were speaking I heard a sound in my ear, it was old but I didn't

recognise it, it wasn't familiar to me, it was "mama". Just a sweet little sound; "mama".

What was going on? Scott and I said farewell, and it was as if we really were parting forever.

On the Sunday my conscience tortured me. If what I was feeling was legitimate and genuine then I should honour it and tell my parents. But how can a child tell his parents that he is going away and won't ever see them again? It is inhuman. I tried to understand what I had seen in different ways; perhaps I was going away and when I returned I would be a different person, so in that way I was never going to return again - as I was. It didn't wash. That is not what the feeling was seeking. The voice that had spoken whimsically with "no sex, no meat, no underpants", was now compelling me to surrender my family and friends. It was tearing me apart, it was too much, I didn't understand it, how could I expect my mother and father to? I remember sitting with mum on their bed as we read the Sunday papers and asking her what I had called her as a baby. She said "perhaps ma", though she wasn't sure. I asked if her if I had ever called her "mama", she said yes, I had.

I sat down with them on the Monday night and told them. Dad said this; "Well you do what you like Nicholas, but you know that what you are doing is very hurtful to your mother and me", and he was right. We talked about it, and again what was frightening is that there was somehow a truth in it, and even mum and dad saw that, though they didn't accept it. At one point I looked at mum and said "mama". I told her I had been hearing it for the last few days, ever since I realised I would not see them again. What made all this so strange is that there were no issues between my parents and I. There were no grudges, no problems, nothing to be argued about or fought for. There was a clean slate. How rare a thing, how strange, and how right that it would allow me to say goodbye and leave for no other reason than I felt called to it. I remember mum saying "Well, I'm going to have to be selfish and go to bed as I have to work in the morning". Mum's have a wicked way of putting us in our places, even in the strangest of circumstances.

I acted upon the conviction, it was all I could do. I began saying goodbye to my friends. I sold all my belongings, and those I didn't sell I gave away. Naturally people were concerned I was suicidal, I affirmed at every opportunity that I was not suicidal. "No way, uh-uh, I am not going to kill myself. That is not what this is about. I am going away, and I won't be coming back".

Mum and Dad could only relate it to as when someone enters a monastery.



They had a friend when they were young who took vows and was cut off from their family. At one point I offered to do this, to enter a monastery, if that would put them at peace. It seemed to me that it would fulfill all the demands of the conviction and bring me closer to the promise, if not to Anglesea herself. They told me they did not want this, they did not want to lose me. I did not want to lose them, and told them that it was hurting me deeply as well, but that I had nothing left in my life except to act upon this conviction. I had come too far to turn back. There was no turning back.

Telling Juliet was fascinating. She understood, actually it was as if she expected it. As with everyone, I told her I loved her, and would always love her, that she would always be a part of my life, and I part of her. She made hot chocolate and laughed. We kissed goodbye. It was sweet, she is just so sweet.

I told my friend Ian. He was calm; much too calm. He didn't claim to understand, but he seemed accepting of it. It was wrong, it was all wrong. As I sat with him I became filled with anger. He drove me home, and I remember telling him I was angry, and I didn't know why, kicking the floor of his car. He didn't flinch, he just stayed with me. It scared me to say goodbye to Ian, I felt that saying goodbye to him was "The Final Event of Goodbye". Goodbye said to Ian was goodbye said everywhere and to everything. I hated him for his peace and calm. It wasn't over yet.

I went to Fiona's house. Fiona had been the woman whose house we had stayed in when we went to Anglesea for the college project. We had talked a lot since Anglesea, since the day in the cafe when she and Malcolm were angry at me for leaving, she had come to care and support me with great love. I told her I was going away and would never see her again. I tried to explain why, recounting every detail of the story you are reading now. She was angry, and could not accept what I was saying. Mostly she was concerned that I was saying this to my parents. "You can't say you'll never see your mum and dad again", and I replied shortly "Yes I can. And I have done. And I will". We fought over this, and then we both gave up. As I hugged her goodbye she said "Besides, we'll probably run into you at Anglesea" as she still spent weekends at the house they had there. She was right. I would run into her, and it would save my life.

I travelled to my sister's house. She was pregnant, and just about due. I rang the bell for a while, and since no one answered I thought I had missed her. I began to walk away and she came to the door, inviting me in. Her husband Phil was there, but he needed to sleep as he was on a night shift. He left us alone. Good on him. I told her I was going away, and I would not be coming

back. Perhaps mum had spoken to her already. She immediately asked me "What about mum and dad?".

"That's between mum and dad and I"

"We're family" she said.

"Speak to mum and dad. There are no issues between us. They know I love them and honour them with my life. There are no issues between us. Point to the issue that is between mum and dad and I will attend it today. There is nothing. I am at peace with mum and dad. I am not running away from anything, I am doing this because I feel I must"

"What if dad gets sick" she asked me. It hurt me deeply.

"There's nothing I can do about that"

"We won't be able to contact you?"

"I'm going away. I won't be back"

"Family is everything Nicholas"

"To you Sarah, but not for me"

"Yes, for everyone"

"Not for me. It's not my choice, but that's how it is"

She fell silent, then I spoke again, "You know I'm not pursuing theatre work any more. I won't do that ever again. That's over, it's all over". She looked at me and was silent a long time, then she said "Well, Christmas won't be the same". I replied "No it won't be" and I bowed my head and started crying.

Then she got up, and went and got a box of tissues and she nudged them against my arm. And then my sister spoke to me saying "Why does everything with you have to be so dramatic Nicholas?". And I wept and breathed relief because after many years in the cold my sister spoke to me with real words, not just with a polite "hello", or "how are you", or a pleasant "happy birthday", not even a prepared script to protect herself, she spoke from her heart and it had been such a long time since she had done that, and I had waited so long to hear her voice again. And now, at this moment when I was surrendering her, she came home. My sister was home again, we had found each other. She had forgiven me. At last she had forgiven me.

We embraced for a long time, and I didn't want to let go, but that was inevitable, we had to say goodbye now. Walking away up the street I couldn't quite believe it had happened, this is what people who win the lottery must feel like. As I was walking I heard her call after me. I had forgotten my bag. I ran back and collected it off her, she said "There you go. Ta ta". Goodbye Sarah.

I caught the tram to my brother's work. He took me to the park across the

way. I told him I was going and wouldn't see him again. He was dumbfounded. He struggled with it, and didn't know how to respond. Who can blame him? I tried to explain how I felt. My brother worked at the end of the tram line, it was close to where we lived when we were younger. I told him a story.

"I used to catch that tram home every day during primary school. There was a group of mates and we used to muck around down the back of the tram, I really loved those afternoons. There was one guy in particular, Paul, who I really got along with. When I went to high school I missed them, and I would sometimes go out of my way to catch the same tram. One afternoon they were on the tram, and when they saw me they were happy and we had the same good time we used to. Slowly each of them got off at their stops until finally it was just me and Paul at the end of the line. We used to go to the milk bar and get mixed sweets, and we did that day too. Finally though we had to part, and the last thing I remember is Paul saying "See ya' Nick". And as I walked away those words pushed in on me and haunted me. I cried all the way home, and couldn't stop. That was the night of your twenty first birthday. We went out to a pub to celebrate, the family, and even at that dinner I couldn't stop crying. I was only eleven years of age, and I was so disturbed by those words "See ya' Nick". Do you remember that night? I cried myself home and into my bed that night. Do you know what it was like? It was like I walked with Paul to a fork in the road, and then my path took me away from him. That's what it's like David. My path takes me away from people, it takes me away from you".

He stared at me, a little frown on his forehead. I remember when we were much younger and lived in Mosman, and Sarah and David and I would spend time together out the front of our house. I remember the three of sitting on the fence out the front, and as I sat with David this day it was like sitting with a twelve year old Mosman boy. I wonder if he has ever left Mosman.

He was upset by what was happening and as we parted I tried to hug him. He let me, but then he grabbed my hand and shook it, winking at me and saying "There you go mate, it's official". And he walked off back to his work. I had hurt him. I'm sorry.

I was spending every moment trying to understand why it was necessary to do this. I questioned again and again if I was doing the right thing, if this was what was needed. I said goodbye to Robert, my counsellor, and told him. I had exhausted him too. He trusted it would find its way, it had before, and it would this time. That was his lesson to me; faith. He had restored my faith, and now all I needed to do was trust it. The rest would sort itself out.

On the eve of my departure I met with Ian again. This was the last chance for us to have it out, to say goodbye. Whatever was between us would find its way this night, or it never would. I trusted that somehow we would find our way, these were high stakes. To leave Melbourne I needed peace with Ian, at whatever cost. I needed him to accept that I was leaving and not coming back. He had to let me go.

He refused steadfastly. He told me he was sad that I was leaving, that he accepted it, but he would not stop hoping to see me again. He refused to let me go and accept that I was leaving for good. I fought him for it tooth and nail, I tried to tear it from him, I threatened and bullied him. At one point I grabbed my coat and said "Fine. If that's it I can go now. Right? Do you call this peace between us? Will you be happy for this to be our last moment? Because it will be, if you don't accept my leaving, then this is how we will part". He grabbed his bag and said if that is what I wanted then there was nothing he could do about that. We eyed each other off, and I let go of my coat.

We walked in silence. We didn't know what was happening to us. It was bigger than us, and we just had to wait it out. We wandered aimlessly and then quite suddenly there was a shift in the temperature. We sat down. Ian made it clear to me then that although I was going away, he would never, could never stop loving or caring for me. I realised then that I had been demanding that of people. As I had been saying goodbye I had wanted a complete departure from their lives, I wanted to cut the connection. Ian was the one person who refused me. And in refusing me he had taught me that it can't be done. I could go away, and I might never come back, but people would never stop hoping I would return; they would never stop loving me, or I them. That was forever, that was real.

It was a painful realisation, and the acceptance of it even more painful than the thought I would never see my parents again. Now I said "Yes" to a new proposition. "Yes" I might never see them again, that was a real possibility, but perhaps I would. I hoped I would, but I accepted I may never. I was going away, and when we say goodbye we risk a real departure. Goodbye finally is forever, and at the same time we never part, we are always with one another, the love never departs; it can't. I fell down in Ian's arms and the words came flooding out of me "My mother and my father. My mother and my father". Now it was made real. I might never see them again. I really might never see them again. But I hoped I would.

I went home and told mum and dad "I am going away tomorrow. I might

come back, but I might not. I don't know. I hope I do, but I might never see you again. There is nothing sure about this, it is not in my hands. I love you, and I will always love you, but I may not see you again. That is the real risk of leaving, and I accept that, though I hope to see you again. I love you". And they were at peace with that much more than when I had simply said "I'm going, and won't be back". Now I was saying "I'm going, and I hope to come back, but I may not". It is an unhappy thing to say, it may even be hurtful, but it was the truth, and it was of the deepest love. And that is what they opened their hearts to and offered me; love.

In the morning I rose early and packed what little I had. I gave mum an envelope, in it were the addresses and phone numbers of Robert, my counsellor, and Juliet, who I had asked to ring mum from time to time and keep in touch with, I'm not sure why. I hugged my dad goodbye. Then I hugged my mum goodbye. And then I left.

The tram took a while to come, and after a while I noticed my dad on the other corner of the traffic lights. He was waiting for his lift to work. He watched me get on the tram with my bag, he watched me go.

It seemed bizarre but of all people for me to run into on the tram that morning I saw the guy that had been the school captain at my high school in my leaving year. I told him I was going to Anglesea, he thought I was going surfing, I didn't want to disillusion him. One of us mentioned the school, I said something like I never wanted to see the place again; he agreed with me. What a surprise. It was only a few stops to the train station and I said goodbye to him, setting off on the adventure of my life, he thought I was going to hang out down the coast for a bit; we were both right.

Ian and Juliet saw me off. There was also a crazy man called Jim, we called him Spiderman (it's a long story). I don't know why he was there, it doesn't matter. The last thing I saw as the train pulled away was Juliet pulling at her fingers and motioning me with her hand. I didn't understand. Then Ian started doing it, and then crazy Jim the Spiderman. There were three friends tugging at their fingers and laughing, and I was motioning them with my hand, mirroring them and laughing too. I think they were saying "Do you have gloves?". The sun caught Juliet's tear and I laughed for hours after that, it was just like her. Goodbye.

It lasted forty days at Anglesea. I was by myself. I made no contact with anyone, apart from when I would go into town to buy groceries. I stayed in a cabin. It was small, cosy and perfect. It was on top of a hill, about half an hours walk from the beach and the town. There was no telephone. During

those forty days I didn't watch television or listen to the radio. I did virtually no reading. It was just me and the sea and the beach. Try it for twenty four hours. Try going without seeing anybody or talking to anyone for just one day. And during that day you can't watch tv, or listen to your stereo, or nestle down into your favourite novel. In fact all you have is yourself. Try it for just one day, you might enjoy it. Try it for a weekend. You might appreciate the silence. Try it for three, you might get sick of it. Try it for four, you mightn't last that long. It is not easy. The desert is a difficult place to be, because in the desert there is only you; and Him.

The first day was a Friday. When I first arrived I lay down on my bed and fell fast asleep. I was exhausted. Anglesea's rhythm was silent and still, I was buzzing at a thousand miles an hour. I needed to rest. I made a decision not to go near the campsite or the beaches where I had been before; not yet. First I needed to prepare for seeing those places again, they were powerful places, and I needed to be ready before I went there to face them again. I needed to arrive.

On Saturday I went for a long walk from Anglesea, along the beaches to the west, for about six hours; three hours one way, three hours back. In the evening I made dinner and kept warm by a single element electric heater. I fell asleep about nine o'clock.

On the Sunday I took the same walk, this time going further; a seven hour round trip. In the evening I made dinner and kept warm by a single element electric heater. I fell asleep about nine o'clock.

On the Monday I took the same walk, this time going further; an eight hour round trip. In the evening I made dinner and kept warm by a single element electric heater. I fell asleep about nine o'clock.

On the Tuesday I took the same walk, this time making it to the next town along from Anglesea, Airey's inlet; about a nine hour round trip. In the evening I made dinner. I grabbed the pots and pans and threw them down on the stove. I smashed cutlery into the sink, and slammed cupboard doors shut. This was driving me crazy. I started shouting as I stormed around the cabin waiting for the water to boil; "I'm fucking going out of my mind. What the fuck am I doing here? Fucking fuck you. Fuck you. Fuck you" kicking a chair out of the way. "Fucking fuck this for a joke. I don't have to do this. Fucking silent fuck. Fuck you. Fuck you. I could turn that fucking television on" (there was one in the cabin) "I could. Just fucking watch me. How'd that be? This is all bullshit, this is all fucking madness, I could turn it on any time I want. You stupid mother fucker". I kept slamming doors and kicking walls.

I noticed the water boiling over and I swore my way over to, grabbing a tea towel and lifting it off the hot plate; "You stupid fucking mother fucking cunt. Shit. Shit. Mother fucka', mother fucka'" and I started speaking in some kind of Italian accent. "You stupida mudda farckin' cunt. Mama Mia. You thinka I wanta be here? You crayzee stoopid fucka. I tayka da whole stinking pot of boling wadda and I spit on your farckin cunt wid it. You smelly slimey stupid fuckin fuck. You thinka I'ma crazy man. You got it right mister. You hit da fuckin' nail ona da head mister farcking fucka". I kept going until even I started laughing and finally I calmed down, made my meal, ate it, and then sat calmly by that single element heater in silence.

It came suddenly and painfully to the heart, I shouted out "Mum. Oh mum. I miss you mum". I was crying, what lay with the tears was the sudden fear that I might not see mum again. I saw her in my mind's eye and that was the only place I could see her. I cried out "Not even a phone call? Why can't I even make a phone call. Just a phone call. Please. Please", and there was no movement in the conviction. I lifted the chair I sat in off the floor and slammed it down with my body and grunted anger. "Just a phone call. Just a -" and I imagined what I would say "Gee it's good to hear your voice mum". I kept going and finally exhausted myself into an early bed; it was eight thirty.

The rest of the week was like that. Walking in the day, tears and anger at night. But I never did turn that television on, and I never did make that telephone call, and as much as I railed against its regime, I honoured the silence of this Anglesea, as difficult and painful as that was. I was learning.

On the Saturday I returned from another long walk to the west. As you come out of Anglesea on the Great Ocean Road there is a lookout at the top of one of the cliffs. It offers a stunning view of the whole town and the ocean that stretches around it. You can see every beach for miles. I sat there and I felt so alone; just a kind of desperate isolation. I had been remembering a lot about being at high school, and trying to remember what had happened at Anglesea in that week, trying to piece it together day by day. For some reason one man in particular, Daniel, had kept coming into my head that day.

Daniel was half Italian, half French. He was out of control. He was close friends with Jonno, the other boy who had kissed one of the girls at the campsite with Richard. Daniel and Jonno had been in a car accident about two years earlier, and this had left Daniel in a coma, then in hospital for almost a year. He was okay by the time we went to Anglesea, but the accident had put pressure on his friendship with Jonno. They were growing apart.

I couldn't get Daniel out of my head. Daniel was firey, and he and I had clashed often and with force, but we had become good friends too and shared a taste for mischief. As I had begun to cut myself off from my friends Daniel had become frustrated with my behaviour. He didn't understand it and in those last six months before I completely cut ties, he would target me for particularly cruel abuse, which he was very good at. I was remembering that time and then something occurred to me that I hadn't thought about for ages.

After I cut myself off from that group of friends, Daniel had decided to go away to Italy and study there for a year. We saw him off from the airport, and as he had left I hugged him goodbye. Then we all got a lift back to Melbourne. That is when it struck me. I remembered the rest of the guys had tickets to the football Grand Final, which was always held on the last Saturday in September. I remember they didn't have a ticket for me, naturally; I hadn't been near them for months. It was Richard who they nominated to tell me that they only had enough tickets for all of them, and not for me. It had been the last Saturday in September.

As I sat in that lookout I realised that today was the last Saturday in September. It was the anniversary of that event. I turned to my side and imagined Daniel was sitting by me, holding me. And I remembered hugging him goodbye at the airport, and only now did I feel how much I had missed him, how sorry I had been that he was going. I had closed off that feeling then, and experienced it now, and it was just as if he sat there with me and held me. I tell you I saw him clearly that day, clearer than I had seen him in years. He was there. I mourned his loss. I mourned the loss of each of those friendships that I had abandoned. I had never allowed myself to believe that they were that important to me; they were, and now I grieved. It was the anniversary of that Grand Final day. I cried the tears I should have cried then. Light was breaking through. I was learning.

In the second week I walked eastward. It still did not feel right to walk down onto the beach where I had spent that time when I was fifteen, to visit that campsite. The beaches to the east are where those high cliffs are, those I had walked when I had come a year earlier with my college. I didn't feel ready to face those either. So I would walk the hour above those cliffs to take me well out of the town, and then descend onto the beaches just past the ones where I had walked before.

It was the same pattern as the previous week. Each day I would walk further and further. Each day upon returning close to the beaches I had been the year before, I would climb up and then walk around them. Each day I would



spend time staring at the rocks that lay guard at the entrance to those beaches. It was like a gate and I didn't know how to get past it. Yes, I could just have walked through it, but what I was seeking was the conviction that it was right; I was seeking to walk through it with "Yes" in my heart.

Every day I walked I had the incessant noise of the city in my head. Twenty years of jingles and pop music and television coco pop shit in my head. I had never been in silence for so long, and so never noticed all the junk that played every second in my head. In the morning I would wake up and bloody Andrew Lloyd Webber tunes were swimming me; I couldn't shake the bastard. It was a constant haunting, the cheap jingle jangle of tunes corrupting the clarity of my experience. I realised this was my creation, that this thin but persistent covering had protected me from the crushing depression through those lost years. Silence was death then. To stop and pause and breathe was to reflect, and to reflect was to start the journey I was now on. For years I had fought that, and one of the shields had been this twenty four hour channel of junk and trivia pumping out into my consciousness. It was so ingrained I couldn't shake it off.

I was walking back towards Anglesea one afternoon and I came to the beach I had adopted as my favourite. It was about two hours walk from the town and sat just below the Ironbark National Forest. They had built stairs to it, so it was quite accessible, but mostly it was deserted because it was out of the way, and after all, this was the cold early months of Spring.

It was completely deserted on this particular day. I was alone on this stunning piece of beach. Although it faced directly onto the ocean, it was protected by its surrounding landscape, so that the tide was gentle and quite shallow. You could walk quite a way into the sea, and still not get your shorts wet. The way the light caught the water made it shimmer and shine opaque blue. The sand was white as white and laid gently across its shore. At one end the rocks created several little pools of water that heated through the day in the sun, you could just lay in them they were so warm. It was perfect.

I came onto this beach and was enjoying it so much I couldn't stop smiling, which was a relief from the nightly meal of tears and fear and exhaustion of emotions. I was listening to the waves break, and then suddenly realised that the soundtrack to this sublime scene was some awful Andrew Lloyd Webber tune, something from "Evita". Jingle Jingle Jingle Smash. I couldn't stand it, I couldn't be anywhere without this accompanying trash. I started running. I ran and ran and ran, banging at my head, shouting one sound loud and long; "aaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh". I screamed it along the beach, I ran into the sea, and got soaking wet. I fell down and started laughing. I

wanted to hear anything but this rubbish in my head. Anything.

I was laying with my head against the shore. The sea was brushing up against my ears, the wind whistling through it. I imagined I heard a woman singing, I sat up and imagined she was sitting on a rock that lay just feet from where I was. She was a big black mama. She was fat and had huge breasts. She wore old rags, but they were beautiful and colourful. She was just humming her song, and then a huge grin broke out across her face as the sound opened out and started to fill the beach.

I walked over to her, but stood at a respectable distance. She saw me and smiled at me, but didn't seem to be bothered either way. I just kept staring at her, she was stunning. She got into full swing, letting go the sound inside of her and I listened as it ripped across the beach. This was delicious, this is what I craved, this was the soundtrack to the experience I was having. Her eyes looked away to the sea, she grinned so big and broad I wondered what she was looking at.

I turned and saw a little boy, he was maybe eight or nine years old. He was naked. He was white and had a big wash of blonde hair. He was playing in the water, running with the tide and giggling. She was grinning at him, and then it was as if she called him with her song. Laughing he came running toward her and grabbed her around her neck and hugged her.

What happened next was wonderful. She reached around and patted his hair, and let go her sound so that it tore through the air, and then he sang with it, not the same, in harmony with her, but as if in two parts; contrapuntal. She would sing a phrase and then hold her sound, and he would open his mouth and sing the high song of an eight year old boy, its rhythm fast and cheeky. It was like hot blues, dirty jazz, they improvised their way forward. He let go from behind her neck and she grabbed his arm and he followed down her arm to her hand, until he was standing away from her, both of them holding hands. And he giggled when she sang through him, and then he let his head fall back, and he would stamp his foot as he responded with his song, then convulse with delight as she caught his song and extended it.

I ran to them. I ran to them and grabbed their hands; "The Black Mama" in one hand, and "The Kid" in the other, the three of us sang in a circle, our laughter bubbling up and delivering a sound that lifted us up and saved me. We ran to the where the tide was breaking against the shore and we sang our song there, dancing in a circle, celebrating the day. What a gift. What an extraordinary and unexpected gift.

That song accompanied me all the way back into Anglesea that night. Whenever the junk of the city would fill my head I would take a breath, and distantly I could hear the song, and slowly it would become clearer and stronger until it was all there was. To this day, as I write this now, the song is around me, and in me, and carries me. I hear it now.

Each day in that second week I would walk further eastward, and upon heading back to Anglesea I would stop at this little beach and spend time with "The Black Mama", and "The Kid", and their sweet tune. They cared for me. I would leave them each day and keep walking until I came to "The Gate", the entrance into the beaches by the high cliffs, which eventually ran into the Anglesea main beach. Each day I would sit and contemplate how I could walk through that "Gate", what I needed to do to pass through it.

On the Saturday I walked the longest I have ever walked in my life. I walked from Anglesea to Torquay, which is the next town eastward, and back again. That's about six hours there and six hours back; twelve hours. On my way back I passed "The Black Mama" and "The Kid". As I left the little boy ran after me, almost as if he was curious. He followed me until we came to "The Gate", and then turned back and would not come any further, as if he had gone too far. As I came back into Anglesea I was walking at the top of the cliffs, and distantly I saw Fiona and her husband Ian. I was so happy to see someone I knew and I ran to them. My enthusiasm must have been confusing for Fiona, because just a fortnight earlier I told her I would never see her again. Oh well. I was just happy to see her. We talked for a bit, and I told her I hadn't been down onto the main beach, but that I hoped to go there next week. Eventually we parted.

As I walked away into town, despite my sore feet, I had the feeling that I should go back and see Fiona. It was a strong conviction that I needed to tell her something. I walked back to her house, and they were preparing dinner. I walked in and said "I just wanted to say thankyou. It hasn't been easy being here for me in the last fortnight, but in a very real way you have been with me, been by my side. At times I feel very lonely, and then my friends will be with me, caring for me, looking after me, as you have been; even though I haven't seen you, you have been with me, caring for me. Thankyou. Anyway what I've learnt is that you can say goodbye to someone, but you never stop caring for them, or being cared for by them. That's what I've learnt". And she smiled. When I had said goodbye to her weeks earlier as if I would never see her again I had made her angry. Now I was apologising, and more than that, thanking her for caring for me. She smiled a big broad grin and I immediately saw the grin of "The Kid" on the beach. As she smiled that smile she gave me permission. Fiona was "The Gatekeeper", and

now I had passed the test. She had opened "The Gate" with that smile, I had found the key. "You can say goodbye, but you can never finally leave someone, you can never stop caring, or being cared for". Now "The Gate" was open, all I had to do was walk through.

On the Sunday I rested.

On Monday morning I prepared. Today is the day, that's what I thought. I began the walk, deciding I would trek eastward to the beach where "The Black Mama" and "The Kid" were, and then head along the beaches before finally walking through "The Gate".

The tide was in. I was furious. Why was the fucking tide in now? I could only have got so far, and then would have been cut off from the main beach by the fact that the sea was crashing against the cliffs and that meant no way through. At any time I could have just walked onto the main beach from the road behind it, but that was not the way. The way was through "The Gate", along that narrow strip of beach by the cliffs, and then onto the main beach. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.

I went for a long walk into the national forest where the group of us had been the year before. I tried to understand why the bloody tide had to come in now. The conviction was clear; it wasn't time yet, I wasn't ready. But why? As far as I could tell I had learnt the lesson that would allow me to walk onto the beach, this was preparedness, wasn't it? Doubt filled me. I began to reflect on how crazy this all was, I was losing faith.

On the Tuesday the tide was still in. I tried to make the best of it, walking inland along the coast until there was beach again, spending some time with "The Black Mama" and "The Kid". Again, on the way back "The Kid" followed me for a while. It was like he was curious, like he wanted to go somewhere. He kept looking at me like I knew the way. I laughed. I couldn't even get through "The Gate" because the bloody tide was in. He stuck close by me, but finally I had to go inland again to avoid being drowned; you see the ocean sat between me and "The Gate".

On Wednesday I noticed the tide was still in, but was quite at peace about it. I had given in. It will happen when it happens, that's what I thought. I walked a long way eastward, then headed back. I came to the beach with "The Black Mama" and "The Kid". I sat with them, and listened to them sing. Every time "The Kid" smiled I thought of Fiona, that big broad grin, and the freckles on his face, that big blonde hair; just like Fiona. Later "The Kid" seemed distracted. It's like he had come to find me interesting, and what he liked the

most is that I went beyond his little beach and further west.

After a while I set off again, and "The Kid" followed me again. Then I saw something wonderful. The tide had gone out. It was clear. The way was clear. "The Kid" was still with me, looking ahead at the path of sand that led through "The Gate" and into Anglesea. We started walking, he grabbed my arm, as if he was frightened. This was as far as he had ever followed me. I held his hand and we walked forward. "The Gate" itself came into clear view. "The Kid" was tired so I picked him up and carried him in my arms. We came closer to "The Gate". Why did I have "The Kid"? I didn't get it.

The closer we came the more I was aware that "The Kid" wanted to go to "The Gate", that's why he had been following me. He lay in my arms, his hands around my neck, and he wouldn't take his eyes off "The Gate". We walked, closer and closer. This was it, I could feel it, this was it. The adrenaline was pumping through my heart, I walked steadily and surely forward.

We came to "The Gate". What now? Did I just walk through, was that it? I looked at "The Kid". He looked at me and grinned Fiona's grin. He was "The Key". This child was "The Key" to "The Gate". How could I open a gate with a little boy. I had brought him to "The Gate". How can a child open a gate? Then I knew the answer. Give him to "The Gatekeeper"; bring him to Fiona. But how could I bring "The Kid" to Fiona. Finally he was a ghost, how could I make her see him? How could I bring this child into Fiona's life? And he grinned at me because he already knew the answer.

With a story.

With the Kid in my arms I walked through "The Gate". The story that would bring this child to Fiona would carry me not just through this gate, but finally through Anglesea; "Yes".

As I began walking in and around the different rocks "The Kid" vanished. I was alone. The cliffs were just as I remembered them; vast, stretching and primitive. The walk wasn't nearly as long as I remembered it to be. Very quickly I came upon the rusted car I had remembered from the year earlier, and almost as quickly the other one, even more buried under another twelve months of tides. It only seemed a short walk and I was almost at the main beach.

The tide was out, but not that out. The same point presented itself that had threatened to cut us off from the main beach last year. The tide was in further

that it was the year before, but I wasn't going to turn back. I clung to the side of the cliff and slipped my way around. At the outer most point a wave crashed over me and threatened to pull me out; I clung on and made it onto the main beach. I was soaking wet and banged my shoes dry, laughing at the absurd scene.

There was no rush. I took my time and made my way slowly to the actual campsite. They had done work on the grounds in the intervening twelve months, so it was slightly unfamiliar now, but I still knew exactly where to go. It was quite a sunny afternoon, around three or four o'clock. The whole place was more or less deserted. I came to the campsite and sat down.

It was good to have arrived. I took in the shape of the trees, the tenure of the day, the colour of the light here. I smelt it, I savoured it. I listened. Gently, gently, gently.

Later it began getting dark and I started to head back to the cabin where I was staying. I walked out onto the road outside the caravan park that leads back to the main town. As I walked I remembered walking there when I was fifteen. This whole area was littered with memories. I tried to remember and see what I was wearing. I remembered those tacky two dollar summer thongs I wore, the red ones, the pink, yellow, blue board shorts that were just a little too big and hung less around my stomach, and more around my groin, and the t-shirt, the white one with the splash of colour against my chest. I could see myself very clearly, walking this walk, and then it was as if he had caught up with me, chased me out of the camp. It was sad, so sad because "You've come back". That's what I heard; "You've come back". And it was true, I had come back, I had finally come back. He had waited so long for me, so very long, and now I was here. "You've come back. You've come back" said the boy in the two dollar thongs; "Yes".

Now I knew two things. The first was this. The way through Anglesea was to bring "The Kid" to Fiona. The way to bring "The Kid" to Fiona was to tell her "The Story" of "The Kid". What you are reading now is not "The Story" of "The Kid". What you are reading now is an account of what happened. It tells you, event by event, day by day, what happened. "The Story" of "The Kid" was different. Firstly, "The Story" didn't come from me, it was given to me. Secondly it was a myth. It didn't have characters, it had archetypes; not a name, instead "The Kid". It didn't have a location; not Anglesea, instead "The Gate". This told me quite a lot about what the story would look like, its form. I knew that in this myth would be revealed the secret of what had happened at Anglesea that night when I was fifteen. This myth would contain the essential truth, would shed light where every other effort had failed. It

would be complete and whole. It would free me from this prison, this prison where I had been for seven years.

The second thing I knew is that there was a prisoner. The prisoner had run after me that afternoon with his adolescent gape and grabbed me with enthusiasm declaring "You've come back". And I had said it to him as much as he had said it to me; "You've come back". He was still alive, and kicking, but so sad, and so alone. He had been stuck here for seven years, he hadn't moved since that night, I had banished him here. Now he was saying "You've come back". He wanted help, he wanted care, he wanted love, he wanted to be set free. He had been hurt, very badly hurt, and now I had a responsibility; to care for him, to hold him, to be with him. I would set him free. But first I would need to learn how to care for him, how to listen to him, how to love him. Actually I didn't know him, so that was the first order of business; introductions.

The following days panned out like this. I would wake up at dawn, have breakfast, shower and get dressed. I would clean up the cabin. I would brush my teeth (these details may be trivial to you, but would shock many who know me). Sometimes I would draw. I had A3 photocopy paper and pastels. I am a terrible drawer, really like a young child, I have no enthusiasm for doing it; which is why, I think, it was the one creative expression that I got up to while I was there. I drew images from my life. I started from the earliest memory I had and then drew every significant image and emotional event I could remember. Over the weeks that I did it I ended up with over five hundred drawings. Many of them caused a lot of heartache and sadness, many of them were funny and exciting to remember. Each was powerful in its own way.

The other thing I did was make a list. It was a list of names. It was each of the people that had been in my class at school. There was about two hundred and thirty boys in my year, and at first bash I could only remember about one hundred and fifty. Slowly, each day, I would remember other's names and add them to the list. It was a constant project. The strangest thing would reveal another name to me. It was like these names, and the remembering of them, was lubricating the memories of those years. And those years were the crucial years, the hidden years, the buried years. It was in those years I had visited Anglesea. Now they needed to be unearthed, and named. This list was an allegory; I was set upon the work of naming, and piece by piece, I reconstructed that list, and those years.

Late into each morning I would head east and walk. Sometimes all the way to the beach with "The Black Mama" and "The Kid", but not always that far

(it was about two hours). As I walked I would turn over "The Story" in my head. Slowly, each day, it was taking shape. I wasn't writing it; it's as if each day was revealing it to me, piece by piece. It arose out of my questions. It was a way of asking questions and receiving answers. Finally the question was "What happened at Anglesea that New Year's Eve night?". The myth intersected with the events of my life, it shone light on them, it revealed them in a way that connected all the distant threads of my memories and experiences. It had a way of reducing a dozen distant events in my life, from different times and different places, and connecting them in a single event in the myth, that revealed the underlying truth and connection between them, and in turn in my life. The story wasn't complete then, it lacked an integrity. There were times when it would seem almost complete, with a beginning, middle and end, but there would be one element in it that didn't fit. Often that single element would bring the whole lot unstuck, and "The Story" would begin reshaping itself and recreating its myth, getting closer to the actual truth. At the heart of the myth was "The Kiss", everything led to and led away from that event. Each day I would question and answer, question and answer, witnessing the slow revelation of truth through this myth.

Each day I would head back, through "The Gate", onto the Anglesea main beach, and from there to the campsite. All I would do is sit there, mostly in silence. Sometimes I would speak to the younger me. It was frustrating, he seemed reticent to come out in the open, I was learning about him; he was very shy. He wanted to see if he could trust me, if I would keep coming back, or if I would abandon him again. I thought this was fair enough, he had been hurt, and it was me that had hurt him. All I could do was keep turning up and being with him and hoping to win his trust. Slowly he revealed himself to me.

One afternoon I sat there and was having a bit of a cry, feeling lonely and frustrated and quite sorry for myself. I really just wanted someone to hold me, but since it clearly wasn't forthcoming, I just sat there by the campsite and sulked about it for a while. All that day I had been trying to add another name to my list of ex-schoolmates. It was a particularly difficult name, and while I could see the guy's face, I just couldn't remember his second name. It was Peter something, but nothing I did could stir that memory. As I was walking away that afternoon from the campsite I suddenly heard something. I turned around and the tears filled up my eyes; Peter Gyori. What a name, what a gift, what a voice. He had run after me and whispered it in my ear. I could almost see those baggy board shorts scurrying back behind the tree as I turned around. He had sneaked up and whispered it in my ear, "Peter Gyori". Cheeky bugger.



After that I would generally go home and sleep for an hour or so, then at about five o'clock I would head west and walk for a while, then head back to the Anglesea main beach. As I made this walk every evening I often felt a call to surrender. The day would have revealed to me something that I needed to give up to get closer to this promise of life, this hope. Here is what I surrendered walking along that beach on those evenings; career, status, money, work, sex, lovers, friends, brother, sister, father. I would hate it and fight it and rail against it and shout at it, but it wouldn't budge. It was always clear what it wanted; absolute surrender. When it sought the surrender of my mother I fought it, at every turn, with every breath in me. I said "No deal". I tried negotiating. I offered never to see or speak with her again, but at least a postcard; just a postcard, not even a letter. "No" was the clear reply. Just a postcard saying "Love Nicholas". "No" that wasn't it, that didn't do, absolute surrender. I remember walking along the beach and pleading, begging for this not to be what was asked. It wouldn't move, it was firm and sure of its demand "Surrender your relationship with your mother. Surrender her". I stopped where I stood, and turning to the ocean, the sky, in fact anywhere that would receive me I spat out "You vicious fuck. You vicious fuck. She is my mother. My mother. What good in this? Are you listening? Fucker? Vicious Cunt". After days of this it tamed me finally. I knelt on that beach as I had knelt each time before and I surrendered my mum as I had surrendered every other thing; "Yes".

In the evenings I would walk to the top of the hill where the lookout was and I would watch the sun set. In the beginning I would imagine my family and friends sitting with me, side by side, holding their hands. You were there, caring for me, being with me, holding my hand. As the weeks wore on it grew less and less busy at that lookout, until finally there was just my parents and me. And then of course even they were surrendered. Then I was just silent each night. Suddenly one night just before I got up to go home I whispered "Thankyou". As the weeks passed I would sit there and watch the sun disappear, and thank Him for the day. Then I would thank Him for the gifts I had received in my life, and those I was receiving. "Thankyou", I began to say "Thankyou".

After the sun had gone down I would head home and make a meal. Although it seemed wrong to read, one night I noticed a Reader's Digest in the cabin, it was an old one, from the sixties. I flicked through it, it felt right to do this. There was a particular article in it and I felt invited to read it. It was such a relief to read, such a gift. The article was a description of the River Jordan. It was only four pages long, and accompanied by simple illustrations. The prose was clear and simple and beautiful. I read it, and I read it again, and again and again. It was like a travel narrative, inviting you on a trip down the

Jordan, taking you on its adventure. Some nights I would read it half a dozen times. What a gift it was. What a gift. Finally I would sleep, and the day would begin again with the next dawn, moving every day closer to His Promise; His Heart.

At the end of the fifth week I stayed one day through the afternoon into the sunset at the campsite. This was unusual, but I thought about it like this. If I was this fifteen years old I would be very tentative about trusting this twenty three year old, especially after what he had done to me. I also knew that he was frightened and scared, and needed caring for, but had grown hard and wouldn't seek it from me, showing me his mistrust. I thought how I would feel being there all by myself for so many years, and how the worst time would be at night, in the dark, all alone. I had a hunch he might feel more vulnerable in the night time, and so maybe need me more than he could bare to hide from me.

It fell dark. I waited a while and I got the sense he was very nearby. I could feel him, his fear, his sadness, his loneliness. It upset me, and I cried, but just a little. He came closer and looked at me crying, still at a distance. He let go and fell in my arms. He was crying, crying like a baby. I comforted him. "Shhh. It's alright. I'm here now. Shhhh. It's alright. It's okay. I'm here now. I'm here now. I know. I know. Shhh".

Then he spoke to me. "I'm afraid" he said. I comforted him saying "I know. I know that. It's okay. I'm here now".

And then he spoke again. "I'm afraid to grow up".

And then the tears came flowing out of me. I held him and rocked him back and forth. "Yes", I said that word over and over, "Yes". That's what I had thought when I saw that kiss on New Year's Eve; "I'm afraid. I'm afraid to grow up". And fearing it, I had refused it. I had ceased to grow, I had frozen, it had paralysed me, and I hadn't moved an inch from this place since I had seen that kiss, and thought "I'm afraid to grow up. So I won't". A powerful will is a dangerous gift, and I had used it that New Year's Eve. I had willed it that I would not look at that kiss, I would not feel that pain, I would not grow up, and I had frozen myself, I had stopped growing. I was still fifteen, still standing at a campsite in Anglesea on New Year's Eve watching a kiss. I had never left here, I had never moved on, I had ceased to grow. And now I had come back, and I looked at that kiss, and I spoke "I'm afraid to grow up", and in saying it I face it and turned to Him and began to grow again. At last, I'd come home.

This revelation opened out the myth and gave it a heart. Everything had always led to, and away from, this mysterious moment. Now I knew what had happened that night. I knew what I had seen; an invitation to adulthood. I didn't know everything about that kiss, but I knew that it had made an invitation that night, and the invitation had scared me so much I had thought "I'm afraid to grow up", and rather than face that fear, see that kiss, I turned away and ceased to grow. The myth now shaped itself to connect the event of that New Year's Eve with the image of me on my bed with my father the night I would kill myself six months later. It still lacked a connectedness, there were gaps, but there were less gaps, and it could be seen where they were. It had brought me this close, now I knew it could deliver me from this prison and beyond Anglesea.

The Sixth week began with this hope, and quickly decayed into despair. The myth now had a definitive shape, I celebrated this. But as sure as its shape were its gaps, and these would not shift or budge. It lacked the integrity and wholeness it needed to be complete, to free me. The more I worked at it, the less it gave. I was running out of things to surrender. I had given up everything I could think of; possession, career, family, friends, status, authority, the telling of this story itself, teaching - I looked frantically for anything that I had grasped to surrender. I wanted, wanted, wanted to have this myth revealed to me, to understand completely the events of my life, the secrets, the mystery; my self.

Each afternoon I would spend time at the campsite, getting to know this young self. What was exciting is that he had a distinctive way of seeing; he had an interesting take on the world. I was getting to know it. He was funny, and shy, and friendly once you got to know him. He was always excited to see me, he was welcoming me into his heart; we were becoming friends.

Feeling frustrated toward the end of this week I travelled into nearby Geelong, a large town about an hour away on the bus, and bought a tent. I returned to Anglesea and hired the campsite. When I requested the specific campsite they were very suspicious, but I used every drop of charm in me to convince them, and they agreed.

I camped there on the Saturday afternoon. I set the tent up and laid my stake here. I would wait it out. I would force His hand. He would have to move and show Himself one way or another. I wouldn't just spend a couple of hours sitting here. I was going to spend an afternoon, an evening, a night and a morning here. I would sleep here, I would dream here, now here was His chance.

It was a cold night, bitterly bloody cold. I didn't sleep much. I didn't move off the campsite the whole time. I didn't even visit the toilet. I didn't eat. I had surrendered everything to be here, in the moment, in this way. I was His. Let Him come and present Himself; this Pretender, this Presence in the shadows, this Ever Present But Never Seen Him. Here was His opportunity. I had come a long way, and done all that I could, by my very presence here with my body I was showing an openness to Him; "Yes", "Here I am", "I surrender".

In the early hours of the morning I got up, it was too cold to stay lying against the damp earth. I sat near the tap. It was windy, bitterly cold sea wind, and I could hear the waves crashing over the sand dunes nearby. I rocked and cradled myself back and forth, back and forth. I was scared and sick and tired. I was sore, I was hungry, I was lonely. So this is how it had been for the fifteen year old, stuck here for seven years; "Forgive me", I held him and pleaded with him "Forgive me". He just held me, glad to have someone with him at last on these long, dark, cold nights. It seemed like it would never end.

As the sun rose I felt parched and went over to the water tap and filled my hand with water and emptied it in my mouth. I don't know why I did what I did next. I filled my hand up again and tipped it over my head. It was freezing cold, and despite this I did it again, and then finally I put my head under the tap and let the water flow over me.

Once the sun was shining, I packed the gear up and headed back to the cabin. And this time I took the fifteen year old with me. I told him, "No more, you come with me, I'll look after you, we're getting out of here". And with the tent on my back, he and climbed the hill to the cabin, his hand in my hand. I would look after him, that's what I decided.

He was a chore. He needed constant care and attention. Everywhere I was, he was. I couldn't take a shit by myself. He was sweet and affectionate and friendly and needy and selfish and too much. After less than a day I abandoned him, sending him back to the campsite, it was too much; this was not the answer. In fact I had run out of answers, I was at my wits end. I felt very close, and felt despair that I would never finally get there. I felt like this whole journey was made up of ever decreasing circles that got closer and closer to the centre, but never finally arrived. I felt defeated, and stupid, and careless and ugly and thought about killing myself. Even suicide seemed a pointless departure from the real issue, even death was no solution. I felt stuck.

Someone knocked on the door. It was Graeme, the lonely individual that I used to work with, the guy everyone made a joke of and teased, the nervous fellow who went on and on about useless nonsense. This sad, lonely, weak, pitiable man knocked on my door and my heart leapt. I hugged him and welcomed him and celebrated him and had never been so happy to see someone in my life.

I had forgotten how to talk. It only lasted about twenty minutes, and then it all kicked in again, but I really had forgotten how to be with another human being. I just stared at him, grinning. So many times Graeme's ceaseless nattering had driven me berserk, I had even snapped at him and told him to shut up at times. Now I listened to him like he uttered a symphony, it was delightful, his noise, his words, his warmth, his humanness was delightful. Graeme. Graeme. Beautiful, gorgeous Graeme. I stared at him like he was an angel. A beautiful, winged angel humming with light and radiance.

Graeme was a messenger sent by Him. What a miracle for someone to arrive at this moment, a moment of complete despair and hopelessness when everything seemed lost. Graeme was an angel, a messenger, an event in himself. He had been sent. Of all the people that could have been sent, He had chosen the one person in my life most despised and pitied by the world. The lonely man without a lover, without a career, without a car, without an education, without anything. Graeme was poor. He looked after himself, and he had a nice little flat that he rented, but he was the poorest of the poor. He was sad and destitute. He was looked down upon by everyone I knew, he was beneath them. And this was the fellow He had sent. I couldn't take my eyes off Graeme the angel.

He took me for lunch up the coast, to a trendy little town along the Great Ocean Road. Lunch! In a cafe! We walked along the beach, he took my photograph, he still has it. I'm standing peacefully with that big, wild, bushy beard. I look funny.

I love Graeme. I don't know why. I feel very comfortable around him, he makes me laugh. He's a very funny man, a very warm man, a very caring man, a very loving man. He is wise. He is actually one of the wisest people I know, but it is so rarely glimpsed, because people make him what they see; a silly looking middle aged failure. They miss him completely. He is the most human person I know. He is fragile and vulnerable and weak. He is glorious.

I talked and talked and talked away to him. He could hear me, but I don't know what he made of it all. I don't think it matters, what matters is he listened and came to me and spent that day with me.

As he left I was sad. But more than anything I was frightened. Frightened to be left alone again. Frightened to walk back into the world I had been living in for almost two months. I would rather not have had the seaside lunch in the little cafe to remind me that there is a real world that we live in. Now I was reminded of how strange this world was that I was living in; "The Black Mama", "The Kid", "The Song", "The Gate", a fifteen year old me in two dollar thongs, kneeling on the beach and surrendering my friends, my family, my life. Suddenly I saw how strange this all was, and how far I had left the world I had grown up in. As he pulled away I walked back into a silent cabin; and I was exactly where I was before he came.

It was Monday evening. I began fasting. It seemed one of the few things left that I could surrender to Him. I walked with the sunset; it was silent. When I got to the campsite I told the fifteen year old that this was it, that I wasn't coming back. That I would never come back, it was over. I was saying goodbye, it was a last ditch attempt, I was cutting the tie. I left the campsite that night never expecting to see it again.

I sat in the lookout; it was silent. I sat there and wept. I was deeply frightened, I didn't understand anything any more. I just wanted to go home. That's all I knew. Wherever home was I just wanted to go there. And then something very simple happened. I started singing, a song I had been taught since I was a little boy, since I was a very little boy. It had brought me comfort and warmth then, and that is what I needed now.

"Our Father  
Who art in Heaven  
Hallowed be thy name  
Thy Kingdom Come  
Thy Will be done on Earth  
As it is in Heaven  
Give us this day our daily bread  
And forgive us our trespasses  
As we forgive those who trespass against us  
And lead us not into temptation  
But deliver us from evil"

I sang it. Over and over and over. It wasn't so much the words, it was that I had sung this when I was a child. I was made a child again as I sang this, I felt the warmth and comfort of its song, it held me and cared for me; I became a child again. I had lost the gift of prayer years earlier, now I

received it again. That night I went to sleep with that song. I listened carefully. It was silent.

I woke up the next day. It was silent. I no longer had the conviction to walk, it was wrong to walk, there was no need to walk anymore, I had walked all that I could walk. Not eastward or westwards, or anywhere, the walking was finished. There was nothing to do. I couldn't even make a meal, I was fasting after all. There were no dishes to wash, the place was spotless. It was six in the morning and I watched the sun rise; it was silent. I lay in bed for a while, naked and vulnerable. I got up and got water, then went back to bed. I would have fits of sleeping then lay there empty and shaking, sometimes praying, sometimes crying; what's the difference?

The morning wore on. Each hour taking longer than the one before it. Silent. Nine o'clock. Ten o'clock. Smash. Smashing the wall with my fist. Smashing it and smashing it and smashing it. I walked to the pile of drawings I had made, there was nothing more to draw, I had drawn it all. I looked at the list of names. I hadn't added to it for a week, there was no more I could physically remember. I couldn't add another name, it was over, that was finished now.

Eleven o'clock. Twelve o'clock. I thought to walk to the campsite, but why? I had been there, I had spent that night there, I had faced it, and been with him, and brought him home, and that hadn't worked. I had taken him back. And now I had left him for good. What would be the point in going there? It would be a step backward, there was no point. I gave in and went back to bed.

One o'clock. Two o'clock. Three o'clock. I went and sat in the chair where I would eat. I pleaded with Him, begged Him, prostrated myself before Him, sick and shaking and naked like a baby before Him, the tears streaming from my eyes. I banged the chair, I hit it with my fist, I couldn't even swear at Him anymore, it had lost its power. I moaned, I just moaned like an animal, like a beast.

Four o'clock. Five o'clock. I got dressed. I walked with the sunset. I came to the campsite. I said this:

"I don't know. I don't know if I will come back tomorrow. I don't know if I won't. I can't promise you either way. That's all. I give up now. I don't know what will happen, you have to accept that, I can't guarantee you anything. There are no guarantees. I might come back tomorrow, I might not. I might never come back here again. It's not up to me. I don't control it. I can't

promise you. I love you. I care for you. Goodbye".

I walked back along the beach toward the lookout. Before I left the beach I sat down on a seat that overlooks the beach, and I wept. I listened. It was silent. I listened. It was silent. I listened. It was silent. I gave up. This was it. It was over. I had failed. I had come all this way, but now I was throwing the towel in. I had tried my best, but it was beyond me. I would leave Anglesea in the morning, a broken man. Whatever He wanted, it wasn't in me to give it. The fifteen year old boy would be stuck here forever. The myth was just a story after all, it would never be told. It was over. I would live an incomplete life, broken and sad. I had given everything in me to come to this moment, and I accepted I had failed. I surrendered the only thing I had left; my seeking. I surrendered the journeying; I surrendered the journey. I surrendered even surrender itself. There was nothing more to give, so I gave up giving. My head bowed down, and I fell silent at last.

Then I heard "Jerusalem".

There are two things I couldn't stand about my father when I was younger. The first was he would tell stories. They would always drive me crazy, he insisted on telling stories, and I always saw him as ugly when he told them, I couldn't stand it. The second thing is he would sing. I hated it when he sang. I always remembered he would sing throughout "Carols by Candlelight" on Christmas Eve every year. It was on the television, and mum and I would always suffer his ruining each carol by singing along with it. I couldn't stand it. The song I remembered the clearest was a song called "Jerusalem", which he would sing with all his heart. "Jerusalem. Jerusalem. Jerusalem".

Suddenly that is the sound that came flooding into my world, into my heart, into my life; "Jerusalem". This was its name. This was the name of the dream, of the hope, of what I had been seeking. "Jerusalem". When everything else had been stripped away and I had been made utterly naked before Him, all there was in my ear was "Jerusalem". All there was in my heart was "Jerusalem". Not the place, the event; "Jerusalem" was "Home" and "Homecoming". The journey was "Jerusalem", dream was "Jerusalem", promise was "Jerusalem", hope was "Jerusalem". He spoke to me and the speaking was "Jerusalem". The sun died, the tide rushed against the sand.

Jerusalem

Jerusalem

Jerusalem



I walked to the lookout. I wept and prayed, it was all over. I had failed. Whatever it was I had expected, a sense of resolve, the thought that I would finally understand what had happened that night at Anglesea, and how it had touched my life, all that was over. I had given up. Tomorrow I would return to the city and be content to live not knowing, not being whole, but being with Him. That's all that mattered now. I had found Him, and He was with me. In fact He had never left me, but now I was turning to Him and embraced Him, and felt His Embrace.

I prayed that night, and if I slept it is unlike any sleep I have endured. It was a long, dark night. It is not your privilege to know what happened that night. It is not my privilege either. I can tell you I would not like to spend another night like that one ever again. I cannot describe it to you except to say it was a long, dark night.

In the morning the sun rose. I stood by the window and let it rush over my naked body, it felt good. I honoured my fast and did not prepare breakfast until eight o'clock. I wasn't so hungry at first, just a little food was enough to fill me to begin with.

Since I had given up there was no longer anything to hold me to this place, so I began preparation to leave. The first thing I did was shave. I had been wanting to shave for months, I hated the big wiry beard and couldn't wait to get it off my face. It took quite a while, and when I finally looked in the mirror at the clean shaven man I was shocked and couldn't stop grinning. He was handsome! I liked what I saw, and it really seemed quite unfamiliar to me. I had forgotten what I looked like. I smiled and washed my face and then set about my business.

I walked to the pile of five or six hundred pictures. They were each drawn on a piece of A3 photocopy paper. I grabbed the list of the names of all the people I went to school with and put them on the top. I carried the pile over to the fireplace and grabbed some matches on the way. I began by burning the two hundred names. They were scrawled in big letters over about five or six pages. I set each alight and watched the names burn slowly. When I had finished with those I grabbed the top drawing and screwed it up in a ball, then threw it into the fire place and watched it catch fire. For the next hour I watched each picture burn until there was nothing but ashes.

I washed up and headed down to the town to see what time the busses left for Geelong. My plan was to go to Geelong and then catch up with Michael in Rye, that fellow who Robert my counsellor had introduced me to. He seemed

to be the one person who might understand what I had been through; "surrender" and "trust" he had said. I thought I would spend some time with him talking my way back to day to day life, and then head to Sydney. I did not want to see my family, I did not want to return to my old life. All that had been burnt just as I had set fire to each of those pictures. Even though I felt I had failed, I would still honour each of the promises I made to Him when I had surrendered everything. I didn't know what would happen with my life now, but I knew that He would be with me, and that was enough.

I had missed the morning bus, and the mid week evening bus would not connect with the ferry to take me to Rye. I felt frustrated. I wanted to get out of Anglesea. I didn't need to be there anymore. It was over. Why had circumstances conspired to keep me here another day? I was vaguely suspicious.

I went home, prepared and ate lunch, and then put some cookies and a water bottle in my backpack and set off inland into the National Forest. As I was walking, just for fun, and partly out of habit, I tossed "The Story" around in my head. Really I had given up on it now, I didn't think it would yield any great truth and had abandoned it to all intents and purposes. Nevertheless it seemed to pursue me that morning, and as I walked my pace picked up as I recalled the events of the previous night and juxtaposed them against "The Story". Something wonderful happened; wholeness. Suddenly the story began to connect; here, then there, and there, and there. Before my eyes the myth metamorphosised; changing shape, color, structure and form to reveal its truth; "Surrender" and "Trust". The story would still take a couple of weeks to distil to its final form, but suddenly I could see it. I was shocked and surprised. I had given up the hope that I would ever understand what Anglesea had been all about, and now before my eyes it was revealing itself with greater and greater light. Within a fortnight I would understand clearly exactly what Anglesea had been all about. The test of it would be not just whether I could make sense of it for me, but whether I could express that in a down to earth way to the people in my life. The answer would be what it always is to anything I seek from Him; "Yes".

The journey hadn't ended, I had surrendered it and now it carried me and cared for me. "The Story" was engineering itself rapidly around me, and I watched in awe as it revealed, and revealed, and revealed. It wasn't perfect yet; but it would be. Knowing this would take time I settled down for what I thought would be more walking and more sunsets in Anglesea.

That night passed. Thursday morning came, the afternoon dwindled away, and in the evening I ate and rested. In that single day "The Story" evolved more

than it had in the whole time since I had carried "The Kid" along the beach in what seemed a life time ago.

On the Friday I woke up and felt restless. I tried to behave, to release the tensions and allow myself to empty and be in silence. It wasn't washing. I felt alive, light and cheeky. I tried to calm down and be at peace, but finally I gave up and started jumping around the house with my hairbrush as a microphone singing a heavy metal rendition of "The Song" I had heard on the beach, the one "The Black Mama" and "The Kid" had sung. I ended up in the bathroom and caught myself in the mirror, my hair hanging over my head like Bon Jovi and I laughed. Something was happening, something wonderful.

I spent the day in the cabin. I felt at a loose end. It didn't seem right to walk, it didn't seem right to do anything in particular. The cabin itself seemed stale and eerie.

In the afternoon I decided to go to the newsagent, just to have a browse through the magazines. I was treating myself, and it seemed okay to do this. As I got closer to the shops I passed the bus stop and stopped. I checked what time the bus was leaving for Geelong; it was at four o'clock which was about quarter of an hour away. I went into the newsagent and looked at the magazines. I had a crazy idea. What if I could just leave Anglesea like that, just go, now. I walked out of the newsagent and there was the bus. I remembered when I had checked the ferry times a few days earlier that on Fridays the evening bus connected well with the ferry that got me to Rye, where Michael was. I jumped on the bus and headed off.

While waiting for the ferry I met a young guy named Jason. He was seventeen. His mum and dad were divorced so he spent time going back and forth between Lorne, (which is close to Anglesea) and Frankston (which is close to Rye). For some reason he took to me and befriended me. I think he thought I was a surfer, I certainly had the haircut by now, and all that walking had given me a tan.

At first I found it difficult to enter into conversation with him. I found myself listening with an intensity and calm that seemed unnatural. Day to day chat doesn't happen at the level I had fallen into. I just relaxed, sat back, and let him do most of the talking. He spoke about his parents break up, his feelings about his family, his friends and himself. I heard his stories. Here was a kid with a lot of brokenness in his life, but he was a good kid, he was friendly and open and caring. Sometimes I felt like he was looking after me on that ferry trip.

At one point he went away to be with the ferry crew. Since he caught this ferry every Friday evening, he had come to know the crew and during the voyage they would practice Tai-Kwon-Do. He showed me the board he carried with him in his bag. It was split in two, and connected at its centre. If you gave it a hard enough whack it broke in two, but then you could put it back together again in no time.

When he came back and found me again he said "Here's the man!", and he just sat down and joined me again. Those words stuck in my head; "Here's the man". We sat for a little while longer, and then he went and joined the cabin crew again. I didn't see him after that, we didn't get a chance to say goodbye. It didn't matter.

The ferry dropped me at a town which was some miles from Rye. I walked for a while, and finally got a taxi. It was about nine o'clock at night now. I had looked up Michael's name in the phone book, and there was two names with his surname and initial. I took a punt and a taxi dropped me off at the first one, but it wasn't his place. I hadn't phoned because it simply hadn't felt right, but now I faced the prospect of a night out in the cold; and it was freezing. I rang the second place, and that wasn't him either. I felt stuck.

I rang Robert in Melbourne, hoping to get Michael's phone number. Robert was pleased to hear from me, and when I asked him for Michael's number he said "Well, he's sitting here next to me, why don't you ask him yourself". Robert had some friends over for dinner, and Michael was among his guests. As it happened Michael was just on his way out the door as I rang. I spoke with him, and he gave me instructions to where his house was, and how to break in with as little fuss as possible. He was spending some time in Melbourne, but said I was more than welcome to stay in his place. He said he would come and join me the following week.

I ordered pizza. Big gooey, cheesy, coca-cola, pepperoni pizza. Michael's place was full of books. I read, and read, and read. I had never wanted to read so much in my life. On the Saturday I cautiously approached the record player. He had a bunch of records, and for the first time in months I felt it was okay to relax to some music. I put a record on.

It was "The Joshua Tree" by U2. I had heard this album before, and I heard the opening track "Where the Streets Have No Name" many times. It opens with an eerie sound that picks up with a rhythm and guitar riff. I was in the kitchen cooking as it began to play, and as I heard this I started crying, and fell down and knelt and bowed my head. Because though I had listened to this song hundreds of times before, I had never heard it before. It was at once

familiar and new. I had died, this was a song from my old life; I was born, now I heard music for the first time.

I relaxed that weekend. I read whatever I wanted to, I listened to all the trashy albums I could find in Michael's collection. I danced around the house, I went into town and spent much more than I could afford on sweets and cakes and junk food. I had a party, I celebrated.

Michael came down on the Tuesday. I don't know what he expected. We talked casually for the first couple of hours. I didn't know what to say, I had so much to tell, and he was the man to tell it to. I was patient, it will find its way, I had a faith in that.

We went out to dinner and over a glass of red wine he asked me "So what's been happening with you?". I told him, beginning slowly I told him what had happened to me at Anglesea. "I've been to the desert", and I grinned at him with cheek. He nodded slowly and smiled. "Today is the fortieth day since I walked into the desert. It takes time to walk into the desert, and time to walk out. I have just walked out of the desert". I felt Spirit rise up in me and lift me out of my body. As I spoke each word I couldn't believe that what had happened, happened, what was happening was happening. My heart beat faster and faster, I took my time, but it was flowing out of me, I couldn't contain it, it was like a drug, lifting me up, up, up. I grabbed Michael's hand and said "Do you feel it?" and he said "It's jumping right across the table". He started crying. It is the only time I have seen him cry. He laughed as he cried, and I laughed. And I couldn't stop laughing, I felt as if I was shining like a beacon and I was drowning in the joy of that light, drenched in it. I swallowed the glass of wine and filled it up again, swallowed another glass of wine. I felt out of control, and Michael helped me back down to earth, he said "Just focus on your breathing, come back to your body, just relax and put your feet on the ground. Just breathe, just breathe". And slowly I calmed down. It was thrilling, absolutely thrilling.

I told Michael everything that night and when we went back to his place we sat by his open fire and I told him "The Story". At that time "The Story" was big and awkward and not yet complete, it would become a fraction of the size of the rambling giant I shared with him that night, but it's essential message was there, and now it was whole, it was complete. He listened and was fascinated. He was also down to earth. As much as this was an exciting experience for him, he never once lost sight of caring for me in a simple way, keeping it simple. We did the dishes that night, and that was typical of Michael. He would often say "And now the laundry" at a point in conversation where day to day life had been lost in a complex of ideas and

feelings. Michael holds His hand and lives in this world. He is the Practical Spiritual. He is exactly what I needed as I began to leave the desert of Anglesea and begin my walk back into the city, into day to day life. What lay before me now was the integration of this other world experience with the world that you and I live in; and that would not be easy.

To encounter Michael was to encounter the world. This encounter was now a highly charged event. At that time I had surrendered everything in my life. I expected then to live a simple life honouring that. I thought perhaps I could work in some community, using my hands to do some simple physical work, and being rewarded with food and a place to stay. Later Michael would suggest I spend some time in a monastery, not as a life choice, just as one of many experiences he thought I would find useful. But that is where my thinking was at during those early weeks after Anglesea. I had a thousand questions for Michael, and I asked every one of them. We would walk along the beach and he would gently guide me toward finding my own answers. Slowly he welcomed me back into the community.

After spending those few days with Michael I felt it was time to return to Anglesea. I still had one thing to do before I could finally leave there; I had to pass on "The Story" to Fiona, that was the beginning and the end of this experience. I couldn't have arrived where I was unless I had set about that task in the beginning, and now the last thing to do before leaving Anglesea was to complete this task.

For the rest of that week I worked on "The Story" and wrote it down. I went to Fiona's house in Anglesea on the Saturday night with a bottle of wine, and "The Story" in my bag. It was about three or four pages long at that time, and though I thought that it was finished, I was wrong. As chance would have it, Fiona and Ian were down for the weekend. Chance also had them entertaining a guest, a woman who Fiona had gone to university with.

We drank, smoked some pot, and ate pancakes and strawberry jam; Ian could really cook those pancakes. Fiona was cautious, and it made a lot of sense. I had been acting very strangely for about eighteen months now, and she never quite understood what I was up to. Neither did I. She tentatively broached the subject of what I had been up to. Somehow we came to talk about Michael, and then in turn she asked me what my plans were. I told her I might go to a monastery. I think she handled this very well. She was patient to a point, but I think I made her quite angry by saying this. She didn't understand why after all the work we had done at college, and knowing who I was, that I would lock myself away in a monastery. Her friend, without having a friendship with me as Fiona did, must have thought me a complete

fuckwit. I remember as she left she said "I hope you find whatever it is you're looking for". Yeah, and happy holiday to you to sunshine. I didn't say that. But I wish I had.

Fiona, Ian and I sat around. It no longer felt like the right time to tell Fiona "The Story", I think she might have lost her patience with me and kicked me out the door shouting "And stay out!". So we sat back, smoked some joints, and relaxed. Then Fiona and I had an exchange like this. She said "So, how are your folks, have you contacted them"?. And I said "No". And she said "Right". And we stared at each other, and then she got up and went to the kitchen. I left soon after that, feeling dreadful.

The next day I was severely depressed. I had tried to accept that I would never see my mum and dad again but it was tearing at me. That afternoon I was hunched over in the middle of the cabin, banging on the floor, mucus dripping from me, shouting out "You cruel bitch Fiona. Don't you know how it makes me feel not to contact my family. Don't you know. Do you want to help me? Then fucking help me, don't accuse me. Try to understand, try to help me to understand. Don't accuse me. Please don't accuse me". I banged the floor, and banged it again, and again.

In my mind's eye I imagined my mother, old and senile. She was standing with the sea at her back, her skin wrinkled and dry. She was wearing a egg shell blue jumper and a white cardigan. Her hair had gone white and blew in front of her face. She reached out to touch me, but in her senility she had forgotten me; she didn't know who I was.

My fist bled into the floor. Was this a life? "Another fucking cathartic experience, and then wipe the tears and snot away, and get on with it? Is this a life? Is this a fucking life? It's not right. It's not right". I could see no answer, and the tension inside of me was stretching me on tenterhooks. I was hurled into a deep despair. After all that I had been through, I could not honour it. I could not cut myself off from my family, I just couldn't. But where was the answer? Which was the way forward?

I rang Michael and told him I was in trouble. I arranged to travel to him. He asked me whether I would be staying the night, insisting it was best to make things clear. I said I didn't know, I was angry at him for being so calm and rational and real about all of this. I told him since there was no ferry to bring me back that night then "Yes" I would be staying the night.

When he picked me up from the ferry I was furious and wound up in knots. He took me to his favourite cafe. First off I told him I was angry at him for

"Boundary Setting" and insisting on "Clarity" and being so "Assertive". I had a raw, naked need and I didn't feel like being handled like someone's "Client". I can't say it wasn't right for me to feel that way, but I am sorry I got angry at Michael; he was absolutely right to be caring for me and himself in this way.

I told him on the way I had decided to leave it, the whole thing. I was moving away from Anglesea, even though I hadn't delivered "The Story". This meant I was abandoning "The Journey". Why? Because I didn't have any options left. I couldn't honour the abandonment of my family. I didn't understand why this was being demanded of me, and I just couldn't live with it. I was giving up, and I didn't care any more. This whole thing had got beyond me, I felt sick and tired. I was angry with Him, and I was showing Him by moving away from the path, I wanted to show Him I couldn't do this.

Michael drove me away from the cafe. As we drove up the main road a rainbow stretched across the sky, I turned to Michael saying "And I'm sick of fucking signs and images poking and prodding at me, so fuck off rainbow, fuck right off". I asked him to take me to the station, which would have taken me back into Melbourne, and then from there to Sydney. I thought I could find work, and settle down for a while, then make contact with my family again. Michael suggested we go back to his place and talk about it. I said "Whatever", I no longer cared, I was doing the only thing I could do.

It was a difficult moment. It must have been confusing for Michael. Here was eighteen months of struggle at its end, and in its death it was spitting and fighting and convulsing. I said I just couldn't cut the tie with my mum, that the bond between a mother and a son is sacred and that it just wasn't possible to break that. Michael questioned me, trying to understand why I thought "The Journey" was demanding this of me, trying to discern exactly what was being asked. Again and again we came back to this essential choice; surrender your mother. And "No" I would not. I remember sitting in his armchair and saying "No. No. No. No. No. No. No. No" and pulling my whole body backwards and shouting it from the nub in me, from my gut, from my groin, from my heart "No" I would not do this thing.

At this moment I felt as close as I felt in the whole time as needing to be put into a mental institution. This was literally tearing me in two, I thought I might break apart and bleed. At one point I asked Michael to take me to the psychiatric ward of a hospital, and then quickly recanted with "I'm okay. I'm okay". I said "It's like I'm being held tight in His grasp and He's shaking me saying "Learn. Learn. Learn you fucker. Learn. Learn. Learn". As I remember it now, he was nursing me gently saying whispering in my ear "Learn. Learn.



Learn".

I told Michael I didn't understand what was happening; "It's like there is this door. And I've walked a long way to get to this door. And now I have arrived. And I am knocking on the door, but there is no answer. And I am knocking and knocking and knocking, but He won't open that door. And I'm reaching for the door knob and I turn it and it's shut, it's locked, I can't get in, I can't open the fucking door. Why won't the fucking door open, I've come so far to knock on this door. Can't He hear me knocking, doesn't he know how far I've come? Open the fucking door Fucker. Open the fucking door. Open it. Open it. It's locked. I don't even know where the key is. Where is the fucking key? Where is it? Open. Open. Open".

I was weeping. Michael remained calm and he said; "I don't quite understand what this is about, but I have these words in my head and I feel very strongly to say them. I mean disregard them if they don't mean anything, but I think I should say them nevertheless". I spat at him, "What?".

He said "Have you asked for help to find the key?"

I stopped breathing. I stared at him and immediately knew that the answer to his question was "No". "No", I had not asked for help to get through that door, I was just trying to force it open, I had not sought help. I put my hands over my face. Who would I ask for help? And then I knew the answer to that question; Him. I had not asked Him for help. I had fought Him, and surrendered to Him, and listened to Him, and asked Him, and cajoled Him, and sworn at Him, and prayed to Him, and prostrated myself to Him, and done everything for Him, but I had not sought His help. I got straight up out of my chair and said to Michael; "I have to be alone".

I walked down to the Rye back beach. It was late in the afternoon, and the surf here was violent and white. I opened my arms out to sea and welcomed Him into my heart, I grabbed His hand and held it, I walked through that door with Him. I didn't really understand what had happened, but one thing I knew for certain; now I could contact my family. Now that door was open, and He would walk with me. Even more than that, He would carry me, He was carrying me. I could ring my mum and dad, and soon I would.

The wind was high and fast and rushed through me, my arms outstretched to embrace the sea, the sand whipping against my body. I breathed Him in. I wanted to thank Him. I began

"Our Father

Who art in heaven -

Hallowed be thy-

Thy Kingdom come

Thy will- Thy will- They will-"

It fell apart in my soul, it had ceased to resonate. It's gift had been that it had made me a child again, now it was only a six year old's prayer before bedtime. It didn't speak for now, it spoke for then.

I listened and heard "The Song" that the "Big Mama" and "The Kid" used to sing. It was sweet and comforting, She held me and nestled me at Her Bosom. "The Kid" was singing with Her, accompanying Her, in harmony with Her. Together they sang their contrapuntal hymn. Then I heard His words:

"I'm gonna take your heart

I'm gonna take your heart

I'm gonna take your heart

And set you free".

I ran up the beach singing it with Him, over and over and over. I am held, I am carried, I am cared for, I am loved, I am forgiven, I am saved, I am His, He will take my heart, and He will set me free.

I returned to Michael's house and we shared a simple meal in front of the open fireplace. I told him what had happened. He rejoiced for me, we celebrated. He told me that when I had covered my face just before I left it was like I had died; he was right.

The next morning I sat with Michael and I told him I felt humble. I remembered that night after I had seen Richard, when we had sealed our bond with our lives, and how I had paraded around the house as if I had scored a victory. This day there was a celebration to be made, but I felt silent and at peace. I felt earthed, I had both feet on the ground. This was a victory, but not mine; His. I felt grateful and humbled before Him. That was enough.

As we sat there my heart began to race, the adrenaline in my body began to pump, my flesh began to tingle and come alive. I told Michael it was

happening. By now I had become used to my body taking off suddenly like this, as I talked with someone, but this experience happened suddenly and was racing away with me. I told Michael I was excited by it. He was relaxed and at ease with me. As it kept getting higher and higher I laughed and said "It's like a drug. It's like a drug taking me on a high and stealing me away from the earth". I laughed and laughed and laughed. I said "I've had enough of this drug now. That's enough now". And I began to take deeper breaths to come back into the room, to slow it, and stop it. Then Michael looked at me and said "What would happen if you just gave way to it and let it happen". I immediately began crying and said "I don't know. I don't know".

I did give way to it. It lifted me up, the room changed colour, and then it changed colour again, and then colour changed, and then there was no such thing as colour just light, and the light was playing inside of me, and then was inside me, and then was me, and it kept heightening. It went further and further and further until my head was tilted back and my body lay open to Him. Michael just sat by me and watched.

Spirit filled me, was in and around me, He was by me. He caressed me, He gently stroked my hair, He let his fingers gently discover my face, He felt the bristle of a three day growth. His fingers brushed over my neck, squeezing my Adam's Apple gently and then brushing through my chest hair. He felt my chest, took each breast in His clasp, let me feel His hand wander down my midriff, softly over my stomach, and then He held my groin in His palm. He rested his hands under my buttocks and across my back, rubbing me gently up and down, massaging my spine. With one hand He clasped my neck, and with the other He cupped me under my bum, and He lifted me into His arms. He held me into His chest, my head nestled into His neck. I felt His warmth, I could hear His heart beating, His heart in my ear. He brushed His cheek against my forehead. I felt His face close to mine and then He kissed me. He put His lips on mine, and He kissed me, softly, gently, resting His lips on mine. I opened my mouth to receive Him, and He took me into His, kissing me long and deep kisses. I swallowed Him, I breathed Him, I received Him in this kiss. This was "The Kiss". This is all that a "Kiss" could be. This finally is all that a "Kiss" is. He kissed me, long and deep and soft and gentle and playful and cheeky and smiling and laughing and longing and kissing; He kissed me. Finally He lay me down, and sat by me a while, brushing His fingers through my hair, letting His touch go up and down my body. I grew calm and peaceful and slowly there was colour again, and then I saw the colours of the room, and then they changed, and changed again, and changed again, and then I saw Michael sitting by me, with his eyes closed, as if he was praying.

Michael spent some time by himself, and I prepared the evening meal, which was pumpkin soup. He arrived back and was in good spirits; I felt tired and quite exhausted. The closer we came to the meal, the more agitated I became. Until finally, as the soup was just about ready, I told Michael something was wrong, that I didn't feel well. I just wanted to share this simple meal and be content with that, but the feeling was persistent and unrelenting. I fought it and decided it would take care of itself, and I was intent on enjoying the meal. We sat by the fire and Michael says, as he always says, "Thanks for the meal and the company".

I took a piece of bread and broke it in front of me. I felt so heavy by this moment that I couldn't take my eyes off the bread in front of my face. I lost my concentration for a moment, and when I got it back, I realised I had been taking the two pieces of bread in front of me and putting them together, then pulling them apart, putting them together, then pulling them apart. A continual pattern of breaking, and making whole again, breaking the bread, then making it whole again. I turned to Michael in panic and cried "What's going on in me?". Later Michael told me that at this moment he had prayed "Leave him be. Hasn't he had enough? Give him a break".

I gave up on the meal and told Michael I was going to try and sleep it off, and wished him goodnight. I went into my bedroom. I got into bed and tried to sleep. I couldn't. It was dark and quiet and I couldn't shake the feeling of a human presence in the room. I knew Him. He had pursued me my whole life, and now it was as if He was sitting behind my shoulder. He was eternal and spirit and life and being; and He was human too. I could feel that, just as if anybody else was in the room. I could hear Him hearing me breathe. I could see Him seeing me. He knew me. I could feel Him knowing me. He was both of the heart and of the flesh; He was here, in this room, at my ear, behind my shoulder. I turned sharp around and thought I could catch Him and reached out to grab Him. Of course the room was dark and silent, my hand found only a clenched fist; there was nothing to grab. I reflected on what I had just done, and felt that I was behaving like a crazy person, and left the room to watch television with Michael until the early hours of the morning, until I was so exhausted that my body could do nothing but sleep.

The next day it was time to return to Anglesea. I was afraid to be on my own, but I knew that Anglesea called me to tell Fiona "The Story", and so I headed back. As Michael and I parted it was intense and charged, as if we were lovers parting.

I rang mum and dad. Mum had been worried sick. She told me she had cried herself to sleep every night I had been away. There was this unremitting tone

of concern in her voice, a voice I was so glad to hear. Dad was good, I could hear him holding his emotions in his throat, he is a brave man, a courageous man, a good man. My sister Sarah was there with her new born son Thomas. Sarah told me how concerned they all were, and asked me when I was coming home. I heard my nephew giggle down the phone. It was wonderful. I invited mum and dad to Anglesea for the following weekend. In the days that followed I honed "The Story" down to its basics, its absolute essentials. It was growing simpler and simpler every day.

Mum and Dad arrived on the Saturday morning. Their embrace was precious and I had never treasured it as I did that morning. We sat down and shared a cup of tea. They had brought groceries up for me, and they very much liked the cosy little house I had adopted as home for the last two months.

At last I was able to explain to them what this had all been about. Whether it finally matters, I don't know, but it was important for me to tell them. Here is what I said:

"When I was fifteen I was struggling. I had suffered bouts of depression since I was about eleven, though I didn't know they were, I just felt blue from time to time, probably nothing unusual for many kids that age. I struggled with being gay, but again so do most young gay kids in their early teens, no big deal. But it did mean I carried some heavy baggage around with me, and the nature of the baggage meant I didn't tell anyone about it; it was a secret. I had a good friendship with Richard, we were close, quite close emotionally, probably that was unusual for boys our age, but not unique. When we turned fifteen we started hanging out with a gang of guys, and I had adapted quite well to this, but as time went by it was becoming harder and harder to keep my secret; that I was gay".

"When we went away to Anglesea it was quite a big deal. You might remember you didn't want me to go at first, you thought I was too young. But I fought for it and you let me go. It was the first time in my life I was away from you for very long. In fact it was the first time I was away from any kind of adult supervision. A whole week to do exactly what I want, behave exactly how I want, I got my first taste of adult freedom. I was fifteen. I was at an age when we begin to let go of our families and venture tentatively into our independence and adulthood. It was a highly charged age, it was a highly charged event, my first time away by myself. It was already high voltage, this simple summer trip up the coast".

"We spent every day on the beach at Anglesea. If we weren't in the water we were sitting on the beach. There was no television to distract us, there were

no books, no lessons to go to, nothing to do at all actually. Just us and the beach. If you know me then you know that given half a chance I will reflect. Leave me alone for two minutes and I will reflect on what is going on in my life. It is part of the way I'm made. I didn't know this when I was fifteen, but it was certainly as much me then as it is me now. Put me on a beach for eight or nine hours a day, for six or seven days and I will do some pretty serious reflection. And that's what I did on that beach, I thought a lot about what was going on in my life. I looked around and saw my friends around me, my friends' bodies, my friends' behaviour. I felt alien to them, I felt different. I looked further along the beach and I saw all the different tribes that inhabit the beach; the surfers, the families, the students, the lifeguards, the kids. I looked to each of these tribes, and I didn't belong to any of them, in fact I felt quite alien to each of them, I felt my difference quite deeply".

"If you look at a beach, finally it is where the sea meets the sand. It is a place of encounter; this world with the other. In a fundamental and essential way it is where one thing ends, and another begins. It is a death, and a life. I couldn't say that then, but I certainly felt it. This whole place called Anglesea resonated for me in many ways. Finally the beach presented a powerful backdrop to an even more powerful event".

"New Year's Eve. What do you do on New Year's Eve? I'll tell you what I do. I look back and I look forward. One year ends, and another begins. There is the death of something, and the birth of another thing. Again, the event of New Year's Eve has always been a powerful moment of reflection for me. I look back and I look forward. I ask myself where have I been? Where am I going? When Anglesea, a place that resonated with change for me, intersected with New Year's Eve, a time of powerful reflection, I must have felt cornered. Throw into this scenario the fact that I was fifteen, a time in life that is between childhood and adulthood, an age that is about childhood dying and adulthood beginning, and you have a potent event".

"This was me as I walked towards the campsite on that New Year's Eve. Everything in my life had led to this moment, not just this time in my life, I mean this specific night in this specific place at this specific moment. Anglesea was a conspiracy, there is no way I could have avoided what happened next".

"I loved Richard. I had a deep, emotional attachment to him. He was the one person who I had planned to tell I was gay. I held onto that hope. I believed Richard would understand. I did not believe he was gay. I trusted him, it was a deeply invested trust, it was by this trust, by this hope, by this friendship that I was staying alive. This friendship was keeping my head above water,

without it I would have started drowning. As I walked towards him that night I had made a decision; to tell Richard I was Gay".

"As I approached the campsite I saw Richard and the girl kissing. I stood dead still and stopped breathing. I looked at him kiss her and suddenly realised how different I was from him. I realised we were two different people, and that he was growing away from me. I felt the gap between us and froze dead still, paralysed by what I saw. I couldn't move. From that time on I lost hope that I would ever speak to Richard about what was going on in my life. I lost my voice. I gagged myself. I fell silent. It was so painful that I switched off the whole part of me that was suffering, and when I left Anglesea a few days later I left that part of me here; that fifteen year old part of me named Nicholas".

"When I got back to Melbourne I got on with my life, but now I was becoming seriously withdrawn. In a simple way I was saying less and less, I really was just speaking less and less, growing reticent and silent. My friends reacted negatively to it, quite understandably, and slowly I grew apart from them. And the more I grew apart, the more depressed I got, and the more silent I became".

"Within six months I was in serious trouble, the depression was a very serious one. I had decided to kill myself. I had decided when and how I would do it. The night before I was going to do it, dad and I had a fight. You came up to my room dad and sat with me. And what I needed to do was speak to you and tell you I was in trouble; but I was gagged. I had gagged myself at Anglesea and now I was ashamed to speak to you, I couldn't speak to you, even though it was what I needed to do to save my life. There was "something else" in the room; it was Anglesea. And specifically the decision I had made to silence myself when I saw the kiss".

"That night I went to bed, ready to kill myself the next day. I was going to pretend to go to school, wait until you had both gone to work, then come back into the house. I would run a bath, undress and lay down in it, and then cut my wrists open and bleed to death. As I was preparing myself in the night, planning it and running it through my head, I imagined what would happen after I was dead. I imagined you coming home mum. I imagined you coming up the stairs and walking into the bathroom and finding me there. It hurt me too much to imagine what finding me there like that would have done to you. It would have destroyed your life. I couldn't do that to you. And make no mistake about it, I had no qualms about the pain or reality of the suicide for myself. I had made the decision to do it; but it was the thought of what it would do to you that stopped me. I couldn't do that".

"Instead I woke up and went to school and cut myself off. Immediately that meant having nothing to do with my friends at school. What it meant really was that I cut myself off from people. This is all new to you, you have only heard about it recently because I never gave you any indication of what was going on. I kept you, as I kept everyone, at arms distance. And that lasted years".

"When I hit my early twenties I started clawing my way out of my depression. Slowly I got better, and started functioning and then flying as a young man with ambition and drive. My life took off, my relationships deepened and everything seemed exciting and new. And then I came to Anglesea a year ago, and it all collapsed in a heap. I was a man who was split in two. The choices I made had set stakes in my life that divided me in two. Every choice I made, every thought I had was a reaction to that Anglesea night. At the heart of me was a frightened fifteen year old, still paralysed by what he saw in a kiss on New Year's Eve. Now I have faced that kiss, and embraced it, and received the gift of it. I'm growing up. Now I can move on".

"It's over mum and dad. It's over".

That was it. In the plainest language I could muster, in the simplest way I could tell it, that was what Anglesea was. This was not "The Story", this was not the myth, that was for Fiona. "The Story" had been wrought and given to me as a gift and it had delivered this understanding. Soon it would be delivered to Fiona.

Mum and Dad and I spent the day driving down the coast. There was bush fires in the neighbouring town, and it was all quite exciting. Mum talked a lot about her father that afternoon. She loved to tell stories about her dad, Jack. I never met him, he died before I was born, but he sounded like a good man to me, with a big heart, and fire in him, and laughter. Mum talked about him a lot, stories about him and the little town in New South Wales where they grew up, and her eight brothers and sisters. It was great, mum was great when she got going, full of funny stories, cheeky stories.

That night we shared a meal in a restaurant, which was a lovely treat. We talked about politics, about the family, my brother and sister, their new grandson Thomas. They had such a powerful affection for him, they would beam and loved to talk about him, and it was one of the few times I saw them jointly share telling a story without snapping at one another. They were going to be fantastic grandparents, as they had been fantastic parents to



David, Sarah and me.

Mum got onto a story about when she was little and her younger brother Noel was in a Christmas pantomime. Mum was the second youngest in a family of nine. Noel then was the youngest, he must have been about four years old in the story mum was telling. As she spoke she mentioned that her mum had been in a sanatorium for over four years. I knew that my grandmother had suffered some kind of nervous breakdown after Noel was born, and it's not surprising given that she was looking after such a brood. I knew also that the oldest sister, Molly, had taken on the mothering role, and I noticed the maternal relationship mum had with Molly. When Molly had died a few years earlier, mum had been heartbroken, and it was then I realised how close they were; how Molly had always been like a mum to my mum. But I didn't realise my grandmother's breakdown had meant they put her in a mental institution for over four years. I told mum she had never told me that before. She nodded and said "Yes, well she was". I said to mum that her mother must have suffered a very serious condition to spend such a long time in an institution. Mum just kept telling me the story.

"I remember Noel played one of the little angels in the Christmas pantomime. And he so wanted mum to be there, so they organised for mum to have a trip away from the sanatorium and come and see the panto. It was terrific, he was a really feisty little fellow. I remember him running down the aisle to see mum and - "

And then mum went silent, and she looked at me right in my eyes, and she blushed, and her eyebrows scrunched up and she said -

" - and he said to her "Are you coming home soon mum?" "

and tears came to her eyes

"And do you know. That's the saddest part of that story".

And she cried. My mum who just never cries, cried big tears. Mum pushes affection away from her, she always has done. Dad and I went to touch her, but she shook us away from her. I just gently rested my hand on her back. I said "It's about Molly too isn't it mum?".

And she said "Yes".

I watched my mum cry, and for the first time in my life I caught a glimpse

of why mum never cries, and why she pushes affection away from her. It hurts her. Because in her heart she is still a little girl waiting for her mother to come home. She is three, she is four, she is five, she is six years old. Big six year old tears fell onto the restaurant table, a public place, and I'd put good money down that mum had never in her life cried in public. I held her hand, this little six year old girl. She had never told that story; not to anyone. But she had told it to me. She had given it to me, because I could hear it. Because I could hear it.

We drove back to the cabin, and mum retreated into herself. She snapped at Dad when he asked how she was, she snapped at Dad when he had trouble parking the car, she snapped at dad, she snapped at dad, she snapped at dad; and he took it all. We went inside and had a cup of tea. I said "Mum" and laughed. She looked at me. "Mum on the tram. That's how I remember you. Mum on the tram coming home from work, crumpled up in the corner in your grey brown coat, the radio in one ear as you listen to 3AW. Some young person opposite you whose engaged you in conversation, and you're smiling away. And you see me walking up Burke Road, and you wave your umbrella at me, you smile at me". I laughed and she was laughing now "Crumpled up mum on the tram and her little tranny radio". We were all laughing now, my mum and dad and I, all of us laughing.

The next day Dad and I went for a drive and we talked about what had happened with mum the previous evening. It was during this conversation that I suddenly realised something; mum had found exactly what she sought in dad. Dad had never left mum, and he is never going to. It was a sure bet, and mum put everything she had on it. Mum always bemoans that we never owned a house, that we moved from one suburb to another, always renting and having to move on. Mum never got her house, but she got her home, stable and forever, in her husbands heart. And Dad had sacrificed everything to give it to her. He is a noble, fine, good man. I know that is what his father would have said of him.

Mum and dad left for Melbourne on the Sunday evening. I told them I had decided to go to Sydney. It was the right choice, Melbourne was where I had been, it held all that had happened there. That was finished now, time to move on. They understood, but were sad I was not returning to Melbourne. I told them I would contact them when I got to Sydney, and promised them I would keep in constant contact. We said goodbye.

"The Story" had fashioned itself into a collection of simple phrases that could be written on the back of a postcard. Everything that was not absolutely essential to its telling had been cut, and now it shone like a beacon. It was

complete. It just needed to be delivered to Fiona, and then I could leave Anglesea finally.

I went there on the Saturday night hoping she would be there, and she wasn't. I hung around another three or four days, and then decided to leave Anglesea anyway, and track Fiona down in Melbourne. In many ways I had left "Anglesea" already, I just needed to complete the journey, or indeed begin it, by telling Fiona "The Story". So I packed up, cleaned up, and got that bus out of there. "See ya' Anglesea".

I arrived in Melbourne on Thursday morning. Graeme picked me up and we had lunch and spent the afternoon together. I dumped my stuff at his place and decided to stay overnight there, intending to catch the train to Sydney on the Friday; I really preferred that to going back home and spending anytime there.

I had arranged to catch up with Fiona in the evening. While I was killing time I hung out in the city centre and sat down in the mall. The sun was setting, and something that had been bothering me all day became suddenly very clear to me. I had thought that returning to Melbourne would seem strange. After all, whenever I went on short trips into the country or interstate and returned I always felt an initial sense of strangeness upon returning; as if everything was just slightly unfamiliar. Or rather it was familiar, and having been away from it made it the more so. Anyway this time I had no such feeling. Everything felt just as it had felt the day before when I was at Anglesea; no change.

Then as the sun was setting I realised I was sitting just as I had sat in that lookout over the ocean at Anglesea to watch the sun set each evening. This was exactly the same place, exactly the same feeling. It didn't matter whether I was in Melbourne, Anglesea, Rye or Sydney. I had come home.

"Take your heart  
Take your heart  
Take your heart            And set you free"

This was a new way of being and feeling, and nothing could shake it, not even the tall city sky scrapers around me. I had come home to Him, He was with me, holding me, caring for me, wherever I was. Geography had lost its power.

Fiona was a little tipsy. She had just had her first day recording a documentary she was making and it had been a hit. The day had gone very well, and she had just celebrated with the crew. We went for a walk along St Kilda beach and I told her "The Story".

"The Story" was for me to tell to Fiona, to give to Fiona, to pass on to Fiona. The story is a piece of art. It is archetypal and mythic. I did not write it, it was revealed to me, as a way that I could get through Anglesea. "The Story" itself is very clear about the fact that I had to surrender it, surrender the telling of it, to Fiona. What you have read here is not "The Story", it's just my account of what happened. "The Story" is something altogether different. As I've said, it's brief. This account has taken hundreds of pages. "The Story" would fit on half of one of these pages. If you want to hear it then I suggest you contact Fiona of Anglesea. She lives in a house on this side of the town as you come from the east, from Melbourne. It's quite close to the cliffs, and only a short walk from the caravan camp. Ask around the town, they'll point you in the right direction. It's not for me to tell, but Fiona is a story teller, and the story has been given to her, so it's just possible if you ask her then she'll tell you. Maybe. I don't know. Anyway, that's up to you.

On Friday morning I went to purchase a train ticket to Sydney hoping to leave that evening. It was sold out. They sold me a ticket for the Saturday evening. That left me with a loose day in Melbourne. I was disappointed, and it didn't make much sense to me. I had finished here, it had all been done and said, I wanted to break free and go, finally, go. Why another day?

What a delight then upon arriving in my parents home to find your letter sitting above the mantle piece. They had put it with my mail, I don't know why though, after all it wasn't addressed to me, was it? You had sent them a letter, hadn't you? Why had you written to my parents?

I read that appalling letter and grew furious. Veiled in concern for my parents at their "wayward" son and his confusing ways was an out and out attack on me as selfish and hurtful; but it wasn't about how I had hurt them, it was about how you had been hurt. The first few lines were about mum and dad, and the other dozen paragraphs all talked about you. We share that, you and I, an obsession with self. Somehow, though, I've managed to live this life and not to write a letter to your mother about it, though I must say you're welcome to show her this one. Especially this paragraph, I think she'd find it very interesting.

Speaking of your mum, that's immediately who I rang, to get your number in London so I could ring you and confront you about this attention grabbing

scrawl. It was while speaking to your mum and talking about your sorry state of affairs, that she mentioned Jason and then said "You know about Jason then". I think we even continued the conversation for a little while until I realised I was missing something. I asked her about Jason. She said "Oh he died. I thought you knew. He committed suicide a few weeks ago".

She told me how he had run away, hired a hotel room, locked himself in, overdosed, and died.

I put the phone down and sat down at my family's dinner table in shock. I had almost died, Jason hadn't made it. He didn't make it. The pressures of his life defeated him, and broke him. I remember he said "Don't worry. It'll be alright", and in fury at his ugly naivete I had reached across, made the sign of the cross on his forehead and accused him "Who died and made you the prophet?". He had.

I let the day idle away, sat with my feelings, prayed and needed Him to hold me. In the evening my parents and I shared a meal and a movie. It was great. We were up quite late and talked a lot of the night away. They were puzzled by your letter, they didn't understand why you had written it to them. They appreciated it, but confessed it was "much more about Doug than about us".

I rang you, and got you out of bed. You were doing on a Friday midday (London time) what you had been doing Friday middays for five years; sleeping. The pattern of your life had been on hold for years, it didn't matter if you were in Ballarat, or Melbourne or London; it is a holding pattern and you are stuck there. Why?

Overseas telephone calls are an expensive event, I got straight to the point. I pointed out the letter should really have been addressed to me. For a while you pretended it was concern for my parents, as you had heard reports from friends about my unusual behaviour, but when pushed you acknowledged you were really angry at me, and had been since you left in February. You told me I didn't appreciate what a valuable experience London had been for you. You told me you'd changed, but I hadn't appreciated that either. You told me I had been dismissive of your experiences, and had characterised you as being stuck in a life that wasn't going anywhere. You're right. That's exactly what I think. But it's your life, and I had left you to live it. Now you had viciously and manipulatively written that letter to my parents at a time in my life when I most needed support from my friends, not vindictive attacks via mum and dad.

I told you I had heard about Jason. It seemed you did not want to talk about

this; fair enough.

The final part of the conversation was about your anger that I had not written to you, even though I said I wouldn't when we parted. You kept saying how angry you were at me for not writing to you. I suggested you could have written to me and told me this. You replied, rather confusingly, "Well you could have written to me". Yes, but I didn't need to. As far as I knew we were at peace with each other. It hadn't crossed my mind twice. At Anglesea the thought of you caring for me, being there and holding my hand, had been a source of comfort, not disturbance. I had no idea about all of this. You said to me "I remember when we spoke last year you told me you'd write it all down and send me a letter. Well why don't you? You said it would like a book. Well write it then. Write it then and send me your letter".

I couldn't imagine writing all this down at that time and passed you off. In February I had been aching to tell you, and you didn't want to hear. Now you wanted to hear, but I didn't want to tell you. At one point you said "Okay. Tell me then. Tell me what has happened in your life". At two dollars a minute this letter would cost thousands of dollars. I couldn't even begin to tell you. It wasn't time. Not yet.

"Just a Christmas card. That's all. Just send me a Christmas card". You pleaded with me, you begged me, you demanded me. "No" was as clear and beautiful a word as I had ever heard. "No" I would not. It was not the way to care for you. I take full responsibility for this choice, and if you don't see it now, then you will see one day how I cared for and loved you by saying "No" to your pleading.

Instead I said this to you "I am with you Doug. Every day, I am side by side with you, in your heart, in your life, I am caring for you. In my heart, in my life, I am caring for you. I am holding your hand. I am with you. I love you, I have always loved you, I will always love you. I am sitting next to you, I am holding your hand. I am with you. No matter how bad it gets, I am with you. I love you. I care for you". And I said it again, and again, in different ways, with different words, until finally you fell silent for a moment. I thought perhaps you'd felt it; my love for you. We said goodbye.

I spent a lazy Saturday at home with mum and dad. Mum made a meal for me, and after that I took my bag and walked to the front door. Hug mum. Hug dad. Goodbye mum and dad. Goodbye Melbourne.

Jacob and I met on a Manly ferry. Sydney is a stunningly beautiful city, its harbour and its sunshine make it almost irresistible. It was a stunning day

when I met Jacob. I had just had a job interview and they had offered me the job on the spot. I was staying in Manly at the time so I went and jumped on the next ferry to take me there. It was a sensational day on the harbour, still and clear and blue and sunshine and a gentle breeze.

Jacob wore blue jeans, a white t-shirt and hung a black leather coat over his shoulder. He had sun glasses tucked into his t-shirt. He was sexy, and walked it easily. He looked about twenty, in fact he turned out to be thirty five or something.

Eyeing each other off, we played the game we play, but then he went inside the ferry, away from me as I was sitting on the side in the open air, taking in the harbour. He came and sat down suddenly and directly next to me. Neither of us would make the first move until he said "Nice day for sailing" and we eased our way into a conversation. "Nice day for sailing". We swapped phone numbers, and ended up going out for dinner at the end of the week.

Jacob was a Mormon. Jacob was gay. Jacob was absolutely a dyed in the wool Mormon. He knew the doctrine inside out, back to front, every which way, any which way you wanted it served. He had been in the religion since he was about ten and it had shaped him and cared for him, and he knew it comprehensively. Jacob was gay. He had been gay even longer than he had been Mormon. He knew the scene, he could walk Oxford street with the best of them. He had lived, breathed, danced and cruised Paddington and Surrey Hills for years. He had fucked, and been fucked. He was a gay boy through and through, he was wise to it and part of it, he made it happen.

Good boys don't fuck other boys, so say the Mormons, of course so say religions the world over. So it happened that there was this gap in his life, between his religion and his sexuality, and the gap was a chasm, and the chasm was a schism, and so it went, back and forth, back and forth. He had gone completely one way, and then the other. Most of the time he lived life neither here nor there, but in the breach, eternally falling like Dante into the Inferno. It caused problems.

Jacob introduced me to Stanley. Stanley was a Mormon. Stanley was gay. Stanley was also a Maori. A gay, Mormon, Maori. Stanley's boyfriend had just walked out on him (I didn't know why) and he had a spare room, would I like it? "Yes". Later I would find out it was because Juan (Stanley's boyfriend) feared that Stanley was going to kill him.

Now here is the story of the statue and the burn letters. One night Jacob took

me back to his place, he lived in a hospital dormitory, as he was a nurse. It was a Catholic hospital, and on the way to the building where Jacob lived there was a little crypt with a statue of an angel in it. Jacob stopped to show me this angel, he had his eye on it, and wanted it. He told me it was his plan to steal it.

About a month later Jacob moved in with Stanley and I. The three of us went out one night for a crawl along Oxford Street, visiting the bars and the clubs. Oxford Street was quite close to where this hospital was, and as we began to head home Jacob said he wanted to steal it. Why not?

Mormon's are very strict about this sort of thing. Good Mormon boys definitely don't steal statues of angels from Catholic hospitals. Stanley, slightly drunk and slightly with his tongue in his cheek, went into a full fire and brimstone sermon at Jacob as to why he shouldn't steal the statue. You've got to understand the dangerous subversion that characterised Stanley, as much as he was taking the piss out of Jacob, he was also with full force invoking Mormon doctrine and scripture to warn Jacob of the danger he was putting our souls in. It was quite weird.

Stanley didn't seem to mind that in accompanying us to try and save Jacob's soul he was damning himself. He helped us get the statue into the taxi, and we got it home. It was bloody heavy. Jacob eventually put it in his room, very proud of his new acquisition.

I came home about a week later, collected mail from the box, put two letters in Jacob's room, and went into the kitchen. Stanley appeared with fire in his eyes. He asked me what I thought about this statue theft. I said it was none of my business, that it belonged to Jacob. He pursued me, but I was more interested in the pikeletts and jam I was eating.

He came back and he had one of the letters to Jacob in his hand. He opened it before my eyes. We both knew that this was a personal letter to Jacob from his lover. It was a love letter. Stanley opened it and I just ignored him. He started reading the letter out loud, and then frustrated by my disinterest prodded me "Don't you have any reaction to this?". I replied "These are your actions Stanley". He took a match and lit it, then he set fire to Jacob's letter in front of my eyes. I was shocked, and didn't say a word. He burnt it completely, then burnt the other letter (which was an important form from social security) and washed them both down the sink. Then he hugged me and made me promise not to tell Jacob he'd done it; I resisted tamely and then agreed.



About a week later Jacob came and sat on the edge of my bed as I was falling asleep. He often did this, it was very comforting. He would just talk about the day, and I would talk with him, until I became so tired I would just fall asleep. It was a very caring and loving thing to do. Anyway it was a Friday night when he came and sat down and was talking to me as I was nodding off, when he said this; "I'm worried. I was expecting two important letters and they haven't arrived. I wonder what's become of them". And I fell silent. I felt gagged. I felt guilty. I felt stuck. I fell silent.

The next morning I asked Stanley to tell Jacob, and this is characteristically Stanley, he did immediately. I got out of the house and they had their argument. That was Saturday.

On Sunday Jacob came and sat on my bed and we were talking for a while and everything seemed fine. He said "I'm very disappointed in you". I asked him why, and he told me that I should have acted to protect him when Stanley was burning the letters. We argued, I told him it was a difficult situation. I said I was sorry it had taken me a week to see that he was told, I was sorry I had promised not to say anything to him about it. That was wrong and hurtful and I apologised. But I also said that I wasn't a policeman in the household. That it was a difficult situation. Did he want me to grab Stanley's arm and stop him physically? He told me I should have told Stanley to stop. I couldn't agree with him. I said "Even if I was in that situation now I wouldn't know what to do". I told him I didn't appreciate being told how to act, that a constant theme of his was that his way was The Way, and I argued that this was a legacy of his Mormonism; "Our way is The Way". I told him I felt like my way of being was valid alongside his. He thought about it, and without great conviction, acknowledged that my way was valid too. I said "I don't believe you" and then we both fell silent, we were stuck.

I gave myself to the silence, I tried just to listen. Then I knew clearly what to say, though I didn't quite understand why. I said "I would believe you if you took that statue back". And for a while he was stunned, then stuck for words, then he climbed back onto his Mormon moral horse, and rode off into the sunset. There was a tension between us now.

About this time Michael from Rye came up to visit me and we went to Mardi Gras. We were Mardi Gras virgins together, as neither of us had been before. On the first night we shared a meal and he was talking about the social and political situation in South America, and the ugly play of Western power in their systems. As he was describing the atrocities there I stopped him and said "I don't want to live in the world you're describing".

We talked a lot that weekend and I told him I longed for the encounter with Him. Not just the ethereal tease of the spiritual encounter, but somehow to really encounter Him fully in my life; an actual encounter, a real encounter, a physical encounter. The same longing compelled me forward toward him, I felt His voice in my life saying "Go", "Act", "Come", "Now". These are different words for the same compulsion I was feeling, a compelling push towards Him. There was a sense of vocation, of needing to act, of "Ready, Set, Go!". Every time I went near Mascot airport my body would go berserk. I knew that I would be going soon, but I didn't know what "Go" meant. I just wanted to encounter him. I remember talking to Michael about this one night, and being so moved by this compulsion as to cry gently. I left Michael and went for a walk down the beach.

I would often take this walk. In the hot and humid summer nights of Sydney I would walk to Bondi Beach and enjoy the cool sea breeze. There was a cliff walk away from everything else, and it was dark and quiet here, all that could be heard was the crashing sea. At the top of the cliff walk was a kind of lookout, made into a circle, and looking out over the ocean. I loved to sit here and pray, this was the place I went to encounter Him.

As I came up the cliff walk there was a man standing at the top of the hill above me. I went and sat in the lookout. He came nearby and we started to cruise each other. He walked down into a crevice against the cliff face. I walked there to and then he followed me further. He came close and took my head in his hand and we kissed. He tasted sour like smoke, sweet like a kiss. We undid each other's pants and he came over me, then he wanked me off. My eyes caught the horizon as I came, the dark Bondi night crashing against the shore, beautiful and sweet and soft. We kissed and held each other. We didn't just hug, we clung onto each other and held each other. I felt his embrace and saw the two of us, standing on a cliff face, an encounter in the dead of night, secret, hidden and mysterious. We held each other, two bodies clinging on the edge of a cliff, the sea all around us celebrating the encounter.

The next morning I told Michael what had happened. I told Michael the guy was from Mascot, which is where the airport is. More and more I felt the need to "Go", to actually "Go", and it was so near, so near. I mentioned to Michael that his name was Christopher. Michael said "You know what that means don't you?". I said "No". Michael told me; "It means Christ Bearer".

After Michael returned to Rye, the issue of the lease in the house came up. Juan, Stanley's boyfriend, had gone to Spain and so Stanley was moving back to where he used to live, and that left Jacob and I with a couple of decisions. Firstly did we want to renew the lease, but finally did we want to live with

each other? This immediately brought Jacob and I back into the same moment we had been all those weeks alone. Now we had to decide whether we wanted to continue to live with each other, and the simmering tensions of the statue and the burnt letters remained. That statue still sat in Jacob's room; and it hadn't budged an inch. Jacob still argued that I should have acted and done something when Stanley opened and burnt those letters. I continued to tell Jacob that I still did not know how I would act. Jacob said he wanted to live with someone who would act to care for him, and I told Jacob that I could give no guarantees that I would act any differently given the same situation. We came to a standstill again. It was a stalemate.

On the next Sunday I rang mum. I told her the story of the statue and the burnt letters. She listened carefully and then said "Well, I'm very surprised Nicholas. I thought that you, with your strong sense of right and wrong, would have told Stanley to stop". I felt dumbfounded. I felt like a child. I also immediately knew that I would act, and act decisively. Firstly I had to speak with Stanley.

Curiously it was that Sunday when Stanley went missing. He was longing for his boyfriend who had gone to Spain indefinitely, and had left several messages with friends saying he felt like he was in "trouble". That particular phrase had a resonance with me in my life; "I'm in trouble". I was concerned for Stanley, and for two days no one knew where he was. As time went by I realised how strongly I wanted to speak to Stanley, how important it was both for me and him.

He turned up at my work on the Tuesday. I was so glad to see him. I mean he was alive. We went for a drink after work. I said this to him; "You were wrong to burn those letters". He said "Yes". I said "It was hurtful and destructive and you shouldn't have done it". He said "Yes". I said "And I was wrong to standby and let you do it. I should have told you stop. I'm sorry". He said "Yes" and laughed and laughed and laughed. Stanley was an angel, a mischievous bloody angel.

I went home and Jacob was there. I sat on his bed and said "I've just seen Stanley. I told him he shouldn't have burnt those letters. I told him it was wrong. I told him it was hurtful to you and destructive. I was wrong. I should have acted to care for you. I should have told Stanley to stop. I'm sorry Jacob. I'm sorry". Jacob smiled and nodded. And then I said "And you shouldn't have stolen that statue". And he smiled an even larger grin and nodded again saying "Yes". I told him I thought he should take it back.

Go Act Move Now Come Come Come Ready Set "Go". These were the beats

in my heart for the next few days. I couldn't sit still. The event of the statue and the burnt letters had brought me closer to Him. Now I was ready. I was ready to encounter Him. I was encountering Him. In this action, in this doing, in this event I had finally acted, I had played my hand. I remember saying to Michael that I did not want live in the world he was describing, and hiding my head in my hands. Now my hands were open wide and embracing Him. I do live in this world, and there are burning letters all around us. I have turned to face Him, I have turned to see Him, I have turned to embrace Him, I have turned to kiss Him, I have turned to act, I have turned to go with Him, and come to Him and be with Him. Ready Set Go. This was the compulsion in every breath. Time to go. Time to go. Time to go. Now. Now. Now.

I came home on the Friday and it was so loud and clear it was driving me crazy. I pulled coins out of my pocket and threw them across the room shouting "I have no bloody money. How can I go anywhere?". And in the silence I thought "Fuck it. Fine. You want me to go, I'll fucking go".

I immediately walked to the post office and got my passport application forms. I didn't care where I went, but it had to be big enough to satisfy this compulsion in me, and that meant a flight from Mascot International Airport. My first choice was Canada, as that is where Richard was at the time. I found out this required all kind of visas and application forms and time; too much time. Every place in the world wanted you to have thousand of dollars in the bank and a return air ticket before they'd even consider you. I had two dollars in the bank. And I wanted to go "Now", not in six months.

I really didn't want to go to London. I don't like the cold, and England has always seemed a kind of miserable, grey, far off kind of place. Finally, though, I had to accept that Britain was the one country in the world that would let me walk through customs with no money in my pocket and a one way ticket; you see my Dad was born in the United Kingdom.

I worked my ass off. I took every shift at work they offered me and then begged for some more, did emergency shifts and sundays. I worked every day for three weeks straight. I sold everything I had (which wasn't that much actually). I got my bond back out of the lease, and I borrowed, begged and stole every dollar I could. "Go" is what He had said, so I fucking "Went". Now I acted, now I played my hand, now I sought to encounter Him. And three weeks later I walked through customs at Heathrow Airport, London.

I had no particular desire to go to London. That fact that you were here was immaterial. However, once I got here, it was clear that you were the first person I wanted to see. I didn't come to London to see you, but coming to

London meant an encounter with you and dealing with that. I got off the train, dumped my stuff at the youth hostel, had a shower, and walked into the West End of London.

I didn't expect to see you the very moment I walked up to theatre you were working at, but somehow fate had intervened so that you were selling programs out the front that day. I bought a ticket to the show and then approached you and smiled. You went purple. You started hyperventilating and you actually went purple. How wonderful to see you like this. I had thought you would be surprised, but this was really a treat.

At first you were very excited and very sweet. I felt your friendship and warmth and felt welcomed by you. Unfortunately that only lasted about three and a half hours. You gave me your number, but when I tried to ring you didn't seem to be in. Your flatmates were very helpful, managing to make it absolutely clear to me that you weren't at home and had no idea when you would be. How sweet of them.

When I did finally catch you at home I tried to set a date for lunch. You were reluctant to commit so far ahead (after all this was Thursday, and anything could happen between today and, say, tomorrow lunchtime couldn't it?). You said to ring and confirm in the morning. You managed to be out that morning. How unlike you to be up before two o'clock in the afternoon. We did finally set a date, but you needed to spend those three hours in the Gym that afternoon, and I grew impatient waiting for you to call me and went and had lunch by myself.

I tried genuinely to contact you and make a time to be with you, and it just refused to happen, didn't it? Meanwhile I got a job and found a place to live, made some friends and started going out. You know what it's like when you arrive in a city and don't know anybody, don't you?

Finally, after about a month, I cornered you at work and with some sense of fun berated you for behaving so badly. You didn't flinch. I bullied you into a lunch date the next day. Even with this heavy handed approach you still did not actually want to set a time. I had to insist on actually committing to a time and a place. You didn't make it easy.

We actually talked. We talked about a lot of stuff, and it seemed genuine and sincere. We had both hurt each other, and I'm sorry I did, but I never stopped loving or caring for you. I remember the same old issues coming up and again you told me "You said you'd write it all down. That you'd write me a letter and that it would look like a book. Well why don't you? Why don't

you?". This was the dominant recurring motif of your conversation with me.

As we parted that afternoon there was a sense of peace, a sense that here were two people who had been inextricably caught up in each others lives, the closest of friends, who had grown apart and hurt each other on the way, but now were seeking reconciliation. We had talked frankly and openly. Not just me, both of us. I had extended my hand and sought your friendship and I thought it had been taken, tentatively, but I did feel the grasp. We held each other and kissed goodbye.

A week later I passed by the theatre to say hello. You were working, and I didn't want to disturb you, so I just popped in to say hello and pass on the news I had heard about someone we had worked with in Australia; he had died of AIDS. We talked for a little while and then we parted and you said to me "I'll call you, okay?". That was two months ago. I haven't heard a word from you.

I had received the news about the death of our workmate through a mutual friend of that man and mine. His name is Ed. He is Dutch and I met him in Australia three years ago while working backstage on a show. We had become friends quickly, and somehow we kept encountering each other in our lives every so often. Most recently I had got off the train from Melbourne to Sydney and walked straight into him. We had spent some time together then, but neither of us had any idea that we would both end up in London six months later. Serendipity.

He had never really spent much time in London, just a few days over the years, so this was a new city for him. I told him where I worked and he came straight from the station to me and joined me after I had finished. We shared a meal together, and I welcomed him. I offered him my home and he stayed in my bedroom for a week. I introduced him to my friends and workmates, I helped him to get on his feet and start looking for employment. I pointed him in the right direction. There is nothing extraordinary about this behaviour.

Ed kept staring at me. I mentioned it on the first night, "What are you staring at?". I said it with a smile on my face in a friendly way. He shrugged his shoulders and I let it go. He did keep staring at me though. Not just when we were talking, I mean all the time. I thought it might pass, perhaps he was happy to see me. Years ago he had wanted to have sex with me, and I had said no. It had been fine. We had seen each other plenty of times and sex had never come into it again. In fact the reason he had come to the UK was to be with his sometime boyfriend in Oxford, where he spent a delirious three day sleepathon weekend. I don't think sex had much to do with why he kept

staring at me. But he was staring at me.

When he came back from Oxford I met him at Victoria station and we took his bags back to my place. On the tube we were standing in the doorway, opposite each other, and he was just plain staring at me. Okay, I thought, I'll return the gaze. And from Victoria, through St James Park and Westminster all the way to the Embankment we stared at each other. Finally he began to look a little panicked and backed off, asking me some strange trivial question that didn't make sense. I hoped that would be the end of it.

It wasn't. I would brush my teeth in the morning, and I would turn around to see him staring at me. I made a joke of it one morning, and laughed him off taking my toothbrush into the bathroom telling him there must be something more entertaining than me cleaning my molars. It continued on and off, and I just ignored it mostly, thinking it harmless by and large, if a little disquieting.

After a couple of weeks, without success at finding work, he headed back to Holland. We shared a meal at Victoria the night he left. Towards the end of the meal he caught my gaze, and I thought, well why not, and returned it right back to him. Finally he said "What are you thinking of when you look at me in this way?" And I said "I'm returning your gaze. I'm thinking "Yes?", you know, "Yes? What? What is it? What do you want?". That's what I'm thinking". He looked at me with and said suspiciously "Is that all?" to which I replied, rather tectchily, "Yes. That's it I'm afraid. I'm just returning your gaze".

We talked about it. I asked him why he looked at me in this way. He said he didn't know, and affirmed it wasn't sexual. He said "It most definitely has nothing to do with that. I don't want to have sex with you". And so we continued. I told him that it was tiring when someone kept staring at you and you didn't know what they wanted. I accused him of seeking something from me, but since I didn't know what that was, I couldn't give it to him. He said he didn't know that he was seeking anything from me. I looked at him and said if someone just stares and keeps looking at someone that they are seeking something. He denied seeking anything from me. We started to argue. We got stuck. I said to him "I want to tell you a story. I'd like to tell you a story, but I don't know which one to tell you". We argued some more and then I said "We're stuck because you won't acknowledge that you are seeking something from me". "That's right" he said. I said "Fine". And started to make a move away from the table.

We went to the bus station at Victoria and waited for the bus that would take

him to the ferry that would take him back to Holland. We sat, side by side, two men stuck together. I listened and reflected and tried to empty myself. I held his Hand and prayed for Him to be with us. I could hear "The Song":

"I'm gonna take your heart

I'm gonna take your heart

I'm gonna take

your heart

and set you free"

I listened carefully. I realised I had been wrong. I didn't know that Ed was seeking anything from me, because if he was then I would know what it was.

I turned to him and said "I'm sorry Ed. I was wrong. I don't know that you're seeking anything from me. I don't know that. I'm sorry". He said "Right". I said "But you are looking at me, I know that". He said "Yes, that's true". I said "I have a message for you". He said "What's that?". I said "Stop looking". He said "I've been doing that already", meaning he hadn't looked at me for nearly half an hour. I said "In your life. Stop looking, start seeking, and then you'll find it".

He fell silent.

"Take your heart

Take your heart

Take your heart

Set you free"

He asked me "What's the difference between looking and seeking?". I fell silent. I thought "What the fuck is the difference between looking and seeking?". I listened, I held His hand, I opened my heart to Him, I emptied



myself. In flooded a forest, and in the forrest was a window frame filled with glass. I was looking through the window frame into the forrest, then suddenly my hand moved forward and I smashed the window into a thousand pieces. Now I knew the difference between looking and seeking.

I shared the image with Ed and he understood. One is passive, the other is active. I said "Stop looking in your life. It's time to stop looking. Now is the time to seek what you want. Seek it and you'll find it. Seek it and you are promised to find it. You are invited to seek it, and you are promised to find it". He said "Thankyou". I said "Don't thank me. It's not my invitation, I'm just doing the inviting". And He was close to us now, this was the encounter. Ready set go. I was moving. I was coming to him, here and now, real and actual. This was the encounter. Sitting there with us He whispered these words into my ear and I spoke them loud and clear "Stop looking. Seek it and find it. You are invited to seek it, and promised to find it".

We sat there in silence. A group of people was boarding a bus in the distance. There was a boy there, about seventeen years of age, tall and slightly gangly, but gorgeous, soft and beautiful and gorgeous. He had waves of black hair hanging down around his neck. He was wearing black, all black. Jason. I saw Jason. He moved distantly and slowly, I couldn't take my eyes of him and I started crying. There was a sense of urgency, there was no time to waste, Jason presence said "Now. Act Now". I said to Ed "I wish I could tell you a story". He said "Why don't you". I said "Because I don't know which one to tell you". Jason was slowly disappearing. I said "Stories are all that I have. They're all I have". And just then Jason looked at me with those big eyes, and suddenly I knew he wanted me to pass on a message to you. But what was the message? And how could I pass it on? Then Jason grinned his big gorgeous grin at me. Then I knew how to bring Jason to you.

With a story.

"I'm gonna take your heart

I'm gonna take your heart

I'm gonna take your heart

And set you free"